Across Sea and Ocean: Transmitting and Receiving Caliphal Sovereignty Claims between the Late Medieval Cairo Sultanate and the Sultanates of India

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Abstract

Although universal recognition of the caliphate diminished substantially in the post-Mongol territories of the Islamic East it remained a symbol of culture and tradition capable of bridging Muslim societies across the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean. The eighth-/fourteenth- and ninth-/fifteenth-century Muslim rulers of India considered themselves in need of symbolic ties with the Abbasid line in Egypt to better strengthen their claims to ruling authority. This article examines diplomatic exchanges linking Syro-Egyptian elites with those in Delhi, Gujarat, Bengal, Malwa, and the Deccan, placing emphasis on the role of late medieval Indian sultanates in shaping the discourse associated with the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo. Analysis also considers the relationships connecting premodern societies that spanned the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and Eastern Mediterranean, framed through the prism of religious diplomacy involving transoceanic ideas of caliphate.

Introduction

The seventh-/thirteenth-century Mongol conquest of Abbasid Baghdad and its accompanying murder of the caliph al-Mustaʿṣim bi-llāh in 656/1258 brought notions of Sunni caliphal universalism to a dramatic close. Though new realities challenged old ideals of universal Abbasid sovereignty, the symbolic legacy of the caliphate maintained cultural appeal in many regions. In the aftermath of the Mongol invasions both Cairo and Delhi emerged as sanctuaries attracting fleeing Muslim populations. These cities, each forming the central base of two contemporary seventh-/thirteenth-century "Mamluk" sultanates, also attracted scholars and placed reliance on the Islamic *sharīʿa* as well as the support of Sufi *ṭarīqa* brotherhoods.[1]

1. Some debates in modern historiography touch on the argument that after the Mongols conquered Iran, not Cairo but Delhi emerged as the last refuge of Islamic civilization. See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2, *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 119–25, 371, 419–20; idem, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 173, 184–88, 193; Sunil Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, 1192–1286* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 3, 46–47; John O. Voll, "Islam as a Community of Discourse and a World-System," in *The SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies*, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn, 3–17 (London: SAGE, 2010), 9–10; Blain H. Auer, *Symbols of Authority in Medieval*

Thriving on revenues from the Indian Ocean spice trade by way of the Red Sea, the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate of Cairo (648–923/1250–1517) established itself firmly as a stronghold of Sunni Islam. The religious preeminence of the sultanate was bolstered by the installation of a line of refugee Abbasid caliphs in Egypt beginning in 659/1261. The sultans of Cairo and their supporters were also seen as defenders of Islam by virtue of their seventh-/thirteenth-century wars against Crusaders and Mongols as well as the safeguarding of the pilgrimage routes to Muslim holy cities in western Arabia. These religious and political strategies enhanced the legitimacy of the sultanate and strengthened its reputation as a haven for religious learning and scholarship.[2]

In South Asia, Indo-Muslim rulers sought public ties with the distant Abbasid line to strengthen their own political authority. Diplomatic embassies from Cairo to Delhi brought investiture diplomas signed by the caliph, accompanied by Sufi escorts and religious scholars, ensuring the transmission of caliphal protocol and religious learning. This article argues that the Cairo-based Abbasid Caliphate was crucial to the legitimization processes of several Muslim rulers in India between the seventh/thirteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries.

The primary local audience for claims of Abbasid fealty consisted of elite circles surrounding the Indian Muslim sultan including rivals, subordinate courtiers, and administrative personnel. Many of these individuals, such as Turkic *mamlūk*s, *ghulām*s, or Turko-Indian courtiers, had Central Asian, Afghan, or Iranian origins. Religious scholars and *ʿulamāʾ* in Delhi and other Indian polities (akin to their counterparts in Cairo) reinforced ideological frameworks that underpinned loyalty to the caliphate and had the added effect of reinforcing their own religious authority.[3] For Indo-Muslim rulers, Cairo's preeminence in the western Arabian region of the Hijaz during the lucrative hajj season presented opportunities for diplomatic engagement. By engaging with religious patronage projects in Mecca and seeking formal Abbasid instatement from Cairo, Indian rulers pursued ways of ideologically reinforcing their power both at home and in the broader Islamic world.[4]

Islam: History, Religion and Muslim Legitimacy in the Delhi Sultanate (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 1–2; Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 126, 129, 150; Ṣāhibe ʿĀlam al-Aʿẓamī al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt al-diblūmāsiyya bayna salāṭīn Dihlī wa-l-khilāfa al-ʿAbbāsiyya fī Baghdād wa-l-Qāhira: dirāsa tārīkhiyya fī ḍawʾ al-maṣādir al-Miṣriyya wa-l-Hindiyya," *Dhākirat al-ʿArab* 6 (2022): 43–70, at 54–55.

2. On "Mamluk" political ideology, see Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

3. On this point, see al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 44. See also Sohaib Baig's article in this issue.

4. Malika Dekkiche, "New Source, New Debate: Re-Evaluation of the Mamluk-Timurid Struggle for Religious Supremacy in the Hijaz (Paris, BnF MS ar. 4440)," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 18 (2014–15): 247–72, at 256; John Meloy, "'Aggression in the Best of Lands': Mecca in Egyptian-Indian Diplomacy in the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," in *Mamluk Cairo: A Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche, 604–20 (Leiden: Brill, 2019); idem, "Mecca Entangled," in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History: Economic, Social and Cultural Development in an Era of Increasing International Interaction and Competition*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Stefan Conermann, 453–78 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019).

Islamic political thought underwent a transformation from the earlier conception of a universal Arab caliphate successively centered in Medina (11–35/632–56), Damascus (41–132/661–750), and ultimately Baghdad (136–656/754–1258) whose influence began to wane by the tenth century. The privileges of the Abbasid caliphs were curtailed during the later Buyid and Seljuq periods as power shifted to military stakeholders. The Buyid amirs, for example, monopolized honors such as the *bayʿa* allegiance ceremonies and minting of coins, while also using the caliphate to legitimize their hold on governance.[5] The Seljuq Turks, similarly reflecting political realities of the time, later formalized a division of power in which the caliph retained symbolic influence in the religious sphere while the sultans exercised temporal rule.[6]

Despite numerous institutional changes and challenges to the office, the idea of the caliphate nevertheless survived the fall of Baghdad to the invading Mongols in 656/1258. Responding to a persistent demand to fill the vacant caliphate, the amir Baybars (r. 658–76/1260–77) in 659/1261 invested an Abbasid refugee from Baghdad with the family office in Cairo. This individual, in turn, recognized the former *mamlūk* amir as sultan of Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. Thus, the new Cairene era of the Abbasid Caliphate was inaugurated, in which a caliph would reign, but not rule, supported by the sultanate. Scholars argue that the decision of Baybars to invest an Abbasid caliph at this moment was a calculated effort to bolster his own validity as a ruler by linking his reign with the religious and political traditions of Islamic governance to appeal to the *ʿulamāʾ* and the broader pious public.[7] A few former prerogatives remained with the caliphs of Cairo, such as the rights to have their name mentioned on coinage (*sikka*) and in the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*), but these were ultimately usurped by the sultans themselves.[8]

Nevertheless, the incumbent caliph serviced the regime of each new sultan by buttressing his Islamic claims to legal rule. Meanwhile the caliph's ability to issue authorizations (*taqālīd*) to distant rulers provided the sultan of Cairo with a degree of supervision over a valuable commodity: Islamic acknowledgment from the "commander of the believers" (*amīr al-muʾminīn*), granting a legal (*sharʿī*) gloss to the local power of foreign rulers without implying direct control by the sultan.[9] Thus, endorsement from the caliphate became a reward or favor to bestow on subordinates like the amirs of Mecca or Yemen, or to bridge stark physical distances with potential allies such as the eighth-/fourteenth-century rulers of post-Mongol Iran or far away India.

5. Auer, *Symbols of Authority*, 104–5; Amir Hasan Siddiqi, *Caliphate and Kingship in Medieval Persia* (Lahore, 1942), 52–58, 63, 118, 128.

6. Siddiqi, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 132, 138–39; V. V. Bartold, "Caliph and Sultan," trans. N. S. Doniach, *Islamic Quarterly* 7 (1963): 117–35.

7. Mustafa Banister, *The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo, 1261–1517: Out of the Shadows* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 25–29; Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 71–88; Stefan Heidemann, *Das aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261): vom Ende des Kalifates in Baghdad über Aleppo zu den Restaurationen in Cairo* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 98–102.

8. For the remaining rights of the Cairene Abbasids, see Mustafa Banister, "'Naught Remains to the Caliph but His Title': Revisiting Abbasid Authority in Mamluk Cairo," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 18 (2014–15): 219–45, at 227–37.

9. Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 32.

Widespread recognition for the Cairo Caliphate, however, was largely unachieved due to various competing claims to sovereignty among rulers like the Ilkhanids and the Timurid ruler Shāhrukh (d. 850/1447) who rejected the validity of the Abbasid line, asserting their own divine right to rule.[10] The official acknowledgment thus provided by the caliph concerned elite political culture, and applications to Cairo were supported by luxurious gifts. The Egyptian sultans sent ambassadors back with deeds, insignias, honor garments (*khilʿa* or *tashrīf*), standards, and jewelry to be donned publicly by Muslim rulers in India.[11] The office was therefore lent power by virtue of caliphal expectation expressed among the receiving populations of India.

Early twentieth-century historians including Sir Thomas Arnold (1864–1930) and Vasiliy V. Barthold (1869–1930) have argued that few eastern Muslim rulers recognized the Cairene Abbasids because of the widespread idea that the lands of *any* pious Muslim ruler technically constituted a "caliphate."[12] Nevertheless, for those primarily Indian Muslim rulers interested in the Cairene Abbasid dispensation, caliphal authority appeared potent and viable, offering significant resonance among diverse local audiences of subjects and rivals. Among the petitioners in the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries were various regional rulers of the Indian subcontinent, occasional Ottoman sultans (at times of political vulnerability amid succession struggles), and several post-Mongol dynasts including the Jalayrids of Mesopotamia and the Muzaffarids of Fars.[13]

Diplomatic overtures and embassies were of great interest to chroniclers in both the Syro-Egyptian and Indian sultanates. Famous as a prolific period of historiographical production (ca. 1250–1517), late medieval Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz provide us with numerous Arabic narrative sources that have survived to modern times. Arabic chronicles and chancery manuals from this period contain detailed passages on these diplomatic encounters. Questions of the authorship behind the narratives are relevant to uncovering the reality portrayed in the sources and discerning what they seek to tell us.[14] Authors of Arabic chronicles such as al-Maqrīzī (*Kitāb al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*), al-Ṣayrafī (*Inbāʾ al-haṣr bi-abnāʾ al-ʿaṣr* and *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-l-abdān fī tawārīkh al-zamān*), Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (*Inbāʾ al-ghumr bi-anbāʾ al-ʿumr*), Ibn Iyās (*Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ*

10. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam*, ed. Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, and Babak Rahimi, 353–75 (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018); John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 7.

11. Émile Tyan, *Institutions du droit public musulman*, 2 vols. (Paris: Sirey, 1954–56), 2:221–22; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 23, 152.

12. Thomas Arnold, *The Caliphate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 99–120; C. H. Becker, "Barthold's Studien über Kalif und Sultan," *Der Islam* 4 (1916): 350–412, at 378–86.

13. Gustav Weil, *Geschichte des Abbasidenchalifats in Egypten*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1860–62), 2:47; Becker, "Barthold's Studien," 378; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 150.

14. Stephan Conermann, "On the Art of Writing History in Mamluk Times," in *Mamluk Historiography Revisited: Narratological Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Conermann, 7–26 (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2018), 7–8; Sunil Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," in *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, ed. Suvir Kaul, 140–82 (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 152–54.

al-duhūr), Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (*Taʾrīkh*), and Ibn Taghrībirdī (*al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* and *Ḥawādith al-duhūr fī madā al-ayyām wa-l-shuhūr*) observed Cairo's relations with delegations sent from India with keen interest, keeping track of matters concerning the local Abbasid caliphs.

Arabic sources produced in late medieval Egypt and Syria frequently employ the somewhat imprecise term "al-Hind" when addressing relations with the various polities of the Indian subcontinent. Existing Arabic chancery manuals and chronicles from the period sometimes muddle the number and chronology of embassies exchanged and express confusion about precise Indian polities and rulers.[15] Historians and scribes based in Cairo such as al-Qalqashandī, al-Saḥmāwī, and Ibn Taghrībirdī differentiated between Indian territories, but their knowledge often appears uneven. Prominent South Asian polities with strong diplomatic ties to Cairo such as Delhi or Cambay were better integrated into Syro-Egyptian perceptions of the Indian subcontinent, while lesser-known regions like Malwa or Bengal were often overlooked or misunderstood.[16]

Some diplomatic material has also survived, notably a deed of investiture sent from the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh (r. 763–808/1362–1406, with two interruptions) to the Delhi sultan Fīrūz Shāh, which is preserved in the anonymous eighth-/fourteenth-century Persian chronicle *Sīrat-i Fīrūz Shāhī* (discussed below). Al-Mutawakkil's son al-Mustaʿīn bi-llāh (r. 808–16/1406–14) also sent a similar document to the ruler of Gujarat, a copy of which survives in the ninth-/fifteenth-century Arabic chancery manual *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ*, authored by the Cairene scribe Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418).[17] These deeds emanating from the Egyptian chancery were sent to Indian courts in Arabic and often read and displayed publicly, though no original copy of any document survives today.[18] The caliphate remained part of an ongoing conversation in

15. If they mention India at all, many Egyptian chroniclers of the time such as al-ʿAynī refer broadly to the "lands of India" or "the kingdoms of India [ruled] by several Muslims kings." See Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān fī taʾrīkh ahl al-zamān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Rāzīq al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Qarmūṭ (Cairo: al-Zahrāʾ, 1989), 480–1; Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, ed. Ibrāhīm ʿAlī Ṭarkhān (Cairo, 1963–74), 16:323–24. For chancery manuals, see Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʾat al-inshāʾ* (Cairo, 1963), 10:129–34; Abū Bakr b. ʿAlī Ibn Ḥijja, *Qahwat al-inshāʾ*, ed. Rudolf Veselý (Beirut, 2005), 428–34; Muḥammad al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Thaghr al-bāsim fī ṣināʿat al-kātib wa-l-kātim*, ed. Ashraf Muḥammad Anas (Cairo, 2013), 604. On confusion in the sources over the number of provinces in India, see Meloy, "'Aggression in the Best of Lands,'" 610–11; Christopher D. Bahl, "Eunuch and Scholar—Two Ways to Be 'Indian': Socio-Cultural Significances of the Category 'al-Hindī' in the Late Mamlūk Period," in *Islamische Selbstbilder: Festschrift für Susanne Enderwitz*, ed. Sarah Kiyanrad, Rebecca Sauer, and Jan Scholz, 25–37 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Press, 2020), 28–29, 33.

16. Meloy, "'Aggression in the Best of Lands,'" 610–11.

17. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 10:129–34; Ibn Ḥijja, *Qahwat al-inshāʾ*, 428–34; al-Saḥmāwī, *al-Thaghr*, 604. For discussion of the document, see Banister, *Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo*, 361, 383, 388, 402; Otto Spies, "Ein Investiturschreiben des abbasidischen Kalifen in Kairo an einen indischen Koenig," in *Professor Muḥammad Shafiʿ Presentation Volume*, ed. S. M. Abdullah, 241–53 (Lahore: Panjab University Press, 1955).

18. In the fourth/tenth century, the Buyids made attempts to validate their rule through caliphal diplomas alongside claims to descent from pre-Islamic Iranian kings. For commentary on earlier caliphal investiture practices, see Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 18, 39, 54–57, 60–62; Stewart Gordon, "Robes, Kings, and Semiotic Ambiguity," in *Robes and Honor:*

which such chancery writs were among the ways that Islamicate societies communicated internally. Such communication, based on the shared sources (history and tradition) of the Islamic experience,[19] was particularly important at times when the caliphs were sequestered from the public. The investiture documents incorporated the elites, including scholars, bureaucrats, and military men, illustrating the way their power relationships were integrated into a whole. The caliphal discourse in the rhetoric of such documents included admonition, lessons, refinement, and encouragement; they were filled with impactful words and eloquent expressions to strengthen the idea that legitimate rule could only be achieved through allegiance to a living Abbasid descendant.[20]

Persian narrative sources produced in the context of the South Asian sultanates are comparatively far fewer. As Blain Auer argues, these narratives typically emphasized the strength of Muslim authority, the legitimacy of the local sultan, and occasional eschatological concerns. Such depictions are significant for understanding how local sultanic power was legitimized, particularly through the symbolic transmission of caliphal investitures documented in diplomas sent from Cairo. The Persian texts underscored the transregional connections of the Delhi Sultanate, situating its rulers within a broader continuum of Islamic governance.[21]

Sources produced in the Delhi Sultanate reflect mostly the voices of contemporary Muslim elites. Such narrative sources expose internal discourses taking place on notions of sovereignty and caliphate put forth in the authorial voices of historians and political thinkers like Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī (ca. 684–758/1285–1357) in Delhi, whose major work, the *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, completed in 758/1357, covers the history of Delhi from the reign of Balban to the early years of Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq (r. 752–90/1351–88). Baranī's historical writing, though short on precise dates, delves into explanations of events, aiming to educate rulers on their duties toward Islam. The text thus has a normative bearing on how the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo was understood abroad. Another brief text attributed to Fīrūz Shāh himself, the *Futūḥāt-i Fīrūz Shāhī* (discussed below), also offers a unique first-person perspective from a South Asian ruler on the Cairene Abbasids.

The later Indo-Muslim chronicler Muḥammad Qāsim Hindū Shāh Astarābādī, also known as Firishta (ca. 967–1029/1560–1620), writing in Persian at the ʿĀdil Shāhī (r. 895–1097/1490–1686) capital of Bijapur, in his *Tārīkh-i Firishta* covers several Indian Muslim dynasties such as the Tughluqids and Bahmanis and recounts an interesting anecdote about the Abbasid investiture of the latter. Like Baranī, Firishta's history also takes a didactic approach, seeking to educate Muslim rulers on their duties and to help explain the rise and expansion of Muslim political authority in India.

Finally, the Arabic travel narrative of the Maghribi faqih and qadi Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 770/1368 or 779/1377) integrates visual and symbolic elements of the caliphate into its accounts of the Delhi Sultanate while the author was in the service of the ruler Muḥammad

The Medieval World of Investiture, ed. Stewart Gordon, 379–85 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 381.

19. Voll, "Islam as a Community of Discourse," 8; Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 22–27.

20. Al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 62.

21. Auer, *Symbols of Authority*, 104, 107.

b. Tughluq (r. 724–52/1324–51). Muslim rulers in India staged elaborate public ceremonies to display newly arrived caliphal decrees from Cairo, emphasizing their fealty to the distant caliph. These spectacles, which impressed eighth-/fourteenth-century observers like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, were designed to project the influence of the ruler and bolster his legitimacy. Modern historians frequently evoke the illustrative power of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's mobility and the opportunities available to him in Arabo-legal contexts in Mediterranean, African, and Indian Ocean spheres of the Islamicate world.

As modern scholarship notes, many South Asians who traveled to the Hijaz for pilgrimage often continued on to Egypt, where they sought further knowledge, joining the intellectual circles of the Cairo Sultanate and contributing to the transoceanic flow of scholars between the Indian subcontinent and the broader Islamic world.[22] Itinerant scholars, *fuqahāʾ*, and learned elites—all of whom provided our source base—enjoyed great freedom of movement and could move between Mongol Ilkhanid Iraq and Iran or travel further east to India. In the west they could visit the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate, which also included the holy cities of western Arabia, move freely into Asia Minor while the ghazi followers of the Ottomans expanded the frontier into the Balkans, or travel west across North Africa and Andalus. Wherever they settled, there were opportunities to participate in ongoing discourses on religious or political matters such as the caliphate. These discursive communities participated in a system of meanings that embodied a semiotic cosmos shared by medieval Muslims. This phenomenon of professional mobility sheds light on the ease with which the learned could find opportunity all over the Islamic world. The Muslim sultanates of India were thus not so distant from the sultanate of Cairo, all belonging to the same cultural cosmos that still gave currency to ideas of caliphate.[23]

Problems, as always, remain with the sources at our disposal. Evidence of the relations between Muslim rulers in India and Egyptian caliphs exists on coins and in inscriptions and textual descriptions, which, as Stephan Conermann and Anna Kollatz have argued, constrain our understandings of royal authority at the popular level.[24] In addition to reflecting largely elite understandings, most of the narratives discussed in this article are cultural products of late medieval Syro-Egyptian Arabic sources, which necessarily skew the perspective. As this article aims to be free of a strictly Cairo-centric perspective, it is important to remember the inherent biases of the authors in seeing the Cairo Sultanate as dominant or more significant than it was in the regional dynamics of South Asia. Balancing this perspective with the far fewer Indo-Persian sources allows for a more holistic narrative and analysis.

22. Bahl, "Eunuch and Scholar," 25–26, 28; idem, "Reading *Tarājim* with Bourdieu: Prosopographical Traces of Historical Change in the South Asian Migration to the Late Medieval Hijaz," *Der Islam* 94, no. 1 (2017): 234–75, at 235; Baig, in this issue.

23. Voll, "Islam as a Community of Discourse," 8–10; Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 95–97. Legal scholars like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa or caliphal emissaries from Cairo could simply "plug in" with their backgrounds in Arabic and find places in the system despite limited fluency in courtly Persian. See Stephan Conermann, "South Asia and the Indian Ocean," in *Empires and Encounters, 1350–1750*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard, 391–552 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), 479–81.

24. Stephan Conermann and Anna Kollatz, "Some Remarks on the Diplomatic Relations between Cairo, Delhi/Dawlatābād, and Aḥmadābād during the Eighth/Fourteenth and Ninth/Fifteenth Centuries," in *Mamluk Cairo*, 621–37, at 635.

Indian Petitions for Abbasid Recognition

Before examining diplomatic relations between Cairo and the Indian sultanates, it is important to consider the earlier pre-Mongol contexts in which some South and Central Asian Muslim rulers looked for acknowledgment from the Abbasids of Baghdad. Regional rulers were enthusiastic about demonstrating religious identity through titles sanctioned by the caliphate, which ultimately became so common that they lost significance—being both relatively cheap and easily obtainable through correspondence and gifts.[25] Gavin Hambly argues that Indo-Muslim rulers wanted to retain and enhance their power through style, symbol, and the emulation of Abbasid ceremonial and Iranian kingship.[26] Repeating the model used by the Samanids (r. 204–395/819–1005), the Ghaznavids (r. 366–582/977–1186) under Sultan Maḥmūd (r. 388–421/998–1030) attempted to secure Abbasid recognition from Baghdad. These diplomatic endeavors (which involved exchanging letters and robes) were intended to legitimize the Ghaznavid invasion of the Punjab as well as numerous looting expeditions into northern India.[27]

Abbasid investiture continued in India during the foundational period of the Delhi Sultanate. Ghurid warlords from Afghanistan and eastern Iran invaded northern India in the late sixth/twelfth century. From his stronghold in Ghazna, the Persian ruler Muʿizz al-Dīn Muḥammad Ghūrī (r. 569–602/1173–1206) oversaw the conquest of India beginning in 570/1175. By 581/1186 Muʿizz al-Dīn extinguished Ghaznavid power in Lahore and established Muslim rule from the garrison town of Delhi seven years later.[28] Aware of Samanid and Ghaznavid precedents, Muʿizz al-Dīn sent embassies to Baghdad to inquire about caliphal confirmation during the reigns of al-Mustaḍīʾ (r. 566–75/1170–80) and his successor, al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 575–622/1180–1225).[29] Muʿizz al-Dīn's own plans for succession proved fruitless, however, as true power remained locked in an uneasy balance between his Turkic *mamlūk* slave-general and governor Quṭb al-Dīn Aybak (r. 602–7/1206–10) in Hindustan and the *mamlūk* Tāj al-Dīn Yildiz (r. 602–12/1206–15) in Ghazna. Yildiz had seized power after the death of Muʿizz al-Dīn and issued coins in the name of his former master, himself, and the Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir in whose name the Friday *khuṭba* was also delivered.[30]

As Delhi became established as a seat of Muslim power in the northern Indian heartland, the elite corps of slave soldiers that had made up Muʿizz al-Dīn's fighters engaged in internecine struggles as rival *mamlūk* generals tried to carve out areas of influence on the Ghaznavid model of Abbasid legitimation. Aybak ultimately assumed power, inaugurating

25. Meloy, "'Aggression in the Best of Lands,'" 605.

26. Gavin R. G. Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara, from Ghazna to Delhi: The *Khilʿa* Ceremony in the Transmission of Kingly Pomp and Circumstance," in *Robes and Honor*, 193–222, at 194.

27. Ibid., 201–5; Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 28.

28. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 28; Kumar, *Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*, 47–56.

29. Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 206; Kumar, *Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*, 61.

30. Stan Goron and J. P. Goenka, *The Coins of the Indian Sultanates: Covering the Area of Present-Day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001), 1, 18.

the period of rule by the Muʿizzī or Shamsī "*mamlūk*" slave-kings who reigned in northern India from 602/1206 to 686/1287 in the foundational period of the Delhi Sultanate.[31] The Shamsid kings engaged in diplomatic relations with Baghdad and were concerned with Abbasid recognition of their claims to sovereignty. The true consolidator of the Delhi Sultanate was the former *mamlūk* military slave, son-in-law, and successor of Aybak, Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (r. 607–33/1211–36), who took control in India but struggled to balance rivalries among the surviving members of Aybak's entourage. After usurping his master's son and defeating rivals like Yildiz in the Punjab, Iltutmish needed sanction and therefore looked west to seek support from the penultimate caliph of Baghdad, al-Mustanṣir (r. 623–40/1226–42). The caliph sent an embassy to Delhi that arrived in 626/1229 and was received with great pomp and ceremony by the sultan, his sons, amirs, and slave household in which he received a robe of honor, a diploma (which was publicly read), and the title of exalted sultan (*sulṭān al-aʿẓam*). From the reign of Iltutmish, the name of the caliph of Baghdad began to appear on the coinage of the Delhi Sultanate.[32]

By the end of his reign, Iltutmish had successfully welded Muʿizz al-Dīn's conquests into a powerful polity. To maintain cohesion and follow the lead of Iltutmish, later Delhi sultans issued coinage in the names of al-Mustanṣir[33] and his nephew—the final Baghdad caliph—al-Mustaʿṣim (r. 640–56/1242–58). Al-Mustaʿṣim's name appeared on Indian coinage during the reign of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Masʿūd Shāh (r. 639–44/1242–46) and persisted for decades even after the caliph's murder by the invading Mongols in 656/1258. For another fifty years the next strongman sultan in Delhi, Balban (r. 646–86/1249–87), and his successors struck coins bearing the late caliph's name. Hambly speculates that Balban may have been well aware of the fiction of paying allegiance to a dead caliph and quietly seeking to enhance his own legitimation through opulent displays of wealth and magnificence,[34] while Richard Eaton argues that the continuation serves as evidence that Indo-Muslim rulers were largely unable to concoct other convincing sources of legitimizing authority beyond the familiar Abbasid model.[35] Following the death of Balban in 686/1287, his son Bughra declared independence and became ruler of Bengal as Rukn al-Dīn Kay Kāwūs (r. 690–701/1291–1302) and took caliphal titles such as "right hand of the caliph" (*yamīn al-khilāfa*) and "supporter of the

31. Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 28–29, 37.

32. This was the only occasion where an Abbasid caliph sent an *ʿahd* investiture deed from Baghdad to a sultan of Delhi. See Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 209; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 1, 18–20; Kumar, *Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*, 143, 187, 226–27, 352.

33. Several later Delhi sultans who ruled in rapid succession minted the name of al-Mustanṣir on their coins: Muʿizz al-Dīn Bahram (r. 637–39/1240–42), ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Masʿūd (r. 639–44/1242–46), and Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd (r. 644–64/1246–66). See Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 27–29; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 209.

34. Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 210–11.

35. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 31–32; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 38–40; Muḥammad N. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "al-ʿAlāqāt bayna salāṭīn Dihlī wa-l-khilāfa al-ʿAbbāsiyya: dirāsa fī al-fikr al-siyāsī li-salāṭīn Dihlī (602–816 H/1210–1414 M)," *al-Majalla al-Tārīkhiyya al-Miṣriyya* 45 (2009): 9–36, at 23–24; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 40.

commander of the faithful" (*nāṣir amīr al-muʾminīn*) in addition to "great sultan, master of the necks of nations, the king of the kings of Turks and Persians."[36]

The Shamsid and later Ghiyathid rulers were succeeded next by the Khaljī line of Delhi sultans (r. 689–720/1290–1320), Turkic peoples from eastern Afghanistan who had aided the Ghurid conquest of India and maintained the pretense of caliphal sanction long after al-Mustaʿṣim. Khaljī rulers, styling themselves *nāṣir amīr al-muʾminīn*, professed fealty to the idea of the Abbasid Caliphate, though individual sultans including Jalāl al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 689–95/1290–96) and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad Khaljī (r. 695–715/1296–1316) put their names and titles on coins with no allusions to the ghost of the last caliph.[37] In 720/1320 the sultan Quṭb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh Khaljī (r. 716–20/1316–20) went a step further in proclaiming himself caliph as "al-Wāthiq." The claim fell flat and was met with resistance from its intended audience of Muslim elites and scholars. Nevertheless, the notion that multiple caliphs could exist, and that they need not be confined to the Arab world, was now in play.[38]

The Abbasid Caliphate as a Source of Political Legitimacy in Delhi

It remains uncertain when Indo-Muslim rulers first learned of the 659/1261 Abbasid restoration in Cairo by Sultan Baybars. The first South Asian diplomatic contact with the Cairo Sultanate concerning the matter began with the third Muslim dynasty of Delhi, the Turko-Indian Tughluqids, named for Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq (r. 720–25/1320–25).[39] Before seizing power, Ghiyāth al-Dīn (whose ethnic and slave origins remain a matter of debate) served as a commander under ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Khaljī. In their efforts to consolidate territories to the south including the Deccan, the Tughluqids faced numerous rebellions from regional dynasties such as the Kakatiyas, Pandyas, and Hoysalas, who all later broke away from Delhi's control.[40]

In the reign of Ghiyāth al-Dīn's son and successor, Muḥammad Shāh b. Tughluq (r. 724–52/1324–51), modern scholars have documented a robust Indo-Egyptian diplomatic relationship. For nearly two centuries after his reign, delegations from different South Asian Muslim rulers came to Cairo in search of acknowledgment from several Abbasid caliphs.[41] Early Indian recognition of Cairene Abbasid claims primarily stemmed from a

36. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 39; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 210.

37. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Khaljī used "*yamīn al-khalīfa*" on his coins. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 37–39. These events have been studied and summarized in recent Arabic scholarship: Muḥammad N. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir al-Mamlūkiyya ilā al-ʿalāqāt al-khārijiyya li-mamālīk Miṣr: al-ʿalāqat al-diblūmāsiyya bi-sulṭanat Dihlī (602–932/1206–1526) numūdhajan," *Annales Islamologiques* 58 (2024): 203–32; idem, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 12–33; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 43–55; Yāsir ʿAbd al-Jawād al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt al-Miṣriyya al-Hindiyya fī al-ʿaṣr al-Mamlūkī: dirāsa fī al-jawānib al-siyāsiyya wa-l-ḥaḍāriyya* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-ʿArabī li-l-Maʿārif, 2015), 31–41.

38. Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 158; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 210–11; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 40; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 40–44.

39. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 178.

40. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 49.

41. Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 95; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 49.

shared hostility toward the Mongols and a strategic desire to capitalize on the latter's weakness. This allowed both polities to expand into areas in which Mongol influence and power was dissipating, east and west.[42] These later connections between Delhi and Cairo may well have reflected a mutual interest in resisting or even overcoming the Ilkhanids of Mesopotamia and Iran. Muḥammad b. Tughluq had come to power after his father's murder, but his own reign soon became fraught with rebellion and disaster.[43] He brutally suppressed Muslim rivals while seeking to present himself as a pious ruler upholding the *sharīʿa* and respected by local Sufis and *ʿulamāʾ*.[44] Muḥammad b. Tughluq reportedly made a habit of questioning travelers and merchants about the survival of any Abbasid claimants following the Mongol onslaught of the previous century.[45] Having finally learned of one by 730/1330–31, he had initiated correspondence with the Cairene caliph al-Mustakfī bi-llāh (r. 701–40/1302–40).[46] During this period, the Delhi sultan dispatched seven ambassadors from his realm to Egypt, bearing lavish jewels, diamonds, and a golden pencase as tokens of respect for the caliphal office.[47] The embassy received an honorable reception from Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad during their ten-day stay in Egypt.[48]

Considering that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's early eighth-/fourteenth-century visit to Cairo occurred at a time when relations had soured between the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the caliph al-Mustakfī in 727/1327, it is unsurprising that the North African traveler failed to mention the caliph (who would have been isolated in confinement) in his description of Cairene religious dignitaries.[49] In contrast, when some years later Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the Delhi Sultanate during the reign of Muḥammad b. Tughluq (whom he served as an ambassador) in the 740s/1340s, he reported a great deal about the prestige that the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo maintained in India. He wrote of the envoys exchanged between the Indian sultan and his counterpart in Cairo as well as the embassies, gifts, and caliphal diplomas traded between the two.[50]

42. Becker, "Barthold's Studien," 376–77.

43. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 162.

44. Arnold, *Caliphate*, 104; Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," 166–67; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 56.

45. Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, vol. 33 of *Bibliotheca Indica* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), 492; Arnold, *Caliphate*, 104; David Samuel Margoliouth, "The Caliphate Historically Considered," *Moslem World* 11 (1921): 332–43, at 336; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 56.

46. Muḥammad Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: al-musammā Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī gharāʾib al-amṣār*, ed. Ṭalāl Ḥarb (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2007), 174, 474–75; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 625; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 211.

47. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 493; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 174, 474; Arnold, *Caliphate*, 104; Peter Jackson, "The Mongols and the Delhi Sultanate in the Reign of Muḥammad Tughluq (1325–1351)," *Central Asiatic Journal* 19, no. 1–2 (1975): 118–57, at 131–32; idem, *Delhi Sultanate*, 271–72; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 47.

48. Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Saʿīd ʿAshūr (Cairo, 1956–73), 1:2:333; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 162.

49. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 61–64. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also observed in 726/1326 that the caliph of Cairo was not mentioned in the *khuṭba* in Mecca (ibid., 178).

50. Ibid., 174, 474. See also Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 492–95; Auer, *Symbols of Authority*, 110–13.

Muḥammad b. Tughluq's delegation may have come to propose an alliance between the sultanates of Delhi and Cairo, a sensible precaution before expanding eastward toward China and westward into Khurasan to weaken the influence of the Mongol Ilkhanids who posed a threat to his territory.[51] As Hambly argues, it may have been by seeking the prestige of the Cairene Abbasids that Muḥammad b. Tughluq attempted to diminish the standing of Mongol Muslim rulers such as the Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd (r. 716–36/1316–35) or the recently converted Chaghatayid khan ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Tarmashirīn (r. 726–34/1326–34).[52] Although the intentions and results of the embassy are unclear and no formal military alliance was concluded, Muḥammad b. Tughluq's actions indicate a desire to use Cairo's strategic position as a means to empower himself as a dominant force against the Mongols, thereby neutralizing their influence over the region.

Following the death of the last effective Ilkhanid ruler, Abū Saʿīd, in 736/1335, the Ilkhanate plunged into internal strife over the control of resources. Eventually, successor states emerged and gradually abandoned allegiance to their Mongol overlords while maintaining public ties to Chinggiskhanid legitimacy. These new rulers, comprising an autonomous military autocracy of so-called *qarachu* begs (descendants of Mongol aristocrats close to Chinggis Khan though considered "foreign" in relation to the Mongol ruling family), adopted Mongol tribal structures and alliances.[53] Local dynasties gained prominence during a resurgence in the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, until many succumbed to the ambitions of Temür (Tamerlane), the Central Asian Turko-Mongol conqueror (r. 771–807/1370–1405), who sought to revive neo-Mongol dominance.

Despite the pomp and gift-giving in Cairo, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad declined the request for a military alliance with the Tughluqids. Meanwhile, the Arab Muzaffarid dynasty of Fars (r. 715–97/1314–93) demonstrated their own commitment to upholding Sunni norms of orthodoxy by recognizing the Cairene Abbasids, perhaps as an affirmation of their independence from the Mongol political traditions that dominated eastern Iran and Central Asia.[54] Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's attempts at cultivating diplomatic ties with Delhi and Fars in the 720s/1320s may be read as a demonstration of his commitment to supporting reliable allies as bulwarks against Mongol expansion.[55]

Following the deaths of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the caliph al-Mustakfī in Egypt, the son of the latter became caliph as al-Ḥākim II in 741/1341. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, during his time in Delhi, described meeting the Sufi shaykh Saʿīd (also Ḥājjī Saʿīd Sarṣarī), a Cairene caliphal envoy who had been sent with an Abbasid document investing Muḥammad b. Tughluq as sovereign

51. Al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 47; Becker, "Barthold's Studien," 377; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 59, 63; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 211–13; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 5.

52. Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 211. See also ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 212–13.

53. Michael Hope, "'The Pillars of State': Some Notes on the Qarachu Begs and the Kešikten in the Īl-Khānate (1256–1335)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, no. 2 (2017): 181–99, at 182, 185, 186–90.

54. Becker, "Barthold's Studien," 377–78; Stanley Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages* (New York: Haskel House, 1969), 174, 310.

55. Al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 47–48.

of India.[56] Egyptian and Syrian historians likewise observe that in Muḥarram–Ṣafar 744/June–July 1343 messengers from India arrived in Cairo with gifts and a letter of friendship. Their mission also included the request for a *taqlīd* document conferring Abbasid approval upon Muḥammad b. Tughluq as well as for a scholar to return with them to teach proper Islamic laws and rituals to South Asian Muslims.[57] The new sultan of Cairo, al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr (r. 741–42/1341), a son of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, honored the messengers and requested al-Ḥākim II to compose a document that was sent in the company of the shaykh of the Nāṣiriyya *khānqāh* of Siryāqūs, Rukn al-Dīn al-Malaṭī. The shaykh was ordered to return with the messengers along with a group of Sufi ambassadors.[58] The envoys, including Sayyidī Ziyād, Mubāshir Khilāfatī, and Muḥammad Ṣūfī, were also instructed to transmit knowledge to the Indian Muslim masses.[59]

In the meantime, Muḥammad b. Tughluq substituted al-Mustakfī's name with his own in the Friday sermons of 741/1341 and on the coinage. As he anxiously awaited a response he sent more embassies to Cairo. Although the Tughluqid ruler did not receive the diploma from al-Ḥākim II until three years later, numismatic evidence suggests the name of the deceased al-Mustakfī appeared on his coinage as late as 744/1343 with the prayer "[May God make] his caliphate everlasting," the Delhi sultan thus replacing coins struck in his own name with that of the caliph in Cairo.[60]

When the return embassy finally arrived in Delhi, it received a remarkable reception. Muḥammad b. Tughluq himself, accompanied by the dignitaries and amirs of his court, went out to greet the delegation. The sultan embraced Shaykh Saʿīd and his Egyptian colleagues, kissed the caliph's letter, and touched it to his head. According to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Shaykh Saʿīd had discreetly purchased three black robes in Aden and presented them to his master as "caliphal" robes of honor. Despite some doubt about the authenticity of these robes, the shaykh was subsequently enrobed and paraded through the city on an elephant, surrounded by the amirs of Delhi dressed in somber, black Abbasid-style garb. Dancers accompanied the procession, performing in four-story-tall wooden pavilions erected for the occasion.[61] Visiting Egyptian ambassadors enjoyed extravagant hospitality and public displays of Indo-Muslim respect for Islam in general and the Abbasid Caliphate in particular.[62] Muḥammad

56. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 173–75; Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 492; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 626; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 211.

57. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:3:645.

58. Shams al-Dīn al-Shujāʿī, *Taʾrīkh al-malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī wa-awlādihi*, ed. Barbara Schäfer (Wiesbaden, 1977), 1:257–58; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:3:645; ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ b. Khalīl [al-Malaṭī], *Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2002), 1:81; Abū Bakr Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Taʾrīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba*, ed. ʿAdnān Darwīsh (Damascus, 1994), 2:364.

59. Abdur Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture by the Caliph," *Medieval India Quarterly* 1 (1950): 66–71, at 69.

60. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 5, 49–51; Jackson, "Mongols and the Delhi Sultanate," 131–32n74; idem, *Delhi Sultanate*, 271–72; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 626; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 30, 33; Arnold, *Caliphate*, 105; Margoliouth, "Caliphate Historically Considered," 335–38.

61. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 173–74.

62. Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Surūr, *Dawlat Banī Qalāwūn fī Miṣr: al-ḥāla al-siyāsiyya wa-l-iqtiṣādiyya fī ʿahdihā bi-wajh khāṣṣ* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1947), 97–98; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 48–49.

b. Tughluq honored the investiture deed and restored the caliph's name to his coinage.[63] Authorities in Delhi ordered public readings of the caliph's letter every Friday during the *khuṭba* of the traditional congregational prayer service.[64]

Eager to obtain documents annually from Cairo, Muḥammad b. Tughluq sent a Sufi envoy, Shaykh Rajab al-Burquʿī, in 744/1343–44 with lavish gifts for al-Ḥākim II, including a ruby valued at 50,000 dinars, along with a letter requesting a diploma appointing him as the deputy of Hind and Sindh. Upon arriving in Egypt, Shaykh Rajab, reportedly of Qipchaqi origins like much of Cairo's military elite, requested a private audience with the caliph. However, al-Ḥākim II bi-Amr Allāh—mindful of propriety and appearances—declined to meet or accept gifts unless they were first vetted by the Qalawunid sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl (r. 743–46/1342–45) and his amirs. Following advice from his brother, a local Cairene amir, Shaykh Rajab sold the ruby for 300,000 dirhams and used the proceeds to purchase four precious stones, which he distributed among al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl and his amirs. The accompanying letter from Muḥammad b. Tughluq reminded Egyptian elites that his rule in India was incomplete without the governorship (*wilāya*) facilitated by the Abbasid caliph. Al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl and his advisors decided that the caliph should thus compose a deed for Muḥammad b. Tughluq and sent witnesses to the caliph in whose presence he declared solemnly that he had appointed the sultan of Delhi as his deputy in Hind and Sindh.[65] The sultan summoned the caliph and ordered the deed be sent back with a caliphal ring, sword, robe, an Abbasid cloak, and an encasing of one of the Prophet's footprints.[66] Shaykh Rajab returned to India in 746/1345–46 with a diploma and the caliph's robe.[67] On the return journey, Shaykh Rajab discovered that his diplomatic predecessor Shaykh Saʿīd had indeed purchased bogus caliphal robes in Yemen and informed Muḥammad b. Tughluq, who, although reportedly furious, remained benevolent toward Shaykh Saʿīd, who maintained favor at the time of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's departure from Delhi in 748/1347.[68] It remains unclear why Shaykh Saʿīd purchased counterfeit robes on the return journey and why the caliph or his representatives in Cairo did not simply provide authentic black Abbasid robes for the Tughluqid ruler. Shaykh Saʿīd may have made the decision out of personal greed, or perhaps out of expediency as a practical solution to avoid delays, though the precise reasoning is obscure.

During the reign of Muḥammad b. Tughluq, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad (a son of the Baghdadi Abbasid caliph al-Mustanṣir) made his way toward Delhi upon hearing rumors about the incumbent sultan's admiration for his family. Eager to honor his royal guest, the sultan provided financial assistance for his journey east. In his role as a Tughluqid representative, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa served as a liaison who met the surviving prince in Baghdad,

63. Al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 47.

64. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 492.

65. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 175; Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 494–95.

66. Al-Shujāʿī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1:257–58; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:3:645; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Taʾrīkh*, 2:364; Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 69–70.

67. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 494; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 272.

68. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 174–75; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 626.

confirmed his Abbasid lineage, and accompanied him to Delhi. The sultan warmly welcomed the pair and paid homage to his guest by offering his own horse and riding together under the same canopy. The account underscores Muḥammad b. Tughluq's extensive efforts to demonstrate respect and offer largesse to the visiting prince. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa even shares Muḥammad b. Tughluq's claim that had he not already recognized the caliph in Cairo, he would have proclaimed his visitor caliph in Delhi.[69]

Delhi's relationship with Cairo continued even after the throne passed to Muḥammad b. Tughluq's cousin Fīrūz Shāh (r. 752–90/1351–88), who received a return delegation from al-Ḥākim II in 756/1355 that contained a diploma confirming his rule over Hindustan along with robes of honor.[70] Fīrūz Shāh followed the practices of his predecessor by seeking caliphal acknowledgment from the next caliph, al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh (r. 753–63/1352–62), and continued minting gold coins in the name of the Abbasids.[71] In reply, the new caliph issued documents accompanied by lavish gifts, artifacts, and articles of clothing with the usual éclat.[72] The arrival of this latest embassy from Egypt relieved Rukn al-Dīn al-Malaṭī, allowing him to return home in 754/1353 after nearly a decade in Delhi.[73] These patents confirmed Fīrūz Shāh's rule over India as well as its neighboring lands, islands, and ports. They also conferred new titles for the Delhi sultan such as "sword of the caliphate" (*sayf al-khilāfa*) and "partner of the commander of the faithful" (*qasīm amīr al-muʾminīn*).[74] Upon receiving the deed of 756/1355 Fīrūz Shāh minted coinage in the caliph's name and ruled officially as his deputy (*nāʾib*).[75]

At roughly the same time, in 755/1354 the Muzaffarid ruler of Fars, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Tabriz, Muḥammad Mubāriz al-Dīn (d. 765/1363), made his own *bayʿa* to al-Muʿtaḍid of Cairo to display his Sunni piety. In 758/1357, after receiving Abbasid acknowledgment with an investiture diploma, he inserted the caliph's name in the Friday sermon and stamped it on his coinage.[76] As Patrick Wing argues, however, the motivations behind Muzaffarid acknowledgment of the Cairene Abbasids at this time was not so much an attempt to form alliances with the sultans of Egypt but an articulation of an ideological framework for the ascent and recently enlarged domains of their dynasty in late eighth-/fourteenth-century Iran.[77]

69. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, 478–81; see also al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 58–59; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 32; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 212.

70. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 598; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 214.

71. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 62–65; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 214.

72. Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 66–71; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 626.

73. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 296; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:3:887; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 626.

74. Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 70.

75. Al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 49; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 62–65.

76. Arnold, *Caliphate*, 103; Peter Jackson, "Muẓaffarids," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al., 7:820–22 (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009), 821; Stephen Album, "Power and Legitimacy: The Coinage of Mubāriz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Muẓaffar at Yazd and Kirmān," in *Le monde iranien et l'Islam: Societies et cultures*, ed. Jean Aubin, 2:157–71 (Geneva: Droz, 1974).

77. Patrick Wing, "Mozaffarids," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, last updated January 26, 2017. Muzaffarid acknowledgment of the Cairene Abbasids continued during the reign of the reportedly less pious Shāh-i Shujāʿ

Regional Competition, Diplomacy, and Ideological Assertion

Established by rebellious generals of the Tughluq dynasty, the newly founded Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan sought to assert its political legitimacy and ideological authority within the competitive landscape of early modern Indian polities. In his coverage of the year 760/1360 the later historian Muḥammad Qāsim Firishta (d. ca. 1620) reports that Malika Jihān, the mother of the second Bahmani sultan, Muḥammad Shāh (r. 759–76/1358–75), made the pilgrimage to Mecca, leaving from the port of Dābul (Dabhol) on India's western Konkan coast. Accompanied by a substantial retinue of eunuchs and courtiers, she met representatives of the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid of Cairo (who was also at hajj in 760/1359–60[78]) and managed to secure formal Abbasid approval for her son's rule. Haroon Sherwani read the Bahmani queen mother's diplomatic exertions as a means of warding off the imminent threat of invasion to the Deccan by Fīrūz Shāh of Delhi. An earlier caliphal decree warning Fīrūz Shāh not to shed the blood of the Muslims in southern India may have facilitated this as well.[79] On her return from pilgrimage the queen mother brought not only a piece of the Kaʿba's curtain (*kiswa*) but also a formal decree granting her son the right to have the Abbasid caliph's name mentioned in the Friday sermons and Eid prayers, and minted on coins along with his own name.[80]

It is reasonable to question the veracity of Firishta's account given the lack of any supporting contemporary Bahmani sources or evidence from the Cairo Sultanate. There is also the possibility that the account was shaped by later narrative construction that attempted to frame the rise of Bahmani power as divinely sanctioned and interconnected with the caliphate and the sacred geography of Islam in the Hijaz. While elements of the narrative of Malika Jihān's pilgrimage and her interactions with the Abbasid Caliphate may be rooted in truth, the story is more likely a constructed account aimed at serving ideological purposes. Securing approval from the Abbasid caliph of Cairo would have reinforced Bahmani claims to divine favor and rightful rule within a larger Islamicate political order.

(r. 759–86/1358–84), who struggled with his brothers as well as the Jalayrids and appealed to the Cairene Abbasids for a caliphal advantage in 770/1369, until his domains ultimately fell to Temür in 785–86/1384. See Becker, "Barthold's Studien," 377–78; Arnold, *Caliphate*, 103; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 150.

78. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:3:903, 3:1:77; idem, *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (London: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2002), 3:785; idem, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda fī tarājim al-aʿyān al-mufīda*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002), 2:210; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Taʾrīkh*, 3:47; al-Malaṭī, *Nayl al-amal*, 1:257, 340; Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Dhayl al-tāmm ʿalā duwal al-Islām li-l-Dhahabī*, ed. Ḥasan Ismāʿīl Marwa (Kuwait: Maktabat Dār al-ʿUrūba, 1992), 1:119, 134; idem, *Wajīz al-kalām fī al-dhayl ʿalā duwal al-Islām,* ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf et al. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1995), 1:70, 123.

79. Muḥammad Qāsim Hindū Shāh Astarābādī [Firishta], *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, ed. Muḥammad-Riżā Naṣīrī (Tehran: Society for the Appreciation of Cultural Works and Dignitaries, 2010), 2:258–61; Haroon K. Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985), 62. On Fīrūz Shāh's tensions with Muḥammad b. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Bahmānī, despite the latter's attainment of caliphal sanction, see al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 60.

80. Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:261; Haroon K. Sherwani, *Maḥmūd Gāwāṇ: The Great Bahmani Wazir* (Allahabad: Kitābistān, 1942), 46–47.

Faced with rebellion and secession by former governors in the Deccan and Bengal as previous Tughluqid territories transformed into successor states, recognition by the caliph also came at an opportune moment for Fīrūz Shāh.[81] After the death of al-Muʿtaḍid in Cairo in 763/1362, his son al-Mutawakkil continued relations with Fīrūz Shāh, issuing a second caliphal deed in 764/1362–63. The caliphal envoys at this time, Qāḍī Bahāʾ al-Dīn and Khwāja Kāfūr Khilāfatī, delivered the document investing Fīrūz Shāh as governor (*wālī*) and endowing his sultanate with authority over an impressive territorial expanse in Central and South Asia including "Sarāndīb [Ceylon], Jawāt, Maʿr, Saylān, Kawlam, Sawliyān, Hunūr, Bāknūr, Bangāla, Lakhnawtī, Tank, Dēōgīr, Sawāẓil, Malwa, Gujarat, Delhi, Kūhmā Qarājil, Sindh," and other areas well beyond his actual sphere of control.[82]

Cairene Abbasid endorsement of rival rulers in India, particularly the near-simultaneous investiture of both Muḥammad Shāh Bahmani and Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq, raises intriguing questions about the nature of caliphal authority and its diplomatic functions. It is worth pointing out that the Cairene Abbasids—from the late eighth/fourteenth century—had the avenue of composing enthronement documents for foreign rulers that they could exchange for cash and material gifts. While conventional wisdom suggests that only the sultans could oversee any such projects and thereby gain the most, the true level of caliphal autonomy in such matters is perhaps murkier.[83] The caliphs issued deeds to rival Muslim rulers in India, while the sultans of Cairo showed little concern unless return embassies arrived bearing valuable gifts. These gifts and the funds accompanying Indian requests provided a significant source of income for the Abbasids as well as the sultans of Cairo, who benefited from the lucrative exchanges sometimes offered at the same time by competing rulers.[84]

Acknowledgment of rulers in both Delhi and the Deccan may reflect Cairo's pragmatic approach to rival claims at a time when multiple powers vied for control in the region. By

81. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, 598; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 214; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 99.

82. *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*, trans. S. H. Askari (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2019), 360–66; Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 70; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 634.

83. The freeborn "*awlād al-nās*" amir and courtier Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī suggests the Cairene Abbasids maintained an autonomous division within the chancery in which investiture and other documents were produced; see Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, *Kitāb zubdat kashf al-mamālik wa-bayān al-ṭuruq wa-l-masālik*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 75. The historian and religious scholar Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī claims the Abbasids were in possession of their own distinct family seals and identifiers used freely to sign such documents, which they kept in their private residence; see Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī, *Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr li-asrār ahl al-ʿaṣr*, ed. Muḥammad Sālim b. Shadīd al-ʿAwfī (Giza, 1992–93), 2:79. On Cairene Abbasid autonomy and agency in forging marriage ties, pursuing religious learning, and acquiring financial capital, see Mustafa Banister, "Princesses Born to Concubines: A First Visit to the Women of the Abbasid Household in Late Medieval Cairo," *Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 20, no. 4 (2022): 396–430; idem, "The *ʿĀlim*-Caliph: Reimagining the Caliph as a Man of Learning in Eighth/Fourteenth- and Ninth/Fifteenth-Century Egypt," in *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam: Religious Learning between Continuity and Change*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 741–67; idem, "Keeping Up with the ʿAbbāsids: Towards an Economic and Urban Spatial History of the Cairo Caliphate (1261–1517)," in *From Cairo to Jerusalem and Beyond: Studies of the Later Islamic Middle Period in Honor of Linda Stevens Northrup*, ed. Mustafa Banister and Fadi Ragheb (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

84. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 36; Banister, "Keeping Up with the ʿAbbāsids."

recognizing multiple Muslim rulers in India, the Abbasid caliph in Cairo and his various handlers could maintain a symbolic balance of power among the rival Indo-Muslim sultanates without alienating any one of them outright. This dynamic becomes even more interesting when considering the investiture of Fīrūz Shāh in 764/1362–63, which apparently excluded the Deccan region, raising the question of whether this was a conscious nod to the recent recognition of the Bahmanis.

The listing of all the other territories may have been a program for conquest, or in some cases reconquest, much like a late seventh-/thirteenth-century investiture deed of the caliph al-Mustanṣir to the sultan Baybars in Cairo that listed many lands the latter did not actually control as pointed out by Stefan Heidemann.[85] The document denounced all opponents of Fīrūz Shāh's rule as rebels against the caliph and the Prophet Muḥammad (perhaps with the exception of the Bahmanis?) and named the Indian sultan as chief agent of the sultan in Cairo in negotiations with other Muslim provinces.[86] Annual mandates approving the ongoing rule of Fīrūz Shāh thus began naming him "master of the sultans" (*sayyid al-salāṭīn*).[87]

According to the anonymous eighth-/fourteenth-century history entitled *Sīrat-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, more caliphal embassies came to Delhi from Cairo after 765/1364–65. In deeds sent to Fīrūz Shāh's court, the caliph al-Mutawakkil reminded listeners/readers that obedience to the caliphal office worked in tandem with obedience to the local sultan and that neither he, the caliph, nor his recent Abbasid predecessors had acknowledged mandates besides those for the sultan of Delhi.[88] The text of the *Sīrat-i Fīrūz Shāhī* preserves some of the text of al-Mutawakkil's deed of 766/1365 presented to the sultan of Delhi by Nāṣir al-Dīn Dāwādār and Sharaf al-Dīn Rifaʾī. The language of the deed repeats previous honorifics for Fīrūz Shāh such as "sword of the caliphate," "associate of the commander of the faithful," and "master of the sultans." Written from the first-person perspective of the caliph of Cairo himself, the document underscores the unique prestige of the Delhi sultan in lofty language meant for his courtiers to hear:

> Let the *sayf al-khilāfa*, the *qasīm-i amīr al-muʾminīn*, *sayyid al-salāṭīn* Fīrūz Shāh know that my father and grandfather have not written mandatory letters patent to any one of the kings of Hind except those who were the occupants of the throne of Delhi, and they had no sanction for sovereignty. We have entrusted to you the dominion and authority in the realm of Hind. Therefore, those who obey you will have obeyed us, and anyone who disobeys you, he may be taken to have disobeyed us, and then he should be deposed, and this sword of ours would be upon his neck. We have truly appointed you *walī* on the country of Hind and whatever belong[s] to that. We have sent to you a sword, special saddle, ornamented chain for the neck of the horse and a horse-cloth so that you may be mounted in the accordance with the ways of the ancient kings.[89]

85. Heidemann, *Das aleppiner Kalifat*, 101–2.

86. Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 70; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 632.

87. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 296; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 60.

88. Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 626–27, 634.

89. Translation by S. H. Askari; see *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*, 365. See also Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 70–71.

Fīrūz Shāh's court accepted such annual writs of confirmation with great pomp and showered luxurious gifts on the envoys from Cairo.[90] In Jumādā II 771/January 1370 envoys[91] brought the investiture document along with a *waqfnāma* returned to the sultan and authenticated by the caliph, a black Abbasid robe, and a sword. The *waqfnāma* was sent to tour the sultan's domain to inform the citizens that the caliph had recognized Fīrūz Shāh's right to rule,[92] and that the latter was the caliph's delegate and representative to all other Muslim princes in India.[93]

A revealing look into these caliphal exchanges with Cairo comes by way of the *Futūḥāt-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, a public proclamation attributed to Fīrūz Shāh himself, which outlined the principles of his reign, while also referring to his achievements and reforms. The source makes known the ruler's overall commitment to upholding the *sharīʿa* as well as reining in heresies and innovations against traditional Sunni Islam by Shiʿites, collecting taxes and distributing war booty, and sets forth ideas about the importance of the caliphal institution. Fīrūz Shāh's own closing remarks in this brief text appear to reflect candidly on the implications for his obedience to the Abbasid caliph in Cairo:

> The greatest and best of honors which I obtained through God's mercy was, that by my obedience, piety, friendliness and submission to the Caliph, the representative of the holy Prophet, my authority was confirmed; for it is by his sanction that the power of kings is assured and no king is secure until he has submitted himself to the Caliph and received a confirmation from the sacred throne. A diploma was sent to me fully confirming my authority as deputy of the Caliph and leader of the faithful was graciously pleased to honor me with the title of *sayyid al-salāṭīn*. He also bestowed on me robes, a banner, a sword, a ring and a footprint as badges of honor and distinction.[94]

The decade after Fīrūz Shāh's death in 790/1388 witnessed the rise of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq Shāh II (r. 790–91/1388–89) and a series of weak successors. Internal infighting played a role in assisting the Timurid invasion of northern India at the turn of the ninth/fifteenth century. Coins, meanwhile, continued to bear the name of al-Mutawakkil in Cairo, but the Egyptian Abbasids garnered little attention amidst more pressing internal challenges facing the Tughluqids. The intense political turmoil of the time suggests the possibility of a rupture in diplomatic exchanges with Cairo.[95] By 800/1398, the Delhi Sultanate lost much of its former territory to governors who broke off independently, resulting in a weakened state that was now merely one of several competing Muslim polities seeking power in northern India.

90. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 296; Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 70–71.

91. In this instance Qāḍī Najm al-Dīn Qurayshī and Khwāja Kāfūr Khilāfatī.

92. Rashid, "Firoz Shah's Investiture," 71.

93. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, 298.

94. Fīrūz Shāh, *Futūḥāt-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, ed. Sh. ʿAbd al-Rashīd (Aligarh, 1954), 18–19; idem, *Futūḥāt-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, ed. and trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi, 1996), 33–34. See also Arnold, *Caliphate*, 105; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 49–50; Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 214; Surūr, *Dawlat Banī Qalāwūn*, 100; Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 627

95. Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," 215; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 60–61; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 217.

Temür and His Wake in India

Modern histories of medieval India typically attribute the favorable conditions for Temür's invasion to the growing weakness of later Tughluqid rulers. Armed with 10,000 cavalry the Central Asian conqueror and his forces brutally sacked Delhi in 801/1398, exacerbating an already intense period of political fragmentation. The Tughluqid sultans nevertheless survived until 815/1413, when they were ousted by two successive dynasties, the Sayyids and Lodis who ruled from Delhi.[96]

Temür appointed Sayyid Khiḍr Khān, governor of Multan, whose domination eventually paved the way for the ascendancy of the Sayyid dynasty in Delhi (r. 817–55/1414–51). After seizing Delhi with Afghan followers in 817/1414 and recognizing Temür's successor Shāhrukh (d. 850/1447) for several years, Khiḍr Khān (r. 817–24/1414–21) replaced Timurid names in official spaces with those of the Cairene Abbasids once again, though the change proved limited to his reign. Later Sayyid rulers as well as those of the subsequent Lodi dynasty (r. 855–932/1451–1526), however, reverted to identifying themselves as deputies (*nāʾib*s) of the Cairo caliphs, a practice that continued until the ascendancy of the first Mughul emperor Babur in 932/1526.[97]

Contemporary to Temür's rattling of the balance of power in India, several independent regional powers also emerged as Muslims migrated throughout the subcontinent and new constellations of power took shape. Among the new stakeholders in South Asia were the aforementioned Bahmani Sultanate (r. 748–934/1347–1528) rooted in the Deccan, the Bengal Sultanate situated in the Bay of Bengal in the eastern part of the subcontinent, the sultanate of Gujarat (r. 806–980/1403–1573) in the western maritime region, alongside the continued growth of the Vijayanagara Empire of the south led by Hindu rulers. In hopes of dissuading the rulers of Delhi from reclaiming sovereignty over their independent Mabar and Bahmani sultanates, southern rebels in the Deccan region searched for additional religious legitimacy from the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo.[98]

The later eighth/fourteenth century was likewise a time of change in the Cairo Sultanate with the reign of the sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq whose turn in power (r. 784–801/1382–99, with interruption) marked the end of the Turkish-descended Qalawunid dynasty (r. 741–84/1341–82). The establishment of a new (though short-lived) Circassian "Barquqid" line (r. 784–815/1382–1412) witnessed the attempts of several Muslim rulers in India to contact Cairo, expressing respect and reverence for the new political order. Sultan Barqūq reciprocated by sending materials to reinforce ongoing relationships and continued the diplomatic initiatives intended to strengthen relations between Egypt and India. Arabic historical sources such as the *Kitāb al-sulūk* of al-Maqrīzī highlight a gathering of ambassadors from Cairo, Delhi, and Mecca with the sultan in Yemen in 800/1397. Barqūq's death in 801/1399 marked a transition of power to his son, Sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj (r. 801–15/1399–1412, with interruption), whose reign witnessed Temür's ruthless conquest

96. On Temür's conquest of Delhi, see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, 12:262–64; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 52–53.

97. Conermann and Kollatz, "Some Remarks," 634; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 218–20.

98. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 96, 98, 99; Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 97.

of the Syrian territories of the sultanate just two years after Delhi. Throughout this chaotic period, the courts of different Indo-Muslim rulers kept up interest in securing Cairene Abbasid recognition.[99]

Notions of the caliphate in this era were not without contestation; notably Temür's son Shāhrukh proclaimed himself caliph and *mujaddid*.[100] Shāhrukh had sought his own acknowledgment as caliph and amir of the Muslims by his father's former vassals but was refused by the Ottoman sultan Murād II (r. 824–48, 850–55/1421–44, 1446–51) and the sultan Barsbāy (r. 825–41/1422–38). The latter also famously barred Shāhrukh from gaining symbolic influence in Mecca by sending a *kiswa* for the Kaʿba in 838/1434.[101] Nevertheless, some weaker Timurid claimants—perhaps in desperation—tried to appeal to the authority of the Cairene Abbasids including Temür's grandson Pīr Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Shaykh (d. 809/1407), who, in the context of his activities in Fars during struggles against his uncle Shāhrukh in 808/1405, considered applying for Abbasid investiture, though he was ultimately dissuaded by advisors.[102]

Formal Recognition and Application to Cairo: Gujarat and the Deccan

Early ninth-/fifteenth-century embassies from various regions in the subcontinent, including remote areas, continued to express interest in the caliphate of Cairo. In 809/1407 the former Tughluqid governor Ẓafar Khān, having ascended to rulership as Muẓaffar Shāh (r. 793–814/1391–1411) in the wealthy maritime Gujarat region, sent an embassy to the Abbasid caliph (and temporary interim sultan) al-Mustaʿīn bi-llāh (r. 808–16/1406–14). This prompted an exchange of correspondence including a return embassy in 813/1410–11. The caliph in Cairo sent a robe and an investiture deed to Gujarat, solidifying diplomatic ties with western India. To demonstrate his ties to the Cairene Abbasids on his silver coins, Muẓaffar Shāh took a title as the caliph's deputy (*nāʾib amīr al-muʾminīn*) and even named the reigning caliph (albeit somewhat anonymously) as "Abū ʿAbdullāh."[103]

In 830/1427, Indian ambassadors from the Bahmani court at Gulbarga, tasked with investing funds locally in madrasas and other building projects in the Hijaz, arrived bearing gifts for Sultan Barsbāy and the caliph of Cairo, reinforcing their liege lord's fealty to the Abbasids and demonstrating respect for the Cairo Sultanate's dominance over the region.[104] A series of embassies were also exchanged between 832/1428 and 836/1433 until the death

99. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 3:2:652.

100. For a nuanced discussion, see Dekkiche, "New Source, New Debate," 268; İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 260–61; Arnold, *Caliphate*, 112–15.

101. Dekkiche, "New Source, New Debate," 248–63, 269–71.

102. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 199; Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Temür and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 8, no. 1 (April 1998): 21–41, at 34–35; Becker, "Barthold's Studien," 378; Banister, *Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo*, 148; Arnold, *Caliphate*, 105–6; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 260.

103. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 359–60.

104. Richard T. Mortel, "Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60, no. 2 (1997): 236–52, at 245–46.

of the sultan of Gujarat and the succession of his fourteen-year-old son, al-Muẓaffar Aḥmad Shāh (r. 836–40/1433–37).[105]

The Egyptian chancery scribe al-Qalqashandī preserved a copy of an investiture deed sent to Muẓaffar Shāh in the name of al-Mustaʿīn.[106] Al-Qalqashandī makes note of the document's rarity, describing it as the only surviving deed issued by a Cairene Abbasid to a foreign ruler.[107] The document authorizes the succession of Muẓaffar Shāh in Gujarat, emphasizing God's elevation of the Abbasid family, designating them as witnesses, spreaders of good news, and carriers of wise counsel. The document assures readers that seeking Abbasid approval ensures victory, while also acknowledging the scarcity of those recognizing the caliph protected by the Cairo Sultanate—likening them to survivors of Noah's ark. Muẓaffar Shāh is acknowledged as a fitting guide and helper for the Abbasid caliph in India, and his subjects are obligated to obey him as the rightful deputy of the Cairo Abbasids. As Ṣāhibe ʿĀlam al-Nadawī argues, the text (as a product of Syro-Egyptian chancery culture) is constructed in language that reinforces ideas of admonition, advice, refinement, and encouragement to perpetuate the arrangement that required Indian Muslim rulers to seek out Abbasid delegation.[108]

Abbasid recognition served the sultanate of Gujarat from its capital in Aḥmadābād in its early decades against the claims of nearby rivals including the Muslim sovereigns of Malwa to its east as well as Khandesh, the Deccan, and the Bengal Sultanate. A lack of sources combined with intermarriage between the Muslim sovereigns and Hindu Rajput rulers in Gujarat,[109] as well as Hindu bureaucrats in the administration and the influence of Sufi networks, makes it exceedingly unclear what, if any, effect the Abbasid delegation played in the local, religiously diverse sociopolitical milieu.[110]

In the Deccan, the Bahmani court had begun in 748/1347 as another successor to the dissolving Tughluqid authority. The rulers ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Bahman Shāh (r. 748–59/1347–58) and the aforementioned Muḥammad Shāh (r. 759–76/1358–75) appear to have used the titles "right hand of the caliph" (*yamīn al-khilāfa*) and "supporter of the commander of the faithful" (*nāṣir amīr al-muʾminīn*) even before receiving formal investiture from the caliph in Cairo.[111] These titles, often not formally recognized by the caliph, acknowledged

105. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:2:756, 924–25. See also Aḥmad Darrāj, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay, 825–841/1422–1438* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1961), 217–19; Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 46–47; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 51.

106. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 10:129–34; Ibn Ḥijja, *Qahwat al-inshāʾ*, 428–34. Conermann and Kollatz date this document to approximately 815/1413 ("Some Remarks," 635). See also Spies, "Investiturschreiben," 241–42.

107. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 10:129. On Abbasid investiture deeds issued to the rulers of India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Auer, *Symbols of Authority*, 108–16; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 46–56; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 220–21.

108. Al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 62.

109. On intermarriage in Gujarat, see Samira Sheikh, *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42, 106, 108, 163, 197–204.

110. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 105–7; Kumar, *Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*, 4.

111. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 290.

his authority and suggest that the rulers felt secure enough in their power to assert them, distancing themselves from the need for formal acknowledgment from the Egyptian caliph in the face of rival claims.[112] Ambiguous titles, such as those issued in the name of the caliph of the time (*fī zamān al-imām amīr al-muʾminīn*), the identification of a nonspecific "Abū ʿAbdullāh" as caliph, and prayers for the reigning caliph's time in office to be everlasting (*khulidat khilāfatuhu*), all appear on the coinage, serving as substitutes for naming the precise contemporary caliph whose identity (residing as he was in distant Cairo) may have been unknown at the time the coins were minted.[113]

Its strategic positioning placed the Bahmani Sultanate in frequent conflict with its rivals in Malwa and Gujarat. By the mid-ninth/fifteenth century, the Bahmani capital had already moved twice: first from Dawlatābād to Gulbarga shortly after the first sultan's coronation (ca. 748/1347), and later from Gulbarga to Bidar in 833/1430, making Bidar the capital by the mid-ninth/fifteenth century.[114] The ruler Aḥmad Shāh I (r. 825–38/1422–36) sent envoys to Mecca in 830/1426, who then proceeded to Cairo with gifts for the caliph and sultan including 7,000 dinars, Indian swords, textiles, and clothing, as well as orders to construct a madrasa for which endowments were established. No letters appear to have remained from the exchange.[115]

Another Indian embassy was sent to Cairo in 833/1429 followed by construction projects in the holy sites of the Hijaz in 838/1434. A letter sent to Gulbarga the same year from Cairo mentions titles bestowed by the Abbasid caliph to Aḥmad Shāh I (or possibly his son ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Aḥmad Shāh II, r. 838–62/1435 or 1436–58).[116] Despite receiving titles from the Cairene Abbasids, Bahmani coinage dated to the reigns of Aḥmad Shāh I and his son Aḥmad Shāh II does not reference the Cairene Caliphate. Both rulers employed titles that evoked Abbasid regnal nomenclature, yet without reference to any reigning caliph. Instead, Aḥmad Shāh the elder used titles such as al-Mustawathiq and al-Manṣūr on his coinage. It seems unlikely that these were meant to serve as regnal designations; rather they were symbolic gestures meant to invoke the prestige of earlier Abbasid caliphs. Likewise, Aḥmad Shāh the younger adopted "Muʿtaṣim bi-khayr Allāh" (he who takes refuge in the goodness of God) perhaps as an indicator of the ruler's reliance on divine assistance. This trend continued with the last Bahmani ruler to reign as a contemporary of the Cairo Sultanate, Maḥmūd Shāh (r. 887–924/1482–1518), who took the title "al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh." Use of such titles is best understood as a regional expression of royal sovereignty and less a reference to any formal political relationship with the Abbasid Caliphate.[117]

112. Sherwani, *Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 60–61.

113. These ambiguous titles also appeared on the coins of other rulers such as Bahlūl Shāh Lodī, Iskandar Shāh Lodī, as well as the sultans of Jawnpur and Gujarat. See Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 85–87, 343, 363.

114. Sherwani, *Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 122–26; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 64, 86.

115. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:2:756; Mortel, "Madrasas in Mecca," 246–47; Meia Walravens, "Arabic as a Language of the South Asian Chancery: Bahmani Communications to the Mamluk Sultanate," *Arabica* 67, no. 4 (2020): 409–35, at 415, 418.

116. Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, 15:194; Darrāj, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay*, 218–19; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 221–22.

117. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 299–300.

The notable Gilani chancery scribe and statesman ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd Gāwān (814–86/1411–81) spent a number of formative years in the sultanate of Cairo before taking up service in the Bahmani court in the Deccan in 850/1447. Gāwān alluded to the caliphate in chancery documents he composed in correspondence with Turkic rulers including the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (r. 848–50, 855–86/1444–46, 1451–81) or Uzun Ḥasan (r. 861–82/1457–78) of the Aqqoyunlu Turkmen.[118] Maya Petrovitch notes that Gāwān may have elevated such rulers to the status of caliphs to better establish far-reaching links. However, acknowledgment of the Ottomans as caliphs does not appear to be directly tied to their conquest of Constantinople, nor does it suggest expansive claims. By the late ninth/fifteenth century, the Ottomans had still not conquered eastern Anatolia from the Aqqoyunlu or the holy cities of the Hijaz from the Cairo Sultanate.[119] Instead, as Petrovitch has made clear, and more recently Meia Walravens in her study of Bahmani diplomatic history,[120] the term "caliphate" in the context of late ninth-/fifteenth-century South Asia was perhaps more of a gracious compliment, synonymous with fortuitous largesse and generosity, and not exclusive to any one ruler.[121] While its meaning fluctuated in time and elite space, Gāwān frequently employed the flexible title of caliphate as a means to praise distant rulers, such as the Timurids including Sultan Abū Saʿīd or Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā, the sultan of Cairo, or the ruler of Gilan. Walravens argues that for Gāwān, "chosenness" was the most significant attribute of the caliphate, rather than exclusivity. She contends that it is perhaps more useful to read caliphate in Gāwān's writings as an expression of God's favor, rather than adhering to the static (pre-1258) traditional understanding of the title as God's representative or living successor to the Prophet Muḥammad.[122]

Coinage and Caliphal Legitimacy in Bengal and Malwa

In the early seventh/thirteenth century, the Afghan military freebooter Muḥammad b. Bakhtiyār Khaljī (r. 594–603/1198–1206), under the auspices of his Ghurid overlords, raided through the Gangetic plain into Bengal, introducing Islamic hegemony to the dense jungles and marshy river region. In 601/1204, he rapidly acquired much of the territory in Bengal and Bihar, consolidating control over the eastern region. Delhi experienced difficulty exerting control over the province due to its thick jungles and rivers.[123] Following Aybak's

118. Meia Walravens, "Networked Diplomacy: Maḥmūd Gāwān's Bahmani Sultanate and the Fifteenth-Century Islamic World" (PhD diss., University of Antwerp, 2022), 38, 47–55; Maya Petrovich, "Merchants, Young Heroes and Caliphs: Revisiting Maḥmūd Gāwān," in *Turkish History and Culture in India: Identity, Art and Transregional Connections*, ed. A. C. S. Peacock and Richard Piran McClary, 104–28 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 104–6; Emma J. Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 62, 133–35; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 87.

119. Petrovich, "Merchants, Young Heroes and Caliphs," 117–18, 120.

120. Walravens argues that Gāwān's use of the caliphate applies to Uzun Ḥasan rather than the Ottomans; see "Networked Diplomacy," 151.

121. Petrovich, "Merchants, Young Heroes and Caliphs," 121.

122. Walravens, "Networked Diplomacy," 126, 152.

123. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 30–31, 99–100; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 23, 28; Kumar, *Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*, 72–73.

consolidation of control over the Delhi Sultanate, he appointed ʿAlī Mardān to govern Bengal.[124] After a failed attempt at independence by the new governor, who was assassinated in 610/1213, ʿAlī Mardān was succeeded by Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿIwaḍ (r. 610–24/1213–27), who had also applied for and received Abbasid investiture from Baghdad.[125] Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿIwaḍ declared his own sultanate and minted coins in the name of the caliph al-Nāṣir of Baghdad. This prompted Iltutmish to invade and reannex Bengal to subjugate Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿIwaḍ. Iltutmish subsequently sought caliphal support of his own in hopes of upstaging the would-be Muslim ruler of Bengal in a grand spectacle.[126]

Richard Eaton's analysis of the later Bengal Sultanate argues that the new Muslim conquerors of Bengal faced the challenge of finding common symbols and a language of political legitimacy—filtered through the prism of local culture—that would resonate with the non-Muslim Hindu subjects and landowning elites in the region.[127] For sixty years Bengal was governed by various rulers on behalf of the sultans of Delhi. To keep up with tradition, many of them minted coins in the names of the last two Baghdadi Abbasids.[128]

Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (r. 739–50/1339–49) later ruled Bengal while succession alternated between the lines of Ilyās Shāh (r. 740–817/1339–1414) and that of Rājāganesh (r. 817–40/1414–37).[129] By the mid-eighth/fourteenth century the reign of Ilyās Shāh (r. 740–59/1339–58) unified several independent kingdoms into the Bengal Sultanate first at Pandua (renamed Fīrūzābād in 756/1355) then Gaur.[130] As a newly independent ruler in the wake of a failed Tughluq siege that led to the signing of a treaty with Fīrūz Shāh in the early 750s/1350s, Ilyās Shāh conquered east and west Bengal and struck coins as the "right hand of the caliph" (*yamīn al-khilāfa*) and "supporter of the commander of the faithful" (*nāṣir amīr al-muʾminīn*), and his successors such as Sikandar b. Ilyās (r. 759–92/1358–90) did the same.[131]

Eaton points out that in the context of their break with Delhi's rule, the early rulers of Ilyās Shāh's line in Bengal reached for a different kind of political legitimacy based on Pan-Islamic and imperial bases that involved association with the caliph as well as building projects and the patronage of shrines.[132] The third sultan of the Ilyās dynasty, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Aʿẓam Shāh b. Sikandar (r. 792–813/1390–1410), desired delegation as "Sulṭān al-Hind" from the caliph al-Mustaʿīn in 814/1411, dispatching wealth and gifts to the court of Sultan Faraj in Cairo.[133] The next Cairene Abbasid, al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh II (r. 816–45/1414–41), sent back

124. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 34.

125. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 22; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 61; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 1.

126. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 141; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 39.

127. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 22–23; Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," 149–50.

128. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 135, 152–58.

129. A later fifty-year period of rule by Ilyās Shāh's line followed from 841/1437 to 892/1487.

130. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 40–41.

131. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 135, 168, 170–79; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 41–42.

132. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 47, 49.

133. Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 97; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 220–21.

the requested titles and documents, though Ghiyāth al-Dīn passed away shortly thereafter. The sultans of Bengal also upheld the Perso-Islamic traditions of the north, demonstrating allegiance to the Cairene Abbasids, while incorporating local customs and ceremonies.[134] The subsequent span between 814/1411 and 825/1423 indicates little by way of Egyptian and Indian exchanges involving caliphal diplomacy.

Meanwhile in Egypt, the sultan al-Muʾayyad Shaykh (r. 815–24/1412–21) assumed rulership and grappled with the challenges of suppressing internal rebellions in the Syro-Egyptian territories of the sultanate. Despite successful pacification of domestic unrest in the Levant and elsewhere, the sultanate of Cairo remained under external threats, as Shaykh engaged in continuous warfare against neighboring Turkmen polities between 815/1412 and 819/1416.[135]

The house of Ilyās Shāh lasted for fifty years until tensions with the Indo-Turkish elites, Sufis, and Hindu landowning elites—who were well integrated into the ruling structure—allowed the Bengali Hindu notable Rājāganesh to seize power in all but name in 817/1414, delivering a shock to Muslim elites at court. Coming to a compromise with the latter, Rājāganesh agreed to put his son Jadu on the throne as a convert to Islam who reigned as Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh b. Fandū (r. 817–36/1415–32). As a Muslim convert and boy-king "surrounded by rebellious Hindus in the interior and shocked Muslim elites in the capital," Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad was in dire need of religious and ideological support to help maintain his throne. He submitted himself to Chisti Sufi advisors who served as the primary legitimizers of Islamic authority in Bengal.[136]

To project himself as a pious Hanafi Muslim, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad rebuilt mosques his father had ordered destroyed, supported the building of a madrasa in Mecca (831–34/1428–31), and began a diplomatic relationship with Sultan Barsbāy of Cairo.[137] Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad sent an embassy to Egypt with gifts to the court of Barsbāy in 832/1429 to acquire an Abbasid contract (*ʿahd*) recognizing his rule from the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid II.[138] Reportedly impressed by Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad's claims of commendable works and charitable activities in Bengal, the caliph issued the requested deed and sent back gifts of his own.[139] The young sultan of Bengal also minted a number of coins that underscored his connection to the caliphate including "supporter of the commander of the faithful" (*nāṣir amīr al-muʾminīn*), "may his kingship be everlasting" (*khalada mulkuhu*), and another coin from the later portion of his reign in 821–36/1418–33 that identifies him as "God's caliph,

134. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 99–100, 103–5; Darrāj, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay*, 217–18.

135. Carl F. Petry, *The Mamluk Sultanate: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 30–33.

136. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 99–100; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 50–52, 55–56.

137. An earlier Bengali madrasa was constructed in the Hijaz in 813/1410–11 by Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muẓaffar Aʿẓam Shāh. See Mortel, "Madrasas in Mecca," 244–45.

138. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr bi-anbāʾ al-ʿumr*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1994), 2:496–97; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, 15:192–93; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Naẓrat al-maṣādir," 221; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 57; Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 97.

139. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 8:243–44.

the helper of Islam and Muslims" (*khalīfat Allāh nāṣir al-islām wa-l-muslimīn*).[140] For a recent convert to Islam to take this unprecedented step in Bengal to assert his legitimacy was met with skepticism by his elite Muslim audience.[141]

In 834/1430, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh again expressed reverence for the caliphate by sending a valuable gift to the Egyptian incumbent.[142] Al-Maqrīzī observes that in late 837/1434 the ruler sent a final lavish gift to Cairo that arrived posthumously. A caliphal deed and appropriate honors were prepared for a return journey to Bengal but arrived in the court of his fourteen-year-old successor, al-Muẓaffar Aḥmad Shāh.[143]

The Malwa Sultanate (r. 804–969/1402–1562), with its central Indian hillfort capital in Mandu, emerged under the Ghuri and Khalaj rulers after securing autonomy from Delhi following Temür's invasion in late 801/1398. Maḥmūd Khaljī (r. 839–73/1436–69) became sultan in 839/1436 and was opposed by Muslim rivals among the Bahmani sultans and the sultans of Gujarat and Mewar.[144] To bolster ideological claims from Malwa, Maḥmūd Khaljī pursued recognition from the Egyptian Abbasids al-Muʿtaḍid II and later al-Mustanjid bi-llāh (r. 859–84/1455–79). These caliphs furnished him with *sharʿī* legal approval for his governance and sent robes and patents from Cairo. Maḥmūd Khaljī minted gold coins utilizing caliphal titles such as "right hand of the caliphate" (*yamīn al-khilāfa*) and "supporter of the commander of the faithful" (*nāṣir amīr al-muʾminīn*).[145]

John Meloy has uncovered a diplomatic exchange between Cairo and the sultanates of Malwa and Delhi in the late 860s/1460s wherein Maḥmūd Khaljī complained to Khushqadam (r. 865–72/1461–67), the sultan in Cairo, in Rajab 871/February 1467 that his emissaries had been mistreated in Mecca. Maḥmūd Khaljī had established a madrasa in the holy city and sent an embassy to Cairo with gifts for the sultan and caliph, as well as for the *sharīf* of Mecca and other judges and dignitaries. In 870/1466, a return embassy was sent to Malwa from the caliph al-Mustanjid along with gifts for Maḥmūd Khaljī including a Quran, sword, ring, robe, and a caliphal investiture deed dated 869/1465. Maḥmūd Khaljī, as recorded by ʿAbdullāh al-Ulughkhānī—a tenth-/sixteenth-century historian of Meccan origin who served in the administrations of Gujarat, Khandesh, as well as the Mughals—later claimed to have had a dream in which he saw himself associating with prominent, black-clad members of the Abbasid family, thereby emphasizing his connection to the caliphate. Nevertheless, as Meloy notes, he addressed his complaints to Khushqadam rather than the powerless al-Mustanjid. Maḥmūd Khaljī then later received his response from Khushqadam's successor, Qāyitbāy.[146]

140. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 187–89, 190–95.

141. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 57, 60.

142. This sultan continued pious works until his death in 837/1433 when the sultanate passed to his son al-Muẓaffar Aḥmad Shāh, who followed in his father's footsteps; see ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Jawharī [al-Ṣayrafī], *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-l-abdān fī tawārīkh al-zamān*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970), 3:297–98.

143. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 4:2:925.

144. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 113; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 419.

145. Sherwani, *Maḥmūd Gāwāṇ*, 12; Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 435–36.

146. ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Makkī al-Āṣafī Ulughkhānī, *Ẓafar al-wālih bi-Muẓaffar wa-ālih: An*

Symbolic vs. Formal Recognition: The Sharqis of Jawnpur and the Lodis of Delhi

When compared to the investiture deeds, coins, and embassy records preserved for us from the Gujarat, Bengal, and Bahmani Sultanates, far less has been left behind from the Lodi and Sharqi dynasties concerning diplomatic engagements. The absence of evidence for such exchanges in the historical record does not preclude the possibility that they occurred. The scarcity of documentation, however, has complicated attempts to construct a detailed narrative of interactions.

The rulers of the Sharqi line established themselves in Jawnpur (r. 796–888/1394–1483) on the Gumti River, situated between Delhi to the west and Bengal to the east. Following a break with Delhi by Malik Sarvar Khwāja Jahān (r. 796–802/1394–99), by 798/1396 the new rulers encountered hostility perhaps because of their proximity to Delhi. Despite political insecurity, the dynasty thrived culturally, especially during the reign of Ibrāhīm Shāh Sharqī (r. 804–84/1402–40), which saw Jawnpur established as a prominent regional center. Seeking to emulate Delhi,[147] the Sharqi sultans named themselves viceregents of the *amīr al-muʾminīn* and engraved the names of Abbasid caliphs on their currency, until Jawnpur fell under the rule of the Lodis, who destroyed the fine buildings of the previous rulers.[148]

The mid-ninth/fifteenth century in Delhi witnessed rule by the Lodi sultans (r. 855–932/1451–1526), some of whom assumed the title of "caliph," minting coins independently without acknowledging the reigning Abbasid in Cairo.[149] In Egypt in 857/1453, the sultan al-Ashraf Īnāl (r. 857–65/1453–61) ascended to power contemporary to the sultan Bahlūl Shāh Lōdī's (r. 855–94/1451–89) establishment of a new ruling lineage in Delhi. On his own coins Bahlūl Shāh's inscriptions prove ambiguous, alluding to the authority of an unnamed caliph of the time and praying for his caliphate to be everlasting (*fī zamān amīr al-muʾminīn, khulidat khilāfatuhu*).[150]

Dawn of the Tenth/Sixteenth Century: Portuguese, Ottomans, and the End of the Cairo Sultanate

Egypt and India kept up communications during the long reign of al-Ashraf Qāyitbāy (r. 872–901/1468–96) in Cairo. The sultan himself displayed interest in trade and cultivating advantageous diplomatic ties with the subcontinent. In 873/1469, Qāyitbāy and the Abbasid caliph al-Mustanjid received an Indian embassy carrying a letter of respect. To honor his visitors Qāyitbāy broke with more traditional reception protocols reserved for ambassadors and left his palace in the citadel to relocate to the Siryāqūs *khānqāh* where his staff erected lavish tents to host the Indian diplomats.[151]

Arabic History of Gujarat, ed. E. Denison Ross (London: John Murray for the Government of India, 1928), 204–5; Meloy, "'Aggression in the Best of Lands,'" 604, 606, 613–14; Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 46–47.

147. Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 98, 112.

148. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 344–48.

149. Al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 39.

150. Goron and Goenka, *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, 85; Iskandar Shāh Lodī (r. 894–923/1489–1517) followed with the same formula on his coins (ibid., 86–87).

151. Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith al-duhūr fī madā al-ayyām wa-l-shuhūr*, ed. William Popper as "Extracts

Despite his unpopular confiscation of several caliphal *iqṭāʿ* land grants in Egypt, Qāyitbāy continued to enjoy the reputation of a fervent supporter of the Abbasid Caliphate in his realm.[152] Indeed, much of the Sunni world recognized the sultan as one of the strongest rulers alongside his Ottoman counterpart. Foreign rulers widely accepted the preeminence of Qāyitbāy and in Jumādā II 876/November–December 1471 Cairo received a visit from the ambassador of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Shāh Khaljī (r. 873–906/1469–1501) of Malwa who requested an Abbasid *taqlīd* for his master's enthronement.[153] The Indian embassy presented precious gifts to Qāyitbāy and the caliph al-Mustanjid. The ambassador delivered a request for delegation to rule over the territory. The sultan extended proper respect, and the caliph issued a delegation bestowing sultanic honors. Qāyitbāy draped the ambassador in a robe and received recognition as suzerain. The sultan then sanctioned the caliph's confirmation of Ghiyāth al-Dīn's succession and al-Mustanjid signed a decree.[154] After receiving acknowledgment, Ghiyāth al-Dīn struck coins describing himself as "the one upon whom authority has been conferred by the caliph of the age in the worlds."[155] The Indian sultan venerated the investiture deed and sent back impressive gifts including a colossal elephant to both the caliph and the sultan. The sultan hosted a grand three-day feast with his amirs and entourage in a large tent.[156]

Indian emissaries continued to arrive in the court of Qāyitbāy, delivering gifts such as lions and costly war tents, seeking caliphal inauguration, and receiving robes of honor in Jumādā I 879/September 1474, Shaʿbān 884/October 1479, and Dhū al-Qaʿda 889/November 1484.[157] The next year, a Bahmani embassy intended for the Ottoman sultan was detained at Jiddah by representatives of the sultan of Cairo. Bahmani goods and gifts were confiscated and redirected instead to Cairo, heightening tensions that sparked confrontation between the Ottomans and the Cairo Sultanate.[158]

The aftermath of De Gama's rounding of the Cape of Good Hope and subsequent arrival of the Portuguese "Franks" forever altered the Indian Ocean world at the turn of the tenth/

from Abû 'l-Maḥâsin Ibn Taghrî Birdi's Chronicle Entitled *Ḥawâdith ad-duhûr fî madâ 'l-ayyâm wash-shuhûr*" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930–42), 680.

152. Banister, *Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo*, 259–62.

153. ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Jawharī [al-Ṣayrafī], *Inbāʾ al-haṣr bi-abnāʾ al-ʿaṣr* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1970), 362; Muḥammad Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1960–63), 4:65.

154. Al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-haṣr*, 362; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*, ed. Elizabeth M. Sartain as *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, II: al-Taḥadduth bi-niʿmat Allāh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 2:157; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 3:65; Carl F. Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamluk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāytbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 74; Ghaythāʾ Aḥmad Nāfiʿ, *al-ʿAlāqāt al-ʿUthmāniyya al-Mamlūkiyya: 868–923/1464–1517* (Beirut, 2005), 86.

155. Margoliouth, "Caliphate Historically Considered," 337.

156. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 2:131.

157. Ibid., 3:99, 158, 212.

158. Ibid., 210; Petrovich, "Merchants, Young Heroes and Caliphs," 119; Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485–91* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 104.

sixteenth century. Trade relations between Cairo, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean began dwindling in the later ninth/fifteenth century as more trade was diverted toward Lisbon.[159]

The penultimate sultan of Cairo, Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī (r. 906–22/1501–16), in Rabīʿ II 911/September 1505 mobilized a large number of troops, sending expeditions to the Red Sea coast, the Levant, and the coastal areas of India to thwart the Portuguese.[160] He spent a considerable sum on the forces being sent to India, which included royal *mamlūk*s, North Africans, black archers, and Turkmen. The early tenth-/sixteenth-century Egyptian historian Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1524) tracked the Egyptian expedition to India as it traveled through the Red Sea in Ṣafar 912/June 1506 and Dhū al-Qaʿda 912/March 1507 facing Portuguese incursions into the Red Sea.[161]

In 914/1508, the sultan of Cambay in the Gujarat Sultanate, Maḥmūd Shāh, allied with Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī, and despite Muslim naval victories initially near Mumbai the Portuguese captured Goa from the ʿĀdil Shāhīs of the princely western Deccan state of Bijapur and Maḥmūd had to make peace. For a period following their defeat by the Portuguese at the first Battle of Diu in 915/1509, the sultans of India continued corresponding with the sultan of Cairo, expressing their desire to expel the Portuguese from the western coasts of the subcontinent. Ships belonging to Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī were destroyed alongside the sinking of Indian pilgrimage boats bound for the holy cities—all contributing to high prices in the port cities of the Cairo Sultanate.[162]

In the year 916/1510, an embassy arrived from Maḥmūd Shāh, bearing precious gifts for the sultan and seeking legal delegation from the final Abbasid of Cairo, al-Mutawakkil III (r. 914–22/1508–16), to legitimize their sultan's rule. Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī honored the ambassadors, providing them with support against the Portuguese by assigning a fleet, and the caliph sent them a symbolic robe of confirmation.[163] The ambassadors of an unidentified Indian prince also reached Cairo in Ramaḍān 918/November 1512 with elephants draped in velvet finery, presented to Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī at the Hippodrome preceded by drums and oboes.[164] Maḥmūd Shāh's grandson Bahādur Shāh (the last sultan of Gujarat) conquered Malwa before losing it along with the rest of his domains to the second Mughal emperor, Humāyūn (d. 963/1556).

According to Ibn Iyās, Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī, increasingly alarmed about ongoing Portuguese influence and aggression on the coast of India, selected another detachment to counter them in Jumādā I 920/June 1514. He ultimately sent over 6,000 soldiers including royal *mamlūk*s, veterans, and reservists. His plan was to construct twenty ships in Suez and load them with weapons, rifles, cannons, and other war equipment. He reviewed them and prepared them for an attack on Portuguese positions in India with Ottoman assistance.

159. For a useful discussion of the concept of a so-called Indian Ocean world, see Maria Gajewska's article in this issue.

160. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 4:82, 85.

161. Ibid., 95–96.

162. Ibid., 151–54; al-Nadawī, "al-ʿAlāqāt," 47; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 59.

163. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 4:182; Petry, *Twilight of Majesty*, 205–6; al-Mashhadānī, *al-ʿAlāqāt*, 57–58.

164. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, 4:284.

Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī's ships, with their cargo of weaponry, were ultimately sunk in the Indian Ocean.[165]

The sultanate of Cairo along with its nearly 250-year incarnation of the Abbasid Caliphate was ultimately subsumed by victorious Ottoman forces led by Sultan Selim I in 922–23/1516–17. The Ottoman Sultan dispatched al-Mutawakkil III to Istanbul, and the Ottomans began competing and militarily engaging with the Portuguese more directly after becoming the new rulers of the sultanate's former territories in Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz.[166]

Conclusions

The preceding investigation provides space to discuss diplomatic elements of the Abbasid Caliphate that emerge from narrative historical sources and deeds of investiture, fashioned from the views of religious scholars, travelers, and bureaucrats.[167] From the perspective of the Cairo Sultanate, engagements with the polities surrounding the Indian Ocean were vibrant, varied, and multifaceted in the realms of intellectual pursuits and cultural exchanges.[168]

While much of the broader post-Mongol Islamic world, particularly the Ilkhanids, Timurids, and Ottomans, evolved away from seeking caliphal legitimacy, several Indian Muslim rulers, perhaps uniquely, continued to view the Cairene Abbasid Caliphate as a viable source of power and authority. The roots for this phenomenon are historical, as northern India experienced interactions with Islamic rule early on, and later South Asian rulers, predominantly coming from the Turko-Persian Muslim elites who invaded India from regions like Iran and Central Asia, maintained the idea of caliphal authority as integral to ruling legitimacy for the link it provided to the wider Islamic world.

Many subsequent Muslim rulers of India, at least for a time, could fathom no new strand of legitimacy more potent than the Abbasid family in Baghdad or later Cairo. While these pitiable caliphs had little real control at home or over distant eastern sultanates, diplomatic exchange allowed Indo-Muslim rulers to connect themselves with the caliphate and reinforce the idea that religious and political authority could coexist and be adapted to local regional contexts. Thus, narrative descriptions and rare surviving documents transcend notions of mere propaganda; they strengthened and communicated existing notions of communal identity among the military, civilian, and religious elites between the Cairo Sultanate and its various counterparts among the South Asian Indo-Muslim polities.[169]

165. Ibid., 381–82, 5:115, 203. See also Halil İnalcık, with Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, *1300–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 319–25.

166. For useful discussions of regional relations between the Indian sultanates with the Hijaz in the late "Mamluk" and early Ottoman periods, see Guy Burak, "Between Istanbul and Gujarat: Descriptions of Mecca in the Sixteenth-Century Indian Ocean," *Muqarnas* 34, no. 1 (2017): 287–320; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A View from Mecca: Notes on Gujarat, the Red Sea, and the Ottomans, 1517–39/923–946 H.," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2017): 268–318.

167. On this evolving discourse, see also Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 5, 13–16, 22–27, 30–33, 85, 97, 108–15, 120–22, 127.

168. Al-Ṣayrafī, *Inbāʾ al-haṣr*, 362; Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 9.

169. Jo Van Steenbergen, "Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix:

In view of the vast distances spanning the premodern Muslim world it may have been difficult to imagine any other situation.[170] Notions of the "return of the caliphate" were powerful in the post-Mongol religiopolitical discourse of the time as Mona Hassan's work also makes clear. There was anxiety to rejoin the universalist convention and conform to it. Thomas Arnold long ago dismissed the diplomas issued by the Cairene Abbasids to foreign rulers as feeble attempts to "tranquilize the tender consciences"[171] of Muslims living beyond Egypt and Syria, but one wonders if this was an attempt in the various Indian sultanates to perform a public unification with Egypt as the (post-Mongol) "caliphate." Islamic societies occasionally pressured their rulers, from Iberia to Sindh, to conform to broad perceptions of a culturally unified Islam, and encouraging loyalty to the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo, despite the challenges, proved sustainable over many centuries even beyond the Syro-Egyptian region. The sultans of Cairo themselves did little to actively pursue such a course, even though they made expedient use of the caliphate in foreign relations rhetoric.[172]

These diplomatic interactions facilitated a broader exchange of ideas, perhaps influencing philosophical, political, and religious approaches across regions. The broader concept of the "Islamicate Republic of Letters" includes a number of transregional exchanges within intellectual networks and the shared commitment to ideas despite geographical distances. It is tempting to include ideas of caliphate into this discussion, though the meaning of "caliphate" itself was quite contested by the ninth/fifteenth century, and we remain consigned to only a few fleeting descriptions in a handful of Arabic and Persian sources.[173]

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Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 1–28, at 1–2. The means of communication taking place in documents and poetry tapped into the ongoing social expectation that relied on an incumbent Abbasid caliph in the Egyptian capital.

170. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 2:645; Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 32; idem, "Late Mamlūk Military Institution and Innovation," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry, 462–89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 463–64.

171. Arnold, *Caliphate*, 77, 88.

172. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 38–137; Urbain Vermeulen, "Une lettre du Calife al-Mustakfī à Dāwud b. Yūsuf b. Rasūl (707 A.H.)," in *Proceedings of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1992, 1993, and 1994*, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and Daniel De Smet, 363–71 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995).

173. Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 8–11; Walravens, "Networked Diplomacy," 21–22, 65–66.

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