مجلّة نصف سنوية محكّمة تصدر عن قسم الدراسات التأريخية في بيت الحكمة - بغداد
رقم إيداع مجلة دراسات تأريخية في دار الكتب والوثائق ٦٨٢ لسنة ١٩٩٩
رقم الإيداع الدولي ISSN 2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

The caliphate between Baghdad and Cairo
A Tale of Two cities in the 13th century

Prof. Albrecht Fuess Ph.D.(*)

I. Introduction

In 1258 the Mongols ended the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and the city lost its role as most important capital of the Muslim World. However, it staid an important center for the Mongol Ilkhanids although they resided more in their tent city than between the walls of the old capital. Once the Ilkhanids converted to Islam in the early fourteenth century some of the former governmental roles returned to Baghdad and as place of the grave of the eminent scholar Abu Hanifa (d. 767) it stabilized its role as hub for Sunni religious teaching. However, the role as most important capital of the Muslim world had shifted to Cairo.

Sultan Baybars (1260-77) had instituted the Abbasid Shadow Caliphate in Cairo in 1262 with al-Hakim bi-Amri'llah an Abbasid survivor from Baghdad. As new seat of the caliphate the Mamluks turned Cairo in a centre of religious learning and splendor. This can also be seen by renovations made to the grave of Imam Shafii (d. 820) in old Cairo. Until the advance of the Ottomans in the early 16th century Cairo could retain its political role and importance as place of Muslim scholarship.

The proposed paper will therefor try to trace these developments and the transition of the caliphate from Bagdad to Cairo. A special stress shall be

albrecht.fuess@staff.uni-marburg.de (*) University of Marburg.

Semi-annual Quarterly journal issued by Department of Historical Studies In Bayt Al-Hikma
No.of deposit at Library and Archives(682)1999
ISSN.2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

laid on the architectural and spatial policy of the Ilkhans in reconstructing Baghdad and the Mamluks in transforming Cairo in the glorious capital of their sultanate.

II. Baghdad

In 750, the Abbasids, who could be traced back to the uncle of the Prophet Abbas, overthrew the Umayyads caliphate and in 762, under the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-775), founded the new capital Baghdad as round city in Iraq as the seat of the caliphate. According to Ya qūbi, al-Mansūr conceived the plan to build his capital in 141 after the Hijra (755 AD). However, work did not begin until Djumādā I 145 (762)[1]. The town soon started to grow and developed into the most splendid place for Islamic knowledge transmission and political power. Although the caliphate lost some political powers its staid the center of the (Eastern) Muslim until the Mongol conquest in 1258 with the assassination of the last caliph plunged the Sunni world into chaos.

The conquest itself is depicted as a great slaughter by Ibn al-Fuwaṭī dead corpses were everywhere. The graves of the caliphs and the shiite Imams were destroyed as was the caliphal mosque. The destruction was so horrible that after peace was finally declared, the survivors came traumatized and starved out of their hidings[2].

However, Baghdad lost its role as capital of the Muslim world and the death of the last caliph send a shockwave through the Muslim world but on the local level Baghdad did stabilize again. The Mongol ruler Hülägü (1217-1265) kept the infrastructure and Islamic institutions to ensure continuity for the population[3]. The provisional government of Baghdad during the first year after the conquest of Baghdad came to an end when ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Juwaynī was appointed governor of Baghdad and Iraq and head of a Persian administration established in an Arabic speaking province in 1260 CE. He came from a family of administrators that had served the Seljuks and the Khwārazmshāhs. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Juwaynī accompanied the history of the city under three Ilkhans: Hülegü, then Abāqā and finally Aḥmad Tekūdar in many ways restored and improved agricultural and city life[4].

مجلّة نصف سنوية محكّمة تصدر عن قسم الدراسات التأريخية في بيت الحكمة - بغداد
رقم إيداع مجلة دراسات تأريخية في دار الكتب والوثائق ٦٨٢ لسنة ١٩٩٩
رقم الإيداع الدولي ISSN 2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

Nevertheless, his position was disputed, he was often accused and arrested, disowned and even sentenced to death (without consequences); there was even an attempt on his life. constant fear of the Mamluks which may be also due to the fact that the defeat at the battle of ʿAyn Jālūt (658/1260) was still in recent memory.

The charges had to be dropped when the main witness admitted under torture that the story was all made up. Thus, especially the first years of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's rule in Baghdad were very unstable, and he faced accusations both from the Mongol military commanders as well as the local Iraqi population. However, with the help of his brother active in the court of the Ilkhan Hülegü, he was able to prove his innocence and intervene in the nomination of officials in his province, eliminating political enemies and keeping those he hoped would be loyal followers. During this time of relative stability Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī was able to fill the most important positions with members of his family and his brother ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn was able to dedicate himself to the reconstruction efforts of the city and the agricultural hinterland. 'The situation in Baghdad during the time of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn was better than during the caliphate (kānat Baghdād ayyām al-ṣāḥib ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ajwad mā kānat ayyām al-khalīfa)'[5].

Although ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's period in office was marked by turbulences, conspiracies and attempts to end his rule, it still denotes an effort to create continuity in Baghdadi life after the break induced by the Mongol conquest. He distinguished himself by his active interest in construction and that placed him in the tradition of Muslim rulers[6]. First of all he ordered that a palace with an elaborate colonnade, a ḥammām and a large garden be built outside the city walls in the eastern side of Baghdad between the Ẓafariyya and Halba gates[7]. He also dedicated himself to rebuilding Baghdad's urban infrastructure especially the water system as well as the famous Mustanṣiriyya School that had already been damaged under the caliph and the dam of al-Qamariyya Mosque that had also been damaged by floods during the caliphate and not properly repaired[8]. Finally, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn promoted the Shiite holy sites by adding a ribāṭ to ʿAlī's mausoleum in Najaf in 666/1268 which he also richly endowed[9]. Moreover, he

Semi-annual Quarterly journal issued by Department of Historical Studies In Bayt Al-Hikma
No.of deposit at Library and Archives(682)1999
ISSN.2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

built a canal from the Euphrates town of Anbār to Kufa and Najaf in an effort to promote agricultural production and the creation of allegedly 150 villages along the bank. Another example of settlement development is the construction of a new city, al-Maʾman, along the Jaʿfar canal in the Wāsiṭ district, equipped with a Friday mosque, a dīwān, a market and a school. It was quickly populated and became a centre for traders and merchants to and from Basra(10).

So, we can see that although Baghdad lost its role as main capital of Islam, Baghdad kept its role as regional centre and around the grave of the important Sunni jurist Abu Hanifa (d. 767) regional Sunnism could regain importance as center for religious knowledge.

III. Cairo

After the Ayyubids took power in Egypt in 1171 the country adhered again to the Abbasid caliph in Bagdad, only that this was already ended in 1258 by the Mongols. The last caliph al-Mustaʿṣim bi-'llāh being killed. The Mamluks as successors of the Ayyubids in Egypt and Syria and defender of Islam against Crusaders and Mongols were able to fill this void at least a bit. They installed with al-Ḥakim I. a remote relative of the last Abbasid of Baghdad as shadow caliph. Stripped of any political role the Abbasid Caliphs of Cairo did become ritual figures who had to accompany the Mamluk sultan on public appearances. The Mamluks as slave soldier dynasty did not claim any religious or spiritual authority but their promise was security and justice for the World of Islam. They took their seat of government in the Citadel the Ayyubid had constructed on the Muqaṭṭam hill above the old Fatimid city.

Headgears were essential for investiture processes in Muslim societies as well. Ideally, a caliph would bestow ceremonial clothing on the sultan, but in the case of the Abbasid shadow caliph of Cairo it was in practice the other way around. Ibn Taghrībirdī reports a striking episode that illustrates this fact: "On Monday, 1 Shaʿbān 808/22 January 1406 Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir sent for Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās, son of the caliph al-Mutawakkil ʿalá Allāh Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad, and recognized him as caliph after the

مجلّة نصف سنوية محكّمة تصدر عن قسم الدراسات التأريخية في بيت الحكمة - بغداد
رقم إيداع مجلة دراسات تأريخية في دار الكتب والوثائق ٦٨٢ لسنة ١٩٩٩
رقم الإيداع الدولي ISSN 2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

death of his father. The former then put on the tashrīf [ceremonial clothing], received the title of al- Mustaʿīn billāh and went back to his home"[11].

The Citadel represented the centre of the public representation of Mamluk sultans as they and their entourage did leave it on a regular basis by means of a highly ritualised public procession, the so-called mawkib. The sultan and the amīrs went usually to dār al-ʿadl sessions in these public processions through Cairo and after the hearing of judicial cases followed by an official banquet (simāṭ) and the whole ceremony became known as khidma (service).

Al-Maqrīzī describes the first procession of Sultan Baybars as follows: "on Monday 7 Ṣafar 659/ 11 January 1261 al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars rode out of the citadel of the mountain with the Sultan's insignias. He then entered Cairo by the Bāb an-Naṣr and the amirs and the army walked in front of him until the Bāb Zuwayla. Then they returned to the Citadel. Cairo had been decorated for this event. Dirhams and dinars were scattered on the Sultan. He bestowed honour clothes on the nobles of the Empire. And this had been his first public outing. And from this day onwards the outings were followed by a game of polo"[12]. The processions became in the following a regular part of Mamluk public representation. They were done as well by Mamluk governors in province capitals and every city of the Empire where units of the Mamluk army were stationed[13].

During the processions people were apparently allowed to approach the sultan. In a memorandum of Sultan Qalāwūn (r. 678-689/ 1279-1290) for his son al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ on how to govern Egypt during a military absence of his father, it states that: "If petitions were handled to Him while riding (on processions outside the citadel), let Him help the one who handles them, treat him justly and give redress against the wrongs. He should investigate the injustice personally and not entrust the case to those who delays things"[14]. How successful such a "petition by chance" was, is hard to decide, but Sultans were handed petitions on a regular basis once they descended the citadel[15]. Of course the public processions contained a certain element of danger. No wonder that Sultan Qalāwūn told his son in

Semi-annual Quarterly journal issued by Department of Historical Studies In Bayt Al-Hikma
No.of deposit at Library and Archives(682)1999
ISSN.2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

his memorandum to watch his back carefully and never leave the official route on public outings[16].

The processions became in the following a regular part of Mamluk public representation. They were done as well by Mamluk governors in province capitals and every city of the Empire where units of the Mamluk army were stationed. The most usual form of processions took place on the days when the Sultan heard complaints of his subjects in the house of justice, the dār al-ʿadl. Quite often the Abbasid shadow caliph was part of the processions. The last of the caliphs Al-Mutawakkil III (r. 1508-1517) was taken by the victorious Ottomans to Istanbul where his traces are lost and the Ottoman sultans assumed the caliphal title for themselves, although they were for the first time non-Arab caliphs.

Still, the military threat of the Mongol cousins was not banned until the vanishing of the Ilkhanate by the mid-fourteenth century. Therefore the ideology of the Mamluks was very much forged in the intellectual and military encounters against the Mongols as Anne F. Broadbridge has shown in 2008 in her book "Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol World", where she describes Mamluk ideology as follows: "Unlike Chingizid or later Turko-Mongol notions of kingship, however, this ideology hinged consistently and exclusively on antiquated Islamic concepts, on a vision of the Mamluk sultan as a martial Guardian of Islam and Islamic society. The Mamluks sultans used this outdated model because they suffered from two serious, linked problems: the institution of slavery and the lack of lineage"[17].

The second source of Mamluk military prestige was the victory against the Crusaders. The grave of the Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn (1279-1290) in the Centre of Cairo at the place of the old Fatimid palace is a case in point. It constitutes the heart of a large hospital complex which he endowed himself. His grave therefore is a metaphor for healing processes of the sick in the Mamluk Empire. Even more so as the building resembles the structure of the dome of the rocks in Jerusalem. When his son Sultan Ashraf Khalīl ibn Qalāwūn (1290–1293) had finally conquered Accre the last stronghold

مجلّة نصف سنوية محكّمة تصدر عن قسم الدراسات التأريخية في بيت الحكمة - بغداد
رقم إيداع مجلة دراسات تأريخية في دار الكتب والوثائق ٦٨٢ لسنة ١٩٩٩
رقم الإيداع الدولي ISSN 2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

of the crusaders in Palestine, he entered Cairo through the Gate of victory (Bāb an-Naṣr) and went straight to the grave of his father where he prayed extensively with his entourage[18]. It is also interesting that the Mamluks took very good care of the mausoleum of Imam Shafii (d. 820) in Old Cairo in order to underline their role for the transmission of Sunni knowledge and they strengthened as well the Azhar University. The qibla of Mamluk Cairo was moreover changed compared to Fatimid Cairo because the Mamluks wanted to show that they knew Islam better than the rest.

IV. Conclusion

What is obvious here is that the Mamluk sultans transformed Cairo into a stage to show their role as defenders of Islam. Cairo and the Citadel were reshaped through new buildings in order that the heritage of the Fatimids was erased. By adhering to the Abbasid caliphate and installing an Abbasid shadow caliph in Cairo, the Mamluks declared Cairo to be the natural successor of Baghdad. Cairo was in somehow a new and better Baghdad. However, Baghdad still existed and it was rebuilt in the 13th century after the catastrophe of the Mongol invasion, but it emerged more as an important regional centre than as the capital of an Empire. When the Mongol Ilkhans converted to Christianity it did develop better although the Mongols preferred often the tent cities (urdu) to the old urban centres. But Baghdad proved to be resilient and did survive as mega centre until today.

V. Footnotes

1. al-Ya qūbī, Aḥmad b. Ishāq (9./10. Jh.): Kitāb al-Buldān (Book of countries), ed. by Michael Jan de Goeje, Leiden 1892, 238.
2. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, al-Ḥawādit al-jāmiʿa wa-l-tajārib al-nāfiʿa, ed. by M. Jawād and M. Riḍā al-Shabībī, Bagdad 1932, 330.
3. Hend Gilli-Elewy, Bagdad nach dem Sturz des Kalifats. Die Geschichte einer Provinz unter ilḫānischer Herrschaft (656-735/1258-1335), Berlin 2000, 33.
4. al-Juwaynī, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAṭāʾ Malik (1912-37): Tārīkh-i jahān-gushā, ed. M. M. Qazwīnī, 3 vols, Leiden: Brill; al-Kutubī, Muḥammad ibn Shākir (1951-2). Fawāt al-wafayāt, ed. Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, vol. 2, al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-nahḍa al-miṣriyy., 453.

Semi-annual Quarterly journal issued by Department of Historical Studies In Bayt Al-Hikma
No.of deposit at Library and Archives(682)1999
ISSN.2223-6376
Info@baytalhikma.iq

5. al-Kutubī (1951-2), II:453.

6. al-Kutubī (1951-2), II:452-453.

7. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1407/1987), 357.

8. Ibid., 365.

9. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1407/ 1987), 358.

10. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (1407/1987), 372f.

11. Ibn Taghrībirdī, Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah, (Cairo: 1970), 13:51.

12. Al-Maqrīzī, Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1934–73), vol. 1/1(1956): 443-444.

13. Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, Masālik, p.43.

14. Lewicka (1998). pp.35, 37 (English Text), p.36 (Arabic Text).

15. Nielsen (1985), p.66.

16. Lewicka (1998), pp.35, 37 (English Text); pp.34, 36 (Arabic Text).

17. Anne Broadbridge, Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds, Cambridge: CUP 2008, 12.

18. Robert Irwin, Mamlūks and Crusaders. Men of the Sword and Men of the Pen, Farnham: Ashgate 2010. The main articles on the crusaders date thereby from the 80s and 90s. In recent years Robert Irwin published more on literary figures, firearms and the last decades of Mamluk rule.