

The Political Revival of the Abbasid Caliphate: Al-Muqtafī and the Seljuqs

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The reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtafī (r. 1136–1160) was one of great historical significance. Despite his having been chosen and elevated to the caliphate by the Seljuq sultans during the nadir of Abbasid power, after they had murdered one caliph and deposed another, it was al-Muqtafī who finally succeeded in reestablishing Abbasid political rule over Iraq. This article traces the course of al-Muqtafī's relations with the Seljuq sultans, analyzes how and why he succeeded in reviving Abbasid political rule, and considers the import of the events that transpired during his reign.

INTRODUCTION: THE SELJUQ CHALLENGE TO THE CALIPHATE

A new era in world history began with the Seljuq Turkmen invasion of the Islamic heartland in the eleventh century, which resulted in the almost millennium-long Turkic political and military domination of the central Islamic lands.¹ The arrival of the Seljuqs in the central Islamic lands was also fraught with significance for Islamic civilization. Among many other milestones, the Seljuq dynasty was the first and only non-caliphal dynasty in the pre-Mongol period to conquer the entire Middle East, from Central Asia to Syria, and the only Sunni Persianate dynasty ever to conquer the caliphal heartlands in Iraq while the caliphate lasted. The Seljuq conquest of the Middle East therefore also marked a turning point in the history of the caliphate.

The caliphate itself was, of course, the formative, fundamental political institution of Islam, and until the coming of the Seljuqs, in Patricia Crone's words, "all legitimate power flowed from the [caliph], so that all public offices would be void in his absence [. . .]."² Even after the political power of the caliphs had crumbled and local and regional rulers seized rule by force throughout the Islamic lands, these rulers, unless they were sectarian, had never claimed for themselves any special political authority independent of the caliph's; indeed, they called themselves by the traditional title used by caliphal governors from the beginning: *amīr*, or commander.³ Although they did concurrently adopt additional, more grandiose titles

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1. On early Seljuq history, see A. C. S. Peacock, *Early Seljūq History: A New Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 2010). The standard political history of the period in its entirety remains C. E. Bosworth's "The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (A.D. 1000–1217)," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5: *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), 1–202, now supplemented by A. C. S. Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2015), which provides, finally, the first thorough book-length study that surveys the Seljuq period in its entirety.

2. P. Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam. Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 239.

3. Evidenced most clearly in the titlature inscribed on the official coinage of the Saffarid, Samanid, and Ghaznavid rulers; see, e.g., S. Album, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins* (Santa Rosa, CA.: S. Album, 2019), 68–71, 82–83; for the Samanids, M. Fedorov et al., *Sylloge numorum arabicorum Tübingen: Buḥārā / Samarqand. XVa*

of rule taken predominantly from pre-Islamic Iran,⁴ conceptually, in Islamic terms, they were still caliphal governors, even if in fact the caliphs had no control over their actions and rule.

This Islamic legal fiction of the caliphs' remaining the font of legitimate political authority could no longer be maintained, however, once the Seljuqs came upon the scene—first, because they were “much too powerful to masquerade as governors,”⁵ and second, and more importantly, because after “liberating” the caliphs from the control of the Shi'ite Buyids and their generals, the Seljuqs themselves discarded the fiction of governorship that had held sway since the ninth century. Instead of restoring caliphal political power, the Seljuqs became the first Sunni dynasty to claim for itself *universal* political authority. This was explicitly manifested in their arrogation of the formerly caliphal title of *sultān* as their own official title;⁶ they also encouraged the formulation of new Islamic political theories that exalted this new sultanic political authority at the expense of the caliphate.⁷

For a long time the accepted scholarly consensus regarding the Abbasid reaction to Seljuq claims was that although there were ample grounds for conflict between the Seljuq sultans and the Abbasid caliphs, the caliphs accepted—or were at least resigned to—the radically new political situation and concepts that came to prevail at this time. This quondam consensus, however, has been shattered by scholars over the last several decades, who have convincingly challenged the myth of Seljuq–Abbasid cordiality.⁸ Despite this, however, little study has been made not only of Seljuq–caliph relations, but also of the caliphate itself during this period.⁹

Mittelasien / Central Asia I (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 2008); on Saffarid coinage, D. G. Tor, “A Numismatic History of the First Saffarid Dynasty,” *Numismatic Chronicle* 162 (2002): 293–314.

4. Most notably, for instance, *shāhānshāh*, or king of kings, a title that was embraced by both the Samanids and the Buyids; see D. G. Tor, “Shāhānshāh,” *Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. G. Böwering et al. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), 492; L. Treadwell, “Shāhānshāh and *al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad*: The Legitimation of Power in Sāmānid and Būyid Iran,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 318–37; C. E. Bosworth, “The Persistent Older Heritage in the Medieval Iranian Lands,” in *The Rise of Islam*, ed. V. S. Curtis and S. Stewart (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 30–43. The essential thing to note is that none of these titles made any kind of claim in the Islamic tradition.

5. Crone, *God's Rule*, 234.

6. See D. G. Tor, “Sultān,” *Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, 532–34.

7. Crone, *God's Rule*, 243–47.

8. G. Makdisi, “The Marriage of Tughril Beg,” *IJMES* 1,3 (1969): 259–75; idem, “Les rapports entre calife et sultān à l'époque saljūqide,” *IJMES* 6,2 (1975): 228–36; H. Laoust, “Les agitations religieuses à Bagdad au IVE et Ve siècles de l'hégire,” in *Islamic Civilization 950–1150*, ed. D. S. Richards (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1973), 169–86; D. G. Tor, “A Tale of Two Murders: Power Relations between Caliph and Sultan in the Twelfth Century,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 159 (2009): 279–97; E. J. Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place: Power, Authority, and the Late Abbasid Caliphate* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2007); O. Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006), 35–42; and Peacock, *Great Seljuk Empire*, chap. 3. Crone (*God's Rule*, 248–49) has rightly noted that “When there was tension between [the caliph] and a political ruler, it was usually because [the caliph] was trying to recover his own former position as political ruler [. . .]. The coexistence of caliph and sultan, in other words, led to political competition [. . .].”

9. Scholarship to date has generally treated the caliphs either in the early period through Malikshāh—e.g., E. Glassen, *Der Mittlere Weg: Studien zur Religionspolitik und Religiosität der späteren Abbasiden-Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981)—or in the period after the end of Seljuq rule—e.g., A. Hartmann, *An-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (1180–1225): Politik, Religion, Kultur in der späten 'Abbāsidenzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975). The critical reign of al-Muqtafi, however, has received scant notice. (The article by V. Van Renterghem, in *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society, and Culture*, ed. C. Lange and S. Mecit [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2011], 117–38, touches on the subject of Seljuq–Abbasid relations during the relevant years only tangentially and very briefly; note the erroneous dating of the cessation of the Seljuq *khuṭba* in Baghdad, p. 120: the correct date is 552*h*.) The two works most ger-

The present article therefore addresses one discrete but highly significant portion of the historical lacuna that constitutes the history of the Abbasid caliphate in the twelfth century, particularly with respect to the state of sultan–caliph relations during the time when the Seljuqs were the main obstacle standing in the way of a restoration of caliphal rule: the reign of the caliph al-Muqtafī (530–555/1136–1160). The aim of this article is to trace al-Muqtafī’s relations with the Seljuq sultans throughout his reign and his own recorded attempts to wrest political power from them, utilizing the full range of Arabic and Persian sources available in order to elucidate the path by which al-Muqtafī finally succeeded in realizing the dream of his two immediate predecessors in reestablishing both Abbasid independence and temporal rule.

SELJUQ–ABBASID RELATIONS IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY PRIOR TO AL-MUQTAFĪ’S REIGN

The hostility between the Seljuq and Abbasid camps became particularly overt and politically important from 1118 onward. This was the year in which strong and ambitious rulers succeeded to both the Seljuq and the Abbasid thrones: the supreme sultan Aḥmad Sanjar b. Malikshāh on the Seljuq side and the caliph al-Mustarshid on the Abbasid side.¹⁰ In fact, the key timeframe in Abbasid revival stretches throughout the period of Sanjar’s rule, from 1118 until 1157. This was at least in part due to his relocation of the political center of the empire from western Iran to the city of Marv, located some 1,000 miles from the caliphal seat in Baghdad. He thereby left only a much weaker subordinate sultan in Iraq and western Iran, which meant that the Abbasids had much greater scope of action.¹¹ From that point, the history of the caliphate is rife with repeated attempts on the caliphs’ part to restore their erstwhile temporal rule, all of which, up to the reign of the caliph al-Muqtafī, ended in disaster.¹²

In order to understand fully al-Muqtafī’s successful attempt, one must be conversant with the historical context of the earlier part of this period, 1118–1136, that of al-Muqtafī’s three immediate predecessors. In the spring of the year 511 (1118) the Seljuq Great Sultan Muḥammad Ṭapar died and was succeeded in the supreme sultanate by Aḥmad Sanjar, who had been ruling Khurasan and the East for twenty years as regional sultan and had constituted

mane to the subject of this article are H. Mason, *Two Statesmen of Mediaeval Islam: Vizir Ibn Hubayra (499–560 AH/1105–1165 AD) and Caliph al-Nāṣir li Dīn Allāh (553–622 AH/ 1158–1225 AD)* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), esp. 12–66, and Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, which deals with al-Muqtafī’s reign on pp. 169–80. Both of these, however, rely upon a very limited source base for their analysis.

10. Little has been written about either. For succinct treatments, see C. Hillenbrand, “al-Mustarshid bi’llāh,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004), vol. 7; D. G. Tor, “Sanjar, Aḥmad b. Malekshāh,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (online edition); on the relations between the two, Tor, “Tale of Two Murders.” A brief summation can also be found in Peacock, *Great Seljuk Empire*, 146–51. See also Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place*, 142–69, for an epitomizing of the accounts of Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Athīr.

11. Although David Durand-Guédy has provided a needed corrective to the assumption of scholars that the Seljuq sultans became more or less sedentary after their conquests, he perhaps forces the evidence too far in the opposite direction; cf. his “Ruling from the Outside: A New Perspective on Early Turkish Kingship in Iran,” in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. L. Mitchell and C. Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 325–42; “Where did the Saljūqs Live? A Case Study Based on the Reign of Sultan Mas‘ūd b. Muḥammad (1134–1152),” *Studia Iranica* 40 (2011): 211–58. The sources regarding Sultan Mas‘ūd in the period under discussion have him residing in both encampments and palaces (especially in Baghdad); in this, as in so many other aspects, the Seljuqs were an odd blend of steppe and sedentary practices. Furthermore, while the sultans during this period moved between western Iran and Baghdad, Sanjar clearly established a capital at Marv.

12. As elucidated in Tor, “Tale of Two Murders.”

the power behind his brother's throne;¹³ just a few months later (512/1118) Muḥammad Ṭapar's brother-in-law, the Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir bi-llāh, died at the ripe age of forty-one.¹⁴ Al-Mustazhir had earlier tried to assert some kind of caliphal authority to intervene in Seljuq affairs, as reported by Ibn al-Athīr.¹⁵ This report, with its revelation of the beginnings of Abbasid attempts to flex political muscle, displays perhaps the seeds of conflict that bore such bloody fruit in the reign of his successors, his son al-Mustarshid and grandson al-Rāshid. The following events surrounding al-Mustazhir's death suggest this.

Immediately upon Muḥammad Ṭapar's death, his son, the Seljuq prince Maḥmūd, sultan of the 'Irāqayn and aspirant to the position and title of Great Sultan, requested of al-Mustazhir that the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*) be made in his name.¹⁶ Among Maḥmūd's first actions was to dismiss Behrūz, the military representative (*shihna*) of Baghdad, and to appoint to the post, first, the amir Āqsunqur al-Bursuqī,¹⁷ and then the amir Mankūbars (Mengü-bars),¹⁸ one of his greatest commanders. Mankūbars sent his own stepson, the amir al-Ḥusayn b. Ūzbek,¹⁹ to serve as his deputy in Baghdad and Iraq.²⁰ Upon his dismissal, however, the amir Āqsunqur appealed to the caliph al-Mustazhir, who wrote to the new Seljuq appointee, al-Ḥusayn, ordering him to halt his advance toward Baghdad while he corresponded with Sultan Maḥmūd on the matter. This attempted caliphal intervention in political affairs proved unsuccessful; al-Ḥusayn replied that if the caliph gave him a direct order (in contravention of Maḥmūd's) to retreat, he would obey it, but al-Mustazhir apparently did not dare do so and in the end the issue was decided by a battle between al-Bursuqī and al-Ḥusayn, which the former won. Ibn al-Athīr notes specifically that this attempted caliphal intervention took place

13. Ṣadr al-Dīn b. 'Alī al-Ḥusaynī (*Akhbār al-dawla al-Saljūqiyya* [Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadīda, 1984], 84) notes that at the time of Muḥammad Ṭapar's death "[t]here was no one greater than [Sanjar] in the [Seljuq] family, or with a more powerful kingdom." Seljuq dominions were ruled as something of a familial federation, with subordinate sultans, members of the dynasty, ruling large regions such as Kirman in Iraq together with western Iran (the so-called 'Irāqayn, "two Iraqs"), Syria, and so forth, but owing fealty to, and relying upon the ultimate military support of, the Great Sultan (*al-sultān al-mu'azzam*). After a brief war to settle "the sultanate pass[ing] from the ruler in Iraq to the ruler in Khurasan" (ibid., 83), Muḥammad Ṭapar's son and heir Maḥmūd, who ruled in the 'Irāqayn, unequivocally acknowledged Sanjar as suzerain (ibid., 88–89); Ṣāhīr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, ed. A. H. Morton (Chippenhām, UK: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 70; Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Sulaymān Rāvandī, *Rāhat al-ṣudūr wa-āyat al-surūr dar tārikh āl Saljūq*, ed. M. Iqbāl (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1364 [1945f.]), 205; Yahyā b. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Qazwīnī, *Lubb al-tawārikh* (Tehran: Bunyād va Gūyā, 1363 [1984]), 181–82.

14. 'Izz al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-tā'rikh*, ed. C. Tornberg (repr. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1399 [1979]), 10: 534. Al-Mustazhir had married the sultan's sister in 504h (al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 81–82; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 483–84). Seljuq–Abbasid matrimony was not always conducive to longevity; two casualties that spring to mind are Toghril Beg—who died very soon after his marriage, which had been vociferously opposed by the bride's father—and Malikshāh, who died suddenly in his thirties during the ten-day moratorium he had given the caliph to quit Baghdad.

15. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 535: "Whenever a sultan or one of his deputies undertook to wrong someone, [al-Mustazhir] did his utmost to condemn this and restrain [the Seljuq official] from it." Al-Mustazhir's hopes of reclaiming lost glory were doubtless nourished by the circumstances of succession contention within the Seljuq family, which several sources claim led in the year 496h to the temporary reversion to the recognition of the caliph alone in the *khuṭba*, and the omission of any sultan's name alongside his (e.g., Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tā'rikh al-khulafā'*, ed. M. 'A. Bayḍawī [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.], 342; Abū l-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tā'rikh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. 'A. 'Aṭā [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1412/1992], 17: 80).

16. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 533; al-Faṭḥ b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra wa-nukhbat al-'usra*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1889), 119–20.

17. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 533.

18. L. Rásonyi and I. Baski, *Onomasticon turcicum = Turkic Personal Names*, 2 vols. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ., Denis Sinor Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2007), 2: 540.

19. Ibid., 2: 600.

20. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 534.

“a few days before the death of al-Mustazhir bi-llāh,” and it is not inconceivable that the proximity of the two events might even have been cause and effect rather than coincidence.²¹

Whatever the circumstances behind al-Mustazhir’s untimely demise, his son al-Mustarshid bi-llāh Abū Maṣūḥ al-Faḍl b. Abī l-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Mustazhir bi-llāh succeeded immediately to the caliphate (r. 512–529/1118–1135).²² During the seventeen years of his rule, al-Mustarshid slowly but persistently expanded the political and military scope of caliphal power to a level unprecedented since the ninth century, a policy that ultimately resulted in 1135 in his being first taken captive by the Seljuqs and then violently murdered while in their custody.²³ The tension between the Seljuqs and the Abbasids did not end there: al-Mustarshid’s son and heir, al-Rāshid (r. 529–530/1135–1136), was immediately estranged from the Seljuq sultans whom he blamed, quite vocally, for his father’s murder.²⁴ Al-Rāshid set about forming alliances with various atabegs and strongmen, most notably ‘Imād al-Dīn Zengī, “in order to oppose Sultan Mas‘ūd,” who was by this time Sanjar’s subordinate sultan in Iraq and western Iran.²⁵ Mas‘ūd soon received intelligence of the coalition al-Rāshid was gathering against him and marched upon Baghdad, which the caliph fled. Mas‘ūd then forced the religious clerics of Baghdad to declare al-Rāshid deposed.²⁶ In sum, at the opening of the period this article will be examining, the Seljuqs had just ended two consecutive caliphal reigns by force in an untimely fashion: that of al-Mustarshid, by murder; and, less than a year later, that of al-Rāshid, who was first deposed and subsequently murdered.

THE SELJUQ-ABBASID BALANCE OF POWER DURING THE EARLY REIGN OF AL-MUQTAFĪ

At this point, during one of the most critical junctures in Abbasid history, Mas‘ūd appointed in the year 530 (1136) the deposed caliph’s uncle Muḥammad b. al-Mustazhir as the new caliph, with the throne title of al-Muqtafī.²⁷ Divergent reasons are given for this choice, ranging from al-Muqtafī’s marital connections and the promised payment by the

21. Ibid., especially since he apparently died of a gastro-intestinal malady; see D. S. Richards’s footnote in *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi ‘l Ta’rikh*, 3 vols. (Farnham, Surrey, 2005), 1: 190.

22. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 17: 161–62.

23. According to one source, the western Seljuq sultan was convinced that “the caliph sought the rule of Iraq and Khurasan” (Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Nizām al-Ḥusaynī Yazdī, *al-‘Urāda fi l-ḥikāya al-saljūqiyya*, ed. M. M. Shamsī [Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār Yazdī, 1388 (1968f.)], 104–5).

24. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn al-‘Imrānī, *al-Inbā’ fi ta’rikh al-khulafā’*, ed. Q. al-Sāmarrā’ī (Cairo: Dār al-‘Afaq al-‘Arabiyya, 1999), 186; Qazvinī, *Lubb al-tawārikh*, 124; Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 75; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 28; Abū l-Fidā’ ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl b. ‘Alī, *al-Mukhtaṣar fi akhbār al-bashar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1417/1997), 2: 74.

25. Abū l-Fidā’, *Mukhtaṣar*, 76. Atabegs were the military officers who served as official guardians for Seljuq princes.

26. Al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 183; Abū l-Fidā’, *Mukhtaṣar*, 76; Muḥammad b. Burhān al-Dīn Khwāndshāh Mīrkhwānd, *Tārikh-i rawdat al-ṣafā’* (Tehran: Markaz-i Khayyām Piruz, 1959–60), 3: 532.

27. Rāvandī, *Rāhat al-sudūr*, 228–29; Ḥamdallāh b. Abī Bakr b. Aḥmad b. Naṣr Mustawfi Qazvinī, *Tārikh-i guzida*, ed. ‘A. Ḥ. Navā’ī (Tehran, 1339 [1960]), 360–61; Qazvinī, *Lubb al-tawārikh*, 124; Abū l-Fidā’, *Mukhtaṣar*, 76; Ibn al-‘Ibrī, *Ta’rikh*, 205–6; Mīrkhwānd, *Rawdat al-ṣafā’*, 3: 353; al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 108–9; al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 183; Ibn al-‘Imrānī, *al-Inbā’*, 186; Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlallāh, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, ed. A. Ātesh (Tehran: Dunyāy-i Kitāb, n.d.), 1–2: 361; Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Shabānkārā’ī, *Majma‘ al-ansāb*, ed. M. H. Muḥaddis (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1376 [1956f.]), 115; Yazdī, *‘Urāda*, 106. See also Tor, “Tale of Two Murders,” 292. Rashīd al-Dīn, Yazdī, and Shabānkārā’ī never mention the deposition and make it seem as though Mas‘ūd appointed al-Muqtafī only after al-Rashid was killed by so-called *bāṭinis*.

new caliph of 120,000 dinars to the sultan,²⁸ to his personal qualities, including, notably, his perceived pliancy.²⁹ If this last reason was indeed the decisive one, it is ironic that when the Seljuqs actually had the power to choose an Abbasid caliph, at this nadir of Abbasid power, the one they selected, al-Muqtafi, would finally reestablish the Abbasids as an independent political power and throw off Seljuq rule in Iraq.

The relationship between Mas'ūd and his new pick began rather inauspiciously when Mas'ūd inaugurated it by plundering the caliphal palace, Dār al-Khilāfa:

Sultan Mas'ūd [. . .] took all that was in Dār al-Khilāfa of horses, mules, furnishings, gold, silver, carpets, curtains, canopies, mats, and cushions [. . .] not leaving anything in the royal stable except for four horses (*arba'a ar'us min al-khayl*), and three mules for drawing water [. . .]. They took slave-girls, female servants, and male military slaves (*ghilmān*).³⁰

This plundering was said to have been, variously, either in addition to or part of a 100,000 or 120,000 dinar fine or levy laid upon the new caliph.³¹ The taking of the caliphal steeds, however, apparently had an additional purpose, for we are informed that the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) was made to al-Muqtafi “upon [condition] that he have neither horseman nor any instrument of travel.”³² Clearly, the Seljuqs were anxious to prevent any further Abbasid attempts to restore their lost glory and military power. Nor did Seljuq strong-arming stop there. The “companions of the sultan” then came to the treasurer demanding their salaries, whereupon he resorted to the expedient of bringing these soldiers into the private female apartments of Dār al-Khilāfa and forcing the wives and concubines of al-Mustarshid and al-Rāshid to disgorge their jewels and valuables. This process included deliberately frightening the women and humiliating them by making them unveil their faces.³³

Finally, Sultan Mas'ūd decided for al-Muqtafi who his vizier would be.³⁴ The chosen vizier, Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī b. Ṭirād al-Zaynabī, was the son of a famous cleric and had served

28. Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abū 'l-Faraj 1225–1286*, tr. E. A. W. Budge (repr. Amsterdam: APA-Philo Press, 1976), 1: 263. This information is not present in the Arabic version: Gregorius Ibn al-'Ibrī, *Ta'rīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1992), 205–6.

29. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 43; Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, tr. Budge, 1: 208. The stories presciently warning against al-Muqtafi are surely foreshadowing literary devices, e.g., Bar-Hebraeus, *Chronography*, tr. Budge, 1: 263; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 11: 44.

30. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 17: 314; Shams al-Dīn Abū l-Muẓaffar Yūsuf b. Qiziloghlu Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān fī ta'rīkh al-a'yān*, ed. K. S. al-Jubūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1434 [2013]), 13: 516.

31. E.g., Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 523, where the fine is levied after the plundering, and is clearly additional; note the acerbic answer al-Muqtafi sends to the sultan's demand for this money.

32. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 17: 314; al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*, 349–50. Al-Ḥusaynī (*Akhbār*, 129; repeated in al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 235) writes, on the other hand, that the caliph swore not to undertake a purchasing program of specifically Turkish *ghilmān* (*al-ghilmān al-atrāk*); this question will be addressed below. Suffice it to note here that David Ayalon (“The Mamlūks of the Seljuks: Islam's Military Might at the Crossroads,” *JRAS* 3rd ser. 6,3 [1996]: 308–10) interprets this ban as meaning that the Turkish mamluks were so far superior to all other military slaves that the Seljuqs did not fear the caliph's power should he have others; but there are many other possible reasons for a specifically Turkish ban, assuming this was not authorial interpolation in al-Ḥusaynī that was then followed by a number of subsequent authors. One is Seljuq fear of losing their advantage of racial solidarity should potentially rival armies also be manned by Turks, whether free or slave (for an instance of racial solidarity influencing the outcome of a battle, see al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 177, discussed in D. G. Tor, “Mamlūk Loyalty: Evidence from the Late Saljūq Period,” *Asiatische Studien* 65,3 [2011]: 778); a second may be due to the fact that while it was impossible in a society so permeated by slavery for the Seljuqs to forbid the caliphal household to purchase any slaves, it was possible to limit their purchase of the one category that tended, especially after the advent of the Seljuqs and the corresponding rise in Turkic prestige, to be used predominantly and disproportionately as military slaves.

33. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 17: 314; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 516; cf. Yazdī, *Urāda*, 106.

34. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 17: 314.

in various positions under al-Mustarshid, including vizier.³⁵ He had been taken prisoner by Mas'ūd in 1135, together with al-Mustarshid, and had remained with, and become close to, the sultan after his former master's murder, so that he was brought to Baghdad by Mas'ūd for the purpose of deposing the caliph al-Rāshid. Indeed, it was al-Zaynabī who actually chose al-Muqtafī as caliph—and he probably expected the new caliph to be beholden to him.³⁶

But al-Muqtafī clearly regarded al-Zaynabī as Mas'ūd's tool and resented being under the vizier's—and thus the sultan's—control. In 534 (1139) matters came to a head in a falling out between the caliph and the vizier, and the latter was dismissed. According to Ibn al-Athīr, “The reason for [the falling out] was that the vizier would oppose the caliph in all that he commanded, and the caliph had an aversion to this.” For his part, the vizier was first angry, then frightened, and he finally fled to the sultan's palace and sought refuge there. After much correspondence between the caliph and the sultan, “the sultan permitted [al-Muqtafī] to dismiss [the vizier],”³⁷ who remained in the sanctuary of the sultan's palace for nearly two years, until Mas'ūd came to Baghdad and, at al-Zaynabī's request, extracted from al-Muqtafī, in Sanjar's name,³⁸ permission for al-Zaynabī to leave his asylum and return to his own home, where he remained under virtual house arrest until his death less than two years later.³⁹

Ibn al-Jawzī similarly ascribes the falling out between the two to the caliph's moves toward independence, but he places a much greater emphasis on the underlying power struggle between the caliph and the sultan, whose representative al-Zaynabī essentially was, stating that “The caliph dispatched servants and administrators over the country without consulting the vizier so there occurred between the two of them estrangement, and the vizier desisted from paying him service.”⁴⁰ In his telling, while this disagreement was temporarily patched up, the vizier's followers then clashed with the followers of the amir Turshak,⁴¹ who “was one of the caliph's elite circle (*khawāṣṣ*) and among those who had grown up with him and in his house.” Al-Zaynabī thereupon instigated Mas'ūd to arrest the amir. The caliph objected vociferously, and when Mas'ūd saw how offended and displeased al-Muqtafī was, he sent Turshak back; but the vizier's provocations continued: he subsequently prevented one of the caliph's own longtime agents from having access to the caliph's presence, upon which the caliph arrested the vizier's major-domo. At this point al-Zaynabī fled to Mas'ūd's palace and was permanently dismissed from the caliphal vizierate.⁴²

35. Al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 175; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 653.

36. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 26, 42; al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 183; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 515–16.

37. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 76.

38. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 18.

39. He died in Ramaḡān 538/March 1144: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 97; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 18. On the Seljuq intervention, see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 552. A truncated version of this affair can be found in al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 194. Cf. Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, tr. Budge, 266: “The word which Sultan Mas'ud spake to the Wazir Sharaf al-Din was actually fulfilled [. . .]. For that Khalifah began to meddle in political matters without the advice of the Wazir, and the Wazir was cut off in his house. And when he brought him he discussed matters with him disingenuously. And the hand of the Wazir was suppressed in very many affairs, and after a little the Khalifah dismissed him finally from his office of Wazir.”

40. Al-Muqtafī had begun his caliphate with an empty treasury but, according to Ibn al-Athīr (*Kāmil*, 11: 43–44), the sultan sent to al-Muqtafī to determine which land revenues (*iqṭā's*) would go toward the caliphal privy purse, and in the end the caliph was awarded the amount that al-Mustaẓhir had enjoyed.

41. According to C. Edmund Bosworth (“Notes on Some Turkish Personal Names in Seljuq Military History,” *Der Islam* 89 [2012]: 108), the correct form is probably “Tershek,” although another possibility would be “Torsuq”; see Rásonyi and Baski, *Onomasticon*, 2: 781–82.

42. In June 1140; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 4. Cf. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 92, who separates the events, placing the arrest of Turshak at a later point in time.

Finally, Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī gives several different versions of the vizier's downfall: One, listed under the same year as the other sources (534*h*), speaks merely of a quarrel, although it is possibly connected to the fact that at this time Mas'ūd married al-Muqtafī's daughter, in an act reminiscent of Toghrih Beg's.⁴³ The other recounting, though, which precedes it under the year 531, makes quite explicit the cause of al-Muqtafī's hostility toward the vizier—namely, his prior complicity and involvement in the Seljuq deposition of al-Muqtafī's predecessor, al-Rāshid:

Al-Muqtafī pursued the people who had issued the fatwa about the evildoing of al-Rāshid and had written up the charges [against al-Rāshid]; he punished those who had justified the sanctions and fired whoever had justified the deposition [of the caliph al-Rāshid]; and the vizier Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī b. Ṭirād al-Zaynabī fell from favor for this reason. Al-Muqtafī said: "If they acted thus with another, then they would act thus with me," and he dismissed Ibn Ṭirād most ignominiously and confiscated all his assets.⁴⁴

Whatever the exact course of events leading to the downfall of the Seljuq-appointed vizier, al-Muqtafī by all accounts wanted to free himself from a perceived Seljuq lackey. He achieved his aim, emerging from this showdown with the right to appoint his own viziers, without Seljuq interference. He was undoubtedly assisted by the fact that, politically, neither Sanjar nor Mas'ūd was anxious to quarrel with—and perhaps end up having to murder—yet a third caliph in a row. Perhaps to soothe the bad feeling caused in 534 (1136), a few months thereafter Sanjar returned to al-Muqtafī the most important heirlooms of the Abbasids, the alleged outer garment and staff of the Prophet, which had been taken from al-Mustarshid when he was defeated.⁴⁵

THE MIDDLE YEARS OF AL-MUQTAFĪ'S REIGN: THE CAREFUL ACCRETION OF CALIPHAL POWER

Beginning in the 1140s, though, the opportunity presented itself for al-Muqtafī to commence cautiously intervening in Seljuq affairs and strengthening his own power. Mas'ūd, the regional sultan of al-ʿIrāqayn, was, at least intermittently, a weak ruler, whose authority ultimately depended on the amirs' knowledge that if they committed too flagrant a usurpation the supreme sultan Sanjar might swoop down upon them. It is not clear from the sources whether the relative weakness of the western sultans throughout Sanjar's supreme sultanate was situational or personal—the sons of Muḥammad Ṭapar had all become sultans at a young age, which meant that their atabegs and other powerful amirs had years in which to consolidate their own political and military positions and to manipulate the affairs of state before the sultans could really assume control. Thus, for instance, Mas'ūd was said at the beginning of his reign to have been entirely under the sway of Yarīn-Qush the Bāzdār;⁴⁶ and he contended with other powerful amirs at numerous junctures throughout his reign. Certainly in part as

43. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 544. It is perhaps suggestive that the information regarding this quarrel between the caliph and his vizier immediately succeeds notice of the wedding; if, indeed, the vizier facilitated this match, it would be another parallel to Toghrih Beg's presumptuous marriage, on which, see Makdisi, "Marriage of Tughrih Beg" (above, n. 8), passim.

44. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 528.

45. Abū l-Fidā', *Mukhtaṣar*, 82.

46. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akḥbār* 106; al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 175, who points out that this was only after the atabeg Āqsunqur was assassinated by the Isma'īlis (for this event, *ibid.*, 169). On this name, see Rásonyi and Baski, *Onomasticon*, 1: 334.

a result of this situation, these sultans were far poorer than earlier ones. “His treasury was empty most of the time,” several of the sources state regarding Mas‘ūd.⁴⁷

Equally important, the ruler of the empire—as mentioned above—was over a thousand miles distant after 1118, which meant that his authority was necessarily weaker than when the sultanate was centered in western Iran and military intervention was a much more imminent threat. Moreover, by the 1140s Sanjar, venerable as he was, is specifically described as becoming senescent and losing the tight control he had previously exercised;⁴⁸ as well, his aura of invincibility had been shattered by his defeat in 535*h* (1141) at the hands of the Qara-Khitai, and he thereafter had to invest much of his time and energy in squelching challenges from ambitious and far-flung liegemen.⁴⁹ In fact, according to the chronicler Ibn al-Athīr’s specific asseveration, after the defeat at Qaṭwān Sanjar essentially granted Mas‘ūd independence in his own dominions.⁵⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that one finds Mas‘ūd’s magnates taking advantage of this fact and engaging in rebellions and political maneuvering after this time.⁵¹

All of this presented opportunities for a canny caliph to try to undermine Seljuq authority and increase his own, and al-Muqtafi was not slow to avail himself of these. It led in the end, once again, to armed confrontation between sultan and caliph. Regarding this preliminary building of caliphal authority at Seljuq expense, let us examine two different incidents, both occurring in 541*h*. In Jumādā II (December 1146) Mas‘ūd came to Baghdad and operated the mint, whereupon the caliph arrested the minters because they had allowed that. In retaliation the Seljuq *shihna* arrested the “major-domo (*ḥājib al-bāb*) . . . and four *khawāṣṣ*,” stating that he would not hand them over until the minters were released. The caliph reacted by ordering everyone out of the mosques and commanding that they be locked. They remained so for three days, but then the *shihna* backed down and the caliph’s major-domo was freed.⁵²

The second incident is more egregious, for it reveals the caliph actively plotting with highly placed Seljuq commanders in an attempt to assassinate Mas‘ūd. A few months after the minting incident, Mas‘ūd managed to kill, and thus free himself from the control of, one of a triumvirate of amirs who had been keeping him a virtual captive in Baghdad since the previous year.⁵³ One of the two surviving amirs, ‘Abbās—whose troops supposedly outnumbered those of the sultan⁵⁴—is said to have then entered into an agreement with the caliph to have Mas‘ūd assassinated at a public festival; however, the sultan did not go out that day due to inclement weather. By the following week the sultan had discovered the plot and had ‘Abbās seized and executed.⁵⁵ The following year Mas‘ūd fought and won a pitched battle

47. Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 74; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, 1–2: 359.

48. E.g., al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 276: “When the term of Sanjar’s life lengthened [. . .] the amirs gained sway over the rule of his affairs, and behaved familiarly with his power.”

49. Most notably the Khwarazmshahs and Ghurids; see, e.g., J. Paul, “Sanjar and Atsız: Independence, Lordship, and Literature,” in *Nomad Aristocrats in a World of Empires*, ed. idem (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2013), 81–130.

50. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 11: 82: *adhina lahu fi l-taṣarruf fi l-Rayy*.

51. E.g., Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt al-zamān*, 13: 567–68.

52. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 49; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt al-zamān*, 13: 572–73; cf. al-Suyūṭī, *Ta’rikh al-khulafā’*, 350. This incident perhaps helps to answer at least partially the question of how al-Muqtafi was financing his comeback, since it is doubtful that the *iqṭā’*s originally awarded him by Mas‘ūd would have sufficed to raise armies.

53. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṭughāyaruk. E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 104.

54. *Ibid.*, 116.

55. Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 82; Yazdī, *‘Urāḍa*, 110; Rāvandī, *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr*, 238, 242; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, 1–2: 375; Mirkhwānd, *Rawḍat al-ṣafā’*, 4: 328–29. Ibn al-Athīr (*Kāmil*, 11: 116–17), al-Ḥusaynī

against the last triumvir, Būz Aba; it was at least in part as a warning message to the caliph that the sultan had the rebel's head sent to Baghdad and hung from the gate of Dār al-Khilāfa specifically.⁵⁶ It may well have been this not-so-subtle hint, in fact, that impelled al-Muqtafi at this time to have his son al-Mustanjid named in the *khutba* as heir apparent, in order to provide for contingencies.⁵⁷

But the greater geopolitical position was on the caliph's side for, ultimately, Mas'ūd's power rested on his liege lord Sanjar's military might. Yet, as mentioned above, in the late 1140s Sanjar's grasp on the reins of power, not to mention ability to undertake long-distance military campaigns, was diminished.⁵⁸ All of the subordinate Seljuq regional sultans, Mas'ūd included, therefore also became significantly weaker, since their power ultimately rested upon that of Sanjar; consequently, Mas'ūd's amirs became increasingly fractious and al-Muqtafi exploited every opportunity to profit from the situation.

In fact, a turning point in Abbasid caliphal revival occurred in 543*h* (1148). At this time, a group of Mas'ūd's senior amirs, worried by his recent assertion of independence from them and the growing power and favor he was bestowing upon the Turkmen amir Khāṣṣ Beg, took the opportunity to rebel. This coalition of amirs marched on Baghdad, together with a Seljuq pretender, one of Mas'ūd's nephews; the caliph seized upon the occasion both to order the city wall to be repaired and strengthened and to gather an army for himself.⁵⁹ Revealingly, when the rebel amirs reached the city and encamped on its eastern side, Mas'ūd's prefect fled "in fear of the caliph," not of the rebels.⁶⁰ It is significant that the caliph not only managed to form and lead an army, but that he managed to put the forces of the renegade Seljuq amirs to flight.⁶¹ For the first time since al-Mustarshid's disastrous military ventures, a caliph was recruiting and leading armies.

Sanjar was sufficiently worried about his subordinate sultan's position after these events, and also by the sway that Mas'ūd's magnates, particularly the amir Khāṣṣ Beg, held over him, to pay an unusual visit to his nephew's domains—the last such visit by a Great Sultan outside of Khurasan—in order to shore up Mas'ūd's authority.⁶² This move on Sanjar's part

(*Akhbār*, 118–19), Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (*Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 580), and al-Bundārī (*Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 217) all omit 'Abbās's plot with the caliph from their accounts.

56. Rāvandī, *Rāhat al-sudūr*, 242; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, 1–2: 377; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 55; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 580; Shabankarā'ī, *Majma' al-anṣāb*, 116; Nīshāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 83; Yazdī, *Urāda*, 111. Cf. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (*Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 574), who states merely that Būz Aba's head was sent to Baghdad, without mentioning the caliphal palace gate; al-Ḥusaynī (*Akhbār*, 119) omits this episode entirely.

57. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 123. Another proximate cause may be the revolt of the caliph's own brother, Ismā'īl b. al-Mustazhir, against him (Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 584) or even the death of al-Muqtafi's Seljuq wife, Sanjar's niece, two months prior to the appointment (*ibid.*, 586).

58. For the reference, see n. 48 above.

59. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 132–33; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 587–88. Al-Mustarshid had previously built this wall in 517 (1123); Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 10: 616. Al-Bundārī (*Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 235) mentions the fortifying of the walls and digging of trenches only after the death of Mas'ūd.

60. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 133–34; al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 120. Both Ibn al-Jawzī (*Muntaẓam*, 18: 64) and Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (*Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 587) have the caliph mention his flight, implying that it was the rebel amirs who frightened him away; *pace* Hanne (*Putting the Caliph in His Place*, 172–73), who interprets this episode as a significant defeat for the caliph due to the civilian casualties reported by Ibn al-Athīr. These might have been of little concern to a medieval ruler, however; Ibn al-Athīr states also that the amirs accomplished nothing of military significance and were not able to breach eastern Baghdad's defenses, let alone defeat the caliphal forces in battle. Al-Ḥusaynī's account in particular is vital to understanding the outcome of this episode.

61. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 120; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 65–66.

62. Rāvandī, *Rāhat al-sudūr*, 243; al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 121; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 13: 594 (who places Sanjar's progression in 544); Nīshāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 83–84; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, 1–2: 378. All state that Sanjar came to Mas'ūd's dominions expressly to seek Khāṣṣ Beg's head.

seems to have produced the desired results: “Mas‘ūd’s power was augmented [. . .] and the caliph came to an agreement with him [whereby] his adversaries were subdued.”⁶³ This agreement with al-Muqtafī bore fruit in the latter’s refusing to countenance a rebellion by one of Mas‘ūd’s great-nephews in 544*h* (1149*f.*)—in fact withstanding a siege of Baghdad⁶⁴—and, subsequently, in Mas‘ūd’s visiting Baghdad in both 544 and 546.⁶⁵

The effect of Sanjar’s intervention diminished steadily after he had gone home, however, while al-Muqtafī’s power was clearly growing, together with his political assertiveness toward the Seljuqs. Thus, in 545 (1150*f.*) an appointment was made by the sultan at the Nizāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad—as was usual, without the caliph’s order or permission. This time, however, the caliph decided to assert a right to control such matters, and the appointee, Yūsuf al-Dimashqī,⁶⁶ was prevented from entering the mosque on Friday and had to pray in the sultan’s mosque, where he was, however, prevented from speaking. When the sultan approached another shaykh to ask him to preach instead, he refused to do so except upon order of the caliph, “so the sultan extracted (*istakhraja*) the permission of the caliph in this [matter].”⁶⁷

AL-MUQTAFĪ’S LATER REIGN: THE LIBERATING OF THE CALIPHATE

Soon thereafter, in Rajab 547/October 1152, when the relations between the Seljuqs and the caliph still hung in the balance, Mas‘ūd died at the age of 45,⁶⁸ “and the fortunes of the Seljuq house died with him.”⁶⁹ What this meant in practice was that, as had happened previously, the succession was contested and the usual plethora of young and inexperienced Seljuq princes and their retinues, including overweening atabegs, contended for power. But the strategic situation was now very different from earlier models and the Seljuq position far more precarious—the caliph now had an army in addition to his ambitions, and a scant half-year later, in the spring of 548 (1153), Seljuq power received a fatal blow in the form of Sanjar’s downfall and captivity by the Turkmen. There was no longer a Seljuq overlord to head west with an army and arrange political matters; conditions were finally propitious for the caliph to shake off Seljuq tutelage.⁷⁰

Indeed, Seljuq supporters and officials apparently realized this, for when news of Mas‘ūd’s death reached Baghdad, the Seljuq prefect fled the city.⁷¹ Deciding that the moment was auspicious, al-Muqtafī confiscated the prefect’s residence in Baghdad along with those

63. Shabānkārā’ī, *Majma‘ al-ansāb*, 116, although he places this event in 541, unlike the annalists.

64. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 143; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 71–72; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt al-zamān*, 13: 593–94.

65. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 143, for the earlier date; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 72, 81; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt al-zamān*, 13: 594, 622; Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 84, 85; Rāvandī, *Rāhat al-ṣudūr*, 244, 245; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, 1–2: 379, 80.

66. Yūsuf b. ‘Abdallāh b. Bundar al-Dimashqī, see Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1419/1998), 20: 513–14.

67. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 152; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 77. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (*Mir‘āt al-zamān*, 13: 609–10) relates a somewhat different version.

68. Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 86. According to al-Suyūfī (*Ta’rikh al-khulafā’*, 351), his death was due to al-Muqtafī’s having prayed against him for a month.

69. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 160; Abū l-Fidā’, *Mukhtaṣar*, 93. Cf. Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, 1–2: 384: “After sultan Mas‘ūd, there remained to the Seljuqs no splendor (*rawnaq*) in Baghdad.”

70. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 123–26: “After him, Seljuq rule over the kingdom of Transoxiana and over Baghdad came to an end, and the Khwārazmshāh took over his realm.”

71. E.g., Yazdī, *Urāda*, 134; al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 129.

belonging to the sultan's supporters (together with all their possessions), gathered his own supporters and an army, and set about expelling all the Seljuq forces:⁷²

When Sultan Mas'ūd died, [al-Muqtafi] set to work pushing out the non-Arabs (*a'jam*)⁷³ from Baghdad. He had mamluks, some of them Byzantine and some of them Armenian, and he made them commanders and consigned to each one of them an area of Iraq.⁷⁴

In vain did the new Seljuq western regional sultan,⁷⁵ Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd, repeatedly send the caliph abject letters promising that he was unlike “the sultans who preceded me,” pledging his allegiance and vowing that he had no intention of installing a military representative to oversee the caliph; al-Muqtafi had no intention of subjecting himself to another Seljuq sultan—or even of letting him into Baghdad.⁷⁶

The succeeding years witnessed not only deft caliphal diplomacy, playing off one Seljuq contender against the next,⁷⁷ but also the active military campaigns of caliphal armies, sometimes led by al-Muqtafi himself, against the various Seljuq forces seeking to master the western sultanate (al-ʿIrāqayn). The history of these campaigns is somewhat confused, but the most likely chronology can be sorted out as follows: In 547–48 (1152f.) the caliphal army captured Ḥilla, Kūfa, and Wāsiṭ; in 549 al-Muqtafi personally besieged Takrīt. The caliph and his army subsequently met a large Seljuq force of Turkmens in battle, under the command of the erstwhile Seljuq *shihna*, and defeated them resoundingly, in either 549 or 550 (1155f.)⁷⁸ In al-Bundārī's words: “The caliph took possession of Iraq from the farthest part of Kūfa to Ḥulwān, and from the borders of Takrīt to ʿAbadān, and he assigned Wāsiṭ and its districts in *iqṭāʿ*, and Baṣra [. . .] and al-Ḥilla and Kūfa.”⁷⁹ Immediately after this last battle, the caliph is said to have bestowed upon his own vizier the title of “Sultan of Iraq, King of the Armies” (*sulṭān al-ʿIrāq malik al-juyūsh*), in a clear attempt to cut down

72. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 84; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 161–62; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʿāt al-zamān*, 14: 11; see also al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 234–35. Ibn al-Athīr describes how the caliph also made a show of confiscating the apparently abundant store of alcoholic beverages in the homes of the Seljuq supporters, especially the *shihnas*.

73. The term here is clearly used to refer to the Turks, i.e., the Seljuqs.

74. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 129. The caliph's implacable opposition to everyone connected with the Seljuqs extended even to well-known preachers and religious scholars, e.g., Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn al-Ghaznawī, from whom the caliph is said to have “turned away” after Mas'ūd's death because of his close connection with the Seljuqs; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 216–17. Al-Suyūṭī (*Taʾriḫ al-khulafāʾ*, 351) mentions that one of al-Muqtafi's first actions after Mas'ūd's death was to depose “whoever had been appointed by the sultan as an instructor in the Nizāmiyya.”

75. Disregarding the four-month rule of the drunkard Malikshāh b. Maḥmūd, who was speedily deposed; see, e.g., Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 87–88.

76. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 131, 134; Mirkhwānd, *Rawdat al-ṣafāʾ*, 3: 533 (for Muḥammad's pleading).

77. E.g., Yazdī, *ʿUrāda*, 120, 125; Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 94; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 18: 106; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʿāt al-zamān*, 14: 29–30, 33. Al-Bundārī (*Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 235–36) describes the rivalry among the various camps and how the caliph also took astute advantage of this blessing. In this case, the caliph did permit the weak contender Sulaymānshāh (who reigned 555/1160 in ʿIrāq-i ʿajam for a scant six months before being killed; Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 103) to enter Baghdad, but al-Muqtafi was clearly using him as a counterpoise to the more threatening sultan Muḥammad. For caliphal exploitation of Sulaymānshāh, see additionally al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 240–42. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (ibid.) notes that the caliph laid out explicitly that “Iraq would be the caliph's, and Sulaymānshāh would not have anything but what he conquered himself outside Iraq.”

78. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 162, 194–96; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʿāt al-zamān*, 14: 11, 20–21; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 90–91, 95–97, 101–2; al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 131–33; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ al-tawāriḫ*, 1–2: 394–95; Bar-Hebraeus, *Chronography*, tr. Budge, 282ff.; Abū l-Fidāʾ, *Mukhtaṣar*, 100.

79. Al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 235. The various campaigns can be found on pp. 236ff.

to size and to subordinate the position of sultan.⁸⁰ From this period onward, in the words of one source, “the authority (*sulṭān*) of al-Muqtafī strengthened, and his might increased; he vanquished opponents, and resolved upon betaking himself to the districts that opposed his rule [i.e., conquering recalcitrant areas]. His power did not cease to increase and rise until he died.”⁸¹

Caliphal independence was not yet assured, however; al-Muqtafī had to fight one last Seljuq attempt to defeat the caliph and conquer Baghdad. This final showdown between al-Muqtafī and the Seljuq sultan Muḥammad took place in 551 or 552 (1157), when Muḥammad sent a missive to the caliph “demanding the *khuṭba* and the sultanate”;⁸² during this campaign a Seljuq sultan besieged Baghdad for the last time. In Rabīʿ I of 552 (May 1157) the Seljuq forces lifted the siege, however, and withdrew,⁸³ “and after this the ambitions of the Seljuq sultans were sundered from Baghdad.”⁸⁴ The final seal to Abbasid independence was set by the death of Sanjar in Ṣafar 552 (April 1157), after which the caliph felt no need to pay even lip service to any Seljuq sultan. When news of Sanjar’s demise reached Baghdad, his name was removed from the *khuṭba* and the Dīwān held no mourning session in his memory; Seljuq rule over the Abbasids had officially ended.⁸⁵ In celebration of this milestone achievement, and as a memorial of thanksgiving to God, al-Muqtafī had the door of the Kaʿba replaced with a silver-plated one; he had the original door made into a coffin for himself.⁸⁶ Al-Muqtafī died not long thereafter, in 555/1160.⁸⁷

CONCLUSIONS

There are several conclusions to be drawn from the events of al-Muqtafī’s reign. First, one of the more noteworthy aspects of his military campaigns for caliphal independence—which seems not to have been remarked upon previously—is that the caliph achieved his military successes almost entirely without the aid of Turkish mamluks; the sources state explicitly that all of his slave soldiery (as opposed to his free soldiery, which included Turkmens as well as every other Muslim ethnic group) was recruited from Byzantium and Armenia—and these mamluks apparently maintained their position quite well against the various Seljuq and atabeg armies, which consisted largely of Turks, both Turkmens and mamluks:

80. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 97; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 196. Al-Bundārī (*Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 235) explains that the caliph gave in *iqṭāʿ* to his vizier, Ibn Hubayra, “everything that the vizier of the sultan and his high dignitaries had held.”

81. Al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, 352.

82. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zamān*, 14: 37.

83. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 134–40; al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 246–55, 290ff.; Nīshāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, 95–98; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 212–15; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 111–18; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zamān*, 14: 37–39; Abū l-Fidāʾ, *Mukhtaṣar*, 102.

84. Al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhbār*, 140.

85. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 222; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 121. According to Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (*Mirʾāt al-zamān*, 14: 49), the caliph also confiscated all of Sanjar’s property in Baghdad and, when the sultan Muḥammad sent messengers to the caliph the following year, the vizier refused them entry or even a hearing (ibid., 60). There was subsequently a very brief period during the first year of the reign of al-Muqtafī’s son, al-Mustanjid (who succeeded his father in 555/1160, after thwarting an assassination plot by one of his half-brothers; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 256–57), when the new caliph recognized the ephemeral Sulaymānshāh in the *khuṭba*, apparently as a precautionary measure during the perilous transition period (Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam* 18: 146 reports the ending of the practice). This extremely brief resumption of Seljuq inclusion in the *khuṭba* appears to have been purely pro forma—there was not, for instance, any renewal of the practice of stationing a *shīḥna*.

86. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 228; al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, 352; Mīrkhwānd, *Rawḍat al-ṣafāʾ*, 3: 533.

87. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, 18: 138; al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, 352; al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 292; Abū l-Fidāʾ, *Mukhtaṣar*, 105.

When the imam was made caliph, it was upon the condition that he would not purchase any Turkish mamluk; and throughout the entire length of his caliphate he purchased only Armenian or Byzantine [ones], and he did not have any [slave] Turks, with the sole exception of Turshak, whom he had owned before [his elevation to] the imamate.⁸⁸

Ironically, this passage, which has been held up as proof of Turkish mamluk superiority, proves the contrary, since al-Muqtafi's virtually Turkish-mamluk-free armies⁸⁹ repeatedly beat the Turkish (supposedly mamluk-filled) ones in open combat.⁹⁰ Even after freeing himself from Seljuq domination, when he enjoyed complete freedom of action, al-Muqtafi continued to avoid purchasing Turkish mamluks, according to this passage.⁹¹

The second and more important conclusion is that al-Muqtafi attained the goal toward which the Abbasids had been aspiring for two centuries, realizing what his murdered brother al-Mustarshid had aspired to achieve. By the end of his reign, for the first time in two hundred years, an Abbasid actually ruled over substantial portions of Iraq and maintained this position successfully in combat; this was a prodigious achievement, noted as such in the sources:

He was the first to rule independently in Iraq, standing alone without any sultan alongside him, since the beginning of the days of the Daylamites until this time; and the first caliph to have command of the caliphate and rule over his army and associates since [the period] when the mamluks took control over the caliphs, from the period of al-Muntaşir [r. 247–48/861–62] until [al-Muqtafi's day].⁹²

Finally, an examination of the reign of the caliph al-Muqtafi shows that he was a pivotal figure not only in Seljuq and Abbasid history specifically, but also in the history of the caliphate more generally, for it was he who finally succeeded in reestablishing, for the first time in centuries, Abbasid independence, and in resurrecting moribund caliphal political rule.

88. Al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 235. We have already encountered this lone Turkish mamluk above.

89. Al-Muqtafi had apparently inherited a few mamluk commanders from his predecessors, for instance, the amirs Mankūbars and Quṭluḡ Bārs, both of whom are explicitly referred to as having been among the mamluks of al-Mustarshid; al-Ḥusaynī, *Akhhbār*, 131 (who is explicit only regarding Mankūbars); al-Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, 237 (who states that “both of the two were [originally] from among the Mustarshidiyya”).

90. Although in the last Seljuq siege of Baghdad there was apparently quite a large Kurdish contingent; see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 14: 37.

91. It seems he was wise to do so—in the end, Turshak defected to the other side; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 252. Mamluk loyalty was a severe systemic problem, and this would not be the only recorded case of racial *‘aṣabiyya* trumping other loyalties; see D. G. Tor, “Mamlūk Loyalty: Evidence from the Late Saljūq Period,” *Asiatische Studien* 65,3 (2011): 767–96; and for a more general critique of the romanticization of Turkish mamluks, idem, “The Mamlūks in the Military of the Pre-Seljūq Persianate Dynasties,” *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 46 (2008): 213–25.

92. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11: 256, correcting “al-Mustanşir” to “al-Muntaşir”; Abū l-Fidāʾ, *Mukhtaṣar*, 110; Ibn al-ʿIbrī, *Taʾrīkh*, 209; Mīrkhwānd, *Rawḍat al-ṣafāʾ*, 3: 534. Cf. al-Suyūfī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, 352–53, dating caliphal impotence from al-Muqtadir's reign: “From the days of al-Muqtafi, Baghdad and Iraq returned to the hand of the caliphs [. . .] before this, from the reign of al-Muqtadir [r. 908–932] until his [al-Muqtafi's] time, rule had belonged to those kings who gained mastery, and there did not remain to the caliphs anything but the title of caliph.”