PART ONE

MOSQUES
CHAPTER ONE
MOSQUES IN SOCIETY

From the break of dawn, when the first Allāhu akbar (God is the greatest) pierced the air announcing the new day, the call of the muezzin (mu’adhhdhin) marked the flow of time in the medieval Muslim city. Its domineering presence echoes in the language of medieval Muslims, who indicated the times of public and private events in relation to prayers: a procession was held “at the noon call to prayer”; enemy forces penetrated a besieged city “between the two prayers,” and a baby-boy was born “after the morning prayer.”¹ The minarets of mosques could be seen above the skyline of all other buildings of the medieval Muslim town, proclaiming Islamic presence far and wide. Economical, social and political activity was concentrated in and around mosques. The authoritative indication of the peaceful continuity of rule was articulated by the mention of the sovereign’s name during the Friday sermon, while its absence dramatically symbolized his overthrow.² The version of the call to prayer and the formula of the Friday sermon indicated whether Sunnīs or Shi‘īs controlled the place,³ and if Sunnīs—which of the four Sunnī schools of law predominated there.⁴ Important news—such as the abolition of taxes, the arrival of a famous scholar in town, terms of surrender to a conqueror—were read out loud in the mosque after the public

¹ Abū Shāma, Tarājim, 63, 75, 189; idem, al-Rawdatayn, 2:308, 312; Padwick, Muslim Devotions, 29.
² For a general discussion of this aspect of the sermon, see, for example, Von Grunebaum, Islam, 145–146. For Ayyūbid cases, see Cahen, “La chronique,” 136; Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya, 13:12; Humphreys, From Saladin, 273.
³ The addition “Ḥayya ‘alā khayr al-‘amal—come to the best of works” became a shibboleth of the Shi‘īs.
⁴ The minor differences in formula (see Juynboll, “Adhān,” 188) were a focus of power struggles between Sunnīs and Shi‘īs in Aleppo: in 462/1069 under the Mirdasid prince Maḥmūd ibn Naṣīr ibn Šāliḥ; in 541/1146, when Nūr al-Dīn enforced the Sunnī adhān, and ten years later, during a Shi‘ī rebellion (see Khayat, “Šī‘ite Rebellions,” 169–170, 178–191). Saladin compelled the Shi‘ī khaṭībs of Medina to pronounce the formulaic blessing of the ṣahāba according to Sunnī custom (Marmon, Eunuchs, 58, 139 n. 170).