“Saladin always sought out Fridays for his battles, especially the times of Friday prayer,” claims Bahā’ al-Dīn ibn Shaddād, the sultan’s devoted companion and biographer, and goes on to explain why: “to gain the blessing of the preachers’ prayers on the pulpits, for they were perhaps more likely to be answered.”1 Towards the end of the biography, describing Saladin’s final hours, Bahā’ al-Dīn mentions that on Ṣafar 27 589/March 3 1193, the twelfth day of Saladin’s fatal illness, a prayer leader was called to his bed. Shaykh Abū Ja’far al-Qurṭubi (d. 596/1200), the imām of the Kallāsa mosque, and “a man of piety,” came, in Bahā’ al-Dīn’s words, “to spend the night in the citadel, so that, if death throes began during the night, he would be with the sultan, keep the women away from him, rehearse his confession of faith and keep God before his mind.” Shaykh Abū Ja’far recited the Qurʾān beside Saladin, “and called God to his remembrance” until his last breath. Thus, the shaykh facilitated the sultan’s ‘beautiful death’: unconscious as he was, upon hearing the words of verse 22 of sūrat al-ḥashar (59)—“He is God, other than He there is none, Knower of the invisible (ghayb) and the visible (shahada). He is the Beneficent, the Merciful”—Saladin opened his eyes and said ‘amen’.2

Possibly, Bahā’ al-Dīn ibn Shaddād is telling us that preachers (khaṭībs) and prayer leaders (imāms) could, according to the perception of Saladin (and his men), bestow blessing because of their formal position. Perhaps the baraka was attributed to them on account of their personal virtues of piety, learning or charisma, or else, because the khaṭīb and imām (often the same person) were held to represent the whole praying community, and the intercessional power of the

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1 Richards, Rare and Excellent, 72. Saladin also acknowledged a similar dependence on intercessory prayers (duʿāʾ)—those of the jurists and ascetic and al-Khabūshānī (see Lev, “Piety and Politics,” 305).
2 Ibn Shaddād, Ṣirat al-Sulṭān, 152; trans. in Richards, Rare and Excellent, 243. The other “imām of Saladin” mentioned in our sources is Diyāʾ al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Amāli (d. 598/1201–2), see Dhahābi, Taʾrīkh, 50:481; Abū Shāma, Tarājim, 47–48.
multitude of Muslims. This section is devoted to the personnel of the mosque, and seeks to find out whether khaṭībs and imāms did indeed enjoy moral authority in the eyes of medieval Syrian Muslims, and in what ways they exercised that authority. It opens with a presentation of the khaṭāba according to legal and administrative literature, and goes on to sketch the profiles of preachers who served in Zangid and Ayyūbid congregational mosques, namely, their social and educational backgrounds, the functions they performed, the social status they gained with the nomination, the relationships they established with rulers and congregations, the messages they propagated, and the strategies of preaching they employed. The final section deals with imāms: their social and religious status, rights and obligations, and their rapport with the praying-congregation.

3.1. Friday Preaching (khaṭāba)

Ideally—that is, in the early Muslim state as constructed in Islamic collective memory—the Friday-noon sermon (khutba) was the duty and prerogative of the caliph. Over time, it was delegated to the ‘ulamā’. Hārūn al-Rashīd (170/786–193/809) is said to have been the first caliph who did not prepare sermons himself: he ordered written sermons from religious scholars and memorized them. During the course of the third/ninth century, most caliphs and local rulers refrained from delivering the sermons themselves altogether, and committed the task to the charge of professional preachers. Latter-day Muslim rulers mounted the pulpit only on rare festive occasions, if at all.³ Once the caliph no longer preached himself, great importance was attached to the mention of his name in the khutba—a symbolic expression of the fidelity of his subordinates, and one of the two standard tokens of sovereignty (the other being the sikka—the privilege of minting coins).⁴

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³ The Fāṭimids, who wished to emphasize the ecclesiastical aspect of their caliphate, are an exception. They used to preach themselves, behind a veil, on Fridays of Ramaḍān and on the festivals (Mez, Renaissance, 317–319; Pedersen, “Khaṭīb,” 1110).
⁴ When al-Malik al-Ashraf became the effective ruler of Northern Syria in 615/1218, he was explicitly granted the privilege of being mentioned second in the Friday sermon; after the sultan al-Kāmil (then head of the Ayyūbid federation), and before the titular prince of the city—al-Malik al-'Azīz (Humphreys, From Saladin, 106).