
In this impressive and innovative study, Anne Broadbridge analyzes a number of conceptual transformations that kingship and political legitimacy underwent in the medieval Middle East and Mongol Empire. Her discussion addresses several issues of primary concern. Central among these are to determine what it was that constituted legitimate rule in the medieval Middle East and Central Asia, how ideologies of political legitimacy among the Mongols and Mamluks changed during the period under consideration, and how perceptions of legitimacy informed the ways in which rulers in both of these environments acted, and reacted. While perceptions may be ephemeral, Broadbridge convincingly argues that their impact on the ground was profound and lasting.

The volume begins with a discussion of the distinct ideologies previously employed by the Mongol “golden family” (the Chinggisids) of the Central Asian steppe and the Mamluk Sultans in the Islamic Middle East. Broadbridge then sets out to trace the transformations in the ruling ideologies as they developed in the period stretching from the Mamluk victory over the army of the Ilkhan Hülegü at ‘Ayn Jalut in 1260 to Temür’s death in 1405. In an effort to impose a clear structure on her discussion she identifies five distinct periods within this time frame. More interesting are her nuanced discussions of the various factors that precipitated these ideological shifts.

The first of Broadbridge’s five periods of concern began with the Mamluk victory in 1260. Hülegü had just two years earlier overseen the execution of the final ‘Abbasid caliph and it is therefore perhaps not surprising to find that the defining feature of diplomatic exchanges in this period was one of confessional-based hostility. The Mamluks present themselves publicly, both to the Ilkhanate and to their own subjects, as the militant “Guardians of Islam” from the pagan Mongol onslaught. In the Ilkhanate, the response was to dismiss their Mamluk neighbors as irrelevant or, at most, as recalcitrant slaves. Broadbridge then charts the ways in which these ideological positions began to shift in 1295, when Ghazan Khan (r. 1295-1304) converted to Islam and assumed leadership over the Ilkhanate. Rather than usher in an era of peace and religious unity, however, conflict continued: the Ilkhans emphasized their status as the supreme
power in the Muslim world, while the Mamluks endeavored to draw legitimacy from their earlier, and therefore more legitimate, conversion to Islam.

From 1317 to 1341, Broadbridge posits a third period that covered the overlapping reigns of Özbek Khan (r. 1313-41) of the Golden Horde, the Mamluk Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad (1310-41), and the Ilkhan Abu Sa’id (r. 1317-35). She finds that this period is defined by official rapprochement, religious rivalry, ceremonial displays largely having to do with the pilgrimage, and regional ideology. The Ilkhans retained their identity as Muslims and fostered a reputation as benevolent patrons of the faith, while the Mamluks endeavored to assert their superiority over the Muslim Mongols of the Ilkhanate and Golden Horde, at least partly because of their position as the rulers of the holy cities. This period witnessed subtle ideological changes throughout, but Broadbridge observes that the dynamic shifted significantly and abruptly when Abu Sa’id died in 1335 without an heir. A power struggle ensued, the Ilkhanid state decentralized, and the Mamluk Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad exploited the situation to assert Mamluk dynastic supremacy over myriad minor rulers across the region. Of special interest here is Broadbridge’s discussion of the internal dynamics of Mamluk relations with Ilkhanid successor states, which sheds important new light on the complicated state of affairs on the eve of the Temürid onslaught.

The fifth and final phase in Broadbridge’s analysis, which lasted from 1382 to 1405, features a return to a climate of hostility as the Central Asian conqueror Temür emerged as a new threat to Mamluk supremacy in the region. At first the Mamluks were able to draw support by returning to their earlier position as the Guardians of Islam against barbarian infidels. But Temür eventually defeated the Mamluks and, Broadbridge notes, demonstrated his impressive creativity by employing a combination of tactics to establish his legitimacy. These include embracing the Chinggisid tradition (through marriage, patronage, and his use of puppet khans); claiming a unique position as the “Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction” (sahib qiran), the natural successor to Chinggis Khan and divinely selected to take over the world (pp. 169-70); and also as a pious Muslim ruler and patron of the faith, whenever it was in his interest to do so. Temür launched his third invasion of the Middle East shortly after the death of Sultan Barquq in 1399, and in 1402 he reduced Barquq’s son and successor, al-Nasir Faraj, to a humiliating position as regional governor and vassal. Three years later, Temür died.