Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies
Vol. 61, no. 2 (2023), pp. 267-296, doi: 10.14421/ajis.2023.612.267-296

DRAWING A "GEOPOLITICS" OF MEDIEVAL MIDDLE EAST
Political Alliance and Rivalry among Islamic Caliphates, the Mongols, and the European Kingdoms

Muhammad Abdul Karim
Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
email: muhammad.karim@uin-suka.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to sketch the "geopolitics" of the past by investigating the context of the medieval Islamic world. Not only in today's world, international political and economic relations have also had their precedents in the past. Given its strategic position in this issue, the Middle East is one of the regions that are interesting to study in the context of geopolitical narratives from the past to the present. This article tries to unravel the geopolitical situation of the Medieval Middle East by tracing historical records related to the economic-political relations of Islamic dynasties through a broader picture by looking at their relationship with other political powers that existed at that time, especially the Mongols and European-Christian kingdoms in general. This exploration shows how the issues of political pragmatism filled with negotiations and the necessity of religious issues have been deeply intertwined with each other and became a major feature of geopolitical relations in the medieval Middle East.

[Artikel ini menggambarkan sebuah sketsa tentang "geo-politik" di masa lalu dengan menginvestigasi konteks dunia Islam pada abad pertengahan. Tidak hanya terjadi di dunia saat ini, relasi internasional dalam bidang politik dan ekonomi juga telah memiliki presedennya di masa lalu. Timur tengah adalah salah satu ranah yang layak untuk dikaji dalam konteks narasi geopolitik sejak masa lalu hingga saat ini, mengingat posisinya yang strategis dalam isu ini. Artikel ini mencoba mengurai situasi geopolitik Timur Tengah pada abad pertengahan dengan menelusuri catatan sejarah

terkait relasi ekonomi-politik dinasti-dinasti Islam ditinjau dari konteks yang lebih luas dengan melihat kaitannya dengan kekuaan politik lain yang ada ketika itu, termasuk Mongol dan kerajaan-kerajaan Kristen Eropa secara umum. Penelusuran ini menunjukkan bagaimana isu pragmatisme politik yang dipenuhi dengan negosiasi dan isu keagamaan telah sangat terkait satu sama lain dan menjadi fitur utama dalam relasi geopolitis di Timur Tengah pada abad pertengahan].

Keywords: Islamic dynasties, the Mongols, European kingdoms, political alliance and rivalry.

A. Introduction

This article invites the readers to imagine the "geopolitics" of the past Middle East through its historical narrative.[1] The scholarly investigation of the Middle East has always been of particular interest. Today, one of the issues that has always been in the spotlight is the fact that this region has become the arena of wars for various geopolitical interests. Political instability in some Middle Eastern countries and the intervention of other countries have fueled the flames of turmoil that are still raging today. One should be aware that the region under consideration is a land of natural resources (read: oil) that attracts the attention of the whole world. This fact should be regarded as the pre-conditional issue that precedes further narratives. The geopolitical problem in the Middle East today reflects a meeting of various interests and pre-condition issues that have existed before.

In today's scholarship, the Middle East is a term politically derived from the discourse created by colonialism. The term Middle East does not have a single meaning.[2] Geographically, however, the Middle East,

[1] The use of the word "geopolitics" should not be viewed as historical anachronism, as the term has emerged in contemporary times. However, what is meant by the term "geopolitics" in this paper is the political relations between powers in the Medieval times, especially in the Afro-Eurasian regions.

[2] Actually, in my opinion, there is no region that is truly in the "centre" of the world, to call a place in the "centre", is determined from where one sees the location. Prior to World War II, the Eastern World, in terms of its proximity to Europe, was known in three parts; the Near East, which included the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, which referred to the area around the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia, and the Far East, which includes East Asia bordering the Pacific Ocean. These three designations have shifted as the territorial map of the world changed during the nation state era, especially after World War II. The countries that emerged in the Near

in the current sense, is a region surrounded by seven seas; hence, it is also known as "the lands of seven seas",[3] although there are some differences. In the United Nations (UN) version, the seven seas are the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Black Sea, Gulf of Aden, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Caspian Sea.[4] Within these geographical boundaries, the countries of the Middle East – as they are known today – include the countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates), Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and Libya.[5]

In addition to the fact that the Middle East was home to Mesopotamia, one of the cradles of human civilisation, this region also witnessed the disputes between Byzantium/Eastern Rome and Sasanid/Persia, two world superpowers in the 3rd to the 7th Centuries which was followed by Arab-Muslim domination from the 7th Century to the end of the 19th Century , until the emergence of the latest phenomena since the 20th Century until today, when oil was discovered in many of these areas.

In its rich historical narrative, this paper explores the history of the Middle East under the caliphate rule with a focus on the geopolitical dynamics of the Medieval times. It starts from the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 until the latter part of the 17th and early 18th centuries, marked by the Karlowitz Treaty in 1699. The signifi-

---

East, the majority of which were former territories controlled by the Ottoman Turks in the pre-World War era, are now better known as the Middle East. See: "Middle East", *Brittannica*, https://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East, accessed on 5 Apr 2023.

[3] Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. and Ibrahim al-Marashi, *A Concise Dictionary of the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 8.

[4] See Globefish, "Markets in the Middle East: Market, Trade and Consumption," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, 20 Oct 2015, http://www.fao.org/in-action/globefish/fishery-information/resource-detail/en/c/338542/, accessed 5 Apr 2023. In Goldschmidt and al-Marashi's version, the seven waters are the Black Sea, Bosporus Strait, Sea of Marmara, Dardanelles Sea, Aegean Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Red Sea, Goldschmidt Jr. and al-Marashi, *A Concise Dictionary of the Middle East*, p. 8.

[5] "Middle East". In 2004, the term Greater Middle East was also introduced, a term coined in the context of US foreign policy targeting the aforementioned Middle East regions and the neighbouring countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. This region is also sometimes referred to as the MENA (Middle East and North Africa).

cance of discussing the "Middle East" in the Medieval times is to get a broader picture of the region when Islamic dominance and influence reached its peak along with complex political turmoil. It shows how the political dynamics between competing Islamic powers in the Medieval Middle East set a kind of "historical precedent" for the current turmoil in the Middle East.

B. The Muslim World after Baghdad's Fall: Decline or Decentralisation?

After the fall of Baghdad by the Mongols, the Islamic World (Islamdom) is often considered to have entered a period of decline and decadence.[6] It needs to be revisited as the cultural and political achievements at that time represent the advancement of Islam in the post-Baghdad era. This is well revealed by Marshall G.S. Hodgson, who states that until the 16th and 17th Centuries, the Muslims associated with Islam (Islamicate society) were "the most expansive society in the Afro-Eurasian hemisphere and had the most influence on other societies". It was not only because of their central position and political power but also because they offered a cosmopolitan and egalitarian cultural system. For Hodgson, the vitality and creativity of Islamic culture at the "international" level was still very much present. The strategic political position of the Islamic world until that Century reflects that the achievements of Muslim societies were one of their high points. Therefore, he believes that the declinist historical narratives after Baghdad's fall in the 13th Century are a "misconception" that does not see Islamic culture as a whole.[7]

Politically, the heir to the legitimacy of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) fell to the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Syria. The heroic actions of the two leaders of the Mamluk Sultanate (1259-1517), Saifuddin Qutuz (1259-60) and Ruknuddin Baybars (1260-77) who successfully blocked the Mongol troops under the command of Naiman Kitbugha at 'Ain al-Jalut, had succeeded in saving the post-Baghdad centre of Islamic civilisation from further destruction caused by the

[6] This is shown, for example, by the conventional view that the golden age of Islam occurred during the Abbasid period in Baghdad, so that the fall of Baghdad in the 13th Century (1258) by Mongol forces also meant the fall of civilisational progress in the Islamic world.

[7] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 97-102.

Mongol expansion.[8] It is worth noting that the historical facts prove that after the fall of Baghdad, the progress of civilisation continued in the Middle East, even in several regions, including al-Maghrib (North/Sub-Saharan Africa and Andalusia),[9] Central Asia[10] and South Asia.[11] One should also be aware that this continuing progress was brought not only by the Arabs but also by the Turks, Persians, and even the Mongols themselves. Thus, to say that Islamic civilisation has experienced a radical decline after the Mongol attack is not based on a closer look at the historical facts. It would be more accurate to say that the movement of Islamic civilisation at that time continued to show progress, as featured by the "decentralisation" of the cultural centre, which was previously localised in Baghdad. In the pre-modern context, the fall of Baghdad, in this case, had allowed more dispersed cultural centres in various parts of the Islamic World from al-Andalus to Southeast Asia.

The Mamluk Sultanate, which the Abbasid caliphs legitimised in Egypt and elsewhere, even though they were puppet rulers, was a

[8] This decisive battle made Baybars the 2nd Savior of Islam after the Prophet. After the destruction of Baghdad, the Mongol army under the command of Hulaghu Khan continued to push into the Levant towards Egypt. But on the way, news of Mongke Khan's death at Karakuram came to the troops. Hulaghu finally returned to Karakuram for the election of a new Great Khan and leaved his army to Naiman Kitbugha. Their troops were driven back by Mamluk soldiers under the command of Baybars and Qutuz. Due to the absence of Hulaghu and the dwindling Mongol forces, they were finally defeated by the Mamluk forces. Abu al-Fida Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāya*h (Giza: Hijr li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nasyr, 1998), vol. 13, pp. 254, 262, 287. See also Muhammad Abdul Karim, *Bulan Sabit di Gurun Gobi* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2014), p. 84.

[9] Despite its political decline from the 13th Century due to the wave of Reconquista by Christian forces, Islamic civilisation still made progress in the region under the Banu al-Ahmar (Sultanate of Granada), the last Islamic power in Andalusia, until it was defeated by the coalition of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1492. The Banu Marin, based in present-day Morocco, as successors to the Muwahhidun dynasty, were also the centre of Islamic culture in North Africa until 1465. See Thomas K. Park and Aoman Boum, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco* (Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), pp. 237-8.

[10] The history of Islamic Civilisation in Central Asia after Baghdad is represented by the Mongol-Islamic dynasties of Ilkhan, Chagathai, Golden Hordé, and Timurid. Some of these dynasties showed great cultural achievements. For these achievements, see Karim, *Bulan Sabit*, pp. 147-66.

[11] The "Three Large Empires" period in Islamic History refers to the Mughal Sultanate, the Ottoman Turks and the Safavids. Hodgson sees this period as the peak of the political power of the Islamic World; Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, pp. 98-9.

significant factor in the post-Baghdad expansion of Islam in Egypt and Syria. This unique dynasty[12] became one of the Islamic World's centres. It is evident that Islamic intellectualism is alive and well in the area. Some famous names ranging from Syamsuddin al-Dzahabi (d. 1348), Syihabuddin al-Qalqasyandi (d. 1418), Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 1449), Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (d. 1505), and many other great figures under of Mamluk rule, showed the important progress of Islamic thought of at that time. Politically, it should not be forgotten how significant the Mamluks were in the political map of power in the Islamic world at that time, where they were involved in the geopolitical arena in the Afro-Eurasian region. Behind the Mamluks' success, for example, there was a good coalition with Barke Khan (d. 1266)[13] of the Golden Hordé Dynasty, a grandson of Genghis Khan who became the first Mongol leader to convert to Islam.

It should be emphasised that the advancement of Islamic civilisation was also continued in the former centre of the Muslim World, which the Mongols destroyed in the East-Central region under the rule of Genghis Khan's descendants, who are also partly responsible for the pos-Baghdad achievement in the history of Islamic civilisation. Beginning with Barke Khan, certain Mongol emperors accepted Islam and replaced *yasak*, the Mongol customary law, as the official state religion. It is also important to remember that the Mongol Empire started to break up in the 1260s. At the very least, it is because of a religious split and political turmoil. Historical evidence indicates some religions other than Tengrism, the ancient Mongol faith that Genghis Khan embraced from the beginning.[14]

[12] Being different from the principles known in the dynastic system, the basic principle of Mamluk leadership does not recognise the hereditary system, rather it applies the principle of "military oligarchy". This led to political instability, which resulted in a pragmatic perspective on the political affairs of the government. Mamluk history is also characterised by tensions between the sultan and the caliph, where the caliph was positioned more as a puppet leader to legitimise power. Amalia Levanoni, "The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1994), pp. 3, 36.

[13] The Mamluk Baybars' coalition with the Barke of the Golden Hordé is recorded in some Islamic historical literature, see for example Taqī al-dīn Aḥmad bin 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Suluk li Ma'rifat Duwal al-Muluk*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub 'Ilmiyyah, 1997).

[14] Muhammad Abdul Karim, "Baghdad's Fall and Its Aftermath: Contesting the Central Asian Political Background and the Emergence of Islamic Mongol Dynasties", *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2018), p. 206.

Apart from the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt-Syria and the Golden Horde in the Caucasus and the region around the Volga River, Islamic civilisation's progress after Baghdad's fall was also flowered in other regions. The Ilkhan Dynasty (1256-1335), founded by Hulagu Khan (1256-65) in the heart of the Islamic world that he had previously conquered, was also transformed into an Islamic dynasty that reached its glory during the time of Mahmud Ghazan Khan (1295-1304), a descendant of Hulagu who embraced Islam and became the seventh ruler of the dynasty. After its demise, the region was seized by the Timurid Dynasty (1370-1507), founded by Timur Lenk (1370-1405), a Turko-Mongol leader who was also the descendant of Genghis Khan. Timurid rule has even given birth to an advancement in civilisation known as the Timurid Renaissance, especially during the reign of Ulugh Beg (1447-49).[15]

The achievements of this period would then pave the way for the achievements of Islamic civilisation during the "Three Great Empires", the Safavid, the Ottoman Dynasty and the Mughal. Ultimately, the triumph of Islam after the fall of Baghdad is a historical fact that shows an increasingly cosmopolitan character than before and shows a spread of power centres. For Hodgson, the real pinnacle of Islamic glory was at this time when the power of Islam politically and culturally was fully at the "international" level in early modern times.[16] On the other hand, the fact of the spread of power centres, in turn, also shows a geopolitical dynamic that occurred in the Islamic world in Medieval times. This dynamic was internal to the Islamic World and strongly linked to external political forces, especially the Mongols and European Christians.

C. Behind the Political Dynamics of the Medieval Middle East: Three Pre-conditional Issues

1. Internal Turmoil: From Ethnicity to Religious Sectarianism

The Mongols' conquest of Baghdad, the epicentre of the Muslim world in the Middle East, opened a new chapter in human history. Numerous dangers surrounded the Abbasid court by the eleventh Century. As Lewis points out, numerous assaults from internal and

[15] Further explanation of the Timurid Renaissance, Linda T. Darling, "The Renaissance and the Middle East", in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. by Guido Ruggiero (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 58-60.

[16] Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, pp. 98-100.

external forces occurred as the fall of the Abbasids became clear in that period. The Crusader movement rises in the Middle East due to the wave of Reconquista (reconquest) from European Christian kingdoms. The Berber Kingdom in South Morocco was established thanks to an African religious movement. Other unexpected threats came from East and Central Asia, namely the Mongols and the Turks.[17] Suppose the Umayyad period was characterised by Arab-Muslim superiority and made non-Arab Muslims (*mawali*) second citizens. In that case, the Abbasid revolution in 750 can be seen as the gateway to an Islamic government with a more multi-ethnic character. The implication is that non-Arabs began to become an integral part of Islamic political power. In the intellectual realm, non-Arabs even dominated in terms of scientific activities. In the political context, the implications of this *mawali* penetration brought the identity of Islamic power from an Arab political entity into a cosmopolitan empire.

The Persians and Turks were *mawali* who took part in the power struggle during the Abbasid dynasty after previously being subordinate in politics and the economy under the Arab-Muslims. Until the Buwaihi domination (945-1055), a Persian Shi'a dynasty, took control of Baghdad, the Abbasid government's decentralisation allowed political dominance to fracture from the ninth Century onwards. The Buwaihi domination was then ended by the Seljuk Dynasty (1055-1100), who were of Turkic origin and Sunni, like the majority of the Bani Abbas caliphs.[18] From then on, political mobility was controlled by Turko-Persian leaders, although they still recognised the caliphs of Banu Abbas as the spiritual leaders of the Islamic world. In the western region of the Islamic world, the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) in Egypt, with its Shi'a Ismaili ideology, broke away from Baghdad's authority and became a political and intellectual rival to the Umayyad dynasty in Andalusia (756-1031) which had been politically autonomous from Abbasid rule from the beginning.

This kind of political phenomenon shows how ethnicity and ideological sectarianism in Islam play a significant role in the turmoil of power within the Muslim community itself, which often leads to political pragmatism. The gradual weakening of the Baghdad court was due to these factors. On the other hand, the political power of Islam since its emergence until the Middle Ages was one of the beacons of civilisa-

[17] Bernard Lewis, *Arabs in History* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2002), p. 159.

[18] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, *Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 96.

tion in its time, which of course became a competitor for pre-existing political power and a challenge to future political power. In 1258, the Mongol forces and their coalition quickly conquered Baghdad in such a fragile state. The involvement of Mu'ayyid al-Din al-'Alqami, the Shi'i Abbasid vizier, in the successful siege of Baghdad, the role of other Shi'i figures such as the historian Ata Malik Juwaini (d. 1283)[19] and the astronomer Nasiruddin al-Tusi (d. 1274),[20] who spent their time to the study of Baghdad and devoted to Hulaghu and participated in the siege as well as the intervention of the Crusaders who joined Hulagu's army, shows the complex geopolitical pattern behind the fall of Baghdad.[21]

2. The Crusades

On the external front, major challenges came periodically from the Crusaders. A series of military expeditions launched by Christian European monarchs against Muslims to take over the holy city of Jerusalem and several other holy cities took place from 1096 until 1291. Hitti mentions that the main cause of the emergence of the Crusades was the request of Emperor Alexius Comnesus (1081-1118) of Byzantium to Pope Urban II in 1095 to help him because the Seljuk Turks had attacked his power in Asia Minor along the coast of the Sea of Marmara. Thus, the Seljuk attack threatened Constantinople. The Pope himself saw the request as a way to reunite Greece and the Roman Churches, which had been divided from 1009 to 1054.[22]

Historians usually divide the period of the Crusades into three major phases. The first phase, from 1096 to 1144, is known as the period of conquest. With their victory, the Crusaders managed to establish several Christian kingdoms in the East: the Latin Kingdom of Edessa (1098) under King Baldwin (1161-85), the Latin Kingdom of Antioch (1098) under King Bohemond I (1089-1111), the Christian Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099) under king Godfrey (1099-1100), and

[19] W. Barthold and J.A. Boyle, "Djuwayni, 'Ala al-Din Ata-Malik b. Muhammad", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. by P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, vol. 02 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), p. 606.

[20] H. Daiber, "al-Tusi, Nasir al-Din", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. by P. J. Bearman, et. al., vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), p. 746.

[21] Some of these narratives (except those related to the Crusaders' intervention) have been described in Karim, "Baghdad's Fall".

[22] Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 10th ed. (London and Basingstoke: McMillan, 1970), p. 636; Reza-i-Karim, *Arab Jatir Itihash* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1972), p. 536.

the Latin Kingdom of Tripoli (1109) under king Raymond (1152-87). The Second Phase lasted between 1144 and 1192. This phase began when 'Imaduddin Zangi (1127-46), the governor of Mosul, attempted to awaken the Muslim forces to stem the advance of the Crusaders. The Muslim movement reached its peak during the time of Salahuddin al-Ayyubi (1174-93) who is well known as Saladin. Among the cities seized by him were Aleppo and Edessa (1144), Antioch (1149), Cairo (1169), and Jerusalem (1187).[23] The Third Phase, lasting between 1192 and 1291, is known as the period of the Crusaders' destruction. This phase marked the decline of the Crusaders' religious fervour and war morale. They were preoccupied with political affairs in their neighbourhoods and were more concerned with economic benefits than waging war. The main goal of conquering Jerusalem was forgotten.[24]

The significance of the Crusades, in this case, is related to the European-Christian Empire, which became one of the main political rivals of the Islamic World at that time. Not only related to the motive of theological polemic, this dispute was also related to economic issues, where the emergence of Islamic dynasties was seen as a threat to the continuity of commerce and monopolisation of its routes, especially in the Mediterranean connection, one of the hearts of commerce for Europeans, where the Seljuk Empire had shown its offensive resistance to Byzantium in the Asia Minor region. In the western part of the Islamic world, Islamic rule in al-Andalus was also seen by Christian European Kingdoms as a real threat that needed to be reconquered. In the context of European-Christian kingdoms, political power in the Islamic World was seen as a competitor and ultimately positioned as a "common enemy" of the scattered Christian empires.

3. The Mongol-Crusader Alliance

If the political power of Islam was a competitor for European Christians, then for the Mongols, a force that emerged later, the glory of Islamic dynasties was seen as a challenge to conquer. In the attempt to conquer Baghdad, there was a common standing position between the Mongols and the Crusaders of the European-Christian kingdoms; they wanted to seize the centre of the Islamic World because many Nestorians were influential in the Mongol court. When Guyuk (d.

[23] Reza-i-Karim, *Arab*, pp. 545-6.

[24] Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 648-53; Ajat Sudrajat, *Perang Salib dan Kebangkitan Kembali Ekonomi Eropa* (Yogyakarta: Leutika, 2009), pp. 63-4.

1248) was elected Great Khan in 1246, given that many of his advisors were Nestorian, Pope Innocent IV sent Pian del Carpine on a mission to convert him to Christianity. The Great Khan replied to the Pope's message by asking him to recognise Mongol sovereignty and explaining that the Mongols' only goal was expansion/conquest. After that time, there were many military coalitions between the Crusaders and Mongol forces, especially in conquering Muslim forces.[25] On the other hand, Hulagu Khan's mother, Sorghaghtani Beki, and his consort, Dokuz Khatun, were devout Nestorian Christians, as well as one of his trusted generals, Naiman Kitbugha.[26] This is most likely a strong reason for his emotional attachment to Christianity.

While the Mongols were in the midst of their westward advance and seeking to penetrate the fortifications of the Islamic world's political forces to capture the holy city of Jerusalem, the Crusaders had successfully established numerous kingdoms in the Middle East. It should be remembered that the Mongols had already conquered numerous Muslim and Christian countries that extended throughout the Middle East and Eastern Europe since the time of Ogedei, the second Great Khan (who reigned in 1229-1241) before Baghdad was destroyed. In these conditions, Hulagu Khan requested the Crusaders in Georgia and Armenia, which he had subjugated, to assist his military alliance efforts. It is said that the Georgian Crusaders, a part of Hulagu's army, first broke into the fortress of Baghdad.[27] Earlier, the Christian Kingdom of Armenia-Sisilia also surrendered to the Mongols in 1247, calling for a Christian-Mongol alliance with all other crusader political authorities. The Armenian-Mongol coalition was pivotal in the success of the siege of Baghdad and subsequent expansion efforts.[28]

At the behest of his consort, Hulagu kept the Christians in Baghdad alive while he massacred the local populace. Christians in the Middle East rejoiced at the news of Baghdad's devastation. They even declared that Hulagu and his companion were the reincarnations of Constantine and Helena sent by God to destroy the adversaries

[25] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusade*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 259.

[26] Cristoph Bauman, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), pp. 216-7.

[27] Runciman, *A History of the Crusade*, vol. 3, p. 303.

[28] For a comprehensive historical narrative of the alliance of Mongol and Armenian forces, *see*: Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

of Christians.[29] In succeeding centuries, the Crusaders and Mongols remained allies. The Mongol army, co-working with the Crusaders, tried repeatedly to breach the Mamluk walls after defeating the Abbasids and Ayyubids and losing the battle of 'Ain al-Jalut in 1260. The Mongols were fundamentally on the side of the Crusaders in this aspect, and their military alliance and cooperation continued after the destruction of Baghdad.

However, not all Christian kingdoms in the Middle East saw the Mongols as a coalition against Muslim forces. The Crusaders of Acre, for instance, saw the Mongols as a threat to their territory. So, they favoured the Muslim forces over the Mongols, who were known for their brutal slaughter, whereas they were more familiar with the attitudes of the Muslim forces. When a Mamluk diplomat asked for permission to cross Acre's territory, the local authorities granted permission and provided security for the Mamluk troops that would intercept the Mongols.[30]

D. Geopolitical Complexities in the Middle East after the Fall of Baghdad

Having explained some of the pre-conditions, both internal and external, in the political turmoil in the Islamic world reflected after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 and its geopolitical background, we will then present some important historical narratives that show the political complexity of the medieval Middle East. This is done by tracing the dynamics of political power that took place in the Middle East from a macro perspective. In particular, it highlights the geopolitical setting of the Mamluk-Golden Horde rivalry with the Ilkhan-Crusader coalition as well as the Ottoman Turkish and Timurid confrontation in the Battle of Ankara that changed the political map in Anatolia. In addition, it also explains the rivalry between the three great powers of the medieval Islamic world, the Mamluks, Ottoman Turks, and Safavids, and the "European connections" behind the dispute.

1. Mamluk-Ilkhan Political Rivalry (1260-1323)

The history of the war between the two powers has been comprehensively described by Reuvan Amitai-Preiss in his book *The*

[29] Runciman, *A History of the Crusade*, vol. 3, pp. 303-4.

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 311-2.

Mamluk-Ilkhanid War.[31] This conflict was a further stage of the confrontation between Mongols and Muslims after Hulaghu had successfully overthrown Baghdad and established the Ilkhan dynasty, which established Mongol authority over the conquered territories. After Baybars successfully repulsed the Mongol forces and became the Mamluk Sultan, he realised that Hulagu's counterattack to respond to the defeat at Ain al-Jalut would be far stronger. He made the choice to form an alliance with Berke Khan, the leader of the Golden Hordé and a recently converted Mongol leader, and he started carrying out the Ilkhan campaign. Baybars asked Berke to overthrow Ilkhan control by starting a "holy war against infidels" because he was in the same situation as Muslims, and in 1262, he formed an alliance with the Golden Hordé.[32]

According to Amitai-Preiss, the two sides had at least 60 years of military contact and "cold war" before a peace treaty was concluded in 1323. In this case, Ilkhan forces made offensive attempts to invade Mamluk territory in Syria in 1260, 1281, 1299, 1300, 1303 and 1312. Apart from the 1299 expedition, which the Ilkhan won at Wadi Khaznadar, all of these attempts failed. Nor did the Ilkhan's sole victory in the military confrontation lead to a permanent Mongol occupation of Syria and the defeat of the Mamluks.[33]

It goes without saying that this is strongly tied to the geopolitical realities of the time when the Mamluk-Golden Hordé combination played a crucial role in putting an end to Ilkhan expeditions that were being supported militarily by some Crusaders. This was sparked by conflicts within the Mongol family when Kublai and Ariq Boke fought over who would succeed Mongke as the great Khan. Both men claimed to be the rightful heir to the throne. Berke supported Ariq Boke, while Hulagu supported Kublai.[34] This had implications for the political dynamics of their respective domains, especially since Berke had embraced Islam in 1252 and strongly objected to Hulagu's planned destruction of Baghdad, given the good diplomatic relations between Berke and Muslim dynasties in the Middle East at that time. Since

[31] Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[32] James Chambers, *The Devil's Horsemen: The Mongol Invasion of Europe* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), p. 154.

[33] Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 1.

[34] P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam Volume IA: The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic Times to the First World War* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), pp. 164-6.

Hulagu destroyed Baghdad in 1258 and planned to invade Syria, Berke entered into a coalition with the Mamluks in 1260 to intercept Hulagu's ambition, who had established Ilkhan rule in Persian territory. There were several military confrontations between the two Mongol leaders, and both died while the war was in progress.[35]

It should also be noted that the Ilkhan Dynasty underwent a transformation in religious identity, with Tegudar/Sultan Ahmad (d. 1284), the third Ilkhan leader, following Berke's footsteps by embracing Islam. This also caused great controversy at the court, and Tegudar was deposed by Arghun, who was assisted by Kublai.[36] Although the court was again ruled by Buddhist Mongol leaders, Islam began to flourish among the Mongols during the time of Gaykathu (d. 1295), the fifth Ilkhan leader, and expanded massively during the time of Mahmud Ghazan Khan (d. 1304), the seventh Ilkhan leader, who converted to Islam following Tegudar. In the end, Islam was made the official religion of the Ilkhan Dynasty, although it did not affect the Ilkhan's political policy in fighting the Mamluk Dynasty over the disputed territory of Syria.

One should also note the continuing alliance formed between the Mongols and the Crusaders during the confrontation with the Mamluks. Despite the initial success of this collaboration during Hulagu's attack on the Abbasids in Baghdad, it never resulted in a major success in the Mamluk conquest.[37] The alliance with the Crusaders that had been in place since Hulagu's expedition to the Middle East was continued by subsequent Ilkhan leaders, including Ghazan Khan.

The political Ilkhan-Crusader alliance that continued to fight the Mamluks under Ghazan Khan even became a polemic among Muslims and was transformed into a theological issue. Despite publicly embracing Islam and making it the official religion of the Ilkhan dynasty, Ghazan Khan's continuing anti-Mamluk tendencies by attacking Syria and his

[35] Karim, "Baghdad's Fall", pp. 204-5; Ashrafuddin Ahmed, *Maddhyajuger Muslim Itihash (1258-1800 M)* (Dhaka: Cayonika Press, 2003), p. 85; Thomas W. Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World: A History of Peaceful Preaching* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001), pp. 221-30.

[36] One of the controversies was that Tegudar opened diplomatic relations with the Mamluks; Edward Granville Browne, *A History of Persian Literature Under Tartar Dominion (A.D. 1265-1502)*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), p. 26; 'Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārikh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2000), p. 616.

[37] Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians*, p. 193-4.

coalition with the Crusaders by sending a letter to Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 to instruct the leaders of the Christian Empire to send military aid,[38] has caused controversy regarding his Islamic status.

This was especially voiced by scholars within the Mamluk dynasty itself, including the famous Ibn Taimiyyah, who had issued a *fatwa* on the obligation of *jihad* against the Ilkhan forces and a *fatwa* on fasting relief for the troops. He himself played an important role during the Mamluk-Ilkhan confrontation, including participation in diplomatic efforts with Ghazan Khan's authority in Damascus.[39] Among his *fatwa*s, he even claimed that the Tatars (Mongols) were infidels who presented themselves to ordinary Muslims as Shi'a and followers of the teachings of the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-bayt*), but in fact, they did not believe in Allah and His Messenger.[40] This is an explicit example from the Islamic Middle Ages of how political turmoil greatly influenced the religious discourse of the time and how the two realms were deeply intertwined.

2. The Battle of Ankara (1402) and its Geopolitical Setting

Later on, the map of Islamic political power in the Middle East saw the emergence of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), which would later become one of the most powerful Islamic dynasties ever. After being conquered by the Seljuk Empire, the Anatolian region became the base for the flowering of political power led by the Turks. The weakening of the Seljuk power by the Mongol invasion opened up opportunities for local leaders to declare their independence. Among those who declared independence was Uthman, who controlled a small region that was previously an emirate under the Seljuks.[41] Since its declaration in 1299, direct political confrontations took place with the Anatolian region, the Balkans, and in turn, with neighbouring Byzantium. The establishment of the Ottoman dynasty was projected from the start as a challenge to the remnants of the Eastern Roman power with its capital in Constantinople, a city that Muslims wanted to conquer since the time of 'Uthman bin 'Affan. As such, there were many attempted sieges of

[38] W. Barthold and J.A. Boyle, "Ghazan, Mahmud", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 02, p. 1043.

[39] H. Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 03, p. 951.

[40] Taqi al-Din Ibn Taimiyyah, *al-Fatawa al-Kubra*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987), p. 506.

[41] Stephen Turnbull, *The Ottoman Empire: 1326-1699* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012), p. 10.

the city by Ottoman Turkish leaders that were eventually executed by Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih in 1453.

Before the conquest of Constantinople, a monumental Middle Eastern polemic took place between Timur Lenk (1370-1405), the founder of the Timurid dynasty, and Bayazid I (1389-1403), the fourth leader of the Ottoman Turks. Both were great leaders who were very ambitious for political power. Bayezid I, whose title was *Ildrim* (lightning), was known as the undefeated leader in the Anatolian region at the time. He was the fourth Ottoman leader, and the dynasty became very strong under his leadership. He was known as a very ambitious leader. He laid siege to Constantinople for six months, and the rest of the Byzantine Empire almost fell into his troops.[42] During Bayazid's time, the Ottoman Turks began to unify Anatolia, conquer Bulgaria and Northern Greece, and continue to besiege Constantinople.

On the other hand, the wave of resistance from the European Crusaders continued under the Ottoman Turks, even though their rule in the Middle East ended in 1291 with the capture of the last Crusader stronghold of Acre by Mamluk forces. After that, the battlefield shifted to the Anatolian region, featuring the Ottoman Turks against a coalition of European Christian kingdoms. It should also be noted that a coalition of European crusaders representing the Latin Church - for theological, economic and political reasons - had also attacked Byzantium, representing the Greek Church, in 1204. This led to the fragmentation of power and the shrinking of Byzantine territory and ultimately paved the ground for its destruction at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.[43]

In this situation, Bayazid's army was made up of both Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers, particularly those from friendly kingdoms or areas he had acquired. Princess of the Kingdom of Serbia, which had been seized by the Ottoman Turks after the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and whose commanders Sultan Murad I (1362-89) and Lazar Hrebeljanovi (1329-89), were both killed, was one of Bayazid I's brides. Even Stephen

[42] Some say the siege lasted for seven months; Karim, *Bulan Sabit*, p. 117.

[43] The invasion of Byzantium by Crusaders has long been a topic of discussion among historians. Byzantium was a fragment of the Roman Empire in the East that had a different style of theology and liturgy from the Latin Church centered in Rome, Italy. Constantinople with Hagia Sophia became a "second Rome" and a "second Jerusalem". Against the backdrop of such theological sectarianism and some differences and misunderstandings during the Crusades, the siege of Constantinople by fellow Christian armies eventually came to be. For further explanation, *see* Jonathan Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusaders* (London: Hambeldon and London Books, 2003).

Lazarevic (1389–1402), the successor to the Serbian throne and Bayazid I's own brother-in-law, led the Serbian army that aided Bayazid I in his fight against Timur Lenk.[44] Prior to this, King Ladislaus of Naples (1386–1414) and King Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437), one of the Christian countries in the European crusader alliance that was vanquished by the Ottoman at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396 , were allies against King Bayazid I.[45] In principle, Bayazid I's cosmopolitan approach to politics assisted the Ottomans in expanding their influence into Europe. Due to the great division that split the Christian world into the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church, the Ottoman Empire represented a significant threat to the European Christian countries.

Moving to Central Asia, Timur Lenk was also the undefeated leader of the Mongol-Islamic Dynasty who declared his rule in an attempt to bring back the glory of the Mongols. Genealogically, the Timurids were the continuation of the Chaghatai Dynasty (1227-1369) which in the period 1334-1469 was in political turmoil and on the verge of collapse. At that moment, Timur Lenk took over the power of the Chaghatai Dynasty and declared the Timurid Dynasty.[46] Although there had been previous political tension between the Timurids and the Ottoman Turks, there was no compelling reason for the two to open military contact, as Bayazid I's focus was on Constantinople, and Timur initially targeted the Mesopotamian region.

However, in 1402, Timur Lenk made an offensive attack against Bayazid I in Ankara. There are many backgrounds behind this attack, although it was essentially driven by a policy of pure expansion. Several events were also the reasons behind the war between the two sides. Among them was the political asylum granted by Bayazid I to Kara-Yusuf, who was considered a rebel and troublemaker by Timur Lenk.[47] In addition, a controversy erupted when the Ottoman Turks asked one of Timur Lenk's loyalist emirs for tribute, which was interpreted as an insult and a signal for war.[48] Since the conquest of Delhi in 1399 and in

[44] Turnbull, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 28.

[45] Emir O. Filipović, "Colluding with the Infidel".

[46] Ahmed, *Maddhajuger*, pp. 96-7.

[47] Ivar Lissner, *The Living Past*, trans. J. Maxwell Borwnjhon (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1957), p. 203; Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam*, trans. Djahdan Humam (Yogyakarta: Kota Kembang, 1997), p. 312.

[48] Spencer C. Tucker, *Battles that Changed History: An Encyclopedia of World Conflicts* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2011), p. 40.

preparation for the invasion of Anatolia, Timur Lenk began to establish some diplomatic relations with the European Christian kingdoms that were feeling threatened by the Ottoman expansion.

The alliance between the Mongols and the Crusaders that had existed since Hulaghu invaded the Middle East set a "precedent" in the political policies that were reintroduced during the Timurid Dynasty. Timur Lenk, for example, had established excellent relations with King Charles VI of France and King Henry of Castille, Spain. During the battle of Ankara, two diplomats from Castille, Pelayo de Sotomayor and Fernando de Palazuelos, even witnessed the battle. After the battle, King Henry sent a mission to Timur Lenk under Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, Gomez de Salazar, and Fr. Alonso Paez de Santa Maria in order to congratulate him and obtain more information about the victory.[49]

While Bayazid I was besieging Constantinople, Timur Lenk finally went on the offensive war by convoying to Anatolia. He brought about 140,000 to 200,000 soldiers to attack the Ottoman Turkish forces.[50] Bayazid I, who was attempting to blockade Constantinople at the time, finally decided to withdraw troops from Byzantium to Ankara as Timur's forces had conquered Sivas in 1400, one of the strategic cities under Ottoman rule defended by Armenian Christians and continued to move westward. On the way to Ankara, Timur conducted various diplomacies with Christian kingdoms that were rivals of the Ottoman Turks in Anatolia, including the Kingdom of Trebizond (1204-1461),[51] which became one of the three successor kingdoms to Byzantine rule, along with the Kingdom of Nicaea and the Kingdom of Epirus, after it was conquered by the crusaders.

On the opposite side, Bayazid brought about 85,000 troops consisting of infantry and cavalry, including Serbian Christian troops.[52] Being exhausted from the long journey, Bayazid's army was finally defeated by Timur Lenk's army. Bayazid was finally defeated by Timur, who had more troops and was better prepared due to his earlier arrival at the battlefield and could plan his tactics more thoroughly. Bayazid tried to escape but was eventually caught and imprisoned. He died in

[49] Laurence Lockhart, "European Contacts with Persia, 1350-1736", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. by Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 375.

[50] Tucker, *Battles*, p. 140.

[51] Turnbull, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 26.

[52] Tucker, *Battles*, p. 140.

prison in 1403.[53] Bayazid's defeat became very popular and left a legacy in European popular culture.

Immediately after his victory, Timur Lenk sent Johannes de Galonifontibus, who had previously been appointed bishop by Pope Boniface IX of the Sultaniyya region, to bring news of his victory to Venice, Genoa, London and Paris. To King Henry IV in England and King Charles VI in France, he specifically sent treaties granting privileges to merchants from his territory. Both European monarchs welcomed this and congratulated Timur Lenk on his brilliant victory. His victory at the battle of Ankara also changed the political map of the Middle East. Bayazid's fall from power gave the Byzantine Empire a longer chance to survive the next half-century.[54] Bayazid I's defeat also led to a turbulent succession, in which a series of civil wars took place over 11 years (1402-1413) to contest the throne of the Ottoman Turkish Sultanate and to restore its power.

3. Political Rivalry in the Middle East in the "Gunpowder" Period

Entering the 16th Century, when the political position of the Islamic world was increasingly showing its peak and the influence of Islamic culture became the most expansive cultural system in the context of community life in the Afro-Eurasian world at that time, a geopolitical dynamic occurred with an increasingly complex pattern. However, one can summarise the complexity by stating that the main players of world politics at that time were the "continuation" of the old powers mentioned. When some of the heirs showed development to become stronger, the others showed a decline and were even on the verge of collapse because they were no longer able to govern and the many threats from external parties were getting stronger.

Following the fall of Baghdad in 1291, which ended the Crusaders' rule in the Middle East, the Mamluks rose to prominence as one of the Islamic dynasties that entered its final decades in the 16th Century, becoming one of the greatest strongholds of the Islamic world. By preventing the Mongols and their descendants from further encroaching on the Middle East and North Africa, the Mamluks were able to establish Egypt as a safe haven for the development of Islamic thought and civilisation. The Ottoman Turks in Anatolia, who had

[53] Hasan, *Sejarah*, pp. 312-3; Ali, *Muslim*, pp. 54-61.

[54] Lockhart, "European Contacts", p. 375.

survived the civil war, continued to develop as a powerhouse in the Islamic World and even evolved into a considerable force when Bayazid I was overthrown in the Battle of Ankara.

With the establishment of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), the largest Islamic dynasty in Persia that shaped the history of modern Iran, after having previously been ruled by Arab, Turkish, and Mongol rulers, a change in succession occurred in Persia in the early 16th Century. This occurred after the Buwaihiyya dynasty collapsed in 1055. With the rise of Babur (1526-1530), the founder of the Mughal Dynasty (1526-1857), who was derived from Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk, Turco-Mongol descendants continued to rule throughout South Asia.[55] Together with the Ottoman Turks and Safavids, the Mughal was one of three great Muslim empires in medieval times that were among the strongest and most stable political-economic empires of the early modern. In the course of Islamic history, they are identified with the "gunpowder empires" phase. In this phase, explosive gunpowder as a new weapon material had become widespread in military equipment,[56] signifying the latest achievement in warfare technology at the time.

On the other hand, the European people began to show their awakening with the revolution of thought marked by the Italian Renaissance that took place in the 15th and 16th Centuries, followed by enormous social changes and a series of scientific revolutions. Politically, European empires began to shift their areas of exploration from land to sea and new territories were discovered, including the Americas. The Spanish and Portuguese empires, for example, colonised much of Central and South America, followed by France and Britain in North America. In term of military, this made the Christian kingdoms in Europe very capable at sea. It also further strengthened stability, accelerated the economy, and stimulated the progress of European civilisation at that time.

The Middle East in the early 16th Century has witnessed political rivalry among the Muslim rulers at the time. The Mamluk dynasty, which had been at the centre of the Islamic world since the mid-13th Century, was generating polemics with the Ottoman Turks, a new power that had emerged on the political stage since its aggressive expansion into

[55] John F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge Universty press, 1995), p. 9.

[56] Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 3: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

the Balkans. Through a broader picture, the relationship between the Ottoman and the Mamluks was characterised by the political agitation played by Aq Qoyunlu (1378-1503), a confederation of Turkic-Oghuz tribes that emerged in eastern Anatolia in the fragmentation of Timurid rule. In its heyday under Uzun Hasan (1452-1478), after defeating his rival Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu seized Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, and most of Iran. One should be aware that the political position of this power was in opposition both to the Ottoman and Mamluks. Most importantly, Aq Qoyunlu was also a "partner" of European Christian kingdoms, especially with the Italian-based Kingdom of Venetia, which shared the goal of stemming Ottoman Turkish and Mamluk expansion. One of Uzun Hasan's own consorts was Theodora Megale Komnene, daughter of King John IV of the Kingdom of Trebizond, one of the Byzantine fractions. In this context, Uzun Hasan and his descendants played a significant role in provoking polemics between the Ottoman Turks and the Mamluks. Later on, when the Safavid Empire replaced Aq Qoyunlu under Shah Ismail (1501-24), the geopolitical position was still inherited by the Imamiyyah Shi'a dynasty. Thus, political agitation was also played by Shah Ismail in Constantinople-Cairo relations.[57]

Initially, Constantinople-Cairo diplomatic relation was at good condition when Bayazid I, who was politically inferior, established a correspondence with Sultan Barquq (1382-89 and 1390-99), who first sent gifts in appreciation of the Ottoman Turks' achievements.[58] As the Ottoman expanded its power and became one of the strongest Islamic Dynasties, a political tension slowly emerged with the Mamluk Dynasty, especially in the period after Bayazid I. The Ottoman Turks and Mamluks were separated by several small kingdoms that competed with each other, such as the Karamanids who submitted to the Ottomans in 1487 after previously siding with the Mamluks and Dzulqadir and Banu Ramadan who were still under Mamluk patronage as buffer areas for the expansion of the Ottomans. This dynamic made the border region between the Ottomans and Mamluks politically unstable.[59]

After the time of Bayazid I, relations between the Mamluks and the Ottoman Turks intensified and found a new direction. After the Ottomans became the most powerful dynasty in Anatolia, there was

[57] Cihan Yuksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and The Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), p. 13.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 79.

[59] *Ibid*., pp. 12-3.

the traditional rivalry with the Mamluks for control of the holy city of Makkah-Madinah, which at that time was under Mamluk sovereignty, on the one hand, and the desire to control trade connections in the eastern region, on the other.[60] Moreover, an important factor contributing to the tensions in Constantinople-Cairo relations was the political asylum granted by the Mamluks to Cem Sultan (d. 1495), an Ottoman Turkish prince who fled after the attempted usurpation of the throne of his brother Bayazid II (1481-1512) in the polemical succession after the death of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih (1432-81).[61] During his escape in Mamluk, he fought back, although he was defeated by Bayazid II.

After putting down Cem Sultan's resistance, Bayazid II then established cooperation with the border kingdoms. Eventually, he succeeded in bringing 'Ala al-Dawla, the leader of Dulqadir who was none other than his own father-in-law, on board in 1482 after the beylik renounced his ties with the Mamluks.[62] After formalising the alliance with Dulqadir, Bayazid II's forces moved offensively to invade Mamluk territories which were responded to directly by Mamluk forces under the command of Sultan Qaitbay. This led to a war between the two sides that lasted from 1485-1491. Consisting of a series of relatively equal military contacts, the war finally ended with a peace treaty in 1491 with the territorial situation remaining the same as before the war.

After the peace treaty, both dynasties were still preoccupied with other equally serious political dynamics. The Ottoman Turks had to focus their attention on the dynamics of the Middle East when a new power with ambitions to invade Syria emerged under the Safavid Dynasty. On the other hand, the Mamluks were preoccupied by maritime conflicts with the Portuguese Empire which agitated the spice trade routes. The Portuguese disrupted the Indian Ocean and successfully attacked Calicut in India and blockaded Arab ships sailing from the Red Sea. This immediately provoked reactions from the Mamluks and other interested parties, including the Kingdom of Venice, which had just concluded a peace treaty in 1503 with the Ottoman Turks after being at war since 1499.

In 1504-1516, Venice sent a series of diplomatic missions to the Mamluks to restore trade routes. They hoped for the intervention of

[60] Palmira Johnson Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 52.

[61] Muslu, *The Ottomans and The Mamluks*, pp. 136-7.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 138.

the Mamluks as protectors of the holy city of Makkah-Madinah and one of the centres of power of the Islamic World to act militarily and diplomatically to stop the Portuguese alliance with the Muslim kingdom in India.[63] Under Sultan Qanshu al-Ghuri (1501-16), the Mamluks undertook a maritime expedition, although it was not familiar to those who were used to fighting on land. However, the expedition was a success with the Mamluks defeating the Portuguese at Chaul in 1508. Furthermore, in cooperation with the kingdom of Gujarat, they also expelled the Portuguese from Diu. This restored trade and thwarted the Red Sea blockade by the Portuguese.[64]

However, the Portuguese naval forces under the command of Alfonso de Albuquerque invaded the Red Sea once again by trying to attack Aden in 1513. Although they failed to occupy the fortress at Aden, the arrival of the Portuguese in the Red Sea again posed a serious threat to Mamluk sovereignty, especially its position as protector of the two holy cities. In 1514, Qanshu al-Ghuri asked Ottoman Sultan Salim I (1512-20) for military assistance. This was welcomed by Salim I, who sent Salman Rais bringing thousands of naval troops. The coalition ran from 1514 to 1517 and successfully defended Jeddah from Portuguese attacks, although it did not succeed in defending Yemen and Aden. This allowed the Portuguese to monopolise the spice trade and caused an economic crisis for the Mamluks. In this context, the Ottoman Turks finally "took over" the task of fighting the Portuguese from the Mamluks, their traditional enemies, by conquering the dynasty in 1517 under the command of Salim I.[65]

In addition to the aforementioned motives, another reason for the conquest of the Mamluks by the Ottoman Turks, who were both Sunni ideology, was related to the ambition to seize the legitimacy of the "caliph" whose authority was held by the Mamluks who continued the lineage of the Baghdad Caliphate, even though they were puppet leaders under the Mamluk Sultan. The Mamluk Caliph al-Mutawakkil III was then "kidnapped" by Salim I and the attributes of the caliphate were taken for the Ottoman leaders. Forcibly, Selim I took the title of Caliph from al-Mutawakkil III, where, for the first time, one person had the title of Sultan as well as Caliph.[66]

---

[63] Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower*, p. 34.

[64] *Ibid*., p. 35.

[65] *Ibid*., pp. 118-9.

[66] Ever since Caliph al-Mansur (754-775) of the Abbasids declared that *anā*

Discussing the relationship between the Mamluks and the Ottoman will undoubtedly also be related to the Safavids, the new power that replaced the Aq Qayunlu in mainland Persia. It should be noted that when the Portuguese disrupted the Red Sea to monopolise the spice trade, the Ottoman were engaged in a serious dispute with the Safavids, who were expanding their invasion to the west. There was also the reason of religious ideology, in which the Ottoman Turks, representing the Sunnis, had implemented an anti-Shi'a policy, an ideology that became the "national identity" of the Persian people built by the Safavid Dynasty.[67] The geopolitical position applied since the time of Uzun Hasan, the ruler of Aq Qoyunlu, who stood in opposition to Ottoman expansion and forged alliances with several European Christian kingdoms, continued during the Safavid period.

The emergence of the Safavids was also related to the long-standing polemic between the two largest Sunni powers at the time, the Ottoman and the Mamluks. Apart from differences in religious ideology, the Safavid interest in intervening in Constantinople-Cairo relations was also related to the geopolitical position mentioned. When Safavid expansion succeeded in penetrating Mesopotamia and the southern Caucasus region, it became a real threat to both the Ottoman Turks and the Mamluks. When news of the Safavid invasion of Syria reached both authorities, in 1501 , Sibay, the Mamluk governor of Damascus, levied an illegal tax on the people to support military preparations for the invasion. Being aware of this, in 1503 , Bayazid II invited the Mamluks to work together to hold back the Safavids. Hearing the news, the Safavids finally launched an expedition in 1507.[68]

Another reason for Selim I's attack on the Mamluks was Qansuh al-Ghuri's secret alliance with Shah Isma'il after the Ottomans won a crushing victory over the Safavid forces at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. Shah Isma'il then warned Qansuh al-Ghuri that the Mamluks would be the target of the next Ottoman invasion, leading the Mamluks

khalīfatullāh fi al-arḍ (I am the caliph of God on earth), the entire Islamic World (especially Sunni) spiritually submitted to the authority of Baghdad. It became the legitimizing centre of Islamic power where the Caliph of Baghdad was recited in every Friday sermon.

[67] The Safavid dynasty unified the whole of Persia in which Imamiyya Shi'ism became a 'national', cultural, political identity for the first time in Persian history; Rula J. Bisaab, *Converting Persia; Religion and Power in Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p. 8.

[68] Rabie, "Political Relations", p. 76.

to secretly plan an alliance with the Safavids to fight the Ottomans. Although Mamluk historians still disputed the historical narrative of the Mamluk-Safawi alliance, what is clear is that Qanshu al-Ghuri's actions led Salim I to declare war on the Mamluks 14 days before the Battle of Marj Dabiq in northern Aleppo, Syria on 24 March 1516, where Qanshu al-Ghuri himself was killed on the battlefield.[69]

After the Mamluks were completely overthrown by the Ottomans, the geopolitical map of the Middle East turned towards a fierce political feud between the Ottomans and the Safavids. From the beginning, against the backdrop of a planned Safavid invasion of Mamluk territory in Syria, the Ottoman Turks realised that this would result in the defeat of the politically weakened Mamluks and the two holy cities would fall to the Shi'a Safavids. In addition, Prince Ahmad, Salim I's rival for the succession, was gaining political asylum from the Safavids in addition to the persecution of the Sunni jurist in Persia.[70] This set of motives led Salim I to invade Safavid territory and a battle was fought at Chaldiran, a region near Tabriz, in 1514 with the victory of the Ottoman.

After this defeat, Shah Ismail cooperated with the European Christian royal authorities of the Habsburg dynasty. He, for instance, forged alliances with King Charles V of Spain and Ludwig II of Hungary to work together against the Ottoman Turks. Peter de Monte Libano, Emperor Ludwig's envoy, came to Shah Ismail in 1516 to discuss the object. At the same time, King Charles also sent an envoy to the Safavids. Ismail's reply is not found in historical documents. A year before his death, in 1523, Ismail sent a Latin letter to King Charles to express his concern over the feud between Christian kingdoms and an invitation to fight the Ottoman Turks as a common enemy. However, until Isma'il's death in 1524, this first diplomacy did not result in any follow-ups.[71]

After the death of Ismail, the next heir to the Safavid throne, Tahmasp I managed to reconcile forces mainly by reforming military equipment. This led to a series of wars between Tahmasp I and the Ottoman Turks under the command of Sulaiman al-Qanuni (1520-66),

[69] Gladys Frantz-Murphy, "Negotiating the Last Mamluk-Venetian Commercial Decree (92-23/1516–7): Commercial Liability from the Sixth/Twelfth to the Early Tenth/Sixteenth Century", in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies*, ed. by Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 766.

[70] Rabie, "Political Relations", p. 79.

[71] Lockhart, "European Contacts", pp. 381-2.

the heir to the throne of Salim I, which took place between 1532-1555. At the geopolitical level, Tahmasp I's forces continued the Safavid alliance with the Habsburg authorities, a dynasty that became the monarchical leader of several European-Christian kingdoms in Europe, including Germany-Austria, the Netherlands, and Spain. After being threatened by the Ottoman Turks who were increasingly aggressive, King Charles V sent a letter to Shah Ismail in 1529, who had by then been succeeded by Tahmasp I, to unite in attacking the Ottomans, which also did not come real.[72] It can be seen that until 1529, the news of Ismail's death did not reach the Habsburg authorities, which indicates the poor communication between the two, making it difficult to realise a military collaboration. The Habsburgs themselves were rivals of the Ottoman Turks in Europe. This is also because when the Ottoman Turks succeeded in conquering the Serbian region, they automatically had to confront the Habsburg region. When the Safavids continued to seek an alliance with the Habsburgs in the war against the Ottoman Turks, Sulaiman al-Qanuni, in 1536, finally accepted the offer of alliance made by King Francis I of France who was the rival of the Habsburgs in Europe, even though it was basically aimed at securing Ottoman Turkish territory in Europe which was then hit by the War in Italy between the Habsburgs and the Valois of France.[73] In the end, the war that took place under the rule of Tahmasp I against Sulaiman al-Qanuni was finally won by the Ottoman Turks and ended with the Treaty of Amasya in 1555, which gave the Ottoman Turks access to the Persian Gulf.

In 1571, a coalition of Spain, Venice, and other European Christian kingdoms in the "Holy League" initiated by Pope Pious V successfully repulsed the Ottoman naval forces at Lepanto. After the victory, the Pope sent a letter to Tahmasp I to attack the Ottoman Turks in the East, although this was not realised because the Safavids were economically and politically weak at the time.[74] Warfare between the Ottomans and Safavids continued under Murad III (1574-95) and Muhammad Khudābanda (1578-87). Twenty-two years after the Treaty of Amasya, Murad III had secured his territory in Europe as King Rudolf II of Habsburg had begun sending tribute. In 1578 , Murad

[72] *Ibid*., p. 382.

[73] Maria J. Rodriguez-Salgado, "The Habsburg-Valois Wars", in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, ed. by G.R. Elton, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 384.

[74] Lockhart, "European Contacts", p. 384.

III finally declared war on the Safavids who were in political turmoil under Khudābanda. The war ended in 1590 with the decision of Shah 'Abbas I (1571-1629), Khudābanda's successor, to conclude the Treaty of Constantinople, in which the Turks annexed several territories in Trans-Caucasus Kurdistan, including Tabriz, the old Safavid capital.[75]

A few years later, 'Abbas I reclaimed the Ottoman annexed territories after winning a war with the Ottoman Turks that lasted from 1603-1618 and ended with the Treaty of Nasuh Pasha (1612) and the Treaty of Serav (1618). In this series of wars, 'Abbas I strengthened the quality of the Safavid military by establishing a special force called *ghulam* or *qillar* which was similar to the *Janissaries*, the elite Ottoman Turkish army. Abbas I also modernised his army's military equipment with the help of Anthony Sherley, a London traveller to Persia who introduced the artillery used in the British Empire and taught the Safavid troops some tactics in warfare. The war resumed in 1623-1639 where the Ottoman Turks avenged their defeat and restored the territories stipulated in the Treaty of Amasya. Military conflicts between the two dynasties continued until the end of Safavid rule and even into the Zand and Qajar periods.

E. Concluding Remarks

The geopolitical sketch of the Middle East in the Islamic Middle Ages shows a complexity that is too hard to summarise. However, there are some common threads drawn from the historical narrative presented in this paper. At that time, it can be said that the political dynamics within an Islamic dynasty were not isolated from other powers outside, primarily by trade relations and political alliances. Furthermore, in carrying out practical political realities, the side of pragmatism will always exist to consolidate power. Although the map of political power is closely related to religious boundaries and labels, political pragmatism will not recognise it all. The possibility of several dynasties with the same faith fighting each other and dynasties with different religions in alliance and cooperation supports this argument. The historical data in this paper is a small part of the broader narratives. In turn, the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East in the Middle Ages became a "precedent" for the geopolitical reality of the Middle East today, which basically shows a familiar reality.

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 257-8.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adamec, Ludwig W., *Historical Dictionary of Islam,* Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009.

Ahmed, Ashrafuddin, *Maddhyajuger Muslim Itihash (1258-1800 M)*, Dhaka: Cayonika Press, 2003.

Amitai-Preiss, Reuven, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260–1281,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Arnold, Thomas W., *The Spread of Islam in the World: A History of Peaceful Preaching*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001.

Barthold, W. and J.A. Boyle, "Djuwayni, 'Ala al-Din Ata-Malik b. Muhammad", in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* ed. by P. J. Bearman, et al., 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1991.

----, "Ghazan, Mahmud", in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* ed. by P. J. Bearman, et al., 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Bauman, Cristoph, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*, New York: IB Tauris, 2016.

Bisaab, Rula J., *Converting Persia; Religion and Power in Safavid Empire*, London: IB Tauris, 2004.

Browne, Edward Granville, *A History of Persian Literature under Tartar Dominion (A.D. 1265-1502),* Cambridge: University Press, 1951.

Brummett, Palmira Johnson, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery,* New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Chambers, James, *The Devil's Horsemen: The Mongol Invasion of Europe*, London: Book Club Associates, 1979.

Daiber, H., "Al-Tusi, Nasir al-Din", in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* ed. by P. J. Bearman, et al., 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Darling, Linda T., "The Renaissance and the Middle East", in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. by Guido Ruggiero, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Dashdondog, Bayarsaikhan, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335),* Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Filipović, Emir O., "Colluding with the Infidel: The Alliance between Ladislaus of Naples and the Turks", *Hungarian Historical Review,* vol. 8, no. 2, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26902327.

Frantz-Murphy, Gladys, "Negotiating the Last Mamluk-Venetian Commercial Decree (92-23/1516–7): Commercial Liability from the Sixth/Twelfth to the Early Tenth/Sixteenth Century", in

Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche, *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies,* Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Globefish, "Markets in the Middle East: Market, Trade and Consumption," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, 20 October 2015, http://www.fao.org/in-action/globefish/fishery-information/resource-detail/en/c/338542/.

Goldschmidt Jr, Arthur and Ibrahim al-Marashi, *A Concise Dictionary of the Middle Eas*t, London: Routledge, 2019.

Harris, Jonathan, *Byzantium and the Crusaders,* London: Hambeldon and London Books, 2003.

Hasan, Hasan Ibrahim, *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam*, trans. Djahdan Humam, Yogyakarta: Kota Kembang, 1997.

Hitti, Philip K., *History of the Arabs,*10th edition, London and Basingstoke: McMillan, 1970.

Hodgson, Marshall G. S., *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

----, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 3: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

----, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Holt, P. M., Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam. Vol. 1A: The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic Times to the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Ibn Kathīr, Abu al-Fida, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, Giza: Hijr li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nasyr, 1998.

Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abdurrahman, *Tārikh Ibn Khaldūn*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2000.

Ibn Taimiyyah, Taqi al-Din, *al-Fatawa al-Kubra*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987.

Karim, Muhammad Abdul, "Baghdad's Fall and Its Aftermath: Contesting the Central Asian Political Background and the Emergence of Islamic Mongol Dynasties", *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies,* Vol. 56, No. 1, 2018, pp. 187-224 [https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2018.561.187-224].

----, *Bulan Sabit di Gurun Gobi: Sejarah Dinasti Mongol-Islam di Asia Tengah,* Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2014.

Laoust, H., "Ibn Taymiyya", in in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* ed. by P. J. Bearman, et al., 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Levanoni, Amalia, "The Mamluk Conception of The Sultanate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* vol. 26, no. 3, 1994, https://www.jstor.org/stable/163694.

Lewis, Bernard, *Arabs in History*, Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2002.

Lissner, Ivar, *The Living Past,* trans. J. Maxwell Borwnjhon, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1957.

Lockhart, Laurence, "European Contacts with Persia, 1350-1736", in *The Cambridge History of Iran,* ed. by Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, vol. 6*,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-dīn Aḥmad bin 'Alī, *al-Suluk li Ma'rifat Duwal al-Muluk,* vol. 1, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub 'Ilmiyyah, 1997.

"Middle East", in *Brittannica*, https://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East, accessed 5 April 2023.

Muslu, Cihan Yuksel, *The Ottomans and The Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World,* New York: IB Tauris, 2017.

Newman, Andrew J., *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire,* London: IB Tauris, 2009.

Park, Thomas K. and Aoman Boum, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco,* Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Rabie, Hassanein, "Political Relations Between the Safavids of Persia and the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria in the Early Sixteenth Century", *Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt,* Vol. 15, 1978 [https://doi.org/10.2307/40000132].

Reza-i-Karim, *Arab Jatir Itihash,* Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1972.

Richards, John F., *The New Cambridge History of India,* Cambridge: Cambridge Universty Press, 1995.

Rodriguez-Salgado, Maria J., "The Habsburg-Valois Wars," in *The New Cambridge Modern History,* ed. by G.R. Elton, vol. II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Runciman, Steven, *A History of the Crusade,* vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Sherley, Sir Anthony, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure,* London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.

Sudrajat, Ajat, *Perang Salib dan Kebangkitan Kembali Ekonomi Eropa,* Yogyakarta: Leutika, 2009.

Tucker, Spencer C., *Battles that Changed History: An Encyclopedia of World Conflicts,* California: ABC-CLIO, 2011.

Turnbull, Stephen, *The Ottoman Empire: 1326-1699,* Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012.