

The Journey of Caliphate from 632 to 1924*

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Abstract

Caliphate signifies maintenance of administrative affairs, led by Muhammad (a.s.) regarding the state and society, following his demise; while caliph is the person to carry out mentioned affairs. In Muslim societies, various terms have been used for caliph; besides, persons holding different offices have been called this way. In Quran, the words “khalifa,” “khilafat” and “khulafa” do not bear any sense of head of the state; nevertheless, hadith sources employed such nominations together with expression that relate with leadership. For accession to caliphate, election-like methods were put to use during Rashidun era; nevertheless, the method was abandoned in upcoming periods. Moreover, during time of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, caliph represented all Muslims, while political dissolution began in Muslim society together with accession of Ali, and disputes became even more apparent in upcoming periods. Hereby study analyses transformations, accession methods, influence and abolition of caliphate, as well as the interest of Western colonialist powers in the institution, beginning from its appearance in 632 after decease of Muhammad (a.s.) until the abolition in 1924.

Keywords: History of Islam, Islamic Institutions, Caliphate, Imamate, Abolition of Caliphate

Introduction

Caliphate, one of the most discussed issues among Muslims following the death of Muhammad (a.s.), simply means succession of a person by another. It is derived from the word *khalf* which means “to be behind,” “to succeed,” or “replace” one. The word *caliph* is a conjugate, explained as “person who replaces one and maintains his office.” Plural forms are *khalaf* or *khulafa*. Appointment of a caliph is called *istihlaf* or *tahlif*. The word is employed principally in two domains, namely, politics and Sufism. In political terminology, caliph signifies the person who succeeds Prophet in order to maintain administrative affairs of Muslim society. Caliphate means replacing Muhammad (a.s.) so as to protect the religion and to conduct worldly affairs pursuant to religious policy. Therefore, caliphate merges two types of leadership, namely, religious and earthly.¹ Qur’an and Hadith sources frequently mention the terms *khalifa*, *khalaf* and *khulafa*. Ayahs mostly treat persons who take due responsibility and are sent to earth as caliph of Allah² in order to realise the rightful and just attitude of man and to carry out useful and benevolent works; besides, the ayahs mention certain blessings to man,³ and indicate how tribes are brought to replace their predecessors and made dominant on earth.⁴

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¹ Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Mukarram al-Misri (711-1311), “Halefe”, *Lisan al-Arab*, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut 1999, I-XVIII, IV, 181-192; Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad (808-1405-6), *Muqaddimah*, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, undated, 191; Sheikh Saleh al-Sharif, “Din ve Devlet yahud Hilâfet ve Saltanat”, *Sabil al-Rashad* 14/359 (1334), 178; T. W. Arnold, “Halife”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi (İA)*, V/1, 149; Mehmet Zeki Pakalın “Caliphate”, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, I-III, İstanbul 1993, I, 815; Casim Avcı, “Hilafet”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XVII, 540; Mustafa Sarıbrıyk, “İslam Siyaset Düşüncesinde Hilafet Kurumunun Aşılama Sorunları Üzerine Bazı Mülâhazalar”, *İstanbul University, Şarkiyat Mecmuası*, 23 (2013-2), p. 169-185.

² About man as caliph of Allah, see Hüseyin Atay, “Allahın Halifesi: İnsan”, *Ankara University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 18 (1970), p. 71-80.

³ Al-Baqara 2/30; Al-An’am, 6/165; Al-A’raf 7/169; Yunus, 10/73; An-Naml, 27/62; Maryam 19/59; An-Nour 24/55; Fatir, 35/39; Sad, 38/26.

⁴ Al-A’raf 7/69; Yunus, 10/14.

Hence, no ayah explicitly treats caliph as a title to be used for successor of Muhammad (a.s.) as head of the state.⁵ However, in hadith sources, the mentioned words are used in the sense of *head of the state, governor and leader*, together with the words *imam* and *emir*.⁶

The term caliph was for Abu Bakr before anyone else. He preferred, however, the title *khalifat al-Rasulallah*, signifying the person who acts for Muhammad (a.s.) in order to fulfil divine verdicts. The term includes fulfilment of all powers and activities of Muhammad (a.s.), except for his duty of prophecy that ended upon his demise. Abu Bakr⁷ and Umar⁸ among Rashidun, as well as Umayyad caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, rejected to have the title *khalifullah*.⁹ Rumour has it, however, that the third caliph Uthman was addressed as *khalifullah*.¹⁰ Besides, use of the title became widespread among Umayyad, Abbasid and subsequent rulers. Umar is the caliph of Muhammad's caliph. Nevertheless, since it would not be practical to use a title such as *khaliftu khalifti rasulallah*, Umar preferred the term *Amir al-Muminin* that lays stress on leadership.¹¹

Throughout history of Islam, the title of caliph is assigned exclusively to the head of the state at the highest level. In fact, *caliph* was used to call certain treasury officers at central government during Umayyad era, persons to assume some powers of the sheikh in certain orders in following periods, successor of the mahdi in mahdi movements, female attendant who overlooked all maids in the palace during Mughal Empire, and court clerks in late Ottoman era. The title *kalfa*, used in Ottoman Empire for the assistant of local school teachers, is also derived from the word *khalifa*. In Morocco, lieutenant governors are called *caliph*, while the denomination is used for craftsmen such as tailors, barbers and cooks in India and Pakistan. *Alfa*, a transformation of caliph, signifies Muslim hodjas and even all Muslims in Togo and West Africa.¹²

Imam, literally "the one in front," becomes synonymous with *emir al-muminin* and *caliph* within conceptual context. The community whom imam governs and leads is named *ummah*. Therefore, *imam* is the person to undertake the direction of *ummah*, while *imamate* is the duty imam assumes. Accordingly, *imam* and *imamate* are used for the person who leads the salat in mosque, due to his position in front of community. Nevertheless, the former is called *imamate al-sughra* (lesser *imamate*), and the latter is named *imamate al-kubra* (greater *imamate*) so as to prevent confusion. In addition, the title *imam* is employed in Sunni tradition for ulama (scholars) who lead their field, such as Imam al-A'zam, Imam Shafi'i, Imam Ghazali and Imam Bukhari. Likewise, Shiite tradition often puts the title to use. Shiites, however, employ it in very different manners. After all, according to common principal view of all Shiite orders, a descendant of Ali is the highest imam and ruler of Muslim world.¹³

⁵ For meanings of the word "caliph" and the ayahs including the word, see Veysel Güllüce, "İnsan Allah'ın Halifesi Midir?", *Atatürk University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 15 (2001), p. 169-214; Erdoğan Pazarbaşı, "Kur'an'a Göre Halifelik ve Toplumsal Süreklilik", *Bilimname*, 1 (2003/1), p. 15-40; Muammer Esen, "İnsanın Halifeliği Meselesi", *Ankara University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 45 (2004/1), p. 15-38.

⁶ Al-Bukhari, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ismail, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, I-VIII, Istanbul 1979, Ahkâm 2, 51, Enbiya 1, Menâkıb 2; Müslim, Ebu'l-Hüseyn Müslim b. Haccâc, *Sahih-i Müslim*, I-V, Beirut 1972, İmâre 4, 5, 8, 9; Abu Dawud, Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ath, *Sunan*, Istanbul 1981, Sünnet 8; At-Tirmidhi, Muhammad ibn Isa, *Sunan*, I-V, Istanbul 1981, Fiten 46, 48. For assessment of hadiths on caliphate, see İlyas Canikli, *Hilâfet Kavramıyla İlgili Hadislerin Tetkiki*, (PhD Thesis, Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences 2004; İlyas Canikli, "Ehl-i Sünnet-Siyaset İlişkisi Bağlamında Hilafetle İlgili Tartışmalarda Rivayetlerin Rolü", *Dini Araştırmalar*, 8/24, p. 143-156.

⁷ Ibn Sa'd, Abu Muhammad Abd Allah ibn Muslim (230/845), *Al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, I-VIII, Dar Sadir, Beirut ts., III, 183; Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 191.

⁸ Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir (310/922), *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* (nşr. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim, I-XI, Dar al-Suwaitan, Beirut, undated, IV, 209.

⁹ Casim Avci, "Hilafet", *DİA*, XVII, 539.

¹⁰ On the use of the expression "khalifatullah", see Lambton, A.K.S., "Khalifa: ii. In Political Theory", *The Encyclopedia of Islam New Edition (EF)*, IV, 947-950; Arnold, "Caliph", *İA*, V/1, 149; Crone, Patricia - Hinds, Martin, "Halifetullah" (tra. Mehmet Azimli - Ali Akay, *Dicle University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 9 (2007/2), p. 171.

¹¹ Sourdel et al, "Khalifa", *The Encyclopedia of Islam New Edition (EF)*, IV, 937-953; Fayda, Mustafa, "Emîru'l-Müminîn", *DİA*, XI, 156.

¹² Sourdel et al, "Khalifa", *EF*, IV, 937-953; Arnold, "Caliph", *İA*, V/1, 149.

¹³ Ibn Manzur, "İmâm", *Lisan al-Arab*, I, 213-215; Madelung, W., "İmame", *The Encyclopedia of Islam New Edition (EF)*, III, 1163; Ivanov, W., "İmam", *İA*, V/2, 981; Pakalın, "İmam", *Tarih Deyimleri*, II, 59; D. Mehmet Doğan, "Caliph",

In political and legal terms, the concept of imamate signify the post and title of a person who undertakes government of Muslim society at the highest level following Muhammad (a.s.); nonetheless, the concept is treated in various manners in kalam, fiqh and political history. Kalam and fiqh scholars often put forth their view about political theories under the topic of imamate, while historians use the word “caliphate” with respect to historical events that begin with Abu Bakr and continue until the end of Ottoman Empire. Imamate makes reference to head of the state in a more theoretical sense, whereas caliphate underlines actual authority. According to Al-Mawardi and Ibn Khaldun, imamate is an institution to protect the religion and substitute for prophecy in earthly government.¹⁴ Such descriptions principally reflect Sunni and Mu’tazila approach. The point of view of Zaidiyya, on the other hand, differs from all other Shiite sects. According to Zaidiyya, there may be more than one imams at the same time, or none of them in a given period. According to Shiite sects other than Zaidiyya, imamate represents an institution that is continuation of prophet in terms of not only earthly authority, but also both corporal and spiritual authorities. According to Isna’asheri (twelve) and Isma’ilism, the word “imam” is synonymous with caliph. However, they employ it in the form of *fake imam* for first three of Rashidun, and Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs. According to them, the duty of true imam is continuation of guidance and messenger character of prophets; it is a divine mission in the form of government and administration of humanity in the wake of prophet. Therefore, there can be only one legitimate, true imam. Such person should be a descendent of Ali and Fatimah, in other words, a grandchild of Muhammad (a.s.). Imam is the rightful caliph of Ali and his successors. Besides, he has the right of earthly sovereignty over Muslim world, as well as the title of highest spiritual guidance in Islam. In conservative Shia, theory of imam has undergone ceaseless amendments. Hence, some disputes and messianic issues came to light among the family and supporters of imam. Consequently, as various imam families came to an end, concepts such as *gaib imam*, *hidden imam*, *expected imam* emerged.¹⁵

Methods of Accession to Caliphate

Muhammad (a.s.) was not only a prophet, but also had some other duties such as army commander and head of the state. As a prophet, he was religious leader of the faithful who believed in and set their hearts on him. In addition, he was in search of a method for coexistence with members of other religions in and around Medina, and he signed certain agreements with them. Thereupon, he became political leader of a society including non-Muslim as well. Since he was also the prophet and since obedience to prophet is synonymous with obedience to Allah, no objections or doubts arouse in Muslim society about his political leadership. Consequently, during the lifetime of Muhammad (a.s.), no dispute took place among Muslim regarding administration of society. Following his death, however, there was no prescribed rule about who and how to replace him as, for example, head of state and other earthly posts, other than prophecy. Thereupon, Muslim society had to resolve the problem of administration in the most reasonable and comprehensive manner possible even before the interment of Muhammad (a.s.).¹⁶

Each of Rashidun took office in a different way. More importantly, even though prominent figures among Sahabah knew Muhammad (a.s.) the best and spent most time with him, they could not maintain a similar approach during designation of first caliph. Indeed, Abu Bakr was assigned upon recommendation of a small council among Sahabah, including himself; Umar was appointed pursuant to testament of Abu Bakr, while Uthman became caliph through resolution by a council formed by Umar and six surviving Sahabi who were promised paradise. Ali, the fourth of Rashidun, took charge in an entirely different manner. He became caliph at a really hard time under extraordinary circumstances. An insurgent group had come from Basra, Kufa and Egypt, occupied Medina, the capital of Islam state, before martyring Uthman.

Büyük Türkçe Sözlük, Ankara 1981, 386; Mustafa Sabri Küçükaşçı, “Imam”, *DİA*, XXII, 178; Mustafa Öz - Avni İlhan, “Imamate”, *DİA*, XXII, 201.

¹⁴ Al-Mawardi, Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Habib Abu al-Hasan al-Basri (450/1058), *Al-Ahkam al-Sultania*, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut 2002, 5; Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 191.

¹⁵ Ivanov, “Imam”, *İA*, V/2, 981; Mustafa Öz - Avni İlhan, “Imamate”, *DİA*, XXII, 201; Şaban Öz, “Hilâfette Nass Teorisi”, *Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 14 (2009), p. 67- 121.

¹⁶ Ibn al-Athir, Ebu’l-Hasan Ali b. Muhammed (630/1232), *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, I-IX, Beirut 1986, II, 291, 292; III, 26, 27, 98, 99; Ibn Qutaybah, Abu Muhammad Abd-Allah ibn Muslim al-Dinawari (276/889), *Al-Imama wa al-Siyasa* (nşr. Tâhâ Muhamed Zeynî), I-II, Cairo 1967, I, 14, 26, 27, 46, 47.

They threatened to kill prominent Sahabah unless one of Ali, Az-Zubayr or Talhah accepted caliphate; whereupon, Ali had to defer to caliphate so as to prevent further chaos in society.¹⁷

Election of Rashidun witnessed influence of some elements, such as tribalism, which Muhammad (a.s.) strived to vitiate. Moreover, it is interesting that Ansar reminded the importance of service and assistance to Islam and Muslims, while the Hashemite emphasised blood relation with Muhammad (a.s.) in favour of Ali. Besides, there is another crucial point to take into account in determination of first caliphs. That is, no candidate or party put forth a dogma, ayah or hadith as evidence in order to have their views cemented or admitted during negotiations with respect to accession to power as head of the state. Allegations caliphate should be entrusted to a descendent of Ali or a member of Quraysh tribe¹⁸ are no exception. When Abu Bakr was appointed caliph, even though Sa'd ibn Ubadah of Ansar and Ali of Hashemite wanted to take the title, they did not furnish ayahs or hadith as counterproof. Hence, not a given dogma, but presence of a quality to ensure unity in Muslim society was influential in assignment of Rashidun.

In the wake of assassination of Ali, his son Hasan ibn Ali succeeded. Even though Ali never declared his son as heir, in practice, son of a caliph replaced him. Thus, contrary to previous methods, determination of fifth Muslim caliph hinted first signs of hereditary system for head of the state. Indeed, following the caliphate of Hasan ibn Ali for six months, a new page was turned in history of caliphate when he withdrew in favour of Muawiyah upon political and military oppression by the latter. Muawiyah concluded hereditary caliphate on the ground of his concerns about a repeat of havoc previously suffered around caliphate. Moreover, he declared Yazid, his son, as the caliph to succeed himself, and took his homage, regardless of whether the son was competent for such a title. In fact, Abu Bakr had also bequeathed caliphate to Umar. Nevertheless, the two situations are different. Firstly, Umar was neither son nor relative, and not even from the tribe of Abu Bakr. Secondly, Umar was competent for caliphate. In this respect, sensibility of Umar in determining his successor is also worth noting. Indeed, Umar added his son Abdullah as the seventh member of the council that elected Uthman, in order to prevent any deadlock in case of equality of votes. Nevertheless, Abdullah solely had a right of vote in case of equality. Umar did not grant his son the right to stand for election, even though he was capable for caliphate, so as not to become the person to pave way for sultanate. In fact, the same can be said of Ali. He too gave no affirmative or negative response to the call "to suggest his son Hasan as his caliph," following a fatal assassination attempt by a Kharijite, and denied a leading role in transformation of caliphate into a hereditary process.

Inheritance system for title of head of the state started when Muawiyah declared his son Yazid as heir; the system was adopted by almost all Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman caliphs and rulers of other Islamic states. Among the exceptions, Umayyad caliph Muawiyah II (684-684 forty days) abdicated without naming any heir,¹⁹ Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (717-720) thought of abolishing inheritance system,²⁰ and Abbasid caliph Al-Ma'mun (813-833) pointed out as successor not one of his descendants or relatives, but Ali al-Ridha ibn Musa Kadhim, the grandson of Shiite imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.²¹

¹⁷ For methods of caliph elections, see Ibn Hisham, Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik al-Himyari (218/833), *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* (editors: Mustafa as-Saqa, Ibrahim al-Ibyari, Abd al-Hafiz Shalabi), I-IV, Beirut, undated, IV, 310; Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam*, III, 206-221, 428-433; IV, 227-237, 391-434; Ibn Sa'd, *at-Tabaqat*, II, 269, 270, III, 61, 62, 67-73, 182, 274, 339-344; Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, II, 292, III, 26, 27, 35, 37, 90, 98, 99; Ibn Qutaybah, *Al-Imama wa al-Siyasa*, I, 13-17, 28-29, 45-47; Muhammad Tawfiq al-Tanji, "Islamda Hilafet ve Mezheplerin Dogusu", *Suleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, I (1994), 53-68; Ramazan Hurç, "Siyaset Bilincinin Oluşumu Bağlamında Dört Halifenin Seçim Sistemi", *Fırat University, Social Sciences Periodical*, 13 (2003/1), 389-418; İsmail Köksal, "İslam Tarihinde Uygulanan Devlet Başkanlığı Seçim Şekilleri Ve Şer'î Tahlili", *Fırat University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 11 (2006/1), p. 25-36; Mehmet Azimli, "Hulefa-i Raşidin Dönemi Halife Seçimleri", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Periodical*, 7 (2007/1), p. 35-59; Sir William Muir, *The Caliphate: its Rise, Decline, and Fall, from Original Sources*, Edinburgh 1915, p. 1-4, 77-78, 193-198, 234-235; Süleyman Genç, "Hz. Ali'nin Halife Seçimlerindeki Tutum ve Tavır", *Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 26 (2007), p. 148.

¹⁸ *Bukhari*, Menâkıb 1, 2, Ahkâm 2, Enbiyâ 1; *Müslim*, İmâret 2, 3, 4. About Qurayshi element in caliphate, see İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, "Hilâfet-i İslâmiye", *Sirât-ı Müstakîm*, III/56 (1323), p. 49-51; Mehmed Said Hatipoğlu, "İslâm'da İlk Siyasî Kavmiyetçilik Hilâfetin Kureşliliği", *Ankara University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 23 (1978), p. 147.

¹⁹ Ibn Qutaybah, *Al-Imama wa al-Siyasa*, II, 10-11; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam*, V, 503, 530-531, 534-535; Yılmaz, Saim, "Muaviye b. Yezid'in Halifelik'ten Ayrılması ve Halifeliğin Mervânîlere İntikali", *İSTEM*, 4/8 (2006), p. 187-206.

²⁰ Apak, Âdem, *Anahatlarıyla İslam Tarihi III: Emevîler Dönemi*, Ensar Neşriyat, İstanbul 2010, p. 207.

²¹ Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil*, V, 179, 180.

Unfortunately, Muslim societies were unable to develop a different method about accession to caliphate, until the last caliph Abdulmeceid II was appointed via act of Turkish Grand National Assembly on 18 November 1922.

Influence of Caliphate

A few months before death of Muhammad (a.s.), a separatist movement called *Riddah* [Apostasy] began among Arabs outside Hejaz region. The revolt snowballed following his demise. Nevertheless, Muslims managed to quench the rebel in no time and dominated Syria and Egypt, the most important provinces of two superpowers of the day, namely, Sassanid and Byzantine Empires. Thereupon, the caliph became one of the richest and most influential statesmen on the world as the leader of Muslims. In those days, caliph was both the commander-in-chief of conquering armies with the title of *Amir al-Mu'minin* and the person who guided the community at salat with title of *Imam*. Therefore, a caliph expected his people to respect him like they did Muhammad (a.s.), and the community often paid due homage. When Muawiyah stipulated a hereditary system for accession to caliphate, the conception of government with respect to caliphate underwent a change, which in turn led to a different perception of the post among people. Indeed, most Umayyad caliphs kept leading the salat as imam pursuant to traditions; but apart from Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, their religious sensibility was below expected. Criticising Umayyad policies, Abbasids won the heart of people, started a kind of grassroots movement and seized institution of caliphate; accordingly, their attitude in relation to patronage of religion and religious institutions differed from that of their predecessors.²²

Umayyad caliphs could maintain their title mostly thanks to support of southern or northern Arab tribes; on the contrary, Abbasids owed their power to notable contribution of non-Arab elements, firstly Persians and then Turks. This fact may be construed as a loss of influence for the part of Abbasid caliphs. However, it may also point out dawn of a new era where non-Arab Muslims have their share in government by contrast with characteristic Arab dominance in Umayyad period. Another factor on decreasing influence of Abbasid caliphs is the strengthening of bureaucracy due to ever-growing power of vizier. The main danger came forth, however, when political integrity of the state underwent degradation and breakup, and independent emirates began to emerge in various provinces. In the process, political influence of caliph continuously diminished down to walls of Baghdad; by 946, caliph had no actual power at all. In the period, Abbasid caliph became a puppet in the hands of first Shiite Buyids and then Sunni Seljukians; nevertheless, *ulama* continued to consider him as an authority in Muslim world; and for independent governors and rulers, it was still a privilege to obtain their respective titles from the hands of caliph.²³

The period when Abbasid caliphs lost their political influence witnessed emergence of two rival caliphates: One was Fatimid Caliphate, established within Shiite-Isma'ili tradition in 909 in the west of Muslim world, namely, Mahdia in North Africa; the other was Caliphate of Cordoba, founded by Sunni Umayyads in Andalusia in 928. However, neither was lasting. Caliphate of Cordoba was annihilated after almost a century, in 1031, by *ulama* and prominent figures in the wake of a severe domestic turbulence; while Saladin destroyed Fatimid Caliphate in 1171. In fact, Muslims under rule of various Islamic states have a long history of obedience to different caliphs. As a matter of fact, Ali and Muawiyah, who understood they could not overcome one another during the battles after Appointment of Arbitrators, divided hitherto united Muslim state in two in 660. The treaty of peace intended to stop civil war; as a result, the provinces of Syria and Egypt were left to Muawiyah, while Ali got Yemen, Hejaz, Basra and Kufa provinces. Besides, both were recognised as caliph by their respective people. Prior to Battle of Siffin, true objective of camel troop including Al-Zubayr and Talhah under guidance of Aisha was to establish a separate centre of caliphate in Basra. Nonetheless, the attempt came to no avail thanks to timely intervention by Ali.

²² Sourdel et al, "Khalifa", *EF*, IV, 937-953; Arnold, "Caliph", *IA*, V/1, 150.

²³ Muir, *The Caliphate*, p. 577-586; Ahmet Güner, "Maverdi'nin Hilafet Kuramının Tarihsel Arkaplanına Bir Bakış (I)", *Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 16 (2002), p. 3-36; Güner, "Maverdi'nin Hilafet Kuramının Tarihsel Arkaplanına Bir Bakış (II)", *Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 17 (2003), p. 228; Mehmet Salih Geçit, "Mâverdi'nin Hilafet Anlayışında Meşruiyet Sorunu", *EKEV Akademi Periodical*, 17/57 (Güz 2013), p. 316-325.

A notable part of Islam society somehow acknowledged the caliphate of Muawiyah in the wake of Rashidun; nevertheless, severe reactions followed when he declared his son Yazid, an unworthy personality, as heir and turned caliphate into sultanate. The first reaction came from Iraq region. People of Kufa renounced their homage to Umayyads and invited Husayn ibn Ali in 680, indicating they would recognise and obey him as their caliph. The movement, however, was repressed on the onset with Battle of Karbala, and events left deep wounds in hearts of all Muslims, including Sunnis, until today. The two other caliphs emerged in Hejaz, due to several economic motives²⁴ in addition to Karbala incident. The reputation of Yazid, thus of Umayyads, was degraded in Hejaz region. Apart from Ta'if, the two major cities in Hejaz, namely, Mecca and Medina, saw Abd Allah ibn Al-Zubayr and Abd Allah ibn Hanzala proclaim their caliphate, respectively. The caliphate in Medina was destroyed via Battle of Al-Harrah in a bloody manner before taking hold or spreading. In Mecca, Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr proclaimed caliphate in 683, and the caliphate of Mecca got the chance to spread even outside Hejaz due to weakness of Umayyad rule and hatred against Umayyads after Battles of Karbala and Al-Harrah. At one stage, Mecca caliphate made its presence felt in all provinces but Damascus. Nevertheless, this establishment was also totally neutralised in almost ten years, in 692. During Umayyad period, there are some examples of rebellions similar to that by Husayn ibn Ali, Abd Allah ibn Hanzala and Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr. But only the movement initiated in 718 by Abbasid family could attain and maintain its objective for some time.²⁵

As is seen in the examples above, some caliphs could not obtain obedience among all Muslims, thus the institution of caliphate could not always seize entire Islamic geography. Abu Bakr, the first caliph, is no exception. Indeed, Sa'd ibn Ubadah, the candidate of Ansar, never recognised Abu Bakr; likewise, the Hashemite, including Ali, did not obey Abu Bakr and recognise his caliphate for a while. Despite being appointed by unanimity of Muslims, Uthman also suffered disobedience, albeit only after some time. In the second six-year tenure of his caliphate, certain unease and related havoc and disorders came in sight. A group of Muslims, including Sahabis who appointed Uthman as caliph, withdrew their support. In terms of homage, Umar is the luckiest caliph, while Ali is the unluckiest. Since his first day in charge till his death, Umar never suffered opposition or problem of homage. Nevertheless, apart from opposition by Muawiyah and Umayyads, there were Ansar and muhajirs who did not recognise Ali as caliph.

In 1258, Mongol ruler Hulagu Khan killed Abbasid caliph Musta'sim during siege of Baghdad; Musta'sim had no heir, and his death led to an unmatched catastrophe in the history of Islam.²⁶ Having two, even three caliphs at the same time once, Muslims were now deprived of any caliph. The period lasted for three years, until two members of Abbasid dynasty escaped massacre by Mongols and resorted to Baibars, Mamluk Sultan in Egypt. One of them was Al-Mustansir Billah (1261-1262), uncle of Al-Musta'sim, and he was appointed caliph in Cairo and seated after a glorious ceremony. However, he was killed by Mongol forces during an attempt to conquer Baghdad with an insufficient army provided by Baibars; thereupon, Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (1262-1301), the other member of Abbasid dynasty, ascended to caliphate in Cairo in 1262. Abbasid caliphs in Cairo got any kind of respect, but had no political power.²⁷

²⁴ Apart from religious and political motives, for economic reasons behind Battle of Al-Harrah, see M. J. Kister, "The Battle of The Harra- Some Socio-Economic Aspects", *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet* (ed. Myriam Rosen Ayalon), Institute of Asian and African Studies, Jerusalem 1977, pp. 33-49; Ünal Kılıç, "Harre Vakasının Sebepleri Hakkında Bazı Mülahazalar", *Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 4 (2000/1), pp. 317-324.

²⁵ About revolts in claim of caliphate during first four centuries of Islam, see Al-Dahabi, Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad (death: 748/1347), "Halifelik İddiasında Bulunanlar" (tra. Abdurrahman Acar), *Dicle University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 1 (1999), pp. 205 - 220.

²⁶ Arnold, "Caliph", *IA*, V/1, 151.

²⁷ Muir, *The Caliphate*, p. 590-596; Abdullah Mesut Ağır, "Memlûk Sultanlarının Gölgesi Altında Hilâfet Kurumu", *Gaziantep University, Social Sciences Periodical*, 10 (2011/2), p. 641-645.

As a result, sultans and rulers in various parts of Muslim world began to use the title of *caliph* as of 13th century. Maghreb,²⁸ Seljuk, Timurid, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Ottoman rulers were among these.²⁹ When Selim the Grim invaded Cairo in 1517, the Mamluk patronage on caliph of Abbasid dynasty came to end; but Al-Mutawakkil, the last Abbasid caliph, maintained his title until his death in 1543.³⁰

By 18th century, Mughal Empire was also in decline, and Ottomans were now the greatest and most powerful state of Muslim world. As Russians invaded regions on the north of Black Sea, they had Ottoman Empire recognise independence of Crimean Khanate, and demanded patronage for Orthodox Christians in the country. This attitude left Ottomans in the lurch. In return, Ottomans had a provision stipulated under Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, whereupon the influence of caliph on Muslims, who were no more Ottoman citizens, was officially established. Thanks to the provision, Christian world accepted Pope as religious leader of Christian world and Ottoman caliph as spiritual leader of all Muslims regardless of nationality or citizenship.³¹ Ottoman rulers rapidly adopted the mission,³² and they, Abdul Hamid II above all, tried to fulfil the post in proportion to their power. Indeed, thanks to this feature of caliphate, Ottoman Empire began to establish close relationships with Muslim communities far from its political borders; especially Muslims under rule of colonialists considered Ottoman caliphs as the only intimate refuge to ask for help.³³

Abolition of Caliphate

In late 19th and early 20th century, caliphate was the principal institution that preoccupied both Muslim and colonialist Western world, leading to diverse ideas on the problem. As a matter of fact, several opponents within Ottoman Empire overlooked their differences to make use of and generatd policies about caliphate for obtaining Western support. Prince Sabahaddin, older son of Damat Mahmud Pasha, was among these personalities. Through meeting with Pope in person or messages to England and France, he explained their “conception of caliphate would not harm Western Liberal states.”³⁴ According to İsmail Kara, the founders of Republic probably did not think about abolition of caliphate on 3 Mart 1924, unity of education, or rearrangement religious affairs under Directorate of Religious Affairs until they came to the table at Conference of Lausanne; up until then, they were at most in the opinion of following the ideas of Committee of Union and Progress, and envisaged a caliphate with higher spiritual emphasis under stricter control. Besides, certain incidents prior to abolition of caliphate explicitly put forth position of the institution. These events include the presence of Arab Caliphate Movement led by British-ruled Egypt, occupation of Istanbul and almost-captive status of caliph. Consequently, institution of caliphate gradually lost weight and reputation. Therefore, when abolished by Ankara government in 1924,³⁵ caliphate was already very feeble and deprived of political power and self-sufficiency, especially after abolition of sultanate in 1922.³⁶

²⁸ About usage of the title of caliph in two African states in late 16th century, see Mervyn Hiskett, “Batı Afrika’da Kurulan İki Derviş Devlet: Sokoto Hilafeti (1232-1317/1817-1900) and Masina Devleti (1318-1279/1819-1862)” tra. Kadir Özköse, *Gazi University, Çorum Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 2/4 (2003/2), p. 174.

²⁹ Arnold, “Caliph”, *İA*, V/1, 151; İnalçık, Halil, “Osmanlı Padişahı”, *Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences Periodical*, 13/4 (1958), 70; Kayaoğlu, İsmet, “Halifelik”, *Ankara University, Faculty of Theology Institute of Islamic Sciences Periodical*, 4 (1980), p. 148.

³⁰ Arnold, “Caliph”, *İA*, V/1, 152.

³¹ Thomas Walker Arnold, *The Caliphate*, Oxford University, Press, Oxford 1924, p. 165, 166; Arnold, “Caliph”, *İA*, V/1, 152.

³² Salih Şerif Tunusî, “Hilâfet-i Muazzama-i İslâmîye Hakkında İngilizlerin Hezeyanları”, *Sabil al-Rashad*, 13/333 (1333), p. 160; Mehmed Âkif Mütercimî - Abdülaziz Çavuş, “Hilâfet-i İslâmîye: Fransa ve İngiltere Matbuatına Cevabdır”, *Sabil al-Rashad*, 14/ 353 (1334), p. 114; Mustafa Oral, “Ulusal Bağımsızlık Savaşı Yıllarında Türkiye’de Hilafet ve Saltanat Sorunu”, *Ankara University, Turk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Periodical*, 5/18 (1996), p. 159.

³³ Arnold, *The Caliphate*, p. 173-177; Arnold, “Caliph”, *İA*, V/1, 152.

³⁴ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Nasihatten Fetvaya, Fetvadan ‘Bizim Hilafet Size Zarar Vermez’ Yaklaşımına”, *Derin Tarih*, 12 (Mart 2013), p. 55.

³⁵ Abolition of caliphate was put into effect pursuant to Article 1 under Law no. 431 on 3 March 1924 by Turkish Grand National Assembly, reading “Caliph is deposed. The title of caliphate is abolished, since Caliphate is already immanent within the sense and concept of Government and Republic.”

³⁶ İsmail Kara, “Hilafeti Kim, Ne zaman Kaldırdı?”, *Derin Tarih*, 12 (Mart 2013), p. 46.

Attitude of Western states towards caliphate brought along an indirect pressure on Grand National Assembly; consequently, it stirred not only Sunni sphere, but entire Muslim world, including even extremist Shiites. Aga Han, the imam of Shiite Isma'ilism, sent Ankara a letter on behalf British Muslim Association, requesting "reinforcement of caliphate instead of its abolition." Indian Muslims were also in the opinion that Ankara Government, which they provided with financial support during War of Independence, would take into account their request against abolition of caliphate.³⁷

As is seen, caliphate lately transformed into an institution which many parties were either interested in or wanted to make use of. As Ottoman Empire sought to strengthen its hand via caliphate and produced new and effective policies to that end, major states gradually increased the attempts to downgrade and siege the Empire by means of the same institution. Britain led the way in this respect, since it controlled India and Egypt, two great Muslim lands, and tried to take effect in Iran and Afghanistan. The British paid more attention to caliphate as of the second half of 19th century, especially as Abdul Hamid II strengthened the policies regarding caliphate and union of Islam. In this context, the British endeavoured to control and manage both the opponents, such as Arab Caliphate Movement, and defendants, such as Indian Khilafat Movement,³⁸ of Ottoman Caliphate, and were often successful.³⁹

Due to its Muslim colonies, France was the other Western state deeply interested in caliphate. In this respect, France tried to invent and construct Caliphate of Maghreb so as to save its colonies from influence of Ottoman caliphate and to prevent French colonies from acknowledging a possible caliphate under British control. Russia also had a word and was a side in problem of caliphate. Pursuant to Constantinople Agreement, the first secret agreement between Allied Powers during World War I, Russia sent England and France a note on the outcome of caliphate on 20 March 1915, indicating "Russia considers it more suitable if caliphate is separated from Ottomans." Sykes-Picot Agreement, the best known secret Allied agreement, which bears the surnames of British and French foreign ministers and was finalised on 10-23 October,⁴⁰ also stipulated establishment of independent Arab caliphate for respective regions under French and British rule.⁴¹ Therefore, despite its feeble reputation, even the weakest presence of an independent caliphate did annoy major colonialist powers, whereupon they intended to create their respective caliphates under their control.

Abolition of caliphate disappointed Muslims not only in Turkey, but also those who strived to survive under various Western colonialist governments. Indeed, they considered War of Independence, led by Mustafa Kemal against Western states, as a defence of honour of caliphate in a sense. In this respect, the most distinguished personalities in Muslim world were in despair. The luminaries included Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the spiritual leader of Algeria, Muhammad Iqbal, the great Islam thinker and poet from Indian land, Sheikh Ahmed Senussi, the great leader of North African Muslim community of Senussis and actual supporter of Turkish War of Independence, Abdurresid Ibrahim, famous Islam inviter who introduced the religion in Japan, Musa Yarulla Bigiev, a scholar in Northern Muslim world from Kazan, and Ahmed Shawqi, the Arab poet who likened Mustafa Kemal Pasha to the great commander Khalid ibn al-Walid on the side of Muhammad (a.s.).

³⁷ Sami Hoccoğlu, "Rüya mı dediniz, bayım?", *Yeni Şafak*, 18 Nisan 2005.

³⁸ Support by Indian Muslims in favour of Ottoman caliphate is allegedly due to their objective of suspending British from the region as soon as possible. See Hoca Halil Halkî et al, *Hâkimiyet-i Milliye ve Hilâfet-i İslamiye*, Yenigün Matbaası, Ankara 1341, p. 19.

³⁹ Azmi Özcan, "England'de Hilafet Tartışmaları 1873-1909", *İslam Araştırmaları Periodical*, 2, (1998), p. 49-71; Kara, "Hilafeti Kim, Ne zaman Kaldırdı?", p. 48. Hindistan'daki hilafet hareketi hakkında see M. Naeem Qureshi, "Hindistan Hilâfet Hareketi", *DIA*, XVIII, 109-111; Mehmet Özşenel, "Hindistan'da Hilafet Meselesine Aykırı Bir Bakış: Şibli Numanî Ve Hilafet Makalesi", *Sakarya University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 15 (2007), p. 153-160; Saad Omar Khan, "The "Caliphate Question": British Views and Policy toward Pan-Islamic Politics and the End of the Ottoman Caliphate", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 24/4 (Fall 2007), p. 11-14.

For Ottoman caliphate and its importance, see Abdülaziz Çavuş, *Al-Khilafah al-İslamiyya*, Dar al-Khilafah al-Udma, İstanbul 1334, 13; Hulusi Yavuz, "Sadrazam Lütü Paşa ve Osmanlı Hilafeti", *Marmara University, Faculty of Theology Periodical*, 5-6 (1987-1988), p. 27-54.

⁴⁰ Sean Oliver-Dee, *The Caliphate Question The British Government and Islamic Governance*, Lexington Books: Lanham, 2009, p. 50.

⁴¹ Ali Satan, "Hilafetin Kaderi Lozan'da mı Yazıldı?", *Derin Tarih*, 12 (Mart 2013), p. 50-51.

Shawqi wrote an elegy several years after the abolition of caliphate, and expressed his sorrow, saying “caliphate was a bride, enshrouded at her wedding night.” Indeed, caliphate became a subject of theoretical discussions more than ever in early 20th century, when the institution went through hardest times. Following the abolition of caliphate, Seyyid Bey, one the first deputies of the Republic and a scholar on Islamic law, made a speech in favour of Assembly resolution; adverse opinions and eventual disputes spread even in other countries. Especially M. Reşid Rıza, who initially approached Ankara in cautious optimism, explicitly sided against government following the abolition; in this respect, the periodical *Al-Manar* became a platform for most severe criticisms against the new regime in Muslim world.⁴²

Conclusion and Assessment

Caliph means the person to succeed Muhammad (a.s.) as head of the state. The title was used by Rashidun, as well as by subsequent Umayyad, Abbasid rulers and Ottoman sultans. Caliphate is a regime peculiar to Islamic societies with a caliph at the top.

Throughout the history of Islam, the title of caliph was also employed for certain officials other than head of the state, representatives of some orders and persons in various posts; besides, many Islamic states were established without naming their leader as caliph.

Given that Muhammad (a.s.) is the last prophet, political quality of his successor outweighs religious identity. Nonetheless, Umayyad caliphs could not meet expectations of Muslims in terms of religious sensibility, since the community had witnessed the period of Rashidun.

Influence of caliph and caliphate on Muslim societies varied tragically depending on time and circumstances. Under the rule of Rashidun, Umar was the only caliph to obtain and maintain homage by all Muslims throughout his tenure. The others either failed to take support of everyone in the beginning, or witnessed withdrawal of support in the course of time. As a result, there were multiple Islamic states or caliphs in Muslim world as of the era of Rashidun.

Political power was a prerequisite for caliph; and upon its diminution, religious and spiritual authority tried to make up for. This process, started by Abbasids, never returned back to origins. Therefore, as of Abbasids, caliphs had religious and spiritual influence albeit not political. As a matter of fact, Ottomans got in contact with Muslims in other countries by means of caliphate when the government underwent certain internal and external problems.

In the light of the process till the abolition, Western states did consider Caliphate as a threat against their system of colonialism.

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⁴² Hocaoğlu, “Rüya mı dediniz, bayım?”, *Yeni Şafak*, 18 Nisan 2005.

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