

The Hierarchical Structure in Baghdad During the Mamluk Rule (1750-1831AD)

Abstract

This research provides a comprehensive study of the Mamluk administration in the Eyalet of Baghdad during the eighteenth century. It examines the governor's powers. It looks at the diwan's structure. It covers the judiciary system. It analyzes roles of officials like the defterdar. It studies the ketkhuda's functions. It explores the aghas' military roles. The research highlights the delicate balance between central authority and internal oversight. Power was distributed among several groups. The governor held significant authority. The diwan shared administrative power. It also examines Baghdad's role as a political and administrative center capable of maintaining loyalty among the populace, the military, and the Sublime Porte, despite the weakening Ottoman Empire during that period. The research shows how the governor's military and administrative experience, in addition to the Mamluks' organizational structure, contributed to the relative stability of the province and the effective management of its financial, political, and military affairs. The research also seeks to uncover the nature of the relationship between the local authority in Baghdad and the central authority in Istanbul, illustrating the limits of obedience and independence in political and administrative practice. It clarifies that Mamluk rule was not merely a transitional phase, but rather represented a specific model for managing peripheral Ottoman provinces. The research highlights how this system helped limit political chaos despite internal conflicts among the Mamluks. It also clarifies the role of institutional balance in reducing opportunities for individual despotism. It affirms that the Mamluk experience of Baghdad represents an important case for understanding the transformations of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century.

Keywords: Eyalet of Baghdad, Mamluk, Administrative Hierarchy, Ottoman Governance.

Introduction :

The Mamluks emerged in Iraq within the framework of the Ottoman military establishment, as trained elements brought from different regions whose loyalty was tied more to the governor than to the central authority in Istanbul. Over time, these Mamluks transformed from a mere auxiliary military force into a ruling elite possessing administrative expertise and organizational capability, which allowed them to control the reins of power in Baghdad. They benefited from the weakness of the Ottoman Empire and its declining ability to directly supervise distant provinces, led them to establish an administrative system based on combining formal loyalty to the Sultan with practical independence in managing the province's affairs. Thus, Mamluk rule was no longer merely a military situation, but became an integrated political and administrative experience, relying on the distribution of power among the governor, the divan, the judiciary, and the military elite, while maintaining a balance with local tribes and notables.

Indeed, the Eyalet of Baghdad during the eighteenth century constituted a unique model for Mamluk administration within the Ottoman Empire, blending authoritarian centralization with local flexibility. The governor was the cornerstone of this administration, combining civil and military powers, while the divan, judiciary, and local notables represented supervisory and

balancing tools. that helped regulate his practices. Studying this administrative system offers an in-depth understanding of the development of local authority, the distribution of financial resources, and the importance of the military and administrative expertise of Mamluk governors in maintaining stability amidst the weakness of the Ottoman Empire. The research also highlights the network of relations between the governor, senior officials, tribes, and the military elite, which formed the basis for the continuity of Mamluk rule in Baghdad, and enhanced the city's centrality as an influential local political power.

Research Problem

The problem of this research lies in attempting to understand the nature of authority in the Eyalet of Baghdad during Mamluk rule, and the extent to which it was practically subject to the central Ottoman model or independent from it. Although the Mamluks ruled in the name of the Ottoman Empire, they established a local administrative and military apparatus that possessed a significant degree of independence in decision-making and resource management. Hence, the main problem emerges in the following question:

Was the Mamluk system of government in Baghdad an extension of the central Ottoman authority, or did it represent a special local model for the distribution of power based on a balance between the governor, the divan, the judiciary, and the military elites?

This problem also gives rise to sub-questions concerning how powers were distributed among governing institutions, the role of the Mamluk elite in controlling or monopolizing power, and the extent of this system's success in achieving political and administrative stability amidst the weakness of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth-century.

Methodology of Research

The research adopted a historical-analytical study approach, relying on primary sources such as manuscripts, official letters, and Ottoman correspondence, in addition to modern studies and academic books that dealt with the history of Iraq during the Ottoman era. The distribution of power among the governor, the divan, the judiciary, and local notables was analyzed, with a focus on the administrative, military, and financial structure of the province. The research also used a comparative approach to review the experiences of Baghdad's governors, such as Suleiman Pasha the Great, in managing the province's affairs, and linked them to the context of the weakening Ottoman Empire and the challenges of local authority.

Chapter One: The Governor and His Powers in the Eyalet of Baghdad

The governor was the highest authority in the Eyalet of Baghdad, combining civil and military powers, and was appointed directly by the Sublime Porte in Istanbul with the title of Pasha. His authority extended to include the administration of the province's daily administrative affairs, oversight of the judicial system and public finance, and supervision of collection and tax revenue (saliyane)(Ghuraibah, 1960, p.59) . He uniquely held the position of (Mirmiran) (Emir of Emirs), and also presided over the beys of the sanjaks belonging to the province. The military leadership of the Mamluk and Janissary army within the province(Ghuraibah, 1960, p.59; Raouf, 1975, p.216–217). . In addition to leading military campaigns directed against forces hostile to the Ottoman(Ghuraibah, 1960, p.59).

This position offered the governor the possibility of almost absolute control over political life, yet his power was constrained by internal factors such as the influence of senior officials and local

military commanders, and external factors such as directives from the Sublime Porte and threats from foreign forces sometimes allied with certain local(Omar, 1980, p.52) .

Mamluk governors often possessed extensive military and administrative experience, which they acquired during their service as Kethüda or Janissary officers, which gave them the ability to assert their authority. The governor had absolute power to confiscate the wealth of his opponents without consulting his officials or seeking their advice. His general duties included protecting the province from external dangers, and attending to the renovation of its fortifications and the restoration of its walls. In the event that the province was exposed For any threat, the responsibility for defending it falls directly upon him, as he mobilizes soldiers, raises their morale, and incites their enthusiasm to repel aggression(Raouf, 1975, p.227–228) .

His relationship with the Sublime Porte, despite the power the governor enjoyed, required him to maintain a balanced relationship with the Sultan, as his continued tenure depended on political loyalty and sending periodic reports, As for his duties towards the central authorities, they were based on active participation in the wars waged by the state against its foreign enemies(Raouf, 1975, p.226). He was also authorized to delegate governance affairs to tribal sheikhs, Kurdish and Arab emirates, and city rulers, in addition to having the authority to choose his officials himself(Nawar, 1968, p.90–100) .

With the increasing weakness of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century, the governor gained a larger margin of maneuver, sometimes even appointing independent local officials without immediate recourse to Istanbul, which contributed to solidifying Baghdad's centrality as an influential local power throughout Iraq(Ezz El-Din, 1967, p.12–13; Nawras, 1975, p.117) .

The governor's authority was not absolute, as there was a balance between the executive and judicial powers, where the judiciary could issue rulings against the governor's transgressions, or directly refer complaints to the Sultan(Omar, 1980, p.52) .

It is clear from the foregoing that the governor represents the cornerstone of the province's administration. If his administration was sound, its affairs would be in order, and if he became corrupt, its conditions would deteriorate with him, which was largely the case in the eighteenth century, as manifestations of corruption, chaos, and unrest prevailed. This deterioration in the conditions of the Ottoman state during that period is attributed to the weakness and corruption of the official administrative apparatus within the state's own departments, where the stability of the governor in his position became linked to the amount of gifts and bribes he offered, which necessarily led to the spread of corruption in the subordinate provinces. Moreover, the decisive factor in appointing governors became linked to the outcomes of conflicts and disputes within the province, especially the disputes between the Mamluk princes in Baghdad during the eighteenth century.

Suleiman Pasha the Great was considered one of the most prominent Mamluk governors of Baghdad in the 18th century, as his administrative policy represented a model for the Ottoman province in terms of the breadth of his powers in overseeing neighboring provinces and influencing the appointment and dismissal of their governors. Since assuming power in 1780, he began reforming administrative and military conditions, forming a corps of trained Mamluks, reorganizing the Janissary forces, and seeking to subjugate tribes by force or diplomacy. Baghdad's distance from the center, coupled with weak oversight and administrative corruption, enabled him to expand his influence and interfere in the affairs of other provinces in exchange for money. In Mosul, some governors acquired the rank of Vizier, which was honorary, which limited their

military role and restricted their activities to protecting the province and carrying out punitive campaigns. As for the Mutasallim, he was the governor's deputy in his absence, temporarily managing the province's affairs until the new governor assumed his duties (Al-Sheyab, 1991, p.86–88) .

Chapter Two: The Divan and its Roles

The central administration and major positions, often held by the Mamluks or those very close to them, included the Daftar Dar, who was the head of the treasury and responsible for financial affairs and tax collection, and the Head Scribe, responsible for archives and correspondence official (Ahmed, 2005, p.71; Nawar, 1968, p.15), and the Qadi, who represented the religious judicial authority and was appointed by Istanbul usually, but his influence was under the control of the Wali (governor) (Ali, 1985, p.26–27), and the Naqibs of the Ashraf (nobles), who represented prominent Baghdadi families and served as intermediaries between the Wali and the city's inhabitants (Faik, 1961, p.199–200; Wardi, 2005, p.267).

The military administration, which represented the fundamental power of the system, included the Agha of the Janissaries, commander of the local Janissary corps, which was a traditional military force but its influence declined in favor of the Mamluks. His position was sensitive and a source of conflict sometimes (Saadi, 2014, p.330), and the commanders of military garrisons in major cities such as Basra, Mosul, and Karbala, and the commanders of Mamluk detachments, who were the true military elite, responsible for training and directing the Mamluk forces, which were the backbone of the army (Ahmed, 2005, p.72–74; Anis, 1990, p.143–144) . .

The Divan was the administrative heart of the Mamluk rule in Baghdad, representing the center for organizing power, finance, and administrative decisions (Nawar, 1968, p.14–15, 1968, p.10).

The Divan consisted of a group of civil and military officials, most notably (the Katkhuda) , responsible for daily financial affairs, tax collection, and budget preparation (Niebuhr, 1965, p.65–67) , and the Ottoman Scribe, who documented official decisions and letters addressed to the Sublime Porte or local tribes. The Divan's secretaries oversaw official records, land transactions, and the organization of soldiers' salaries, effectively serving as the executive authority (Ezz El-Din, 1967, p.18; Ghuraibah, 1960, p.61; Nawras, 1975, p.17).

The Divan played a dual role, administratively to regulate tax collection, monitor government spending, and control the economic resources of the province, and politically to advise the Wali, formulate decisions, and coordinate relations with local tribes and notables. This structure made the Divan the second center of power after the Wali, as its officials could efficiently influence provincial decisions and manage daily affairs (Ghuraibah, 1960, p.61–62).

It is clear from the foregoing that this financial authority gave the Katkhuda a significant role in government stability, as the province's ability to pay salaries and maintain the army depended entirely on the effectiveness of the Katkhuda. However, a notable development occurred regarding the position of the Katkhuda in Mosul, as it became hereditary within one of the non- Jalilifamilies of Mosul, whose members worked as scribes in the Divan of the province (Raouf, 1975, p.227–228) . The Katkhuda was considered the executive instrument for the Wali's orders and ranked immediately after him. His function was comparable in importance to that of the Grand Vizier or Prime Minister in the Ottoman Empire, and he was assisted in his duties by a number of employees (Nawras, 1975, p.117–118) .

The judicial system in Baghdad enjoyed relative independence but was linked to the executive authority (Sharia judges) who examined civil and criminal cases according to Islamic Law. They had the ability to review the actions of officials, including the Wali, especially in matters affecting the rights of citizens or tribes. The judicial system worked to provide legal legitimacy to Mamluk rule and alleviate popular discontent from any potential tyranny (Ali, 1985, p.26–27; Ghuraibah, 1960, p.80–82).

The Mufti held the second rank in the judicial system after the Qadi, and the nature of the fatwa (legal opinion) position qualified its holder to be promoted to the rank of judge, as most judges in Mosul were originally Muftis. There were two Muftis in Mosul: a Hanafi representing the official doctrine of the state, and a Shafi'i. The Mufti sometimes played a role beyond the religious and judicial framework, intervening in the political affairs of the province and mediating settlements between conflicting parties (Raouf, 1975, p.259–261).

It is clear to us from the foregoing, that the balance between the authority of the Wali and the judiciary contributed to establishing a form of internal oversight and preventing a slide into complete despotism, while maintaining Baghdad's centrality as a political and administrative hub.

He was the Daftar Dar The Khaznadar holds the highest financial authority in the province, serving as minister of finance and treasury director. He is appointed directly by the Sultan, independent of the governor, with the right of direct review by the Sublime Porte. He supervised the accounts of feudal funds and safeguarded the wealth of the rich. He also had the authority to hold the governor accountable and confiscate his assets upon his dismissal, placing them under guardianship until his financial obligations were settled, without allowing any dismissed official or governor to leave the province before proving their financial integrity (Ahmed, 2005, p.71). .With the development of the 18th century, the role of the Defterdar expanded to include commanding some armies and participating in the political affairs of the province, so much so that his duties sometimes approached those of the Ketkhuda , and in the latter period, the Pashas of Baghdad were able to appoint their chosen individuals to this position, provided the candidate possessed extensive experience in laws and comprehensive knowledge of public affairs, making the position central and vital in managing the financial and political affairs of the province (Nawras, 1975, p.117–118).

The Naqib al-Ashraf (Syndic of Nobles) represented an element with a legitimate and social dimension within the Mamluk power hierarchy. His role was not limited to verifying the lineage of those affiliated with the Prophet's family and caring for their affairs; he also performed an indirect political function through his religious and symbolic status within urban society. He formed a link between the Mamluk authority and the populace, contributing to bestowing a kind of religious legitimacy upon the existing rule, and was sometimes used as an intermediary to contain social tensions, especially during crises that affected the status or rights of the Ashraf. Thus, the Naqib al-Ashraf became part of the system of social and political control that the governor relied upon to consolidate his influence within the city (Khurshid et al., 1969, p.78).

As for the notables of the country, they formed a civilian base for authority, comprising sheikhs, tax collectors/local rulers (mutasallimun), the head of scholars, muftis, and the Kehya, and the syndic of merchants (Shahbandar). All of these represented social, economic, and religious forces with intertwined interests with the Mamluk administration. The notables played a pivotal role in managing the daily life of the city, organizing market affairs, endowments, and taxation, in addition to acting as intermediaries between the governor and the inhabitants. Their presence contributed to achieving a kind of balance between the military authority of the Mamluks and the social authority

of the city, as the legitimacy of rule was reinforced by the satisfaction and cooperation of these notables, just as their opposition was capable of weakening the governor's authority or igniting local disturbances local(Niebuhr, 1965, p.65–67).

And the Aghas of the senior Mamluks are considered the most prominent military and political pillar in the power hierarchy. They were the leaders of the Mamluk divisions and senior officers who formed the primary pressure group within the system. Their role extended beyond military function to directly influencing the appointment or dismissal of the governor. Indeed, some of them, from the Kuhayyat former members, contributed to the formation of informal councils that determined candidates for rule, as in the case of Suleiman Pasha Abu Layla. Their power lay in their possession of weapons, men, and organization, which made them the decisive force in internal conflicts and a primary tool in consolidating or undermining rule. Consequently, the governor was not able to remain in his position without securing the loyalty of this group or neutralizing them politically(Al-Sheyyab, 1991, p.95).

It becomes clear to us that Mamluk rule in Baghdad was based on a combination of centralization and internal oversight. Power was not confined to the governor alone but was distributed among the Diwan, the Ketkhuda, and the judiciary. The stability of the province depended on a balance between financial, judicial, and military authority, while considering the demands of local tribes and notables. The flexibility of this system allowed the governor relative freedom of movement but also imposed on him a constant sensitivity to coups and internal challenges. In this way, Baghdad was a model of Mamluk administration capable of centralizing and distributing powers practically, while maintaining the loyalty of the people, soldiers, and the Sublime Porte simultaneously.

Local administration included the Mutasallimun / local rulers, who were appointed by the governor to manage the districts (liwas) and major cities. Among the most important was the Mutasallim of Basra, a position of immense importance due to the city's economic significance, and was often held by senior Mamluks or those close to the governor (such as Suleiman Agha)(Faik, 1961, p.29–33) , and regional governors such as those of Kirkuk and Mosul (although Mosul was sometimes a separate eyalet, it was subject to the influence of the Pasha of Baghdad). The base, the rules of parallel powers, included the sheikhs of major tribes (such as Shammar, Muntafiq 'Khaza'il), who were not part of the government apparatus, but were poles of parallel powers parallel, The actual authority of the governor depended on his ability to win their loyalty (with money or coercion) or subdue them by force(Nawar, 1968, p.152);(Nawras, 1975, p.148), and their alliance or rebellion determined the stability of the rule, in addition to local notables in cities and rural areas. The true authority of the governor was determined by his ability to manage the balances between these levels, especially between the great Mamluks (the ruling elite) and the powerful tribal sheikhs, and his failure to control any of these levels, especially the second and sixth classes, often led to rebellion or coup and the end of his rule(Ezz El-Din, 1967, p.29–33);(Al-Azzawi, 2004, p.350–370);(Faik, 1961, p.44–47).

Table (1) illustrates number the hierarchical structure of power in the Mamluk system in Iraq, from the head of power to local administration levels, revealing the complex nature of governance based on the overlap of military, administrative, and tribal authority.

Table (1): Power Hierarchy in the Mamluk System in Iraq.*

Class	Elements of Authority	Nature of Authority
Head of Authority	The Wali (Pasha)	Authority; Absolute (military/administrative)
Ruling Elite	Kahya (Katkhuda), Aghas Senior Mamluks	Executive authority, and influence over decisions
Central Administration	Daftardar (financial), Chief Scribe, Qadi, Naqibs	Authority administrative and specialized executive
Military Leaders	Agha Janissaries, commanders of city garrisons, commanders of Mamluk detachments	Local military and executive authority
Local Administration	Mutasallims (governors of major cities and districts)	Local executive authority
Parallel Forces	Sheikhs of major tribes (al-Muntafiq, Shammar, al-Khaza'il...) and local notables	Independent tribal and social influence

Conclusion and Findings

The research findings show that Mamluk rule in Baghdad was based on a combination of centralization and internal control, where power was not confined to the Wali alone, but distributed among the Diwan, Katkhuda, the judiciary, and local notables. This balance helped prevent despotism and ensured relative stability of the province, despite the weakness of the Ottoman state and the corruption of the administrative apparatus. The research also highlighted the importance of the Wali's military and administrative experience, and the role of his senior officials such as Daftardar and Katkhuda in financial and political administration, and the influence of Aghas of the Mamluks in forming the local military force. Finally, the study showed that the flexibility of the Mamluk system in dealing with tribes and the local elite, in addition to Baghdad's centrality, were crucial factors in sustaining governance and achieving a balance between local and central authorities.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening comparative studies of the Mamluk administration, by conducting comparative research between Mamluk governance systems in Baghdad and other cities like Mosul and Basra, to understand the differences in power distribution, administrative flexibility, and their impact on local stability.
2. Studying the impact of internal conflicts on the continuity of rule, as conflicts between senior Mamluks, local notables, and tribes should be analyzed to assess how they affected the stability of the province and the roles of the Wali and the Diwan.

* The table is prepared based on scattered descriptive data in historical sources regarding the nature of Mamluk rule and its administrative and military structure, especially: Alaa Musa Nawras, Rule of the Mamluks in Iraq; Suleiman Faiq, History of the Mamluks; Abbas Al-Azzawi, History of Iraq Between Two Occupations.

3. Re-evaluating the role of the financial apparatus and judiciary, by focusing on the role of Daftardar and Katkhuda and the judiciary in supervising authority, to highlight mechanisms for preventing corruption and their impact on governance effectiveness.
4. Highlighting the role of military and administrative experience of the Walis, as research should be encouraged that focuses on the previous experience of Walis (as Katkhuda or Janissary officers) and how it contributed to their ability to impose authority and effectively administer the province.
5. Utilizing the findings to understand the transformations of the Ottoman state, The research results can be used to explain the reasons for the central weakness of the Ottoman Empire, and the success of some provinces, such as Baghdad, in managing their local affairs almost independently.
6. Preserving the administrative heritage, manuscripts, and Ottoman documents related to Mamluk administration, to ensure accurate sources are available for future researchers in this field.

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