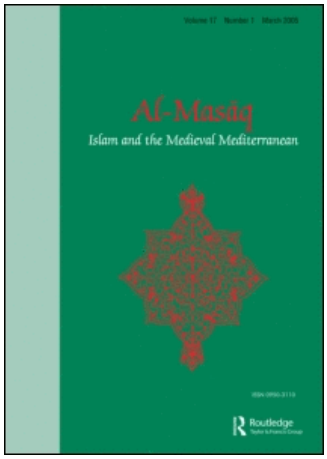

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"He is a child and this land is a borderland of Islam": Under-age Rule and the Quest for Political Stability in the Ayyūbid Period

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"He is a child and this land is a borderland of Islam": Under-age Rule and the Quest for Political Stability in the Ayyūbid Period[1]

KONRAD HIRSCHLER

ABSTRACT *During the late and post-ʿAbbāsid periods, dynasties in Islamic lands witnessed numerous under-age rulers. Given the personalised nature of pre-modern rule, the succession of a child to the throne posed a potential threat both to the polity's stability and to the dynasty's survival. The Ayyūbid family confederation in Egypt and Syria provides, due to the considerable number of under-age rulers in its various branches, fine examples that illustrate the complex relationships between under-age rule and political stability. After discussing the legal concept of maturity and the principal modes of succession dominant in the period, this article considers the issue of regents, arguing that under-age rule was generally conducted without frictions as two main strategies were employed in order to avoid instability. On the one hand, the flexible concept of succession allowed reaction to the various internal challenges that arose over time. On the other hand, a sense of solidarity within the confederation could be activated in order to fight back against external powers that tried to take advantage of these periods of potential weakness.*

Keywords: Ayyūbid dynasty; Egypt – politics; Syria – politics; rulership – underage rulers

Under-age rule was a salient feature of governance in the later and post-ʿAbbāsid periods. While the accession to power of the thirteen-year-old ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–932) was still a novelty, under-age rule became a common feature of various regional dynasties in the following centuries. This regular appearance of under-age rule parallels European medieval history,

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[1]This article is based on a paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 11–14 July 2005 in the panel *Aspects of Medieval Political Culture in the Latin West, the Byzantine Commonwealth, and the Islamic World: Under-Age Rule*. I would like to thank the organisers of the panel for their invitation as well as those present in the session, the anonymous readers of this article, and Alex Metcalfe for their helpful comments. In addition I would like to thank Suzanne Ruggi for reading a draft version of this article.

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when half of the kings of dynasties such as the Merovingian rose to the throne as children.[2] Rule by such young individuals is, irrespective of its regional setting, an intriguing aspect of pre-modern kingship since governance was strongly centred on the person of the king himself. The polities in the Islamic world, although administratively complex by the standards of Latin Christendom, were ruled by political systems that had – compared to the modern state – weakly developed bureaucratic structures, few specialised institutions and rarely clear territorial delimitations. The relatively low importance of elaborate tools of governance was, in the period considered here, to a large degree compensated for by individual relationships and informal networks. The central role of these non-formalised bonds, as well as the absence of non-personal identity markers common to the modern state (such as shape of borders or a flag) set the ruler at centre stage: it was he who founded the dynasty – the *dawla* – led the troops, dispensed justice and was the focal point of the elites' political loyalty. On the symbolic level, and even to some degree on the level of concrete rule, the polity could hardly be dissociated from the person of the ruler.

Evidently, under-age rule put considerable strain on such personalised polities, whose dynasties' survival, as well as the survival of the polity itself, were dependent on securing solutions. The political actors were confronted with two sets of challenges. On the one hand, expansionist tendencies of neighbouring powers were nurtured by potential instability. On the other hand, claims to the throne by regents, other members of the political elite and relatives could lead to internal strife. The present article focuses on this second set, the 'internal' issues, in particular the underlying question as to what degree under-age rule and instability were linked. This focus on internal measures, which were meant to deal with the period of 'crisis', offers not only valuable insights into the issue of under-age rule but also into ruling practices in general.

The concrete example considered here is the Ayyūbid dynasty, the ruling house founded by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (r. 564–589/1169–1193), which governed Egypt, Syria, parts of northern Mesopotamia and Yemen in the late sixth/twelfth and first half of the seventh/thirteenth century. This dynasty is a case in point as at least nine of its 31 rulers – taking into account the seven main Ayyūbid branches in Egypt, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Diyār Bakr I (Mayyāfāriqīn and Jabal Sinjār) and Diyār Bakr II (Ḥiṣn Kayfa, Āmid and Akhlāṭ)[3] – might be considered under age

[2]For under-age rule in the European Middle Ages cf. T. Offergeld, *Reges pueri. Das Königtum Minderjähriger im frühen Mittelalter* (Hannover, 2001); D. Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III* (Berkeley, 1990); T. Kölzer, "Das Königtum Minderjähriger im fränkisch-deutschen Mittelalter", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 251 (1990): 291–323; A. Wolf, "Königtum Minderjähriger und das Institut der Regentschaft", in *L'Enfant, Deuxième partie: Europe médiévale et moderne* [Receuils de la société Jean Bodin 36] (Brussels, 1976), pp. 97–106; W. Ulrich, *Regentschaft bei Unmündigkeit des fränkischen Herrschers* (Bonn, 1964); H. Fricke, "Reichsvikare, Reichsregenten und Reichsstatthalter des deutschen Mittelalters", PhD Thesis, University of Göttingen, 1949.

[3]Cf. C.E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties. A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 70–3 for the principal names and dates. The branches in Yemen and minor places such as Karak, Baalbek, and Bāniyās have been left out as the source basis was too weak for the present discussion, especially as even an approximate identification of rulers' dates of birth proved impossible.

when they rose to power (cf. Table I, Under-age rulers in the Ayyūbid period).[4] Certainly, many of the local dynasties occasionally came either under 'central' Egyptian rule or that of their more powerful neighbouring branch. However, their repeated claims to some degree of independence via the regalia (such as *khuṭba* and coinage) allow treating them as separate cases.

The Ayyūbids (564–650/1169–1252 in Egypt, 570–658/1175–1260 in Syria, 569–627/1174–1229 in Yemen)[5] ruled their lands as a family confederation, especially after the death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. The local branches formed petty dynasties in Egypt as well as in the Syrian and northern Mesopotamian towns and regions. These dynasties descended from various members of the Ayyūbid family: the descendents of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn for instance governed Aleppo, the descendents of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's paternal uncle Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh (d. 564/1169) ruled Homs, and the descendents of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's brother al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (r. 596–615/1200–1218) came to play the dominant role in most towns and regions east of the Euphrates and south of Homs. The ruler of Egypt generally claimed overlordship within this confederation, but continuously had to assert this claim and defend it from his relatives, who were opposed to his rule owing to local interests. The careers of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, his son al-Malik al-Kāmil (r. 615–635/1218–1238) and the latter's son al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ (r. 637–647/1240–1249), the main Ayyūbid rulers of Egypt, were largely consumed with efforts to foster and/or expand their positions within the family confederation. In spite of their success, their deaths set back any tendency towards centralised rule, and each successor had to start imposing the centre's hegemony anew.[6]

That under-age rule was a common feature of the Ayyūbid period is apparent on various levels, for example the entitlement of under-age rulers to the same standard symbolic procedures as adult rulers. Not only did this extend to the aforementioned regalia of the *khuṭba* and the coinage, but also to those linked to the decisive period when power was transferred from the deceased/deposed ruler to his successor. For example, after al-Malik al-Ẓāhir of Aleppo (governor 579/1183 and ruler 582–613/1186–1216) died in 613/1216, the claim of the kingship by his two-year-old son and heir apparent al-Malik al-ʿAzīz (r. 613–634/1216–1236), as well as the death of

[4]Multiple reigns by the same individual – either in several polities or in the same – are counted as one. In such cases, the first accession to power is taken into account. The periods of Mamlūk or Mongol overlordship (e.g. in Diyār Bakr II after 657/1259 and in Hama after 658/1260) are not taken into account. It was only impossible in one case, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Ghāzī of Diyār Bakr I (617–642/1220–1258), to approximate at what age he ascended the throne.

[5]It was only in some places in northern Syria (e.g. Hama) and Mesopotamia (e.g. Diyār Bakr II) that Ayyūbid branches survived into the eighth/fourteenth and the ninth/fifteenth centuries.

[6]There is as yet no monographic overview of the Ayyūbid dynasty. For the time being overview chapters such as H. Halm, "Die Ayyūbiden", in *Geschichte der arabischen Welt*, ed. U. Haarmann (München, 2001), pp. 200–16 and M. Chamberlain, "The Crusader era and the Ayyūbid dynasty", in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, volume 1: *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. C.F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 211–41, have to be supplemented by studies of the local branches, such as A.-M. Eddé, *La principauté Ayyoubide d'Alep (579/1183–658/1260)* (Stuttgart, 1999); R.S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols. The Ayyūbids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany/NY, 1977), and A.Gh. Sābānū, *Mamlakat Ḥamā al-Ayyūbiyya* (Damascus: Dār Qutayba, 1984). For further studies and primary sources, see Halm and Chamberlain.

Table I. Under-age rulers in the Ayyūbid period.

	Ruler	Town/Region	Reign	Age of Succession	Age of Independent Rule	Birth	Death
1	al-Malik al-Manṣūr	Egypt	595–596/1198–1200	~9	-	b. ~586/1190–1	d. ?
2	al-Malik al-Ashraf	Egypt	648–650/1250–1252	~6	-	b. ~642/1244–5	d. ?
3	al-Malik al-Ẓāhir	Aleppo	579/1183[gov], 582–613/1186–1216	11	16	b. 568/1173	d. 613/1216
4	al-Malik al-ʿAzīz	Aleppo	613–634/1216–1236	2	18	b. 610/1214	d. 634/1236
5	al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf	Aleppo	634–658/1236–1260	7	13	b. 627/1230	d. 658/1260
6	al-Malik al-Mujāhid Asad al-Dīn	Homs	581–637/1186–1240	12	?	b. 569/1173–4	d. 637/1240
7	al-Malik al-Ashraf	Homs	644–662/1246–1263	17	19	b. 627/1229–30	d. 662/1263
8	al-Malik al-Manṣūr II	Hama	642–683/1244–1284	10	~23	b. 632/1234	d. 683/1284
9	al-Malik al-Muwaḥḥid[1]	Diyār Bakr II	647–657/1249–1259	~10	?	b. ~637/1239–40	d. ?

[gov] = governor

[1]al-Malik al-Muwaḥḥid ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Malik al-Muʿaẓẓam Tūrānshāh. For information about him cf. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalā*, eds. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ et al., volumes I–XXV (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1981–8): XXIII: 194 (in Tūrānshāh's biography); Ibn Wāṣil, Paris 1703: fol. 78b.

the ruler, were announced in a highly symbolic manner. Al-Malik al-ʿAzīz and his brother al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad (d. 651/1253) presented themselves on horseback to the town's populace and elite, which had assembled in front of the citadel. On the one hand, the brothers were announcing their father's death by wearing black clothes. The populace greeted this announcement with wailing and the officers dismounted from their horses, uncovered their heads and cut their hair. The claim to succession, on the other hand, was expressed by the *ghāshiya*, a splendidly decorated saddle-cover, which had been introduced to the Islamic Near East by the Saljūqs.[7] Sayf al-Dīn ʿAlī Ibn Jandar (d. 622/1225),[8] the senior *amīr* who had played a vital role in settling the succession, walked in front of the infant ruler carrying this crucial element of the Sultan's regalia. The *amīr*s and members of the royal family kissed the young ruler's hand to express their submission.[9] A similar employment of symbolic and ritual resources was also evident when a young prince was nominated officially as heir apparent. The Egyptian Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil, for example, rode with his eleven-year-old son al-Malik al-ʿĀdil II (r. 635–637/1238–1240) through Cairo in order to announce him as his successor with the son displaying the royal banners.[10]

Under-age rulers also received the symbols of recognition from their – theoretical or real – overlord. When al-Malik al-ʿAzīz of Aleppo turned ten in the year 620/1223, some eight years after having ascended the throne and some five years before attaining majority, al-Malik al-Kāmil sent him the *khilʿa*, the robe of honour[11] and the *sanājiq*, the yellow banners of the Sultan from Egypt. Furthermore, the envoy, al-Malik al-Ashraf I (d. 635/1237), the strongman of Northern Syria, carried the *ghāshiya* in the procession of the young ruler through the town.[12] Al-Malik al-ʿAzīz's son al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf (r. 634–658/1236–1260) also received a robe of honour from al-Malik al-Kāmil, in this case immediately after his nomination as ruler of Aleppo at the age of seven.[13]

Majority and independent rule

Despite the salience of under-age rule and the inclusion of under-age rulers in the symbolic and ritual practices of the period, it rarely featured as an independent subject in the genre of medieval political thought, that is to say, in theoretical

[7]On Ayyūbid ceremony and the *ghāshiya* in particular, see Eddé, 204–6.

[8]Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad (d. 748/1348), *Taʾrīkh al-Islām wa wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa l-aʿlām*, ed. ʿU.ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī, volumes I–LII (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1987–2000), vol. 621–630: 109.

[9]Ibn Wāṣil, Muḥammad b. Sālim (d. 697/1298), *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār banī Ayyūb*, eds. J. al-Shayyāl/Ḥ. al-Rabīʿ/S. ʿĀshūr, vols I–V (Cairo: Wizārat al-thaqāfa wa l-irshād al-qawmī, 1953–1977) and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS arabe 1702 and 1703 for years 646–659, III: 241–2.

[10]Al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad b. ʿAlī (d. 845/1442), *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, eds. M.M. al-Ziyāda et al., volumes I–IV (Cairo: Lajnat al-taʾlīf wa l-tarjama wa l-nashr, 1934–1975), Ia: 247.

[11]For the *khilʿa* in general, see M. Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Khilʿa: Studien zur Geschichte des geschenkten Gewandes im islamischen Kulturkreis* (Würzburg, 2000).

[12]Ibn Wāṣil, IV: 129–30.

[13]Al-Maqrīzī, Ia: 254 and Ibn Wāṣil, V: 121. However, other regalia, such as banners, were withheld from him as al-Malik al-Kāmil was dissatisfied with the choice of regents. On the conflict between al-Malik al-Kāmil and Aleppo cf. Eddé, 109ff.

treatises and mirrors for princes.[14] In such works it was only set out that the potential leader had to have reached sexual maturity in order to qualify, or the issue was not touched upon at all.[15] Compared with the main concerns discussed in the theoretical texts, namely the legitimacy of decentralised rule and the practical advice given in the mirrors for princes, the question of under-age rule was evidently of little concern.

The field of law is of more help in establishing the normative aspects of under-age rule, as it clearly defines the concepts of minority and majority. Islamic law differentiates between the major (*bāligh*) adult, obliged to fulfil his religious duties and fully responsible under criminal law, and the minor (*ṣaghīr*) child, who is subject to legal restrictions and guardianship.[16] Within the period of minority, scholars identified several time spans which affect the status of the child. The child was considered a 'discerning minor' (*mumayyiz*) once it was able to differentiate between right and wrong, indicating that it could, for example, enter into beneficial contracts. This point of *tamyīz* was set between three and ten years,[17] and most authors such as the Damascene theologian and jurisconsultant Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) refused to set a fixed age.[18] Similarly, the age of majority (*bulūgh*) did not depend on reaching a certain age, but largely on physical maturity. While the other schools of law did not impose a minimum age for majority, the Shafiʿī school, the then dominant Sunni school in Syria and Egypt, fixed it at nine years. If physical maturity did not manifest itself, the general rule was to declare majority at the age of fifteen years, although for the Mālikī school the age was raised to eighteen. However, conduct of rule did not only require *bulūgh*, but also

[14]On medieval political thought cf. P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004); A. Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought. From the Prophet to the Present* (Edinburgh, 2001); A.K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam. An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: the Jurists* (Oxford, 1981); T. Nagel, *Staat und Glaubensgemeinschaft im Islam. Geschichte der politischen Ordnungsvorstellungen der Muslime*, volumes I–II (Zürich, 1981); E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam. An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge, 1958).

[15]To take two examples composed in Syria during or shortly after the Ayyūbid rule: Ibn Jamāʿa, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm (d. 733/1333), "Taḥrīr al-aḥkām fī tadbīr ahl al-islām", ed. and tr. H. Kofler, *Islamica*, 4 (1934): 349–414; 7 (1935): 1–64; Schlußheft (1938): 18–129, cf. Ibn Jamāʿa 4: 356 on *bāligh*. An anonymous mirror for princes composed in seventh/thirteenth-century Syria in Persian does not contain this condition in its chapter "On Impediments to Kingship", where characteristics such as "impurity in faith or belief", "madness or heedlessness", "negligence, senselessness, lack of judgement, lack of planning, shamelessness, and levity" are enumerated, cf. J. Meisami, *The Sea of Precious Virtues (Bahr al-Favāʾid): A Medieval Islamic Mirror for Princes* (Salt Lake City, 1991), p. 80.

[16]Cf. H.A.R. Gibb et al. on *bāligh* and A. Giladi on *ṣaghīr* in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, WebCD edition (Leiden, 2003).

[17]A. Giladi, *Children of Islam. Concepts of Childhood in Medieval Muslim Society* (Houndmills/London, 1992), and H. Motzki, "Das Kind und seine Sozialisation in der islamischen Familie des Mittelalters", in *Zur Sozialgeschichte der Kindheit*, eds. J. Martin/A. Nitschke (Freiburg/München, 1986), pp. 391–441, esp. pp. 420–2. Further helpful items for the concept of childhood are: H. Motzki, "Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung im frühen Islam", in *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung*, ed. E.W. Müller (Freiburg/München, 1985), pp. 479–550; A. Giladi, "Gender differences in child rearing and education: Some preliminary observations with reference to medieval Muslim thought", *al-Qantara*, 16 (1995): 291–308; A. Giladi, "Infants, children and death in medieval Muslim society", *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990): 345–368; A. Giladi, "Concepts of childhood and attitudes towards children in medieval Islam. A preliminary study with special reference to reactions to infant and child mortality", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 32 (1989): 121–152; F. Rosenthal, "Child psychology in Islam", *Islamic Culture*, 26 (1952): 1–22.

[18]Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (d. 751/1350), *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd bi-aḥkām al-mawlūd*, ed. Aḥmad Sulaymān (Cairo: Dār Ibn Rajab, 1999): 347–51.

'full contractual capacity', which was acquired by attaining *rushd*, i.e. intellectual maturity. Here the picture was even more vague because in general – as with the question of *tamyīz* – no age limit was fixed for the point at which *rushd* had to be declared (with the exception of the Ḥanafī school where latest was at twenty-five years). For the period and regions under consideration here it can thus merely be stated, from a legalistic perspective, that majority excluding *rushd* was attained between nine years and fifteen years while majority including *rushd* was attained at some point after nine years.

The legal category of 'majority' (in- or excluding *rushd*) has to be supplemented by a further category of historical practice: independent/autonomous rule, referred to as *istiqlāl* in the period's chronicles. The following discussion will illustrate that these concepts were not synonymous and why it is also necessary to consider rulers who had reached legal majority. The age of independent rule varied considerably, as can be seen in Table I, and it often took several years after reaching majority before a ruler could *de facto* obtain independent rule – a period of 'prolonged under-age rule'. The only exception in this regard is al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Aleppo, who attained independent rule at the same point as having reached legal majority in the year 640/1242. He "declared himself as having reached majority" at the age of thirteen after his grandmother, who had acted as regent, had died. The chroniclers added immediately afterwards a passage entitled "Report on Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir's [...] independence".[19]

In general, the age of sixteen to eighteen was considered to be sufficient for independent rule. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn nominated for instance al-Malik al-Mujāhid Asad al-Dīn of Homs (581–637/1186–1240) ruler at the age of twelve years. In addition, he "nominated at the side of Asad al-Dīn in Homs an *amīr* of the Asadiyya known as Arslān Būghā. He [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn] gave him [Arslān Būghā] preference over the latter's brothers in arms by designating him to the administration of his [Asad al-Dīn's] interests [*tawallī maṣāliḥ bābi-hi*] until [...] Asad [al-Dīn] acted properly on his own and gained full contractual capacity".[20] The increasing involvement of al-Malik al-Mujāhid Asad al-Dīn in inner-Ayyūbid politics from 586/1190 onwards,[21] shows that the young ruler acquired independent rule at about the age of seventeen. In a similar case the only example of contractual regency[22] to have been transmitted during the Ayyūbid period limited the regency to the young ruler's sixteenth birthday.[23] The age of sixteen to eighteen as the standard age of independent rule is also evident for a number of Ayyūbid rulers who came to power at this age without having a regent at their side: al-Malik al-Afḍal ʿAlī of Damascus (582–592/1186–1196) at the age of seventeen, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Qilij Arslan of Hama (617–626/1221–1229) at the age of seventeen and al-Malik al-ʿĀdil II of Egypt at the age of eighteen.

[19]Ibn Wāṣil, V: 313.

[20]Abū Shāma, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ismāʿīl (d. 665/1267), *Kitāb al-rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa l-Ṣalāḥiyya*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zībaq, volumes I–V (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1997), III: 252–3.

[21]For his participation in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's campaign, see Abū Shāma, *Rawḍatayn*, IV: 119, 241, and 348.

[22]By which is meant a regency on the basis of an oral or written contract that spelled out the regent's rights and obligations. The observance of the contract's terms was controlled by the court.

[23]Ibn Wāṣil, III: 90: Among the conditions set out for the regency of al-Malik al-Manṣūr (Egypt) in 595/1198.

The foregoing reflections explain the inclusion of rulers in Table I whose ages of accession to power range from two to seventeen years. The cases of al-Malik al-ʿAzīz of Aleppo, al-Malik al-Ashraf of Egypt (r. 648–650/1250–1252) and al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Aleppo, who succeeded as rulers at the age of two, six and seven respectively, are – from a legal point of view – beyond any doubt examples of under-age rule in the Ayyūbid period. In contrast, al-Malik al-Ashraf of Homs (r. 644–662/1246–1263), who came to power at the age of seventeen, is a clear example of prolonged under-age rule. He had already attained legal majority, perhaps even intellectual maturity (*rushd*), before he was declared ruler.

He is nevertheless included in the table as the sources emphasise his youth (*ṣabiyy*) when speaking of his affairs as managed by the vizier Mukhliṣ al-Dīn Ibn Qirnāṣ (d. 646/1248), a *de facto* regent.[24] For those placed in the 'grey area' between the ages of nine and fifteen a clear legal status is generally impossible to ascribe, as the sources hardly ever comment on this issue.[25] However, the descriptions in the sources do not leave any doubt that a ruler such as al-Malik al-Manṣūr II of Hama (r. 642–683/1244–1284), who ascended the throne at the age of ten, was treated as an under-age ruler with regents at his side.[26]

The final point to be stressed with regard to legalistic aspects is the fact that the under-age ruler's legal status posed a considerable problem. The affairs of the Ayyūbid polities were *de jure* conducted in the rulers' names, even in the case of the above-mentioned examples who were beyond any doubt minors. This means that – irrespective of their age – their name was mentioned in the *khuṭba*s,[27] their name appeared on the coinage,[28] decrees were issued in their name, alliances were concluded in their name,[29] etc. Governance was so closely associated with the ruler himself that it proved impossible to delegate these crucial elements of symbolic representation to any person other than the ruler, even if he was a two-year-old infant. The paradox that full legal capacity was ascribed to a legal minor also existed in the European Middle Ages. Here, under-age rulers were often endowed with a fictional majority, which allowed affairs to be conducted in their names.[30] At least in the Ayyūbid case this paradox was not solved in such an elegant manner, as under-age rulers were beyond any doubt considered as minors. The above examples

[24]Ibn Wāṣil, V: 371, "*qāma bi-tadbīr dawlati-hi*". Although some authors term the regency in more ambiguous terms (e.g. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 661–670: 115 who speaks only of vizierate of Ibn Qirnāṣ, "*wa-wazara la-hu al-Ṣadr Mukhliṣ al-Dīn*"), the central position of Ibn Qirnāṣ hints strongly at a case of prolonged under-age rule. For instance, it was he who had been the driving force behind the pro-Egyptian position of Homs, which had led to the Aleppan siege and the loss of the town in 646/1248 after which he was tortured to death.

[25]A rare example where a comment can be found is al-Malik al-ʿAzīz of Aleppo whose age of majority (fifteen) is explicitly mentioned (see Ibn Wāṣil, IV: 227).

[26]Al-Yūnīnī, Mūsā b. Muḥammad (d. 726/1326), *Dhayl miʾāt al-zamān*, ed. n.n., volumes I–IV (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1954–1961), IV: 236: "*wa-qāma bi-tadbīr mulki-hi* [. . .]".

[27]For example: al-Malik al-Manṣūr (Egypt) (Ibn al-Athīr, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad (d. 630/1233), *al-Kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg), volumes I–XIII (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1965–1967) (reprint of 1851–1871 edition with corrections and new pagination), XII: 156; al-Malik al-Ashraf (Egypt) (Ibn Wāṣil, Paris 1703: fol. 112b).

[28]For Ayyūbid coins issued in the name of under-age rulers cf. P. Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyūbids* (London, 1980), pp.114–5: al-Malik al-Manṣūr of Egypt; in Balog, 218–24: al-Malik al-ʿAzīz of Aleppo; in Balog, 224–40: al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Aleppo.

[29]For example al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Aleppo with the Rūm Saljūq Sultan (Ibn Wāṣil, V: 131).

[30]Offergeld, 34ff.

of the Aleppian rulers al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf, who declared himself as having reached majority six years after he had come to power, and al-Malik al-ʿAzīz, who was said to have attained majority some thirteen years after his accession to the throne, clearly show that a considerable span of their rule was not only *de facto* but also in legal terms under age. Yet even this obvious contradiction between legal norm and historical practice did not lead to a detailed consideration of the issue in legal and historical discourse.

Under-age rule and dynastic succession

Under-age rule is an inherent feature of the principle of dynastic succession. This is not only seen with the kings of the Old Testament and pre-Islamic divine kings in Near Eastern civilisations,[31] but also in the Ayyūbid period considered here. It is this link which, to a large degree, explains the uneven distribution of under-age rule within the Ayyūbid realms. Some principalities such as Aleppo, with entrenched father-to-son succession, repeatedly had an under-age ruler on the throne, while others such as Damascus, with much more varied patterns of succession, never experienced such a situation. Thus, the system of succession in the various principalities was markedly flexible. Owing to this flexibility, under-age rule hardly appeared in the dynasty's most significant seats of power where a contender could oust the young ruler with a convincing claim of legitimacy.

Sunnism tended to be theoretically averse to inherited rule, as its adherents styled themselves as "those who loosen and tie" (*ahl al-ḥall wa l-ʿaqd*), referring to those adhering to the principle of 'election' in choosing leadership. However, this feature, although regularly stressed by Sunni writers, remained a theoretical ideal which had little impact on actual patterns of succession among Sunni dynasties such as the Ayyūbids. The election principle mainly gained prominence in Sunni thought as a way of distinguishing their own group from the practices of the Shiites, who tended to make leadership of the community hereditary.[32] However, in contrast to this theoretical ideal, hereditary rule – often primogeniture – also turned out to be the standard system of succession under the ʿAbbāsid caliphs and among the various local dynasties. From the fifth/eleventh century onwards a second mode of succession, spreading from Central Asia, gained prominence in Egypt and Syria: here, all male members of the extended family, i.e. including uncles and cousins, could legitimately claim succession. The recognised and legitimate ruler was the one who proved himself the most powerful during the succession conflict(s). This system was also a legacy of the Saljūqs who spread this concept of a family empire after they had risen to power in most of the Islamic Asian world.

It was the combination of these two systems which characterised the Ayyūbid system of succession: while the realms were first divided among the cousins and brothers, most towns and regions tended to adopt subsequently hereditary rule in the father-to-son mode, generally primogeniture. In regions such as Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Diyār Bakr I and Diyār Bakr II succession was mostly father-to-son,

[31]Cf. Kölzer, 295.

[32]The principle's discursive prominence must be furthermore understood in light of anti-Umayyad writings, in which blaming this dynasty for introducing hereditary rule became a recurrent topos (Crone, 36–9 and 226–7).

sometimes brother to brother,[33] never cousin-to-cousin or uncle-to-nephew.[34] In general, rulers appointed in first place in the line of succession, sons born to a wife of royal descent; in second place, were sons of other wives, and finally, other relatives. A typical example was the will left by al-Malik al-Ẓāhir of Aleppo who named his two-year-old son al-Malik al-ʿAzīz (born to Ḍayfa, daughter of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil) as heir apparent, the older brother al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad (born to a concubine) ranked second[35] and his nephew al-Malik al-Manṣūr (r. Egypt, 595–596/1198–1200), who had been previously ousted by his uncle al-Malik al-ʿĀdil from Egypt, in third place.[36]

However, the Ayyūbids are with regard to their system of succession no singular case, but rather inherited and further developed a tradition that was characteristic for the political landscape of the Syrian lands. In a sense, they were the final point of a development, which had started with the appearance of the Saljūqs on the region's political scene in the late fifth/eleventh century. The new 'Central Asian' mode of succession within the enlarged family, that had been introduced by the Saljūqs, was gradually indigenised by the Syrian Saljūq and Zangīd rulers in the following decades by combining it with existing modes of succession. It was with the Ayyūbids that this artful combination of different traditions was developed to its heyday and adapted to the dynasty's demands.

The transition to the following Mamlūk Empire, in contrast, engendered a number of changes on the level of high politics, which broke also with this line of development. The Mamlūks adhered, at least in the sultanate's early period, to an entirely different non-hereditary mode of succession. This mode had hardly any place or need for under-age rulers, except being put up as a stop-gap measure so that the future ruler could consolidate his powerbase.[37] Now, the issue of under-age role not only ceased to play the prominent role that it had played in the previous centuries, but took also a distinctively different role in the succession process.

The prominence of hereditary succession from father-to-son during the Ayyūbid period was also apparent in discourses on rule. When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn recovered from serious illness his friend and counsellor ʿAlam al-Dīn Ibn Jandar (d. 587/1192)[38] reproached him for neglecting the issue of succession. Although the dialogue's main function was to introduce the panegyric topos of the ruler's disregard for his own

[33]For example: In Hama: al-Malik al-Nāṣir Qilij Arslan to his brother al-Malik al-Muẓaffar; In Diyār Bakr I: al-Malik al-Awḥad (r. 596–607/1200–1210) to his brother al-Malik al-Ashraf I (r. 607–617/1210–1220; Damascus, r. 626–635/1229–1237) and the latter to his brother al-Malik al-Muẓaffar (r. 617–642/1220–1244).

[34]With the exception of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil's short reign in Aleppo.

[35]Cf. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 651–660: 88: "He was older than his brother al-Malik al-ʿAzīz, but they kept him from the sultanate of Aleppo because he was the son of a concubine and al-ʿAzīz the son of Sultan al-Malik al-ʿĀdil's daughter."

[36]Ibn Wāṣil, III: 238 and Eddé, 85.

[37]Cf. the contribution to this volume by Angus Stewart "Between Baybars and Qalāwūn: under-age rulers and succession in the early Mamlūk Sultanate", *al-Masāq*, 19, i (2007): 47–54. Under-age rulers did again appear on the political scene during the Qalāwūnid sultanate when hereditary succession played a more salient role in the Mamlūk succession process, cf. the contribution of J. Van Steenbergen on the later Qalāwūnids in this same volume, pp. 55–65.

[38]Cf. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 581–590: 266.

and his family's benefit, the fact that the chroniclers chose the issue of father-to-son succession shows its topicality:

> Whenever a bird wants to build a nest for its young ones, he brings them to the top of a tree in order to secure them. You, however, handed over the fortresses to your family and left your sons on the ground. Aleppo is in the hands of your brother [al-Malik al-ʿĀdil], Hama in the hands of Taqī al-Dīn [your nephew], and Homs in the hands of Shīrkūh's son [your paternal cousin]. Your son al-ʿAzīz is with Taqī al-Dīn in Egypt, who will depose him whenever he likes. This other son of yours is with your brother in his tent who will do with him whatever he likes.[39]

It has been rightly remarked that "[i]n both tribal and Islamic Law, all sons were equal heirs; primogeniture as practised in Europe was not permitted".[40] However, the Ayyūbid case shows that this absence of normative rules did not exclude the consolidation of informal rules, which proved to be of surprisingly high relevance. It was in those regions where the mode of father-to-son succession was firmly entrenched, such as Aleppo, Homs and Hama, that under-age rulers played an important role. The – potentially destabilising – rule of children did not endanger these dynasties' survival: all the under-age rulers in these places remained in power until they reached the age of independent rule and continued to rule as adults. Al-Malik al-Manṣūr II of Hama, coming to power at the age of ten, ruled some forty-one years, and al-Malik al-Mujāhid Asad al-Dīn of Homs, coming to power at the age of twelve, ruled some fifty-six years – the longest reign in Ayyūbid history.

Nevertheless, the concept of a family empire continued to play a considerable role in the Ayyūbid realms and primogeniture was not able to impose itself as the exclusive principle of legitimisation. For instance, when al-Malik al-Muẓaffar (626–642/1229–1244), the legitimate successor to the throne of Hama, set out to fight his younger brother, whom the town's elite had installed against the explicit will of the father, he sought first to legitimise his action by the idea of primogeniture. His uncle, by contrast, advised him not to claim the throne as oldest son, but rather to bring the elders of the town on his side, as "kingship is childless".[41] Remnants of the family empire concept are mainly apparent in cases where the ruler died without leaving an heir and one of his brothers was nominated as successor.[42] Alternatively, they appear as pre-emptive measures in order to avoid potential rivalry between family members.[43] However, it was in the dynasty's main seats of power, Egypt and Damascus, that this form of succession, especially brother-to-brother succession,

[39]Ibn al-Athīr, XI: 525.

[40]Black, 207.

[41]Ibn Wāṣil, IV: 89: "*al-mulk ʿaqīm*". In the Mamlūk period this sentence came to be employed to refute any claim to hereditary succession, cf. P. Holt, "Some observations on the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate of Cairo", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 47 (1984): 501–507, 505 and Haarmann, 229.

[42]For example, the above-mentioned al-Malik al-Awḥad of Diyār Bakr I passed his realms to his brother al-Malik al-Ashraf I during his fatal illness (Ibn Wāṣil, III: 208). Al-Malik al-Ashraf I himself handed the same lands to his brother al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Ghāzī (Ibn Wāṣil, IV: 90) and moved to Damascus, which he handed subsequently over to another brother of his, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl (Ibn Wāṣil, V: 136).

[43]For example al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ's disposition to his entourage that once he falls ill, his brother al-Malik al-ʿĀdil should be immediately executed (Ibn Wāṣil, V: 376) or the fact that al-Malik al-Manṣūr of Homs kept his brother al-Malik al-Masʿūd in prison until the latter's death (Ibn Wāṣil, V: 371).

occurred more regularly. With the decline of the Ayyūbids, the last ruler in Damascus even belonged to the extended family in its broadest sense: the last ruler al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Aleppo (in Damascus 648–658/1250–1260) was the previous ruler's paternal third cousin. Tellingly, not a single under-age ruler came to power in Damascus. The main reason for this was the town's vivid history of succession disputes and struggles. Its key position in the constant conflict between Egyptian attempts to assert central authority and the vivid efforts of the Syrian rulers to fight back[44] did not allow any of the contending parties to place a 'weak' ruler on the throne. The unstable situation in Damascus with regard to succession is evident in the fact that on six occasions the ruler was driven out of town by a relative seeking the throne.[45] During the seventy-six years of Ayyūbid rule, the town experienced some eleven rulers, two of them even ruling repeatedly. By contrast, Homs and Aleppo experienced a mere four rulers each during the eighty-eight and seventy-nine years of Ayyūbid rule there respectively.

In Egypt, the dynasty's focal point, the only early experience of a child king had been instructive for the following generations. It took only one year until Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's grandson al-Malik al-Manṣūr, placed on the throne at the age of nine, was chased away by his great uncle al-Malik al-ʿĀdil. The latter legitimised his step precisely by rejecting the concept of primogeniture and drawing on the discursive resource of a family empire: "It is ignominious for me to act as *atābak* for a youngster taking into account my seniority and precedence. In addition, kingship is not part of the inheritance, but belongs to the victorious (*al-mulk laysa huwa bi-l-mīrāth wa-innamā huwa li-man ghalaba*). I was entitled to be the ruler after my brother the Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn]".[46] The lesson that under-age rule over a region as significant as that of Egypt had to be avoided in the future was learnt: the descendants of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil avoided this and furthermore were fortunate that a grown-up male successor was available until the very end of the dynasty. The second Egyptian under-age ruler, al-Malik al-Ashraf, was a mere puppet in the hands of the Mamlūks, whom the chroniclers described only ironically as "Sultan".[47] Placed on the throne at the age of six and deposed at the age of eight, he hardly left a trace in the sources.

Under-age rule and regents

Another fundamentally important aspect of under-age rule was the office of the regent(s). Contemporary observers commented upon the need for them, such as the commander of the Asadiyya corps when confronted with the infant ruler al-Malik al-Manṣūr Muḥammad of Egypt: "he is a child and this land is a borderland of Islam. A regent (*qayyim bi-l-mulk*) who unites the troops and fights with them is absolutely needed. The right way is that kingship is for this little child

[44]The Damascan succession crises were aggravated by the death of rulers who did not leave any male offspring. For instance, after the death of al-Malik al-Ashraf I in the year 635/1237, rulers were deposed on four occasions during conflicts between his brothers and nephews in under two years.

[45]Humphreys, 12.

[46]Ibn Wāṣil, III: 111.

[47]Cf. for example Abū l-Fidāʾ, Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī (d. 732/1331), *al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*, ed. n.n., volumes I–IV (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥusayniyya al-Miṣriyya, 1907), II: 184: "al-Ashraf, named the Sultan" (*al-Ashraf al-musammā bi-l-sulṭān*).

and that we nominate one of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's sons to guard him until he has grown up".[48] Such regency was assumed by one or several individuals from the young ruler's family or from the court's elite, to whom the authors of chronicles generally ascribe various terms, such as *atābak*, *wālī*, *qayyim bi-l-mulk* or by employing the verb *dabbara*, i.e. to manage or conduct the affairs of the polity. It is not clear from the sources whether these regents also acted as the child's legal guardians.

The question now arises as to what role the regent(s) played in the transition of under-age, and more often prolonged under-age, rule towards independent rule. As shown above, the young Ayyūbid rulers often had to wait until well beyond attaining majority before they were able to govern without regents. In many cases the transition was only possible once the regent(s) had died. Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir of Aleppo, for instance, was placed by his father Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn on the throne in 582/1186 at the age of fourteen. Although he shortly afterwards reached majority,[49] his tutor and regent Shujāʿ al-Dīn ʿĪsā b. Balāshū (d. 584/1188),[50] who was at the same time commander of the citadel,[51] remained in place. It was only two years later with the death of Shujāʿ al-Dīn that al-Malik al-Ẓāhir began to acquire independent rule.[52] In Homs, al-Malik al-Ashraf started his period of independent rule at the age of nineteen, the regent being killed by the Aleppian troops who conquered the town.[53] Al-Malik al-Manṣūr II of Hama had to wait until he was twenty-three years old to be able to acquire independent rule, as his mother handed rule over to him only shortly before her death.[54]

However, no example exists where a regent without family bonds sought to oust the young ruler in order to take over the throne, as occurred within the Zangid dynasty in Mosul during this period. There, the freedman Badr al-Dīn Luʾluʾ (r. 631–657/1234–1259) reigned over the realms of his former masters after he had acted as regent for the town's infant rulers.[55] That Ayyūbid regents did not tend to usurp power is also evident in cases where the young rulers acquired independent rule not by death of the regent but by the latter's resignation. The affairs of al-Malik al-ʿAzīz of Aleppo, for example, were conducted for some fifteen years by the state's strongman Ṭughrīl (d. 631/1233), a *Rūm* eunuch, who had been manumitted by al-Malik al-ʿAzīz's father.[56] Ṭughrīl handed the affairs over to al-Malik al-ʿAzīz when the latter was eighteen and lived three more years in the town.[57] The sources

[48]Ibn al-Athīr, XXII: 141.

[49]The age of majority can be derived in this and other cases from the date of marriage, which was generally concluded as soon as possible after maturity in order to guarantee male descendants. Where marriage and consummation of the marriage are separated by a considerable time-span, the date of the marriage contract alone can obviously not be taken as an indicator of the age of majority. On the case of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir cf. Ibn Shaddād, Yūsuf b. Rāfiʿ (d. 632/1234), *al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniyya wa l-maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyya*, ed. J. al-Shayyāl (Cairo: Dār al-Miṣriyya li-l-Taʾlīf wa al-Tarjama, 1964), 74.

[50]Cf. Eddé, 39, 48, 250–1.

[51]Abū Shāma, *Rawḍatayn*, III: 257.

[52]Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir obtained complete independent rule only with the death of his father some five years later (after this date coins were struck in his own name), but within the town of Aleppo the death of his tutor and regent had already offered him considerable room for manoeuvre.

[53]However, as he had to wait another twelve years until he was able to rule his home town again, which was lost to Aleppo, his independency was merely apparent in his various attempts to regain an important position within the Ayyūbid polities.

[54]Abū al-Fidāʾ, III: 196.

[55]For his rule, see D. Patton, *Badr al-Dīn Luʾluʾ: Atabeg of Mosul, 1211–1259* (Seattle, 1991).

[56]About Ṭughrīl: Ibn Wāṣil, V: 72–3; al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 631–640: 53.

[57]For the most detailed account of this transfer of power see Ibn Wāṣil, IV: 309–10.

do not inform us of the reasons al-Malik al-ʿAzīz acquired independent rule at this precise point, which occurred some three years after the ruler had attained legal majority at the age of fifteen.[58]

This relatively smooth transition to independent rule was also the outcome of the choice of regents. No set rules existed as to who was to take over this 'office', which was arguably a result of the uncertain legal status of Ayyūbid under-age rulers regarding the *de jure* conduct of rule. However, a consideration of Ayyūbid regents (cf. Table II) shows some patterns of who was entrusted with this position. The choice of a male relative as regent – as referred to by the aforementioned commander of the Asadiyya corps in Egypt – ranked at the lower end of preferences since the danger for the dynastic succession was all too obvious. The commander's words stem from the only case where this was tested in the Ayyūbid period. The chaotic circumstances surrounding the search for a regent for al-Malik al-Manṣūr of Egypt and the outcome – a break in the dynastic succession – prevented any further attempt to try out this option. After al-Manṣūr's father al-Malik al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān (r. 589–595/1193–1198) had died, the latter's will that al-Malik al-Manṣūr should become ruler with Bahāʾ al-Dīn Qarāqūsh al-Asadī (d. 597/1201)[59] acting as regent was initially implemented. However, two of his paternal uncles submitted to this state of affairs only after a long dispute, as they both demanded the regency for themselves. After a short period opposition to Qarāqūsh mounted among the elite and a further paternal uncle, al-Malik al-Afḍal of Damascus, was finally contacted to take over the regency. The elite was aware of the potential danger inherent in this solution and set three conditions of "contractual regency": the regency was limited in time to seven years (i.e. when the ruler turned sixteen), the regent was not allowed to raise the banners of the Sultan, and his name was not to be mentioned in the *khuṭba* or to appear on coins.[60] Al-Malik al-Afḍal accepted and took over the regency, but was ousted after just one year by his uncle al-Malik al-ʿĀdil who subsequently deposed al-Malik al-Manṣūr, so ending the rule of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's descendants in Egypt.[61] This episode brought also forth one of the rare instances where an under-age ruler was described in derisive terms. In words Ibn Wāṣil ascribed to al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, he was made to remark, "I think that this youngster should go to school".[62]

As a result of these events the other regents in the Ayyūbid period were members of the administrative and military elite or female family members. Under-age rule was never again accompanied by the chaotic circumstances of al-Malik al-Manṣūr's rule, and no under-age ruler – except the puppet Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf of Egypt at the end of the Ayyūbid period – was again ousted by his regent. Ayyūbid regents who were not related to the under-age ruler by family bonds were in general surprisingly low-profile figures about whom little is known. We have hardly any information, besides the odd two lines devoted to them, on the biography of regents such as the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn Yāzkūj (Aleppo, 579/1183),[63] the *amīr* Arslān Būghā

[58]Ibn Wāṣil, IV: 227.
[59]About him see al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 591–600: 312.
[60]See Ibn Wāṣil, III: 88–90, for the question of succession.
[61]See Ibn Wāṣil, III: 109–114 for al-Malik al-ʿĀdil taking power.
[62]Ibn Wāṣil, III: 111.
[63]Died 599/1203. Cf. Abū Shāma, *al-Dhayl ʿalā l-Rawḍatayn* (published as: *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa l-sābiʿ*), ed. Muḥammad al-Kawtharī (Cairo: Maktabat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1947) [reprint Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1974]: 34; al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 591–600: 421 and Eddé, 35.

Table II. Regents.

	Ruler	Regent	Regency	Relative	Position	Comment on Regent
1	al-Malik al-Manṣūr	al-Malik al-Afḍal	595–596/1198–1200	Paternal uncle	-	Ousted by al-ʿĀdil
		al-Malik al-ʿĀdil	596/1200	Paternal great uncle		Deposed al-Manṣūr
2	al-Malik al-Ashraf	Aybak	648–650/1250–1252	-	*amīr*	Dominates puppet ruler
3	al-Malik al-Ẓāhir	Sayf al-Dīn Yāzkūj	579/1183	-	*amīr*	Left with deposed ruler
		Shujāʿ al-Dīn ʿĪsā b. Balāshū	582–584/1186–1188		Chamberlain	Died
4	al-Malik al-ʿAzīz	Shihāb al-Dīn Ṭughrīl	613–628/1216–1231	-	Administrator	Stepped down when ruler 18
5	al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf	Ḍayfat Khātūn	634–640/1236–1242	Grandmother + council of 4 members	Council: 2 *amīr*s administr, vizier	Regency ended with death of grandmother
6	al-Malik al-Mujāhid Asad al-Dīn	Arslān Būghā	581–?/1186–?	-	*amīr* (Asadiyya)	Stepped down
7	al-Malik al-Ashraf	Mukhliṣ al-Dīn Ibn Qirnāṣ	644–648/1246–1248	-	Vizier	Killed in siege
8	al-Malik al-Manṣūr II	Ghāziyat Khātūn	642 ~ 655/1244 ~ 1257	Mother + council of 4 members	Council: majordomo, 2 administr., vizier	Mother stepped down shortly before death
9	al-Malik al-Muwaḥḥid	?	647–?/1249–?	?	?	?

(Homs, 581–?/1186–?),[64] the *ḥājib* or chamberlain Shujāʿ al-Dīn ʿĪsā b. Balāshū[65] (Aleppo, 582–584/1186–1188) and the vizier Mukhliṣ al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn Qirnāṣ (Homs, 644–648/1246–1248).[66] It is only with Shihāb al-Dīn Ṭughrīl (Aleppo, 613–628/1216–1231), the above-mentioned regent of al-Malik al-ʿAzīz, that we possess a more complete picture of an Ayyūbid regent.[67] Ṭughrīl had been a trusted *mamlūk* and one of the leading amirs of al-Malik al-ʿAzīz's father, al-Malik al-Ẓāhir. Of *Rūm* descent and being a eunuch, he was certainly an ideal regent with no family ties to lead him to impose his own dynasty. Ṭughrīl was praised unanimously in the texts for his extreme loyalty to his Ayyūbid patrons, which culminated in his voluntary retreat from the position when he considered the young ruler able to rule independently.

The second main option for nominating a regent was to choose one of the female relatives who played, in general, a considerable role in Ayyūbid politics. This happened in two cases where the regency was held by the ruler's mother or grandmother: Ḍayfat Khātūn,[68] the grandmother of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Aleppo in the years 634–640/1236–1242; and Ghāziyat Khātūn,[69] the mother of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II in Hama in the years 642–c.655/1244–c.1257. In both cases these regents obviously protected the interests of the under-age ruler, but the case of Ghāziyat Khātūn shows that this was no guarantee for the young ruler to obtain independent rule after reaching majority. It was only shortly before her death, when her son was already in his twenties, that she finally handed power over to him. The texts report unanimously that both female regents were supported by a council of four (male) members.[70] While these councils handled the administration, the final decision of any proposal had to be submitted to the female regent.

As we have seen, under-age rule was a frequently occurring phenomenon during the Ayyūbid period and such rulers had, despite their minority, full legal capacity to rule their realms. Under-age rulers were not put forward merely in order to legitimise the rule of their respective regent(s) or as place-holders in order to guarantee the succession of a strong candidate who would have the opportunity to assemble support, as was repeatedly the case in the following Mamlūk period. Rather, such rule was taken seriously as prelude to the young rulers' subsequent period of independent governance. Although under-age rule represented a

[64]Abū Shāma, *Rawdatayn*, III: 252–3.

[65]Died 584/1188. Cf. Abū Shāma, *Rawdatayn*, III: 257; Eddé, 39.

[66]Died 648/1248. Cf. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 661–670: 115–117 (biography of al-Malik al-Ashraf); Ibn Wāṣil, V: 371; Eddé, 144; Humphreys, 294.

[67]Died 631/1233. Cf. Ibn Wāṣil, III: 220, 237, 250–1; IV: 129, 254, 309–10; V: 9–11, 72–3 (biography), 114–117; al-Maqrīzī, Ia: 185; al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 631–640: 53; Eddé, passim, esp. 103; Humphreys, 155, 160, 166, 168, 172, 179, 182, 183.

[68]Died 640/1242. Cf. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 631–640: 412; Ibn Wāṣil, V: 312–3. On her regency cf. Eddé, 107ff.

[69]Died 655/1257. Cf. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 651–660: 208–9 with further references; Ibn Wāṣil, Paris 1703: fol. 125b.

[70]In the case of Ḍayfa Khātūn: the amir Shams al-Dīn Luʾluʾ al-Amīnī, an Armenian freedman, the amir ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿUmar b. Mujallī l-Hakkārī of Kurdish descent, the vizier Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Qiftī and the administrator and freedman Jamal al-Dawla Iqbāl al-Khātūnī, an Abysinian eunuch. In the case of Ghāziyat Khātūn: the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭughrīl, the *ustādhdār* (mayor of the palace or majordomo) of her husband, the vizier Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Tāj al-Dīn, the scholar and administrator Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī and the eunuch and administrator Shujāʿ al-Dīn Murshid al-Manṣūrī.

potentially fragile period, its transition to real power was generally conducted without substantial friction.

This rather stable situation was also a consequence of two characteristics of Ayyūbid concepts of succession and rule. First, the possibility of under-age rule could always be prevented – as described above – by activating the concept of a family empire so that brothers, cousins or uncles could take over. This played an important role in the most important places where under-age rule would have engendered serious conflicts, such as Damascus and Egypt. The possibility of switching between different concepts of succession allowed a flexible adaptation to changing demands: under-age rule occurred where it had no destabilising effects and was excluded where it posed a potential threat to the dynasty's survival.

The second characteristic touches upon the question of how to deal with the potential threats by neighbouring powers, whose interests in expansion were aroused by the accession of under-age rulers – the first set of challenges raised in the article's introduction. It is apparent throughout the dynasty's history that rival and competing family branches were, despite the intricate history of inner-Ayyūbid disputes, able to regain considerable solidarity in the face of outside threats. For example, when al-Malik al-ʿAzīz of Aleppo took power in 613/1216 at the age of two, the town turned to the Egyptian Sultan al-Malik al-ʿĀdil for protection against the imminent Rūm-Saljūq danger. Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil sent his son al-Malik al-Ashraf I, who installed a form of protectorate for several years over the Aleppian realms.[71] However, despite his strong position within the town he did not try to oust the young ruler. In the same vein, when the young ruler al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf was endangered[72] during the early years of his rule by the advancing Khwarazmian troops, al-Malik al-Manṣūr of Homs offered decisive support[73] – again without trying to oust his under-age relative.

In this regard, the Ayyūbids might be again seen as the culminating point of previous developments in the region as it was already argued above with regard to the combination of different modes of succession. The Ayyūbids continued the long-standing tradition that governed the relations between the region's petty dynasties when outside powers tried to move into the region. This mechanism has been best shown for the early sixth/twelfth century. The various Crusading and Muslim polities of the period were able to put their conflicts aside in order to form alliances against Egyptian (from the southwest), Byzantine (from the north) or Great-Saljūq (from the west) attempts to gain a foothold. The common rationale for these alliances was expressed in the period's texts with the term *lā maqām*, reflecting the fear that a great power's intrusion would leave 'no place' for any of the petty polities.[74] The Ayyūbid solidarity vis-à-vis outside threats to weakened polities within the confederation was a continuation of these political relationships.

[71]Ibn Wāṣil, III: 263–270.
[72]*Ibid.*, III: 263: "*ṭifl*", i.e. a child who had not yet reached the age of *tamyīz*.
[73]Cf. Eddé, 124–5.
[74]Cf. M. A. Köhler, *Allianzen und Verträge zwischen fränkischen und islamischen Herrschern im Vorderen Orient: eine Studie über das zwischenstaatliche Zusammenleben vom 12. bis ins 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/New York, 1991) for a detailed discussion of this issue.

Furthermore, the family bonds, which were continuously reinforced by an active marriage policy throughout the existence of the dynasty intensified this mechanism in the Ayyūbid case so that formal and informal alliances could be easily concluded between hitherto rival polities.

The flexible concept of succession combined with this solidarity within the Ayyūbid family confederation vis-à-vis external powers, not only made way for a number of under-age rulers, but also for the successful conduct of their rule. Although under-age rule was a potentially destabilising factor in personalised polities, the Ayyūbid example shows to what degree flexible and efficient solutions were at hand in order to minimise the internal and external risks inherent in these periods of weakened rule.