

*BAY'Ā: SUCCESSION, ALLEGIANCE, AND RITUALS OF LEGITIMIZATION IN THE*  
ISLAMIC WORLD

by

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(Under the Direction of Kenneth Honerkamp)

ABSTRACT

Bay'ā: Succession, Allegiance, and Rituals of Legitimization in the Islamic World presents a comprehensive overview of the origins and evolution of the ritual of bay'ā, or the Islamic oath of allegiance, from its foundations during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad to its current use by modern governments and political organizations. The intent of this work is to present a cohesive picture of its transformation from a reciprocal and contractual relationship between a prophetic leader and his community, to a highly stylized ritual of power employed for the purpose of legitimizing various rulers and systems of governance. Additionally, emphasis will be placed on both the changes to the physical presentation and ritual performance of the bay'ā through time, as well as the inherent transformation of the meaning and function of the ritual.

INDEX WORDS: Bay'ā, Islamic Ritual, Legitimization, Political Authority,  
Ceremony

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DEDICATION

To Josh, my constant companion

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The function of ritual in recreating unique and sacred moments in history also tends to convey the image of individuals and communities locked in static repetitions of formalized and mechanical practices. However, the belief that rituals maintain their form and function throughout time has been abandoned by most contemporary scholars of Ritual Studies. Regardless of a ritual's sacrosanct origins, it is imperative for rituals, and those who practice them, to possess a degree of adaptability in order to maintain relevance in highly fluctuating environments. This malleability allows rituals to be adjusted to fit existing constraints and demands; often, this process results in dramatic alterations to the original practice. Rituals, especially those that are political in nature, are constantly modified to fulfill the current needs of a community, and to provide acceptable ways of defining social boundaries and communicating political power. Political rituals are essential in displaying political authority by utilizing signs and symbolic action to emphasize a shared sense of tradition on which to base a community. According to Catherine Bell, political rituals “demonstrate the legitimacy of these values and goals by establishing their iconicity with the perceived values and orders of the cosmos.”<sup>1</sup>

One such ritual is the Islamic religio-political “oath of allegiance” or “contract” known as *bay‘a*. At once political and sacred, *bay‘a* has its origins in pre-

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.

Islamic tribal alliances, and still exists today in some areas of the Islamic world, and while *bay'a* refers to many different rituals of commercial and private transaction, the central focus here is on the use of the *bay'a* in caliphal accession to power and succession. The aim of this paper will be to examine the manner in which political rituals such as *bay'a* have been altered over time. The evolution of the rituals of caliphal accession and succession from simple yet profound displays of loyalty and obedience to God and the Prophet Muḥammad, to little more than exhibitions of political theatre, is both functional and symbolic. From a pragmatic standpoint, rituals and rites had to adapt in order to reflect the changing needs of an Islamic empire that was rapidly expanding, both geographically and demographically. This thesis intends to offer a comprehensive understanding of the ritual, and how it has been adapted throughout history to fit numerous scenarios and systems.

Chapter one, entitled *A Literary Understanding: Bay'a in the Context of the Earliest Sources*, will attempt to illustrate how the *baya* ritual was perceived and understood by early Islamic sources, including but not limited to *ḥadīth* collections, Islamic histories, and *Qur'ānic* exegesis. This chapter will serve to lay the foundation for the overall thesis by presenting the earliest understanding of the ritual and its functions from within the Islamic tradition and sets the stage for the development of the ritual during the medieval period.

Chapter two, *Ritual Development: Bay'a from Jāhiliyya to the Medieval Caliphal Age*, will present a chronological analysis of ritual development during the formative Islamic period, and will contrast the unique, particular, and simple act of the Prophetic *bay'a* with the later *bay'a* rituals of the first four caliphs, paying

particular interest to the physical presentation and performance of *bay'a*. The second section will continue to highlight the changing nature of *bay'a* ceremonies and the surrounding political rituals during the later dynastic period of the medieval caliphates. By examining the progression and elaboration of these political rituals, it can be argued that the *bay'a*, and surrounding procedures, developed from rituals of power construction into mere symbolic attempts at political legitimization through highly stylized ritual theatre which carries into the modern period.

The final section of Chapter Two will address the *bay'a* within the tradition of *Sufism*. While much of the original function and practice of the *bay'a* changed dramatically throughout the medieval period, the ritual maintained its intended purpose within *Sufi* orders. Additionally, the essential role of the *bay'a* in transmitting divine knowledge and power between disciples and their masters will be explored.

Chapter three, *Under the Shadow of God: The Bay'a in the Modern Muslim World*, explores the ways in which the *bay'a* has continued to be adapted and fashioned by leaders in the Islamic world to define and secure abstract concepts like legitimacy, loyalty, and fidelity. The first section of this chapter will deal with how and why the *bay'a* was utilized by assorted political leaders in the 20th century as a tool for cultivating nationalism and honing state-craft. The second section of the chapter intends to address the many figures that used the *bay'a* to seek political authority outside of prescribed and internationally accepted norms. The chapter will end with a section devoted to the use of the *bay'a* and its appropriation by extremist and rebel organizations in the modern Middle East.

The search for political legitimacy is a continual process. By understanding the *bay'a*, which for many Islamic countries is a fundamental piece of the political process, one can hope to contextualize and sincerely grasp the current events taking place throughout the Middle East. As the conflicts across the Middle East unfold, leaders and organizations will present their bids for power, and employ various methods for which it may be legitimized.

## CHAPTER 2

### *BAY'Ā* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EARLIEST SOURCES

The use of the *bay'ā* as an accompaniment to political recognition and acceptance did not first occur spontaneously, as the earliest Islamic sources reveal the developing intent and function of the pledge and its surrounding ritual. Early Islamic sources, such as the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth*, portray the *bay'ā* as more than a simple impromptu ritual employed to convey legitimate leadership. Rather, the use of the *bay'ā* evolved in the nascent Islamic community from pledges to accept and obey the tenets of the new faith and fight loyally and unto death in battle, to acceptance and support of new leadership. History has shown from the continual use of the *bay'ā* in the modern age that this ritual was more than a mere stopgap; it perfectly imbued acknowledgments of power with the nature and importance of oath and fidelity to both God and community.

As time passed, the *bay'ā* was established as the *sine qua non* of accession and succession ceremonies throughout the Islamic world. In fact, in examining the formative Islamic community, and how the *bay'ā* was used by the Prophet Muḥammad and his earliest followers, the pledge reveals itself as the bedrock of the entire Islamic faith. The loyalty and allegiance embedded in the *bay'ā*, and the unequal, but still reciprocal nature of the oath nurtured an atmosphere in which a community could foster and grow. This chapter will attempt to convey that while the role of the *bay'ā* was manipulated to fit contemporary needs of the early Islamic

community, it continually based itself on the concepts of loyalty, fidelity and obedience. In essence, the earliest Prophetic *bay'a* can be understood as an extension of the original oath, or “covenant (*mīthāq*) formed at the beginning of time between the souls of humans and God, at which time God asked the souls: ‘Am I not your Lord? And they replied: Yes, we testify.’”<sup>2</sup>

The Arabic term *bay'a* has numerous English translations, with the most popular being “pledge of allegiance” (*bay'a, mubāya'a*) or “oath of allegiance.”<sup>3</sup> Etymologically, *bay'a* is “derived from the verb *bā'a* (to sell), the *bay'a* embodying, like sale, an exchange of undertaking.”<sup>4</sup> There is some contention in attributing the economic connotations of the word *bay'a* to the physical handclasp that occurred between two individuals when concluding a commercial transaction, as the gesture involved the “movement of the hand and arm (*bā*).”<sup>5</sup> In his treatment of the etymological origins of the word in “*Bay'ah* “Homage”: A Proto-Arab (South-Semitic) Concept” in *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam: Studies in Ancient Arab*

*Concepts*, M.M. Bravmann writes:

the “derivation of *Bay'ah* – with reference to the hand-clasp accompanying it- from the noun *bā*, which in the interpretation of Freytag’s Lexicon (translated from the definition of the indigenous lexicographers), means ‘extensionis manus utriusque distantia’ and is of course never used with reference to the hand-clasp accompanying a contractual agreement, is unacceptable.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Malamud, “Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning: The Master-Disciple Relationship in Classical Sufism,” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 103.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, s.v. “*Bay'a*,” accessed September 22, 2012, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/baya-COM\\_0107](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/baya-COM_0107).

<sup>5</sup> M.M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam: Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 213.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 214.

While there is disagreement between Bravmann and other scholars, such as E. Tyan, regarding the connection between the idea of the handclasp and the origins of *bay'a*, there is a consensus concerning the original meaning involving contractual agreements pertaining to commerce and economic transaction.

Although linguistically the origins of *bay'a* reflect the bond of a reciprocal commercial relationship, it should not be confused with *ḥilf*, or alliance, as “significantly, the classical dictionaries do not gloss *bay'a* with *yamīn* or *ḥilf*, the clear terms for “oath,” but with *'ahd* (“contract,” “pledge,” “covenant,” “promise,” and occasionally “oath”) and *'aqd* (“contract”).”<sup>7</sup> The term *ḥilf* is found to be prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabian sources and refers to a wide array of oaths and agreements. Indeed, the *ḥilf* agreement was the fundamental instrument used in creating cohesive action and affiliations between different Bedouin tribes in ancient Arabia. *Ḥilf* agreements were responsible for forming military alliances, both temporary and permanent, and for fostering relationships of mutual cooperation between individuals or entire tribes.

Additionally, *ḥilf* agreements in pre-Islamic Arabia were accompanied by already established ritual conventions. The practice of dipping hands in the blood of a sacrificed animal may have been used to emphasize symbolic familial blood ties, essentially using the blood of the animal to form a binding contract between non-

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<sup>7</sup> Ella Landau-Tasseron, “The Religious Foundations of Political Allegiance: A Study in *Bay'a* in Pre-modern Islam,” *Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World* (2010): 1.

blood relatives.<sup>8</sup> In pre-Islamic Arabia, which lacked the presence of a dominant state, this “pledged covenant under oath” was the principal political institution and ensured a method of protection and collaboration between various tribes.<sup>9</sup>

The defining lines between oath, allegiance, covenant, and alliance are not always clearly demarcated in the early sources. However, in relation to the concept of political succession and accession, *bay‘a* refers to an agreement of a reciprocal nature between a nominated or appointed leader and the community.<sup>10</sup> The use of the word *bay‘a* in reference to a pledge of loyalty to a spiritual and political leader is an Islamic innovation, and “no secure attestations of the verb, *bāya‘a*, and the related nouns, *bay‘a* and *mubāya‘a*, are attested in Arabian languages from before the time of Muḥammad. That is, the words have not been found in pre-Islamic graffiti, inscriptions, or poems.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, it is not until after the time of the Prophet that the *bay‘a* is accepted as the ritual adopted by rulers to ascend to power.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of *bay‘a*, or the belief in a mutual contract which demands parties on both sides uphold and honor specified conditions in order to bring about a desired outcome, can be seen as a fundamental principle of Islam itself. In a basic reading of the *Qur‘ān*, the relationship between God and Muslims can be viewed as a covenant, or agreement, where right and just behavior is rewarded while negative

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<sup>8</sup>Farahi Hamid al-Din, “History, Form, Meaning, and Use of Oaths,” *Renaissance: A Monthly Islamic Journal* 19, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Marsham, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mehran Tamadonfar, *The Islamic Polity and Political Leadership: Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Pragmatism* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1989), 91.

<sup>11</sup> Marsham, 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> Landau-Tasseron, 6.

or forbidden actions are punished.<sup>13</sup> In other words, a reciprocal, though unequal, relationship is established in which both God and believers are required to fulfill sworn obligations. Performance of the *bay'ā* as a means to display allegiance to the Prophet or complete the conversion to Islam changed dramatically with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632 C.E. During Muḥammad's lifetime, the oath of allegiance provided the unique possibility of a partnership with God.

At this point in time, the changing nature of the *bay'ā* ritual and pledge can be viewed simultaneously as both a religious and political rite of submission and loyalty. The ritual grew out of a pre-Islamic environment which relied heavily on verbal communication in the forms of oral alliances, ritual, poetry and oaths. The inevitable contributions of Near Eastern and Roman customs to Arabian practices also augmented pre-Islamic political reality.<sup>14</sup> With the advent of Islam and the Prophetic revelations announced in the *Qur'ān*, *bay'ā* oaths and rituals became centered around familiar forms of commercial transactions which now reinforced the commitment between a specific leader, the Prophet Muḥammad, with his community of newly converted followers.

The earliest described use of the *bay'ā* regarded its role in conversion to Islam and in the testimony of faith. Before the *shahādah* became the standard for conversion for polytheists in the region, the *bay'ā* was the standard measure for pledging allegiance to the new religion of Islam and to its Prophet. Originally, the *bay'ā* consisted of verbally accepting the oneness, or *tawḥīd*, of God, but during the early Meccan period it took on a conditional form. In addition to embracing the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Marsham, 63.

oneness of God, followers pledged to uphold the proper moral and ethical teachings of the Prophet. As Muḥammad Yusuf Faruqi writes in “Bay’ah as a Politico-Legal Principle: Practices of the Prophet (Peace Be on Him) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs and Views of the Early fuqahā”:

Initially, this oath of allegiance was based on Shahadah (testimony), however, later according to the circumstances; he [the Prophet Muhammad] included other conditions also. An important bay’ah in the Makkan period, is known as the *Bay’ah[sic] al-Nisa*. This bay’ah fundamentally included two essentials: affirmation of tawhid and pledge to follow the correct moral behavior. Such a bay’ah was made both by men and women.<sup>15</sup>

The accounts of the *bay’at al-nisā’* vary in the sources, with some consisting of just one conditional moral behavior, while others include a more comprehensive list of regulations; generally they deal with issues of God’s oneness, and how Muslims must conduct themselves in accord with others in the community and in their understanding and relationship with God. While the stipulations of the *bay’at al-nisā’* may vary from one account to the next, a common element is present throughout – the recognition and acceptance of Muḥammad’s authority, implicitly or explicitly, is the keystone of the agreement. In essence, conversion was understood as a contract, or transaction. As Landau-Tasseron explains:

Even if not explicitly stated, conversion was clearly conceived of as a deal. A companion reports that he came to the Prophet and exchanged *Bay’a* to become a Muslim; he then enumerated the pre-Islamic customs which he forsook by his conversion. The Prophet responded, “How successful is the transaction you made!” (*mā ghabinat ṣafaqatuka*). The word used in this tradition is *ṣafaqa*, which is a purely commercial term for a transaction and, significantly, also means “hand clasp.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Yusuf Faruqi, “Bay’ah as a Politico-Legal Principle: Practices of the Prophet (Peace be on Him) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs and Views of the Early Fuqaha” *Insights* 2, no. 1 (2009): 33-56.

<sup>16</sup> Landau-Tasseron, 15.

The costs and benefits of this agreement consisted of more than spiritual rewards and abstract commitments. By swearing to uphold the tenets of the new religion, converted members were given not just divine reward and salvation, but also protection and inclusion in the new community.

Examples of the *bay'at al-nisā'* are abundant in the *ḥadīth* collections and are offered from the perspective of both male and female converts. In this case, the *ḥadīth* support the *Qur'ānic* injunction revealed in *sūra* 9:71: "The Believers, both men and women, support each other; they order what is right and forbid what is wrong, they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. (*Qur'ān* 9:71). This verse goes on to support the reciprocal nature encouraged by the *bay'a* paid to the Prophet, adding "God will give His mercy to such people; God is almighty and wise" (*Qur'ān* 9:71). Here the promise to obey and behave in a correct and upright manner is met with a reward of divine mercy from God, highlighting the expected outcome of following Islamically sanctioned behavioral precedents.

This form of conditional *bay'a* can be found in *ṣaḥīḥ* collections of *ḥadīth*. For example, *al-Bukhārī* recorded:

Narrated Jarir: I have given a pledge of allegiance to Allah's Apostle for to testify that None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and Muhammad is His Apostle, to offer prayers perfectly, to pay Zakat, to listen to and obey ( Allah's and His Prophet's orders), and to give good advice to every Muslim.<sup>17</sup>

Here, the pledge of allegiance to Muḥammad was given in conjunction with a declaration of *tawḥīd* and submission, in addition to paying alms, and serving the

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<sup>17</sup> Bukhari, Book 3, Volume 34, Hadith 366.

community. Similar examples exist in Muslim's collection; a more detailed narration is provided in the Book of *Zakāt* (*Kitab al-Zakāt*):

Malik al-Ashja'i reported: We, nine, eight or seven men, were in the company of the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) and he said: Why don't you pledge allegiance to the Messenger of Allah? – while we had recently pledged allegiance. So we said: Messenger of Allah, we have already pledged allegiance to you. He said again: Why don't you pledge allegiance to the Messenger of Allah? And we said: Messenger of Allah, we have we said: already pledged allegiance to you. He again said: Why don't you pledge allegiance to the Messenger of Allah? We stretched our hands and said: Messenger of Allah, we have already pledged allegiance to you. Now tell (on what things) should we pledge allegiance to you. He said I (You must pledge allegiance) that you would worship Allah only and would not associate with Him anything, (and observe) five prayers, and obey – (and he said one thing in an undertone) – that you would not beg people of anything. (And as a consequence of that) I saw that some of these people did not ask anyone to pick up the whip for them if it fell down.<sup>18</sup>

Again, this displays the importance of the *bay'ā* in understanding and adhering to the stated and expected moral and ethical behavior as it was revealed by Muḥammad to his followers. The last sentence, in particular, implies that the behavior of those giving this particular *bay'ā* changed as a consequence of their pledge.

In addition to the accounts in the *ḥadīth* of the use of the *bay'ā* pledge in establishing and agreeing to the newly dictated tenets of the religion, the *Qur'ān* itself contains a revelation that also addresses these concerns. Although the word *baya'a* "occurs six times, in four places, in three *sura* (*sūrat Bara'a*, or *al-Tawba*, *sūrat al-fath*, and *sūrat al-Mumtahana*, respectively: Q 9:111; Q 48:10, 18; Q 6:12), the *Sūrat al-Mumtahaha*, or women's *bay'ā*, is most closely associated with the

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<sup>18</sup> Muslim :: Book 5 : Hadith 2270.

pledge of allegiance in secondary sources.<sup>19</sup> Resembling the *bay'a* given by male members of the community, the women's *bay'a* contains additional constraints and obligations dealing with infanticide and false allegations of paternity or *buhtan* (falsehood forged).<sup>20</sup> Matters such as these were common in pre-Islamic times, or *Jāhiliyya*, and women who choose to convert to Islam had to swear to abandon these practices. Also, the pledge to fight in defense of the faith is omitted from the women's pledge, and it is the only instance in the *Qur'ān* where the verb *bay'a'a* is not linked to loyalty in conflict. Additionally, the women's pledge constitutes the only *Qur'ānic* examples of the specified conditions of the *bay'a*, as the terms for males giving the pledge are dictated in the *hadīth* and other Islamic historical traditions.

O Prophet! When believing women come to you making a pledge to you not to associate anything with God, nor steal, nor commit fornication, nor kill their children, nor bring out falsehoods that they have slanderously invented between their hands and their legs, nor disobey you in what is right, take the pledge from them (*fa-bayi hunna*) and ask forgiveness for them from God. Truly God is forgiving and merciful (*Qur'ān* 6:20).

Currently, this verse is embraced by many as an example of the central and important role of women in the early Islamic community. Here, women are pledging their faith and loyalty directly to the Messenger of God, and this act highlights the religio-political significance of women in the community. This *sūra* weaves together the themes of *tawhīd*, faithfulness, and obedience to Muḥammad, and as Barbara Freyer Stowasser writes in "The Women's *Bay'a* in Qur'an and Sira," the text thus enshrines the conditions of *umma* membership in terms of sins/crimes foresworn

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<sup>19</sup> Marsham, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Landau-Tasserion, 6.

that are applicable to all believers regardless of gender: polytheism, theft, fornication, infanticide, slander and disobedience to the Prophet.”<sup>21</sup>

Although Muḥammad accepts the *bay‘a* from both men and women, there is evidence in the *ḥadīth* that he did not enact the physical aspect of the ritual with females in refraining from the handclasp usually associated with the early pledges, unless the woman was a blood relative. *Al-Bukhārī* recorded:

Narrated Urwa: Aisha the wife of the Prophet, said “Allah’s Apostle used to examine the believing women who migrated to him in accordance with this Verse: ‘O Prophet! When believing women come to you to take the oath of allegiance to you... Verily! Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful. (60.12) ‘Aisha said, “And if any of the believing women accepted the condition (assigned in the above-mentioned Verse), Allah’s Apostle would say to her. “I have accepted your pledge of allegiance.” “He would only say that, for, by Allah, his hand never touched, any lady during that pledge of allegiance. He did not receive their pledge except by saying, “I have accepted your pledge of allegiance for that.”<sup>22</sup>

There are varying accounts of how the *bay‘a* ritual was performed, ranging from the use of some sort of cover for the hands, usually a piece of cloth or mantle, to the use of water as a vehicle for the actual handshake.<sup>23</sup>

As mentioned previously, aside from *surat al-mumtahaha*, the additional occurrences of the *bay‘a* in the *Qur‘ān* deal with military conflicts and loyalty during battle. Often, those Muslims who intended to engage in battle would gather beforehand and pledge their allegiance to Muḥammad and vow to fight until death.

In *sūrat bara‘a*, *ayah* 111 states:

Truly God has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth that they will have Paradise, fighting in the way of God, killing and being

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Freyer Stowasser, “The Women’s Bay‘a in Qur‘an and Sira” *The Muslim World* 99, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>22</sup> Bukhari:Book 6:Volume 60 Hadith 414.

<sup>23</sup> Stowasser, 92.

killed; a promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qur'an; and who is more faithful to His covenant than God? Rejoice, therefore, in the bargain (bay') that you have made (bay'a'tum bihi); that is the great victory.

The *bay'a* to fight contains the same degree of reciprocity inherent in previously mentioned *bay'āt*. In exchange for perseverance and possible sacrifice in battle, the martyr receives the divine reward of paradise. The *Qur'ān* describes this exchange in strictly commercial language. Andrew Marsham points out that "God is understood to have 'bought' (*ishtara*) the believers' lives (or souls) and they are instructed to 'rejoice in the bargain which you have contracted.'"<sup>24</sup>

The pledge contained in *surat bara'a* is also known as the *bay'at al-'Aqaba*, as the *bay'a* was performed at *al-'Aqaba* between the people of Medina and Muḥammad. Before the nascent Muslim community emigrated to Medina in 622 C.E., several meetings were held between the inhabitants of Medina and Muḥammad, and his followers, to negotiate the terms of cohabitation in the new city. These clandestine meetings are usually referred to as the first and second *'Aqaba*, as the meetings took place on "a mountain path (*'Aqaba* in Arabic)."<sup>25</sup> At the second *al-'Aqaba*, the conditions were agreed upon and the people of Medina pledged to protect the Prophet Muḥammad from any armed aggression by the Meccans, as well as any threat posed by non-Arab tribes, in return for divine reward and eternal paradise.

In addition to the *bay'at al-'Aqaba*, which preceded the emigration to Medina, there was also a particular *bay'a* established for those nomadic peoples that wished

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<sup>24</sup> Marsham, 45.

<sup>25</sup> Landau-Tasseran, 16.

to adhere to the new religion, or to simply form political alliances, but who did not wish to relocate from their desert dwellings to Medina. Subsequently, Muḥammad allowed a “Bedouin *bay‘a*” or *bay‘a a‘rabiyya*, which permitted the Bedouin tribes to stay true to their nomadic roots and still be considered full members of the new Muslim community, in exchange for their pledge to return if and when the Prophet declared a military campaign.<sup>26</sup>

Another early *bay‘a* concerning behavior during battle is also mentioned in a *Qur‘ānic* revelation. The “pledge under the tree”<sup>27</sup> or the *bay‘at al-Riḍwān* (the pledge of Divine Approval or Pleasure) was performed during the campaign of *al-Ḥudaybiyya*, a well about five miles outside of the city of Mecca. In 628 C.E. the Muslim forces left Medina with the intent of performing the *umrah*, or lesser pilgrimage, to Mecca. There is evidence in the sources that this pilgrimage was actually a military expedition, or *ghazwah*, thinly disguised as an *umrah*.<sup>28</sup> When the unavoidable conflict between the Muslim expedition and the Meccans ensues, negotiations are attempted between the two groups, which results in the mistaken assumption that *‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān* had been murdered in Mecca by the *Quraysh* while he was negotiating the terms of pilgrimage.

In retaliation, Muḥammad and his followers vowed to avenge *‘Uthmān*’s death and to attack the Meccans. The *Bay‘at al-riḍwān* echoes similar sentiments found in the earlier *Bay‘at al-‘Aqaba*, to not flee during battle and to fight until victory or

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<sup>26</sup> Landau-Tasseron, 18.

<sup>27</sup> From al-Waqidi – “The people gave a pledge to the Messenger of God under a green tree at that time.” 297.

<sup>28</sup> Bukhari mentions the “Ghazwa of al-Hudaibiya” as does Al-Waqidi in the kitab al-Maghazi (242), and Ibn Kathir in *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, 3:224.

death. *Al-Waqidi* records in his *Kitab al-Maghazi*, “The Messenger of God was accepting the pledge of the people at that time, and *Umar b. al-Khattab* took his hand for the oath that they would not flee. Someone said that it was an agreement unto death.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, to highlight the symbolic importance of the *bay‘a*,

Muhammad carried out ‘Uthman’s pledge in absentia:

When ‘Uthman returned, the Messenger of God brought him to the tree of allegiance. But, before that, when the people gave their pledge, the Prophet said: Indeed, Uthman acts in accordance with the needs of God and his Messenger, so I shall pledge for him, and he struck his right hand on his left.<sup>30</sup>

The *bay‘a* under the tree also highlights the unique and highly sacred components of the Prophetic *bay‘a*. When *bay‘a* was performed in allegiance to the Prophet it was believed that the pledge was also made with God, and the *sūrat al-fath* (48:10) concerning *al-Ḥudaybiyyah* displays as much:

Verily, whoever makes a pledge to you (*yubāyi‘ūnaka*), in truth makes a pledge to God (*yubāyi‘ūna ‘llāh*): the hand of God is above their hands (*yadu’ llāhi fawqa aydiyhim*). Whoever betrays [it] (*nakatha*) in truth betrays his own soul and whoever fulfills what he has covenanted with God, He will grant him a great reward (*ajran ‘azīman*).<sup>31</sup>

Through the *Qur’ānic* revelations, and the living presence of the Prophet, *bay‘a* pledges and rituals retained a sacred aspect or “Divine association,” one that could not be replicated after the death of the seal of the Prophets.<sup>32</sup> The Prophet provided a direct line of communication, conveying the promises and desires of God, to the community of believers. Subsequently, exchanging *bay‘a* with the Prophet was

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<sup>29</sup> Al-Waqidi, 297.

<sup>30</sup> Waqidi, 297.

<sup>31</sup> Marsham, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Anwar G. Chejne, *Succession to the Rule in Islam with Special Reference to the Early ‘Abbasid Period* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1960), 27.

tantamount to exchanging pledges directly with God.<sup>33</sup> *Sūrat al-Fath* continues with the identical themes of reciprocity and reward by God to those who pledged and upheld their promises on the battlefield, although this time the reward for both is tranquility and strategic victory, as “Certainly God was pleased with the believers when they made the pledge to you (*yubayi unaka*) under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility for them, and rewarded them with a nearby victory.”<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

The earliest accounts of the use of the *bay‘a* by Muḥammad in the *Qur‘ān* and *ḥadīth* illustrate how the verbal pledge and physical handclasp were used in establishing the tenets of the new religion of Islam. The Prophetic *bay‘a* was unique; it was intimate and specific to the individuals taking the pledge, and always existed within a broader context of the developing circumstances of the early community. It is logical to expect the nature of the *bay‘a* to evolve with the changing political structures brought about by the introduction of Islam. The qualities adherents swore to uphold during the *bay‘a*, those of loyalty to God and his Prophet, as well as obedience and acceptance of their leadership, were essential to the promulgation of the new faith in the region, and they attest to the hostilities present at the time toward Islam. The nature of the *bay‘a* may have been completely different if Muḥammad and his followers did not face such violence and subjugation for embracing the Prophet’s message.

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<sup>33</sup> Landau-Tasserion, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Quran 48:18.

The early *bay'ā* also sets a precedent of inclusion, albeit not one always followed in the years to come. *Bay'ā* was a requirement for all, men and women, and was even expected of those Bedouins who wished to make a pact with the Prophet. It also transcended socioeconomic boundaries, as it was not something exclusive, only to be performed by the elite, but was required of all economic classes. Although some pledges were performed by groups of people at once, they still retained their intimacy and reaffirmed loyalty, obedience, and fidelity. These early converts made a personal and reflective choice to embrace Muḥammad as both their spiritual and political leader.

Many of these characteristics of the *bay'ā* and its surrounding rituals will change drastically as time progresses. As the Islamic empire grows, both in area and population, the *bay'ā* will lose its universal application, and will come to be regarded as more affirmative than interactive. With time, the *bay'ā* ceremony will grow to include much pomp and circumstance, reducing the significance of the personal commitment present in the original pledge. Additionally, the divine rewards promised in the Prophetic *bay'ā* will disappear, replaced with the mundane assurances of appointed leaders to rule with justice and integrity, shifting the role of the *bay'ā* from one of interactive personal participation to mass ceremonial observance.

## CHAPTER 3

### RITUAL DEVELOPMENT: *BAY'Ā* FROM *JĀHILIYYA* TO THE MEDIEVAL CALIPHAL AGE

This chapter's first section will address the evolution of accession and succession rituals in the early Islamic community. Through a chronological analysis of ritual development during the formative period, the unique, particular, and simple act of the Prophetic *bay'ā* will be contrasted with the later rituals of the first four caliphs. The second section will continue to highlight the changing nature of *bay'ā* ceremonies and the surrounding political rituals during the later dynastic period of the medieval caliphates. By examining the progression and elaboration of these political rituals, it can be argued that the *bay'ā*, and surrounding procedures, evolved from rituals of power construction to mere symbolic attempts at political legitimization through highly stylized ritual theatre. Additionally, the introduction of dynastic succession by the Umayyad Caliphate fundamentally altered the rituals by incorporating steps attempting to ensure the acceptance of patrimonial nominations by the community at large. Symbolically, the language and ritual displays became more elaborate and grand in an attempt to define the relationship between the caliph and the community and to imbue a hereditary act of appointment with an air of collective selection.

While many shadows of pre-Islamic customs still lingered over Prophetic *bay'ā* rituals, the pledges were now encased within an Islamic framework which

emphasized adherence to Islamic practices such as “the duties to ‘perform prayer’ (*iqāmat al-salāt*), ‘give charity’ (*ītā’ al-zakāt*), ‘hear and obey’ (*al-sam ‘wa’l-tā’a*) and ‘help in war’ (*al-nuṣra*), all of which echo the terse terminology of the *Qur’ān*.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to the impetus to abide by Islamic practices, the Prophet also sought to further remove any affiliations from pledges of tribal alliance that existed in *Jāhiliyya*. As mentioned in chapter one, many of the *ḥilf* alliances involved rituals and oaths, therefore the Prophet saw fit to remove these from *bay’a* pledges directed toward him. Rather, pledges or conversions to Islam would be completed by a simple handclasp. In effect, the Prophet stripped away the pre-existing variables of already established rituals and re-ensconced *bay’a* within the reciprocal, and familiar, nature of a business agreement.<sup>36</sup> This shift served a dual function by both providing a ritual practice resembling a well-established tradition while also creating a fully Islamic performative medium in which to acknowledge authority. Stitching together routine customs with newly embodied practices creates ritual continuity, which highlights timeless and enduring patterns, and connects “past, present, and future, abrogating history and time.”<sup>37</sup>

At this point, the rituals surrounding political accession are unique; as the Prophet Muḥammad is the initial catalyst of Islam, these rituals and oaths do not pertain to the concept of succession, but rather are simply acknowledgements of position and authority of the new religion, its tenets and its Prophet. The future

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<sup>35</sup> Marsham, 64.

<sup>36</sup> Landau-Tasseron, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Myerhoff, “A Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama,” in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 152.

conflicts arising from issues of succession to rule, elections, and nominations are not yet present, as the Prophet's nomination in the eyes of his followers was directly appointed from God. Subsequently, it is believed that as the last prophet, or the "seal of the prophets," Muḥammad received his authority to lead and govern the new community from a divine mandate.

In other words, the *bay'ā* pledge and ritual given to the Prophet was sacred, transcending but not omitting profane commitments, as *bay'ā* conveyed a commitment to Islam, the community and the Prophet. Subsequently, future leaders of the *umma* are not regarded as prophets or charismatic personalities, but as *khalīfa*, or in full, *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*, or "successor to the Prophet."<sup>38</sup> Since then *khalīfat rasūl Allāh* are not regarded as prophets, or as having the same relationship to God as Muḥammad, *bay'ā* pledges and rituals of succession lack the dimension of religious conversion shown to the Prophet. The declaration of faith, or *shahāda*, comes to replace the *bay'ā* as the procedure for conversion after the Prophet's death in 632 C.E.<sup>39</sup> This change is just one example of the manner in which *bay'ā* procedures will evolve through the rule of the *Rāshidūn* and into subsequent caliphates.

Indeed, the objectives of political rituals such as *bay'ā*, assume different priorities after the Prophet's death. The selection of a caliph is now the responsibility of the community, and in Sunni political theory, the *bay'ā* doctrine refers to the responsibility and obligation to confirm the nominee. It is held that

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: the Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 12.

<sup>39</sup> Landau-Tasseran, 20.

“even though *bay‘ah*, like *shura* and *ijma*, is an acknowledgement of the community’s right to contribute to the process of choosing the caliph, it does not presuppose any particular method.”<sup>40</sup> In fact, the *Qur‘ān* itself does not address the concept of the verb *bāya‘a* in reference to a pledge taken to confirm a successor to power. As Andrew Marsham writes in *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*:

Whereas the *Qur‘ān* attests to the use of the verb *bāya‘a* in the sense of (1) an oath of allegiance to the leader of the *umma* taken from those seeking to join it and (2) an oath of loyalty in war taken from existing members of the polity, it makes no mention of the third sense in which it is used in the sources for the first decades of Islam: a pledge taken to recognize a new leader of the *umma*. However, once the idea of leadership of the polity by one man had been accepted, this third use of the term *bāya‘a* was a logical consequence of the first: because a pledge of allegiance expressed obligations owed to an individual, that individual’s death ended the covenant and his successor required a new pledge.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, it must be restated that the *bay‘a* should not be viewed as a general election, but as the acceptance by the community, or particular people of importance, of a ruler who gained authority through inheritance, usurpation, or nomination.<sup>42</sup>

The first succession, and the official start of the Caliphal Age, began after the death of the Prophet in 632 C.E. with the nomination and acceptance of his closest companion, *Abū Bakr as-Siddiq* in the city of Medina. The selection of *Abū Bakr* arose from a turbulent meeting of Muslim elites at the *saqīfa*, or shelter, of the *Banū Sā‘ida*, which featured a faction who strongly pushed for his nomination.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup> Tamadonfar, 91.

<sup>41</sup> Marsham, 68.

<sup>42</sup> S.D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill 1966), 203.

<sup>43</sup> Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 55.

events surrounding the nomination and acceptance of *Abū Bakr* as the first caliph highlight the use of *bayʿa* as a means of transferring power in order to avoid what was considered a dangerous vacuum in political leadership.

This fear of a political vacancy created a general sense of urgency on the part of *ʿUmar b. al-Khattab*, a future caliph himself, to have the pledge of allegiance and ritual handclasp performed quickly in order to thwart any other potential successors, as he is reported to have stated, “We feared that if we left the people without a pledge of allegiance they might after our departure suddenly make a pledge. We would then have had either to follow them in [a choice] with which we were not pleased, or to oppose them, and evil (*fasād*) would have resulted.”<sup>44</sup> The events surrounding the nomination and acceptance of *Abū Bakr* as the first caliph highlight the use of *bayʿa* as a means of expediently transferring power. The ritual served as “a vehicle for securing loyalties of the citizens in the name of God and reducing the chances of rebellion.”<sup>45</sup> The early sources indicate that the *bayʿa* pledge and ritual surrounding his confirmation mimicked the simple physical gesture of the Prophetic *bayʿa*, in that it was performed with an oral pledge and a simple handclasp between *Abū Bakr*, *ʿUmar b. al-Khattab*, and other leading elites.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, the ritual now required Muslims who had already converted and committed themselves to the *umma* to reaffirm their loyalty to the newly appointed leader, either through delegations sent out by *Abū Bakr*, or by *Ḥijāzī*

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Liyakat N. Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Marsham, 69.

nomads seeking to renegotiate alliances with Medina.<sup>47</sup> Already, only one succession removed from the person of the Prophet, the rituals of accession are changing in order to recreate the authority of the original Prophetic *bay'a*, and to establish a sense of continuity and political legitimacy. The use of ritual symbolism as a means of communication in the transfer of power from one leader to the next cannot be overstated; as David Kertzer writes in *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, “rituals express the continuity of positions of authority in the fact of the comings and goings of their occupants.”<sup>48</sup> In a sense, *bay'a* and other rituals of accession can be viewed as methods of communicating power and authority not just to the individual in question, but to the position, in effect imbuing the “office” itself with a sacrosanct nature.

The subsequent succession of *'Umar*, after the death of *Abū Bakr*, as the second Caliph was one of appointment, as *Abū Bakr* neither sought out the community's consultation or consensus. It was only after already coming to a decision on *'Umar's* nomination that *Abū Bakr* sought counsel with *'Ābd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf* and *'Uthmān ibn 'Affān*. A formal *bay'a* ceremony involving *'Umar's* succession is not found in the sources, or as Marsham writes:

The tradition remembered this as a succession by *Abū Bakr's* nomination, after a consultation with a few of the leading Muslims. It may have been; it is likely that the word of the incumbent leader counted for something; the right of a ruler to appoint his heir was a well-established principle of the Near East, and an unusual feature of the traditions about *'Umar* is that no mention is made of a *bay'a* to him.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Marsham, 65.

<sup>48</sup> David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1988), 26.

<sup>49</sup> Marsham, 69.

However, while *'Umar's* rise to caliph witnessed no significant changes to the actual rituals of accession, during his years as head of the *umma* he did attempt to standardize the procedure for future caliphal appointments.

This standardized method included the use of *shūrā*, or the *Qur'anic* institution of consultation.<sup>50</sup> 'Umar is said to have "named six leading Muslims to consult together and make a choice from among themselves accordingly. It is questionable, though, what exactly later calls for *shūrā* intended."<sup>51</sup>

Accounts of the *shūrā* tend to focus most heavily on the individuals involved and the contest for nomination waged between the Prophet's cousin *'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* and *'Uthmān*, and detailed reports of the rituals of succession are vague.<sup>52</sup> However, it is mentioned that *'Abd al-Raḥmān* announced the *shūrā's* choice of *'Uthmān* at a public meeting in the mosque with both candidates present. Delivering the nomination in such a way put tremendous pressure on *'Alī* to publicly and immediately pledge his *bay'a* to *'Uthmān*, which consisted of the established handclasp and oath.

This public display of *'Alī's bay'a* to *'Uthmān* can be viewed as an attempt to employ the ritual not only to fill a political vacuum or as a means to transfer caliphal authority, but also as a ritual act of submission. In *'Alī's* choosing to acknowledge *'Uthmān's* future role as leader of the Muslim community, it was hoped that any factions who would support rebellion would be placated. In effect, the ritual of succession is used in this instance to quell

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<sup>50</sup> Tamadonfar, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Hawting, 95.

<sup>52</sup> The council consisted of six members, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, 'Uthmān, 'Alī and al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥa. Madelung, 71.

communal anxiety and anger, and to ground change while establishing order.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the transfer of *'Uthmān* into a new place in the social order creates a crisis because “any change in status involves a readjustment of the entire scheme; this readjustment is effected performatively” – that is, through ritual.<sup>54</sup>

However, while rituals are key components of establishing order and fostering communal solidarity, they are not guarantees of political stability, as is shown by the assassination of *'Uthmān* on 18 *Dhū al-Hijja* 35 (June 17, 656 C.E.). With the appointment of the Prophet’s son-in-law and cousin, *'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*, the pledge of allegiance as a public display of solidarity took on added importance, as the factional disputes amongst the community had reached an apex with the emergence of several rival candidates.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, *'Alī* demanded pledges of loyalty from surrounding garrison camps, or *amṣār*, as well as outlying provinces, and loyalists were often rewarded with high ranking positions of authority. Again, there is not much mention made of the ritual itself, though the fact “that the pledge was concluded by a hand gesture is also in little doubt – all the evidence for pre-Islamic pacts indicates that this is how such pacts were contracted and the tradition is consistent on this point for early Islam.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ronald Grimes, *Rite Out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 144.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 187.

<sup>55</sup> Marsham, 71.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

Much of the early changes imposed upon the ritual of *bay'a* can be partially attributed to the rapid geographic and demographic expansion of the Islamic sphere of influence and rule. With the size and population of the empire expanding at a rapid rate, the ability to involve or inform the entire community of changes in succession required alterations to established rituals. With such a large and scattered population, it became impossible for every Muslim to publicly swear an individual oath of allegiance, as "a common belief was that most of the Islamic community should perform the *bay'a*, as it was considered an Islamic duty for both men and women."<sup>57</sup>

After the period of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, or *al-khulafā al-rāshidūn*, the nature of succession and ceremonies of accession, such as the *bay'a*, began to take on a different quality. Although the process had even from the first never been one of general election, there were degrees of consultation and discourse on the occasion of *'Uthmān's* accession. Aside from *Alī*, the Islamic power structure was not one based on direct heredity or genealogy, a point held very strongly by the first three caliphs. However, this precedent was to change dramatically with the advent of future dynasties, such as the Umayyad Caliphate (660-750 C.E.).

#### RITUALS CHANGES IN DYNASTIC CALIPHATES

Dynastic succession became the standard mode of power transfer in 660 C.E. after the end of the first civil war, with the reign of the *Sufyanid Umayyads*. The then- governor of Syria, *Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān* (r. 661-80),

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<sup>57</sup>Eli Podeh, "The *bay'a*: Modern Political Uses of Islamic Ritual in the Arab World," *Die Welt des Islams* 50 (2010): 124.

appointed himself caliph and moved the geographical capital of the Islamic empire to Damascus, beginning the *Umayyad* dynasty (661-750).<sup>58</sup> This move resulted in a change of location for the ceremony and rituals of succession as well, from the city of Medina in Arabia, which was still under the control of ‘*Alī*’s forces, to Jerusalem, which was and is still today a highly venerated city for Muslims.<sup>59</sup> Although the available sources concerning *bay‘a* rituals are very limited, the accession ritual of *Mu‘āwiya* is narrated in detail in the “Maronite Chronicle,” a contemporaneous source written by an anonymous Maronite Christian, most likely between 664 and 727 C.E.<sup>60</sup> The “Maronite Chronicle” is “a universal chronicle in Syriac, the extant part of which covers a millennium or so, from the time of Alexander the Great to the seventh century. The principal sources used are Eusebius’ *Chronicle* and the *Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret*.”<sup>61</sup>

Certain aspects of *Mu‘āwiya*’s accession ceremony clearly reflect the *bay‘a* rituals of his predecessors, and the reciprocal vocal oath is still the keystone of the performance. *Mu‘āwiya* reenacts the precedents set before him, embracing the mutually beneficial nature of the *bay‘a* pledge by affirming his own commitment to just rule, promising “pensions would be paid on time, troops would not be detained on the frontiers unnecessarily, and war would be carried out in the enemy’s territory. It was after these promises that *Mu‘āwiya* announced, ‘So get up and

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<sup>58</sup> Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>59</sup> Jacob Lassner and Michael Bonner, *Islam in the Middle Ages: The Origins and Shaping of Classical Islamic Civilization* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 94.

<sup>60</sup> Marsham, 86.

<sup>61</sup> James Howard-Johnston, *Witness to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 175.

exchange pledges [with me].”<sup>62</sup> Promising to uphold justice and to implement the examples set forth in the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna* (*‘alā al-kitāb wa-al-sunna*) of the Prophet was established practice long before *Mu‘āwiya’s* rule. *Abū Bakr* made similar claims when he delivered his inauguration speech, pledging “to protect the rights of the weaker members of the community and to follow in the Prophet’s footsteps as best he could. By this he implied that the community’s obedience to him was conditioned on his own conduct.”<sup>63</sup> *‘Umar* is also credited with a similar statement to “fear Allah, to respect the rights of the Immigrants (*muhājirūn*) and Helpers (*anṣār*), not to overtax his subjects and to fulfill the obligations towards the Protected Religions (*ahl al-dhimma*).”<sup>64</sup>

However, while the fundamental exchange of oaths is still paramount, the ritual does assume supplementary rites, and *Mu‘āwiya’s* accession in Jerusalem is more detailed and intricate than the simple oath of allegiance and handclasp of the Prophet and first four caliphs. *Al-Maqdisī* reports that the ceremony was conducted in the newly rebuilt mosque on the Temple Mount, and that *Mu‘āwiya* offered prayers at both Golgotha and Mary’s tomb.<sup>65</sup> The English translation of the Maronite Chronicle relates,

Many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made *Mu‘āwiya* king and he went up and sat on Golgotha; he prayed there, and went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary to pray in it ... In July of the same year (660) the emirs and many Arabs gathered and proffered their right hand to *Mu‘āwiya*. Then an order went out that he should be

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<sup>62</sup> Landau-Tasserion, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Marsham, 88.

proclaimed king in all the villages and cities of his dominion and they should make acclamations and invocations to him.<sup>66</sup>

Here, the rituals of accession move beyond the linguistic nature and handshake of the original Islamic *bay'a*. While the oath and handclasp are still the fundamental act of the ritual, *Mu'āwiya* took great care to display reverence to the People of the Book that populated the region with his prayers at Golgotha and Gethsemane, “displaying due reverence to Christian holy places, but [implicitly putting] Christ and his mother on the same (human) plane.”<sup>67</sup>

Thus, *Mu'āwiya's* accession ritual serves the dual function of the metaphorical and the referential.<sup>68</sup> In other words, the referential language is the actual *bay'a* or oath, being the linguistic context of the ritual that states clearly the relationship and roles between the caliph, *Mu'āwiya*, and his community. The “Maronite Chronicle” states that “*Mu'āwiya* went down to *al-Hīra*, where all the nomad (*Ṭayyāyē*) forces there pledged allegiance to him (lit. ‘proffered their hand to him,’ *yahbw leh idā*) whereupon he returned to Damascus.”<sup>69</sup> The poetic or metaphorical aspect of the ritual refers to the nonlinguistic context and its intended significance, such as the display of prayers at the tomb of Mary to symbolize respect to Christian beliefs. Taking this symbolism one step further, Clifford Geertz’s concept of “Deep Play” or the “conception of a hidden or latent meaning that contradicts or differs from the manifest” becomes apparent.<sup>70</sup> Although on one level

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<sup>66</sup> Howard-Johnston, 178.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph R. Gusfield and Jerzy Michalowicz, “Secular Symbolism: Studies of Ritual, Ceremony and the Symbolic Order in Modern Life” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10 (1984), 423.

<sup>69</sup> Marsham, 87.

<sup>70</sup> Gusfield and Michalowicz, 419.

*Mu'āwiyā's* actions can be regarded as paying due respect to another tradition, the symbolism can also be seen as an attempt to engage and display authority over all the peoples in the region regardless of their religious alliances, creating a subtle bid for legitimatization.<sup>71</sup>

Although some additions to the accession ceremony inject subtle nuances in an attempt to communicate legitimate authority, the introduction of dynastic succession by the *Umayyad* dynasty was a blatant attempt to control the seat of power for future generations. While the *bay'a's* ritual was not to be confused with a general election, we have already seen that there had been, on occasion, a degree of consultation regarding appointed nominations. By contrast, the move toward dynastic succession would deny the family and clan of the Prophet of leadership of the *umma* for the majority of ninety years.<sup>72</sup> In fact, the desire to return to a system of consensus and consultation became the rallying cry and political slogan of many rebel groups.<sup>73</sup> The succeeding civil wars and turbulent history of Islamic leadership is proof that while political rituals, both sacred and secular, establish and help to define the boundaries and margins of power and community, they are not immune to conflict or protest, or as Bell writes: "Rituals meant to establish a particular power relationship are not invulnerable to being challenged, inverted, or completely thwarted by counteractions."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> For further discussion of "Deep Play" see Chapter 15 "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight" in Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

<sup>72</sup> Lassner and Bonner, 96.

<sup>73</sup> Landau-Tasseron, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Bell, 132.

One of the most striking changes to the *bay'ā* ritual made by the *Umayyads* was the process of paying allegiance to the nominated caliph while the incumbent leader was still living. In other words, the *Umayyads* introduced “the custom of willing the Caliphate by means of a contract ( *'ahd*), or will ( *waṣīyah*).”<sup>75</sup> This succession arrangement, known as *wilāyat al-'ahd* or “succession to, or possession of the covenant,” became the accepted procedure for securing future caliphal positions.<sup>76</sup> In effect, a contractual agreement was created between the current and future caliphs, and the caliph became the only individual with the authority to enter into such a contract.<sup>77</sup> The future nominee would take on the title of *walī al-'ahd*, or “the one upon whom the covenant is conferred.”<sup>78</sup>

By introducing the practice of dynastic succession through the concept of *wilāyat al-'ahd* the function of the oath of allegiance and accession ritual changed at a basic level. Rather than continuing to be the springboard by which authority was conveyed and accepted, the *bay'ā* became merely an acknowledgement of an already appointed power shift, or as Anwar Chejne writes in *Succession to the Rule in Islam*, “The *bay'ah* became an accessory to nomination rather than the fountain from which authority is derived.”<sup>79</sup> The rituals which comprised the accession ceremony became more proclamatory in nature when contrasted with the *bay'ā* rituals of the early Islamic community.

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<sup>75</sup> Chejne, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Tamadonfar, 114.

<sup>77</sup> Chejne, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 49.

*Mu'āwiya* invoked the method of *wilāyat al-'ahd*, granting succession to his son *Yazīd* while he was still alive, a move that was viewed with great consternation as it elicited fears of the possibility of a hereditary monarchy. Aside from his personal designation, *Mu'āwiya* is said to have also employed the use of bribery and threats in order to effectively secure the position for his heir, and with his death in *Rajab* 60/April 680, *Yazīd* ascended to power.<sup>80</sup> The practice of *wilāyat al-'ahd* became standard procedure for the *Umayyads*, as Marsham writes in the chapter “Marwanid Rituals of Accession and Succession”:

There were only five occasions in the Umayyad Period where there was no *walī al-'ahd*: the accession of *Mu'āwiya* in c. 660-1; the election of *Marwān b. al-Ḥakam* in 684 near Damascus; and the accessions of *Yazīd* III, *Marwān II* and *Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd*, which all took place in the anarchy of 744 (though some, clearly spurious, traditions assert that *Marwān II* had been formally nominated to succeed *al-Ḥakam* and *'Uthmān b. al-Walīd*). In all other cases, the death of the previous incumbent was the starting-point for the ritual of the accession of his nominated successor.<sup>81</sup>

The practice would be adopted and carried out by future caliphates, such as the *Abbasid* Dynasty.

During the *Abbasid* Caliphate, the appointment of the *walī al-'ahd* was an essential step in ensuring a successfully controlled transfer of authority, and also played a critical role in maintaining political stability in Baghdad. The heir apparent would first be appointed by the ruling caliph, who then had to guarantee the *walī al-'ahd's* acceptance “by obtaining the *bay'a* from various officials and

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<sup>80</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East From the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (New York: Longman Inc. 1968), 89.

<sup>81</sup> Marsham, 137.

ulama that were closely associated with the household of the *dār al-khilāfa*.”<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, the actual declaration of the *bay‘a*, once essentially a simple pledge of “I render the oath of allegiance” became more embellished under the *Abbasids*.<sup>83</sup> Subsequently, the public was informed of the nomination by announcements during the Friday *khuṭba*. Once the appointment of the *walī al-‘ahd* became official, the process had to be repeated upon his actual accession to power once the ruling caliph died or became ill.<sup>84</sup>

According to the chroniclers, a general formula was applied to the *Abbasid* accession rituals. The doors to the caliphal palace were closed to the public until court officials, the chief *qādī*, and family members delivered the *bay‘a* to the *walī al-‘ahd* in a private ceremony.<sup>85</sup> This private ceremony, known as the “notables’ ceremony” or *bay‘at al-khāssa* or *bay‘at al-in‘iqād*, was followed by a public community ceremony or *bay‘at al-‘amma* or *bay‘at al-tā‘a*.<sup>86</sup> The community ceremony consisted of an audience of people delivering the *bay‘a* to the nomination, succeeded by a distribution of money from the *minbars* after Friday prayers.<sup>87</sup>

The practice of holding both a private, secluded *bay‘a* ceremony and a secondary public event was later adopted and elaborated by the Ottomans. Commencing around the time of Sultan *Bayezid* II (1418-1512), the initial private *bay‘a* ritual was held among selected advisors and officials in Istanbul at the

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<sup>82</sup> Eric J. Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in his Place: Power, Authority, and the Late Abbasid Caliphate* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2010), 187.

<sup>83</sup> Chejne, 53.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>85</sup> Hanne, 187.

<sup>86</sup> Podeh, 124.

<sup>87</sup> Hanne, 187.

Topkapi Palace in a confidential space. Shown below is the private ceremony of “*Sultan Vahdeddin*, the last accession ceremony in Ottoman history.”<sup>88</sup>

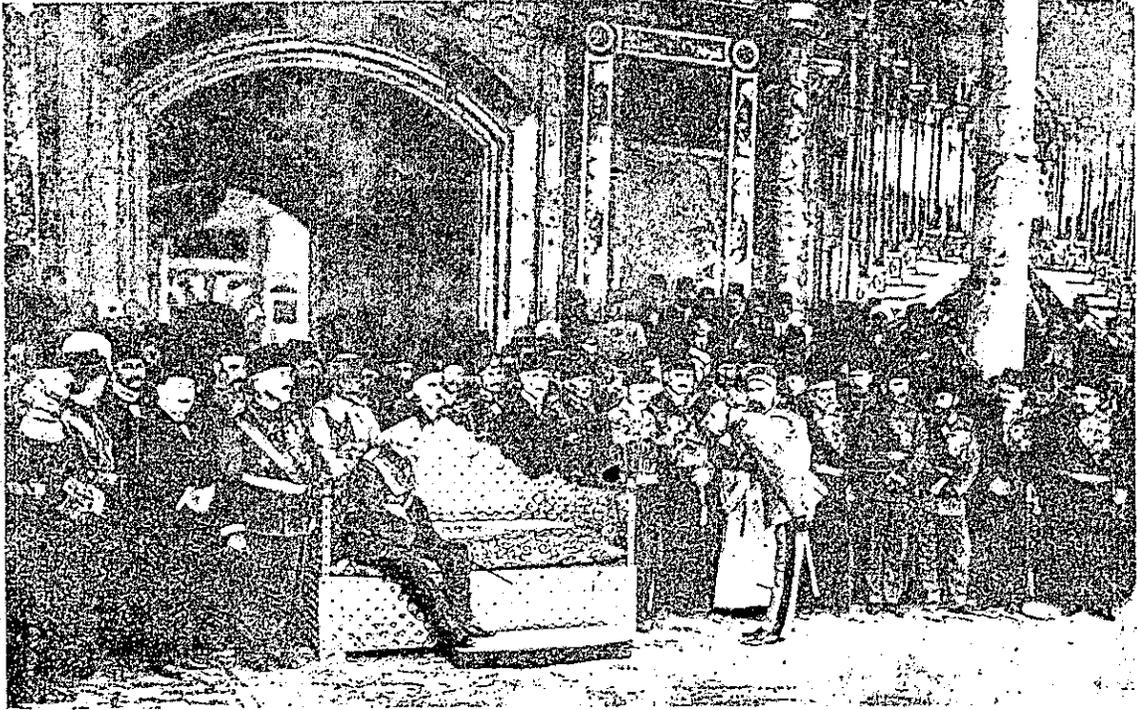


Figure 1: *Sultan Vahdeddin*, the last accession ceremony in Ottoman history

The ritual culminated in a 101-gun salute which declared the accession of the new caliph to power. It was only after this ritual and announcement of accession that the public *bay‘a* ritual would take place, held in a public hall in the palace.<sup>89</sup> As Rhoads Murphey explains in *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*:

For a sultan’s role to be fully confirmed, not just swearing of oaths by officials in the divan was required, but also his presence and a visual manifestation among the widest possible group of subjects of all grades and classes. Only some, the viziers and other high-placed court officials, were granted the favour of offering their personal congratulations and subservience in the form of the hand kiss (*dest-bus*) which required not just visualization, but close approach.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>8888</sup> Insert Citation.

<sup>89</sup> Poteh, 128.

<sup>90</sup> Rhoads Murphy, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty: Tradition, Image, and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400-1800* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 101-102.

This sequence of events serves to highlight that at this point the *bay'a* ritual was more a gesture of political submission and acceptance rather than an active engagement of the general public with the newly selected leader, and also highlights the division and segregation of the ceremonies by socio-economic class.

For the *Abbasid* and *Umayyad* dynasties, accompanying the oaths of allegiance was a transfer of symbolically-infused accessories to the caliphal title. Following the death of the caliph, his successor would be gifted several possessions meant to represent his authority and signify the transfer of power; examples included a seal-ring and caliphal insignia of the staff.<sup>91</sup> For the Ottomans, this process took ritual form with the “Girding of the Sword” ceremony. While some instances of this ritual are known to have occurred during the imperial era, it “was not until the end of the sixteenth century, or even until the enthronement of *Ahmed I* in 1603, that a kind of standard procedure for the ceremony of the girding of the sword was established.”<sup>92</sup> In passing these articles from one leader to the next, the actual investiture of authority becomes visible, lending something intangible such as power a degree of solidity. The idea of legitimate authority, or the “belief that a person has the right to impose his will on others” is itself highly abstract, and hence symbolic ritual serves as one crucial manner in which it can be represented.<sup>93</sup> The ritual actions and oaths surrounding the accession of a new caliph help to actualize the process in which a person who held no authority at one moment acquires

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<sup>91</sup> Marsham, 137.

<sup>92</sup> Murphy, 100.

<sup>93</sup> Kertzer, 24.

authority in a subsequent moment.<sup>94</sup> Through the aid of symbols such as the caliphal seal and staff, a distinction can be made between the authority being transferred and the subject of investiture, while simultaneously creating a bond between the two. Additionally, the exchange of these possessions from one leader to the next aids in removing a degree of ambiguity from the symbolic transaction; vagueness being present in all levels of ritual communication.<sup>95</sup>

The atmosphere of heavy political drama surrounding rituals of succession and accession only grew as the population of the Islamic world increased. Various rituals and exhibitions were employed in order to convey the ruler's newly acquired power to the areas of the community on the outer boundaries of the empire. Under the Ottomans, the accession of the Sultan had to be announced to peripheral communities, and this task was often performed through the use of "cannon firing, the decoration of public space with oil-lamps, torchlight processions and the naming of the sultan in the Friday prayer," all of which were considered culturally normative and accepted sociocultural arrangements by the public.

#### THE ROLE OF *BAY'Ā* IN *SUFĪ* RITUAL AND TRADITION

A thorough discussion of the *bay'ā* would not be complete without mentioning the role and importance of the *bay'ā* in the *Sufī* tradition. The *bay'ā* delivered in *Sufī* rituals between teachers and students functions in a similar fashion as the *bay'ā* in Islamic governments in that it binds successive leaders together. However, while the *bay'ā* given to new rulers acts as a signifier of new authority and

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<sup>94</sup> Kertzer, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Michael L. Raposa, "Ritual Inquiry: The Pragmatic Logic of Religious Practice," *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004): 122.

politico-religious legitimacy, the *bay'a* given by a disciple or *murīd* to his *pir* or *sheikh* is representative of a much more personal and spiritual commitment, one that more closely resembles the *bay'a* paid to the Prophet Muḥammad in its sanctity. In fact, the pledge of allegiance given to a *sheikh* is modeled on the original *bay'a* given by Muslims in the early Islamic community to Muḥammad.

Beginning around the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *sufī* schools, or *ṭarīqas*, arose, and were often constructed around one particular spiritual leader or *sheikh*. The tenets of the school would be structured around the specific teachings, daily routines and mystical exercises of the teacher. The esoteric knowledge and spiritual power of the *sheikh* would be passed from one generation to the next through a *silsila*, or a continuous chain. As J. Spencer Trimingham writes in *The Sufi Orders of Islam*:

Each such *ṭarīqa* was handed down through a continuous 'chain' (*silsila*), or mystical *isnād*. The derivative shaikhs [*sic*] are, therefore, the spiritual heirs of the founder. The link of a person with this *silsila* acquired an esoteric character, and initiation, whereby the seeker swore an oath of allegiance to the founder and early deputy and received in return the secret *wird* which concentrates the spiritual power of the chain, was the means of gaining this link.<sup>96</sup>

The pledge of allegiance between the *sheikh* and his or her follower acts as the amalgamator, fusing together the chain of spiritual authority which spreads through the generations of practitioners.

By understanding the role of the *bay'a* in *Sufī* orders and initiations, the function of the ritual transcends its more prevalent use in governance and the legitimization of authority. Rather, within the *Sufī* context, the *bay'a* serves as a conduit between the teacher and student, creating a link between not just the two

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<sup>96</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Order of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 10.

present participants, but between them and the Prophet Muḥammad, and ultimately, with God. As mentioned previously, this concept of direct communion with God through a sacred chain of authority is reflected in the *Qur'ānic* verse 48:10:

Those who pledge loyalty to you [Prophet] are actually pledging loyalty to God Himself – God's hand is placed on theirs- and anyone who breaks his pledge does so to his own detriment: God will give a great reward to the one who fulfills his pledge to Him (*Qur'ān* 48:10).

The *bay'a*, performed in this context, provides the initiate with a unique opportunity to be included in a sacred chain of transmission rooted in the original relationship between God and the Prophet of Islam.

It must be understood that while spiritual authority is being transmitted through the *silsila* and the ritual of *bay'a*, the essential component of *baraka* is also being transmitted to the student through the *silsila*. *Baraka* is the sacred knowledge, or “invisible spiritual force or blessing,” believed to be necessary to prepare the initiate for spiritual transformation, which culminates in the passing away (*fana'*) and subsistence of the self through God, enabling the Sufi to live a spiritually infused life.<sup>97</sup>

The *bay'a* given to a *sheikh* usually includes an oath of obedience and service which is intended to instruct and aid the disciple in traveling through the stages of spiritual awakening. Obedience is viewed as an essential component in this process of self-examination and in learning how to cope with the demands of the lower self or ego (*nafs*).<sup>98</sup> The relationships established between students and their spiritual teachers can vary greatly depending on the specific *Sufi* order and desired teaching

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<sup>97</sup> William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Publications: Oxford, 2000), 23.

<sup>98</sup> Kelly Pemberton, “Women Pirs, Sainly Succession, and Spiritual Guidance in South Asian Sufism” *Muslim World* 96, no. 1 (2006).

style of the *sheikh*. However, the *bay‘a* and surrounding rituals highlight the importance of obedience and loyalty in the quest for religious insight.

Once again, the nature of the original Prophetic *bay‘a* is mimicked within the *Sufi* ritual as it also places significant importance on the obedience and fidelity paid by the student to the teacher. In addition to loyalty and fidelity to the *sheikh* and a particular *Sufi* order, the aspirant is also expressing the original trust displayed by the earliest followers of Muḥammad in their allegiance.

The actual ritual of the *bay‘a* during a *Sufi* initiation resembles the Prophetic model of a simple handclasp between master and disciple; as Carl Ernst writes in discussing the *Sufi* orders, “the basic elements of the initiation were shaking hands and the presentation of garments, usually a cloak but frequently also a hat or other apparel. Often men’s heads were shaved, again in imitation of the action of the Prophet.”<sup>99</sup> Also, in the custom of Muḥammad, females performed the handshake through additional mediums, such as water or if “she has a scarf, she holds one end while the master holds the other.”<sup>100</sup>

In short, while the function and purpose of the *bay‘a* pledged to the Prophet Muḥammad has been manipulated and exploited by many medieval Islamic governments and power structures, the *bay‘a*’s original intent may still be perceived within the *Sufi* context. By pledging their fidelity and obedience to their *sheikh*, students enter into a sacred bond and chain of transmission with the hopes of divine insight and guidance, much like the earliest followers of Muḥammad.

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<sup>99</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An essential introduction to the Philosophy and practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1997) 141.

<sup>100</sup> Ernst, 143.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of the *bay'ā* from a highly sacred Prophetic oath of allegiance to the later Islamic confirmatory pledge exemplifies the transition from ritual to ceremony. The pledge given to the Prophet Muḥammad served as a promise of submission and loyalty not only to the Prophet but specifically to God. The function of the early Prophetic *bay'ā* was highly transformative and provided a spiritual entryway into the Islamic community, a function the later medieval caliphal *bay'ā* performances lacked. Although the earlier ritual was composed of a simple physical gesture, a handshake, and a verbal oath, the commitment itself was sacred and complex.

Standing in stark contrast to the transformative nature of the early *bay'ā*, the elaborate and dramatic displays put forth by later medieval caliphal *bay'ā* ceremonies served to maintain previously established social positions of authority and submission. Any sincere attempt to involve others in the nomination of the new leader was replaced with a ceremony that served as an announcement of already determined selections. By removing the transformative power of the ritual, the rites of accession and succession serve a ritually structural purpose, holding those engaged in entrenched social positions and reinforcing general avenues of power.

The caliphal *bay'ā* performed during the medieval period can be viewed as the antithesis of transformation or transition, as the power and authority transmitted during these ceremonies was not exchanged with the intent of modification or alteration. In fact, the main objective for these rituals was to ensure the continued and unaltered power structure already in place, and to guarantee the

status quo. This practice will continue into the modern era, and will be energetically employed by leaders across the Islamic world in the wake of colonialization and imperialism as they attempt to marry new customs with old traditions in the search for unquestioned authority in atmospheres of uncertainty and instability.

CHAPTER 4  
THE *BAY'Ā* IN THE MODERN MUSLIM WORLD: THE CONTINUING SEARCH FOR  
LEGITIMACY AND AUTHORITY

As illustrated in Chapter two, since its introduction by the Prophet Muḥammad in the early Islamic community of 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia, the Islamic political ritual of *bay'ā* has undergone numerous transformations, in both principle and practice. Throughout the previous chapter, an attempt was made to demonstrate the evolution of the ritual, from its wholly sacred origins to a point where it was often little more than an affected ceremony to condone transfers of power from one ruler to the next. By examining the implementation of the ritual in early Islamic governments and understanding how the ritual and its intended consequences have evolved over the centuries, it becomes clear that the *bay'ā* is deeply embedded in Islamic political thought, even if its efficacy during times of governmental transition is questionable. This transformation continued into modernity, and is still currently being witnessed in countries across the contemporary Muslim world. The *bay'ā* has managed to maintain a position of absolute necessity for many governments, and indeed for numerous organizations that exist outside the boundaries of accepted and normative political thought.

The use of the *bay'ā* pledge and ritual are still routinely employed by Middle Eastern governments in the pursuit of legitimacy and public support. However, as history has shown, even when a new ruler ascends to power the *bay'ā* does not

serve as any guarantee of enduring popular backing or political longevity. The functional nature of the *bay'ā* ritual and pledge has expanded since its inception by the Prophet Muḥammad, signifying more than a contractual and sacred oath of loyalty of a people to God and their leader. If the Prophetic model is followed, the contractual nature of the *bay'ā* not only concerns ideals such as allegiance and loyalty, but ethical concepts such as justice as well. Both parties involved in a pledge or oath of allegiance are to be held to the highest standards of moral and ethical responsibility towards one another, and if this agreement is violated, the *bay'ā* is rendered null and void. In fact, it could be argued that a consistent characteristic of the *bay'ā* ritual in 20<sup>th</sup> century governments and political movements is a markedly ephemeral nature devoid of long-term shows of public loyalty to newly installed kings and presidents. Additionally, the *bay'ā* has been co-opted by multiple dictators and various extremist organizations as a way to instill power or form alliances between dissenting factions with divergent agendas.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which the *bay'ā* has continued to be adapted by leaders in the Islamic world to define and secure abstract concepts like legitimacy, loyalty, and fidelity, even when history has firmly established that the *bay'ā* offers no actual influence or sway over both parties involved in the contract. The first section of this chapter will deal with how and why the *bay'ā* was utilized by assorted political leaders in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a tool for cultivating nationalism and honing statecraft. Regardless of the particular political institution at play, whether it was dynastic succession by primogeniture or constitutional monarchy, the *bay'ā* was repeatedly acted out, with celerity, as a way

to ensure a secure bid for new power, or protect an already seated authority. The mechanisms surrounding succession and accession rituals and protocols in the Muslim world has been an ambiguous and dominant issue since the end of colonial rule and the beginning of the independence process.<sup>101</sup>

In addition to the use of the *bay'a* by nascent states and developing governments, the second section of the chapter intends to address the many figures which used the *bay'a* to seek political authority outside of prescribed norms. Many of the most volatile figures in modern Middle Eastern and Arab history have incorporated the *bay'a* ritual into the accession ceremonies that followed often violent and unlawful seizures of power. The *bay'a* was used by these dictators to customize national histories designed around fabricated and hybrid narratives intended to aid in grounding legitimate authority in the presence of political turmoil. Often, the *bay'a* would be performed repetitively, to the same leader, and contained within or attached to a larger national holiday or celebration. It was not uncommon for the *bay'a* ceremonies to eventually be replaced by celebrations of the dictator's birthday, or possible nationalist celebrations sponsored by governmental agencies.

The chapter will end with a section devoted to the use of the *bay'a* and its appropriation by extremist and rebel organizations in the modern Middle East. In certain applications, these outlying groups have expanded the traditional use of the *bay'a* to adapt to modern situations; however, in certain aspects, clear parallels can be seen between modern functions of the *bay'a* and those established by rebel groups in ninth and tenth century Arabia. The oath of allegiance is used not just as

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<sup>101</sup> Anthony Billingsley, *Political Succession in the Arab World: Constitutions, Family Loyalties, and Islam* (London: Routledge, 2010), 16.

an accompaniment to accession and succession, but also in fusing together separate organizations, or as the avenue for a previously established member of one group to switch alliances to different organizations. In many cases, the new possibilities offered by technological advances in communications has altered the *bay'a* ritual itself and allowed it to be performed in ways that overextend its original reach and application.

Regardless of the individual or organization behind the *bay'a* performance, all displays of the ritual are at least carried out as a way to ensure the population and parties involved that the newly installed authority is entitled to a position of power. The *bay'a* became representative of what Rousseau coined as “civil religion” and for all the varied political groups using the *bay'a* ritual the intent is clear; by marrying a ritual grounded in Islamic sacred history with contemporary political ceremonies, political groups and leaders can fashion a historical narrative which embraces the myth of origin while tending to current needs for legitimacy and stability. The search for legitimacy is constant, and a ritual such as the *bay'a* has the backing of established religious and political history, as well as the endorsement of the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

#### MODERN *BAY'A* PRACTICES AND STATE CRAFT

The aftereffects of the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the removal of colonial rule throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>, varied across the Middle East and North Africa; it would be overly simplistic and intellectually dishonest to assert that each of these divergent and unique countries experienced identical transitional struggles. The particular political and governmental institution embraced by the

newly independent countries was diverse, and often, highly contingent on whatever residual colonial presence remained. However, the newly formed governments did collectively face the problem of how to legitimize rule and ensure not only a stable rise to power, but also consistently uncontested transfers of sovereignty. The *bayʿa* was a pivotal step in this process of legitimization, and was adapted to fit modern constraints and technologies.

As it was used in the past to secure positions of power in the Umayyad and Ottoman Dynasties, the *bayʿa* was once more employed to assist in the dynastic succession of newly independent countries, such as Syria, Jordan, and Morocco.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, while dynastic succession was a customary practice in Islamic countries, a once familiar vernacular was being reintroduced, as the *Hashemite Hūsayn bin ʿAlī* suddenly informed the British that “according to the wish of the public and assembled *Ulema* the Great Master, His Majesty Our Lord and Lord of all *el-Hussein ibn ʿAlī* has been recognized as King of [the] Arab nation.”<sup>103</sup> It has been argued by some scholars that the use of such titles was an innovation meant to assist Islamic rulers in extracting authority from hegemonic Western examples of government; however the Arabic term for king, *mālik*, had long been assumed in classical Islamic civilizations, and therefore aided in creating a national historical narrative based in accepted Islamic practices.<sup>104</sup> The Arabic word *mālik* carried a largely pejorative connotation in pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as during the classical

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<sup>102</sup> With the beginning of the Umayyad Dynasty in 661, under the rule of Muʿāwiya, the trend of of keeping political power with a selected family became commonplace. The revolutionary nature of this decision is discussed in more detail in chapter two.

<sup>103</sup> Elie Podeh, “The Politics of National Celebrations in the Arab Middle East” 46.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 46.

and medieval centuries, and it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the word experienced a popular revival, and rise in cachet.<sup>105</sup>

In some instances the use of the term king was thrust upon a newly “independent” country by remaining colonial forces, such as in the case of the *Iraqī Hashemite* monarchy, which ruled from 1921 to 1958. In 1920, the British decided at the San-Remo Conference to create the new Iraqī government in the image of their own monarchy, and in August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921 (*dhū al-hijja* 1339) *Faiṣal, Sharif Hussain’s* third son, was crowned King of Iraq.<sup>106</sup> *Faiṣal’s* accession ceremony was a purposefully blended occasion, consisting of western models of a coronation packaged around a traditional *bay’a* ceremony, resulting in an Islamic ritual “meant to confer legitimacy on the newly-imposed *Hashemite* king.”<sup>107</sup> The crownless coronation of *Faiṣal* spawned a new national tradition in Iraq, the Day of Accession or *‘id al-julus*, which would also be celebrated for his son, *Faiṣal II*.

Dynastic succession proved to be a relatively stable, if not desirable, method of government, as shown by the example of Saudi Arabia. The first two kingdoms that existed in Arabia were perpetually torn apart by interfamily feuding and outsider influence, resulting in a constant state of turbulence on the peninsula. As he contemplated the history of the first Saudi kingdom (1744 – 1818) and the second kingdom (1822 – 1891), the future leader of Arabia, *‘Abdul ‘Aziz bin ‘Abdul Rahman* concluded that “constant challenges to the dominant branch within the family substantially weakened the ruler, and that rivalries from collateral branches,

<sup>105</sup> “Monarchy in the Middle East” in *Middle East Monarchies*, page 18.

<sup>106</sup> Eil Podeh, “From Indifference to Obsession: The Role of National State Celebrations in Iraq, 1921-2003” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010): 185.

<sup>107</sup> Podeh, *From indifference*, 185.

although limited, were equally harmful.”<sup>108</sup> The numerous bids for power were overwhelming and created an impossible environment for peaceful governance.

In order to combat the high number of challenges coming from various branches of feuding families, *‘Abdul Aziz* embraced the already established mechanism of the *bay‘a* to guarantee backing for his own chosen heir apparent.<sup>109</sup> In keeping with the 1744 alliance existing between the *al-Shaykh* and *al-Saud* families, the *bay‘a* was pledged to *‘Abdul Aziz’s* designated heir by the “*ahl al-‘Aqd wal-Ḥall*, or ‘those who bind and loosen,’ composed of senior family members and religious notables, who ensured a modicum of stability.”<sup>110</sup> This was the first in a long line of successive hereditary *bay‘āt* within the *al-Saud* family, although the chosen heir was not always the first born son of the previous ruler.

This ambiguous mode of succession was actually written into “the Kingdom’s rough equivalent of a constitution,” with the enactment of the Basic Law in 1992, dictating that future kings of the country must not only be the eldest, but also the *most fit* to rule.<sup>111</sup> Article 5 section b of the Saudi Basic law states:

Governance shall be limited to the sons of the Founder King *‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman al-Faysal Al Sa‘ud*, and the sons of his sons. Allegiance shall be pledged to the most suitable amongst them to reign on the basis of the Book of God Most High and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger (PBUH).<sup>112</sup>

The majority of the second section of the Basic Law directly addresses the Saudi system of Governance, and repeatedly mentions the proper use of the *Bay‘a*

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<sup>108</sup> Billingsley, 226.

<sup>109</sup> J.E. Peterson, “The Nature of Succession in the Gulf,” *Middle East Journal* 55, no. 4(2001): 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>112</sup> “Basic Law of Governance,” *Umm al-Qura* Royal Order No. 3397 (1992): 2.

between the king and successor, and also the public. Article 6 goes on to specify “Citizens shall pledge allegiance to the King on the basis of the Book of God and the *Sunnah* of his Messenger, and on the basis of submission and obedience in times of hardship and ease, fortune and adversity.”<sup>113</sup> However, there is no mention in section two of the reciprocal nature originating from the Prophetic *bay‘a*, which emphasized the responsibilities and commitments required for *both* parties involved. Additionally, the *bay‘a* process has been streamlined in Saudi Arabia by the establishment of the Allegiance Committee (*al-hayat al-baya*), which consists of the sons and grandsons of *Abd al-Aziz al-Saud*.<sup>114</sup>

In contrast to the traditional celebrations and festivities surrounding the *bay‘a* ritual, the strict *Wahhābī* doctrine of Saudi Arabia prohibited the celebration and veneration of a human being during his or her lifetime or even after death. Hence, the accession celebration in Saudi Arabia lacks much of the stylized and highly decorative performances surrounding enthronement found in other Islamic countries. Also, the tombs and burial places of kings in Saudi Arabia are unknown; so as to prevent what is viewed to be prohibited idolization of humans.<sup>115</sup>

While a system of hereditary monarchy was hardly a new phenomenon in the Islamic world, the inclusion of *bay‘a* rituals and pledges into written law was a relatively new addition, and Saudi Arabia was not the only country to legally include the practice in its constitution. In fact, along with a solid foundation of Islamic principles, newly drafted constitutions supplied freshly ascended rulers and

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 36.

<sup>115</sup> Podeh, celebrations 265.

governments with legitimacy in many Middle Eastern and North African countries. In most cases, the constitutions did not reflect actual liberal democratic ideals, and were considered by many to be “camouflage constitutions,” meaning the constitutions and the laws within did not actually dictate the political process, but rather cloaked the real mechanisms of governance from the population.<sup>116</sup>

However, the inclusion of the *Bay‘a* in constitutional documents evidences the religious and political clout of the ceremony in legitimizing new government leaders and in securing accepted bids for future nominations, and even if the new *Bay‘a* contracts of allegiance lacked the equitable nature of the initial ritual, their religious and sacred history still hold significant sway in generating an atmosphere of validity around governmental transitions.

Moroccan political culture has also greatly relied on the clout of the *bay‘a* ritual to justify the rule of the monarchy, and while the *bay‘a* has played a role in Moroccan dynastic succession rituals since the end of colonial rule, it was more heavily employed during the latter half of *Hassan II’s* rule (1961-1999) “since the *Bay‘a* of Layoune in 1979 in Western Sahara, when *Sahrawi* tribal notables performed this act as a sign of *Sahrawi’s* attachment to the Moroccan throne.”<sup>117</sup> Although not included into the Moroccan constitution, the *bay‘a* ritual was mentioned in the *Bulletin Officiel* in 1979, and “confers divine powers on the King; ‘the holder of the legitimate authority of God’s shadow on earth and his secular arm in the world.’”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Billingsley, 104.

<sup>117</sup> James N. Sater, *Morocco: Challenges to Tradition and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

As with the case of the *bayʿa* in Layoune in 1979, the Moroccan monarchy has continually employed the *bayʿa* throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a way to not only justify the rule of the king, but to also alienate those that would attempt to rival or limit the power of the monarchy. The Independence Party, or *Ḥizb al-Istiqlāl*, presented such a threat during the years following Moroccan independence from French colonial rule. In addition to freedom from colonial influence, *al-Istiqlāl*, under the leadership of *Allal al-Fassi*, advocated for a less powerful monarchy, more adept to reign rather than govern. In response, the monarchy “instituted the ritual of *bayʿa* annually to symbolize the allegiance of the Moroccans to the king” and subsequently was “successful in elevating the monarchy as the ultimate expression of national sovereignty.”<sup>119</sup> In the Moroccan government, the *bayʿa* is associated with a dual function; political succession and accession, and also this yearly renewal of allegiance to the king by the political elite and religious scholars or *tajdid al-wala*.<sup>120</sup>

The Moroccan *bayʿa* is also closely tied with not just a religious and political tradition, but also with a geographical place. The city of Fez and the people that dwell there have long been regarded as essential, as it holds the shine to *Idrīs ibn ʿAbdallāh*, the founder of the *Idrīsīd* Dynasty (788-974).<sup>121</sup> As Rahma Bourqia writes in “The Cultural Legacy of Power in Morocco:”

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<sup>119</sup> Mohamed Daadaoui, *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamic Challenge: Maintaining Makhzen Power* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011), 25.

<sup>120</sup> Abdeslam Maghraoui, “Political Authority in Crisis: Mohammand’s VI’s Morocco,” *The Middle East Report* 31 (2001): 13.

<sup>121</sup> An interesting sidenote on the development of a unified sense of nationalism can be seen in the changing nature of the *bayʿa* ritual in Fez during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bettina Dennerlein writes in “Legitimate Bounds and Bound Legitimacy: The Act of Allegiance to the Ruler (Bai’a) in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Morocco:” ...while in earlier centuries the people of Fez often took part in the recognition of a

The allegiance of the people of Fez was considered to be the most important, initiating the process of gaining other allegiances. Fez is therefore not merely a city; it is also a symbolic place where legitimate power begins. According to *Ibn Zaydan*, historian of the 'Alawi dynasty who wrote in the early part of the twentieth century, the texts of allegiance used to be displayed on the walls of the sanctuary of *Mawlay Idris* so that 'people would benefit from their *baraka*.'<sup>122</sup>

This tracing of the presence of the *bay'a* to the origins of Moroccan traditional history displays its essential place in the politico-religious makings of the state. Additionally, the history of the *bay'a* resides in the memory of the people and in groups outside of the normative and prescribed roles of authority.

#### BAY'A AS RHETORIC: THE USE OF RITUAL AS A STRATEGY OF DOMINATION

For certain leaders, the *bay'a* represented a powerful tool for creating an avenue for forced participation in rituals for political recognition. In a sense, the original and intended reciprocal nature of the *bay'a* was manipulated, and rather than serving as a guarantee for a just ruler, the people forced to pledge allegiance were converted into accomplices. In these situations, the *bay'a* and surrounding political rituals engage the public in the acting out of an elaborate ruse, one that litters the public sphere with vacuous slogans and barren political gestures. As Lisa Wedeen writes in *Ambiguities of Domination*, regimes produce "compliance through enforced participation in rituals of obeisance that are transparently phony both to those who orchestrate them and to those who consume them."<sup>123</sup> Modern uses of

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new ruler as sub-groups drawing up their proper bai'a, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the population was obviously perceived and perceived itself as a collective body (ahl Fas). 304.

<sup>122</sup> Rahma Bourqia, "The Cultural Legacy of Power in Morocco" in *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power, and Politics in Morocco*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 246.

<sup>123</sup> Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 6.

the *bay'a* in fashioning these regimes and cults of personality can be found in countries such as Syria and Iraq.

The use of the oaths of loyalty to Syrian president *Hafiz al-Asad's* rose substantially through the late 1970s and early 1980s. A clear parallel exists between the growth and popularity of displays of loyalty and obedience and the decline and mismanagement of Syria's economy, and the increase in governmental corruption. As the resistance to *Asad's* regime continued to grow, more and more government workers and public figures were forced to declare the *Bay'a* as a public display of solidarity. *Asad's* regime did not bother to veil the fact that these loyalty contracts were necessary step towards a guarantee of personal and family safety. After *Asad* defeated the threat from the Muslim Brotherhood at *Hama* in 1982, the defeated party members and their families were forced to sign loyalty contracts and "in the case of Hama, for example, the women and mothers of *Hama* 'contract with the leader to sacrifice everything for the sake of the citizen and of defending him' (*Tu'ahid al-qa'id 'ala badhl kull shay' min ajl al-muwatin wa al-difa'anhu*).<sup>124</sup>

The use of the term *Bay'a* in governmental publications and ceremonies reached its apex in the mid-1980s, after *Hafiz Asad's* health began to decline after suffering a heart attack. His weakened state bolstered his brother *Rifat* in a failed attempt to seize power. After the unsuccessful power grab by *Rifat*, *Asad* increased his demands for renewed oaths of loyalty, and in addition to the use of oaths and pledges, *Asad* began demanding a renewal of allegiance and loyalty through the practice of blood contracts. These "loyalty contracts" were declarations of loyalty

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 35.

and submission to *Asad's* government, and were signed in blood. *Asad's* appropriation of the *Bay'a* ritual was also a strategic maneuver of political appeasement towards Syria's Sunni majority, and as Ariel I. Ahram writes in "Iraq and Syria: The Dilemma of Dynasty"

In *Asad's* resurrection of the *bay'a* in the mid-1980s, such contracts were often signed in blood, bringing the relationship between ruler and ruled even closer than it had been under the caliphate by implying a kinship ("blood") bond between *Asad* and his people. But indulging in such potent and public Islamic and primordial rituals was uncharacteristic of *Asad*. By the 1990s, *Asad* was sufficiently secure to restore the primacy of secular symbols of rule.<sup>125</sup>

*Asad's* use of blood *bay'āt* was an attempt to marry together Syria's complicated and diverse religious populations with secular nationalism.

Loyalty contracts signed in blood were also a characteristic of the regime under Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Hussein's regime also embraced the known but uncommon procedure of having his members of government renew their oaths of allegiance to him, and on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1982, he required his delegates to sign a "document of allegiance (*wathiqat al-bay'a*) allegedly written in their blood."<sup>126</sup> This practice was not limited to members of the National Assembly, but was required from various groups, ranging from religious scholars to soldiers.<sup>127</sup> It is important to stress that the *bay'a* given to Saddam did not reflect the reciprocal nature of the original *Bay'a* performed with the Prophet Muḥammad. The oath of allegiance pledged to Saddam Hussein was purely unilateral, and imposed no obligations or requirements on the leader. The renewal of the *bay'a* spurred on the new tradition

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<sup>125</sup> Ariel I. Ahram, "Iraq and Syria: The Dilemma of Dynasty" *The Middle East Quarterly* (2002): 10.

<sup>126</sup> Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

of celebrating “*Bay‘a* Day” as a national holiday, in which the *Ba‘th* Party would “motivate” Iraqis to “participate in processions, carrying Iraqi flags, photographs of Saddam, and various banners in his support.”<sup>128</sup> Additionally, a commemorative anthem was written, and “a long distance running competition for members of the armed forces was called the *bay‘at al-qa-id* race.”<sup>129</sup>

It is interesting to note that these dramatic displays of loyalty occurred during a very tumultuous period of Saddam’s regime, the years of economic decline and widespread Iraqi casualties from his war with Iran. Elie Podeh makes a compelling argument for the widespread use of fabricated national holidays and celebrations during times of general unrest, or as he writes in the language of Clifford Geertz, “a ‘thick’ calendar reflects a shortage of legitimacy while a ‘thin’ calendar reflects a more secure and legitimized regime.”<sup>130</sup> An entire day of celebration and readmission of *bay‘āt* to Saddam did not occur until three years after his original accession in 1979 as the replacement of *Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr* as head of the *Ba‘th* Party. While Saddam’s original *bay‘a* was a widely celebrated, with members of the National Assembly signing a declaration of allegiance (*wathiqat al-bay‘a*) stating, “with love we swear, with our soul we shall redeem, and with our blood we make this covenant with the president, the struggler Saddam Husayn...Ba‘thi Iraq shall live forever and the flag... of the hero of all-Arab [*qawmi*] liberation, Saddam Husayn, shall fly forever,” it was not until his position became threatened during the

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<sup>128</sup> Podeh, “Indifference”, 195

<sup>129</sup> Bengio, 77.

<sup>130</sup> Podeh, 180.

Iran-Iraq war that *Bay'a* Day was adhered to the national calendar.<sup>131</sup> Once again, the *bay'a* ritual is promoted most during times of deep public disapproval for the regime, rather than at times of relative stability and approval.

#### THE FUNCTION OF *BAY'Ā* IN A CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The presence and utility of the *bay'a* ritual extends beyond the scope of sanctioned and internationally recognized governments. Several rebel groups and Islamic terrorist organizations have taken to employing the *bay'a* in an attempt to legitimize splintered and often chaotic networks of separate organizations within the framework of traditional Islamic authority. For these groups, the *bay'a* is often used for its original purpose, as a symbol of loyalty between a particular leader and his followers. However, the bestowal and removal of the oath are also employed as avenues demonstrating dissent between separate factions, as well as a means to create cohesive affiliations between disjointed groups.

The roots of the revocation of the *bay'a* are planted in the earliest period of the Islamic empire. Throughout history, rebel groups have usually cited one of two main causes for deeming a *bay'a* invalid – either they denied the *bay'a* was pledged in the first place, or held that the caliph exhibited unfit behavior in direct violation of Islamic law, therefore making it a duty to rise in rebellion against an unjust ruler. One such case occurred early in Islamic history, during the second civil war (680-692), with the revolt of *Ibn al-Ghasil*, a Medinan rebel who revoked his *bay'a* to *Yazīd*, accusing him of sinful and unscrupulous behavior.<sup>132</sup> *Ibn al-Ghasil* and fellow rebels charged *Yazīd* and the *Umayyads* with purposefully biased actions against

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<sup>131</sup> Ahram, 4.

<sup>132</sup> Landau Tasserou, 26

Medinans, and “rendered the Umayyad policy in religious terms; they considered it an infringement upon the religious principle of equity, hence as a breach of the rulers’ sacred commitment to act justly. The *bay‘a* exchanged with *Yazid* was therefore revocable.”<sup>133</sup>

In addition to the historical accounts of rebel groups revoking a *bay‘a*, there are also instances of such leaders receiving pledges from their own followers. These leaders often resorted to the *bay‘a* themselves as well, urging their followers to now swear allegiance to them. As Ella Landau-Tasseron emphasizes in her article “The Religious Foundations of Political Allegiance: A Study of *Bay‘a* in Pre-Modern Islam”:

Deeming themselves to be restorers of the original and just order, true heirs to the Prophet, rebels followed the practice of exchanging pledges with their followers. It is no accident that they used the same formula – pledging to adhere to the Qur’an and the sunna – since this precisely was their point: the ruler diverged from these models, and the rebel rose to restore it. Emulation of the caliphal *bay‘a* was entirely appropriate.<sup>134</sup>

It can be argued that the main function of the *bay‘a* in such instances is to define and accentuate the relationship between a leader and a follower, and to reinforce the original principles that had allegedly been violated in the preceding pledge.

Utilization of the *bay‘a* by groups operating outside conventional spheres of legitimacy can be witnessed in the present day as well. A publicly sworn *bay‘a* designed to demonstrate support rather than direct allegiance was delivered in 2010 by the Prime Minister of the Hamas faction of the government in Gaza, *Ismail*

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

*Haniyeh*, who performed the *bay'ā* over the telephone to Egyptian Muhammad *Badi* of the Muslim Brotherhood. As related by the *Muslim World News*:

In a phone call yesterday, *Ismail Haniyeh*, the Prime Minister of the Hamas government in Gaza, gave the oath [*bayah*] to Muhammad *Badi*, the new General Guide of the MB, about a week after accepting his role. In a communique issued yesterday, Haniyeh's government maintained that the PM "called upon Allah to give a hand of assistance, support, and soundness to Badi', so the MB's course in helping the Palestinian national cause and the besieged Gaza continues", expressing his hope that "the MB will play a role in keeping relations between the Palestinian and Egyptian peoples."<sup>135</sup>

Here the motivations behind the *bay'ā* clearly lie in a desire to generate solidarity between two separate organizations in hopes of ensuring a future beneficial relationship.

The Muslim Brotherhood has long employed the *bay'ā* as a tool for political advancement and as "one of the most important means of going up the ladder of ranks in the group."<sup>136</sup> For the Brotherhood, the religious and political origins of the ritual are of equal significance, and it is regarded as a binding contract. After *Muhammad Mursi* won the bid for the Egyptian presidency in 2012, his previous *bay'ā* to the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was voided, as he would no longer serve as the FJP's chairman. In the particular circumstances of Mursi's "unbinding," the Muslim Brotherhood's *shura* council reported that there would be no negative consequences: "there is no punishment for breaking the *bay'ah*. A brother would pledge that he would work in the service of Islam through

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<sup>135</sup> "Hamas Leader Pledges Oath to New Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Leader," *The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Report*, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://globalmbreport.org>.

<sup>136</sup> 'Amr al-Misri. "The Muslim Brotherhood Bay'ah," *The Arab West Report Daily Overview* 18 (2012): [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week).

the Muslim Brotherhood because he believes in their approach.”<sup>137</sup> Here *Morsi's bay'a* was delivered not to one man and leader, but rather to the ideals and aims of an entire organization, and because *Morsi* would no longer serve in a leadership position within the Freedom and Justice Party the *bay'a* was no longer a necessary prerequisite.

A majority of extremist organizations exist in geographically scattered cells across the globe, requiring members to rely on the Internet as their major conduit for communication. Through the use of websites, chat forums, and blogs, participants establish communities of like-minded individuals, and subsequently the *Bay'a* ritual has taken on a wholly new virtual characteristic. Philipp Holtmann writes extensively on what he refers to as “virtual leadership” and the “virtual *bay'a*” in his 2011 article “Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications, and Discussion.” Holtmann emphasizes the differences between the modern “virtual *bay'a*” and the “classical *bay'a*”:

The virtual *Bay'a* ritual is a written proclamation via the internet. The classical ritual (consultation (*shura*) – proclamation (*mubaya'a*) – final handshake (*musafaha*) has been drastically shortened. While the primary electorate commission (“men of resolution and contract”) is missing, the secondary electorate-pool and those qualified to pledge allegiance and proclaim has been drastically enlarged. An undefined number of Muslims can “proclaim” directly via the internet by a simple blog entry stating “I pledge allegiance” (*ubayi*). Consultation and final handshake are probably supposed to be included into the written proclamation.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week).

<sup>138</sup> Philipp Holtmann, “Virtual Leadership in Radical Islamist Movements: Mechanisms, Justifications and Discussion” *The Institute for Policy and Strategy* (2011) <http://www.herzliyaconference.org/eng/Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/PhilippHoltmann.pdf>

Here, Holtmann points out the almost democratizing effect created by the open nature of the Internet. Whereas in the past, and within traditional governmental institutions, the *bay'a* was conferred only by an elite group of either highly positioned individuals or relatives, here the *bay'a* is open to anyone who wishes to pledge allegiance to the stated cause. The initial *bay'a* or private *bay'a* is rendered useless online, and it is the second or public *bay'a* ritual, originally held for the public to swear allegiance to a new ruler, that has become the primary and crucial performance.

The technique of the “virtual *bay'a*” is also a frequent tactic of *al-Qaeda*, commonly used as a way to encourage loyalty and demonstrate support of one organization to another. Today, these pledges are often performed on web recordings and internet broadcasts. The internet transmissions and recorded speeches of *al-Qaeda's* top officials have become well known after several high profile recordings were released, and many pledges have been given in a similar fashion. After the death of *Abu Musab al-Zarqawi* in June of 2006, *Abu Hamza al-Muhajer* replaced him as commander of the Iraqi branch of *al-Qaeda*. *Al-Muhajer* went on to release a recorded *bay'a* addressed to Osama bin Laden, pledging “We are at your disposal, ready for your command.”<sup>139</sup> In the same year, another top militant, *Gulbuddin Hekmatyar*, was shown by an al Jazeera broadcast on tape, performing the *bay'a* in allegiance to al Zawahiri and bin Laden.<sup>140</sup> The *bay'a* ritual also validates an organization’s attempt to rebrand itself, even when the group’s overall motivation and mission remain the same. For example, in 2004, when

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<sup>139</sup> Peter Bergen, “Al Qaeda, the Organization: A Five-Year Forecast,” *Annals* 618 (2008): 17.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

renaming his coalition of terrorists and rebels in Iraq “*Al Qaeda* in the Land of the Two Rivers,” *Abu Musab al-Zarqawi* upheld the transition and “publicly swore *bayat*, a religiously binding oath of allegiance to bin Laden.”<sup>141</sup>

*Al-Qaeda* also uses the Internet and “virtual *bay’ahs*” as a tool for indirect recruitment of new members. In November of 2005, the website *al-Hesbah* hosted a forum in which members were asked to pledge allegiance to top al-Qaeda officials such as “*Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Mullah Muhammad Omar* and *Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi*.”<sup>142</sup> The relative anonymity offered online in addition to a virtual grassroots environment resulted in 173 people offering their *Bay’a* to the *al-Qaeda* leaders. Additionally, a member of the *al-Hesbah* forum posted, “This is the internet, that Allah employs in the service of *jihad* and the *mujahideen* and that has become [used] in their interest, so that half of the *muhahedeen* battle is fought on the Internet sites.”<sup>143</sup>

This use of the “virtual *bay’a*” as a tool for indirect recruiting was demonstrated again in 2006 on the Islamist forum *al-Buraq*. However, the “virtual *bay’a*” called for in this instance was a “death *bay’a*,” or a pledge to adhere to the order and tenets of *Usama bin Laden* until death. An anonymous user outlined two aims in particular: “to pledge allegiance to *Usama bin Laden* as “leader of the Muslim armies (*qa’id juyush al-muslimin*) and his terrorist campaign against the West; and to consent to die for the cause.”<sup>144</sup> The actual recruitment of physical members to

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>142</sup> Hanna Rogan, “Jihadism online - A Study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes,” FFI Report (2006): 29.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>144</sup> Holtmann, 6.

*al-Qaeda* cannot accurately be calculated, since the vast majority of online users posted their *bay'at* under pseudonyms, but these examples demonstrate the use of the *bay'a*, even in virtual environments, in lending historical and religious credibility to rather indeterminate declarations of virtual allegiance.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The changing nature of the *bay'ā* and its surrounding ceremonies is not unique amongst other ancient religious or political rituals that have survived into contemporary times. In fact, the continued existence of the *bay'ā* attests not only to its adaptability, but also its fundamental importance to the Muslim world. Even though the Islamic pledge of allegiance has been appropriated by many political dynasties and various governments as a tool for legitimization, the original history of the ritual represents a significant and pivotal moment in Islamic tradition.

The original *bay'ā* delivered to the Prophet Muḥammad enacted a reciprocal covenant with God and also served as the primary vehicle for admission into the early Islamic community. The pledge outlined the responsibilities of the convert with regards to his or her moral behavior and, for males, established expectations during times of conflict. In return for loyalty and obedience, God's justice and divine rewards would be bestowed upon the believer, and victory in battle would be delivered if deserved. This reciprocal quality was also a significant component of the later caliphal *bay'ā*, though it tended to exist in theory rather than practice; while the *bay'ā* was never intended to serve as a liberal democratic election, it quickly became relegated to the realm of symbolic approval.

The introduction of dynastic succession into the Islamic empire greatly influenced how the *bay'ā* was utilized by rulers as power and authority was passed

from one subsequent generation to the next, and this trend continues on into the present day in some parts of the Muslim world. In contrast with the *bay'a* paid to the Prophet, the *bay'a* given to the caliphs, sultans, and kings was typically a mere formality, one given during a public ceremony, after the elites and previous ruler had already selected and installed the new leader.

Currently, the *bay'a* and surrounding rituals have been co-opted by organizations that reside outside the boundaries of international law, and who mimic and warp religious history in an attempt to lend credence to their political and religious aims. The *bay'a* has also been fashioned as the weapon of choice for many dictators and autocrats seeking to strengthen their holds on populations by forging connections with sacred narratives and historical traditions.

With the ongoing upheaval across the Muslim world, and the revolutionary attempts of many individuals and organizations to overthrow older regimes and systems of governance, the relevance and use of these foundational political rituals can be questioned. Once the dust has settled, will the *bay'a* continue to be employed by these reform movements to justify newly selected, or perhaps elected, leaders? Why do political rituals exist? What is the necessity of enacting the same cycle of metaphoric pageantry from one generation to the next, especially when the aim is to recreate and refresh the whole governmental apparatus? A possible answer resides in the necessity to articulate the hope and trust implicit with recognizing and willfully accepting an institution or individual's authority and legitimate power. The only certain conclusion is there will be a ritual aspect present

in the formation of these new governments, be it the *bay'a* or something else entirely.

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