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**HISTORIES OF THE
MUSLIM HERO:
MEDIEVAL & MODERN
PERCEPTIONS OF
AL-ZAHIR BAYBARS**

AMINA A. ELEENDARY

1999

Thesis
1999/70

The American University in Cairo
The School of Humanities and Social Sciences

20

HISTORIES OF THE MUSLIM HERO:
MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PERCEPTIONS OF AL-ZAHIR BAYBARS

Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Arabic Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts
with a specialization in Middle Eastern History

by

Amina A. Elbendary

Bachelor of Arts

October 1999

Thesis
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HISTORIES OF THE MUSLIM HERO;
MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PERCEPTIONS OF AL-ZAHIR BAYBARS


A Thesis Submitted by Amina A. Elbendary
to The Department of Arabic Studies


October 1999

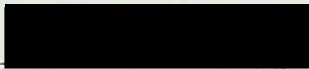
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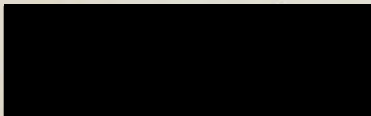
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For Mummy,
Nawal Mehallawi

*"I've kept my promise,
don't keep your distance..."*

Acknowledgments

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ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

Histories of the Muslim Hero:

Medieval and Modern Perceptions of al-Zahir Baybars

By Amina A. Elbendary

Advised by Dr. Elizabeth Sartain and Dr. Stuart D. Sears

Medieval writers differed in their perceptions of the personality and rule of al-Zahir Baybars (658-676 A.H./1260-1277 A.D.) . These serve to show which qualities were appreciated in a ruler and what was expected of a Mamluk sultan at different given points in time. The backgrounds against which these writers lived and worked deeply influenced their reconstructions.

Contemporary writers were obviously under the strong influence of the Sultan. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, Baybars' loyal employee, wrote the sultan's official biography which introduced an ideal ruler and an excellent soldier. However, in works written during the fourteenth century Baybars is often a harsh despot who was cruel to his subjects and paranoid. Historians like Shafi' ibn `Ali, Ibn al-Dawadari, al-Nuwayri and Mufaddal ibn Abi al-Fada'il were influenced by the regime of al-Nasir Muhammad which had to compete with the legacy of Baybars.

Fifteenth century Mamluk historians like Ibn al-Furat, al-Maqrizi, and Ibn Taghribirdi, demonstrated a more balanced approach towards Baybars. A sense of nostalgia for "the good old days" is expressed alongside reports of his excesses and harshness. They emphasized the Sultan's establishment of a

strong state, his military campaigns and expansion, his establishment of justice and his instituting a strong rule of Islam in Egypt.

During the late Mamluk and early Ottoman periods the popular epic, *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, took a developed form. It introduced Mahmud Baybars, the legendary Muslim hero. The *Sira* humanized its protagonist and presented him in terms the audience could identify with.

The events of the thirteenth century inspired the novel and film *Wa Islamah* and the T. V. series *al-Fursan* in the twentieth century. In these works more emphasis was placed on the achievements of Baybars' predecessor, Sultan Qutuz. The Egyptianized and Islamized Qutuz becomes the real hero of the events as writers use the historical narrative to promote Egyptian nationalist discourse.

Medieval and modern perceptions of Baybars ranging from idealized ruler, to harsh despot and finally to legendary hero reflect the biases and circumstances of their makers, as much as they reflect the legacy of the Sultan. They prove that qualities that were appreciated in an ideal Muslim ruler and hero changed from one generation to another and varied from military valor, to justice, to religious piety.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The sultan al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Salihi (r.658-676 A.H. /1260-1277 A.D.) was the fourth sultan of the Bahri Mamluk dynasty and the true founder of the Mamluk regime in Egypt and Syria. He is one of the most famous Mamluk sultans and the only medieval Muslim ruler whose exploits inspired a folk epic that continued to be popular in Egypt until the twentieth century. Al-Zahir Baybars has been considered a Muslim hero for centuries. He was an extraordinary warrior who fought the Mongol and Frankish enemies of Islam. During his reign he also set the institutional and bureaucratic foundation for the Mamluk state that was to remain in power in Egypt and Syria until the Ottoman conquests in the early sixteenth century.

Baybars' extraordinary exploits have made him a legend. Writers of his own generation as well as later medieval scholars could not ignore his great achievements even as they differed in their evaluations of his reign. Parallel to the scholarly and official literature on Baybars and his reign, a popular folk epic based on his exploits emerged by the fifteenth century and continued to be popular until the early twentieth century. In modern times, the spread of print literature and the invention of motion pictures have led to the emergence of new literary and artistic genres in which images of Baybars have been reconstructed and reproduced. These works demonstrate how the legend of this sultan is still alive in Egyptian collective memory and is still invoked for various cultural and political purposes.

This thesis investigates the image(s) of Baybars and the reconstructions of his reign in various literary and artistic genres dating from his own times to ours. In so doing, the aim is to deconstruct the seemingly straightforward veneer of narrative that these various sources employ and to glimpse the undercurrents beneath. It examines and compares the various perceptions that different writers had of Baybars' life and character. Each of these writers had his own personal biases and his own purposes for writing about Baybars. The backgrounds against which they each lived and worked deeply influenced their writings. This led each to select and emphasize different aspects of his personality and legacy and to ignore others. Comparing these perceptions will demonstrate how the historiography of Baybars was – and still is – used to make different political arguments concerning the Sultan, the Mamluk regime, rulership, and cultural identity. This thesis argues that history-writing is a political tool. Thus the writings of court historians show how they employed history in the process of state-building. Alternatively, popular works subverted these constructions of history.

The first source to be examined in this thesis is the official royal biography of Baybars, *al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir*, written by his employee Muhyi al-Din Ibn `Abd al-Zahir (620-692/1223-1292).¹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir was a prominent bureaucrat in *Diwan al-Insha'* under Baybars. This text was most probably commissioned by Baybars. In any case, Baybars was

¹ Muhyi al-Din Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir* ed. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir (Riyadh: `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir, 1976).

involved in its writing and duly awarded the author for his work.² It is clearly a panegyric of the Sultan. Yet Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's position in the royal bureaucracy meant he was an eye-witness to many of the events he recorded.

Another courtly biography of Baybars was written by `Izz al-Din Muhammad ibn `Ali ibn Ibrahim ibn Shaddad. The *Tarikh al-malik al-zahir* was written by Ibn Shaddad – or completed – after the death of Baybars.³ The extant part of the only surviving manuscript deals with the period between 670/1272 and 676/1278.⁴ Ibn Shaddad was close to the ruling regimes of the Ayyubids and the Mamluks and could thus be considered a court historian as well. His position made him, too, an eyewitness to Baybars' regime. Thus his main source for the *tarikh* was his own experience and information in addition to what was transmitted to him by contemporaries.⁵

These two works are important for several reasons. Firstly, these works were written exclusively as biographies of Baybars and thus were meant to comment on his regime and achievements as a whole. Secondly, they were written by actual contemporaries of Baybars who were loyal to him and his regime and thus consciously portrayed positive images of his reign. Thirdly, they are the main primary sources used by later medieval historians who wrote about Baybars.

² Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib al-sariyya al-muntaza'a min al-sira al-zahiriyya*, ed. `Abd al-`Aziz ibn `Abd-Allah al-Khuwaytir 2nd Edition (al-Riyad: `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir, 1989), p.339.

³ Ahmad Hutayt, Introduction, *Tarikh al-malik al-zahir* by `Izz al-Din Muhammad ibn `Ali ibn Ibrahim ibn Shaddad, ed. Ahmad Hutayt (Bibliotheca Islamica, 31) (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983), p.18.

⁴ Hutayt, Introduction, *Tarikh al-malik al-zahir*, p.19.

⁵ Ahmad Hutayt, "Ibn Shaddad: Kitabuhu fi al-sira al-zahiriyya min khilala al-Yunini wa minhajuhu fi al-kitaba al-tarikhiyya," *al-Fikr al-`arabi al-mu`asir* no.12 (1981), p.147.

The following objects of study are later scholarly medieval sources that deal with Baybars and his reign. Only one of these works is exclusively about Baybars: Shafi' ibn 'Ali's *Husn al-manaqib al-sariyya al-muntaza'a min al-sira al-zahiriyya*. The other works consulted include a representative sample of thirteenth to fifteenth century histories, chronicles and biographical dictionaries. For example, the works of fourteenth century writers Baybars al-Mansuri (d. 725/1325), Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 736/1336) and al-Nuwayri (d. 733/1332) as well as the later Mamluk historians Ibn al-Furat (d. 807/1404), al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1441) and Ibn Taghribirdi (d. 874/1469).

These writings are contrasted to the works of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir and Ibn Shaddad. Accounts that are introduced in these writings highlight those that were ignored and censored by court historians and thus serve to provide a somewhat different portrayal of Baybars. Acts which were celebrated by official propaganda were perceived differently by non-officials as well as by subsequent generations. Thus while court historians provided an image of Baybars as an ideal just ruler, other scholarly sources considered him a cruel despot.

Baybars' legacy and the political events of the thirteenth century have inspired several works intended for popular entertainment. The earliest such work is *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* which dates back to the fifteenth century at least. It is an oral folk epic that has continued to develop to the early twentieth century. The *Sira* relates the adventures of the legendary hero and sultan, Baybars, and his exploits against the enemies of Islam, especially the Franks.

The political events of the thirteenth century inspired `Ali Ahmad Bakathir's novel *Wa Islama* and the T.V. series *al-Fursan*. In these works, especially *al-Fursan*, more emphasis is placed on Sultan Qutuz and his legend and achievement. These works show that the histories of the sultans Qutuz and Baybars are still relevant to modern Egyptian culture. They are invoked as Egyptianized Muslim heroes and recalled to support political arguments about Egyptian national culture and identity.

Comparing the different perceptions of al-Zahir Baybars across centuries elucidates which qualities are to be highlighted and which are to be down-played when constructing the ideal image of a ruler. It also explains how these qualities change from one writer to another and from one generation to another. As the circumstances in which historians live change, so do their reconstructions of his reign and legacy. Even though the perceptions of Baybars have varied dramatically from ideal ruler to harsh despot, his legacy is still invoked by modern historians.

Chapter Two: The Good Soldier: Baybars' Royal Biography

The royal biography is one of the historical genres that appeared during the medieval Islamic period. Before al-Zahir Baybars, however, only Salah al-Din had been the subject of such works, these being his biographies by 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani and Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad.¹ Therefore, whereas there was a precedent of a royal biography for Baybars to follow, it was not an established custom to commission one. We could surmise that Baybars felt a need to promote his own side of the story, that he consciously sought to draw his own image.

Baybars' royal biography, *al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir* was written by his employee Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir (620/1223-692/1292). It falls into the category of official writings rather than scholarly and academic (discussed in Chapter 3) or popular ones (Chapters 4 and 5). Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir was a prominent bureaucrat in the *Diwan al-Insha'* during Baybars' reign.² Whereas he does not specifically say that his book had been commissioned by Baybars, he made it clear that the sultan was very much involved in the writing of his own biography. The sultan is at different points given a voice in the story as Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir writes: "the sultan told me" or "I was informed by the sultan" and other phrases that indicate that his source

¹ P. M. Holt, "Three Biographies of al-Zahir Baybars," in *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*, ed. David O. Morgan (London: SOAS, 1982), p. 19.

² 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Khuwaytir, introduction, *al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir* by Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Zahir (Riyadh: 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Khuwaytir, 1976), p. 9.

for a particular piece of information was the sultan himself.³ Another work, which is also used as a separate source in this research, and that sheds light on Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's *Rawd*, is the *mukhtasar* or abridgment of that book written by the author's nephew, Shafi' ibn `Ali.⁴ In his *Husn al-Manaqib al-sariyya*, Shafi' comments that Ibn `Abd al-Zahir was under certain obligations as well as restrictions while writing this work. The Sultan was still alive and in power and Ibn `Abd al-Zahir worked for him. Shafi' added that the author would often read parts of the book to Baybars as he wrote it and that the Sultan would often praise his good work and award him for it.⁵

It is therefore clear that Baybars was very much a part of the writing of his official *sira*. This does not, however, discredit Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's work as a source for this research. On the contrary, *Rawd* is a manifestation of what Baybars would like us to think of him and of his actions. I do not mean by that to ignore the role of Ibn `Abd al-Zahir as author and writer. However, the general impressions and images we get from reading this work are ones we can safely assume met with Baybars' approval. These are not only images of Baybars the man and ruler, but of the Mamluk regime of Egypt and Syria as well. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's position in the chancery meant that he witnessed many of the events he describes and had access to state documents — some of

³ for example: Muhyi al-Din Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir*, ed. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir (Riyadh: `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir, 1976), p. 51.

⁴ `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir, introduction, *Husn al-manaqib al-sariyya al-muntaza'a min al-sira al-zahiriyya* by Shafi' ibn `Ali, second Edition, ed. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir (Riyad: `Abd al-`Aziz ibn `Abd Allah al-Khuwaytir, 1989), p. 24.

⁵ Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p. 339.

which were of his own composition — which he often quotes.⁶ Such references add to his authority as a witness of the events of Baybars' reign.

`Abd al-`Aziz al-Khuwaytir, who edited Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's work, takes the writer's credentials to mean that he was more or less objective in his rendition of events. He argues that Ibn `Abd al-Zahir had a chance to re-write any sections of the book after Baybars' death. He also adds that such sections that Baybars would have disapproved of are indeed very few.⁷ It is difficult to tell whether the writer did — or indeed, could — change or revise his work once it was written and completed. Yet that is beside the point. The whole *raison d'être* of Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's biography is to be a panegyric of the ruler and to glorify his actions and his history. This assumption is in itself crucial to understanding the angle from which he approached the subject. In his introduction to the *sira* Ibn `Abd al-Zahir informs his readers that "it is a duty to write the history of the Zahirite state to remain as the days go by, and to write its good deeds even though the gracious angels have already written them down...and I have served the thriving library by collecting this *sira* [...] and including in it every good deed."⁹ Nowhere did he write that he intended to include both the good and the bad deeds. The praise that he bestows on Baybars' rule in the very first lines of the book suggests that he did not intend to include any criticism.

⁶ al-Khuwaytir, introduction, *Rawd*, p. 10.

⁷ al-Khuwaytir, introduction, *Rawd*, pp. 33-34.

⁸ blank in manuscript

⁹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 46.

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir stressed qualities and incidents that would enhance Baybars' image and reputation as a good ruler and a good Mamluk. At the same time he ignored or downplayed other qualities and incidents that would have been to Baybars' disadvantage. This in itself gives us an indication of the qualities which were deemed desirable in a ruler.

In writing the biography of Sultan Baybars, Ibn `Abd al-Zahir begins at the point where the future sultan comes into view. He does not begin the biography with its subject's birth and childhood. He neglects the sultan's childhood and adolescence even though some reports of his early life are recorded by other historians. Talking about those years would have entailed referring to Baybars' enslavement and his being a Mamluk in service of consecutive masters. The mention of such details would have been disrespectful of the Sultan and grand master. Baybars was one of the founding members of the Mamluk state and sultanate. His generation of Mamluks were pioneers in that they managed to achieve power for themselves and not in the name of others. Yet that was not yet fully accepted at the time. The slave origins of the Mamluk statesmen would remain a controversial issue from both social and Islamic *shar'i* points of view.

The few incidents that Ibn `Abd al-Zahir mentions dating back to Baybars' pre-sultanic years all glorify him. They are moments of achievement and victory, not enslavement and defeat. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir does not ascribe any role to Baybars in the battle of Mansura 647/1249.¹⁰ The first significant

¹⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 47-8.

action Baybars takes, as described in this *sira*, is his involvement in the murder of Sultan Turanshah. Turanshah is described as an evil ruler who deserved to be killed. The first criticism directed against him is, interestingly enough, that he mistreated his father's Mamluks, the Bahriyya, Baybars' regiment, and the Salihyya, and preferred his own Mamluks over them.¹¹ The second is that he did not ride in person to fight Louis IX during the battle of Mansura and was merely a spectator of the fighting.¹² Turanshah is also portrayed as having been morally deficient: he mistreated his father's *harim* including his own paternal grandmother. He blatantly violated Islamic *shari'a* by praying without ablutions and drinking alcohol openly so that "pitchers of alcohol would be brought in as if they contained water and he would drink it in the presence of others."¹³ Thus Turanshah is condemned according to both Muslim and Mamluk criteria.¹⁴

Turanshah's deeds are portrayed as ones for which a sultan deserves to be killed. They are important because just as they show which qualities were deemed important in a ruler, they foreshadow the qualities Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir chose to emphasize in Baybars. He presents Baybars and his colleagues as realizing that Turanshah would bring about the downfall of the country and state, which is why they rose up against him and killed him.¹⁵ His murder is described as a heroic act. They saved the country at a time of serious threat posed by the Crusaders. Baybars also saved the country from

¹¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 48.

¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 49.

¹³ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 50.

¹⁴ Holt, "Three Biographies," p. 22.

¹⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 50.

another threat posed by an Arab uprising in the south of Egypt which he put down by force.¹⁶ He is introduced in the book as a hero from the very beginning. Baybars — rather than Turanshah — is painted as the true heir of al-Salih Ayyub's legacy.¹⁷

After the murder of Turanshah, there was a power vacuum as no Ayyubid managed to make serious a claim to the throne. This vacuum, eventually to be filled by the Mamluk sultanate, opened the door to grave inter-Mamluk rivalry and competition over power. As a Bahri, Baybars belonged to the faction headed by Faris al-Din Aqtay — a faction that was and opposed by the Salihyya. According to later sources, this faction was tough and cruel to the subject population and wreaked havoc in the country. Their fallout with the first Mamluk sultan, al-Mu'izz Aybak, ended with the murder of Aqtay and the exile of the Bahriyya to Syria.¹⁸

Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's treatment of this situation brings out the Bahriyya as the wronged party. Even though Baybars warned Aqtay that Aybak intended to harm the Bahriyya, "Faris al-Din Aqtay responded by referring to his [Aybak's] courage, generosity, kindness to the people and their love of him."¹⁹ Aybak then betrayed Aqtay's trust and ordered his Mamluks — including the future sultan Sayf al-Din Qutuz — to kill the Bahri leader.²⁰ Baybars and his fellow Bahris fled to Syria where they moved from the

¹⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 71; Holt, "Three Biographies," p. 22.

¹⁸ P. M. Holt, "Mamluks," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second edition, volume 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), p. 321.

¹⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 52.

²⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 53.

service of one Ayyubid ruler to that of another.²¹ During this time they participated in several attacks on Egypt that aimed to restore it to Ayyubid rule. They all failed.

Though Ibn `Abd al-Zahir does refer to the defeat of Baybars and the Bahriyya by Qutuz at al-Salihiyya, he constructs the events in a way that is favorable to Baybars. It is the Syrian allies that flee the battle and cause the defeat.²² In fact Baybars himself told Ibn `Abd al-Zahir that he [Baybars] "prayed to God Almighty not to let us win the battle, and to defeat this army that intended betrayal and corruption, and asked God to defeat us."²³ God answered his prayers.

That year 658/1260 witnessed a new advance of the Mongols into the Eastern Islamic lands. Baybars tried to encourage his Ayyubid allies to fight the enemies, yet they kept finding excuses not to and wasted their time and effort on other pursuits.²⁴ It is then that Baybars decided to join forces with the new sultan in Cairo, Qutuz, and resist the Mongol invasions.²⁵

The alliance between Qutuz and the Bahriyya resulted in the legendary Muslim defeat of the Mongol armies at `Ayn Jalut. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's version of the battle makes Baybars the true hero of the war and attributes the larger part of the victory to his military efforts. It is Baybars who sneaked into the enemy camps at Acre before the battle and obtained information about their

²¹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 55-63.

²² Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 59.

²³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 60.

²⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 62.

²⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 62-3.

army and its weak points.²⁶ This information was crucial to the battle and "so the victory that God ordained occurred and al-Malik al-Zahir was the reason behind it."²⁷ He fought hard and with courage during the battle and sustained the attacks of the enemies. His valor provided a good example for the Muslim troops who imitated him and attacked the enemies.²⁸ When the Mongol troops retreated and fled into Syria, Baybars rode after them and continued to fight them.²⁹

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir concludes his account of `Ayn Jalut by writing that: "all this conquest was done by his [Baybars'] sword, and all this victory is from God and from him, and the fear that struck the enemies was because they dreaded him."³⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir gives all the credit to Baybars and almost none to the Sultan, Qutuz. No mention is made of Qutuz's role in uniting a front and forming an alliance against the Mongols nor of his pushing the troops into battle.

It is of particular importance that Ibn `Abd al-Zahir makes Baybars the hero of `Ayn Jalut. This battle was one of the important victories gained against the Mongols. While it did not destroy the Mongol threat to the Muslim lands, it set a demarcation line between Mongol and Muslim spheres of control and hence defined the core of what would become the Mamluk state. The Mongols were not just ordinary enemies to the Muslims. Their barbaric cruelty is legendary. Their sack of Baghdad in 656/1258 spread tales

²⁶ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp.63-5.

²⁷ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 64.

²⁸ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 64.

²⁹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 64-5.

³⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 66.

of horror throughout the Middle East and put an end to the 'Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad. Defeating such an enemy was a major victory. The portrayal of Baybars as a hero in that battle is also crucial because it preceded another major event, that of the murder of Qutuz and Baybars' own rise to power.

Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's account of the murder of the Sultan Sayf al-Din al-Muzaffar Qutuz is of particular interest to the modern historian. This is one of the main questions of this thesis: how are these two men both portrayed as heroes, Muslim heroes, when one of them killed the other? We might have expected Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir to ignore this whole incident altogether. However, such a gap in the narrative would have been difficult to sustain, considering how it is linked to Baybars' own rise to the crown. We might then have expected him to downplay or dismiss Baybars' role in the regicide. Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir does neither. In fact he over emphasizes Baybars' role in the murder of Qutuz.³¹

Having decided to deal with the murder, Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir might have provided strong justifications for the murder and argued that Qutuz deserved to be killed. He had already dealt with the murder of another sultan, Turanshah, in this manner and provided justifications for the regicide. Yet in dealing with the murder of Qutuz, Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir is noticeably vague. He does not mention any evil deeds committed by Qutuz to justify his murder. Nor does he provide any explanations for the deterioration of relations

³¹ Holt, "Three Biographies", pp. 21-22.

between Qutuz on the one hand and Baybars and the Bahriyya on the other. These are his comments on the period after the battle of `Ayn Jalut and the pacification of Syria:

"When al-Malik al-Muzaffar [Qutuz] and the sultan [Baybars] left together, he [Qutuz] became arrogant and his intentions changed. The sultan [Baybars] saw through this and asked for permission to perform deeds of *jihad* for which God and the people would thank him. al-Malik al-Muzaffar [Qutuz] refused to allow him so that he [Baybars] would not monopolize all the praise."³²

Therefore according to Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, Baybars fought hard for Qutuz at `Ayn Jalut and pacified Syria and brought it under Mamluk control.³³ Qutuz then repaid this loyalty with arrogance. Somehow, one expects a better explanation for a regicide.

Not only does Ibn `Abd al-Zahir mention Baybars as one of the conspirators that murdered Qutuz, he argues he is the one who dealt the death blow and killed Qutuz all by himself: "al-Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir [Baybars] did what he did alone and reached his aim all on his own despite the large numbers of soldiers and the close security, and no one could speak nor dare to touch him."³⁴ He argues that Baybars is the only true regicide and is almost proud of that. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir points out that according to Turkish customs and the *yasa*, a regicide became the next king.³⁵ Therefore, Baybars

³² Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 67-68.

³³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 65.

³⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 68.

³⁵ The *yasa* included both codified and Turkish tribal customary laws. Ulrich Haarmann, "Regicide and the "Law of the Turks", " *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson* eds. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), p.127. For more on the *yasa* see A. N. Poliak, "The Influence of Chingiz-Khan's Yasa upon the General Organization of the Mamluk State," *BSOAS* 10 (1939-1942), p.

deserved to become the sultan. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir emphasizes Baybars' role in the murder to establish his right according to the *yasa*. That the *yasa* would be given so much authority by Ibn `Abd al-Zahir is remarkable. He does not attempt to consolidate this argument by any support from Islamic *shari`a* since it would have called for *qisas* against Baybars in this case. Yet it seems to have been quite acceptable for him that there were different sets of rules that applied to different people even when all were Muslims. So Muslim Mamluks could -should, in this case- follow their customary *yasa*.

In this account, Baybars is prominent in the shaping of events because he played the main part in the murder. When it came to choosing the next sultan, Baybars was once again a prominent decision maker. The Mamluk amirs met and their *atabek* ³⁶ told them about the supposed rule of the *yasa*. At this point, Baybars spoke up and said: "I did it."³⁷ He was not nominated by anyone nor chosen by the group. He nominated himself, as it were. This version gives him an extremely active role in his appointment as sultan. No alternative names for sultan were suggested. The Mamluk *amirs* then agreed and he stepped up and sat on the throne. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir ignores any tension that must have existed amongst the group in such a time of crisis. The account he gives is one of unanimous consensus over Baybars.

862. David Ayalon argued against Poliak's opinion and proved that the particular code promulgated by Chengiz Khan, and referred to as the *yasa*, was not of direct influence under the Mamluk sultanate especially in its earliest periods under consideration here. David Ayalon, "The Great Yasa of Chingiz Khan: A Re-examination (C1), The Position of the Yasa in the Mamluk Sultanate," *Studia Islamica* 36 (1973), pp. 146-150.

³⁶ The title of *atabak al-`asakir* referred to the commander-in-chief of the Sultan's armies. P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London and New York: Longman, 1986), p. 27.

³⁷ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 69.

That there was some resistance to Baybars' claim to the throne is only hinted at. Some Mamluk amirs refused to swear an oath of loyalty to Baybars before he swore an oath of security to them. These amirs had been in disfavor and had just been released by Qutuz and were therefore understandably in doubt about their own political fates.³⁸

Once in power, Baybars had to fight to bring the different areas of the state under his control. This ushered a life-time of war and conquest which is the main topic of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's biography. Baybars spent all of his rule fighting, fighting to seize Syrian territories from Ayyubid and Frankish control, fighting the Mongols and the Armenians in Asia Minor, and conquering northern Nubia. His war efforts claim the greater part of the book. The predominant image that Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir reproduces of Baybars is that of the Good Soldier. Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir dealt with the events of each year of Baybars' rule and concentrated on the battles that took place in each of these years. It is these battles that Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir considers to be Baybars' main achievements because they expanded the rule of the Mamluk state and of Islam.

In a section where the author lists all of Baybars' good qualities, he mentions his bravery first. Baybars is described as an excellent horseman and soldier, an expert at the business of making wars, both getting into them and out of them.³⁹

³⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 69.

³⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 74.

Baybars was keenly interested in all aspects of warfare. He spent time and money on fortifying his borders,⁴⁰ on accumulating weapons and ammunition,⁴¹ and on training his armies and arranging war games. Furthermore, he was often present at the battle field and participated in the fighting.

Baybars is not presented in this work as having been aloof or detached from his troops. Though he commanded a lot of respect -even fear- Baybars was accessible and fought in the battles alongside the soldiers. He often joined the ranks of the fighters as in the siege of Frankish Arsuf in 663/1265.⁴² He also worked with his own hands alongside his men in other manual military tasks. He took part in the destruction of the walls of Caesarea in 663/1265 and hurt his hands,⁴³ in digging trenches during the siege of Arsuf⁴⁴ and in moving heavy military equipment during the battle for Safad in 664/1266.⁴⁵ Working with his own hands is not seen as being beneath a great sultan. On the contrary, Baybars is considered an ideal leader and general who knew how to motivate his men to work by setting an example.

The methods that Baybars and his troops used in the fighting were often brutal. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir seems to have admired that. Unlike the legendary Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, this sultan was not reported to have been

⁴⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 194, 196.

⁴¹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 187-188, 210.

⁴² Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 238.

⁴³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 226.

⁴⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 237.

⁴⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 257.

gracious and magnanimous to his defeated enemies.⁴⁶ For example, in 667/1269 Baybars' troops raided areas in Syria, burning fields, stealing cattle, killing its men and exiling its peasants.⁴⁷ The writer is proud of such toughness.

Baybars established a communication network, the *barid* and a strong intelligence institution. This was one of his main political and military tools. It allowed him to control his vast empire by keeping track of its different regions at the same time. The *barid* was an efficient means of communication between the sultan and his officials. It allowed him to keep the larger part of his armies in Cairo, under control, and reinforce the frontiers whenever and wherever needed. The mail arrived from Cairo to Damascus in four days which allowed him to correspond with the various provinces of the state once or twice a week.⁴⁸ It also provided crucial information for battles.⁴⁹ Baybars used this tool efficiently and never delayed reading the mail. During a battle against the Mongols a message from one of his *amirs* arrived while he was taking a bath. The Sultan promptly rushed out to read it not waiting till he had finished his bath.⁵⁰ He also read the mail regularly while on pilgrimage.⁵¹

Baybars' conduct of foreign policy and his use of the intelligence service are taken as manifestations of his efficiency and ability as a ruler.

⁴⁶ John Victor Tolan, "Mirror of Chivalry: Salah al-Din in the Medieval European Imagination," in *Images of the Other: Europe and the Muslim World Before 1700*, ed. David R. Blanks, *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, 19 (Summer 1996), pp. 16 & 21.

⁴⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 351.

⁴⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 95.

⁴⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 136.

⁵⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 223-4.

⁵¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 355.

While the sections on his war efforts take the greater part of the biography, Ibn `Abd al-Zahir also dealt with the public works that Baybars carried out. He started with the renovations of the mosques at Medina and Hebron and then mentioned al-Madrassa al-Zahiriyya which Baybars established in Cairo.⁵² The establishment and maintenance of places of worship and learning was obviously one of the duties of a good Muslim ruler which the author assured us his Sultan carried out.

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir also mentions the irrigation works that were carried out during the reign of Baybars such as the barrage (*qanatir*) at Shubramant.⁵³ He lists such projects without giving any information about their cost, benefits or such details.⁵⁴ He does not dwell on these achievements. Through his position in the Chancery, Ibn `Abd al-Zahir must have been involved in such crucial state affairs like raising revenue and what that necessitates in matters of infrastructure such as irrigation. His position also entailed access to state documents other than the ones of his own department. We can assume that he knew -or could find out- the details he chose to ignore. However, the logic of the whole text is one of justifying Baybars' rule as well as praising him. In this context, *jihad* is a stronger justification for rule, and a more glorious achievement, than financial management and infrastructural renovation which were traditionally managed by the local bureaucracy rather than the Mamluks.

⁵² Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 89-90 & 287.

⁵³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 91.

⁵⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 289-90.

Perhaps this is why in the sections on public works Ibn `Abd al-Zahir deals more extensively with building and repairing citadels. These are directly related to the war effort which is presented as Baybars' main achievement.⁵⁵

Just as war and *jihad* are presented as the main spheres of Baybars' interest and achievement, his dispensing of justice is also presented as an extremely important part of his duties and legacy. Baybars the good soldier was also Baybars the just ruler, according to Ibn `Abd al-Zahir. Baybars renovated the *dar al-`adl*, an institution born during the period of the Counter-Crusades and instrumental to the Islamic ideological revival that accompanied it.⁵⁶ *Dar al-`adl* was an embodiment of "justice", a crucial Islamic ideal demanded by the people and promulgated by the ruling and religious elite. Baybars is often reported to have administered justice himself and to have presided over public sessions in the *dar al-`adl*.⁵⁷ He listened to the complaints of his subjects including, the poor, the weak and women.⁵⁸ When in 662/1264 people complained about the governor of al-Gharbiyya, Baybars rode alone in disguise to investigate the case and ask about the conduct of the governor and his men. When he established that the man was unjust he punished him and replaced him by another governor.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 93, 187-188, 194, 285-286.

⁵⁶ Nasser O. Rabbat, "The Ideological Significance of the Dar al-`Adl in the Medieval Islamic Orient," *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*, 27 (1995), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 176.

⁵⁸ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 225.

⁵⁹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 186.

The anecdotes that Ibn `Abd al-Zahir reported suggest that Baybars was keen on assuring justice for all his subjects not just for his class, the Mamluks. Thus when the ruler of Sawakin started attacking merchants and confiscating the properties of those of them who died thereby preventing their heirs from inheriting, the sultan sent out the governor of Qus and Akhmim with troops to fight him.⁶⁰ Establishing law and order was one of the important duties of a sultan. It was to Baybars' credit that after he became sultan, the Yemeni merchants were able to come to Egypt twice in 660/1261 because the routes had become safe for travel.⁶¹

One of the main institutional innovations that al-Zahir Baybars introduced to the Mamluk state was the establishment, in 663/1265, of four chief judgeships in place of the Shafi'ite chief judge.⁶² Interestingly enough, Ibn `Abd al-Zahir does not deal with this issue. He only refers to a preceding decree by Baybars which ordered the Chief judge to appoint four deputy judges one from each school of *fiqh*.⁶³ The reason the writer gives for that decision is that the population had grown and people needed more judges.⁶⁴ It is intriguing that Ibn `Abd al-Zahir did not include the establishment of the four chief judgeships as one of the achievements and good deeds that Baybars performed. Whether this omission signals a disapproval by the writer and presumably others of the Sultan's innovation remains an open question.

⁶⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 248.

⁶¹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 132.

⁶² This issue is further discussed below in Chapter Three.

⁶³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 182.

⁶⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 182.

The stress on Baybars' justice is part of the larger argument by Ibn `Abd al-Zahir that Baybars was a good Muslim. Abiding by the rules of the *shari`a* was one of the qualities for which a ruler was praised. The author establishes Baybars' Islamic religiosity by recounting his deeds in the realms of both traditional and popular Islam.

Al-Zahir Baybars restored the `Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo after its fall in Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols. This intensely political and religious act served two purposes at the same time. The Caliph's formal appointment of Baybars as sultan — a precept of Islamic jurisprudence — legitimized Mamluk rule. Yet this act was primarily for popular consumption as the Caliphs were only Caliphs in name and were never allowed any share in power and the Mamluks were the *de facto* rulers. Secondly, the establishment of the Caliphate allowed Baybars to present himself and by extension his regime, as the defenders of the faith.⁶⁵

Baybars also issued decrees that were in line with a strict interpretation of the *shari`a*. Several decrees are mentioned prohibiting alcohol and abolishing taxes levied on it.⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, the first such ban on alcohol mentioned by Ibn `Abd al-Zahir specifies a beer made from grain (*al-muzr*) and was issued in 663/1264.⁶⁷ The preceding year 662/1263 had witnessed shortage in grain and increases in prices probably resulting from a low Nile.⁶⁸ Although Ibn `Abd al-Zahir does not make this connection, the

⁶⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 228-9, 307, 390.

⁶⁷ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 228.

⁶⁸ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 188.

shortage in grain might have been an incentive behind the ban on the production of *muzr* and the abolition of taxes levied on it. Even if this were the case, the writer did not waste such a chance to argue that Baybars was only seeking God's grace and abiding by His will by issuing such a decree.⁶⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir did not mention what –if any– specific punishments Baybars instituted for violation of the alcohol ban. However he mentioned that, during the battle of Safad in 664/1266, it was announced to the troops that whoever brought or drank alcohol would be hanged.⁷⁰ This extremely tough measure that exceeded the *hadd* laid down by *shari'a* was obviously resorted to in order to control the troops at a time of war. That same year the sultan also abolished taxes on *hashish* "in pursuit of God's reward" and ordered that whoever ate it be punished, although the punishment is not specified.⁷¹ Baybars' puritanical campaigns also included prostitutes who in 661/1263 were prohibited from working in Alexandria and in 667/1268 were prohibited from Cairo, Fustat, the provinces and the rest of Mamluk territories.⁷²

The best example of Baybars' observance of the *shari'a* is Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's account of the sultan's performance of pilgrimage to Makka in 667/1268. The writer sought to impress upon his readers that Baybars performed the rites of pilgrimage perfectly. He humbled himself before God:

" He remained like an ordinary person not shielded by anyone and protected only by God. He was alone in

⁶⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 228-9.

⁷⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 258.

⁷¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 266.

⁷² Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 176 & 350.

praying and performing the rites of pilgrimage. He then went over to the *ka'ba* -God bless it- and washed it with his hands. He carried the water in a waterskin over his shoulders and washed the blessed house and remained among the common people....He took people by their hands -may God take him by the hand- and assisted them to the *ka'ba* and one commoner clung to him and could not keep hold of his hand because of the crowds and so clung to the sultan's clothes and tore them and almost threw him on the ground."⁷³

He also instructed his close employees to distribute money and clothing to the people of the *haram* discreetly. Baybars obviously wanted to perform the pilgrimage correctly and to do all the rites to perfection, so much so that he had the Hanafi Qadi al-Qudat accompany him throughout the trip and instruct him in matters of religion.⁷⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir concludes the account of the pilgrimage by declaring that: "the sultan performed the duty of pilgrimage as it should be."⁷⁵

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir also emphasizes Baybars' pious works, especially in establishing *waqfs* for charitable causes like feeding and clothing the poor.⁷⁶ He also built and endowed a college in his name, al-Madrassa al-Zahiriyya.⁷⁷ In Ramadan he used to have food distributed to the poor of Cairo and Fustat.⁷⁸

Even in Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's official version of the sultan's life, it was important to argue that he participated in popular religious activities.

⁷³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 355.

⁷⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 355.

⁷⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 356.

⁷⁶ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, pp. 82 & 220-221.

⁷⁷ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 184.

⁷⁸ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 200.

However, the writer mentions these events without much emphasis, almost *en passant*. Whether he personally disapproved of such activities or not is disputable since he did not — indeed, could not — openly criticize the ruler.

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir reports numerous visits by Baybars to Sufi shaykhs and holy men as well as to the graves of such men which had become local shrines. In 661/1262 he visited al-Shaykh al-Salih al-Qabbari and al-Shaykh al-Shatbi in Alexandria.⁷⁹ In recounting the events of the battle of Arsuf in 663/1265, the writer mentions that Sufi *fuqara'* as well as the more traditional *fuqaha'* accompanied the Mamluk armies.⁸⁰ After the victory, Baybars visited the grave of a holy man buried at the gates of Arsuf which had become a local shrine.⁸¹ In 664/1266 while in Hebron, the sultan visited the grave of a certain Shaykh `Ali al-Bakka'.⁸² In Damascus in 667/1269, Baybars went to visit a Sufi shaykh who foretold the future for him and his companions.⁸³

One aspect of Baybars' popular religious activities which Ibn `Abd al-Zahir specifically ignored is the sultan's special relationship with the infamous Shaykh Khidr. The writer does not ascribe any particular importance to that relationship. He mentions him only twice, both among the events of the year 664/1266. After the battle of Safad, Baybars is reported to have established *waqfs* for Shaykh Khidr and other shaykhs.⁸⁴ That same year the sultan ordered that a *zawiya* be built for Shaykh Khidr and visited him

⁷⁹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 175.

⁸⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 238.

⁸¹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 239.

⁸² Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 250.

⁸³ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 350.

⁸⁴ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 263.

there.⁸⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir is careful not to refer to any reports of Shaykh Khidr's questionable moral behavior, which might have reflected badly on the sultan. At the same time he refrains from fostering the impression that Baybars was this shaykh's patron or that the two men enjoyed a special relationship, issues that were to be stressed in later sources.

Another method which Ibn `Abd al-Zahir employs to emphasize Baybars' Islamic religiosity is his positive accounts of deeds that are blatantly anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. Baybars' main enemies in Syria for most of his reign as sultan, were the Crusaders who clearly employed Christian motifs in their propaganda. The Muslim counter-Crusades often targeted Christian symbols.

In 661/1261 on the verge of war with the Franks, Baybars ordered the church of Nazareth "razed to the ground, and none of the Franks dared walk out of the gates of Acre [i.e. to protect Nazareth], and none could breathe a word."⁸⁶ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir noted this after having explained the importance of the church to Christians. In 664/1266 Baybars issued a decree forbidding Christians and Jews from visiting the grave of the prophet Ibrahim at Hebron.⁸⁷ The explanation which is given for such a decision is that they were unclean and so sullied the holy shrine.⁸⁸ After conquering Caesaria and Arsuf in 665/1267, Baybars had a church turned into a mosque.⁸⁹ This sort of decision and the way the writer presents it support the view that Baybars and

⁸⁵ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 266.

⁸⁶ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 157.

⁸⁷ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 251.

⁸⁸ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 251.

⁸⁹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 275.

his regime considered any defeat of Christians and destruction of Christian symbols to be a victory for Islam. This is also clear in Baybars' letter to the ruler of Tripoli in 669/1271 informing him that "the sound of bells has been replaced by [the Islamic slogan] *Allahu Akbar*."⁹⁰

Even more blatantly anti-Christian is the letter drafted by Ibn `Abd al-Zahir himself to the ruler of Antioch after its fall, in which Baybars proudly informed him of the behavior of his Muslim armies:

"If you had only seen your churches with their crosses broken and scattered, their sheets of false Bibles ripped off, and the graves of Bishops dug up, if you had seen your Muslim enemy stepping on the altar where they slaughtered the monk, the priest and the deacon..."⁹¹

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's work makes it clear that Baybars' regime did not argue for tolerance nor acceptance of *dhimmi*s but tried to keep its non-Muslim populations under strict control.

Yet these populations are remarkably absent from Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's account. The author does not mention the fires of Cairo and Fustat in 663/1265 in which Christians and Jews were blamed and severely punished by Baybars. The writer could have used these events to demonstrate his sultan's toughness and strength, yet he chose not to. Whether this signifies that Baybars' behavior did not provide much to be proud of is a matter of speculation. As a Muslim ruler, Baybars was responsible for the protection of all his subjects including the non-Muslims among them who were in the

⁹⁰ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 380.

⁹¹ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p. 311.

dhimma or protection of Muslims and hence referred to as *ahl al-dhimma*. Later sources would differ in their judgment of his decisions. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir was more interested in emphasizing Baybars' *jihad* and his efforts in quelling the external enemies of Islam.

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir ends his biography of al-Zahir Baybars with the expected conclusion: the Sultan's death. His account of Baybars' death — though of course not written under the Sultan's influence — is in line with the rest of the biography. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir gives the official version of how Baybars fell ill and died without referring to any of the rumors that surrounded his death all of which would appear in all later sources.⁹² Reporting stories of intrigue and poison would perhaps have been too sensitive for a man so long a part of the official bureaucracy and whose name was associated with the sultan. In addition to this, it would not be very appropriate to mention rumors about the Sultan's death in a book that was meant to praise him.

Thus Ibn `Abd al-Zahir traces the years of Baybars' sultanate and stresses that he was a good soldier and an able general who fought hard against the enemies of Islam, a just ruler and a pious Muslim. These are the three main qualities that the author stresses throughout his *al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir*.

⁹² Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, *Rawd*, p.473.

Chapter Three: Baybars in Medieval Scholarly Writings: The Hero, The Tyrant

Baybars continued to challenge and interest writers long after his days were over. He is one of the sultans who has a large share of the data in the histories, chronicles, and biographical dictionaries of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. The writers of these works had different perceptions of Baybars' reign and thus their reconstructions of it drew varying and often conflicting images. It is not the purpose of this chapter to summarize what each and every medieval writer thought and wrote of Baybars. Rather, I will try to concentrate on several of these writers who represent different schools, ages, and political stances. Each writer had his own personal biases and his own purposes for writing about Baybars. The backgrounds against which they each lived and worked deeply influenced their writings. This led them to emphasize different aspects of his personality and legacy and to ignore others.

Medieval writers' evaluations of Baybars' rule and their rendition of his actions serve to demonstrate several points. First it shows how a ruler was judged by the intelligentsia and what was expected of a Mamluk sultan. It also shows how acts which were celebrated by official propaganda were perceived differently by non-officials as well as by subsequent generations. These writings may be contrasted to the work of Ibn `Abd al-Zahir discussed in Chapter Two. Accounts that are introduced in these writings highlight

those that were ignored and censored by Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir and thus serve to provide a somewhat different portrayal of Baybars.

Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir had presented Baybars as an ideal sultan. By contrast, works written after the Sultan's days show more ambivalent attitudes towards him. This is true of Baybars' second courtly biography, *Tarikh al-Malik al-Zahir* by 'Izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Shaddad (d. 684/1285). Unlike Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's work, Ibn Shaddad's biography of Baybars was not written under the Sultan's influence. In fact it was written or completed after the Sultan's death.¹ In addition, while the writer was close to Baybars' court, he did not occupy an official position as did Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir.² Both these circumstances allowed Ibn Shaddad more freedom in his writing about Baybars' reign. Unfortunately, *Tarikh al-malik al-Zahir* does not survive in full. The extant part deals with the years between 670/1272 and 676/1278 only.³

In contrast to the benevolent, just ruler that Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir presented, the physician 'Ala' al-Din ibn al-Nafis (d. 687/1288) described a harsh cruel despot. In his treatise *al-Risala al-Kamiliyya fi al-sira al-nabawiyya*, Ibn al-Nafis included a detailed description of a Muslim ruler assumed to be Baybars.⁴ He argued that a sultan had to be courageous, cruel and pitiless for the preservation of the Muslim community.⁵ He described Baybars as a man

¹ Ahmad Hutayt, introduction, *Tarikh al-malik al-zahir* by 'Izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Shaddad (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983), p. 18.

² Hutayt, introduction, *Tarikh*, p. 15.

³ Hutayt, introduction, *Tarikh*, p. 19.

⁴ Remke Kruk, "History and Apocalypse: Ibn al-Nafis' Justification of Mamluk Rule," *Der Islam* 72 (1995): 324.

⁵ Peter Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), p. 251.

of "a harsh character, nay, an evil and threatening one" who with confiscations of his subjects' possessions led to "an increase in thefts and a bad state of affairs."⁶

Some fourteenth century writers, like Baybars al-Mansuri (d.725/1325), Shafi' ibn 'Ali (649/1252-730/1330), Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 736/1336) and al-Nuwayri (d. 733/1332), who were alive at the time of al-Nasir Muhammad, tended to place more emphasis on Baybars' despotic actions. They may have wished to diminish the importance of Baybars' legacy in order to enhance the achievements of the regime of al-Nasir Muhammad. This is particularly evident in Shafi' ibn 'Ali's *Husn al-manaqib al-sariya al-muntaza'a min al-sira al-zahiriya*, his *mukhtassar* of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's *Rawd*. P. M. Holt argued that it might have appeared as a sort of companion to Shafi's biography of Qalawun, *al-Fadl al-ma'thur min sirat al-sultan al-malik al-Mansur* during the third reign of al-Nasir Muhammad.⁷ This later work was intended as a praise of Qalawun and served to legitimize his regime and by extension his sons'.⁸ Shafi' had the task of justifying Qalawun's usurpation of the throne from the sons of Baybars, his *khushdash* and former sovereign to whom he owed allegiance. This prompted Shafi' to slight Baybars' reputation while simultaneously praising Qalawun.

Fifteenth-century Mamluk historians, like Ibn al-Furat (d. 807/1404), al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1441) and Ibn Taghribirdi (d. 874/1469) demonstrated a

⁶ Kruk quotes Ibn al-Nafis. Kruk, "Ibn al-Nafis," p. 332.

⁷ P. M. Holt, "The Presentation of Qalawun by Shafi' ibn 'Ali," in *The Islamic World From Classical to Modern Times; Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis* eds. C.E.Bosworth, Charles Issawi et al. (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1989), p.143.

⁸ Holt, "Presentation," p.148.

more balanced approach towards the Sultan, and presented him as a great ruler while still acknowledging his shortcomings and excesses. They included the less glamorous and less flattering accounts of the Sultan alongside those of his military achievement and the glories of his reign. They even expressed a sense of nostalgia for "the good old days" which prompted al-Maqrizi to describe Baybars as "one of the greatest rulers of Islam."⁹

In later works, Baybars' role in the murder of Qutuz was no longer the main one, nor was it necessarily to be celebrated.¹⁰ The murder of Qutuz was presented as a conspiracy involving several *amirs*, among whom was Baybars. According to Shafi' ibn 'Ali, Baybars al-Mansuri, al-Nuwayri, al-Maqrizi and Ibn Taghribirdi, for example, Baybars was not the one to deal the first blow nor even the death blow.¹¹ These writings thus stripped him of whatever glory official propaganda — such as that of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir — tried to bestow on his act. He was no longer the only courageous one who dared strike a sultan in the midst of the heavy security of his own army. In fact al-Nuwayri cast doubt on his role altogether by remarking:

⁹ Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-suluk li-ma'rifat duwwal al-muluk*, ed. Muhammad Mustafa Ziyada (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1957), volume one, part two, p.641.

¹⁰ Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib al-sariyya al-muntaza'a min al-sira al-zahiriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd-Allah al-Khuwaytir 2nd Edition (Riyad: 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Khuwaytir, 1989), p.66; Baybars al-Mansuri, *Mukhtar al-akhbar: Tarikh al-dawla al-Ayyubiyya wa dawlat al-Mamalik al-bahariyya hatta sanat 702 A.H.* ed. 'Abd al-Hamid Salih Himdan (Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriyya al-Lubnaniyya, 1993), p. 11; idem, *Kitab al-tuhfa al-mulukhiyya fi al-dawla al-turkiyya: Tarikh dawlat al-Mamalik al-bahariyya fi al-fitra min 648-711 A.H.* ed. 'Abd al-Hamid Salih Himdan (Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriyya al-Lubnaniyya, 1987), p. 45; Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab fi gunun al-adab* ed. Muhammad Diaa' al-Din al-Rayyis (Cairo: al-Hayy'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma lil-Kitab, 1993), volume 29, pp. 477-8; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:435, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum al-zahira*, p. 83

¹¹ For example: Baybars al-Mansuri, *Mukhtar*, p.11; idem, *Tuhfa*, p.45; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:435; Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, pp.66-67; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 29:477-478 and Ibn Taghribirdi, *Nujum*, 7:83. Holt, "Three Biographies," p.26; idem, "Some Observations," p.125.

"al-Malik al-Zahir [Baybars] claimed that he is the one who killed him [Qutuz] with his own hands. Some say that he did not kill him but used to boast that he did."¹²

The next step in the narrative of Qutuz's murder and Baybars' accession to throne was the convening of the top Mamluk generals. Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's version implied that the Mamluks had not decided on a sultan before the *atabek* interfered and backed Baybars' candidacy. Therefore his version implied that Baybars had unanimous approval and that there were no serious competitors to the throne. However, Shafi' ibn 'Ali wrote that the *amirs* had already chosen Sayf al-Din Balaban al-Rashidi "the most prominent amongst them" to be their next sultan.¹³ The idea that Baybars was not among the prominent Mamluk *amirs* echoed through Ibn Kathir's version which could complement Shafi's. Ibn Kathir wrote:

"it is said that when he [Qutuz] died the *amirs* were confused amongst themselves over whom to make sultan. They each feared the consequences and that what befell others could befall them fast [i.e., that they could be murdered by fellow Mamluks like Qutuz, his predecessor Aybak, and the Ayyubid Turanshah before them], so they agreed on Baybars al-Bunduqdari, though he was not amongst the most prominent *muqaddamin*, but they wanted to try it out on him."¹⁴

More seriously perhaps, by suggesting alternative names of regicides, these accounts undermined Baybars' self-chosen legitimization tool. As mentioned above, the official narrative asserted that according to the Turkish *yasa*, a regicide had the right to the throne. Hence, if — as Shafi' ibn 'Ali

¹² al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 29:478.

¹³ Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.67.

¹⁴ Abu al-Fida' al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-ma'arif and Riyad: Maktabat al-nasr, 1966) 13:223.

argued — it was Anas al-Silihdar who actually murdered Qutuz¹⁵, then it was that latter *amir* who should have been the legitimate sultan, and not Baybars. This implies that Baybars' rule was illegitimate, at least by Turkish standards. Instead of the glorious courageous sultan of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, we are presented with a usurper of the throne.

This image of the usurper was in some sources backed by explanations of Baybars' decision to turn against Qutuz and murder him. Shafi' ibn 'Ali in his *mukhtasar* of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's work did not provide any new insights on the reasons behind the fallout between Qutuz and Baybars.¹⁶ It is Ibn al-Dawadari who later in the fourteenth century gave more information. He explained that relations had soured between Qutuz and the Bahriyya after 'Ayn Jalut because the sultan reprimanded some of them and insulted them for fleeing the battlefield. Therefore they held a grudge against him.¹⁷ With such bad feelings on their part explained, Ibn al-Dawadari then quoted Ibn Shaddad's version that an informer had warned Qutuz that Baybars and some Bahri *amirs* had turned against him.¹⁸ Thus he harbored evil intentions towards them and Baybars might have been aware of them. The quotation from Ibn Shaddad ends with the remark that "they thus left Damascus each of them wary of the other."¹⁹ This version of events complements the one given by Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir of how Qutuz had changed towards Baybars and the

¹⁵ Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p. 66; Irwin, *Middle East*, p. 37

¹⁶ Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Abi Bakr ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Aybak al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar wa jami' al-ghurar* ed. Ulrich Haarmann (Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1971), volume 8, p. 60.

¹⁸ The surviving manuscript of Ibn Shaddad's *Tarikh* does not cover the early years of Baybars' reign.

¹⁹ Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, p. 60.

Bahriyya and was aloof towards them. The important difference in Ibn al-Dawadari's account is his explanation of why the Bahriyya had turned against Qutuz. At the same time, Qutuz cannot be held to blame for reprimanding troops for fleeing a battlefield. This version is thus in Qutuz's favor.

It is only in later medieval works that another account was introduced. According to al-Maqrizi and Ibn Taghribirdi who wrote in the fifteenth century, Qutuz had promised Baybars — before `Ayn Jalut— to make him his viceroy in Aleppo, perhaps as some kind of incentive to get him to join ranks and fight the Mongols. Yet Qutuz changed his mind after the victory and broke his promise by granting Aleppo to someone else.²⁰ This is the reason given for Baybars' holding a grudge against Qutuz. Here Qutuz is not presented as blameless as he was in the earlier versions.

Medieval writers further emphasized the abhorrent nature of Qutuz's murder by portraying him in positive terms that suggested he did not deserve to be killed and that his murder was therefore unjust.²¹ Qutuz in these writings was a good pious sultan who was betrayed by his men. This was emphasized by reports that Qutuz was the Muslim-born descendant of the Khawarizm-shahs and his real name was "Mahmud". Mahmud Qutuz, the story goes, was sold into slavery after the defeat of his dynasty by the Mongols. In line with the romantic overtones of this legend, Qutuz later avenged his family's misfortune by defeating the Mongols at the battle of

²⁰ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, pp.434-435; Jamal al-Din Abi al-Mahasin Yusuf ibn Taghribirdi al-Atabiki, *al-Nujum al-zahira fi muluk Misr wa al-Qahira* (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Misriyya al-'Amma lil-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjama wa al-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr, 1963) volume 7, p.82

²¹ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 29:484; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, p.41

`Ayn Jalut.²² A free nobleman and a Muslim by birth, Qutuz is contrasted to Baybars, who was an imported mamluk slave, born a non-muslim and a regicide who usurped the throne.

The Mamluk dynasty sought to present itself as the defender and savior of Islam against its Frankish and Mongol enemies. With time, the first important Muslim victory over the Mongols at `Ayn Jalut in 658/1260 assumed a central role within that schema.²³ Whereas Ibn `Abd al-Zahir made Baybars appear to be the true hero of the battle, later medieval writers tended to give more importance to the role of the sultan, Qutuz. Qutuz's true heroism lay not only in the actual fighting of the battle but, perhaps more importantly, in laying the political and diplomatic groundwork for `Ayn Jalut. The Ayyubids were a divided fragmented family. Some of them had already formed alliances with the Mongols.²⁴ The fierce reputation of the Mongols made the Mamluk armies themselves extremely reluctant to fight them. Qutuz had the heavy task of creating a united Muslim front to fight the invading Mongol armies and of ensuring that Syrian Franks would not support the Mongols. He formed alliances with various Ayyubid kings of Syria such as al-Malik al-Ashraf Musa of Hims.²⁵ He also had to convince all the Mamluk factions including the Bahriyya to fight the Mongols and not

²² For example: Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-Drar*, 8:39-40; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 29:479-80; Qutb al-Din Abu al-Fath Musa ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Qutb al-Din al-Yunini al-Ba`labaki al-Hanbali, *Dhayl mir'at al-zaman* (Hyderabad: Dai'rat al-ma'arif al-uthmaniyya, 1954), volume 1, p.368; Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum al-zahira*, 7:85-6; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:435.

²³ B. Spuler, "The Disintegration of the Caliphate in the East," *The Cambridge History of Islam*, eds. P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 213.

²⁴ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:424-425.

²⁵ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 29:470, 473-474.

surrender.²⁶ In addition, Qutuz was credited by many of these writers with fighting hard alongside his men and urging them to stand up to their enemies.²⁷ Thus sources credit Qutuz with the ground-work necessary to prepare for battle.

Later medieval historians such as Shafi' ibn 'Ali, al-Nuwayri, al-Maqrizi and Ibn al-Dawadari gave most of the credit for the victory of 'Ayn Jalut to Qutuz. They also mentioned Baybars' valor during that battle and credited him with pursuing fleeing Mongol troops into Syria.²⁸ Stripping Baybars of the honor and title of the victor of 'Ayn Jalut as these writers did, deprived him of another of his legitimization tools.

Even with his reputation as a victorious army general and the claim that the Turkish *yasa* gave him the right to rule, Baybars still needed Islamic legitimization to become sultan. He acquired an Islamic seal of approval by re-establishing an 'Abbasid caliphate in Cairo and arranging for the Caliph to legitimize his authority. Furthermore, the Caliphate remained an institution of juridical significance, legitimating the authority of Sunni rulers and authorizing the processes of Muslim law in their territories.²⁹ He presented himself as the restorer of the Caliphate and the defender of Islam. Baybars had the Caliph —whom he himself instituted— appoint him sultan and denote him *Qasim Amir al-Mu'minin*.³⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir presented this deed

²⁶ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:429

²⁷ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:430-431.

²⁸ Shafi', *Husn al-manqib*, 63; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 29:474; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:429-432; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, 8:49, 60.

²⁹ P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: the Near East from the eleventh century to 1517* (London and New York: Longman, 1986), p. 92

³⁰ Armand Abel, "Le Khalife, Présence Sacrée," *Studia Islamica* 7(1957), p.44.

as an unquestionable example of Baybars' devotion to Islam. Later medieval writers, on the other hand, were not oblivious to his more political intent, and furthermore questioned Baybars' behavior towards the first Caliph.

Historians writing after Baybars' reign were clear in explaining that the `Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo was a shadow Caliphate whose Caliphs were kept under virtual house arrest.³¹ According to Shafi' ibn `Ali, Baybars had at first allowed the Caliph to keep an administration and to appoint employees. Worrying that the Caliph would form a rival base of support and topple the Mamluks, Baybars then put him under virtual house arrest and forbade people to meet with him.³²

The first `Abbasid Caliph left Egypt with a small army to re-conquer Iraq from the Mongols and re-establish his Caliphate in Baghdad. A unit of Mongol troops met and defeated them on the way, killing the Caliph. Shafi' ibn `Ali criticized Baybars' administration for sending the Caliph off to fight the Mongols with a small force.³³ Shafi' considered this expedition a waste of money and lives and criticized his uncle, Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, for downplaying it in his *Rawd*.³⁴ Both Ibn al-Dawadari and Mufaddal ibn Abi al-Fada'il wrote that the Caliph was defeated because his Arab and Turkish troops deserted him.³⁵ It is al-Maqrizi's version of the events that complements Shafi's and implies that Baybars had evil intentions. Here is what al-Maqrizi wrote:

³¹ Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.114; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:540

³² Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.114.

³³ Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, pp.71, 96

³⁴ Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.71

³⁵ Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, 8:82-84; Mufaddal ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks: texte arabe publié et traduit en française par E.Bloch* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919), p.89.

"The Sultan [Baybars] had intended to send ten thousand soldiers with the Caliph to establish his rule in Baghdad.... but someone advised the Sultan not to, arguing that 'if the Caliph were to re-establish his rule in Baghdad, he will fight you and remove you from power in Egypt.' And so he became suspicious and sent only three hundred soldiers with the Caliph."³⁶

It is as if Baybars sent the Caliph out to meet his death.

The credit for `Ayn Jalut and the Caliph's failed expedition to Baghdad aside however, Baybars' own *jihad* against the Crusaders and the Mongols was considered by most medieval historians his most important contribution and was listed with pride even by writers of later generations.³⁷ All medieval writers who were consulted for this thesis, listed with pride Baybars' *jihad* in Syria, Armenia, and Nubia. As sultan, Baybars spent most of his time on battlefields. He worked hard to build up and maintain a strong army and supervised many war games to train his soldiers for battle.³⁸ He also spent a lot of resources on building and maintaining fortifications and citadels.³⁹ He was very much involved in the wars his troops fought. He fought by their side on the battlefields.⁴⁰ He was not afraid of dirtying himself with manual labor so, for example, he worked alongside his men while they destroyed the walls of the fort at Caesaria and while they re-built Safad.⁴¹ So engrossed was

³⁶ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:462.

³⁷ For example: Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, pp.54-55; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:239-253.

³⁸ Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahim ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh Ibn al-Furat* ed. Qustantin Zurayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1942), volume 7, pp.6-7; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:517, 573, 626.

³⁹ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:24-25.

⁴⁰ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:270; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:527, 528-529, 559.

⁴¹ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:267, 137.

he in the details of his armies that when the news of the Mongol retreat from al-Bira arrived in 663/1265, the Sultan insisted the letter be read to him immediately, while he was still in the bathroom.⁴²

In reading medieval accounts of Baybars' rule, a modern reader is struck by the fact that both the official propaganda of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir and later writing presented Baybars as behaving, not as a ruler elevated above his people, but as one of the mamluk soldiers. An inscription on the walls of Safad reads that Baybars who had conquered the city "himself stood until the dust of its trenches and its stones were lifted from his head and those of his close men."⁴³ Similarly, when some *amirs* sent to Baybars to complain that they had had to move the stones which the Mongols had put in the ditch around al-Bira, the Sultan received the news while he was standing tearing down the walls of Caesaria with the tools in his own hands, which were wounded from the effort. He wrote back in reply:

"We are — thank God — not enjoying any exclusive rest or luxury while you are in a difficult situation. He whom you have here is a fighter night and day and a mover of stones and a fighter of *kuffar*. In all these matters we are equals."⁴⁴

Since the first statement was inscribed most definitely at Baybars own request and the second was written in his name, this implies that the Sultan himself sought to promote a tribal image of the "first among equals" of himself.

⁴² Shafi', *Husn al-manaqib*, 179; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:524.

⁴³ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:138.

⁴⁴ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:525.

Baybars was also shown to be tough and hard on his soldiers, often pushing them beyond their limits.⁴⁵ Yet the discipline that he maintained as a general was also respected by writers like al-Maqrizi who realized how difficult it was to control a Mamluk army and keep discipline among its soldiers. Thus in recounting the details of the battle for Safad al-Maqrizi wrote:

" On the night of the fourteenth [Shawwal 664/ July 19, 1266] the fighting continued from the night to noon, so the troops dispersed out of tiredness. The Sultan was angered by this and ordered his men to go to the camp and wake the *amirs* and soldiers by pricking them saying: "The Muslims are in this state and you are resting?" So they were woken up. And the Sultan arrested more than forty *amirs* and cuffed them and imprisoned them. After intercessions he set them free and ordered them to keep to their positions."⁴⁶

Just as Baybars' victories against the Franks, Mongols, Armenians and Nubians were appreciated by the later writers and historians whom I consulted, so was his subjugation of the Syrian Isma'ilis. The Isma'ilis had developed a legendary reputation of power and invincibility and had inspired terror in many areas. Baybars was considered truly heroic by many writers for having managed to bring the Isma'ilis under his control and get them to pay tribute to the Mamluk sultanate while previously they were independent and used to collect tribute from Frankish principalities.⁴⁷ Baybars' power over them reached the extent that allowed him to appoint their leaders.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:287.

⁴⁶ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:547

⁴⁷ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:587.

⁴⁸ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:587.

Furthermore, the Isma'ilis were Batini Shi'is and as such were considered heretics by Sunni 'ulama'. The subjugation of the Isma'ilis thus affirmed the Sunni character of the sultan, who subdued unorthodox Muslims who had deviated from the right path and revolted against the Caliph.

Baybars needed to provide bureaucratic foundations for a strong centralized state that could fund and maintain a large army fighting enemies literally east and west. He revived the official institution of *barid* as a communication network. So efficient was its administration that, according to al-Maqrizi, state correspondence from the Syrian provinces to the Citadel in Cairo arrived twice a week.⁴⁹ This allowed the Sultan to maintain close control over the large expanding Mamluk state, and to quickly send troops defend the Syrian frontiers when needed without posting large numbers of soldiers there permanently.

Baybars paid close attention to building and maintaining public works that were needed to sustain the economic foundations of the state. Thus Shafi', al-Nuwayri and Ibn al-Furat praised the sultan for financing projects of agricultural infrastructure, such as the aqueducts of Shubramant.⁵⁰ He also supervised these projects in the various provinces himself and worked alongside the construction workers.⁵¹

The toughness that Baybars exhibited as an army general in dealing with his troops as well as his enemies was considered a trait of his rule in

⁴⁹ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:446.

⁵⁰ Baybars al-Mansuri, *Tuhfa*, p.69 Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p. 251; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:24,134; Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p.83.

⁵¹ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:543-544

general. So feared and respected was Baybars by the Mamluks that "when one of them was sick, none could visit him without prior permission [from Baybars]." ⁵² On his own death bed, the *amirs* did not dare enter his chambers without his permission. ⁵³

In fourteenth-century writings Baybars came out as harsh and despotic. Writers such as Shafi', al-Nuwayri, Ibn al-Dawadari and Mufaddal reported that he spied on and imprisoned several top Mamluk *amirs*, often on the grounds that they were conspiring against the Sultan. ⁵⁴ These accounts tended to portray unfavorable images of Baybars as a paranoid insecure dictator rather than a strong ruler trying to control a huge empire. For example, Baybars' imprisonment of Shams al-Din Sunqur al-Rumi could have been presented as an instance of the Sultan reining in his top generals, a continuing challenge for the Mamluk regime. Instead, the background given to that incident by Shafi' ibn 'Ali and al-Nuwayri casts shadows over Baybars' character. According to Shafi', the sultan imprisoned the *amir* Sunqur al-Rumi who had tortured one of his mamluks to death despite the sultan's intercession. Shafi' explained that Sunqur had discovered that the mamluk was a spy for Baybars. ⁵⁵ Al-Nuwayri's version, on the other hand suggests that the sultan might have been attracted to the mamluk who was

⁵² Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p.82

⁵³ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:637.

⁵⁴ Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.129; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab* Muhammad 'Abd al-Hadi Shu'ayra Ed. volume 30, pp. 84-87, 111, 123, 180; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-Durar*, 8:96; Mufaddal ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks: texte arabe publié et traduit en française par E.Bloch* E.Bloch Ed. And Transl. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919), p.79; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, pp.493-5.

⁵⁵ Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.210

"good looking" and it was this which prompted Sunqur al-Rumi to punish him.⁵⁶ Both explanations for the imprisonment of this amir thus portray Baybars in a negative light.

Some writers, like al-Maqrizi, do not appear to criticize the toughness that Baybars demonstrated in dealing with the Mamluks. So, for example, in dealing with the imprisonment of a top general, Sayf al-Din Balaban al-Rashidi, al-Maqrizi mentioned his several transgressions and Baybars' patience and tolerance until he was informed — through spies of course — of this *amir's* conspiracy with an Ayyubid ruler against Baybars, which the Sultan could not allow to go unpunished.⁵⁷ Here Baybars hardly seems despotic in seeking to control the Mamluk generals and preempting a coup d'état. Interestingly enough, al-Nuwayri also took the same approach in dealing with this particular incident remarking that though Baybars had been especially generous with Balban al-Rashidi assigning him several lucrative grants and *iqta's*, this *amir* was too busy drinking and having fun instead of working on the affairs of government.⁵⁸

Al-Maqrizi's attitude is also similar in the case of a Christian overseer in Gharbiyya whom people complained of to Baybars. He wrote:

"and he received complaints of the injustice of a Christian overseer, and so ordered that the man be hanged because he said things that deserved such a punishment."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:123.

⁵⁷ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, p.493.

⁵⁸ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:84.

⁵⁹ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:505.

The writer did not mention the crimes and injustices this overseer committed nor did he question the justice of Baybars' ruling which in itself may imply his implicit approval.

Some of the anecdotes related about Baybars present him as paranoid and insecure. Having reached the sultanate through two regicides, Baybars did not trust his subordinates.⁶⁰ He forbade all gatherings and instituted a close system of surveillance.⁶¹ Ibn Shaddad's comments concerning this issue are among the few instances in which there is a hint of criticism for Baybars in his *Tarikh*:

"He forbade gatherings in open areas, and assigned spies on those whom he distrusted, and kept the spies in their turn under surveillance, so that people feared their mothers and fathers, their wives and brothers, and feared that the walls of their homes had ears."⁶²

The Sultan was often said to have ridden in disguise and secrecy from one part of the empire to another to check on his subordinates and the state of the population and to find out what was being said about him.⁶³ In 662/1264 he visited Gharbiyya in disguise asking its people about their governor. Having heard bad things about the man he had him arrested and replaced.⁶⁴ Baybars often led his men to believe he was somewhere while he rode in disguise to another place for a surprise or secret visit.⁶⁵ In Sha'ban of

⁶⁰ Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate, 1250-1382*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p.42.

⁶¹ Thorau, *Lion of Egypt*, p. 251.

⁶² Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, p. 314.

⁶³ For example: Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, p.131; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:540

⁶⁴ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:505.

⁶⁵ For example: al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:161-164; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:598

667/1269 while he was supposed to be sick on the battlefield in Syria, he rode in secret to Egypt "to determine the conditions of his kingdom and know the conditions of his son al-Malik al-Sa'id in Egypt."⁶⁶ The *atabek*, 'Izz al-Din al-Hilli had just died.⁶⁷ Thus Baybars might have wanted to ensure that no serious power struggle took place while he was away and given that his army was in battle he could not announce his travel without causing some confusion.

Even when he decided to go on pilgrimage, Baybars kept all the preparations a secret so much so that when "Jamal al-Din ibn al-Daya al-Hajib said: 'I wish I could go with the sultan' he [Baybars] ordered that his [Jamal al-Din's] tongue be cut off."⁶⁸ Such a punishment cannot but seem harsh and unproportional to the "crime." Yet writers like Baybars al-Mansuri ignored the political background in Hijaz against which the Sultan decided to go on pilgrimage not just to fulfill a religious obligation but perhaps also to make a political statement in the struggle to build his empire and control its vast territories. While in Mecca, the Sharif of Mecca finally pledged formal allegiance to Baybars thereby establishing a form of Mamluk suzerainty over Hijaz.⁶⁹ Going to Mecca on pilgrimage meant a ruler would be away from governmental business for a considerable period of time leaving room for possible coups d'état. Thus many rulers, including Salah al-Din, never went

⁶⁶ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:574-578.

⁶⁷ Baybars al-Mansuri, *Tuhfa*, p.65.

⁶⁸ Baybars al-Mansuri, *Mukhtar*, p.41.

⁶⁹ Irwin, *The Middle East*, p.56.

on pilgrimage. Hence, Baybars' insisting on secrecy need not appear as out of the ordinary as some writers made it.

Nevertheless, even in these later writings that were not intended to idealize Baybars, he was acknowledged to have played an active role in the administration of justice and the implementation of *shari'a*.⁷⁰ Unlike Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir who omitted Baybars' decision in 663/1265 to appoint four chief-judges from the four schools, later sources dealt with the decision but differed in the way they evaluated it. Shafi' ibn 'Ali in his *mukhtasar* of Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir's text, explained that the reason behind the decision was the strictness of the Shafi'ite qadi, Ibn Bint al-A'azz, which led to a state of stagnation in the administration of justice.⁷¹ Shafi' made the qadi's adherence to the letter of the law rather than its spirit appear almost unjust and obstructive. He thus presented Baybars' decision as a valuable and innovative solution to the everyday problems which people faced in the *qadi*'s court.

For al-Nuwayri on the other hand, Ibn Bint al-A'azz was a respectable firm judge who followed the rules of *fiqh* strictly even when it was in contradiction to the interests of the ruling authorities, the Mamluks. In this version of the incident, the *qadi* had issued a ruling — according to the then dominant Shafi'ite *madhhab* — which harmed the interests of one of the top *amirs*, and it was this *amir* who suggested that Baybars appoint four chief

⁷⁰ Baybars al-Mansuri, *Mukhtar*, p.13; Shafi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.1135, 143, 157; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, p.501, 503, 508, 536-7

⁷¹ Safi' ibn 'Ali, *Husn al-Manaqib*, pp.210-211; Muhammad Jamal al-Din Surur, *al-Zahir Baybars wa hadarat Misr fi 'ahdihi* (Cairo: Matba'at Dar al-Kutub al-Misriya, 1938), p. 139.

judges.⁷² This would have allowed the *amir* to pick the school whose ruling would suit him. Al-Nuwayri's probable disapproval of the decision is hinted at because he included an account of the Syrian judges' resistance to this decision. He stated that they first refused their appointments and then tried to resign but the Sultan would hear none of that.⁷³

That there would be resistance to such a decision after traditional Shafi'ite control is perhaps understandable. Furthermore, it is worth noting, that the Egyptian Muslim population in the thirteenth century increasingly included non-Shafi'ites. Most Mamluks were Hanafis, as were many of the immigrants fleeing the Mongol conquests from the east, while those fleeing the Spanish reconquista in the Muslim west were mostly Malikis.⁷⁴ Baybars himself converted to the Shafi'i *madhhab* only after his assumption of the sultanate, yet he continued to favor Hanafis throughout his reign.⁷⁵ The new system diminished the authority of a single chief *qadi* and curbed the influence of the religious establishment thus increasing Baybars' control of the judiciary.⁷⁶

Al-Maqrizi, who had strong Shafi'ite convictions, expressed his disapproval openly. He included an anecdote that reveals how unpopular the decision was: Somebody saw al-Zahir Baybars in a dream after his death and

⁷² al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:117.

⁷³ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:122.

⁷⁴ Jorgen S. Nielsen, "Sultan al-Zahir Baybars and the Appointment of Four Chief Qadis, 663/1265," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 169; Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdari in Cairo," *Annales Islamologiques* 18 (1982): 62.

⁷⁵ Nielsen, "Appointment of Four Chief Qadis," pp. 173-174.

⁷⁶ Jorgen S. Nielsen, *Secular Justice in an Islamic State: Mazalim under the Bahri Mamluks, 662/1264 - 789/1387*, (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1985), p. 51; Nielsen, "Appointment of Four Chief Qadis," p. 171.

asked him how God had judged him. Baybars responded that he received the most punishment from God for appointing four judges since this had disunited Muslims.⁷⁷ This then, according to al-Maqrizi, was his most unjust decision

Baybars' toughness and strictness extended to his practice of Islam as well. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir tried to demonstrate how strict Baybars was in the implementation of *shari`a* by including his bans on alcohol and *hashish* and the cancellation of taxes levied on the production of both. Baybars' concern for the implementation of *shari`a* was a point taken up by later writers as well.⁷⁸ Ibn `Abd al-Zahir was silent on the punishments Baybars exercised on those who dared to break these laws. Al-Yunini mentioned that Baybars threatened to execute whoever produced alcohol in his realms.⁷⁹ In addition, al-Safadi reported in his *Kitab al-wafi bi al-wafayat* that Baybars changed the *hadd* of consuming alcohol or hashish from flogging to execution.⁸⁰ The first anecdote al-Safadi included in this regard is of Ibn al-Kazaruni who was arrested drunk and promptly crucified.⁸¹ He quoted two famous verses of poetry through which Ibn Danyal (646/1248-710/1310) commented on the incident:

لقد كان حد السكر من قبل صلبه
خفيف الأذى إذ كان في شرعنا جلدا
فلما بدى المصلوب قلت لصاحبي
ألا تب فإن الحد قد جاوز الحدا

⁷⁷ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, p.640.

⁷⁸ See for example: Baybars al-Mansuri, *Tuhfa*, p.56; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:113, 130, 180-181; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, 8:141; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:525, 550, 553, 566.

⁷⁹ Qutb al-Din Muhammad Musa al-Yunini, *Dhayl mir'at al-zaman*, 2:454

⁸⁰ Salah al-Din Khalil ibn Aybak al-Safadi, *Kitab al-wafi bi al-wafayat* Eds. Ali Amara and Jacqueline Sublet (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980) volume 10, p.343.

⁸¹ al-Safadi, *Wafi*, p.343.

[The *hadd* (punishment) for drunkenness before his crucifixion was light, since in our shar` it was flogging;

But when the crucified appeared I told my friend, won't you quit (drinking alcohol) since the *hadd* (punishment) has exceeded the *hadd* (limit/ *fiqhi* punishment)]

There is a direct criticism of Baybars' puritanical harshness in commenting that his punishment had exceeded the punishment set down by *fiqh*. All the other verses of poetry that al-Safadi quoted praised Baybars' decree because it safeguarded morals and kept the devil at bay.⁸²

Sources also cite the case of *al-tawashi* Shuja` al-Din `Anbar Sadr al-Baz, a close personal attendant of Baybars, whom he hanged in 674/1275 for drinking alcohol.⁸³ This shows how tough Baybars was in applying the punishment even on his close associates. According to Ibn Shaddad, Baybars ordered that the other fourteen servants who drank along with Sadr al-Baz be blinded and that a hand and leg be cut off each of them.⁸⁴ al-Nuwayri gave more details to this incident:

"It was said that *al-tawashi* Shuja` al-Din `Anbar Sadr al-Baz then became addicted to drinking alcohol with the servants in the Sultan's residence. The Sultan found out and when he returned at night summoned him and slapped him to shock him and punish him. But this servant was very close to Baybars and so addressed him in an unacceptable manner saying: 'Beating me will do

⁸² al-Safadi, *Wafi*, p.344.

⁸³ Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, p. 133; Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p. 53; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:623

⁸⁴ Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, p. 133.

you no good, hang me instead.' The Sultan was angered and ordered that he be hanged."⁸⁵

This version of the incident that al-Nuwayri cited implies that the *tawashi* was hanged because he was rude to the Sultan rather than simply because of his drinking alcohol as official narrative would have it.

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir showed that Baybars performed orthodox rituals of worship and participated in acceptable popular religious practices. However, he made a point of omitting any reference to the Sultan's relationship with the Sufi Shaykh Khidr completely, an omission which most later sources rectified. These sources agreed that Shaykh Khidr was particularly close to the Sultan. They thus offered a glimpse into the personal life of Baybars, showing that beneath the tough general and able administrator was a man capable of personal friendship and susceptible to superstition.⁸⁶ Yet they presented Shaykh Khidr more as the Sultan's friend and fortuneteller than his *sufi* master. Thus Ibn al-Furat wrote about Shaykh Khidr that "Baybars used to visit him two or three times a week, as often as he could and he used to share with him his most mysterious secrets and take his advice in his affairs and follow it and he accompanied the Sultan on all his travels and used to tell al-Malik al-Zahir things before they happened."⁸⁷ There are no references to Baybars' performing any Sufi rituals such as *dhikr* with Khidr or having instruction in the Sufi path.

⁸⁵ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:220-221.

⁸⁶ Louis Pouzet, "Hadir ibn Abi Bakr al-Mihrani (m.7 muh. 676/11 juin 1277), sayh du sultan mamelouk Al-Malik az-Zahir Baibars," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 30(1978): 182.

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p. 102

It is Ibn Shaddad and the historians of the fourteenth century who mention the transgressions and injustices Khidr was said to have committed. For example, he is said to have ordered the destruction of some churches and converted others into *zawiyas*.⁸⁸ According to Ibn al-Dawadari, every city contained a *zawiya* filled with Shaykh Khidr's disciples, yet they were all evil doers. They committed adultery and robbed people on highways.⁸⁹ al-Nuwayri and Ibn al-Furat relate that this Shaykh Khidr was so powerful within the Mamluk state that he dared cross two powerful state officials, the *amir* Badr al-Din Baylak al-Khazindar and al-Sahib Baha' al-Din. These two men finally confronted Baybars with Khidr's transgressions of adultery and sodomy among other things. Baybars then arrested and imprisoned Shaykh Khidr.⁹⁰

These stories about Shaykh Khidr of course throw a negative light on the Sultan for having been associated with such a disreputable character. Moreover, they implied that the injustices and crimes Shaykh Khidr committed had some blessing from Baybars who obviously let them go unpunished until he could ignore them no longer. Baybars himself was not indifferent to the idea of destroying churches especially after his defeat of various Frankish principalities in Syria. He could have consciously used Shaykh Khidr and his followers to that aim. While Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir totally ignored this seemingly important person in the Sultan's life, these later

⁸⁸ Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, pp. 59, 273; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, 8:222; Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, p.295; Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p. 103.

⁸⁹ Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, 8:222.

⁹⁰ Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, p. 59; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:199; Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, p.217.

sources that were unsympathetic to Baybars sought to cast shadows on his character through stories about Khidr. However, al-Maqrizi, writing in the fifteenth century, did not seem interested in these details and stated simply that "on the twelfth of Shawwal 671 [Second of May 1273], al-Shaykh Khidr ibn Abi Bakr ibn Musa, the Sultan's shaykh, was arrested and imprisoned in the citadel."⁹¹

The ambivalence of later Mamluk sources towards Baybars' harshness and injustice is further demonstrated in their accounts of the fires in Fustat and taxation of Damascus. Neither of these events were dealt with by Ibn `Abd al-Zahir, who sought to promote an ideal image of the sultan.

The fires that plagued Fustat in 663/1264 were obviously dangerous and threatened to lead to disorder. They occurred during a time when Syrian Franks and Crusaders were among the main enemies of Islam and when toughness with Franks and Christians in general were welcomed by many Muslims. According to Shafi` and al-Nuwayri, rumors blamed Copts for the spread of the fires, supposedly as a revenge for Baybars' attacks on and destruction of churches in Syria after his defeat of various Frankish enemies.⁹² They, as well as al-Maqrizi, related that Baybars reacted by ordering that all Copts and Jews including the elders of both communities be burned.⁹³ These responded by offering to ransom themselves. Shafi` reported that the elders of the community paid the ransom.⁹⁴

⁹¹ al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:608.

⁹² Shafi` ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.198; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:114.

⁹³ Shafi` ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.198; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:114; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:535.

⁹⁴ Shafi` ibn `Ali, *Husn al-manaqib*, p.198.

While none of the writers consulted openly criticized Baybars' actions, some of their accounts seem to suggest they thought the punishment was too severe. Thus al-Nuwayri and Mufaddal ibn Abi al-Fada'il, a Copt himself, reported that a pious Coptic monk, who was known for helping people in need regardless of their religion, paid the requested amount.⁹⁵ This man was tortured to death, on the basis of a *fatwa* by the *fuqaha'* citing "fear of *fitna*."⁹⁶ The positive terms in which they both described him suggest that they thought that he was doing a good deed by helping pay the fine, which in itself implies that they considered that Baybars treated these *dhimmis* unjustly.

While all sources appreciate Baybars' war efforts and his victories against the Mongol and Frankish enemies of Islam, later sources also acknowledge that this glory came at a high price. Building and sustaining large armies cost a lot of money. This overburdened some members of the population more than others. Baybars raised the taxes on Damascus and its environs arguing that this was land reconquered from the Mongols and therefore as technically *'anwa* land, could be taxed at a higher rate.⁹⁷ The sultan's earlier decision to appoint four chief qadis came to his service. He secured *fatwas* from *Hanafi* jurists legitimizing his argument and his decision.⁹⁸ Yet this decision was listed among Baybars' injustices in several

⁹⁵ Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, pp. 135-6.

⁹⁶ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:151-2.

⁹⁷ al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:152-153; al-Safadi, *Wafi*, pp. 345-346.

⁹⁸ al-Yunini, *Dhayl*, 2:386-7; Badr al-Din Mahmud al-'Ayni, *Iqd al-juman fi tarikh ahl al-zaman*, ed. Muhammad Muhammad Amin (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-misriyya al-'amma lil-kitab, 1988), 2:30.

later sources. The understandable unpopularity of this maneuver was still clear a century later in Ibn Kathir's *al-Bidaya* where he wrote:

"This issue is famous and there are two opinions on the matter, the correct one is that of the majority which is that [Muslim property reconquered from infidels] should be returned to its original owners."⁹⁹

Ibn al-Furat and al-Nuwayri reported that the people of Damascus suffered so much that they prayed Baybars' rule would end.¹⁰⁰ After much pleading and with the intercession of al-Sahib Fakhr al-Din, the *wazir* Ibn Hanna's son, who had studied *Shafi'ite* jurisprudence, Baybars agreed to allow Damascenes to keep their property in return for a thousand thousand *dirhams* paid in installments.¹⁰¹ al-Nuwayri wrote that various '*ulama*' of Damascus had pleaded with Baybars to decrease those heavy taxes, and though the Sultan promised them to end all taxes once he defeated the enemy, he broke his promise.¹⁰² When he died, Damascenes had only paid half of the taxes due.

Historians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries cast doubts over the manner of Baybars' death which further tarnish his image. Most reports involve the Sultan drinking *qumiz*, a favorite Mamluk drink made from fermented mare's milk.¹⁰³ Having had too much to drink, Baybars fell sick

⁹⁹ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya*, 13:252.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, 7:85; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:363.

¹⁰¹ al-Yunini, *Dhayl*, 2:387; al-'Ayni, *Iqd al-juman*, 2:30; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya*, 13:252.

¹⁰² al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-arab*, 30:362-363.

¹⁰³ *Qumiz* does not appear to have been considered *khamr* by the standards of the time. Ibn Shaddad who mentioned the details of the Sultan's drinking *qumiz* also asserted that "he [Baybars] never drank *khamr* [alcohol] throughout his life." Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, pp. 222, 299. Baybars al-Mansuri, *Mukhtar*, p.62; Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, pp. 276-277; Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p.85; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-Durar*, pp.208; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:635; Thorau, *Lion of Egypt*, p. 240.

and the attempts of his servants to nurse him only made his condition worse so that when the doctors finally arrived it was too late and he died.¹⁰⁴

In other versions, the sultan had poisoned another man then drank from the same cup by mistake.¹⁰⁵ The man he poisoned was an Ayyubid who had performed outstandingly in a battle and received high praise, which is said to have made the sultan jealous.¹⁰⁶ These reports imply that Baybars' death was a just reward for his attempt to murder the Ayyubid for what seems a petty reason. This in itself betrays the authors' true judgment of his character.

Other versions of Baybars' death referred to his belief in astrology. According to these reports, fortunetellers told Baybars that a king would die in Damascus that day and seeking to avert the prophecy from himself, Baybars poisoned the Ayyubid king.¹⁰⁷ Since he ended up dying too, the argument seems to have been that it was his fate and he could not do anything to stop it no matter how powerful he was. Some writers like al-Maqrizi combined both explanations for poisoning the Ayyubid king, Baybars' jealousy and his desire to avert the prophecy.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh*, pp. 222-223; al-Safadi, *Wafi*, p. 336; Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar*, pp.208-210; Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, pp.276-277.

¹⁰⁵ Baybars al-Mansuri, *Tuhfa*, p.86; idem, *Mukhtar*, p.62; Ibn Abi al-Fada'il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, pp.276-277; Abu al-Fida', *Mukhtasar*, volume 4, p.10; al-'Ayni, *Iqd al-juman*, 2:179-180.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p. 85; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 1:635-636.

¹⁰⁷ Baybars al-Mansuri al-Dawadar, *Zubdat al-fikra fi ta'rikh al-hijra*, ed. D. S. Richards (Beirut: Orient-Institut der DMG and Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1998), p. 160; Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn al-Furat, *Tarikh*, p.86; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, p.635-636.

In conclusion, historians of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries presented very different perceptions of al-Zahir Baybars. These varying and often contradictory accounts show that they used the historiography of this Sultan to make various political arguments. Historians of successive generations demonstrated ambivalent attitudes towards Baybars. It is possible that some writers like Baybars al-Mansuri, Shafi' ibn 'Ali and al-Nuwayri were motivated to de-emphasize Baybars' achievements by a desire to enhance those of the regime of al-Nasir Muhammad under which they worked. This might have prompted them to include negative aspects of Baybars' rule and character. This might not seem strange in light of the changes that al-Nasir Muhammad was introducing to the institutional foundations set by the founders of the Mamluk state, including his own father, Qalawun. His experiences at being ousted from the sultanate twice left him determined to turn his third reign into a new beginning for Mamluk rule and to make a name for himself as a great ruler.¹⁰⁹ To justify and rationalize his innovations it followed that al-Nasir Muhammad and his court intellectuals would attempt to slight the founders and originators of the very traditions they sought to overturn. It is revealing that al-Nasir Muhammad chose to destroy and rebuild Baybars' famous Bridge of the Lions at a lower height, the lion being Baybars' *rank* which adorned the bridge.¹¹⁰ That they were not writing under his control like Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir was, also allowed

¹⁰⁹ Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nasir Muhammad Ibn Qalawun (1310-1341)* (Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 31 & 197.

¹¹⁰ al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawa'idh wa al-'itibar bi dhikr al-khitat wa al-athar* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1996), volume 3, p. 238.

fourteenth and fifteenth century Egyptian historians more freedom in expressing their views – a point which Shafi' ibn 'Ali explicitly made.

In contrast, most Syrian historians of the fourteenth century, like al-Yunini (d. 726/1326) and Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), were religious scholars and teachers.¹¹¹ Their distance from the court and the fact that they did not hold official positions meant that they were less likely to be influenced by the attempts to slight and defame the legacy of Baybars for the benefit of the Qalawunid dynasty. The third Syrian historian of this period referred to here is Abu'l Fida, the Ayyubid prince of Hama.¹¹² Though Abu'l Fida was part of the ruling regime he was more concerned with provincial affairs in his work. Being an Ayyubid himself he did not need to legitimize the Qalawunid dynasty and consequently he too was not overly prejudiced against Baybars. Thus the attitudes expressed by fourteenth-century Syrian historians towards the Baybars paralleled those of later Egyptian historians of the fifteenth century.

Yet obviously the legacy of Baybars was so strong that even later regimes could not afford to ignore his achievements. His military victories and conquests and his establishment of a strong centralized large empire were not ignored by any of the Mamluk writers I consulted. Needless to say, a

¹¹¹ Donald Presgrave Little, *An Introduction to Mamluk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Analistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of al-Malik an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qala'un*, Freiburger Islamstudien Band II (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970), p. 69. For a review of literature discussing the existence of a "Syrian school" of Mamluk historiography see Li Guo, "Mamluk Historiographic Studies: The State of the Art," *Mamluk Studies Review* 1 (1997), pp. 29, 37-41.

¹¹² Little, *Introduction*, p. 46.

severe attack on the founder of the Mamluk state would have undermined the legitimacy of the regime they all lived and worked under.

Furthermore, the ambivalence that these writers demonstrated towards Baybars suggests that while they appreciated his contributions to state building and his establishment of order and military conquests, they also realized that these came at a heavy price. Large armies that were strong enough to expand Mamluk rule into Nubia, Libya and Armenia, to keep such a huge empire together, and to fight off enemies like the Mongols and the Crusaders also required a high degree of discipline and order and were — necessarily — funded by heavy taxation. However, by the fifteenth century, writers were further removed from the events of Baybars' reign and the heavy burdens of his achievements had been somewhat forgotten. His reign came to represent an age of glory, perhaps because these writers perceived their own times as one of decline and decadence.

Chapter Four: Baybars, Sultan of the People

While historians were busy writing their interpretations of the Mamluk regime and the reign of Baybars, other histories, unofficial and unscholarly, were also being constructed. The events of Baybars' life and reign have provided a source for popular entertainment. The first major work of a popular nature to take Baybars as its main protagonist was *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*.

The dating of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* is a fundamental problem facing researchers who wish to use it as a source for cultural and social history. We know that some form of the *Sira* had come into being by the fifteenth century, because it is mentioned by Ibn Iyas.¹ His comments were very brief and do not indicate to what degree it had developed by then. The earliest existing manuscript of the *Sira* is found in the Vatican collection and dates to the sixteenth century.²

Arab literary elites have traditionally treated vernacular folk literature including *siyar* literature with disdain, dismissing these works as vulgar and regarding their subjects as "frivolous lies that threatened the proper Muslim and a sign of unlettered poverty."³ This traditional disdain paradoxically gave rise to what Bridgette Connelly terms "decayed epic theories." These theories suggest that earlier and original versions of the *siyar* must have been

¹ R. Paret, "Sirat Baybars," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition. 1:1127; Boaz Shoshan, "On Popular Literature in Medieval Cairo," *Poetics Today* 14(1993):354

² Bridgette Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic and Identity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986), p. 8; Paret, "Sirat Baybars," p. 1127.

³ Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic*, p. 12.

composed and written by educated literary artists especially for the common people and that these original texts were then corrupted through oral transmission.⁴ This traditional disdain influences the judgment of modern western scholars such as R. Paret in his article on *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* for *The Encyclopedia of Islam* where he wrote:

"The history of the development of the *sira* would probably become clearer if the different manuscripts were to be classified and compared in detail. It is questionable, however, whether it would be worth the time involved."⁵

With such research as yet incomplete, the debate on the origins and development of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* and Arabic *siyar* in general remains academic. For the historian, the important point to stress is that no matter what its original form may have been, *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* reached the form in which we now recognize it through being an oral tradition.

The fact that the *Sira* was primarily an oral performance meant that it was a fluid, changing, text rather than a static and defined one. Thus as Connelly phrased it, a recitation of a *sira* was "at once a transmission and a composition."⁶ The story-teller and the audience reconstructed the already fluid text at every recitation. We could argue that *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* continues to develop to this day through various literary and artistic genres. This work which began as an *oral* folk epic was eventually put into writing. However, most surviving manuscripts of the *Sira* date back to the eighteenth

⁴ Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic*, pp.19-21.

⁵ Paret, "Sirat Baybars," p.1127.

⁶ Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic*, p.56.

or nineteenth centuries only.⁷ Yet it continued to be a live oral tradition since E. W. Lane reported that there were thirty reciters, in Cairo alone, who specialized exclusively in *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* in the nineteenth century.⁸ In addition, Taha Husayn mentioned public recitations of it and the sale of printed editions in the early twentieth century.⁹ The printed versions of the *Sira* that are available are not carefully-prepared editions of identified manuscripts. As Georges Bohas argues, these pulp editions are not faithful to the richness nor to the language of the manuscripts.¹⁰ Unlike *Alf layla wa layla* whose earliest surviving manuscript has been edited by Muhsin Mahdi, the only serious academic work carried out so far on *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* is its on-going translation into French – without an accompanying edited Arabic text – by Georges Bohas and Jean-Patrick Guillaume.¹¹ This translation is based on a nineteenth century manuscript from Aleppo.¹² Since this thesis is not a study of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, I decided to use the printed edition currently available in the bookstores of Cairo. This is a five volume edition published in 1996 by al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li al-Kitab.¹³ The title page of each part (of which there are fifty in the five volumes) includes the title "*Sirat al-Zahir Baybars, Tarikh al-Malik al-'Adil Sahib al-Futuh al-Mansura*"

⁷ Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic*, p.8.

⁸ E. W. Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (The Hague and London: East-West Publications and Cairo: Livres de France, 1978), p. 395.

⁹ Taha Husayn, *al-Ayyam*, (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram lil-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1992), p.82.

¹⁰ Georges Bohas, "L'autobiographie de Baibars," *La Museon* 104(1991), p.125.

¹¹ Muhsin Mahdi ed. *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla) From the Earliest Known Sources: Arabic Text with Introduction and Notes* 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1984); Georges Bohas and Jean-Patrick Guillaume, *Roman de Baibars/Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, vols.1-8 (Paris: Sindbad, 1985-)

¹² Robert Irwin, "Baybars, Romance of," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), volume 1, p.144.

¹³ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, 5 volumes (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma lil-Kitab, 1996).

and announces that it is a second edition of a version first published in 1341/1923.¹⁴

The historical events of the thirteenth century have also provided material for the twentieth century novel *Wa Islamah* by `Ali Ahmad Bakathir as well as the popular T.V. series *al-Fursan* by Sami Ghunaym. Thus, we may conclude that this *sira* is a late Mamluk or early Ottoman work that has continued to develop till the early twentieth century and has influenced twentieth-century artistic productions.

Works of a popular nature like *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* are often thought to be of interest only to those who study the development and history of Arabic literature. The prevailing attitude among scholars of the Middle East has been that such works have no value to the historian because they do not directly correspond to historical facts and events as set down in chronicles, histories and other traditional primary sources. Once more R. Paret's article on *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* for *The Encyclopedia of Islam* exemplifies this attitude:

"Many of the people and the events in the *sira* are historical, but its overall character, as well as most of the descriptive detail, is fictitious. Its only historical value lies in the fact that it represents the type of intellectual nourishment accepted by large parts of the Muslim population in Cairo in the late Middle Ages and in the following centuries. Its real interest lies rather in the fields of sociology, folklore, and history of literature."¹⁵

¹⁴ for example: *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.9.

¹⁵ R. Paret, "Sirat Baybars," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition. 1:1126-1127.

Similarly, Boaz Shoshan wrote that "although *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* includes many historical personages and events, in character and detail they are enveloped in a great deal of fiction."¹⁶

Sirat al-Zahir Baybars was part of the entertainment of society and not part of the official discourse. It does not represent a conscious attempt by the people of Mamluk society to explain their world to us.¹⁷ Instead, it allows us to understand how they expressed themselves as they were. It is therefore a valuable source for social history, not for the history of events.¹⁸ The importance of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* in studying the historiography of Baybars himself has not received sufficient consideration. It is as if scholars of the *Sira* were trying to divorce its protagonist from his historic counterpart. It is important for the scholar to realize and to emphasize that Baybars the sultan, Baybars of the historical scholarly sources and Baybars of the *Sira* are not identical. Yet it is equally important to realize that this distinction was probably lost on most reciters, listeners and readers of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*. Thus the reconstructions of Baybars' life through the *Sira* — just as those in traditional primary sources — referred to Baybars the sultan and consequently to ideas on rulership in general even while they entertained the public.

The *Sira* relates the exploits of "Mahmud" Baybars, the legendary Muslim hero who triumphs over wicked *kuffar*. It is important to note that in

¹⁶ Shoshan, "On Popular Literature in Medieval Cairo," p.354.

¹⁷ Qasim `Abdu Qasim, *Bayna al-tarikh wa al-fulfur* (Cairo: Ein, 1998), p. 86.

¹⁸ `Abd al-Hamid Yunis, *al-Zahir Baybars fi al-qasas al-sha`bi* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam and Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, n.d.), p. 17

the epic it is Baybars not Qutuz who is born into a Muslim noble family.¹⁹ This fabricated royal lineage might have been necessary to legitimize Baybars' – and by extension, the Mamluk regime's – rule. Just as in official discourse Baybars needed the legitimization provided by a Caliph's seal, so in popular discourse this legend served to affirm the right of slave troops who were born non-Muslims to rule over most of the central Islamic lands.

Most medieval scholarly sources did not dwell on Baybars' pre-Mamluk life. He entered official narrative as a mamluk of Aydakin Bundukdar after which he rose through the military bureaucracy and became one of the top mamluks of al-Salih Ayyub.²⁰ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* offers a domesticated image of this military slave. It does not picture Baybars in any barracks. Instead, "Mahmud" is adopted by a rich Damascene lady, Fatma al-Aqwasiyya. She is the one who names him "Baybars" after her deceased son.²¹ Thus the *Sira* domesticates its hero and presents him in terms the audience could relate to, within an ordered family structure. The motif of Baybars' adoption is repeated with al-Salih Ayyub and Shajar al-Durr who also adopt Baybars as their son and name him as al-Salih's heir. The emphasis on Baybars' origin as Mahmud as well as his adoption by prestigious Muslim families appears to be a response to the charge that mamluks did not know their families and their parents. The Turkish substitute for the family, the *khushdashiyya* or mamluk household, was unfamiliar to local populations. For

¹⁹ *Sirat Baybars*, p.128, 277, 469, 471-477, & 704.

²⁰ G.Wiet, "Baybars I, al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din al-Salihi," *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2nd Edition. (Leiden: E.J.Brill,), p.1124.

²¹ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.164.

a culture that highly esteems the family as a social unit it might have been important to present the hero as a man from a "good family."

All medieval scholarly reports, both those in Baybars' favor and those against him, claimed that he had played a part in the regicide of his predecessor Qutuz. Some, like Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir, were even almost proud of the role Baybars played in the murder. Contrary to that stance however, *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* attempts to clear its hero and protagonist from any such charge. The relationship between the two men is amiable and strong, Qutuz treated Baybars very generously and appoints him his heir to the throne.²² Baybars "commended Qutuz's doings and rulings and praised him."²³ Then Qutuz is mysteriously killed and a note beside the corps accuses Baybars of the regicide.²⁴ It turns out that Baybars' Frankish enemy, Juwan, is behind both the murder and the accusation and subsequently Baybars is cleared.²⁵ This suggests that medieval Egyptian society did not appreciate the Turkish custom of rule of the regicide and preferred its hero to come to the throne through his predecessor's nomination.

Sirat al-Zahir Baybars is rather nuanced in its interpretation and representation of Baybars' legend. It presents him as a hero, a good pious Muslim ruler. Yet, unlike the ideal Sultan which Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir makes Baybars out to be, *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* humanizes rather than valorizes its protagonist. This Baybars is not a larger than life hero; he himself does not

²² *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.1076-1077.

²³ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.1078.

²⁴ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.1079.

²⁵ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, pp.1080-1081.

perform miraculous feats and is often caught in troublesome situations and needs assistance. It is the secondary "helper" characters of `Uthman ibn al-Hubla, a former outlaw, and Jamal al-Din Shiha, an Isma`ili chief, who perform miracles and are often considered to be divinely guided.²⁶ Baybars himself is not almighty or invincible. In fact, he is defeated, kidnapped and imprisoned several times within the narrative.²⁷ This almost subversive portrayal of a ruler's power is best exemplified in how the *Sira* deals with Baybars' relations with the Isma`ilis.

In the official narrative Baybars crushed and subjugated the Isma`ilis of Syria.²⁸ A lot of emphasis is placed on how they were made to pay tribute to the Mamluks rather than to the Franks.²⁹ Even in the *Sira* Baybars appoints their leader for them and chooses an outsider for the job; an act of extreme subjugation for such a group.³⁰ However, the Isma`ilis are presented in the *Sira* as the "*fidawiyya*" rather than "the Assassins". They are one of Baybars' main support groups who come to his rescue when he is in danger and perform miracles to save him.³¹ Their leaders save Baybars from deadly situations whenever Christian enemies tried to kill him.³² It is as if he owes them his sultanate and maintenance of power. The position of the Isma`illis in

²⁶ For example: *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, 571, & 636.

²⁷ Yunis, *al-Zahir Baybars*, p. 64.

²⁸ Jean-Patrick Guillaume, "Les Ismaéliens dans le *Roman de Baybars*: genèse d'un type littéraire," *Studia Islamica*, 84(November 1996):145.

²⁹ For example: Shafi' ibn `Ali, *Husn al-Manaqib*, 224-225, & 241-242; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-Arab*, 30:247-252; al-Maqrizi, *Suluk*, 587. Khowaiter, *Baibars*, 123-126

³⁰ Guillaume, "Les Ismaéliens," 145.

³¹ *Sirat Baybars*, 5 volumes (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-`Amma lil-Kitab, 1996), for example: 203, 206, 565, 705, 1038, 1051, 1055, 1106, 1171, 1173, 1175, 1186, & 1322.

³² *Sirat Baybars*, p.1175.

the *sira* is thus very subversive. It implies that the founder of the Mamluk sultanate, the protector and promoter of Sunni Islam, relied on Isma'illi Shi'is to reach and maintain power. This hints at underlying tensions within Egyptian society in the struggle to promote Sunni Islam and suppress Shi'i influences.

Baybars' piety and loyalty to Islam is stressed throughout the *Sira* primarily in terms of traditional popular religious beliefs and practices.³³ He is looked after by several saints and is saved from life-threatening dangers by miracles.³⁴ He is also depicted as strictly performing orthodox religious rituals.³⁵ al-Sayyida Zaynab is the patroness of many of the characters of the *Sira*, she ensures their victory and helps them out of trouble.³⁶ al-Sayyida Nafisa is the one who unites Baybars with his aide and companion 'Uthman ibn al-Hubla.³⁷

Baybars' loyalty to Islam is also expressed in terms of strong religious prejudice against Franks and Christians in general. The Franks are the main enemies of Islam in the *Sira*, along with fire-worshipping Mongols. Baybars' main enemy and the personification of evil in the *Sira* is Juwan, a Christian monk who disguises himself in several personae including that of a chief *qadi* in order to kill Baybars and defeat the Muslims. This motif of Christian villain in Muslim disguise is echoed throughout the *Sira*. Several minor villains also

³³ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, 290, 323, 570, 573, & 592.

³⁴ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, 676, & 718.

³⁵ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, 145, 257, 325, 328, 332, 621, & 720.

³⁶ Faruk Khurshid, *Adwa' ala al-Siyar al-Sha'biyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1964), p. 101.

³⁷ Khurshid, *Adwa'*, p. 101.

turn out to be Christians in disguise.³⁸ Baybars defeats them all, with the help of 'Uthman or the Isma'ilis. Tough and despotic measures by Baybars and Shiha against Christians such as destruction of churches and turning them into mosques are related with pride.³⁹

As in the more scholarly sources, in constructing a heroic image of Baybars, a lot of emphasis is placed on his justice. Baybars himself put down forty conditions before he would accept the sultanate. Most of these conditions have to do with government and the administration of justice. In correspondence with Baybars' image in some of the later medieval sources, despotic suspicion seems behind some of the conditions he sets according to the *Sira*. Thus any two *amirs* consulting over a decision of his would be killed, *amirs* are not to convene except in the Sultan's *diwan*, and only the '*ulama*' would have the right to voice opposition over any of his decrees.⁴⁰ In return, Jamal al-Din Shiha puts only one condition for Baybars to be sultan: "Abide by justice and fairness. For I have made you ruler over Egypt, Syria and other Muslim lands as long as you obey God. If you steer away from the course of Truth you will be dismissed and we would not owe you any obedience."⁴¹

The despotic side of Baybars which was apparent in many of the medieval sources is, as one might expect, almost absent from the *Sira*. Yet the *Sira* does deal with the taxation of Damascus, which was considered one of Baybars' most unjust decrees. In the *Sira*, Baybars tries to levy taxes on

³⁸ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.800,804, 807, 812, 927, 990, 1039-1040, 1103, 1174,

³⁹ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p. 946, 982, 1202, 1238, 1242, 1245.

⁴⁰ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.1084.

⁴¹ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, pp.1084-1085.

Damascus to fight the Mongol enemy Hulawun, but the Damascenes refuse to pay, arguing "you are a king and kings meet one another and fight for their positions... we serve whoever sits on the throne."⁴² The pious shaykh al-Nuri tells Baybars that these taxes are unjust. When Baybars asks how he is to defend his land from unbelievers then, the shaykh curses him and accuses him of insulting the men of virtue and the doctors of the law.⁴³ The *Sira* reverses the traditional balance of power between ruler and subjects. Baybars appears helpless in the face of strong opposition from the people and the 'ulama'. This must have brought some sort of sweet imaginary revenge to audiences used to heavy taxation throughout centuries.

Several critics of the *Sira* have argued that it presents historical events from the point of view of an urban middle class.⁴⁴ They could have reproduced their Muslim hero in their own image. The *Sira* appears to be an expression of these non-literate urban classes, the ruled subjects rather than the dominant authorities represented by official and scholarly historiography. Thus while in the scholarly sources most of the justice was carried out within the boundaries of formal judicial and legal procedures, the *Sira* celebrates a more crude street style of justice where Baybars always defeats the "bad guys".⁴⁵ He champions the causes of the weak and down-trodden masses. His use of questionable means is justifiable, because it leads to the triumph of good over evil. Thus one of the recurring motifs of the work is of Baybars

⁴² Lyons, *Arabic Epic*, 1:33.

⁴³ Lyons, *Arabic Epic*, 1:33.

⁴⁴ Paret, "Sirat Baybars," p.1127.

⁴⁵ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, pp.147, 151, 226, 278, 285, 363, 369, 373, 378, 426, 556, & 563.

killing an evil character apparently without due cause. In court, the truth would be made clear and it would become obvious that Baybars' action was just. His taking the law into his own hands is not condemned.

This practical attitude towards justice and the law that is demonstrated in the *Sira* was paralleled by a distrust and disdain of *qadis* and the court system.⁴⁶ Thus Baybars' main opponent and the personification of evil in the *Sira*, the Christian spy Juwan, spends the first half of the work disguised as a chief *qadi* in the Ayyubid court. In his position as *qadi* he repeatedly tries to prosecute Baybars for the various murders which he commits but Baybars always comes out innocent. The *sira* also makes fun of the schools of law. To save himself from a long wait for their case to be heard by a *qadi*, 'Uthman, Baybars' friend and aide proposes that he would be a Hanafi while Baybars could be a Shafi'i "for today."⁴⁷ This further confirms the pragmatist stance that the *sira* and by extension its Cairene audience took with regards to the law, a stance that could be argued is still part of Egyptian urban culture to this day. It also corresponds to Baybars' decision to appoint four chief *qadis*, one from each of the schools of law which helped speed up court cases.

Baybars' reputation from the earliest scenes of the *Sira* is based on his justice. In his pre-sultanate days, Baybars rises quickly through the government bureaucracy and at each new post fights corruption and injustice against the common people.⁴⁸ This — rather than some miraculous power —

⁴⁶ Qasim, *Bayna al-tarikh wa al-fulklur*, p.88.

⁴⁷ M.C. Lyons, *The Arabic Epic: Heroic and Oral Story-Telling*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), volume 1, p.34.

⁴⁸ Yunis, *al-Zahir Baybars*, p. 19.

seems to be both his greatest credential and his greatest achievement. Baybars' main attraction as a hero in this *sira* is his ability to defeat wrongdoers and dispense justice. This fight to establish internal justice and order precedes external battles against enemy troops.

It is Baybars' local reputation as a man of honor and courage, a man capable of fighting corruption, which qualified him for leading armies into battle and earning his troops' loyalties.⁴⁹ The *Sira* is full of anecdotes about Baybars' military capabilities and stories of his courage in battle.⁵⁰ In many instances however, Muslim victories are due more to tricks and intelligence rather than simply to military power.

In the preceding chapter, I attempted to show how scholars writing under Qalawunid influence and patronage tended to throw unfavorable light on Baybars' image and present his legacy in a negative manner. In fact, it could be argued that al-Nasir Muhammad destroyed the Bridge of the Lions built by Baybars precisely to shatter his predecessor's legacy.⁵¹ The text of the *Sira* appears to be conscious of those subtle tensions. In *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, Baybars, the protagonist, is poisoned to death by none other than Qalawun al-Alfi!⁵² It is interesting that the *Sira* presents the founder of the historical Qalawunid dynasty as seeking to displace Baybars in his maneuvers to reach the throne.

⁴⁹ Khurshid, *Adwa'*, pp.105-106.

⁵⁰ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, pp.981-982, 989, 996, 1163

⁵¹ al-Maqrizi, *Khitat*, 3:238.

⁵² *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.3078.

Contrary to those scholarly sources which presented Baybars' death in mysterious manners suggesting that he deserved to be murdered or poisoned, *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* presented the poisoning of Baybars itself as the evil act.

Although *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* survived in its oral form into the early twentieth century, changing life styles and modern technologies brought about new forms and genres of entertainment. Similarly, new political realities and the rise of nationalism demanded a reconstruction of the events of the thirteenth century to serve new purposes. Thus the political history of Egypt in the thirteenth century inspired works of various genres in the twentieth century. These include 'Ali Ahmad Bakathir's novel *Wa Islamah* and its film version as well as the T.V. series *al-Fursan* by Sami Ghunaym. Bakathir's novel was first published in 1945 and represents the Arabist school within Egyptian literature.⁵³ It has become a traditional part of Egyptian secondary school curricula. If "*Sirat*" *Al-Zahir Baybars* was supposed to be at one level a "biography" of Baybars, then these last three works are biographies of Qutuz. They take the birth of Qutuz as the starting point for the story(ies).

In *Wa Islamah*, the novel and the film, as well as *al-Fursan* a lot of emphasis is placed on the legend that Qutuz was originally Mahmud, the Muslim-born son of the Khawarizm-shahs. Whereas not all medieval scholarly sources had considered this anecdote of vital importance, it had received considerable attention in the folk epic *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, although

⁵³ Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 131.

there, Baybars is the subject of the anecdote. In the film *Wa Islamah*, it is Qutuz who is consistently referred to as "Mahmud".

It is not coincidental that in popular accounts of *Sirat Baybars* and its modern metamorphoses, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the legend of the hero born Muslim and then enslaved. It signifies a desire to present these heroes in terms the audience could relate to and identify with. It signals an attempt by the dominant culture to reconstruct the history of Egypt in its own self-image, one that is decidedly Muslim, free, and noble. The mamluks have not been accepted on their own terms. To be constructed as Muslim heroes, Mamluks have to be Islamized, nobilized and domesticated — reproduced in the image of preceding Arab Muslim ruling elites.

Wa Islamah and *al-Fursan* are reminiscent of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* in that they give the hero, now Qutuz, a home to grow up in. Qutuz was not sent to the military barracks for training but became a domestic slave in Damascus. Once more the idea of the hero being adopted into a family structure is accentuated in opposition to the idea of the hero as slave. Historical accounts refer to Qutuz's being enslaved after his family's defeat at the hands of the Mongols and then sold to a Damascene merchant who in turn sold him to the Mamluk *amir*, Aybak in Cairo.⁵⁴ In *Wa Islamah* Qutuz's master was not some military *amir* but rather one of the notables of Damascus, al-Shaykh Ghanim al-Muqaddisi. Though he himself was a pious learned man, Shaykh Ghanim's son was not well-mannered. This prompted

⁵⁴ D. P. Little, "Kutuz," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds. C. E. Bosworth et al, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986) volume 5, p. 571.

the old man to "buy a handsome, obedient slave as a son."⁵⁵ Qutuz and his cousin, Gulnar, grow up like children of their Damascene master, to the extent that he bequeathed to them part of his inheritance.⁵⁶ We are not told how or where he developed his excellent military skills which suddenly emerge in battle with the Mongols.

`Ali Ahmad Bakathir's novel was made into a film in 1961 and has become one of the classics of Egyptian cinema. This state-sponsored production of the film came during Egypt's Arab nationalist years. Thus it used the historical events to make important points about the present. The film highlights certain sections out of the official narrative. The focal point of *Wa Islamah* is the battle of `Ayn Jalut. Qutuz is the true hero of the battle. A lot of emphasis is placed on the preparations for the battle and the need to unite. In one of the very first scenes of the film, the defeated sultan Jalal al-Din Khawarizm-Shah instructs his young daughter and nephew (Mahmud-Qutuz) to always remember that one day Muslims will unite to defeat their enemies. The underlying message of the film is the need for modern-day Arabs to unite in order to defeat their common Israeli enemy. The Mahmud legend adds a romantic line whereby the hero has a personal vendetta against the enemies who defeated his family and killed them. In fact the film opens with the motto "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Mahmud-Qutuz is presented as the victorious hero who avenges his family.

⁵⁵ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p.79.

⁵⁶ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p.81.

The casting of actors for *Wa Islamah* is of particular interest. The role of Mahmud-Qutuz was played by Ahmad Mazhar who was nicknamed "the knight of Egyptian cinema." On the other hand, Baybars was played by Rushdi Abaza, who was famous for playing roles of the macho, sometimes threatening, playboy. And sure enough, the Mahmud-Qutuz of this film is a real officer while Baybars is a playboy, albeit one who was sincere when it came to "national" interests. Yet he pales considerably in comparison to Mahmud.

There are several subtle differences between Baybars the protagonist of the *Sira* and Mahmud in *Wa Islamah*. This Mahmud while being a good able soldier and an honorable politician, he was also very much a "gentleman" with courtly manners. He did not possess any of the crude toughness of Baybars as depicted in *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*.

In keeping with the apparent message and purpose of the film, *Wa Islamah* ends with the victory at 'Ayn Jalut. Any reference to subsequent disunity among the victorious Muslims would have harmed the call for unity. Thus the film does not allude to any tensions that might have existed between Mahmud-Qutuz and Baybars nor did it deal with the murder of Qutuz.

Unlike the film, however, the novel *Wa Islamah* did deal with the murder of Qutuz. Similar to the position of the composers of the *Sira*, Bakathir was faced with the problem of presenting two men as Muslim — and in his case "national" — heroes, when one of them killed the other. Unlike his predecessors however, Bakathir addressed a mostly literate public many of

whom must have been aware of the reports in published medieval sources or at least in history text-books. Therefore, he did not present the murder as a treacherous act committed by Frankish spies and unjustly blamed on Baybars. Instead in *Wa Islamah* — as in some medieval accounts — Qutuz promised Baybars to make him governor of Aleppo once `Ayn Jalut was over. After the victory however, he failed to fulfill his promise.⁵⁷ Feeling betrayed, Baybars stabbed him to death. What Baybars did not know — Bakathir's contribution to the legend — was that Qutuz had something greater than Aleppo in store for him: the sultanate itself.⁵⁸ Qutuz felt that he himself was not the ideal man for the job and that his role was completed by achieving the victory at `Ayn Jalut.⁵⁹ He believed that Baybars would make a better sultan. Yet even as he presented Qutuz taking such a decision, Bakathir did not fail to criticize Baybars:

"Even as he became disinterested in power and in life, Qutuz did not forget to think about Islam and its people and to choose from among them a strong man to whom he could trust the responsibility of governing... He looked around and the only man he deemed suitable was his old friend, bitter enemy and ally against the Mongols: the *amir* Rukn al-Din Baybars. He judged that despite Baybars' qualities of deceit, shrewdness and hunger for power, he was the most suitable for the job and the most capable of performing it and of ruling people with his stick and pushing them towards what would be in their own good and what would ensure their power and the authority of Islam."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, pp.207-208.

⁵⁸ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p.206.

⁵⁹ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p.206.

⁶⁰ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p. 206. Bakathir's logic recalls that of Ibn al-Nafis discussed earlier in Chapter Three.

Here Bakathir made a political statement that toughness and even brutality in a ruler are qualities more important than piety in a ruler at a time of turbulence and conflict.

Ignorant of his sultan's train of thought, Baybars joined in a conspiracy to kill him.⁶¹ Qutuz revealed this to Baybars as he lay dying.⁶² Anguished by his own rashness and impatience, Baybars felt very guilty for killing the sultan. Qutuz however, forgave his murderer and appointed him as his successor.⁶³ Qutuz ordered his entourage to "leave Baybars alone, don't kill him! He is your sultan for I have appointed him over you so obey him... He who killed me is none other than your sultan, Baybars, and I have forgiven him, so listen to him and obey him."⁶⁴

The general outline of the characters of Qutuz and Baybars in the television series *Al-Fursan* is very close to that employed by Bakathir. Qutuz is presented as a pious "Egyptian" Muslim. His piety is emphasized by his close relationship with the popular – and historical – Shaykh 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam. He regularly attended religious classes in the mosque with the Shaykh. He follows Shaykh 'Izz al-Din's advice to levy war taxes on Mamluk *amirs* before taxing the population in preparation for war with the Mongols.⁶⁵ He refuses to accept Shajarat al-Durr as sultana on the grounds that this is

⁶¹ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p. 213.

⁶² Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p. 214.

⁶³ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p. 214.

⁶⁴ Bakathir, *Wa Islamah*, p. 214.

⁶⁵ Sami Ghunaym, *al-Fursa*, Egyptian Radio and Television Union, Cairo (1997), episode 40.

against Islam's "shari'a".⁶⁶ He is also very patriotic in an Egyptian national sense. He is the leader of "the Egyptian armies" and the victory at 'Ayn Jalut is reconstructed as "Egypt's" victory over the infidel Mongols which saved the "Arab" world from annihilation.

Many of the events of the T. V. series *al-Fursan*, including the explanation for Qutuz's murder, follow the novel *Wa Islamah* very closely. However, unlike the makers of the film *Wa Islamah*, the makers and producers of the T.V. series chose to present the murder of Qutuz on screen. The final scene of the series had Baybars as sultan accompanying the corpse of his predecessor whom he had killed.

It is interesting to note that when popular works include such bloody unflattering events in Baybars' life, they do so to exonerate him. While the *Sira* did a better job at that by absolving him completely, *Wa Islamah* presented a more "realistic", if most probably equally "fictitious", scenario. In both cases the rule of Baybars was meant to be. It was Egypt's fate to have him as sultan and his fate to rise to power. *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* is full of references to Baybars' eventual sultanate as being God's will.⁶⁷ It is destiny. In the early scenes of the *Sira*, the Isma'ili leaders saw the saintly al-Salih Ayyub in their dreams telling them that the then weak and sick Mahmud (Baybars) would eventually be ruler and sultan and that they would be his closest allies.⁶⁸ Thus Jamal al-Din Shiha, the Isma'ili chief with saintly powers, later

⁶⁶ I have placed the word *shari'a* between quotation marks because though it is the term used in the text, it is not accurate. The author is probably referring to *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence. The two terms are regularly confused in popular discourse. Ghunaym, *al-Fursan*, episode 36.

⁶⁷ Yunis, *al-Zahir Baybars*, p. 21.

⁶⁸ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.134.

told Baybars "I *know* that you have to become king and sultan."⁶⁹ In addition, al-Salih Ayyub named Baybars as his successor and heir to the throne.⁷⁰ Similarly in *Wa Islamah*, Qutuz had already decided to make Baybars sultan even before he stabbed him. He even gave him his blessings.

Bakathir created this story of the misunderstanding to get rid of what is an obstacle to Egyptian nationalist historiography. This discourse seeks to construct and promote a homogenous image of Egypt. It promotes the legends of historical heroes as noble, pious Muslims united against a common foreign enemy. Any reference to internal strife or injustice which could skew this straightforward narrative is either ignored or, as 'Ali Ahmad Bakathir showed us, smoothed out to prove the very point it could disprove.

⁶⁹ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, p.959. (My emphasis.)

⁷⁰ *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*, pp. 964-965, 981, 987, 994, 1000.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Ibn `Abd al-Zahir wrote Baybars' first royal biography. In that work he presented him as an ideal sultan. He stressed and highlighted all the qualities that complemented Baybars and presented him a positive light. He thus painted a portrait of a strong courageous and capable army general, a just ruler and a pious Muslim. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir ignored any events or decrees that could have tarnished Baybars' images.

al-Rawd al-zahir fi sirat al-malik al-zahir was a panegyric of Baybars written largely under his influence. Therefore, the conclusions Ibn `Abd al-Zahir drew were ones that would have met with the Sultan's approval. That was not the case with later medieval historians. Egyptian historians and bureaucrats who worked under the regime of al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun tended to draw more unfavorable images of Baybars. In writings such as those of Baybars al-Mansuri, Ibn al-Dawadari, and al-Nuwayri, Baybars was more of a harsh despot than an ideal sultan. It is writers of the fifteenth century and late Mamluk period like al-Maqrizi and Ibn Taghribirdi who drew more balanced images of Baybars.

The popular folk epic *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* took the sultan as its protagonist. As popular hero, however, Baybars comes out as more down to earth than Ibn `Abd al-Zahir would have him. He is a very human hero and sultan whose powers are not unlimited and who is not invincible nor infallible. By humanizing the hero in such a manner *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* was perhaps making subversive comments on rulers and rulership in general. It

also marked a popular desire for a ruler who was one of his people and was ready to serve them.

In the modern variations on *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* and works inspired by the events of the tumultuous thirteenth century, Qutuz has become the protagonist rather than Baybars. It is as though a *Sirat Qutuz* is being constructed. The few events of Qutuz's life that were chronicled and constructed by medieval scholars lend themselves to more politically correct images. Qutuz's reign was short which meant that he did not get a chance to do much of the things that often make rulers unpopular. He did not get the chance to levy heavy taxes to fight endless wars for years on end. His short reign was taken up by what has been reconstructed as a major Muslim victory over the forces of evil. Needless to say, victories are essential to any nationalist reconstruction of history. The fact that Qutuz's short reign ended by his murder lends itself to romantic interpretations. Baybars' reign was filled with many more military and political achievements. Yet these do not serve purposes of modern political nationalist discourse so well. Baybars' main enemies were the Franks. Many of his policies could easily be interpreted as prejudiced against Christians. This might have appealed to medieval audiences as evidenced by the decidedly anti-Christian tone of *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars*. Yet this would be counter-productive in an age when there is a call to promote a tolerant peaceful image of Islam and the Arabs and of reaching out to European and Western allies. Even though the discourse of the Crusades is often recalled to comment on the Arab-Israeli conflict, this is

done in a more tolerant and less confrontational context, one that promotes peace and co-existence rather than *jihad* and annihilation. Therefore the legend of Salah al-Din is more useful, for it promotes the tolerance of the victorious Muslims towards their defeated Christian enemies. In fact, Baybars was a better soldier, who as P. M. Holt argued "excelled Saladin."¹ He was also a good administrator who left his successors a centralized state. The importance of this latter achievement becomes evident in light of the state of disunity and chaos which the central Islamic lands suffered from under Salah al-Din's Ayyubid successors. Many of the disasters of the Frankish and Mongol invasions were caused by Muslim disunity, a condition which Salah al-Din was unable to remedy for long. Baybars' establishment of a strong centralized state with a strong hierarchy is therefore perhaps his best achievement. It facilitated the rule of law and order even after his days were over.

The total achievements of Baybars' reign were perceived as weighty enough to inspire a folk epic. Perhaps he was more popular than many other medieval rulers because he fought more battles over a large territory. His portrayal as being just yet tough at the same time must have appealed to medieval imaginations.

Comparing the different and often conflicting perceptions of Baybars and his reign which varied from that of ideal sultan to that of harsh despot we can reach a degree of consensus on the qualities which were deemed

¹ Holt, *Age of Crusades*, p.97.

important and desirable in a ruler. These were the qualities that were to be highlighted when constructing an ideal image. The anti-theses of these qualities are those that were used to provide a negative image of a ruler. The prioritization of these qualities of course differed from one generation to the next.

The ideal ruler had to be a legitimate ruler according to some law or custom. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's work provided legitimization for Baybars' rule through the Turkish *yasa* and the Islamic seal of an `Abbasid caliph.

The good ruler had to be a good soldier. If there was only one thing the sources agreed about, it was that Baybars was a good, tough, courageous soldier. His military achievement was important especially to historians writing in times of perceived decline and challenge. In *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* a lot of emphasis was placed not only on the protagonist's physical attributes and strength, but also on his mental abilities to deceive his enemies. In *Wa Islamah* the stress was placed on the hero's role in unifying a Muslim front rather than on the actual fighting of wars.

Loyalty to Islam and to its teaching was also one of the main attributes of a good ruler and a "Muslim" hero. Ibn `Abd al-Zahir's official portrayal of Baybars emphasized the ruler's adherence to orthodox Islam and played down his relationship with the unorthodox and corrupt Shaykh Khidr. Historians of the later Mamluk period appreciated his observance of *shari`a* especially in controlling vice and breaches of the *hadd* even though his measures had seemed too harsh to some of them.

In *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* adherence to Islam is one of Baybars' main qualities. The protagonist performs both orthodox and popular religious rituals. The popular religious element is strong in the *sira* as popular saints look after Baybars and his companions, just as the audience hope they will protect them too.

For twentieth century writers the ruler's loyalty to Islam was stressed through his ancestry. In both *Wa Islamah* and *al-Fursan* a lot of emphasis was placed on the legend that Qutuz was "Mahmud." In these works, the hero enjoys excellent close relations with famous 'ulama' like al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam. There is no mention of either Qutuz nor Baybars participating in popular religious rituals in these works. This may be because sufism has suffered a bad reputation since the late Ottoman period. Consequently the model modern Muslim does not partake in such activities which are often deemed ignorant, superstitious and deviant.

Just as the ideal ruler and the Muslim hero had to be a good pious Muslim, he also had to be a just ruler. Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir emphasized Baybars' just rulings and his restoration of *Dar al-'Adl*. His decision to appoint four chief *qadis* one from each school of law was considered an innovative solution to everyday problems by some writers and an unjust decree that disunited Muslims by others. Historians presenting a negative assessment of Baybars emphasized his tough unjust decrees such as those concerning the taxation of Damascus. In *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* the protagonist helped common people get their rights from crooks, petty thieves and corrupt state officials. His battles

to establish internal law and order preceded his wars against the enemies of Islam. Social justice did not figure in *Wa Islamah*, but in the more modern work, *al-Fursan*, the hero, Qutuz, is presented as being kind and just to the population in stark contrast to the other Mamluk characters of the series. He is also presented as a patriotic Egyptian in the national sense, promoting the love of Egypt and Egyptian leadership within the Middle East.

The qualities that were appreciated in an ideal Muslim ruler and a Muslim hero therefore changed in their importance from one generation to another. They varied from military valor, to justice, to religious piety.

Ultimately, this study is not meant to be a history of Baybars as such. Rather it is an attempt to deconstruct his histories and his image(s) as a Muslim hero as well as an attempt to argue that history still matters.

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