

DANIEL MARTIN VARISCO

AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR YEMENI STUDIES

## The Trials and Tribulations of the Rasulid Sultan al-Malik al-Mujāhid ‘Alī (d. 764/1363)

### Introduction

The fifth Rasulid sultan of Yemen, al-Malik al-Mujāhid ‘Alī, may be considered both the luckiest and the unluckiest of the monarchs of this dynasty, which was a distant rival to the Mamluks during his reign.<sup>1</sup> He ruled for a total of 42 years, a

---

This article was written and presented during a fellowship at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg Mamluk Studies Program in Bonn in 2019 and discussed at a Near Eastern Studies seminar at the School of Historical Studies of the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton in December. I thank my colleagues at the Kolleg, especially Dan Mahoney, for their comments. I also thank colleagues at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences for their comments, especially Najwa Adra and Andre Gingrich, as well as Hassan Ansari of the IAS and the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript. John Meloy at AUB helped me better understand the Rasulid presence in Mecca. Rex Smith and Noha Sadek also answered my queries.

<sup>1</sup>For details on his biography and reign, see ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allāh Abū Makhramah, *Tārīkh thaghr ‘Adan* (Beirut, 1987), 171–83; Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Fāsī, *Al-‘iqd al-thamīn fī tārikh al-balad al-amīn*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭabākḥī (Beirut, 1986), 6:158–84; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī Ibn al-Dayba’, *Qurrat al-‘uyūn bi-akhbār al-Yaman al-maymūn*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Akwa’ (Ṣan‘ā’, 1988), 349–67; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah fī a’yān al-mī‘ah al-thāminah*, ed. Sayyid Jādd al-Ḥaqq (Hyderabad, 1945–50), 49–50, no. 106; Ismā‘īl ibn Abī Bakr Ibn al-Muqrī, *‘Unwān al-sharaf al-wāfi fī ‘ilm al-fiqh wa-al-‘arūḍ wa-al-tārīkh wa-al-naḥw wa-al-qawāfi*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (Beirut, 1996), 168–69; Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘asjad al-masbūk fīman waliya al-Yaman min al-mulūk* (Ṣan‘ā’, 1981), 338–410; idem, *Al-‘uqūd al-lu’lu’riyah fī tārikh al-dawlah al-Rasūliyah=The Pearl-Strings: A History of the Resūliyy Dynasty of Yemen*, ed. James W. Redhouse (London, 1906–18), 2:3–109, 5:1–126; idem, *Al-‘iqd al-fākhīr al-ḥasan fī ṭabaqāt akābir ahl al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Qā’id al-‘Abbādī (Ṣan‘ā’, 2008–9), 3:1392–1415; al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā‘īl ibn al-‘Abbās, *Fākihāt al-zamān fī mufākahāt al-ādāb wa-al-fanan fī akhbār man malaka al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Alī Ḥasan al-Ma‘īlī (Riyadh, 2014); al-Malik al-Afdal al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Alī, *Al-‘aṭāyā al-sanīyah wa-al-mawāhib al-hanīyah fī al-manāqib al-Yamanīyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Khāmīrī (Ṣan‘ā’, 2004), 480–82; Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kingship in a Fifteenth-Century Literary History of Muslim Leadership and Pilgrimage: al-Dahab al-masbūk fī dīkr man ḥaḡḡa min al-hulafā’ wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Jo Van Steenberg (Leiden, 2016), 402–9; Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd fī tarājīm al-a’yān al-mufīd*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī (Beirut, 2002), 2:484–97; Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, *Al-badr al-ṭālī’ bi-maḥāsīn man ba’d al-qarn al-sābi’*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Ḥallāq (Beirut, 1998), 483, no. 308; Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Baqī ibn ‘Abd al-Majīd, *Bahjat al-zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥibshī and Muḥammad al-Sanabānī (Ṣan‘ā’, 1988), 285–96; Yaḥyá ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Ghāyat al-amānī fī akhbār al-qitr al-Yamanī*, ed. Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ‘Āshūr (Cairo, 1968), 494–519; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Wuṣābī, *Tārīkh Wuṣāb al-musammá al-i’tibār fī al-tawārikh wa-al-āthār*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Ṣan‘ā’, 1979), 119–20.



©2021 by Daniel Martin Varisco.

DOI: [10.6082/s7g0-yz50](https://doi.org/10.6082/s7g0-yz50). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/s7g0-yz50>)

DOI of Vol. XXIV: [10.6082/msr24](https://doi.org/10.6082/msr24). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/msr2021> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

span second only to that of his grandfather, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf, who held power for 46 years and is credited with building up the Rasulid state.<sup>2</sup> Al-Mujāhid faced numerous rebellions, including by four of his sons, and suffered the humiliation of being kidnapped in Mecca and held in Mamluk territory for fourteen months.<sup>3</sup> His story reveals the difficulties the Rasulids faced in their fragile relations with the Mamluks—especially in terms of competition for influence in Mecca—as well as their constant conflict with the Zaydī imams in Yemen’s north and rebellion by tribes in the coastal Tihamah region. There were also internal family struggles over succession. Al-Mujāhid’s reign began at the midpoint of the dynasty and signaled the Rasulids’ increasing weakness in the region. It is a story that needs to be told but has received little attention thus far.<sup>4</sup> After a brief discussion of the Rasulid context and their influence in Mecca, the life of al-Mujāhid will be discussed, followed by a detailed analysis of his kidnapping.

The story of the Rasulid dynasty begins with the Ayyubid conquest of Yemen by Tūrānshāh, the brother of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, starting in 569/1173. Later Yemeni historians report that among the amirs assisting the Ayyubids were three grandsons of a man known as the *rasūl* (the messenger).<sup>5</sup> One of these amirs, Nūr al-Dīn ʿUmar, would rise through the ranks to become entrusted with control of Mecca and later was left in charge of Yemen when the last Ayyubid king, al-Malik al-Masʿūd Yūsuf, left for a post in Damascus. After al-Masʿūd Yūsuf died in Mecca in 626/1229 and no new ruler was sent from the Ayyubid court, the *de facto* assumption of power by the new Rasulid sultan, now named al-Malik al-Manṣūr ʿUmar, began in Jumādā I 626/April 1229, two decades before the Bahri Mamluks overthrew Ayyubid rule in Egypt. Nūr al-Dīn received the blessing of the caliph al-

<sup>2</sup>The Rasulids under al-Muẓaffar are discussed in Daniel Martin Varisco, “Texts and Pretexts: The Unity of the Rasulid State in the Reign of al-Malik al-Muẓaffar,” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67, no. 1(1993): 13–21. For a concise introduction to the Rasulid dynasty, see G. Rex Smith, “Rasūlids,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 8:455–57. The early sequence of Rasulid rulers was as follows: al-Malik al-Manṣūr ʿUmar (626–47/1229–49), al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf (647–94/1249–95), al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar (694–96/1295–96), al-Malik al-Muʿayyad Dāwūd (696–721/1296–1322), al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī (721–64/1322–63).

<sup>3</sup>The term Mamluk, when capitalized here, refers to the Bahri Mamluk dynasty that overthrew the Ayyubids. When not capitalized, “mamluk” simply refers to slave soldiers.

<sup>4</sup>One of the few modern scholars to discuss the kidnapping and its impact is Éric Vallet, *L’Arabie marchande: état et commerce sous les sultans Rasūlides du Yémen (626–858/1229–1454)* (Paris, 2010), 463–64, 517–18, 690; idem, “Les sultans du Yémen protecteurs de la Mecque (XIIIe–XIVe S.),” *Académie des inscriptions & belles-lettres: Comptes rendus des séances de l’année 2017* (Paris, 2017), 226–27.

<sup>5</sup>The genealogy of the Rasulid sultans, including a fictive claim to a Yemeni ancestor, is discussed by Daniel Mahoney, “Writing the Ethnic Origins of the Rasulids in Late Medieval South Arabia,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 1–20.



Mustanşir in Baghdad in 631/1234 to legitimize his own dynasty in South Arabia.<sup>6</sup> As both were heirs to the Ayyubids, a rivalry evolved between these two major powers regarding trade, control over Mecca, and competition in promoting Islamic learning after the fall of the caliphate. During the long reign of al-Manşūr's son al-Malik al-Muzaffar Yūsuf, who came to power after the assassination of his father in 647/1249, the Mamluk preoccupation with both the crusading Franks and the Mongols kept them from opening a southern front in Yemen against the Rasulids. This was one of the few times in Yemen's long history that its power was on an almost equal footing with a regime outside the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most important political rivalries between the Rasulids and both the Ayyubids and the Mamluks was over control of the sacred pilgrimage center of Mecca, which until the fall of the Abbasid caliphate was generally ceded, at least in principle, to the caliph in Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> During the Rasulid era, Yemen was one of the most important trade partners of Mecca and the Hijaz, due to Rasulid control of trade in the lower Red Sea to the port of Jiddah and Mecca's close proximity to both the Yemeni highlands and Tihamah coast. The items the Hijaz received from Yemen, either directly or through the entrepôt of Aden, included raisins, almonds, grapes, sugarcane, honey, cowpeas, clarified butter, incense, sweets, gemstones, henna, *wars* (*Memecylon tinctorium*) and indigo dyes, wood, fine silk clothing, all kinds of fabric, hides, essences and perfumes, live animals, and weapons.<sup>9</sup> The trade continued uninterrupted, as did the annual pilgrimage from Yemen, no matter whether the Mamluks or Rasulids held sway with the Meccan sharifs.

Rasulid interest in Mecca began during the reign of the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Mas'ūd, who appointed Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar governor there in 617/1220–21. Upon assuming power, the first Rasulid sultan al-Malik al-Manşūr 'Umar sent troops to Mecca, where he was well regarded. The local Ayyubid commander, Shujā' al-Dīn

<sup>6</sup>It is reported that al-Manşūr sought the *tashrīf al-salṭanah* as early as 628/1230, and during 630/1232 al-Manşūr minted coins in his own name, which was proclaimed in the *khuṭbah* throughout Yemen, according to al-Khazraji, *Al-'uqūd*, 1:97, 4:51. The official declaration and robe of honor for his dynasty were sent by the caliph in 631/1233–34 but did not arrive until the following year because the pilgrimage from Iraq had been blocked, according to Ibn Ḥātim in *Al-ṣimt al-ghālī* (G. Rex Smith, *The Ayyubids and Early Rasulids in the Yemen [567–694/1173–1295]* [London, 1978], 1:206–7).

<sup>7</sup>I am indebted to Andre Gingrich for making this point.

<sup>8</sup>For details on this rivalry, see Noha Sadek, *Custodians of the Holy Sanctuaries: Rasulid-Mamluk Rivalry in Mecca*, Ulrich Haarmann Memorial Lecture 20 (Berlin, 2019).

<sup>9</sup>This list was compiled in the thesis of 'Alī 'Abd al-Karīm Barakāt, "Al-ṣilāt al-ḥadāriyah wa-al-fikriyah bayn al-Yaman wa-bilād al-Islāmiyah (626–858 H/1229–1454 M): Mişr wa-al-Hijāz anmūdhajān—dirāsah tārikhiyah" (Şan'ā', 2010), 207. The Hijaz also exported a number of items to Yemen.



Ṭuġtakīn, fled to the coastal town of Yanbuʿ, notifying the sultan al-Kāmil of this intrusion. The next year Ayyubid troops routed the Rasulid soldiers, killing the amir leading them.<sup>10</sup> In 639/1242 al-Manṣūr defeated the mamluks deployed to Mecca. The Ayyubid amirs were unpopular due to the institution of unlawful taxes (*mukūs*) and the strong-arm tactics of their soldiers. Al-Manṣūr set up a marble marker near the Zamzam well that declared an end to these taxes; this lasted until 646/1249 when irregular taxes were reinstated by a corrupt Rasulid deputy there.<sup>11</sup> In 641/1243 al-Manṣūr ordered the construction of the Manṣūriyah madrasah to the west of the great mosque. When the newly installed caliph al-Mustaʿsim arrived on the pilgrimage with his mother, they were warmly received by al-Manṣūr’s deputy in Mecca. It is recorded that al-Manṣūr went to Mecca eight times during his reign, though not during the actual pilgrimage season.<sup>12</sup>

When the Mamluks came to power in Egypt in 648/1250, al-Manṣūr’s son al-Muẓaffar had already assumed the throne after his father. The year before the Mamluk takeover in Egypt al-Muẓaffar had sent a message to al-Mustaʿsim in Baghdad requesting the continued blessing of the caliph for his rule over Yemen. In 659/1261, three years after al-Mustaʿsim was killed, al-Muẓaffar performed the pilgrimage, providing the *kiswah*, washing and perfuming the Kaʿbah, spreading alms, and having the *khutbah* delivered in his name.<sup>13</sup> The prestige of providing the *kiswah* for the Kaʿbah became a major point of contention after the fall of the caliphate. For example, in 667/1269 the Meccan sharif Abū Numayy sent a letter to the Mamluk court warning that his uncle, the sharif Idris ibn Qatādah, had sided with the ruler of Yemen; Abū Numayy sent his uncle out of Mecca and the *khutbah* was restored for the Mamluk sultan.<sup>14</sup> This was the same year that the Mamluk amir Baybars made the pilgrimage, washing the Kaʿbah with rose water and hanging up the Mamluk *kiswah* with his own hands. He wrote a letter at the time to the Rasulid al-Muẓaffar, exhorting him to join the jihad against the Mongols.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk* (Beirut, 1997), 1:366; al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:96–97, 4:49.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ḥātim in Smith, *The Ayyubids*, 1:221; al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:113, 4:77–78; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 1:435–36.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:103, 4:62. For details on al-Manṣūr in Mecca, see al-Fāsi, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:360–65.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kinship*, 349. For details on the *kiswah* sent to Mecca during the Rasulid era, see Sadek, *Custodians of the Holy Sanctuaries*, 13–19. Sadek notes that “the Rasulids’ insistence on providing their own *kiswah* for the Kaʿbah, and on restoring the sanctuaries, expresses not just their religiosity, but also their refusal to being regarded as vassals of the Mamluks.”

<sup>14</sup> Baybars al-Manṣūrī al-Dawādār, *Zubdat al-fikrah fī tārikh al-hijrah*, ed. Donald S. Richards (Beirut, 1998), 120.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kinship*, 361–63; idem, *Sulūk*, 1:61.





Although there is no record of either of the next two Rasulid sultans, al-Ashraf ʿUmar and al-Muʿayyad Dāwūd, traveling to Mecca, they did send envoys along with the annual pilgrimage caravan. The Meccan sharifs who vied for control of Mecca continually played on the rivalry between the Rasulids and the Mamluks, although after the reign of al-Muẓaffar the Mamluks usually had the upper hand. According to al-Khazrajī, in 696/1296–97 the Meccan ruler Abū Numayy received the envoy of al-Muʿayyad and swore an oath of loyalty to the Rasulid sultan.<sup>16</sup> With the death of Abū Numayy in 701/1301, al-Muʿayyad entered into the rivalry between the Meccan ruler’s sons for succession. Ironically, both Abū Numayy and his grandson Thaqabah were ardent supporters of the Zaydī imams, against whom the Rasulids fought for control of Yemen’s central and northern highlands.<sup>17</sup> As will be related below, it was al-Mujāhid’s support for Thaqabah in the mid-fourteenth century that resulted in his kidnapping.

### The Teenage Sultan

According to the late fourteenth-century Rasulid court historian Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Khazrajī, al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī was born in Zabīd, either during Jumādā II 706/December 1306 or in Ramaḍān 707/March 1307.<sup>18</sup> His mother was the daughter of a respected Islamic scholar named Muntakhab al-Dīn Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥalabī, who arrived in Yemen from Mecca during the reign of al-Muẓaffar. His main tutor was Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Zafārī. Among his other teachers were Abū Qāsim al-Ṣaghānī and Tāj al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Yamānī.<sup>19</sup> He was only about 14 or 15 years old when his father al-Muʿayyad died in 721/1321, but he is said to be the only surviving son.<sup>20</sup> His young age explains why there is no mention of any previous official assignments in charge of a region, as was the case for most sons of sultans. On assuming the throne he allied with the power-

<sup>16</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:268–69, 4:336.

<sup>17</sup> Richard T. Mortel, “Zaydi Shiism and the Hasanid Sharifs of Mecca,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 1:461.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:282–83, 4:370. Al-Mujāhid’s son, al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās (*Al-ʿatāyā al-sanīyah*, 480), notes that the correct date is 706/1306. Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghribirdī (*Al-manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfā baʿd al-wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn [Cairo, 1999], 8:76–79) gives his birth date as 701/1301–2 in Taʿizz.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:76. Tāj al-Dīn, who served in the chancery of al-Muʿayyad, was the author of *Bahjat al-zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman*.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Maqrizī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:484, notes that he was 15 years old at the time; al-Maqrizī’s lengthy discussion of al-Mujāhid appears to be taken from al-Khazrajī. His brother al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Ḥasan, who had been active in commanding troops for al-Muʿayyad, died in 712/1313, according to al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:303, 4:403. His brother al-Malik al-Zāfir had died before this. On assuming power, however, he gave positions to two sons of his brother, although their ages are not provided.



ful amir Shujāʿ al-Dīn ʿUmar ibn Yūsuf ibn Manṣūr, who was made commander (*atābak*) of the royal troops. As noted by al-Khazrajī, Shujāʿ al-Dīn was the real power at the start of al-Mujāhid's reign and was someone to be feared. Shujāʿ al-Dīn was well aware of the threat from al-Muʿayyad's uncle, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn al-Malik al-Ashraf, and convinced al-Mujāhid to seize and imprison his uncle, first in Taʿizz and then in Aden.

As a youthful successor to the throne, al-Mujāhid had much to learn and he does not seem to have been well prepared for the task. Al-Khazrajī notes that people disapproved of the way al-Mujāhid handled his father's funeral.<sup>21</sup> One of his first recorded acts, when he departed from the highland fortress of Taʿizz, suggests that he did so at what the court astrologer considered an inauspicious time, foreshadowing his future problems. He soon visited the storehouse of the Rasulid treasury in the fortified mountain stronghold of al-Dumluwah, seeing what wealth he now owned. When he returned, however, he did not provide largesse to certain important individuals and soldiers, as was normally the custom of the sultan. This upset a number of the amirs and major mamluks, who decided to back another uncle, al-Malik al-Manṣūr Ayyūb ibn al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf, and staged a coup. They killed Shujāʿ al-Dīn, along with his son-in-law, the chief judge, and a shaykh of the ʿAns tribe. Shujāʿ al-Dīn had major enemies in Taʿizz and created more by having al-Malik al-Nāṣir imprisoned. The rebelling troops then seized al-Mujāhid, continuing to attack the houses of those in Taʿizz who supported the young sultan. Al-Manṣūr took over as the new sultan, but did not harm al-Mujāhid. Although al-Mujāhid was under arrest, he was given whatever he needed, including female companions.

In his first 70–80 days the rival al-Manṣūr spent an enormous amount of money from the royal treasury, but his reign did not last long. It is reported that one of the slaves (*ghilmān*) of al-Mujāhid had escaped and gathered forty men who surreptitiously entered the fortress in Taʿizz, killed the overseer, and captured al-Manṣūr. When the news reached those below in the city, al-Malik al-Nāṣir, who had been liberated by al-Manṣūr from prison, attempted to rescue al-Manṣūr, but neither he nor the rebel amirs could enter the fortress. When al-Mujāhid was freed, he commanded a herald to let the people in Taʿizz know that they could take whatever they wanted from the houses of those associated with his uncle al-Manṣūr. In the commotion that followed al-Mujāhid was restored to power, arresting the amirs who were against him and pardoning the soldiers. He even released al-Malik al-Nāṣir and one of al-Manṣūr's sons, demanding that al-Manṣūr, who was now imprisoned in Taʿizz, write to his son al-Malik al-Zāhir to hand

<sup>21</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 1:318, 4:441. It is not clear what al-Mujāhid did, since the directions for his burial are said to have been given in advance by al-Muʿayyad. These included burial at night using common items from the Taʿizz market rather than a public celebration.



over the treasure fortress of al-Dumluwah. In reply, al-Zāhir soon mounted a campaign against al-Mujāhid, taking the nearby town of al-Janad and sending forces composed of Kurds and mamluk soldiers to Ta'izz, where they were defeated after a brief siege. A furious al-Mujāhid refused to pardon the mamluks who had rebelled against him, giving license for anyone to capture or steal from them. Seventeen were killed, while a number of them fled to Zabīd and took possession of the city for al-Zāhir.

The unrest in Ta'izz and Zabīd spilled over into Laḥj and Abyan, with a force loyal to al-Zāhir taking Aden in 723/1323. This meant that the revenues from Aden would go directly to al-Zāhir in al-Dumluwah, a major blow to al-Mujāhid. Two of al-Mujāhid's nephews also openly rebelled against the sultan and took their troops to the Tihāmah. Unrest continued in Ta'izz in 724/1323–24 with infighting between the remaining mamluks loyal to al-Mujāhid and tribesmen of the Shafālīt tribe,<sup>22</sup> the latter outnumbering the mamluk soldiers. In the midst of this the rebel mamluks allied with al-Zāhir returned to Ta'izz from Zabīd. Forces also arrived from Aden and al-Dumluwah with two ballistas, although these proved to be ineffective in removing al-Mujāhid from the Ta'izz fortress.<sup>23</sup> Al-Mujāhid's luck worsened when two confidants turned against him and he was forced to sleep in a different place each night due to the continued onslaught of rocks thrown by the ballistas. Then, as related by al-Khazrajī, a miracle happened.<sup>24</sup> After performing his ablutions, a nearby wall opened and a young man (*ghulam*) appeared and immediately moved al-Mujāhid to another space. At first everyone was alarmed, but then a rock that would have killed him fell exactly where he had been sitting. The young man told al-Mujāhid he was his brother by a slave-girl of al-Mu'ayyad and had been brought up as a jinn and would help him defeat his enemies. Further rebellion erupted in the Tihamah, drawing away some of the rebel mamluks, and eventually the siege was lifted.

The constant rebellion and unrest kept al-Mujāhid from traveling to the coastal town of Zabīd—an annual custom for the sultans—until Jumādā II 725/May 1325, in time for the date palm festival known as *sabt al-subūt*.<sup>25</sup> In a pragmatic

<sup>22</sup>Information on this tribe is not available in the major sources. They appear to be from near Ta'izz, probably closer to al-Janad, according to Redhouse (al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 3:154, n. 1003).

<sup>23</sup>Al-Mujāhid wrote a brief description of the ballista and this survives in the mixed manuscript of his son, al-Malik al-Afḍal; see Daniel Martin Varisco and G. Rex Smith, eds., *The Manuscript of al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Dāʿūd b. Yūsuf b. ʿUmar b. ʿAlī ibn Rasūl* (Warminster, 1998), 258–59.

<sup>24</sup>According to al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:15, 5:20, this information came from a female slave of al-Mujāhid's mother.

<sup>25</sup>*Sabt al-subūt* usually occurred on the first Saturday of the month *Ayyār* (May), but it often lasted throughout the date harvest in the Tihāmah; for details on this, see Daniel Martin Varisco, *Medieval Agriculture and Islamic Science: The Almanac of a Yemeni Sultan* (Seattle, 1994), 157–58.



move, he gave amnesty to all who had supported al-Zāhir. Before returning to Taʿizz, he asked the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad for help against his local enemies.<sup>26</sup> In response, a large expeditionary force arrived to Zabīd from Egypt, reported to include 2,000 horsemen, 1,000 foot soldiers, four amirs, and 22,000 camels.<sup>27</sup> They first honored the 18-year-old al-Mujāhid, presenting a robe of honor from the Mamluk sultan, and then part of their force accompanied him on his return to Taʿizz. As they neared Taʿizz, the Mamluk troops appropriated much of the local food, plundered villages, beat and killed people, and even captured and sold women as slaves. Several of them went to al-Dumluwah to see al-Zāhir, who gave them gold and incited them to seize al-Mujāhid, who escaped to the impregnable Taʿizz fortress before they could take him. The beleaguered sultan immediately informed the Mamluk amirs that their services were no longer needed, even sending them money, but they paid little attention and killed people in a number of the surrounding villages before laying waste in the northern Tihāmah and eventually returning to Egypt. Al-Zāhir continued to oppose al-Mujāhid until 734/1333, when he sought amnesty. This was granted by al-Mujāhid, but al-Zāhir died soon after arriving in Taʿizz. Al-Mujāhid then ordered that the body of his enemy be inspected to make sure it had been a natural death and he would not be blamed.

Only four years after assuming power, the young sultan still had little direct control of the area ruled by his father and grandfather. When his attempt to take Aden failed, he accused his troops of not trying hard enough. With growing unrest among his troops he went by land to al-ʿĀrah on the southern sea coast and eventually to Zabīd for the Ramaḍān fast. Instead of acting as a peace-maker he took soldiers with him and attacked the area of the Maʿāzibah tribe, perennial foes of the Rasulid sultans.<sup>28</sup> Many people were killed and date palms were cut down as a penalty for their alleged crimes as rebels. Before returning to Taʿizz in 726/1325 there is a record of the first gifts sent by al-Mujāhid to the Mamluk

<sup>26</sup>See al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:487, who notes that al-Mujāhid had been advised by his father, al-Muʿayyad, to seek help from the Mamluk sultan, promising to send much wealth back to Cairo for this help. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah*, 3:49, states that the experience of the Egyptian troops led to many tales (*qiṣaṣ ṭawīlah*), but he does not elaborate them. The reception of this expeditionary force is also described by Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿAshūr, and Ulrich Haarmann (Cairo, 1960–96), 9:318. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:27, 5:32, does not mention that al-Mujāhid had requested help from the Mamluk sultan.

<sup>27</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:27, 5:32, noting that the two main amirs were Sayf al-Dīn Baybars and Jamāl al-Dīn Ṭaylān. Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:489, and Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:77, record 2,000 foot soldiers.

<sup>28</sup>The Maʿāzibah were one of the most important tribes of the Tihāmah, centered on the town of Bayt al-Faqīh.





court in Cairo. The next year he came down with a serious fever, but his health returned. He later appears to have suffered from a pox (*judarī*), which he survived.<sup>29</sup> Following another unsuccessful attempt to retake Aden, he returned to Taʿizz in response to news that the Zaydī imam Muḥammad ibn Muṭahhar was on his way with 1,000 horsemen and 12,000 foot soldiers. This anticipated attack did not occur and by 728/1327 al-Mujāhid's troops finally took control of Aden. This time al-Mujāhid was merciless to captives, blinding some, hanging others, and even drowning rebels. By this time al-Dumluwah had been liberated from al-Zāhir, so al-Mujāhid was finally able to visit his treasure fortress again. In 730/1329 al-Mujāhid returned to Taʿizz with a major force said to be between 12,000 and 17,000 men and found the city in open rebellion against him. For fifteen days his forces murdered inhabitants, especially on Jabal Ṣabir, until he gave amnesty to those who laid down their weapons.<sup>30</sup> It is clear from the sources that he could rarely trust the forces allied with him, but his record of executions and his limited grants of amnesty only made more enemies.

In addition to the difficulties al-Mujāhid faced in coming to power at such a young age, he was the target of numerous rebellions during his reign, including by four of his sons. In 744/1344 his son al-Malik al-Muʿayyad took over the important coastal town of al-Mahjam, because his father had bestowed a higher rank on his younger brother, al-Malik al-Muḥaffar. This act forced his father to send troops against him, but al-Muʿayyad soon sought immunity and returned to Taʿizz, where al-Mujāhid imprisoned him and where he soon died due to severe beatings. Three years later a group of slaves in Zabīd plotted to seize al-Mujāhid while he was out among the date palms near Zabīd. The plan was to replace him with his cousin, al-Malik al-Fāyiz Abū Bakr ibn Ḥasan ibn Dāwūd. One of the plotters informed al-Mujāhid, who escaped and then took vengeance on the plotters. A decade later the men of al-Shaʿir, who had been loyal to the sultan, were accused of plotting against him.<sup>31</sup> The sultan arrested seventeen of these shaykhs who had come in peace to negotiate. Trouble in the southern Tihāmah continued with the constant rebellions of the Maʿāzibah tribe, who often held their own against the Rasulid forces. After some of these battles, notes al-Khazrajī, some villages were abandoned and never recovered. During these rebellions the town of Fashāl along Wadi Rimaʿ, although placed under the control of al-Mujāhid's son

<sup>29</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:42, 5:52. This is said to have occurred in 729/1328. The term *judarī* is often used for smallpox, but it can refer to several diseases which produce pock-marks on the body.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:44, 5:55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:81, transliterates this tribal name as al-Shīʿr, but the reference appears to be to al-Shaʿir near Ibb; see Ibrāhīm Aḥmad al-Maḥfāfi, *Muʿjam al-buldān wa-al-qabāʾil al-Yamanīyah* (Ṣanʿā, 2002), 1:868–69.



Šāliḥ, was destroyed in 759/1358 along with al-Qaḥmah, al-Kadrā, and most of the villages near Zabīd.<sup>32</sup>

During 763/1361–62 there was a revolt by two of the sultan's sons: al-Malik Šāliḥ and al-Malik al-ʿĀdil. At the same time the amir Muḥammad ibn Mikāʿil, governor of several northern districts of the Tihāmah, turned against al-Mujāhid and declared himself sultan, minting coins in his own name and having his name recited in the *khuṭbah* of the mosques at al-Maḥjam, al-Maḥālib, and Ḥarād. His aggrandized title was the noble and highborn sharif (*al-sharīf al-ḥasīb al-nasīb*) and he claimed to be descended from the Prophet Muḥammad through Ḥusayn. His rule in the region only lasted about two years. Soon, yet another son, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar, rebelled against his father, allying with several Egyptian Mamluk amirs that had recently come to Taʿizz on a diplomatic mission. Al-Muẓaffar attempted unsuccessfully to gain entry into Aden; his father sent a force against him, but it was defeated. Then al-Mujāhid went himself to Aden, where he died in Jumādā I 764/March 1363—at the age of 57—and was later buried in his madrasah in Taʿizz. The weakness of the Rasulid state was evident at the time of his death. In the same year the important northern town of Ḥalī was taken over by the Meccan sharif, ʿAjlān, revealing the dynasty's weakness.<sup>33</sup> Accompanying his father to Aden was al-Malik al-Afḍal, who had remained loyal, and he was chosen as the most suitable successor to his father.

Whether it was due to his young age or lack of experience outside the royal court, al-Mujāhid was remarkably ignorant of conditions in the country he was attempting to rule. In 736/1335–36 he authorized the minting of a new silver dirham called the *riyāḥī*, which was to be used for all revenue payments from farmers and merchants.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, the new coins only became available when the market prices were so low that local farmers became destitute. The situation was so dire that many fled and stopped growing crops along the lucrative Wadi Zabīd. The problem was that the taxes throughout the earlier dynasties had been assessed according to the market price during Dhū al-Ḥijjah of the preceding year. This time the prices during that month had been high but declined considerably when it actually came time to pay, making it difficult for the farmers to

<sup>32</sup>ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Abu Dhabi, 2004), 523.

<sup>33</sup>ʿUmar ibn Muḥammad Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-warā bi-akhbār Umm al-Qurā*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Mecca, 1984), 3:294. Most of the territory formerly held by the Rasulids was lost near the end of al-Mujāhid's reign, according to the later Yemen historian Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, as recorded by ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Anisī al-Šanʿānī, *Ithāf dhawī al-ḥiṭan bi-mukhtaṣar dhawī anbaʿ al-zaman* (Šanʿā, 1981), 42.

<sup>34</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:52, 5:65. The notes to the translation suggest that this term may have been that of the die-maker, since in 800/1398 a man by that name was said to making coins for the Rasulids (ibid., 3:219).



afford the taxes. When al-Mujāhid heard about the crisis, he descended to Zabīd and gathered the local officials, wanting to hear from the local people themselves what the problem was. Al-Mujāhid, who al-Khazrajī states was fond of the farmers, agreed that this was unfair and resolved the crisis by ordering that the market prices be taken twice a month so taxes would not be based on a single inflated amount. He is also credited with increasing the supplemental payments made to Tihāmah farmers and reducing their overall tax burden by a quarter, actions that endeared him to local farmers.

### Kidnapping in Mecca: The Rasulid View

Unlike his predecessors, al-Mujāhid did not perform the pilgrimage during his first two decades in power, due in large part to his preoccupation with establishing control at home. He finally arrived in Mecca in Shawwāl 742/April 1342. Al-Khazrajī describes the pilgrimage, on which he was accompanied by the Meccan sharif Thaqabah ibn Rumaythah.<sup>35</sup> The Rasulid sultan was well-received in Mecca by Rumaythah, the local sharif ruler, who in turn received 40,000 silver *riyāhī* dirhams, clothing, perfume, robes of honor, horses, and mules. In Mecca, al-Mujāhid stayed at the Shafī'i Mujāhidīyah madrasah, which al-Khazrajī claims was set up in 740/1339–40 and supported by *waqf* from three places along Wadi Zabīd.<sup>36</sup> As al-Khazrajī reports, relations with amirs of the Egyptian and Syrian pilgrimage delegations were cordial and al-Mujāhid honored both with robes of honor. Both sets of amirs are said to have kissed his noble hand repeatedly. His return to Yemen was through the main towns of the Tihāmah, where he gave out alms and was treated with festivities and entertainment.<sup>37</sup> The local officials in charge of al-Mahjam and Ta'izz created floats with musicians and singers to entertain the sultan.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 2:56, 5:71–72. The Redhouse translation misnames the sharif as Bāghīyah; the associated Arabic text of *Al-ʿuqūd* misspells Thaqabah as Baqīyah (!). The sharif Thaqabah ibn Rumaythah challenged his brother ʿAjlān for control of Mecca during the Mamluk era. In 761/1360 he is reported to have killed many people in Mecca in acts that are called repugnant (*qabīḥah*) by al-Shawkānī, *Al-badr al-ṭālīʿ*, 1:125. See also the description of this pilgrimage by al-Mujāhid's son, al-Malik al-Abbās, *Al-ʿatāyā al-sanīyah*, 481.

<sup>36</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:56, 5:68. Al-Fāsī, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:251, disagrees with al-Khazrajī, stating that the madrasah was built the year before. This Meccan scholar locates it to the south of the main mosque. He also mentions a building (*ʿimārah*) provided by al-Mujāhid for the *mawlid* celebration of the Prophet in Mecca's Sūq al-Layl. Some scholars reported that at the base of the Ka'bah was a silver plaque with the name of al-Malik al-Mujāhid in thick letters, but al-Fāsī said it did not exist in his time.

<sup>37</sup>From Mecca he first went to Ḥalī, then on to the coastal towns of al-Maḥālib, al-Mahjam, al-Kadrā', Fashāl, Zabīd, Ḥays, and finally back to Ta'izz.



Nine years later, in 751/1351, al-Mujāhid made his second pilgrimage, one that would not end with a triumphal return through his coastal towns.<sup>38</sup> This time the sultan of Yemen was kidnapped by Mamluk soldiers and taken to Egypt, where he spent 14 months before being able to return. The Rasulid sources describe the trip to Mecca and the kidnapping, but do not report anything about what happened to al-Mujāhid during his stay in the Mamluk realm. The Yemeni historian al-Ahdal (d. 855/1451) briefly mentions the second pilgrimage of al-Mujāhid in 751, noting that he was captured (*asira*) and taken to Egypt, where he was imprisoned for nearly a year and then released and returned home in 752, when there was great turmoil in Yemen.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately, the Mamluk and Meccan texts provide important details about his trip as a prisoner to Cairo, his reception by the Mamluk sultan, the first attempt to return to Yemen, his later imprisonment in al-Karak, and his eventual return to rule. Although each of these sources has bias, a comparative analysis indicates a broader picture than any specific account affords.

The main Rasulid source is al-Khazrajī's chronicle, *Al-ʿuqūd al-luʿluʿiyyah*, which contains virtually the same information as his *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*.<sup>40</sup> According to al-Khazrajī, al-Mujāhid appointed several high-ranking officials to be in charge during his absence. The amir Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn al-Qāhirī took over the Taʿizz fortress, where all al-Mujāhid's children except al-ʿĀdil were placed for protection.<sup>41</sup> The highly regarded eunuch Amīn al-Dīn Ahyaf was designated the paymaster (*shaddād*) with oversight of the *wazīr* and chief judge Muwaffaq al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī al-Yaḥyawī.<sup>42</sup> Another eunuch, Jamāl al-Dīn Bārīʿ, was left in charge of troops in the fortress of Irbāb.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>This is said to be his third pilgrimage by Yaḥyá ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Ghāyat al-amānī*, 516, but all other sources indicate that it was his second.

<sup>39</sup>Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 523.

<sup>40</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:69–76, 5:83–90. The Redhouse edition of al-Khazrajī's text has many flaws, but it is the most available account. There is also a Yemeni edition edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Ṣanʿā, 2009). The account in his *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 385–91, only adds a few more details. There is a shorter account in his *Al-ʿiqd al-fākhir al-ḥasan*, 3:1407, which does not mention the imprisonment. The surviving texts from Yemeni historians who lived during the time of the kidnapping were by al-Wuṣābī, *Tārīkh Wuṣāb*, 119–20, and by al-Mujāhid's son al-Malik al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAlī, *Al-ʿatāyā al-sanīyah*, 482. The later chronicle of al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl is virtually the same as al-Khazrajī's *Al-ʿuqūd*.

<sup>41</sup>These included the older ones, al-Muẓaffar and Ṣāliḥ, as well as the younger sons al-Afḍal, al-Ẓāfir, al-Nāṣir, al-Manṣūr, and al-Masʿūd.

<sup>42</sup>A detailed study of Ahyaf is provided in Magdalena Moorthy-Kloss, "Slaves at the Najahid and Rasulid Courts of Yemen (412–553 AH/1021–1158 CE and 626–858 AH/1229–1454 CE)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 2019), 139–47.

<sup>43</sup>Irbāb was a fortress between Ibb and Taʿizz. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:147, 5:169.





Al-Mujāhid took with him his son ʿĀdil, his mother Jihāt Ṣalāḥ,<sup>44</sup> several dignitaries, servants, and soldiers. Once again, al-Mujāhid was accompanied by the sharif Thaḡabah, recently expelled from Mecca by his brother ʿAjlān. A rumor reached ʿAjlān that al-Mujāhid intended to replace him with his brother and take him as a prisoner back to Yemen. So ʿAjlān went to the amir of the Egyptian Mamluk delegation, arguing that al-Mujāhid planned to put his own *kiswah* on the Kaʿbah, and set up his own governor with his troops. He insisted that if the Mamluk amirs did not seize al-Mujāhid he would return with them to Cairo rather than be captured by the Rasulid sultan; this would obviously upset the Mamluk sultan who had given him authority over Mecca.

The Egyptian troops planned to capture al-Mujāhid in Minā, when he was separated from the bulk of his own troops. They found him in a camp with only a few guards, since he had gone ahead of the pilgrimage group that included his mother and his son al-ʿĀdil. There was killing on both sides. Realizing that resistance would be futile, he offered himself up and asked the Mamluks not to harm those with him. They agreed and treated him honorably when taking him to their camp, where he was given his own tent and allowed to take one of his amirs with him. When his mother and his troops entered Mecca, they were able to recover most of what had been taken from him. While this account describes how the news of his capture reached Yemen and events that took place in his absence, there is no information from al-Khazrajī about how he was treated while held in Egypt for over a year.

The Rasulid scholar Ibn al-Muqrī (d. 837/1433) does not mention the kidnapping, only noting that al-Mujāhid went to Egypt after his pilgrimage and returned safely.<sup>45</sup> The Rasulid historian al-Wuṣābī, however, records a line of poetry that the Mamluk sultan reportedly recited to al-Mujāhid when he was taken to Egypt: “The water of the Nile was indeed low, but it rose over the riverbank due to your flowing generosity” (*wa-qad kāna baḡru al-Nīl daḡḡāḡan māʿuhu, fa-amaddahu bi-al-sīf min jawdikum baḡru*).<sup>46</sup> It is not clear how this Yemeni historian received this information. It is possible that it came directly from al-Mujāhid, since it has a positive spin. I interpret the term *baḡr* here both in its literal sense to the Nile and also with the connotation of someone who is generous. Since all the Mamluk accounts suggest that al-Mujāhid was received honorably and even caught the

<sup>44</sup>Her full name was ʿĀminah bint al-Shaykh al-Ṣāliḡ Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbd Allāḡ al-Ḥalabī, known as al-Naqqāsh. Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Al-faḡl al-mazīd ʿalā bugḡyat al-mustafīd fī akḡbār madīnat Zabīd*, ed. Joseph Chelhod (Ṣanʿāʿ, 1983), 99.

<sup>45</sup>Ibn al-Muqrī, *Unwān al-sharaf al-wāfī*, 169.

<sup>46</sup>Al-Wuṣābī, *Tārīḡ Wuṣāb*, 120. This follows four lines of poetry that al-Mujāhid is said to have given when he began the pilgrimage. Al-Mujāhid was said to be a noted poet and some of his verses survive in al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿiqd al-fāḡhir*, 1411–15.



affection of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, such a line of poetry is plausible.<sup>47</sup> The line may also relate to the fact that the Mamluk sultan expected al-Mujāhid to send him a very lucrative set of gifts from Yemen after his return.

The son and successor of al-Mujāhid, al-Malik al-Afdal al-ʿAbbās, put a positive spin on the experience of his father in Egypt without mentioning the cause of his being there or his imprisonment.<sup>48</sup> He wrote that his father had entered Egypt and engaged in discussion with scholars on every kind of science, winning their hearts to the extent that they magnified his intellectual prowess and praised him so much that the sultan had feared they would select al-Mujāhid to rule Egypt and replace him. So his father had stayed there for twelve months and then returned satisfied to Yemen. Al-Afdal refers to the pilgrimage as a famous story (*qiṣṣah mashhūrah*), but totally omits any negative reference to his father.

In *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, al-Khazrajī adds a detail not found in the earlier published edition of *Al-ʿuqūd*. He writes that he himself heard the news of the kidnapping in Minā a day or two after it happened while he was in Zabīd, but that it was not clear if it was true or false and undoubtedly it had arrived via a devil (*shayṭān*).<sup>49</sup> People stopped talking about the alleged kidnapping after two or three days because it could not be verified. He then notes that a Yemeni pilgrim named ʿUmar ibn Zurayzir was the first to return and confirm it with a message from al-Mujāhid.

In al-Mujāhid's absence the threat of rebellion was raised. The eunuch Jamāl al-Dīn Bārīʿ left his post in Irbāb with his troops for al-Janad hoping that he could endear himself to one of the sultan's sons if al-Mujāhid did not return. The alarmed eunuch Amīn al-Dīn Ahyaf demanded to know why Bārīʿ had left his post, but he lied and said that he had been summoned by the chief judge. Both the judge and Bārīʿ were promptly called up to the Taʿizz fortress and arrested. Deciding that he could trust neither, Ahyaf had both men hanged and appointed a new chief judge. When the sultan's mother, Jihāt Ṣalāh, finally returned to Taʿizz in Ṣafar 752/April 1351, she was given a royal reception and received an oath of loyalty from Ahyaf. Letters written by the sultan eventually arrived from Medina and Cairo. In Rabīʿ II 752/June 1352 a message arrived that al-Mujāhid had started his return to Yemen but had been called back to Cairo, although no reason is given. Another letter arrived from al-Mujāhid when he was at the African port of Suwakin. His troops met him when he landed on Yemeni soil at the harbor of

<sup>47</sup>The Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan came to power in 1347 at age 12 and was at first under the control of several powerful Mamluk amirs. In 1351 he was overthrown but returned to power in 1354, lasting until 1361, when he was killed at the age of 27 by one of his mamluks.

<sup>48</sup>Al-Malik al-ʿAbbās, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 482.

<sup>49</sup>Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387. In 752 al-Khazrajī would have been 22 years old. This is also recorded by Ibn al-Daybaʿ.



al-Ḥādith, and they went on to Zabīd, where his mother and his sons joined him from Ta‘izz. It is clear that the sultan’s mother was exercising power during her son’s absence.<sup>50</sup>

### Kidnapping in Mecca: The Mamluk View

The Mamluk sources provide some of the same information about the capture of al-Mujāhid in Mecca, but add new and different details about the events leading up to the Mamluk pilgrimage that year, the troops’ encounter with al-Mujāhid in Mecca, and the Rasulid sultan’s sojourn in the Mamluk realm. One of the main sources is al-Maqrīzī, writing almost a century later, in his *Al-dhahab al-masbūk*,<sup>51</sup> *Durar al-‘uqūd fī tarājim al-a‘yān al-mufīd*,<sup>52</sup> and *Al-sulūk fī ma‘rifat al-mulūk*.<sup>53</sup> Al-Maqrīzī no doubt borrows some of his information from the earlier account provided by Ibn Kathīr, who remarks that stories about this were known in his day.<sup>54</sup> Regarding the first pilgrimage of al-Mujāhid in 742/1342, al-Maqrīzī differs from al-Khazrajī in noting that the ruler of Mecca prevented al-Mujāhid from covering the Ka‘bah with his *kiswah* and that al-Mujāhid left in anger. Before the second pilgrimage a decade later, the sharif Thaqabah had visited al-Mujāhid, seeking assistance in overthrowing his brother ‘Ajlān.<sup>55</sup> In *Al-sulūk* al-Maqrīzī reports that in Rajab 751/September 1350 ‘Ajlān had visited the Mamluk sultan in Egypt asking for troops to defend Mecca. This was denied, but ‘Ajlān was able to buy 40 mamluk soldiers, hire 20 foot soldiers and 100 horse soldiers, and return to Mecca. That year the pilgrimage delegation from Egypt was led by the amir Buzlār with as many as forty higher and lesser amirs, including Baybughā Rūs, the deputy of the sultan.<sup>56</sup> The amir Ṭāz, commander of the troops for the pilgrim caravan from Egypt, brought 150 mamluks and 60 horse soldiers.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>50</sup>She died in 762/1361, according to al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘uqūd*, 2:100

<sup>51</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 402–9.

<sup>52</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd*, 2:493–96.

<sup>53</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:130–31, 134–36, 146.

<sup>54</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, ed. Riyāḍ Murād and Muḥammad ‘Abid (Qatar, 2015), 16:356–60, places the kidnapping in 752. Ibn Kathīr would have been alive when the event happened. Unfortunately, he provides a very brief account of the kidnapping and nothing about the reception in Cairo. He also does not provide news of the death of al-Mujāhid in 764.

<sup>55</sup>For a Mamluk perspective on ‘Ajlān (d. 777/1375), see Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:9–12.

<sup>56</sup>Buzlār al-Nāṣiri (d. 756/1355) was a high-ranking Mamluk amir. The amir Baybughā Rūs or Ārūs (d. 753/1352) was the main amir in charge of the young al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, who had become sultan at the age of 12; for details on his life see Ibn al-Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 3:486–89, who notes he became an alcoholic when he was appointed to Aleppo.

<sup>57</sup>Sayf al-Dīn Ṭāz ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Nāṣiri (d. 763/1362) was a powerful amir in the Cairo court. In 1351 he orchestrated the replacement of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan with his brother for three years.



In Yemen al-Mujāhid set out for the pilgrimage with Thaqabah, who wanted his support to replace his brother ʿAjlān as ruler of Mecca. Along with his mother and at least one son, al-Mujāhid gathered a large number of soldiers and prepared a Yemeni *kiswah* to cover the Kaʿbah. When al-Mujāhid reached the northern town of Ḥalī, Thaqabah’s two brothers Sanad and Mughāmis joined the troops. When ʿAjlān heard of their arrival, he forbade their entry into Mecca, but al-Mujāhid ignored him and entered to do “mischief” without respecting the Meccan sharifs or the amir Buzlār, so ʿAjlān informed the amir Ṭāz that al-Mujāhid was bringing soldiers and weapons that would create a chaotic situation (*fitnah*) in Mecca. The Egyptian amirs sent a message to al-Mujāhid warning him not to cause problems and to hand over Thaqabah as a hostage until his royal pilgrimage was completed. Al-Mujāhid is said to have seen no choice but to comply and a group of Egyptian soldiers was sent to assist him, but instead they disarmed his soldiers and prevented him from parading with his royal insignia (*ghāshiyah*). Al-Maqrīzī adds that al-Mujāhid was biding his time, waiting until the amir Ṭāz left so that he and Thaqabah could take over Mecca.

Then an altercation occurred on the day the pilgrims were in Minā.<sup>58</sup> The commander of the Egyptian caravan, Buzlār, called out to al-Mujāhid or one of his retinue, who refused to come to him. When one of Buzlār’s mamluks wounded one of al-Mujāhid’s soldiers, a fight broke out and both sides took losses. Soon ʿAjlān arrived with a large number of troops, but the amir Ṭāz told ʿAjlān to protect the pilgrims and leave the fighting to the Egyptians. In the end the Yemenis were defeated.<sup>59</sup> According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Mujāhid fled to his tent, but he was surrounded and the tent ropes were cut so that he and his sons were thrown to the ground and could not escape. Al-Mujāhid’s possessions were looted and al-Mujāhid himself was captured, along with his *wazīr*. A large number of his troops were killed, as were many pilgrims. Thaqabah took advantage of the chaos to escape his guards. It is reported that Ṭāz placed al-Mujāhid’s mother and his women under the protection of ʿAjlān.

There is some confusion in Ibn Kathīr’s account, even though he suggests that there were still people around who had memories of the event. First, he briefly mentions the fighting between al-Mujāhid and the Mamluk amirs on Thursday,

---

He was later imprisoned and blinded in al-Karak. For details on his life, see Ibn Taghrībīrdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfī*, 6:362–65.

<sup>58</sup>This is called a strange event (*kāʿinah gharībah*) by Ibn Kathīr (*Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:356), who notes the killing took place in Wadi Muḥassir, and a great strife (*fitnah ʿuzmā*) by al-Zāhiri (*Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmūrī [Beirut, 2002], 1:210).

<sup>59</sup>Ibn Kathīr (*Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:358) claims that the Yemeni force suffered more casualties and that as a result many people looted their possessions.





12 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 751, that resulted in al-Mujāhid being taken in chains to Cairo.<sup>60</sup> The same event is treated by Ibn Kathīr in more detail for 752. He says the cause of the problem was the attempt by al-Mujāhid to replace the sharif ‘Ajlān with his exiled brother Thaqabah, causing ‘Ajlān to go to the Mamluk amir Buzlār and ask for help. This made the pilgrims fearful, but the Mamluk troops were patient, waiting to capture al-Mujāhid until the pilgrims had completed the sacrifice. On 12 Dhū al-Ḥijjah there was a battle between the Egyptian and Yemeni forces, with many of the Yemenis being killed. Al-Mujāhid fled but was taken prisoner and chained. His horses and camels were also seized and the Yemeni possessions were looted. In addition to al-Mujāhid, the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs and the previous deputy of Medina named Ṭufayl were also bound with chains and taken to Cairo. Ibn Kathīr does not explain why the two Mamluk amirs were seized, although he later notes that both Baybughā Rūs and al-Mujāhid were released from prison in al-Karak. Al-Dhahabī writes that the amir Ṭāz arrested Baybughā Rūs because he thought that Baybughā Rūs had made the pilgrimage without the permission of the sultan.<sup>61</sup> Ibn Taghribirdī states that al-Mujāhid did a number of shameful things in Mecca, including bringing 200 hunting dogs with him to the holy city.<sup>62</sup>

When the amir Ṭāz left Mecca, he took the Rasulid sultan with him, treating him honorably. In Muḥarram 752/March 1351 they entered Cairo with al-Mujāhid in chains. Upon meeting the Mamluk sultan, al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, the Rasulid sultan kissed the ground three times and his chains were removed after the amir Ṭāz commended al-Mujāhid’s behavior.<sup>63</sup> At this point he was treated as a guest in the Ashrafiyah palace, with a large stipend and servants. Al-Nāṣir Ḥasan granted the Rasulid sultan two robes of honor and permitted him to ride in the royal public procession. One condition of his release was that he should make an annual payment to the Mamluk court, as had been the Mamluk rule. Although it is said that he could have returned sooner, al-Mujāhid spent up to ten months in Cairo before his first attempted journey back to Yemen. During this journey he attempted to

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 16:356–57. This date is known as *nafr*, the day that the pilgrims depart from Minā.

<sup>61</sup>Al-Dhahabī, *Al-‘ibar fī khabar man ghabar*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Kuwait, 1967), 6:284. The Meccan account of al-Sinjārī (*Manā’ih al-karam* [Mecca, 1998], 3:245–48) notes that Baybughā Rūs was arrested because his brother Manjik rebelled against the sultan. The editor of al-Sinjārī’s *Manā’ih al-karam* wrongly asserts in a footnote that al-Malik al-Mujāhid was the brother rather than son of al-Malik Mu’ayyad (2:358, n. 3).

<sup>62</sup>Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:10.

<sup>63</sup>Failure to kiss the ground before the Mamluk sultan would no doubt have angered him, as was the case for an Ottoman ambassador before Khushqadam (r. 865–72/1461–67), noted by Y. Frenkel, “Embassies and Ambassadors in Mamluk Cairo,” in F. Bauden and M. Dekkeche, eds., *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Leiden, 2019), 249.



flee the accompanying amir Qasṭamur, who complained to al-Nāṣir.<sup>64</sup> As a result, al-Mujāhid was arrested again in Yanbuʿ and sent to prison in al-Karak.<sup>65</sup> Ibn Iyās suggests that the reason he was sent back from Yanbuʿ was that he tried to kill the Mamluk amir sent with him.<sup>66</sup> According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Mujāhid was in al-Karak from the end of Rabiʿ I until early Shaʿbān, which would have been about four months.<sup>67</sup>

Al-Mujāhid was eventually freed from al-Karak due to the intercession of the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs and sent to Cairo, where the Mamluk amirs reprimanded him.<sup>68</sup> Borrowing money from the Kārim merchants, he bought mamluk soldiers, horses, and camels for his return journey. Ibn Taghrībirdī writes that it was his mother who asked the merchants to grant him a loan, after she sealed off their items stored in Aden, Taʿizz, and Zabīd.<sup>69</sup> The amount was said to be 100,000 dinars, which he paid back after his eventual return to Yemen.<sup>70</sup> Al-Nāṣir gave him another robe of honor; then sent him along the Nile and eventually by ship from ʿAydhāb. According to al-Maqrīzī, al-Mujāhid arrived back in Taʿizz in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 752/February 1352 and soon wrote to al-Nāṣir that he was preparing the promised gifts. Most of the sources note that his mother had been in charge in Yemen during his absence.

Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī adds an anecdote about the journey of al-Mujāhid up the Nile after the second release.<sup>71</sup> Al-Mujāhid’s horse became thirsty and went to drink from the Nile. When the horse had quenched its thirst, al-Mujāhid burst into tears, so he was asked about this. Al-Mujāhid responded that an astrologer had told him that he would rule Egypt when he drank from the water of the Nile. When he saw his horse drinking from the Nile, he realized this to be a fateful sign that he would never be able to rule Egypt. A similar but somewhat confusing anecdote is related by al-Zāhirī about a prediction from an astrologer. This referred to an event at the madrasah known as Aqbughawīyah, where his horse threw him after a fire (*nār*) erupted. After this dreadful event, he knew his kingdom would

<sup>64</sup>Qasṭamur al-Manṣūrī (d. 770/1369) was the financial controller (*shādd al-dawāwīn*), according to al-Maqrīzī, *Caliphate and Kingship*, 407 n. 371.

<sup>65</sup>This is reported in al-Maqrīzī, but al-Zāhirī (*Nayl al-amal*, 1:213) and Ibn Iyās (*Badāʿiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʿiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā [Cairo, 1960], 1:537) say he was first taken to Alexandria.

<sup>66</sup>Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿiʿ al-zuhūr*, 1:537.

<sup>67</sup>Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, 2:495–596.

<sup>68</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:360. He arrived back in Cairo on Saturday, 9 Shaʿbān 752/1 October 1351, according to Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–72), 10:264.

<sup>69</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 10:264.

<sup>70</sup>According to al-Zāhirī (*Nayl al-amal*, 1:212), the amount was 400,000 dinars.

<sup>71</sup>Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-durar al-kāminah*, 3:50. This is later repeated by al-Shawkānī (*Al-badr al-ṭālīʿ*, 484), noting that al-Mujāhid had been informed by his astrologers while in Yemen.



not continue.<sup>72</sup> After al-Mujāhid's release, the sharif Thaḡabah visited Cairo and was made co-regent of Mecca with his brother 'Ajlān. Thaḡabah borrowed a considerable amount of money from Mamluk amirs, as well as merchants, in order to buy horses, mamluks, weapons, and the service of some soldiers. It is noted that no one in Mecca had news of what had happened to al-Mujāhid in Egypt until the Egyptian pilgrimage came to Mecca in 753/1352.

### Kidnapping in Mecca: The Meccan View

In *Al-iqd al-thamīn*, Taḡī al-Dīn Muḡammad ibn Aḡmad al-Fāsī, the well known early-fifteenth-century historian of Mecca, presents a biography of al-Mujāhid, including his seizure in Mecca.<sup>73</sup> Al-Fāsī notes that along with Thaḡabah were two of his brothers, Sanad and Muḡhāmis, but this disturbed 'Ajlān, the brother who was then in charge of Mecca and had exiled all of them. So 'Ajlān warned the Egyptian amir Ṭāz that al-Mujāhid wanted to cover the Ka'bah with his *kiswah*, take control of Mecca, and drive the Mamluks out. Ṭāz accepted this view since al-Mujāhid had not made cordial overtures to him.<sup>74</sup> On the day of *nafr* (12 Dhū al-Ḥijjah), the commander of the Egyptian pilgrims went to Minā, but although al-Mujāhid wanted to cause trouble, he had few servants with him and thus fled to the mountain above Minā. When the place where he stopped was taken by force, he had no choice but to surrender to the Egyptians. He was granted safety and treated with honor before being taken to Egypt as a prisoner. In Cairo al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan honored him and treated him well, ordering that he be returned to his country.

When al-Mujāhid reached al-Dahnā' in Wadi Yanbu' on his first attempt to return home an event occurred which resulted in his imprisonment in the Mamluk stronghold of al-Karak. The reason for this, according to al-Fāsī, was that the Rasulid sultan did not think it proper to be accompanied by a Mamluk amir on his return. He offered the amir a piece of land in Yemen known as Ḥāfah Munīḡ if he would let him go on his way. The amir asked some of the sultan's servants where

<sup>72</sup> Al-Zāhirī, *Nayl al-amal*, 1:378. This account does not mention the horse drinking water from the Nile.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Fāsī, *Al-iqd al-thamīn*, 5:258–59, #6061. Al-Fāsī ends his biography of al-Mujāhid by noting that there are many things in the sultan's life that are not recorded in al-Khazrajī's *Al-uqūd*, a source he consulted. See also his *Shafā' al-gharām bi-akhbār al-harām* in Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka* (Leipzig, 1859), 282–83. Other Meccan accounts of the kidnapping can be found in al-Sinjārī, *Manā'ih al-karam*, 2:358–62, and 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ṭabarī, *Al-arj al-miskī* (Mecca, 1996), 122.

<sup>74</sup> On a previous pilgrimage in 742/1342 al-Mujāhid had lavished gifts on the Egyptian amirs and given them robes of honor.



this was and they responded that it was the place reserved for lepers in Taʿizz.<sup>75</sup> When the amir realized al-Mujāhid's ruse, he wrote to the court in Egypt and orders were given for the Rasulid sultan to be returned and imprisoned in al-Karak. He remained there until his release was mediated by the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs, and he returned again to the Mamluk sultan in Cairo. In his *Shafā' al-gharām bi-akhbār al-ḥarām*, al-Fāsī notes that al-Mujāhid visited Jerusalem and Hebron after his release from al-Karak.<sup>76</sup> Finally, al-Mujāhid was sent home, sailing from ʿAydhāb and Suwakin and landing on the Yemeni coast at al-Ḥādith during Dhū al-Ḥijjah 752/January 1352. Al-Mujāhid's soldiers met him and his mother handed back control of the country. According to al-Fāsī, he was not weakened by this absence except for rebellion in the area of Baʿdān. The Meccan author notes that after him the Rasulid rulers were weak. Al-Mujāhid briefly prohibited merchants from traveling from Yemen to Mecca out of anger at ʿAjlān's behavior. Three years later he sent a major gift to the sultan in Cairo, as had been demanded.

Writing a few decades after al-Fāsī, the Meccan historian Ibn Fahd provides more details on the kidnapping in Mecca.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Fahd notes that al-Mujāhid came to Mecca with his mother and sons (*awlād*), as well as 700 horsemen and 800 archers. When he reached Ḥalī in Yemen's north he was met by the sharif Thaqabah and his brothers Sanad and Mughāmis. This year the Egyptian pilgrimage included up to forty amirs of all ranks. The amir Baybughā Rūs, who brought with him 150 armed mamluks, left Cairo two days before the others. The commander of the Egyptian forces was the *atābak* Ṭāz, who had 60 horsemen, with Buzlār in charge of the pilgrims. Because the minister Manjak, brother of Baybughā Rūs, had been seized for attempting a coup, the sultan wrote to Ṭāz and Buzlār to be wary of Baybughā Rūs. A message was also sent from the sultan about his brother to Baybughā Rūs, who was told he could either complete the pilgrimage or return right away. He was dumbfounded by this news and told the sultan's messenger that "We are all mamluks of the sultan" (*Kullunā mamālik al-sulṭān*). When he met up with the other two major amirs, they seized him and disarmed his personal mamluks (*tulbah*). He was then escorted directly to prison in al-Karak.

Having set the stage regarding the Mamluk amirs, Ibn Fahd writes that al-Mujāhid entered Mecca with the three brothers of the sharif ʿAjlān, who was in

<sup>75</sup>The same story is told by Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:78, and by Bā Makhramah, *Tārīkh thaghīr ʿAdan*, 180, who probably saw this in the earlier Mamluk and Meccan sources. The *ḥāfah* in the dialect of Taʿizz is the same as *ḥārah*, in the sense of a part of a town (Muḥammad Jāzim, personal communication). There is no known Yemeni placename of Muniḥ, although this term is used for a mountain in the central Arabian desert of al-Dahnāʿ (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* [Beirut, 1988], 5:217).

<sup>76</sup>Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, 283.

<sup>77</sup>Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-warā*, 3:244–53.





charge and had forbidden them to enter. We are told that al-Mujāhid did not do anything good and was not well received by the local residents or the other sharifs, nor by the Egyptian amirs. ‘Ajlān was told that al-Mujāhid was waiting for the Egyptians to leave, so he could put Thaqabah in charge of Mecca and take ‘Ajlān in chains back to Yemen. With this news, ‘Ajlān went to warn Buzlār and the other amirs about what al-Mujāhid was planning. If they did not do something to stop this, ‘Ajlān said, he would be forced to abandon Mecca and return with them to Cairo. On 13 Dhū al-Ḥijjah, as the Yemeni troops were spread out in Minā and preparing to leave, the plan was hatched to capture al-Mujāhid, since he had only a few guards with him. The Mamluk forces surprised him in his tent and people on both sides were killed, so al-Mujāhid decided not to resist due to the sacredness of the time and place. At first he fled up to the mountain, then realized that he needed to give himself up to prevent further loss of life. He was placed on a mule and taken, with the respect due his rank, to the Egyptian camp, where a special tent was set up for him. The horses and other items taken from him and his Yemeni forces were returned, and his mother and son were put under the protection of ‘Ajlān. Meanwhile, ‘Ajlān’s three brothers escaped in the direction of Yemen.

The turmoil was not over, however: a group of Meccan sharifs decided to plunder the Egyptian forces and set al-Mujāhid free but were stopped by ‘Ajlān. The Egyptians considered seizing ‘Ajlān, thinking he might try to take al-Mujāhid from them. ‘Ajlān responded by assembling a large force but did not prevent the Mamluk troops from leaving, which they did immediately. Ibn Fahd now adds another dimension to the entry of al-Mujāhid into Mecca. In addition to what was said earlier, he writes that ‘Ajlān had taken up arms, ready to fight his brother Thaqabah, causing the Egyptians to suspect that the Rasulid sultan was planning to replace ‘Ajlān with Thaqabah after they left. The amirs told al-Mujāhid that anyone entering Mecca must not do so with arms and that Thaqabah should be given over as a hostage until the pilgrimage was ended. Al-Mujāhid agreed, which pleased the amirs, but the Rasulid sultan would not be allowed to enter Mecca with armed guards or with the *ghāshiyah*, the royal saddle emblem of his authority. The story is then told, similar to the version in the Mamluk sources, of the altercation in Minā that led to fighting and the eventual capture of al-Mujāhid. In this account, however, the amir Baybughā Rūs was still in Mecca and taken in chains along with al-Mujāhid to Yanbu‘, from where the amir was then sent directly to al-Karak. Unlike the account by al-Fāsī, no explanation is given about the problem in Yanbu‘ that led to returning al-Mujāhid to Egypt, nor does Ibn Fahd mention that al-Mujāhid was imprisoned in al-Karak. Finally, al-Mujāhid arrived via ‘Aydhāb to Zabīd on Wednesday, 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 752/February 1352. The same year Thaqabah, now in control of the port of Jiddah, levied stiff customs on the Yemeni merchants who arrived there. The loss of revenue from Jiddah



forced ʿAjlān to impose new taxes on date palms in Mecca and confiscate horses and property. The next year al-Mujāhid prevented the Yemeni merchants from traveling to Mecca, out of anger over what had happened there.<sup>78</sup>

## Comparing the Sources

One of the most interesting results in comparing the sources is that the Rasulid texts provide virtually no details about what happened to al-Mujāhid during his fourteen-month absence. The only Rasulid era source that mentions that he was imprisoned in al-Karak is the *Tārīkh al-Shaʿbī*; this source attributes the kidnapping to the jealousy (*hasad*) of the Meccan *ashrāf* and their anger at his bringing soldiers to Mecca.<sup>79</sup> The Rasulid chronicle known as *Al-kitāb al-zāhirī*, which covers events up until 840/1436, simply claims that he went on the pilgrimage in 751 and returned from Egypt in 752, commenting that his entry into Egypt made a great biographical story (*sīrah ʿazīmah*).<sup>80</sup> Al-Malik al-Afḍal describes his father's sojourn in Yemen as such a total success that the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir feared for his own rule; no mention is made of al-Mujāhid's humiliation and imprisonment. The lack of detail on al-Mujāhid in Egypt was no doubt intentional in the major Rasulid chronicles of al-Khazrajī, who as a court historian presented the Yemeni sultans in a positive light.<sup>81</sup> Without the details provided in the Mamluk and Meccan texts, our knowledge of the experience of al-Mujāhid in Mecca and Egypt would have been very one-sided and present the Rasulid sultan as a victim.

Later Mamluk historians had access to al-Khazrajī's work, although they added many more details about the kidnapping. The Mamluk historians who lived or wrote during the time of the kidnapping include al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), but only Ibn Kathīr describes the kidnapping.<sup>82</sup> The Meccan scholar al-Yāfiʿī (d. 1367), of Yemeni origin, does not mention the kidnapping in his *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-ʿibrat al-yaqzān*.<sup>83</sup> The accounts provided by al-Maqrizī almost a century

<sup>78</sup>Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-warā*, 3:263.

<sup>79</sup>This is from the manuscript of Abū Bakr ibn Dāwūd al-Shaʿbī, who died around 800/1398. I am grateful to the Yemeni historian Muḥammad Jāzim for providing me with a copy of the relevant manuscript pages.

<sup>80</sup>Al-Ḥāsib al-Maṣrī, *Al-kitāb al-zāhirī fī tārikh al-dawlah al-Rasūliyah bi-al-Yaman*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Beirut, 2010), 80.

<sup>81</sup>For example, al-Khazrajī does not mention that al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar was poisoned by two slave girls, perhaps to make his brother al-Muʿayyad sultan, while several of the Mamluk sources do.

<sup>82</sup>Al-Ṣafadī in his *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr wa-aʿwān al-naṣr* (ed. Aḥmad al-Arnāwāt and Turkī Muṣṭafā [Beirut, 1998], 2:251) mentions the early problems facing al-Mujāhid, but says nothing about the kidnapping in this text. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 16:356–57.

<sup>83</sup>Al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-ʿibrat al-yaqzān*, ed. Khalil Manṣūr (Beirut, 2012).



after the events expand on what has survived from the earlier sources, although there were no eyewitnesses alive when he was writing. There are a number of differences between the Mamluk and Meccan texts regarding how al-Mujāhid was captured. Al-Maqrīzī writes that al-Mujāhid had fled to his tent, which collapsed on him and his son, but this is not found in any of the other sources. Most sources suggest he had tried to flee up the mountain from Minā but found no escape. While both Mamluk and Meccan sources mention the seizure of the Mamluk amir Baybughā Rūs, Ibn Fahd provides the most details about the reason for this. Both al-Maqrīzī and al-Fāsī note that al-Mujāhid was released from al-Karak due to the mediation of Baybughā Rūs. There are differences in the Mamluk sources regarding where al-Mujāhid was imprisoned, most saying al-Karak but some adding Alexandria.

The Mamluk sources include a few details that might best be called anecdotal embellishment, meaning that they provide interesting or entertaining pieces of information that go beyond the thread of description in the texts. There is little reason to doubt that al-Mujāhid was kidnapped, given the wide range of sources that relate this. However, unique and at times fanciful anecdotes in a single source raise questions about their veracity. For example, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī relates the story of al-Mujāhid being promised the Mamluk kingdom if he drank the water of the Nile, but when his horse drinks from the Nile, he knows this can never happen and breaks down crying. Another example is the statement by Ibn Taghribirdī that al-Mujāhid brought 200 hunting dogs with him to Mecca. This may have happened, but it is also a way to denigrate al-Mujāhid's plan to wrest control of Mecca away from the Mamluks. A story that has the markings of possible fantasy is the claim by the Meccan al-Fāsī, who probably had no access to an actual eyewitness to the kidnapping, that al-Mujāhid had tried to bribe the accompanying Mamluk amir with what turned out to be a leper colony in Ta'izz. Given the obvious wealth that al-Mujāhid had in Yemen, it is hard to believe that he would have tried this kind of trick or that his personal servants would have given an accurate answer. It is more likely that he tried to escape control of his amir, as reflected in several other sources.

Some accounts of what happened are obviously fictitious. In the Meccan *Manā'ih al-karam* of al-Sinjārī, the history titled *Bughyat al-khāṭir wa-nuzhat al-manāẓir* by Ibn Kānī is said to report a unique story by the Yemeni Tahirid historian Ibn al-Dayba.<sup>84</sup> This was reportedly related by the muezzin of a mosque in Zabīd. In the last third of the night a stranger surprised the muezzin at a time

<sup>84</sup>Al-Sinjārī, *Manā'ih al-karam*, 2:360–61. Ibn Kānī (d. ca 1040/1630) was an official of the Ottomans in Yemen. A brief version of this account is found in Ibn al-Dayba' (*Qurraṭ al-ʿuyūn*, 2:363) and in Yahyá ibn al-Ḥusayn (*Ghāyat al-amānī*, 516) and is attributed to al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387.



when few would go out for fear of the town guards. This man went to the market area where animals were butchered, then turned into a dog and mingled with the other dogs there. The muezzin was almost blinded by this sight, but he heard the dogs asking what news the newcomer had and where he came from. The new dog said he had come from ʿArafah in Mecca and that al-Malik al-Mujāhid had been seized by the Egyptians, so he was on his way to Aden to inform his fellow jinn.<sup>85</sup> After this, the muezzin recited two lines of poetry from the minaret.<sup>86</sup> When he came down, he found two individuals who took him to see al-Mujāhid's mother, who asked the reason for his verses. He said there was no reason, but she insisted that he had indeed informed her through this poetry about the sultan's kidnapping. She then told him to keep quiet until they could find out the truth. When the pilgrims returned, they confirmed that al-Mujāhid had been kidnapped and taken to Egypt. Apart from the reference to a man being a jinn who becomes a dog, al-Mujāhid's mother would have been in Mecca when the kidnapping happened. Another version of this tale is found in the margin of the published edition of al-Khazraji's *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, where the dog brings the news on the day that the sultan was kidnapped.<sup>87</sup>

Later Yemeni sources provide few details on al-Mujāhid's kidnapping, although it is not clear whether their sources were Rasulid or Mamluk. In his chronicle *Bughyat al-mustafid*, from the Tahirid period, Ibn al-Daybaʿ (d. 944/1537) does not mention the kidnapping but simply says that al-Mujāhid went on the pilgrimage and reached (*balagha*) Egypt in the company of the pilgrims, staying there awhile and returning safely the following year.<sup>88</sup> Writing almost five centuries later, al-Shawkānī reports a disagreement when al-Mujāhid attempted to place his *maḥmil*, the pilgrimage litter, before that of the Egyptians. This caused a fight and the consequent seizure of al-Mujāhid.<sup>89</sup> Al-Shawkānī adds that the people of Mecca tried to support him, which is the opposite of what is generally reported in both the Mamluk and Meccan sources. He does mention that al-Mujāhid attempted to flee when at Yanbuʿ on his first attempt to return to Yemen and was

<sup>85</sup> A version of this tale is found in the margin of the published edition of al-Khazraji's *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387, where the dog brings the news on the day that the sultan was kidnapped.

<sup>86</sup> As reported by al-Sinjārī, these are:

“*Yā rāqīdu al-layli masrūrān bi-awwalīhi, In al-ḥawādithah qad yaṭruqnā aṣḥarā / lā taʿmannā bilaylin ṭāba awwaluhu, fa-rabba akhiri laylin ajjaja al-nārā*”

(Oh happy sleeper at the start of the night, events will be known to us before daybreak / We should not believe what is good news at night's start, for the last of the night possesses blazing fire.)

<sup>87</sup> Al-Khazraji, *Al-ʿasjad al-masbūk*, 387.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Bughyat al-mustafid*, 98. In his *Qurrat al-ʿuyūn*, 363, Ibn al-Daybaʿ does note that he was seized in Mecca and taken to Egypt, but does not mention imprisonment there.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Shawkānī, *Al-badr al-ṭālīʿ*, 483.



imprisoned in al-Karak. It appears that al-Shawkānī had access to sources other than al-Khazrajī and no doubt had read the Mamluk history of the period.

## Conclusion

Reading the sources on the life of al-Mujāhid, two main things stand out. First, his rule over Yemen was tenuous from the start, culminating in being held in the Mamluk realm for fourteen months and enduring rebellions by his sons. Rasulid forays into the heartland of the Zaydī imams ceased with no mention in the Rasulid sources of attacks on Dhamār, Ṣanʿāʾ, or Ṣaʿdah. The main Rasulid towns in the Tihāmah, including the summer residence of the sultan in Zabīd, were subject to continual attacks by local tribesmen and some were devastated. There is little credible evidence that al-Mujāhid himself was much of a warrior, nor that he inspired loyalty, even in his own family. His vengeance was often ruthless, and he was at times convinced of nonexistent plots against him. He showed pity on farmers in Zabīd, but this was a pragmatic move since his tax revenues would dwindle considerably without their crop production. The contributions he made to his realm were often for his own pleasure, such as expanding the garden palace grounds of Thaʿbāt in Taʿizz. Although it has been claimed that the reigns of al-Mujāhid and his son al-Afḍal were a golden age (*al-ʿaṣr al-dhahabī*) in Yemen, this was not due to their political or military success.<sup>90</sup>

A second issue is the discrepancy between the praise heaped upon al-Mujāhid by al-Khazrajī and other Rasulid sources in contrast to the biographical details that emerge about his life. The list of qualities provided by al-Khazrajī reflects the tendency of this court historian to eulogize former Rasulid sultans.<sup>91</sup> Thus, al-Khazrajī describes al-Mujāhid as fortunate (*saʿīd*), intelligent (*ʿāqil*), reasonable (*rashīd*), generous (*ajwad*), sensible (*labīb*), courageous (*shujāʿ*), awe-inspiring (*muhīb*), knowledgeable (*ʿālim*), and clever (*dhakī*). In his biographical text, al-Khazrajī expands on the qualities of al-Mujāhid, adding that he was very ambitious (*ʿālī al-himmah*), honorably minded (*sharīf al-naḥs*), of liberal character (*karīm al-akhlāq*), of superb nature (*ḥasan al-shamāʿil*), with a mild-mannered disposition (*layyin al-ʿarīkah*), superb in governing (*ḥasan al-siyāsah*), having a keen eye (*ṣādiq al-firāsah*), and fortunate in his undertakings (*saʿīd al-ḥarakah*), among other positive traits.<sup>92</sup> In contrast, the Mamluk historian Ibn Taghrībirdī suggests that al-Mujāhid was pompous (*dhakhm*), clever (*shahm*), brave (*shujāʿ*), and haughty

<sup>90</sup> As noted by ʿAbd al-Wāhid al-Khāmīrī, the editor of al-Malik al-Afḍal's, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 72.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:106, 5:124. Similar praise is given by his son, al-Malik al-Afḍal, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 480.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿiqd al-fākhīr*, 3:1492.





(*mutakabbir*).<sup>93</sup> The Mamluk characterization seems a more accurate portrayal based on what is known about his trials and tribulations.

Some sources claim that al-Mujāhid was more learned than the previous Rasulid sultans.<sup>94</sup> Al-Fāsī quotes the view of the Meccan shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Yāfiʿī that al-Mujāhid was the best of the Rasulid house.<sup>95</sup> Given that he became sultan at such a young age, it does not seem that he could have had as much education before ascending to the throne as his father, uncle, or grandfather. Nevertheless, there are at least six books ascribed to him.<sup>96</sup> One is on agriculture, as referenced repeatedly in his son al-Afḍal’s later agricultural treatise, *Bughyat al-fallāhīn*. His text on horses and veterinary science called *Al-aqwāl al-kāfiyah wa-al-fuṣūl al-shāfiyah fī ʿilm al-khayl* has survived.<sup>97</sup> This provides details on Yemen, including a rare discussion of elephants. According to al-Ahdal, al-Mujāhid’s work on animals was quoted in the major zoological work of the late-fourteenth-century Mamluk scholar al-Damīrī.<sup>98</sup> Al-Mujāhid is also credited with a diwan of poetry and a text on falcons and pigeons now located in the Rampur Raza library of Uttar Pradesh, India. In the mixed manuscript prepared for al-Malik al-Afḍal there is a short text by al-Mujāhid on distances between places in Yemen.<sup>99</sup> Given the lack of copies of most of his works, as well as no record of citation, it is hard to judge the quality of his intellectual pursuits. It is also possible that some of his texts were ghost written.

Al-Ahdal states that al-Mujāhid was trained in *fiqh*, astronomy, and astrology (*falak* and *nujūm*), geomancy (*raml*), and the like.<sup>100</sup> It is claimed that he had memorized the Shafīʿī book *Al-tanbīh fī al-fiqh* of Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī.<sup>101</sup> Like his predecessors, al-Mujāhid sponsored a number of religious institutions in Yemen as well as in Mecca. In 731/1331 al-Mujāhid built a madrasah, mosque, and *khān*

<sup>93</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:79.

<sup>94</sup>For example, Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Bughyat al-mustafīd*, 98. Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 492, claims he was more learned than both his father and grandfather.

<sup>95</sup>Al-Fāsī, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:260. Al-Yāfiʿī, originally from Yemen, was a major scholar in Mecca.

<sup>96</sup>Al-Ḥibshī, *Maṣādir al-fikr al-Islāmī fī al-Yaman* (Abu Dhabi, 2004), 652–53.

<sup>97</sup>*Al-aqwāl al-kāfiyah wa-al-fuṣūl al-shāfiyah fī al-khayl*, ed. Yaḥyá al-Jabbūrī (Beirut, 1987), based on the Berlin manuscript. The British Library ms. is called “Al-aqwāl al-kāfiyah wa-al-fuṣūl al-shāfiyah fī ʿilm al-bayṭar”; see Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1984), 553–54. There are also two copies in Paris; see Baron de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris, 1883–95), 508. His “Kitāb fī al-khayl wa-ṣifathā wa-anwāʿhā wa-bayṭarahā” (Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah MS 107) may be the same as the published text, according to al-Ḥibshī, *Maṣādir*, 652.

<sup>98</sup>Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 492.

<sup>99</sup>Varisco and Smith, *The Manuscript of al-Malik al-Afḍal al-Abbās*, 274–76.

<sup>100</sup>Al-Ahdal, *Tuḥfat al-zaman*, 528.

<sup>101</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-manhal al-ṣāfi*, 8:76.



in Taʿizz, staffing the madrasah with scholars and assuring its finances through *waqf*.<sup>102</sup> Three years later he built a small mosque in the royal garden palace of Thaʿbāt.

The life story of al-Mujāhid encapsulates the decline of the Rasulid dynasty as a major regime in the region. As Éric Vallet suggests, “La capture du sultan en 751/1351 fut un tournant décisif dans les relations entre les différents pouvoirs de la mer Rouge.”<sup>103</sup> His reign was never secure, even from members of his own family. His survival is all the more remarkable for the instability that characterized Yemen during his reign, the second longest of the Rasulid sultans. After the rule of al-Mujāhid’s son and grandson, the last seven sultans survived only five decades before being overthrown by local rivals known as the Tahirids. After al-Mujāhid’s kidnapping, there was no further attempt by the Rasulids to exert major influence in Mecca. The extent of their domain continued to shrink with gains made by the Zaydī imams, renegade Kurds, and independent local tribes. The Mamluks eventually gained control over Yemen, defeating the last Tahirid sultan ʿĀmir ibn Dāwūd in 945/1517, the same year they were themselves conquered by the Ottomans.

---

<sup>102</sup> Al-Khazrajī, *Al-ʿuqūd*, 2:48, 5:59. For other details on the buildings he sponsored, see al-Fāsī, *Al-ʿiqd al-thamīn*, 5:620; al-Khāmīrī in al-Malik al-Afḍal, *Al-ʿaṭāyā al-sanīyah*, 73–78; and Richard Mortel, “Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60, no. 2 (1997): 241–42. For details on the madrasah set up by al-Mujāhid in Taʿizz, see Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAlī al-Akwaʿ, *Al-madāris al-Islāmīyah fī al-Yaman* (Damascus, 1980), 173–77.

<sup>103</sup> Vallet, *L’Arabie marchande*, 690.

