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ABSTRACT

Venetia Ann Porter
Presented for the degree of Ph.D. University of Durham, 1992

The History and Monuments of the Tahirid dynasty of the Yemen 858-923/1454-1517

This thesis examines the rise to power and the rule of the short-lived Tahirid dynasty of the Yemen. The dynasty ruled over most of Lower Yemen at a critical juncture between the fall of the better known Rasulid dynasty in 858/1454, and the Mamluk conquest of the Yemen in 923/1517. The first part of the thesis, chapters 1-5 looks in detail at the political history, while the second part, chapters 6-8, examines other aspects of the period: the coinage and the architectural legacy.

The thesis argues that the Tahirids were able to take over Lower Yemen by making themselves indispensable to the previous dynasty. Once in power, successive Tahirid sultans were faced with three major kinds of problem: challenges to their authority within the family, rebellious tribes on whom they depended for tax revenues and the ever present threat from the Zaydī imamate to the north of the country. However, the end of the dynasty was brought about as an indirect consequence of the Portuguese incursions into the Indian Ocean. This led to the Mamluk interest in and subsequent invasion of the Yemen. In the face of this challenge, the precariousness of Tahirid power and authority became apparent. Defeated by the Mamluks and with no resource to fall back upon, the dynasty came to an abrupt and violent end.

The principal legacy of this short-lived, indigenous Sunnī Yemeni dynasty lies in its architectural monuments. These display an interesting synthesis of traditions some of which reflect the styles of their Rasulid predecessors, some the influence of India. The accompanying volume of plans and photographs illustrates aspects of the Tahirid monuments and their architectural decoration.

**The History and Monuments of the Tahirid dynasty of the
Yemen 858-923/1454-1517**

VOLUME 1

A thesis presented to the University of Durham

by

Venetia Ann Porter

For the degree of Ph.D.

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Faculty of Arts
1992



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I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University.

Signed Veneta A. Polles
Date 26th June 1992

TRANSLITERATION METHOD

The scheme followed throughout this thesis is in principle that employed by Arabian Studies. The names of the dynasties - Rasulids, Tahirids etc. - are not transliterated.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND SOURCE MATERIAL

- i) Introduction ; ii) Organisation of the thesis;**
- iii) Source material**

i) Introduction

The Tahirids were mashāyikh residing in the southern part of Lower Yemen who came to power with the demise of the Rasulid sultans in the mid 9th/15th century. They were the first indigenous Yemeni dynasty to rule the whole of this area in Islamic times which had been previously in the power of conquerors from outside or their vassals. Residing in a strategic area of the Yemen between the Zaydī and Rasulid domains they naturally became embroiled in the territorial squabbles between the two sides. Their gradual rise in the estimation of the Rasulids led to intermarriage with them and placed the Tahirids in a position of such strength that they were finally able to take over the Rasulid domains.

When the Tahirids came to power in 858/1454, they inherited a number of problems which were to dog the dynasty throughout the reigns of the four sultans. Firstly there were difficulties with the Tihāmah tribes and other groups, such as slaves, who would not accede to their sovereignty. Secondly there were unruly members of the Tahirid family who would occasionally challenge the rule of particular sultans. Thirdly, there were the Zaydīs. Attempts to push the Tahirid boundary northwards at their expense became increasingly of paramount concern for the Tahirids, as it had been for the Rasulids. The preoccupations of the first

three sultans were thus largely internal: struggling to keep control of the tribes, as well as rebellious members of their own family, and embroiled in conflicts with the Zaydīs. The last sultan, ʿĀmir, however, had to confront a new set of problems. Catapulted into the world of foreign affairs, he had to face the Portuguese attempt to take Aden and the much greater threat of the Mamluk invasion from Egypt. This was to bring his reign, and indeed the dynasty, to an end. It is evident that the sultan not only committed a series of blunders, but also completely underestimated the Mamluks' strength and intentions. His inexperience and his lack of foresight in this situation led him to rely heavily on his ministers' advice. This tended to go against his own largely conciliatory instincts and to advocate an aggressive strategy. However this strategy was to prove difficult to pursue with the relatively small standing army at his command. Consequently he was obliged to place too much reliance on the often opportunistic tribes. They had a tendency to either change sides or leave without warning in the middle of a fray at certain critical junctures. The end result was that the tiny Mamluk force which was rendered vastly superior by the possession of firearms, unknown in the Yemen at this time, was able within a very short time to bring down the Tahirids.

The interest of this period additionally lies in the fact that this was a crucial period in the history of the Islamic world. It was a time which witnessed not only the advent of the Portuguese in the Middle East, but also the conquest of Granada in 1492, and the coming to power of the great and powerful dynasties, the Safavids in Iran and the Ottomans in Turkey with their territorial ambitions. It is interesting to speculate whether, even if the Tahirids could have fought off the Mamluks, they would have been able to resist the Ottomans.

ii) Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised into three sections: following this introduction and a discussion of the source material used, the first section, consisting of chapters 2-5, chronicles and discusses the rise of the sultans, their short period in power, and the events leading to their demise in 923/1517. The following two sections look at particular aspects and effects of their rule: the monetary economy, chapter 6, and their architectural achievements, chapters 7 and 8.

The subject of the Yemen's monetary economy under the Tahirids, discussed in chapter 6, is important, but has proved difficult to research. There being no specific contemporary treatise on the subject, the information has been gleaned from incidental references in the texts. Taken together these suggest the denominations of coins in circulation, how money was used and what particular coins meant in terms of purchasing power. Parallels have been drawn with other periods in an attempt to form a coherent picture. Much remains speculative, however, given the small number of extant Tahirid coins known.

The final two chapters of the thesis examine the architectural achievements of the Tahirids as the most tangible aspect of their cultural legacy. The descriptions of foreign visitors which are included here are important in furnishing details on the appearance of the cities of Aden and al-Miqrānah in particular. These descriptions are otherwise lacking in the Yemeni sources. References from the Yemeni texts have been put together to gain an impression of the nature and extent of their building activities. These often reflect the extent of the Tahirids' control over a given area and provide an indication of the nature of a particular reign. It is

striking, in this regard, how most building activity appears to have taken place under the last sultan, ʿĀmir. This is undoubtedly associated with the relative stability of the greater part of his reign. During this period Ṣanʿāʾ was taken from the Zaydīs, there was a large measure of control of the tribes and a great deal of money was flowing into the treasury from the various forms of taxation. Sultan ʿĀmir also appears to have been emulating the high period of Rasulid power a hundred years earlier, by undertaking the grand programme of repair of the mosques in Zabīd and by commissioning the lavishly decorated ʿĀmiriyyah madrasah. In many ways this harks back to one of the most important Rasulid foundations, the Ashrafiyyah in Taʿizz.

Chapter 8 examines in detail the architectural style evident in the extant Tahirid buildings. The principal ones have been, where possible, either surveyed, or at least photographed. The style is particularly interesting for the way it is so obviously an extension of the Rasulid style. Yet it has developed quite idiosyncratic features of its own which seem attributable, in part, to Indian influences.

iii) Source material

Our main source for the history of the Tahirids are the three works of Ibn al-Daybā.¹ His full name was Wajīh al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad

¹ See bibliography Ibn al-Daybā; Smith, "The Tahirid sultans" 151-154; Ibn al-Daybā, Faḍl, Ṣāliḥiyyah introduction, 9-44; Sayyid, Maṣādir, 200; Shawkānī, Badr I, 335; al-ʿAydarūs, Nūr, 212-6; Ulughkhānī, History, 4⁹

b. ʿUmar al-Shaybānī al-Shāfiʿī al-Zabīdī known as Ibn al-Daybāʿ.² He himself furnishes biographical details in the conclusion to the Bughyah.³ We learn from this that he was born in Zabīd in 866/1461. Apparently he never knew his father since the latter left the country later that year. It is possible that his father was a merchant or possibly a sea captain, as the only further reference to him is his reported death in 876/1472 in Diu, the important port on the Gujarati coast which was to be captured by the Portuguese in 914/1509. Ibn al-Daybāʿ was brought up by his maternal grandfather as a Shāfiʿī Muslim. Before he was ten years old, he had learnt the Qurʾān by heart under the tutelage of his maternal uncle who was a superintendant of schools in Zabīd.⁴

The high level of scholarship available in Zabīd at this time is evident from the subjects which the young Ibn al-Daybāʿ studied: Arabic, arithmetic, algebra, anatomy, surveying, al-farāʿid and fiqh. He went three times on the pilgrimage, the first time with the eight gold dinars left him by his father. On the last occasion he met the renowned Egyptian scholar al-Sakhāwī (d.902/1496) and studied hadīth with him.⁵ He seems to have specialised in hadīth and before his

² This was the laqab of his grandfather ʿAlī b. Yūsuf which in the Nubian dialect means white, Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 9

³ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 227-233

⁴ The death of Ibn al-Daybāʿ' s uncle is recorded in 868/1463, and that of his grandfather in 884/1479, Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 134 and 163

⁵ Ibn al-Daybāʿ is mentioned in al-Sakhāwī' s biographical work al-Dawʿ al-Lāmi Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 152, note 2. Al-Sakhāwī' s death is recorded in Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 104 (al-farāʿid God' s ordinances)

departure for Mecca had studied with a number of scholars in Zabīd.⁶ After his return from his third pilgrimage and period of study with al-Sakhāwī and possibly inspired by the latter, he started writing . His first book was Kashf al-kurbah fī sharh du‘ā’ al-Imām Abī Harbah , a life of Muhammad b. Ya‘qūb Abū Harbah (d. 724/1323) . This was in fact a paraphrase of a work by al-Ahdal.⁷ His second book was Bughyat al-Mustafīd, a history of Zabīd from its foundation by Ibn Ziyād in the 3rd/9th century and ending in the year 901/1495. In his autobiography, he describes how he took this text to the Sultan ‘Āmir al-Malik al-Zāfir, who praised the work, but reminded him of various facts he had forgotten. Ibn al-Daybā‘ then produced an abbreviated form of the Bughyah called al-‘Iqd al-bāhir fī tārikh dawlat Banī Tāhir ⁸ in which he chronicled the reigns of the sultan’s father and grandfather and their good works. He was generously rewarded for this and for the finished version of the Bughyah which he presented to the sultan in al-Miqrānah. There he was presented with a robe of honour, a house in Zabīd and a tract of land in Wadi Zabīd. He was also appointed as teacher of hadīth in the Great Mosque of Zabīd.⁹ Ibn al-Daybā‘ does not mention here his other text Qurrat al-Uyūn . We cannot know whether this was because he had not yet started it or because he did not think it relevant in this context. He brought the chronicle of Zabīd in the Bughyah up to the year

⁶ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Bughyah, 229-30. Here he gives the names of the scholars he studied with, such as al-Sharjī, and the texts he studied with them.

⁷ Hibshī, Masādir, 18; al-Ahdal d. 855/1451, Sayyid, Masādir, 178

⁸ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Fadl, 15 ,there is a copy of this text in Istanbul in the Maktabat Raghāb, no 21/944.

⁹ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Bughyah, 232; Ulughkhānī, History, 50

901/1495 , and finished writing the text in 906/1500.¹⁰ In the introduction to Fadl al-Mazīd , he says that he was asked to add another 20 years on to his history of Zabīd and agreed to do so.¹¹ We have no date for it and Ṣālihiyyah believes that he probably began it some time after the Tahirid demise in 923/1517 .This could be why Abū Makhramah does not appear to have used it in his Qilādat al-Nahr.¹² The Fadl is extremely detailed about Zabīd, much more so than the Bughyah and contains much useful biographical information. The edition used in this thesis is that of Ṣālihiyyah not the Chelhod edition.

From Ulughkhānī's Arabic History of Gujarāt, we learn that Ibn al-Daybā spent his life reading, teaching and writing and that his eyesight became weak with old age. He died at the age of 80 in Zabīd in 944/1537. He was buried in the graveyard of his maternal grandfather's family, Mubāraz, near Bāb Sahām. Prayers were said for him even in Mecca and people grieved over him "because he was the last remnant of noted traditionalists".¹³

Turning now to look at his work in more detail, in his introduction to the Qurrah, Ibn al-Daybā mentions the sources on which he relied.¹⁴ It was to Khazrajī that

¹⁰ Ibn al-Daybā , Bughyah, 232

¹¹ Ibn al-Daybā , Fadl , 91

¹² Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 18; Schuman, Qilādah, iii

¹³ Ulughkhānī, History, 50 . Another work of Ibn al-Daybā is a poem on the birth of the Prophet, al-mawlid al-sharīf. That he also wrote other historical works which have not survived is clear from Sayyid, Masādir, 205 nos. 8, 9.

¹⁴ Ibn al-Daybā, Qurrah, 17-21 .Specifically, Ibn Samurah, Umārah, al-Janadī, al-Qurashī, al-Khazrajī, al-Muqrī and al-Ahdal.

he owed his greatest debt and inspiration since he regarded his Qurrah as an extension of Khazraji's al-Āsjad al-masbūk.¹⁵ He was anxious to complete the history of the Rasulids, since Khazrajī had died in 812/1410 and had only reached the reign of al-Ashraf Ismā'īl (1377-1401). The Qurrah is divided into three sections: 1. an early history of the Yemen and the kings of Ṣan'ā' and Aden ; 2. a history of Zabīd and its rulers and 3. a history of the Tahirid period which was his own entirely original contribution. His is the only text, other than the Rasulid chronicle (discussed below), which covers the last period of Rasulid rule as well as the Tahirid period and we shall see below how much his work was used by other historians.

Ṣālihiyyah questions why Ibn al-Dayba' should have written the history of the Tahirids so often.¹⁶ The Bughyah, al-Īqd al-Bāhir, and the Qurrah all provide the same core of information, but, as Ṣālihiyyah has pointed out although there is general agreement on the sequence of the historical events, the turns of phrase and the language differ. He did not copy one text from another but rewrote each one. In fact there are not only minor differences in the date of a particular event, but quite major differences of emphasis between the texts: although the Bughyah repeats the basic historical detail as found in the Qurrah, there is much more day to day detail about Zabīd itself in it and even more in the Fadl where a wealth of social and economic history is to be found. The answer may lie in the answer to another question. Was Ibn al-Dayba' the Tahirid court historian? It seems more than likely that he did not set out to be. He was, after all , primarily a serious

¹⁵ Ibn al-Dayba' , Qurrah, 21 - 2

¹⁶ Ibn al-Dayba' , Fadl, 16

scholar of hadīth . However, once he had shown his Bughyah to the sultan who then asked him to put in the "omissions" he can be regarded as such.

Remuneration may also have played some part. He was evidently well rewarded for the Bughyah and highly regarded as a result. There is certainly pro-Tahirid bias in the reporting of events. Where it is particularly noticeable is in the reporting of confrontations with the Zaydīs . The Zaydī sources too are evidently biased and make much more, for instance, of the tyranny of the Tahirids as we can see in the account of the Tahirid seige of Ṣan' ā' in 870/1465.¹⁷ Other opponents of the Tahirids, such as the Tihāmah tribes never have their case presented. All we hear is that they are constantly in rebellion and having to be punished. However, in a rare personal comment, Ibn al-Daybā' does suggest that the sultans may have been unfair to them .¹⁸

Ibn al-Daybā' 's importance, in terms of the influence he had on other scholars was immense. Ṣālihiyyah goes into this in some detail comparing for instance the texts of Rawḥ al-Rūḥ, Nūr al-Ṣāfir and al-Barq al-Yamānī with Ibn al-Daybā' 's original,¹⁹ showing the extent of their often unacknowledged reliance on Ibn al-Daybā' .

The other Sunnī source used extensively is Abū Makhramah's Tārīkh Thaghr

¹⁷ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 156; Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 599

¹⁸ Ibn al-Daybā', Bughyah, 125

¹⁹ Ibn al-Daybā', Fadl, 28-40

‘Adan and the Qilādat al-Nahr.²⁰ Abū Makhramah whose full name was Abū Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib b. ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm Abū Makhramah, was born in Aden in 870/1465. There he studied the Qur’ān and related subjects and taught fiqh. He became a local magistrate (‘umdaḥ)²¹ and later was employed as a qādī. When he was about 60 he was afflicted by some form of paralysis and he died in 947/1540.

His Tārīkh Thaghr ‘Adan provides important information, not only on the history of Aden, but also offers insights into social and economic history. His section on the dārs of Aden was used in chapter 7 below. The Qilādat al-Nahr is particularly useful and has been extensively used, firstly, for its coverage of events connected with the Portuguese and secondly, for the period between 923/1517, and 927/1521, which is not covered by Ibn al-Daybā’. This provides unique insight into a confused period of history. The Zaydī texts which also cover this period provide only incidental information on the Tahirids at this time. Schuman suggests that Abū Makhramah’s main source for the Tahirids was Ibn al-Daybā’s Qurrat al-‘Uyūn.²² One of the interesting features of the Qilādah is that historical events are perceived entirely from the standpoint of Aden. Amir Murjān, the governor of Aden, has in Abū Makhramah’s eyes the status of an autonomous ruler, although he did of course pledge allegiance to the sultan. The affairs of Aden appear quite

²⁰ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh and Schuman, Qilādah; for biographical references to Abū Makhramah, Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 148; Sayyid, Masādir, 206-6; Schuman, Qilādah, ii; al-‘Aydarūs, Nūr, 226; Serjeant, "Materials", (2) 289-291

²¹ Serjeant, review of Schuman, Political History, 350-1

²² Schuman, Qilādah, iii

separate from those of the rest of the country .

For the period before the Tahirids came to power we have relied on the Zaydī texts which will be discussed below as well as on an untitled, anonymous and undated text referred to as the Rasulid chronicle.²³ The manuscript of this was published by the Japanese scholar Hikoichi Yajima who discovered the seemingly unique text in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Its author is unknown, although Yajima believes him to have been an official in the government of al-Malik al-Zāhir Yaḥyā (831-843/1428-1439), such is the level of detail on official court activities. The chronicle begins with the Sulayhids and continues until just before the end of the reign of al-Zāhir Yaḥyā (d.843/1439) A marginal inscription bears the date 841/1437 and the report of an epidemic is referred to as lasting from 839/1435 "up to the year of the compilation of this work, Ramaḍān 840" (1436).²⁴ The age of the manuscript is suggested by a marginal inscription by ʿĪsā b. Lutf Allāh (986-1068/1586-1638) author of Rawḥ al-Rūḥ, which would indicate therefore that this is a late 16th - 17th century copy.

Turning now to the Zaydī sources, the three principal ones that have been used here are Rawḥ al-Rūḥ, Anbāʾ al-Zaman fī tārikh al-Yaman and Ghāyat al-Amānī.²⁵

²³ See bibliography reference Chronicle.

²⁴ Chronicle, 18

²⁵ See bibliography and Smith, "The Tahirid sultans of the Yemen", 148

The earliest of these is Rawḥ al-Rūḥ by ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh who died in 1048/1638.²⁶ His full name was al-Sayyid ʿĪsā b. Luṭf Allāh b. al-Muṭaḥhar the son of Imam Sharaf al-Dīn al-Yamānī al-Kawkabānī. Shawkānī refers to him as the illustrious poet (al-shāʿir al-munajjam). The work was written at the instigation of the 21st Ottoman governor, Muḥammad Pasha (1025-31/1619-21). It begins with the year 901/1495 and ends in the year 1029/1619. It sets out, as the author says in his introduction, to talk about the coming of the Mamluks to the Yemen, the events surrounding this and the fall of the kingdom of the sultan ʿĀmir.²⁷ Smith has pointed out that this text represents an independent Zaydī recension, separate from the other Zaydī chronicles discussed below. Although it follows the other texts in the main, and uses Ibn al-Daybāʿ for the Tahirid period, it often contains material not found elsewhere, such as the text of the letter from the Zaydī imam Sharaf al-Dīn to Ḥusayn al-Kurdī.²⁸

The second Zaydī source used is the manuscript of Anbāʾ al-Zaman of Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn.²⁹ His full name was Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Imām al-Manṣūr billāh al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī. His grandfather the Imam al-Manṣūr was responsible for

²⁶ Sayyid, Masādir, 229-231; Shawkānī, Badr, I/516

²⁷ Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 2

²⁸ Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 18

²⁹ The confusion regarding the authorship of the Ghāyat al-Amānī erroneously thought by its editor, ʿĀshūr to have also been written by Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn has now been clarified by Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 149. He has convincingly shown that neither is the Ghāyah by Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn nor is it an abridgment of the Anbāʾ al-Zaman as ʿĀshūr suggested. This is discussed in detail by Abd al-Malik Eagle in his M Litt thesis, Ghāyat al-Amānī, 17-24

the expulsion of the Turks from the Yemen.³⁰ He was born in 1035/1625 and died ca 1100/1688. A prolific writer, since a copy of the Anbā' in the Great Mosque Library in Ṣan'ā' contains a list of 53 compositions.³¹ The chronicle gives a year by year account of events like the other sources, and concludes with the year 1045/1635-6.

The final Zaydī source used is the Ghāyat al-Amānī.³² This extremely useful text has been edited by 'Āshūr and appears in two volumes. The edition has come under severe criticism from Smith and Eagle both of whom have found many errors in it.³³ 'Āshūr comes in for most criticism for his assumption that the author of the text is Yahyā b. al-Husayn b. al-Qāsim b. 'Alī who is in fact the author of the Anbā' al-Zaman as mentioned above. 'Āshūr believes the Ghāyah to be an abridgment of the Anbā'. These have now been demonstrated to have been by separate authors. (see footnote 29) On the basis of inscriptions on three of the manuscripts of the Ghāyah consulted by Eagle, he has found the author to be Yahyā b. al-Husayn b. al-Mu'ayyad Muḥammad (1044-1090/1635-1679) who held important positions under the Zaydī imam al-Mahdī (r. 1087-1092/1676-1681) and is considered to have been on the radical Shi'ī wing of Zaydism. Eagle has gleaned biographical detail about him from a number of sources all of which

³⁰ Sayyid, Masādir, 246

³¹ Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 149 note 26. The Ghāyah is not amongst this list, further proof that Yahyā b. al-Husayn is not its author.

³² see bibliography

³³ Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 149; Eagle Ghāyat al-Amānī

concur on his qualities of scholarship, ascetism and piety. Unfortunately these authors do not mention him as the author of the Ghāyah, although he was known as a poet. He was evidently a contemporary of the author of the Anbā' and like it the text ends with the year 1045/1635-6.³⁴

The Ghāyah is evidently most concerned with chronicling the history of the Zaydīs, although the text actually begins with the first year of the Hijrah. As far as the history of the Tahirids is concerned, the text is extremely useful for placing events in a wider perspective particularly when Zaydī-Tahirid confrontations take place, since it gives the Zaydī version of the story where the Tahirid sources might remain silent. The text is also useful for the period after the Tahirid demise in 923/1517 when Ibn al-Daybā' 's history stops and Abū Makhramah continues only for a few years thereafter.

To form a clear picture of the Tahirid period, the Zaydī and Sunnī sources must be read together. Their strength lies in the wealth of detail which they furnish on the period. Indeed this is often overwhelming. In this thesis, only the material relating to political events, to the economy and to architecture have been extracted. For a study of other aspects of this period, in particular religious questions, a similar amount of information could be readily gleaned. The one serious drawback of the sources is that they are uncritical, offering little or no analysis. The authors clearly saw themselves as simply there to relate the facts and not expatiate on them.

³⁴ I am most grateful to Mr Eagle for making his most interesting thesis available to me

Chapter 2

THE RISE OF THE TAHIRIDS

i) Introduction; ii) References to the Tahirids in the Zaydī sources and the Rasulid chronicle 794-809/1391-1406; iii) Rise of the Tahirids; iv) Decline of the Rasulid state; v) Review of the economic state of the Yemen; vi) Conclusion.

i) Introduction

This chapter traces the rise to power of the Tahirids from their humble origins as mashāyikh in the Juban/al-Miqrānah area to their complete takeover of Lower Yemen and Tihāmah from the Rasulids in 858/1454. The early references, found only in the Zaydī sources, and which are often unclear, are in the context of Zaydī attempted control over this part of the Yemen and describe skirmishes between the Zaydī forces and the Tahirids. As time goes on, it becomes clear that Āl Ṭāhir are acting for the Rasulids in this disputed territory, and being supported by them. The gradual collapse of the Rasulid regime creates opportunities for the Tahirids who become increasingly indispensable to the later Rasulids. The final chaotic years of the Rasulid era with internecine disputes among rival pretenders, anarchy on the Tihāmah and a disastrous economic situation created a power vacuum which the Tahirids, who had been biding their time, now filled.

ii) References to the Tahirids in the Zaydī sources and the Rasulid chronicle 794-809/1391-1406.

The first references to the Tahirids are found in the Zaydī sources from the end of the 8th/14th century. At this time, Lower Yemen and Tihāmah were ruled by the Rasulid sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl (778-803/1377-1401) while Dhamār and the north of the country were in the hands of the Zaydī imams.¹

In 794/1391 a rebellion at Ḥiṣn al-Rab'ah,² west of Dhamār, against the Zaydīs brought the Imam Ālī b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn down from the north. There was also news of the expulsion of the Zaydī governor (ʿāmil) from Radā'. As the imam was preparing to recapture the town he heard that Shaykh Ṭāhir b. ʿĀmir was in charge of the area on behalf of the Rasulid sultan, al-Malik al-Nāṣir, and that he had entered Radā' previously with the support of the tribes.³ The author of the Ghāyah then comments that this Shaykh Ṭāhir b. ʿĀmir was the first of his family to hold power and that he obtained this power by working on behalf of the Rasulids. The Rasulid sultan gave Ṭāhir funds and men ordering him to fight the Zaydīs. On this occasion things did not go well for Ṭāhir. He was routed as far as

¹ Al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn b. al-Mahdī, the 24th imam, 773-93/1372-91, followed by his son al-Manṣūr Ālī b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, 793-840/1391-1436; on al-Nāṣir's death there were struggles over the succession causing severe disturbances in the Zaydī territories Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, see Ghāyah, 536 f.

² Ḥajarī, Majmū', 355.

³ Specifically mentioned are the B. Dirār, see Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 541.

Riyām⁴ where he took refuge in the fortress. Seven of his supporters the B. Darār were killed, while on the Zaydī side the imam's uncle, Ḥasan b. al-Asad al-Kurdī was killed.

A few months later, the two sides engaged in battle once again; the Zaydī imam retaliating against a Tahirid attack on his governor in Radā'. The Tahirids were defeated, with 50 of their men dead, despite having mustered a large force which included again members of the tribes of B. Dirār and Madhḥij.⁵

Between 796/1393 and 809/1406, the main references to the Tahirids appear mostly in the Ghāyah. There are problems with these references as there would appear to be some confusion in the names. The problem may lie either with the Zaydī source itself, as the author is writing long after the event, or with the edition. These references are as follows: in 796/1394 the imam fought the people of the Radā' area. Presumably the Tahirids were involved, but they are not mentioned by name.⁶ In 803/1400, the year of the death of the Rasulid sultan al-Ashraf Ismā'īl and the accession of al-Nāṣir Aḥmad, the imam went down to Radā', and demanded from Shaykh 'Alī b. Tāhir b. 'Āmir, Tāhir's son, the

⁴ Riyām is the vocalisation used by 'Āshūr, the editor of the Ghāyah; Hajarī, Majmū' does not attempt to vocalise it. He refers to it as baldah fī Radā'.

⁵ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 548; The Madhḥij are a tribal group inhabiting the Dhamār, Radā' area, Smith, "Madhḥij", 953-4; Hajarī, Majmū', 299 f.

⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 550.

fortress of Mi^ʿsāl.⁷ Shaykh ʿAlī immediately handed it over to him and was given in return a thoroughbred horse (faras jawād) and a robe of honour . A mamluk was placed in command at Mi^ʿsāl and the imam went on from there to Riyām where Hurrat Shams, daughter of the deceased uncle of the imam, al-Asad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kurdī, was residing. She was in the care of Shaykh Ṭāhir b. ʿĀmir with her son ʿĀmir b. Ṭāhir and she successfully petitioned the imam to allow her to stay in Riyām.⁸

No sooner had the imam left for Dhamār, than he learnt that the Tahirid shaykhs were again causing trouble . He returned and destroyed some of their territory and received delegations from the people of al-Ḥadā and Radmān suing for peace. Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir came to the imam apologising for his brother ʿAlī. The imam accepted the apology and then proceeded to destroy the fortresses of Radmān leaving only Mi^ʿsāl, al-Zahrāʾ and Riyām.⁹

The next reference to the Tahirids is to the death of Shaykh ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir in 806/1403 who is described as having been one of the foremost opponents of the

⁷ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 558; Mi^ʿsāl is noted by Ḥajari, Majmūʿ al-Buldān, 361, as being one of the fortresses of Radmān which is in the Mikhlāf of Radāʿ al-ʿArsh. Pre-Islamic inscriptions in the location indicate that it was an early stronghold.

⁸ This sounds somewhat unlikely and I have not been able to corroborate it in any other source.

⁹ For Radmān see Smith, Simt, II, 193, in Ḥimyar territory, Bilād Ans, west of Dhamār; Ḥajari, Majmūʿ, 361, 365.

imam ʿAlī b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in the Radāʿ region.¹⁰ The author then advises us not to confuse this recently deceased ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir with the ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir whose exploits he will be recounting later, presumably he is referring to the second Tahirid sultan, ʿAlī al-Malik al-Mujāhid (r.865-883/1460-78).

As suggested earlier, there is some potential confusion here: we have had references to two brothers Muḥammad and ʿAlī, said to be the sons of one Ṭāhir b. ʿĀmir. This would then seem to be a separate branch, not noted by Schuman,¹¹ from Ṭāhir b. Maʿūdah b. Ṭāj al-Dīn, the main and royal Tahirid line, whose sons are Muḥammad, ʿĀmir, Dāʿūd and ʿAlī. (see fig 3a)

The next references to the Tahirids are in the anonymous untitled Rasulid chronicle and offer a somewhat different view of the relationship between the Rasulids and Tahirids. The Tahirid shaykhs are not in these references in the "service" of the Rasulids as indicated above in 794/1391 where Ṭāhir was referred to quite specifically in the Ghāyah as nāʿib ʿalā jihatihī min qibali al-Ashraf al-Rasūlī¹² but in opposition to them. The references are here to Maʿūdah b. Ṭāj al-Dīn and not to the Ṭāhir and his sons referred to above. The relations between all these different Tahirids are not made clear. On 5th of Shawwāl, 809/1406, the Rasulid sultan, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Aḥmad travelled to the territory of Shaykh Maʿūdah, followed on 10th of Shawwāl by his minister, Shihāb al-Dīn, who passed by Tahirid territory on his way to Ḥajar. On 17th Shawwāl, came the news that

¹⁰ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 561.

¹¹ Schuman, Qiladah, genealogical table facing 142

¹² Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 541.

the minister had killed a group of Ma'ūdah's followers and had destroyed many places in his territory. On 8th Dhū 'l Qa'dah the sultan went out to Shukū' and Ṣuhayb to camp on the territory of Shaykh Ma'ūdah. On 27th Dhū 'l Qa'dah, after entering al-Janad the sultan made peace with him.¹³ We are now moving into a new phase of relations between Tahirids and Rasulids. In the first references in 794/1391, the Tahirids were simply working for the Rasulid sultan, but during a brief period in 809/1406 the Tahirids appear rebellious .

iii) Rise of the Tahirids

References to the Tahirids now become more numerous and it is clear that they are rising steadily in the estimation of the Rasulids. In 812/1409, the death of Shaykh Ma'ūdah is announced.¹⁴ In 817/1414, Shaykh Ṭāhir b. Ma'ūdah arrived at the Rasulid court and was given ceremonial robes.¹⁵ As proof of his high esteem for the Tahirids, the sultan ordered that a palace to be called Dār al-Nā'īm be built for Shaykh Ṭāhir in al-Miqrānah . The author of the Ghāyah comments disapprovingly, "it would have been more appropriate to have called it Dār al-Khatb al-Muqīm [the palace of permanence] this name [ie Dār al-Nā'īm] is only

¹³ Chronicle, 76-7. For Ṣuhayb, see Smith, Simt, II, 207 suggesting that it is about 60 miles almost due north of Āden, near al-Ḍālī'. Shukū' is in Lower Yafi', Muflihī territory.

¹⁴ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 103; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 121-2. He is described as the grandfather of the sultans jadd salātīn al-khulafā' Al Ṭāhir.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 103; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 122; Chronicle, 94.

for Paradise ".¹⁶

In the following year, 818/1415, Tāhir was once again met by the Rasulid sultan and a few days later there were spectacular parades and processions in Ta'izz "and our Lord the sultan covered the son of Shaykh Ma'ūdah with every bounty and honour ".¹⁷

In 818/1415, we also have the first reference to actual Rasulid protection of Tahirid lands when the Zaydī imam Ālī b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn marched down and took some of their territory. The Rasulid sultan retaliated with a large force to help the Tahirids who are described as if under the family protection of the Rasulid sultan. The encounter took place at a place called al-Ḍarām.¹⁸ The Zaydī army was defeated and pursued as far as Wadi Khubān, south east of Yarīm, after which the Rasulid sultan al-Nāṣir went to al-Miqrānah and paid the builders of the palace he was building for Shaykh Tāhir, Dār al-Nā'īm, 20,000 dinars.¹⁹

¹⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 564. This is the first detailed reference to al-al-Miqrānah a full description of which occurs below in chapter 7.

¹⁷ Chronicle, 95.

¹⁸ The terms used in the texts are awlād and umanā. In Yaḥyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 564, the event is under the year 818/1415 while in the Bughyah, 102, and Qurrah, 122, it is under the year 820/1417. In Ibn al-Daybā, Qurrah, 122 and note 3, it is al-Ṣaram rather than al-Ḍarām which the editor suggests is in the Yarīm area.

¹⁹ Yaḥyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 564; Ibn al-Daybā, Qurrah, 122; Bughyah, 103; Khubān, Hajari, Majmū, 304

In 821/1418, the imam attacked Tahirid territory again taking the fortresses of Balq and al-Qal‘ah. The Rasulids retaliated by sending Amir Badr al-Dīn al-Kāmili to fight the Zaydī army which was forced to withdraw. In 822/1419, the Zaydīs decided to abandon their attempts to control this part of the Yemen for the time being and handed over to the Rasulid, Amir Badr al-Dīn al-Kāmili, most of the fortresses which the Zaydī imam had taken forcibly from Ṭāhir.²⁰ This however did not last, for three years later in 825/1421, the Zaydīs attacked Tahirid territory again, but were repulsed.²¹ In 833/1429, Shaykh Ṭāhir took the fortress of al-A‘shūr²² from the imam a momentous event which resulted in three days of celebrations at the Rasulid court.

In 835/1431 there is the first reference to the Tahirids’ Umayyad nisbah, mentioned in the context of a visit by Shaykh ‘Alī to the Rasulid sultan in Ta‘izz. His full title is given here for the first time as Shaykh Shams al- Dīn ‘Alī b. Ṭāhir b. Ma‘ūdah b. Ṭāj al-Dīn al-‘Amrī.²³ The Umayyad nisbah is perpetuated by Ibn al-Daybā in the heading of chapter 8.²⁴ There is no comment anywhere on the veracity of the nisbah and it can be dismissed as having been invented in order

²⁰ Chronicle, 105.

²¹ Chronicle, 113.

²² Chronicle, 131. Al-A‘shūr is in the region of al-Nādirah, see Ḥajari, Majmū‘, 85.

²³ Ibn al-Daybā, Qurrah, 130 and note 3 referring to the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar. The same reference in Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah leaves out al-‘Amrī.

²⁴ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 121 "...al-Qurashī al-Umawī al-‘Amrī".

to enhance their social and religious standing. The Umayyad nisbah is mentioned in connection with ʿĀmir and ʿAlī, but by the time we get to al-Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and the last sultan, his son ʿĀmir, it is interesting to see that the nisbah has been dropped in the chapter titles of Ibn al-Daybāʿ's Bughyah and the genealogy only goes back as far as Ṭāhir.²⁵ It is tempting to compare the Tahirids' adoption of this fictitious nisbah with the Rasulids who adopted the nisbah Ghassānī. The Tahirids however were only trying to prove their respectability and there was no doubt about their Arab stock. The Rasulids in contrast were trying to demonstrate that they were Arabs originally and not simply Manjik Turcomans and went to great lengths to do so.²⁶

In the following year, 836/1432, relations between the Rasulids and the Tahirids were further strengthened through marriage.²⁷ In 840/1436, the Rasulid Chronicle relates that ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir (the future al-Malik al-Mujāhid) occupied the fortress of al-Miqrānah and with the help of the Rasulids ousted his nephew and a number of his followers. The sultan was delighted and parades and military bands (tablkhānah) were played for three days.²⁸ No background is given to this

²⁵ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 121, 159, 185.

²⁶ There was much debate on this question by the early historians as soon as the Rasulids began to come to prominence under the Ayyubids; see Smith, Simt, II, 85-6.

²⁷ One of Shaykh Ṭāhir's daughters married the Rasulid al-Ẓāhir Yahyā, Chronicle, 159; Ibn al-Daybāʿ Qurrah, 131; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 108; Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 145.

²⁸ Chronicle, 185. Tablkhānah is a term used to describe a royal corps of drums, military band or a troupe of up to 80 horsemen. Here a military band is being referred to, see Smith, Simt, II, 125.

Tahirid family squabble.

Also in 840/1436, there are references to the Tahirids being involved in Zaydī family squabbles. During a period of rivalry between the imam al-Muṭahhar and al-Nāṣir, the latter brought in the Tahirid shaykhs on his side and in the ensuing battle at al-Quraysh, near Jahrān, al-Muṭahhar was defeated and imprisoned.²⁹

iv) Decline of the Rasulid state

By the mid 9th/15th century, shortly after the beginning of the reign of al-Nāṣir, the Rasulid state began to enter a period of steady decline. During the 840s/1430s and the 850s/1450s there were constant rebellions against the Rasulids on the part of the Tihāmah tribes, the most recalcitrant being the Qurashīs and the Maʿāzibah whose revolts against the state go back much further. In 806/1403 for instance, the Maʿāzibah had in fact caused such anarchy in the Tihāmah and made the roads so unsafe for travellers and traders that the effects were even felt on the Indian Ocean trade at Aden.³⁰ The sultans would periodically reassert themselves, but the Tahirids were constantly being called upon to help keep the tribes in control and prop up the decaying Rasulid dynasty. The situation is extremely confused. 843/1439 was a particularly bad year for the Rasulid sultan al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl (r. 842-5/1439-42) with massive rebellions on the part of the Qurashīs and Maʿāzibah culminating in the burning of al-Mahjam by unnamed Arab tribes

²⁹ For Jahrān see Ḥajārī, Majmūʿ, 201; Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 575. As we shall see below, 50% of struggles between these two claimants to the Zaydī imamate continued for many years.

³⁰ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 561.

(ʿarab). In 844/1440, 40 Maʿāzibah were clubbed to death by the sultan's forces.

Later in the year the sultan sent a new governor to al-Mahjam who was murdered.

This, says the author of the Ghāyah, marked the end of Rasulid control over

Tihāmah.³¹

In 845/1442 al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl died. He is said to have been mad and his nephew al-Muzaffar Yūsuf b. al-Manṣūr was proclaimed sultan.³²

There then follows what appears to be a period of total chaos in which there are a number of Rasulid pretenders, constant rebellions by the tribes and various groups of slaves. The events can be summarised as follows: In 846/1442, the Zabīd slaves installed their own Rasulid pretender, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. ʿUthmān, giving him the laqab al-Malik al-Afdal. Once in Zabīd, al-Afdal strengthened the position of the Qurashīs and Maʿāzibah by providing them with large sums of money, weapons and horses. They grew so strong that they took control of the palm cultivation of Wadi Zabīd, dividing the area between them and expelling its rightful inhabitants; (this land remained in their hands until the Tahirid period).³³ The Qurashīs and the Maʿāzibah then fell out amongst themselves, the Qurashīs winning out. Matters now became serious in Zabīd. The rightful Rasulid sultan, al-Muzaffar Yūsuf b. al-Manṣūr, sent a delegation down to Zabīd to arrest the pretender al-Afdal and bring him to Taʿizz. The slaves of Zabīd who

³¹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 563; Smith, "Studies on the Tihāmah", 33, for a discussion of the term ʿarab.

³² Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 579; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 114.

³³ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 579-80; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 115; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 140-1.

obviously had a hand in this demanded some repayment from the sultan for the expenses of their participation . When he refused, they proceeded to destroy the crops in Wadi Zabīd. Once the Rasulid pretender al-Afdal was out of the way, a proclamation inviting peace in Zabīd was read out in al-Muzaffar's name. The slaves were not content however, and they found another Rasulid pretender in Hays, Aḥmad b. al-Nāṣir, whom they installed in Zabīd. Good relations however between him and the slaves were short lived and the slaves turned against their new master ; pillage, looting and destruction of the property of merchants and others took place , Zabīd at the hands of Aḥmad b. al-Nāṣir suffering horribly becoming in the words of the author of the Ghāyah, "like a harvested field".³⁴

The events that finally led to the collapse of the Rasulid dynasty in 858/1454 came about through the conflict between the rightful Rasulid sultan al-Muzaffar and another pretender al-Mas'ūd. The Tahirids supported al-Muzaffar and in 847/1443 we find them in Laḥj "outwardly in support of al-Malik al-Muzaffar against al-Mas'ūd while in their hearts they were after independence because of what they saw of the weakness of the Rasulid state".³⁵ This is the first serious intimation we have of Tahirid ambitions.

There was also at this time further Tahirid involvement with the Zaydīs. In 848/1444-5, a battle took place between the Tahirids and Āl-Āmmār, supporters of the Zaydīs. Unable to achieve success, Āl-Āmmār sought the help of the imam al-

³⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 580; Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 116-7; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 141

³⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 117; Ibn al-Dayba' ,Qurrah, 141; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 584.

Nāsir. He came down and made peace but then returned secretly to Tahirid territory destroying a number of dwellings in their domain forcing them to retreat to Ḥiṣn Laḥm.³⁶

In 849/1445-6 the Rasulids were once more confronting the tribes. On this occasion the Rasulid forces under Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī, who had been put in charge (muqaddam) of Zabīd by the Rasulid pretender al-Mas'ūd, attacked the Qurashīs. Somewhat surprisingly the Rasulids who in fact suffered defeat were in alliance with the Ma'āzibah. There are however examples mentioned below of the tribes frequently changing sides in military conflicts with Rasulid and Tahirid authority.³⁷

In 850/1446-7 al-Mas'ūd headed for Ta'izz where he besieged the Rasulid sultan al-Muzaffar in his fortress. The sultan asked the Tahirids for help and 'Āmir b. Ṭāhir came to his rescue. Al-Mas'ūd remained in Dar al-Wa'd in Ta'izz until the Tahirids overcame him again and removed him from Ta'izz safely. Al-Mas'ūd then proceeded to Mawzā' in 852/1448 and on to Aden. The Tahirids and al-Muzaffar together went to Laḥj, where they again fought al-Mas'ūd. Al-Mas'ūd succeeded in escaping and capturing the citadel at Ta'izz in 854/1450-1.³⁸ In

³⁶ For the Āl 'Ammār, see Ḥajarī, Majmū', 611, they are one of the tribes of Dahmah from the Ṣa'dah area. I have been unable to locate Laḥm.

³⁷ For Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī, see appendix

³⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 118-9.

857/1453, ʿĀmir b. Tāhir built a dār in Laḥj³⁹ then returned to his home territory to gather a large army to fight al-Masʿūd. After an inconclusive battle ʿĀmir returned home (presumably to al-Miqrānah, although this is not specified).

The slaves of Zabīd had by now taken over the city and were totally beyond the control of any authority. In 855/1451, they appointed another Rasulid pretender Ḥusayn b. Tāhir al-Rasūlī to whom they gave the laqab of al-Muʿayyad. The state was in total anarchy. The slaves had organised themselves into groups, each under its own wālī, and towns throughout Tihāmah suffered terrible damage : those mentioned in particular were al-Mahjam⁴⁰ al-Qaḥmah and al-Kadrā.⁴¹ Into this chaos arrived an Egyptian ex-governor of Jeddah, whose name is not given, dismissed from his post by the Mamluk sultan. He was travelling to India with a large cargo and hearing of the turbulent state of the Yemen, he stopped off at Hodeida. There he gathered an army together, intending to conquer the country. He camped outside the town, where he was met by Ibn Ḥafīz, lord of Abyāt Ḥusayn, who attacked and killed him and most of his army. Returning to Abyāt Ḥusayn Ibn Ḥafīz was himself attacked by members of the Zaghiyyūn tribe and killed. The Zaghiyyūn then proceeded to destroy Abyāt Ḥusayn which, says the

³⁹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 119.

⁴⁰ Al-Mahjam was a prominent town under the Rasulids. It had its own mint, the coins often bearing the symbol of a lion. See Nützel Coins no. 26 f. The minaret of the mosque built by the sultan al-Muzaffar I still stands.

⁴¹ Ghāyah, 585; for al-Qaḥmah and al-Kadrā', see Smith Simt, II, 168, 189 inland north of Zabīd

author of the Ghāyah, was one of the loveliest towns in the Yemen.⁴²

Between 855-58/1451-54 there were constant struggles between the two Rasulid pretenders al-Mas'ūd and al-Mu'ayyad and between al-Mas'ūd and the Tahirids with alternating success. Finally in 858/1454 al-Mas'ūd left Aden which was then immediately taken over by al-Mu'ayyad. He remained there until the Tahirids came and proclaimed themselves the legitimate rulers later in the year.⁴³ These events and the establishment of Tahirid rule will be recounted in the following chapter.

v) Review of the economic state of the Yemen

Having looked at the political events leading up to the Tahirid takeover in 858/1454 we will now look briefly at the economic situation to try and ascertain what sort of state the country was in at the time of the Tahirid takeover in 858/1454.

The major share of government revenue came from trade and Aden was an extremely significant port and entrepot on the Indian Ocean route. The revenues from Aden were often very high. In 814/1411 for instance they amounted to

⁴² Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah 585. Judging from the description, it seems unlikely that the ex-governor was acting on behalf of the Mamluks. The conquest seems to have been decided upon on the spur of the moment and has the same opportunistic quality of the more successful Mamluk invasion discussed in chapter 5 below. Abyāt Ḥusayn is probably the Bayt Ḥusayn in Ḥajarī, Majmū', 259, cited as being close to al-Mahjam in Wadi Surdud. He says that at the time of writing it was destroyed and was known for a number of famous ulema who came from here.

⁴³ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 119-20.

1,470,000 dinars and the merchants were treated with high regard.⁴⁴ However, the revenues were not always so high. The Yemen as cog in the machinery of the Indian Ocean trade was badly affected for instance in the mid 8th/14th century as a result of economic and political stagnation in Egypt at this time.⁴⁵ Aden and the other major ports of the Yemen, al-Shiḥr and Mocha would have been immediately affected by any changes taking place in the price of bullion or commodities and inevitably the interior would have been also.

As we saw above, the Yemen itself began to suffer both political and economic turmoil during the reign of al-Nāṣir (803-829/1400-28). There were Zaydī/ Rasulid conflicts; revolts by the Ma'āzibah and the 'abīd. The rebellions of the tribes created such an unsafe situation in the hinterland that no goods or traders were coming into Aden and the ships from India stayed away; it clearly was not worth their while to dock at Aden.⁴⁶ Al-Nāṣir's reputation as a tyrannical ruler had clearly spread far and wide, as in 823/1421 a Chinese embassy, bearing gifts worth 20 lakk of gold brought with it a strict message to the sultan to behave more justly towards his people.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Serjeant, "Yemeni merchants", 62; Cahen and Serjeant, "Fiscal Survey" for details of the commodities available at the port of Aden.

⁴⁵ Chronicle, 12-13.

⁴⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 561; Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 12, recounts that during the days of tyranny (al-jawr) under al-Nāṣir, traders fled from Aden to Jeddah; Quatremère, Mémoires, 288-9.

⁴⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 565; In Ibn al-Daybāṣ, Qurrah, 123-4. The reason stated was that the Emperor of China considered all his population to be slaves. A lakk is 100,000 coins.

In 829/1426, 40 vessels from India arrived in Jeddah the port of which had recently been re-built.⁴⁸ The merchants felt more secure in Jeddah and for some time abandoned the use of Aden completely.⁴⁹ Al-Nāṣir had imposed a regime of terror in particular very heavy taxes on the traders. So much so that the Kārimī merchants⁵⁰ in Aden had to leave quickly for India or Jeddah abandoning half their goods. According to Piloti, al-Nāṣir was taking as much as half the value of the goods in taxes.⁵¹

By the end of the reign of al-Nāṣir in 827/1423 therefore revenues from the trade seem to have almost entirely stopped. In 835/1432 a Chinese junk, with porcelain and silk for sale, docked at Aden, but the traders were unable to sell any of their wares "because of the disorder in the state of Yemen".⁵²

Natural disasters too are recorded at this time: in 824/1421 there was widespread famine, presumably due to crop failure, and huge price rises as a result.⁵³ In 839/1435 there was a terrible plague throughout the country which killed thousands of people.⁵⁴ Another plague befell the Yemen in 848/1444⁵⁵ and

⁴⁸ Quatremère, Mémoires, 289.

⁴⁹ Quatremère, Mémoires, 289.

⁵⁰ For discussion of who or what were the Kārim see, Chaudhuri, Trade, 59; Labib, "Kārimī".

⁵¹ Baldry, Textiles, 14; Piloti, L'Égypte, 42.

⁵² Chaudhuri, "A note", 112 quoting Ibn Taghribirdī

⁵³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 104.

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 111.

⁵⁵ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 118.

there was famine in 854/1450.⁵⁶

vi) Conclusion

This introductory chapter can be summarised as follows: references to the Tahirid family first occur in the Zaydī sources from the end of the 8th/14th century, with minor skirmishes taking place in the Radā' area between various members of the Tahirids and the Zaydīs. The early references are only to be found in the Zaydī sources and, as they describe territorial disputes between Zaydīs and Tahirids, this is not entirely surprising. Further references then start appearing in the Rasulid chronicle from 809/1406 when the Tahirids appear temporarily in opposition to the Rasulids. They begin to be referred to as "in the service" of the Rasulids as early as 794/1392 in the Zaydī chronicles, and by 817/1414 Shaykh Ṭāhir b. Ma'ūdah has had a palace built for him in al-Miqrānah and the Rasulids are defending what is evidently defined Tahirid territory. In 835/1432 occurs the first reference to the Tahirids Umayyad nisbah and in the following years the Tahirids become more and more indispensable in the running of the fast deteriorating Rasulid state. By the end of the Rasulid period in 858/1454 the territory under Tahirid control can be broadly defined as the area marked by the principal towns of Juban, Radā' and al-Miqrānah. From about 847/1443 they start being mentioned in connection with Laḥj and are recorded as actually building a dār there. It is clear that as well as working for the Rasulids, they were acting in their own capacity consolidating a base in Laḥj and Aden where they were involved in trade.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 119.

⁵⁷ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 12, in the description of Dār Ṣalāh, "when the B. Ṭāhir came and became connected with trade" (ta' llaqū bi-'l-tijārah)

The country inherited by the Tahirids in 858/1454 was in a poor state, both economically and politically. There was turmoil in Tihāmah that had continued almost incessantly for about 50 years, wholesale destruction of towns and villages and large numbers of the population killed . There had been natural disasters and problems with the trade. The Tahirids thus had a huge task before them to try and pull Sunnī Lower Yemen together and turn it into the cohesive prosperous state it had been at the height of Rasulid power. As we shall see they were not to be fully successful in this until the reign of the last Tahirid sultan, ‘Āmir. A period of prosperity that was to be sadly shortlived; the coming of the Portuguese and the subsequent upheavals and conquest of the Yemen by the Mamluks and Ottomans cutting the Tahirids off in their prime.

Chapter 3

THE FIRST YEAR OF TAHIRID RULE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
POWER

858-83/1454-78

i) **Introduction**; ii) **The Tahirid takeover**, a) The last Rasulids, b) The Tahirid allies, c) The slaves of Zabīd, d) The Tahirid entry to Zabīd iii) **The reign of al-Malik al-Zāfir ʿĀmir 858-864/1454-1460**, a) Control of Tihāmah, b) Rebellion in Taʿizz and the activities of Abū Dujānah; c) Conflict between Zaydīs and Tahirids; iv) **The reign of al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī 864-883/1460-1478**, a) Conflict between Zaydīs and Tahirids, b) The relationship between the sultans, c) The expedition to al-Shiḥr in 865/1461, d) The rebellions of the Ḥubayshī brothers, e) The role of Shaykh Yūsuf and the invasion of Jīzān by Sharīf Muḥammad b. Barakāt.

i) Introduction

The following chapter traces the establishment of Tahirid rule and chronicles and discusses the reigns of the first two sultans, al-Malik al-Zāfir and al-Malik al-Mujāhid and the practical application of their joint rule. The preoccupations of these first 25 years of Tahirid rule were primarily establishing their position in Tihāmah, and the expansion of their domain, firstly north into Zaydī territory and secondly into Ḥadramawṭ.

In the run up to the Tahirid seizure of power in 858/1454, the scene is dominated by the following protagonists:

1. The Tahirids and their principal allies:

The two brothers ʿĀmir (the future al-Malik al-Zāfir) and ʿĀlī (al-Malik al-Mujāhid), the Qurashī tribe, the lord of Hodeida, Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar al-Thābitī, Amirs ʿĀlī b. Sufyān and Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī who assisted the Tahirids in their entry to Zabīd;

2. the Rasulids: al-Muʿayyad and al-Masʿūd;

3. the slaves of Zabīd.

ii) The Tahirid takeover

a) The last Rasulids

The Tahirid takeover began with the capture of Aden by ʿĀmir and ʿĀlī. This took place on 23rd Rajab 858/1454 when ʿĀmir entered the city covertly after dark climbing over the wall with a small band of men whom he had brought with him from the fortress of al-Taʿkar.¹ The next day which was Friday, his brother ʿĀlī entered through the main gate and took control of the town.

Still to be dealt with were the last two Rasulids, al-Muʿayyad and al-Masʿūd. In Aden al-Muʿayyad, whose wealth and possessions were captured, evidently surrendered without demur and set up house in Aden where he was given a stipend, his own retinue and a tablkhānah.² His brother al-Masʿūd had taken refuge in Harqah with Shaykh ʿAbdullāh b. Abī'l-Surūr but was persuaded to

¹ Ḥajarī, Majmūʿ, 155; al-Taʿkar is close to Aden.

² Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 144; tablkhanah see footnote 28 chapter 2 above. Here presumably a small force is indicated rather than a military band

return to Zabīd by a group of slaves loyal to him.³ The author of the Anbā' al-Zaman⁴ suggests that it was al-Mas'ūd who summoned the Zabīd slaves and, once having ascertained their loyalty, entered Zabīd. There al-Mas'ūd stayed under the protection of Bayt al-Ghazālī⁵ until the end of Shawwāl when he summoned Shaykh Ibn Abī'l-Surūr from Ḥarqah and together they set off to Ta'izz. They got as far as Ḥays when al-Mas'ūd obviously had second thoughts, abandoned his ambitions and departed for Mecca. In Mecca he was well treated by the Mamluk sultan Īnāl.⁶ This departure is seen by the author of the Anbā' as the definite end of the Rasulid dynasty and he adds "the Tahirids now entered the historical stage of the Yemen".⁷

b) The Tahirid allies

Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī⁸

Amir Zayn al-Dīn Jayyāsh b. Sulayman al-Sunbulī was driven out of Aden by the Tahirid al-Mujāhid 'Alī with about 30 followers⁹ and settled briefly in

³ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 145. I have not been able to locate Ḥarqah

⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbā', 103.

⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 124. It is interesting that Bayt al-Ghazālī crop up from time to time harbouring opponents of the regime. In 883/1478 at the beginning of the reign of al-Manṣūr the rebellious Yūsuf entrusted weapons and money to them, see below, 77, 89.

⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 124; Al-Ashraf Sayf al-Dīn Īnāl Mamluk ruler of Egypt, 1453-1461.

⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbā', 103.

⁸ See appendix, 268

⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 144.

Mawzā.¹⁰ From there he attempted to persuade the slaves of Zabīd to let him in. Having convinced one of the leaders of the slaves Yūsuf b. al-Fuful to allow him into Zabīd, he was secretly in close communication with al-Mujāhid and began spreading disunity amongst the slaves while preparing the ground for the Tahirid takeover of the city. Al-ʿAmrī suggests that Jayyāsh's expulsion from Aden was part of plot conceived with al-Mujāhid to deceive the Zabīd slaves and to enable al-Mujāhid to take over Zabīd without a fight.¹¹ This is certainly plausible, the other possibility is that he was simply being opportunistic, realising that in order to survive he had to ally himself to the winning side which was clearly the Tahirids.

The Qurashī tribe

This was a powerful tribe belonging according to Ḥajarī to the Ashā'irah from the area of Zabīd.¹² They were initially allies then became disaffected. Their activities and relations with the Tahirids are discussed below in the context of the Ma'āzibah.

The lord of Hodeida Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar al-Thābitī

He joined al-Malik al-Mujāhid with a number of unspecified tribesmen at the outset of the Tahirid takeover and was subsequently installed in Bayt al-Faqīh Ibn

¹⁰ Mawzā is south of Zabīd; Smith, Simt, II, 182; Redhouse, Uqūd, III, note 952, Ḥajarī, Majmūʿ, 724.

¹¹ Al-ʿAmrī, "Slaves", 154.

¹² Ḥajarī, Majmūʿ, 648. For the Ashā'irah, Ḥajarī, *ibid*, 78 f.

ʿUjayl "to put in order the affairs of the Arab tribes".¹³

Sharif ʿAlī b. Sufyān (d. 875/1470)

He was a trusted amir of the Tahirids¹⁴ and it was he who facilitated their conquest of Aden and defended the city against the lord of al-Shihr, Abu Dujānah, in 861/1457 (see below p.49) He is frequently mentioned in the early years of Tahirid rule in the context of the conflicts with the Tihāmah tribes. His son, ʿAbdallāh (d. 918/1512), was also a trusted amir under the sultans ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and ʿĀmir.¹⁵

c) The slaves of Zabīd

The population of Zabīd consisted of two main groups of people, the ordinary inhabitants represented by the elders (kubarāʾ) who on the departure of the Rasulid al-Masʿūd had written to al-Mujāhid ʿAlī pledging their allegiance to him. There were also the slaves, the ʿabīd and the main resistance to the Tahirids came from them. They had a tradition of rebellion even during the Rasulid period. There were various slave factions in the city some of whom were to support the Tahirids and others not.

Yūsuf b. al-Fuful leader of one of the factions as mentioned above invited in to

¹³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 123; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 147 where he is called "al-Thālithī".

¹⁴ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 144.

¹⁵ See appendix, 267

Zabīd the expelled Rasulid amir of Aden, Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī. Groups of slaves won over to the Tahirid side through the efforts of Jayyāsh were the ʿAbīd al-Sayyid and the ʿAbīd al-Shamsī.¹⁶

Against the Tahirids were the slaves of Fashāl¹⁷ who on learning of the impending arrival of the Tahirid al-Mujāhid ʿAlī fled across the walls. Another group of slaves were those led by ʿAbdallāh b. Zaytūn. They also opposed the Tahirids and were angry with Jayyāsh for allowing them to enter Zabīd. Another leader mentioned was Faraj al-Khayrī. The group he controlled numbered about 400 and they were forced to flee Zabīd after a fight with Amir Jayyāsh and his supporters.¹⁸

Who were the ʿabīd? Descendants of slaves from Abyssinia had first been brought to the Yemen in Islamic times by the Ziyadids (818-1018/203-409) who founded Zabīd in 204/819. They were relied upon for the army, administration and for agricultural labour.¹⁹ The first and only hereditary black slave ruling house was established in Yemen under the name of the Najahids (412-551/1021-1159). One of the Najahids, Jayyāsh who ruled Zabīd between 482-499/1089-1104 built the town of Ḥays, bringing relatives from Abyssinia to populate it.²⁰ Al-ʿAmrī

¹⁶ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 146.

¹⁷ Fashāl, Ḥajarī, Majmūʿ, 643, north of Zabīd destroyed, and the town of Ḥusayniyyah built in its place. Smith, Simt, II, 151. It could be that these slaves originally came from there.

¹⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 147.

¹⁹ Al-ʿAmrī, "Slaves", 142.

²⁰ Smith, "The political history", 132; Wilson, "History", 32; Smith, "Studies", 34.

has suggested that the particular character of that dynasty was based on a "unifying spirit of racial identity felt by leaders and followers alike".²¹ Once the Najahids had lost their supremacy, these "slaves" apparently retained this ethnic identity, and must simply have become just another social group. It is presumably they who in the Rasulid and Tahirid periods are referred to as ʿabīd. It is difficult to establish, however, what their exact position was. For instance it is hard to know whether there were still real slaves among them, their numbers boosted by the slave trade which flourished both in Zabīd and Aden in medieval times,²² or whether this was just a term used to define their ethnic and social position rather as the term akhdām is used today.²³

In Ayyubid and earlier Rasulid times a different kind of slave appeared. The Mamluks were Turkish or Circassian slaves, used because of their absolute loyalty to the sultan in a system initiated by the Ayyubids in Egypt. But they were not always to be trusted. In Egypt they obtained such power that they were able to overthrow the Ayyubids and establish their own dynasty, the Mamluks, and in the Yemen, in 722/1322 they turned against the Rasulid sultan, al-Malik al-Mujāhid, whom they had brought to power by murdering al-Malik al-Manṣūr ʿUmar in 648/1250. It is interesting to note that being unsuccessful, they fled to Zabīd where they are described as allying themselves with the ʿabīd. It is not clear from the subsequent description of events whether the ʿabīd were being led by the

²¹ Al-ʿAmrī, "Slaves", 144.

²² Al-ʿAmrī, "Slaves ", 144.

²³ The akhdām are most unlikely to have been descended from the ʿabīd. References in the Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan show that these were real slaves. I am grateful to Professor Serjeant for these comments.

mamluks, or whether they are all being lumped together as ʿabīd as only the term ʿabīd is used after that.²⁴

Other groups of ʿabīd referred to in the Tahirid texts were ʿabīd al-ʿamiriyyīn²⁵ and the ʿabīd of al-Liwā.²⁶

d) The Tahirid entry to Zabīd

After the slaves had been expelled from Zabīd; on that same day, Friday the second day of ʿĪd al-Adhā 859/1454, the khutbah was read out in the name of al-Malik al-Zāfir ʿĀmir b. Ṭāhir.²⁷ Ibn al-Daybāʿ remarks on the strange fact that the day before, the khafīb had pronounced the khutbah in the name of the Rasulid al-Muʿayyad and explained it thus, "When al-Malik al-Mujāhid took both Aden and Zabīd, al-Muʿayyad was there. In Zabīd he was under the protection of Bayt al-Ghazālī. They considered his glory to be a good omen for the future and treated him well".²⁸

Al-Mujāhid made his ceremonial entry into Zabīd the following Saturday. With him were his nephew Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Dāʿūd, the Faqīh al-Muqrī and members of the Qurashī tribe. Once in Zabīd the Qurashīs went on

²⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 495 f.; Redhouse, Uqud, II, 6-7

²⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, note 37, describes them as an unruly tribe in the hills bordering North Tihāmah.

²⁶ In the year 865/1460, Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 153.

²⁷ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 147.

²⁸ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 148.

the rampage looting and pillaging the houses of the slaves and others. Ibn al-Dayba' says, "Some say that al-Mujāhid promised them they could do so".²⁹ Scuffles ensued, fifteen Qurashī tribesmen were killed and they were forced to depart ignominiously with no loot, but thankful for being allowed to leave safely.

iii) The reign of al-Malik al-Zāfir ʿĀmir 858-864/1454-1460

Although the two brothers, ʿĀmir and ʿAlī, came to power jointly, it was quickly established that ʿĀmir al-Malik al-Zāfir, despite being the younger of the two, should assume the senior position. Soon after the unruly slaves had been thrown out of Zabīd, the khutbah was pronounced in al-Zāfir's name and thus it continued until 864/1460 when ʿAlī took over.

The main preoccupations of the Tahirids during the first years of their rule were the consolidation of their power over Lower Yemen, in particular the imposition of firm control over the Tihāmah tribes and other recalcitrant elements of the population, and relations with the Zaydīs.

a) Control of Tihāmah

a) the tribes : the Maʿāzibah

Ibn al-Dayba' warns us at the beginning of his chronicle of the Tahirid period that the subjugation of the Tihāmah tribes was to be their paramount concern: "You should know that throughout the rule of the Tahirid kings, God preserve it, every year they placed an extra tax (makhraj) on al-Madanī, the palm grove of the Maʿāzibah, whether the latter were in dispute with them or supporting them. They

²⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 124.

^{29a} Professor Serjeant has suggested that this may be the name of dates and not a place

would collect the dates and in some years pull some out by the roots....but the purpose of cutting the dates every year was to humiliate them completely and weaken their power".³⁰

The constant struggle to keep control of the Ma^ʿazibah had also been a major preoccupation of the Rasulids. Redhouse describes them as a "warlike and turbulent tribe of hill Arabians... who infested and ravaged the hill country near the plains from from about lat. 13 30' to 15 30' N devastating the plains also on occasions". Redhouse was unable to find any reference to them in the source material at his disposal and suggests that the word Ma^ʿazibah means vagrants (from ʿazaba, be far from) inferring thus that their name described their status and behaviour. Quite plausibly he also suggests that they may have been secretly encouraged in their dissent by the Zaydī imams in whose interests it would have naturally have been to keep the southern parts of the Yemen unstable.³¹

In trying to analyse relations between the Tahirids and the Ma^ʿazibah, it is important to remember as Ṣālihiyyah has pointed out that these tribes occupied

³⁰ Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Bughyah, 125.

³¹ Khazrajī, Redhouse, Uqūd, III, note 358. In note 547 he suggests that they may have been of mixed race; see also Redhouse note 1538 for the suggestion that the Ma^ʿazibah may have been seamen (bahriyyah). Some detail about their origins is provided by Ṣālihiyyah, Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Fadl, 93 note 10. He says that they were associated with the Ashāʿir tribe and dwelt in the area between the mountains and the sea south of Bayt al-Faḳīh. See also Schuman, Qilādah, note 43. The Ma^ʿazibah were incorporated into the Zarānīq tribe who still reside in and around the Bayt al-Faḳīh area. Ḥajari, Majmūʿ, 711. See also Qahhālah, Qabāʿil, 468, who says that they number about 90,000. Schuman, Qilādah note 43 and 44 discusses all the tribal groups including the Ma^ʿazibah.

one of the most fertile parts of the Yemen under Tahirid control. This land was therefore potentially a highly significant source of revenue for the state. Both Rasulid and Tahirid sultans' favourite means of exacting revenue was to tax the date palms and there is certainly evidence that the Ma'āzibah were vulnerable in this regard.

In 866/1461, the date palms in the Madanī palm grove were counted and the number was 101,000 trees on which tax was payable in addition to 15,000 trees belonging to the B. Ūjayl and 1,000 trees belonging to "the rest of the Sufis". The total tax payable was calculated as 80 horses, the value of each being 63 ūqiyyahs.³² Ṣālihiyyah suggests that it was quite impossible that there should have been quite so many trees in the Madanī palm grove and that the number of the trees were deliberately exaggerated to raise more revenue. The reason being that the sultans were not receiving enough revenue to satisfy their economic needs. In 905/1499 they rebelled because Ḥāmir had 4,000 trees planted in the wadi, on which they presumably would have been taxed, as another way of raising revenue. In retaliation against this harsh treatment, the tribes waged economic warfare.³³ Ṣālihiyyah points out that between 864/1459 and 920/1514, 23 fires are mentioned as breaking out in Zabīd, on average about one every 2½ years which, even if due to natural causes and carelessness, does seem excessive. These fires Ṣālihiyyah suggests was the work of the angry tribes. The houses in Zabīd were built of palm fronds and in 872/1468, after a particularly bad fire, al-Mujāhid tried unsuccessfully to stop the Zabīd inhabitants from using palm fronds

³² Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 131. For ūqiyyah see chapter 6, 158.

³³ Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 53.

as building material to prevent the fires from spreading so quickly.³⁴ The fires generally affected the sūq, and caused obvious hardship, the houses of the sultan's appointees, or even the sultan's own property.

There is some implication in Ibn al-Dayba' 's statement referred to above,³⁵ that the sultans may have been unfair. A point followed up by Ṣālihiyyah who suggests that this initial harshness right at the beginning of the Tahirid takeover sowed seeds of hatred that could never be eradicated in future. For none of the Tahirid sultans was able to develop an appropriate strategy in their dealings with the tribes apart from constant chastisement.

If we examine the period between 860-64/1456-60, the first chronicled event of any importance, is the attack in 860/1456 on the Ma'āzibah. Similar attacks and reprisals against them and the Qurashīs then occur frequently in the following years. We will look in detail at these first confrontations to try and establish the scale and frequency of these occurrences, the numbers of men involved and the losses and gains made.

Once al-Mujāhid had dealt with the slaves, he sent a message to the Ma'āzibah calling for their restraint and obedience.³⁶ The Ma'āzibah did not comply and the sultan went out against them to the villages of al-Daj' in Wadi Rima' where they

³⁴ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 141.

³⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 125.

³⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 148.

were then residing.³⁷ The Ma‘āzibah were at that time in great numbers with more than 100 horses. They included a group claiming to be courageous and brave. The two sides met, al-Mujāhid and his troupes on one flank, and the Qurashīs (still on the Tahirid side at this stage) on the other flank, with the Tihāmah cavalry. The Ma‘āzibah made a massive attack on the Tahirid troops, but, while al-Mujāhid and his followers held firm, the other side of the army was routed, including the troops from Hodeida. Al-Mujāhid and his cavalry attacked those Ma‘āzibah opposite them and put them to flight. The sultan’s forces killed 12 of them; one of the sultan’s troupes, Muḥammad b. Ḥāzim who was a brave man, but who had given bad advice, was captured and put to death by the relatives of the dead Ma‘āzibah. Then al-Mujāhid raided the Ma‘āzibah as far as Maḥjariyyah, a village in Wadi Rima‘, and defeated them. He killed one of their cavalymen Mufriḥ b. Junaydah.³⁸ The Bughyah gives slightly varying detail; 200 instead of 100 horses; al-Mujāhid cut off the heads of 7 of the Ma‘āzibah and he does not include the reference to Muḥammad b. Ḥāzim giving bad advice.³⁹

Further encounters with the Tihāmah tribes occurred in 861/1457 when al-Mujāhid attacked the Madanī palms and killed 20 of the Ma‘āzibah. Peace was made on the handing over by the Ma‘āzibah of 60 horses.⁴⁰ A little later, the Ma‘āzibah raided the town of Fashāl, killed 6 troops and took 20 horses. The final references in this year are to the Qurashīs. Al-Mujāhid returned from Aden to

³⁷ Ḥajarī, Majmū‘, 556.

³⁸ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Qurrah, 148-9.

³⁹ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Bughyah, 126.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Qurrah, 149-50.

Zabīd, intending to attack the Qurashīs, but they had put themselves under the protection of Shaykh Ismā'īl al-Jabartī. The sultan seized their horses, later returning them. He prevented them access to the palm groves of Zabīd and returned them to their original owners, who are not specified, for they had been in Qurashī hands since the time of the Rasulids.⁴¹

Although it is not clear what iniquity was committed, in 862/1458 al-Mujāhid deprived the Qurashīs of the income from their date palms, and prominent members of the tribe were shackled and led up to al-Miqrānah.⁴² In another event, dissent among the Qurashīs caused al-Mujāhid to mediate between them and he ordered them to settle in al-Qurashiyyah and invalidated blood revenge among them. He then extracted taxes from them and confiscated 20,000 dinars.⁴³

We learn from the first event of 860/1456 that the Qurashīs were still on the Tahirid side. As was mentioned earlier, they had helped Sultan al-Mujāhid 'Alī enter Zabīd but had run amok in the city and had had to be expelled from there. But by 861/1457 they had turned troublesome and like the Ma'āzibah began to be a thorn in the flesh of the Tahirids and had to be severely stamped on. Fighting with the Tahirids on the same flank as the Qurashīs, were the troops from Hodeida, these were presumably from the group brought over by the lord of Hodeida al-Thābitī who had been put in charge of Bayt al Faqīh. (see above, 37)

⁴¹ See chapter 2, 25, above.

⁴² Ibn al-Dayba, Qurrah, 151. The taking of hostages to ensure good behaviour on the part of the tribe was a custom practised in the Yemen even until recent times.

⁴³ Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Anbā', 105.

The numbers involved in the first event are reckoned by Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ as large, 100 or 200 (depending on the text), but casualties were light, 12 dead on the Ma^ʿāzibah side only 1 mentioned on the Tahirid side (and he gave bad advice !). In the attack in 861/1457, the sultan gained 60 horses and in the conflict with the Qurashī^s 20,000 dinars.

In these three years it will be seen that the pattern has been set: skirmishes, consisting of attack and counter attack, often attacks by the sultan with rarely any reason given; small numbers of people killed and the possibility of substantial prizes, usually horses and money, being gained. We also begin to learn more specifically about the Ma^ʿāzibah bases centering around Wadi Rima^ʿ, the villages of al-Daj^ʿ and Maḥjariyyah.

b) A rebellion in Ta^ʿizz and the activities of Abū Dujānah, lord of al-Shiḥr.

In 861/1457, a threat to the Tahirids appeared from the Naqīb al-Lubayn who took the Ta^ʿizz citadel. He was quickly defeated however by the troops of al-Malik al-Mujāhid who took him prisoner, captured about 50 of his men and recovered the citadel.⁴⁴ A second rather more serious threat came from Abū Dujānah Muḥammad b. Sa^ʿd b. Fāris al-Kindī, the lord of al-Shiḥr.

Al-Shiḥr was the most important port on the Indian Ocean coast after Aden and both Rasulids and Tahirids were anxious to have it under their control in order to profit from the trading revenues. It was taken by the Rasulids under al-Muzaffar

⁴⁴ This is the only mention of him. Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Qurrah, 150; Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Bughyah, 127.

in the late 13th century AD.⁴⁵ During the latter part of the Rasulid period when the state was in decline, al-Shiḥr fell into the hands of the tribe of Kindah with Abū Dujānah at its head.⁴⁶

Not content with al-Shiḥr, Abū Dujānah decided to seize Aden as well and, in 861/1457 in collusion with one of the chiefs of the Yāfi'ī tribe, Mubārak al-Thābitī, he arrived off the coast of Aden with several ships.⁴⁷ The attack was planned for a time when neither of the Tahirid sultans was in the town. Abū Dujānah was thwarted by two factors: the presence of Shaykh 'Alī b. Sufyān in the area, who posted guards on the walls and sent immediately for the sultan al-Malik al-Zāfir. The second factor against him was the weather. A strong wind rose up and caused a number of his ships to break up and sink. In retreat, Abū Dujānah's own ship capsized and was wrecked off the coast. He was captured by the sultan's forces and mounted on a camel in disgrace, and was paraded through the streets of Aden. Both his nephew and the Yafi'ī chief who had aided him were killed.

After hearing of his capture, his mother, Bint Ma'āshir appointed by Abū Dujānah to look after matters in al-Shiḥr during his absence, went herself to Aden to try and get her son released. The sultan agreed on condition that al-Shiḥr be given over to the Tahirids. Abū Dujānah does not seem to have reached al-Shiḥr alive

⁴⁵ Smith, "Ḥadramawt", 337-9; Serjeant, Portuguese, 25f; Serjeant "The ports of Aden and Shiḥr".

⁴⁶ Al-'Alawī, Tārīkh Ḥadramawt, 1/90; 'Abd al-'Āl, B. Raṣūl wa B. Tāhir, 262

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 127.

Abū Dujānah is stated by Shanbal to have come from west of al-Shiḥr. I am grateful to Professor Serjeant for this comment.

however, it was reported that he was poisoned.⁴⁸ In 863/1459, the Tahirid sultan appointed as governor of al-Shihr Amir Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī who, it will be recalled, was instrumental in achieving the Tahirid entry to Zabīd in 858/1454. The author of the Ghāyah finishes the account of Abū Dujānah's rebellion saying, "This was indeed a remarkable coincidence [the defeat] and proof that with the advent of a new dynasty, even rebels submit to it!"⁴⁹

c) Conflict between Zaydīs and Tahirids

The first reference to Tahirid involvement with the Zaydīs occurred in 860/1456 when the author of the Ghāyah notes that the Tahirids were encouraging the two rivals for the Zaydī succession, Nāṣir b. Muḥammad, on the one hand, and al-Muṭahhar on the other".⁵⁰

As discussed in chapter 2, during the last days of the Rasulids, the Tahirids were employed by them as a buffer between Zaydī and Rasulid domains and on several occasions engaged in battle with the Zaydīs on behalf of the Rasulids. At the time of the Tahirid takeover in 858/1454, the territory controlled by the Zaydīs consisted of the northern highlands and south as far as Dhamār which the Tahirids took in 865/1461. In 860/1455 al-Nāṣir marched to Ṣa'adah in response to a complaint by ʿAbdallāh of the Banī Mudā'is regarding sharīfah Fāṭimah who had had one of the Mudā'isīs killed (for reasons not recounted). The sharīfah was the

⁴⁸ ʿAbd al-ʿAl, B. Rasūl wa B. Tāhir, 264.

⁴⁹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 588

⁵⁰ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 588.

widow of the Imam Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn who had been imprisoned in Ṣanʿā by al-Nāṣir and had died there in 849/1445. At this time the sharīfah was in control of Ṣaʿdah. Seizing the pretext of the complaint against her, al-Nāṣir took Ṣaʿdah, shackled her and her minister and led them to Ṣanʿā. Her daughter Badrah escaped.⁵¹

Al-Muṭahhar, taking advantage of al-Nāṣir's excursion to Ṣaʿdah and egged on by the Tahirids, tried to take Ṣanʿā. Fighting broke out between al-Nāṣir's supporters in the city and those of al-Muṭahhar who also had the tribe of Hamdān on his side. Al-Nāṣir was, however, too strong for them and riding through Hamdān he recaptured Ṣanʿā.⁵²

The first Zaydī/Tahirid encounter occurred in 862/1457 between the Tahirid forces and those of Imam al-Nāṣir which ended in a peace treaty.⁵³ In 863/1459, al-Nāṣir once again made for Tahirid territory, Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī attacked al-Nāṣir's camp and killed a number of his followers. These minor encounters prepared the ground for the more serious confrontations beginning the following year in 864/1460 which will be described and discussed below.

iv) The reign of al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī (864- 83/1460-78)

From the Tahirid takeover, of the two brothers ʿĀmir and ʿAlī in 858/1454 until 864/1460, it was ʿĀmir who took precedence. The two brothers do seem, however

⁵¹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 587.

⁵² Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 587; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbaʿ, 104.

⁵³ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 151; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 589.

to have had equal authority. As part of the division of labour it may have been that al-Malik al-Mujāhid was in charge of the tribal matters on the Tihāmah. For in these four years it was he who led the combat against the Ma‘āzibah and the Qurashīs and who attempted to force them into submission. On the other hand it was al-Zāfir’s presence that was required when Abū Dujānah threatened Aden in 861/1457 indicating the potential seriousness of the threat, the port of Aden being one of their main sources of revenue.

However in 864/1460, the khutbah was pronounced and the coinage struck in the name of al-Malik al-Mujāhid. This was done, according to Ibn al-Dayba‘, with his brother’s approval since al-Zāfir preferred him.⁵⁴ The roles were reversed but the two in fact continued to rule jointly until ‘Āmir’s death in 870/1465.

a) Conflict between Zaydīs and Tahirids leading to the death of sultan ‘Āmir in 870/1465

The first event chronicled in 864/1460 is a major battle between the Zaydīs and Tahirids which occurred at a place called Raḍm and was initiated by the the Zaydī al-Nāṣir. Both sides suffered heavy losses. The Tahirids lost Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir, brother of the two sultans, and notable among the Zaydīs losses were one Ibn Kāmil and the "sultan" of the Jawf, ‘Alī b. Mukhārish who was regarded by his Zaydī allies as "of equal value...to 100 cavalrymen".⁵⁵ ‘Alī b. Mukhārish was killed by the future third Tahirid sultan, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Qurrah, 151; Ibn al-Dayba‘, Bughyah, 129; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 589.

⁵⁵ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Qurrah, 151-2; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 589. Here his name is given as Maḥārish.

The most detailed account of the event is given in the Zaydī sources. Al-Nāṣir had mustered a large army and had included forces from the Jawf. When al-Nāṣir reached Radā' from Dhamār, mediation and negotiation began to take place. According to the Anbā' however, the ensuing battle came about by accident when al-Nāṣir's cavalry mistakenly attacked the camp of the Tahirid, Muḥammad b. Tāhir. Sultan Āmir came in to defend his brother, but was unable to prevent him getting killed. What we learn only from the Zaydī sources (and we must take into account the biased view) is that the Tahirid army was totally routed. The Bughyah and the Qurrah do not recount the outcome. Al-Nāṣir's forces plundered and pillaged "weapons, silver and gold" and al-Nāṣir then took control of Radā'. A further battle took place in the fortress of Radā' after which it was handed back to Āmir.⁵⁶

The conflict between the Zaydīs and Tahirids was to escalate dramatically the following year and culminated in the Tahirids' seizure of Ṣan'ā'. In 865/1461 therefore, there converged on Zaydī held Dhamār, two Tahirid armies: al-Zāfir, with foot soldiers, and al-Mujāhid, with troops and the Tihāmah cavalry. Realising that he would get no local support in attacking the sultan, al-Nāṣir fled to the nearby fortress of Hurrān with his family and in the night left for Ṣan'ā' where he began gathering his forces.⁵⁷ Al-Zāfir meanwhile in his camp outside Dhamār received a succession of the elders of Dhamār, including the shaykh of Dhamār, al-Maqmahī, pleading for safe conduct. This was granted to them. Al-Zāfir

⁵⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbā', 105.

⁵⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 590. For Hurrān, see Ḥajarī, Majmū', 751; Smith Simt, II, 161 (1)

appointed his nephew, ʿAlī b. Tāj al-Dīn, as governor of Dhamār and left for Aden to prepare an expedition against the people of al-Shihr who were claiming independence (see below, 65).

A short time later, al-Nāṣir, having mustered his forces returned and recaptured Dhamār. Tāj al-Dīn, its Tahirid governor, fled. In retaliation, the Tahirid sultan al-Zāfir planned a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, the alliance of 860/1456 against al-Nāṣir was revived with the Tahirid sultan al-Zāfir, the Zaydī pretender Muṭahhar and the powerful tribe of Hamdān under the leadership of Amir ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan. The complexities of this alliance are hinted at in the following statement "Hamdān leaned towards Imam Muṭahhar and the Tahirids, while the latter and the imam stood as one against al-Nāṣir".⁵⁸ Imam al-Muṭahhar and Hamdān attacked Ṣanʿā and its surrounding districts. Countering the attack on behalf of al-Nāṣir was Yaḥyā al-Karrāz, more about whom will be heard below. Some skirmishing took place in which a number of al-Muṭahhar's and some of Hamdān's men were killed.

The second line of attack against the Zaydī al-Nāṣir, was against Dhamār. The Tahirid forces once again forced al-Nāṣir out to Hīrrān causing him in his haste to leave behind his treasury whereupon the Tahirids marched in, seized whatever was in the treasury and granted safe conduct to the inhabitants. The palace and the houses of the B. al-Maqmahī were destroyed "while al-Nāṣir looked on from Hīrrān". After some unsuccessful attempts at negotiation over land and fortresses,

⁵⁸ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, *Anbāʾ*, 105.

al-Nāṣir headed back to Ṣan'ā'.⁵⁹ A most interesting event now took place which resulted in al-Nāṣir's capture.

Instead of returning by the expected route, al-Nāṣir turned off via 'Urqub⁶⁰ where he was welcomed by the local tribesmen who invited him in to be their guest. Accepting their hospitality, he accompanied them to their fortress, Haddād, and dispersed his troops round about. As soon as they finished their meal and prayers, al-Nāṣir and his men were robbed by their hosts and insulted. Some of the inhabitants of 'Urqub then went to the Tahirid 'Amir b. Ṭāhīr to let him know what had occurred. The sultan was clearly delighted, rewarded them well and sent them back with shackles and instructions to bring al-Nāṣir down to him. It would seem that the people of 'Urqub had acted entirely on their own initiative. They could not have been in prior collusion with the Tahirids as al-Nāṣir's change of route was, we are told, only on the spur of the moment. Meanwhile, however, news of this affair had spread to the Zaydī fugahā' who were most distressed by this. They appealed to the people of 'Urqub (we presume them to be Zaydīs) advising them "not to destroy the Zaydī madhhab by handing over al-Nāṣir to al-Zāfir but rather to hand him over Imam al-Muṭahhar". The lord of 'Urqub, convinced, then wrote to al-Muṭahhar appraising him of the situation and he personally came down and removed al-Nāṣir and took him shackled to Ṣan'ā'.

⁵⁹ Al-Nāṣir said he would hand over Hīrrān and territory as far south as Dhamār provided the Tahirid sultan would leave all lands to the north of that to al-Nāṣir. The sultan's terms were that al-Nāṣir hand over Hīrrān, return Dhū Marmar back to Hamdān and give unnamed sharīfs (presumably Zaydī) the fortresses they had requested. These terms were unacceptable to al-Nāṣir, Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbā', 105-106; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 592 f.

⁶⁰ In the region of al-Ḥadā, Hamdānī, Ṣifat, (al-Akwa'), 238 and note 3 Ḥajarī, Majmū', 599, spells it 'Urqūb.

Still supporting al-Nāṣir in Ṣan‘ā’ was Ibn Muḫārish, a relative of ‘Alī b. Muḫārish from the Jawf killed at the battle of Raḍm. (see above,⁵²) His men and the garrison of the town resolved to try and liberate him. Also supporting him, as we shall see, was Yaḥyā al-Karrāz and Imam al-Nāṣir’s son Muḥammad. Against al-Nāṣir in Ṣan‘ā’ was Shaṛīfah Fāṭimah who, after being removed from Ṣa‘dah was living in a palace known as Dār al-Kikhyā which had once belonged to her grandfather Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and had since been taken over by al-Nāṣir. A dispute had arisen between the shaṛīfah and the imam over her use of her own servants (presumably guards) which he did not wish her to have. She had persisted in this, nonetheless, and hearing of al-Nāṣir’s capture she locked the gate of her palace and went up with her servants to the roof, shouting support for al-Muṭahhar. The fighting which broke out around her palace was led by Yaḥyā al-Karrāz and Muḥammad b. al-Nasir. They finally broke in and plundered the palace and the shaṛīfah and her daughters were removed elsewhere. Al-Muṭahhar was not at this stage in the city. His preoccupation was to keep al-Nāṣir locked up and he took him from Maṣna‘at Dīla⁶¹ to Kawkabañ and then to the fortress at al-‘Arūs where he was to die in 868/1464.⁶²

Fearing that al-Muṭahhar would try to take Ṣan‘ā’, al-Karrāz and Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir now sought the support of the Tahirids. It is not clear, however, whether al-Zāfir now disassociated himself from al-Muṭahhar his previous ally.

⁶¹ Ḥajarī, Majmū‘, 533, mentions various places called Dīla, the most likely is a mountain near Kawkabañ where there may have been a fortress, none however is called masna‘ah.

⁶² Wilson, Gazetteer, 241, al-‘Arūs is about 5km south of Shibām; Yaḥyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 595, he was buried in the Masjid al-Qubbah in Ṣan‘ā’.

Negotiations between Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir and al-Malik al-Zāfir took place through al-Karrāz and he was much blamed for this role later. The qasr of Ṣan‘ā’ was handed over to al-Zāfir’s messenger, and the khutbah was pronounced in the name of the Tahirids.⁶³ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Dāūd, the sultans’s nephew, the future sultan al-Malik al-Mansūr, arrived in Ṣan‘ā’ as governor and al-Nāṣir’s son Muḥammad was granted some villages around Ṣan‘ā’ and given permission to reside in Ṣan‘ā’ itself.

Nothing further is heard about Ṣan‘ā’ from the sources until 2 years later in 867/1463. In this year al-Malik al-Zāfir came up to Ṣan‘ā’ to counter a rebellion from the people of Dhahbān.⁶⁴ He was at the head of an impressive sized army which included 1,000 cavalry. He fought the people of Ṣan‘ā’ and Hamdañ who, it will be recalled were previously part of the al-Muṭahhar/Tahirid alliance against al-Nāṣir. Punishment was meted out in Tahirid style, with trees cut down in Ḥaddah and houses destroyed.⁶⁵ In the next year we learn that Yaḥyā al-Karrāz was duly recompensed for his efforts on behalf of the Tahirids by being appointed nā’ib of Ṣan‘ā’ along with Muḥammad b. ‘Isā al-Ba‘dānī.⁶⁶

⁶³ The khutbah was in fact pronounced in the name of al-Zāfir even though in 864/1460, it was announced that it would be in the name of al-Mujāhid. This is not explained and may suggest that the Tahirid brothers had decided to be in charge of different parts of their territory.

⁶⁴ Wilson, Gazetteer, 169, a village in the Ṣan‘ā’ plain, he says that it is now pronounced Dhahabān; Ḥajarī, Majmū’, 351.

⁶⁵ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 594; For Ḥaddah, see, Wilson, Gazetteer, 132, a village 8km south-west of Ṣan‘ā’.

⁶⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 596.

In 869/1466 the Zaydīs started their rebellion against the Tahirids in earnest. As this was to become one of the main humiliations suffered by the Tahirids it is worth considering in some detail. There are two main versions, most detail is to be gleaned from the Zaydī sources⁶⁷ while a much briefer version is to be found in Ibn al-Dayba.⁶⁸

When the Tahirids conquered Ṣan‘ā’ in 867/1463 they allowed Muḥammad ibn al-Nāṣir to reside in the city. Two years later they recognized that this had been a mistake, since he acted as a focus for rebellion. Al-Zāfir then wrote to Muḥammad ‘Īsā al-Ba‘dānī telling him that he wanted Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir moved south. Al-Ba‘dānī informed the latter who recognised that this would mean imprisonment for him. Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir then wrote to Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā Shārib, his father’s nā’ib in Dhū Marmar who had remained loyal to him and had continued to provide him with funds. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā Shārib then promised to engineer Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir’s escape.

An opportunity presented itself when al-Ba‘dānī (variously described as ‘āmil or nā’ib) left Ṣan‘ā’ with a large part of the army to collect zakāt from Sanḥān territory,⁶⁹ leaving the city almost empty. Muḥammad ‘Īsā Shārib appeared at Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir’s house and, in the manner of fairy tales, carried him away on a "thoroughbred horse" intending to take him to Dhū Marmar. The townspeople however begged him first to attack the house of al-Karrāz, as they felt

⁶⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbā’, 107; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 596 f.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Dayba, Qurrah, 155 f.

⁶⁹ This is an area to the south-east of Ṣan‘ā’, Ḥajārī, Majmū’, 432.

particularly angered by his role in handing over Ṣan‘ā’ to the Tahirids two years previously. Al-Karrāz’s house was duly plundered and the townspeople then suggested to Muḥammad ‘Īsā Shārib and Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir that they take this opportunity and retake the city completely. The qasr was then attacked and the Hamdān tribesmen in it surrendered immediately. By next morning the Zaydīs had fully consolidated their position.

When this news reached the Tahirid governor of Ṣan‘ā’ al-Ba‘dānī, he was overcome with shame. The sultan was beside himself with rage "he ranted and raged and threatened and gathered a vast, teeming army and set off towards Ṣan‘ā’ which he surrounded on all sides. They set up mangonels and destroyed the walls around Ṣan‘ā’ and the gardens which contained all kinds of fruit and flowers . They caused the wells to be filled up and the rivers to be drained".⁷⁰ The Tahirid forces also destroyed the town of Shibām Banī al-Suhaym in which were antiquities, a description of which the author of the Ghāyah quotes from Hamdānī’s Iklīl.⁷¹

‘Īd al-Adḥā fell during the Tahirid’s seige of Ṣan‘ā’ and, bowing to pressure from the troops, al-Zāfir raised the camp on 13th of Dhū’l-Qa‘dah and went home,

⁷⁰ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 598.

⁷¹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 598. Hamdānī Iklīl VIII, 83-4, Shibām Sukhaym, ".. in it are the remains of great palaces. From this Shibām is carried silver to Ṣan‘ā’ and between it and Ṣan‘ā’ is half a day’s journey. Near this is Raḥabah and in it are great antiquities. Above Shibām is Dhū Marmar". Ḥajarī, Majmū‘, 442, says that Shibām al-Ghirās is what used to be called Shibām Sukhaym and it contains Himyarite antiquities. In the early 1980s there were finds of mummies there by the Archeology department of Ṣan‘ā’ University under Dr. Yūsuf ‘Abdallāh. These are unpublished to my knowledge.

saying he would return in the month of Muḥarram.

On Āmir's departure, Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir now tried to rally more forces. He sent Muḥammad b. Īsā Shārib's brother Ṣalāḥ to the tribe of the B. Jabr and Niḥm to get tribal support but he found that the latter were unfortunately loyal to the Tahirids and Diwār al-Jabrī attacked and killed him. He obtained from the Ṣan'ā' inhabitants 4,000 ūqiyyahs of silver to enable him to pay the troops. Now with sufficient funds, Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir was able to announce that whoever came to join him would be generously rewarded. Many archers came and he also began to rebuild the wall of Ṣan'ā'.⁷²

Al-Zāfir returned as he had promised in Muḥarram 870/1465. In order to force the Ṣan'ānīs into complete submission al-Zāfir decided to cut off the water supply. The destruction wrought on the ghayls is fully chronicled in the Zaydī sources as might be expected but barely referred to by Ibn al-Daybā'.⁷³ Al-Zāfir attacked Ṣan'ā', cutting down the plantations and destroying its strongholds. He then returned safely to his own territory (Juban, al-Miqrānah) and from there he assembled a thousand head of cattle to destroy the remaining wells and the streams around Ṣan'ā'. When he arrived at the foot of Bayt Baws he commanded that the ghayls of al-Aalaaf and al-Barmakī be destroyed.⁷⁴ Al-Zāfir also cut down the trees at

⁷² Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Anbā', 107; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 598-9.

⁷³ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 156; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 599.

⁷⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 599; Serjeant and Lewcock Ṣan'ā', 21, 22 and 26; al-Āmrī "Ghayl al-Barmakī", 29-42.

Ḥaddah "and caused its streams to be diverted".⁷⁵ To emphasise the personal culpability of the sultan, the author of the Ghāyah tells us that "he took great pains over this, even passing by in person by those working under his orders, to see what they were doing".⁷⁶ After this orgy of destruction al-Zāfir returned to Juban on the desert route via Mārib.⁷⁷

The final debacle in the Tahirid 's attempt to recapture Ṣan'ā' was in Dhū'l-Qa'dah of 870/1465. While the Tahirid sultans were in Aden, letters came to al-Malik al-Zāfir from some of the inhabitants of Ṣan'ā' claiming to be supporters of the Tahirids, and described as munāfiqīn (dissemblers) in the Zaydī sources, swearing allegiance and telling him to go and take control of the area. Overcome with joy, he set off in great haste without the approval of his brother al-Malik al-Mujāhid.⁷⁸ In the Bughyah, Ibn al-Dayba' says that al-Zāfir reached Ṣan'ā'"with a large force without being resolute or firm hearted, and ill prepared for battle".⁷⁹

Muḥammadī Isā Shārib, the main Zaydī defender of the city, was outside with only 30 cavalry but managed to enter and rally the people inside. A massive attack took place on the Tahirids camped outside⁸⁰ and 'Āmir al-Malik al-Zāfir was

⁷⁵ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 599.

⁷⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 599.

⁷⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 600.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 157; Ibn al-Dayba' Bughyah, 138

⁷⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 138.

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 157.

killed. The Tahirid army was plundered and dispersed in disarray. Ibn al-Dayba^c attributes the defeat to the sultan's lack of preparedness and the loss of their baggage and wealth which they had not had time to unpack and which a group of Ṣanʿānīs had taken off. Al-Malik al-Zāfir however in the face of both the Zaydī attack and his retreating army "stood firm at the head of the troops from his home territory and they fought honourably until death".⁸¹ This suggests that the deserters were the troops, tribesmen, collected on the way who presumably had only agreed to come at the promise of reward.

Tahirid control of Ṣanʿāʾ was for the time being at an end and Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir was established as imam, his rule lasting for 40 years.⁸²

b) The relationship between the sultans

A question that must be asked at this stage is why, if al-Malik al-Mujāhid was the proclaimed sultan, it was that it was ʿĀmir and not he leading the campaign against the Zaydīs. Some light may be shed on this by examining what can be learnt about the relationship between the two brothers. In 868/1464, a quarrel between them is recounted which took place shortly before the final disastrous Tahirid attempt on Ṣanʿāʾ in 870/1465.

The fullest account of this quarrel is to be found in the Ghāyah.⁸³ This is

⁸¹ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Qurrah, 158.

⁸² Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 603.

⁸³ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 596.

interesting because it clearly shows Ibn al-Dayba's position. In his role as court historian, he was clearly not willing to include anything in his text which might be regarded as sensitive or showing the Tahirids in a bad light. The question does arise where does the author of the Ghāyah obtain this extra information, a question which cannot be answered at present. The story is as follows. Al-Malik al-Mujāhid had appointed as āmīl of Zabīd his brother, ʿAbd al-Malik. Shortly after, however, the latter was dismissed and replaced with Ibn Sufyān, the reason for this was that the sultan had heard that ʿAbd al-Malik had reintroduced the playing of musical instruments (malāhī) to Zabīd which had been popular at the time of the Rasulids. Al-Mujāhid, who is described as virtuous and devout, strongly disapproved of this activity. ʿAbd al-Malik complained to al-Malik al-Zāfir that he had been slandered. Al-Mujāhid, feeling his authority undermined by his family, decided to leave the country. He came down from the mountains and in secret, departed for Mecca by camel avoiding entering Zabīd. When it was clear that al-Mujāhid was not going to enter Zabīd, the qādīs and the faqīhs came out to plead with him to do so. He finally agreed but stayed only a short time and then went on to Aden.⁸⁴

The Bughyah relates that the quarrel was healed after the two sultans went together to Aden and then on to their home territory.⁸⁵ In the Ghāyah another stage in the story is described which is left out by Ibn al-Dayba. After agreeing to enter and remain in Zabīd, al-Mujāhid secretly left for the coast and boarded a ship sailing for Hodeida. The army went out in search of him and news of the

⁸⁴ Ibn al-Dayba, Qurrah, 153 f.

⁸⁵ Ibn al-Dayba, Bughyah, 136.

sultan reached the ‘āmil of Hodeida who prevented him from travelling further and ordered him, it seems, to return to Zabīd. So he returned to the coast of Zabīd (presumably Ghulayfiqah or al-Fāzah) but, obviously still anxious to get away, tried to go to India. The wind however, forced him onto the coast of Aden. Ibn Sufyān followed him and they entered Aden where he was met by his brother al-Zāfir who eventually succeeded in curing him of his anger and melancholy.⁸⁶ What al-Mujāhid’s intentions actually were is not clear. He may indeed have been trying to abdicate which would explain the anxiety of the qādīs and faqīhs of Zabīd who would then have feared anarchy and civil disorder.⁸⁷

Despite patching up their quarrel, it is clear that there was still some animosity between them as is indicated by al-Zāfir’s ill-considered attack on Ṣan‘ā’ which he undertook without prior consultation with his brother al-Mujāhid. It could also be that the price that al-Mujāhid paid for being sultan was that al-Zāfir would control the northern part of the domain which would explain why the campaigns against the Zaydīs were organised by him and why the khutbah was proclaimed in his name in Ṣan‘ā’.

Beyond the attempted conquest of Ṣan‘ā’, there were several other matters to preoccupy the Tahirids. These were primarily concerned with consolidation of their

⁸⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 596.

⁸⁷ It is curious that neither the Bughyah nor the Qurrah makes any mention of the music issue. The Bughyah attributes al-Mujāhid’s anger to a quarrel between him and al-Zāfir over Ibn Sufyān whom al-Mujāhid felt had been imposed on him by his brother. This does not quite accord with the Ghāyah where al-Mujāhid actually appointed Ibn Sufyān.

control firstly over the newly won port of al-Shiḥr, and secondly over the troublesome elements such as the powerful Ḥubayshīs and the Tihāmah tribes.

c) The expedition to al-Shiḥr

As was discussed earlier al-Shiḥr had been taken by the Tahirids in 861/1457 and Amir Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī appointed as governor in 863/1459. Two years later in 865/1461 brothers of the former independent ruler of al-Shiḥr, Abū Dujānah, defied Tahirid authority and began plundering ships on their way to Aden. The following year,

al-Malik al-Zāfir retaliated and sent out an expedition to defeat the rebellious brothers. A large force was assembled and set out for Aden

The hire of the camels alone reports Ibn al-Daybā' in a slightly shocked tone, cost 12,000 dinars.⁸⁸ When the sultan reached Aden, he loaded up his ships with men and supplies and proceeded to al-Shiḥr along the coast road, his ships at sea keeping pace with him. This was not, it seems, an easy task, as at one point the ships lost sight of the army and the sultan and his troops nearly perished for lack of water.⁸⁹ Faced with this large army, the rebel leader fled. The author of the Ghāyah provides two versions of the ensuing events. In the first version, al-Zāfir went in and fought the inhabitants, garrisoned the town, treated with the elders and made peace with the lord of Zafār, al-Ḥabūdī.⁹⁰ In the other version,

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 153.

⁸⁹ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 591.

⁹⁰ The Ḥabūdīs, who are thought to have originated from the Ḥaḍramī village Ḥabūdah near Saywūn were in control of Zafār until it was conquered by the Rāsulid sultan al-Muzaffar in 678/1279 see Smith, "The Rāsulids in Dhofar", 29f.

al-Ḥabūḍī was defeated by the Tahirid general and ex governor of al-Shiḥr, Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī. This last version is from the Qurrah and following this, Jayyāsh then entered the town and sent news of the ensuing victory with his son, ʿAlam al-Dīn Sulaymān, to the Tahirid sultan. ʿAbd al-Malik, the sultan's nephew, then entered al-Shiḥr and plundered it. After a period al-Zāfir himself came in, ordered the plunder to stop and settled the affairs of the town, appointing Amir Aḥmad b. Sunqur al-Yamānī as governor and taking prisoners to Aden. He also compelled the Kathīrī lord of Zafār to help him.⁹¹ The ʿĀl Kathīr whose base was in the region of Zafār, had been hostile to Abū Dujānah since his tribe, the Kindah, had taken al-Shiḥr in 838/1434-5. The Tahirids were not, however, able to maintain control over al-Shiḥr for long and, by the end of the 9th/15th century, the Tahirids had lost it to the Kathīrīs who also held parts of the interior of the Ḥadramawṭ. The continuing history of the region from this time on which lies outside the scope of the present study, is dominated by the struggles of the Kathīrīs against the Aden based tribe of Yāfi.⁹²

d) The rebellions of the Ḥubayshī brothers

A family that figures strongly during this period is that of the Ḥubayshīs. There is some potential confusion as we are dealing with two groups of Ḥubayshīs who may or may not be other than loosely related; the first are rebels against the sultan, the second was an amir working for the Tahirids.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 153; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 132.

⁹² Smith, "Ḥadramawṭ".

⁹³ Al-Ḥubayshī, granted an iqṭāʿ in the northern part of the Tahirid domain in 876/1471, Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 162, was heavily involved in leading the battles against the rebellious tribes. When Sultan al-Mujāhid fell ill in

‘Abbās b. Jalāl b. ‘Abd al-Bāqī and his brother Idrīs al-Ḥubayshī were constantly capturing fortresses in the Dhū Jiblah area from the Tahirids and then losing them to the sultans.⁹⁴ References to these struggles begin in 861/1457 with the recapture by ‘Abbās b. al-Jalāl b. ‘Abd al-Bāqī al-Ḥubayshī of his own area (mikhlāf) in Dhū Jiblah.⁹⁵ Sultan al-Mujāhid, tried to regain it and in 862/1458 he defeated al-Ḥubayshī and killed many of his followers. The sultan then tried to bring under his control all the areas affected by al-Ḥubayshī’s rebellion: and a few months later he recaptured a number of his fortresses.⁹⁶ Four years later in 866/1462 the sultan once again recaptured Ḥubayshī fortresses which had presumably in the meantime been reclaimed by al-Ḥubayshī. Al-Ḥubayshī promised obedience in 868/1464 and they made peace. His brother Idrīs, however, rebelled the following year and this led to the siege of the fortress of Khadād near Dhū Jiblah in which the sultan eventually achieved victory. In 879/1474 shaykh Idrīs finally conceded defeat and as a sign of his capitulation, we learn that he joined the sultan in a ceremonial entrance into Ta‘izz.⁹⁷ Nothing more is heard until 882/1478 when the sultan once again besieged the fortress of Khadād, presumably retaken by Idrīs. The latter took refuge in the nearby fortress of

877/1472 and his nephew, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was appointed caretaker, the amir took advantage of the situation to expand his territory and sow seeds of dissent in Zabīd in particular among the scribes (kuttāb). He was arrested and ordered to pay large sums in compensation and prevented from working with the scribes. He was back in favour in 878/1473, Ibn al-Daybā‘, Bughyah, 147, 149.

⁹⁴ ‘Abd al-‘Āl, B. Rasūl wa B. Tāhir, 310-313.

⁹⁵ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Qurrah, 151.

⁹⁶ Yahyā b. al-Husayn Ghāyah, 589.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Bughyah, 150.

al-Khadrā'. The sultan ordered an attack with mangonels and Idrīs once again suffered defeat.⁹⁸

The final end to the Ḥubayshī rebellion came in 883/1478 when Shaykh Idrīs was killed in Aden by the Tahirid amir ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Azīz al-Ḥubayshī. The sultan had given him permission to do this on account of the fact that Shaykh Idrīs had killed his father. The fortress of Khadād was still not in Tahirid hands, however, and they were not able to capture it until 886/1481 during the reign of al-Malik al-Mansūr after a lengthy siege.⁹⁹

e) Rebellions on the Tihāmah

Following the death of al-Malik al-Zāfir outside Ṣanʿāʾ in 870/1465 the lands of the Tahirids fell into turmoil, with opposition to Sultan al-Mujāhid rising up on all fronts. The Zaydīs having regained Ṣanʿāʾ and Dhamār, al-Mujāhid's next years were spent maintaining order on the Tihāmah and constantly on the move.¹⁰⁰

In 872/1467, there were four fires in Zabīd substantiating Ṣāliḥiyyah's view, (above, 4) that these were no accidents but retaliation on the part of the tribes. Ibn Sufyān, the governor of Zabīd appears to be in charge of quelling the tribes. In 873/1468 there were confrontations with al-Kaʿbiyyūn;¹⁰¹ In 874/1469, with the

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 156.

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 165.

¹⁰⁰ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 603; Anbāʾ, 108.

¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 159 and note 2. The tribe resided in northern Tihāmah; Schuman, Qilādah, 58

Rumāt;¹⁰² later in the year against the B. Ḥafīṣ, one of the more serious encounters of this short period.

The B. Ḥafīṣ were a tribe residing in northern Tihāmah opposite the Kamarān islands in and around al-Zaydiyyah. They were connected to the tribe of the Zaydiyyah.¹⁰³ At the beginning of the Tahirid period, the B. Ḥafīṣ were loyal to the Tahirids. It is not clear what made them rebellious, ʿAbd al-ʿĀl suggests that they were influenced by their neighbours the Maʿāzibah.¹⁰⁴ In 874/1470, Ibn Sufyān attacked them and killed their leader Abū 'l-Ghayth b. Muḥammad b. Ḥafīṣ and large numbers of his followers. Ibn Sufyān then captured a number of their villages, leaving a security force in al-Sharīḥ which he fortified, leaving in charge of it Sulaymān b. Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī. Aḥmad b. Abī 'l-Ghayth, the son of the former leader of the B. Ḥafīṣ, sought protection in Bayt al-Faqīh b. Ḥushaybar.¹⁰⁵ It was not long however before the security force in al-Sharīḥ was attacked by the B. Ḥafīṣ but it managed to hold out. The sultan then sent a force to avenge the attacks in 875/1470 at the head of which was the sultan's brother ʿAbd al-Malik and Ibn Sufyān. In the ensuing battle the B. Ḥafīṣ were defeated with 200 dead the Tahirid Amir ʿAlī b. Sufyān however, was killed. Clearly this was not enough to pacify the rebellious tribe. Later in the year, Sultan al-Mujāhid attempted to buy them off with a gift of 12,000 dinars which he handed over to

¹⁰² Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 159 and note 3, the Rumāt now called al-Zāmiyah reside to the east of al-Manḥūrīyyah.

¹⁰³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 159; Schuman, Qilādah, 57; Ḥajarī, Majmūʿ, 398.

¹⁰⁴ ʿAbd al-ʿĀl, B. Rasūl wa B. Ṭahir, 300 f.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 159 and note 4, the B. Ḥushaybar still reside in Wadi Surdud; al-Sharīḥ is in Zaydiyyah territory.

‘Izz al-Dīn b. Ḥafīṣ to distribute among the tribesmen.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately for ‘Izz al-Dīn, he was attacked and plundered as he went through the territory of the Rimāt. Once more the sultan’s army came out in force to quell the rebels and peace eventually was made.¹⁰⁷

With this confrontation, Sultan al-Mujāhid lost his most trusted amir, ‘Alī b. Sufyān. He was replaced as governor of Zabīd by Qādī Sharaf al-Dīn Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad al-Aḥmar. His first action was to permit the inhabitants to use palm fronds for their roofs after they had been prevented from doing so for three years for fear of fires (*above*, 44). Al-Aḥmar’s standing is gauged by the statement that only his intercession in this matter succeeded in moving the sultan where even that of the Chief Qādī al-Nāshirī failed.¹⁰⁸

f) The role of Shaykh Yūsuf and the invasion of Jīzān by Sharīf Muḥammad b. Barakāt

It is understandable that in times of difficulty the sultan should rely on his immediate family, although, as we shall see in the reign of ‘Amir b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the future al-Malik al-Zāfir it was his family who posed the strongest threat (*below*, 84) ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the sultan’s nephew, as mentioned above, deputised for him during his illness, and Shaykh Yūsuf was appointed

¹⁰⁶ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Bughyah, 144.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Bughyah, 144.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Qurrah, 161; Ibn al-Dayba‘, Bughyah, 145.

deputy of Zabīd in 879/1474. Yūsuf was one of the six sons of al-Malik al-Zāfir Āmir. He was very popular in Zabīd, his entertaining noted in this same year as being more lavish than the sultan's.¹⁰⁹ He was also known as a collector of precious books and a scholar, particularly of language and medicine. Ibn al-Dayba^c also adds that he was not a religious scholar, perhaps to explain his disloyal actions against the new sultan later.¹¹⁰ After the sultan's recovery, Shaykh Yūsuf appears to have an increasingly prominent role in the affairs of the state. He is particularly noted as taking part in the conflicts with the tribes. He also became involved in a dispute over Jīzān.

In 882/1477 the sources record the invasion of Jīzān by the lord of Mecca. It seems that there was a profound disagreement between the Sharīf Muḥammad b. Barakāt, lord of Mecca and Aḥmad b. Dīb,¹¹¹ lord of Jīzān "for a well known reason" which Ibn al-Dayba^c does not elucidate. Muḥammad b. Barakāt prepared to invade Jīzān but curiously prepared himself as though for a pilgrimage, with litters and wives in addition to a large army. After a fruitless exchange of letters, a battle took place which Muḥammad b. Barakāt won and in which Jīzān was plundered, the city wall destroyed and its treasury full of precious books, weapons and robes collected by Aḥmad b. Dīb's father and grandfather pillaged. According to the Ghāyah, Ibn Dīb's son fled to Zabīd where he was welcomed by Shaykh

¹⁰⁹ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 149.

¹¹⁰ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 149.

¹¹¹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 609 where his name is given as Aḥmad b. Darīb b. Khālid.

Yūsuf.¹¹²

In 883/1478, the sultan al-Malik al-Mujāhid ‘Alī died. At the end of the month of Muḥarram he had gone up to Juban from Aden and requested the presence of Shams al-Dīn al-Muqrī. Although his pain got worse, his mind was firm, says Ibn al-Daybā‘, and he appointed Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qammāt al-Zabīdī as chief qādī in Aden.¹¹³ After his death, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Malik prepared his body and the obsequies were performed. In the customary eulogy at the end of the chapter about him, he is praised for his generosity and particularly noted for his distribution of 1,000 mudd¹¹⁴ of food and a large quantity of gold in 881/1476 to the people of Zabīd. His piety is also noted (there was an example of this in the incident over the playing of music in Zabīd (above, 63) and while in Zabīd he would often attend hadīth classes. The chronicler says that during his reign, the Arab tribes (‘arab) and the slaves in Tihāmah were at the height of their dissent and that he controlled them. This is questionable, rather, it can be said that he attempted to control them with varying degrees of success. A number of monuments were built or repaired during his reign (below, 175) and in terms of agriculture, he planted palms in Wadi Zabīd, in Wadi Laḥj and outside Aden, as well as sugar cane and rice.¹¹⁵ As regards any foreign policy, it can be said in general terms that he was too concerned with maintaining order in his domain, as was his brother al-Malik al-Zāfir, to concern himself much with the outside world.

¹¹² Ibn al-Daybā‘, Qurrah, 165; Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 609.

¹¹³ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 53. The word qammāt means cattle dealer c.f. Serjeant and Lewcock, San‘ā’, 590

¹¹⁴ A mudd is a dry measure for grain, see footnote 8, chapter 6.

¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Qurrah, 167.

An exception to this however is that in 879/1474 he was to provide help in the way of 105 horses and swords to the lord of the Ḥabashah Shams al-Dīn Muhammad b. Badhalay b. Saʿd al-Dīn in his jihād.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 163 and note 3; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 150. Cambridge History of Africa, III, 154-6

Chapter 4

THE REIGNS OF ʿABD AL-WAHHĀB AL-MALIK AL-MANṢŪR (883-94/1478-89) AND ʿĀMIR AL-MALIK AL-ZĀFIR (894-923/1489-1517)

i) Introduction; ii) The reign of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Manṣūr 883-94/1478-89; a) The rebellion of Shaykh Yūsuf, b) The Tihāmah tribes, c) A visit by the lord of Jīzān, d) A Zaydī/Tahirid confrontation, e) The rise of Shaykh ʿĀmir, **iii) The reign of ʿĀmir al-Malik al-Zāfir 894-923/1489-1517;** a) Rebellions against the sultan, b) A scandal concerning the head of the Zabīd mint, c) The collection of kharāj and signs of prosperity.

i) Introduction

This chapter examines the reigns of the sultans al-Malik al-Manṣūr and al-Malik al-Zāfir. Both had difficulties establishing themselves at the beginnings of their reigns, their succession rebelled against by rivals within their family. Both continued to encounter opposition from the Tihāmah tribes, as did their predecessors. Al-Malik al-Zāfir was the most successful in obtaining the required taxes from the tribes largely through the actions of his powerful amirs. Signs of prosperity are now evident, more buildings are commissioned or repaired, manuscripts are purchased and copied. This relatively peaceful interlude was to be brought to an abrupt end by the arrival of the Portuguese and subsequent events which are discussed in chapter 5.

ii) The reign of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Manṣūr (883-94/1478-89)

a) The rebellion of Shaykh Yūsuf

Al-Mujāhid appointed his nephew ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, who had desputised for him during his illness, to succeed him. He gave himself the laqab of al-Manṣūr and his full title as stated by Ibn al-Daybāʿ was al-ʿAmir bi 'l-ʿadl wa 'l-ihsān al-Malik al-Manṣūr dhū al-māʿalī wa'l- mafākir ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; Tāj al-Dīn b. Dāʿūd b. Tāhir.¹

Other members of the Tahirid family however did not accept this easily. Particularly disappointed was his cousin Yūsuf who it will be recalled, had been appointed deputy of Zabīd in 879/1474. Immediately following his appointment, the new sultan, accompanied by Shaykh al-Qamāt, went first to Aden. He entered secretly, before the inhabitants should learn of the death of his uncle and established his authority in particular over Yāfiʿ. He distributed robes of honour and carried out his uncle's wishes appointing Shaykh al-Qamāt chief qāḍī of Aden.² He went from there to Taʿizz and was about to go on to Zabīd when he heard of his cousin Yūsuf's rebellious intentions. Words of reconciliation, the inducement of 1,000 ashrafī dinars were of no avail and al-Manṣūr decided to fight it out.³ Yūsuf persuaded the Zabīdīs (largely through threats, says Ibn al-Daybāʿ) to support him and he ordered the khatīb to pronounce the khutbah in the name of the B. Tāhir in general, rather than in the name of al-Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. (It is interesting that his rebellion was not so extreme that he should request the khutbah in his own name). Sultan al-Manṣūr immediately returned to

¹ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 159.

² Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 169; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 159; Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 609-10.

³ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 168.

Aden and collected five lakk⁴ of gold and a large amount of silver from the treasury and took it to al-Miqrānah, presumably to prevent Yūsuf getting hold of it should anything go disastrously wrong. He then prepared a large army ready to march on Zabīd. Yūsuf ordered his supporters who are referred to as ʿabīd al-sultān and ʿabīd al-sayyid to position themselves outside the town to prevent the entry of the sultan's forces and went out with them himself leaving the amir, Qāsim b. Wahbān, in charge of Zabīd. The amir pretended to be on Yūsuf's side while in fact supporting the sultan. And thus it happened that, when Yūsuf returned he found the gates of Zabīd locked against him and unable to enter he decided to make for the fortress of Qawārīr.⁵ It was dark however, Yūsuf and his companions could not find a guide and his resolve weakened. Shaykh Buḥayr ordered those guarding the gates of Zabīd to declare victory for the sultan and advised Yūsuf to give himself up. Yūsuf agreed and made his way to the sultan's camp where the sultan was kind to him and ordered him to go and sleep in the tent of his brother Aḥmad who had remained loyal to the sultan. The next day they all made a grand ceremonial entry into Zabīd with 500 horses and an equal number of men. (The sultan was accompanied at all times by Shaykh Aḥmad). As for Shaykh Yūsuf, confined to Zabīd and anxious to leave, he was finally allowed to go accompanied by two of his uncle's supporters al-Ḥājj Muḥammad lord of Darāʿ, and Shaykh Muḥammad al-ʿAbsī, his anger so intense, Ibn al-Daybaʿ says that he was close to murdering them.⁶ They arrived at the port of al-Buqʿah

⁴ A lakk, is 100,000 coins.

⁵ Smith, Simt, II, 191; Ḥajari, Majmūʿ, 658, says it is situated north-east of Zabīd and has changed its name to al-Makʿal.

⁶ Bughyah, 160-1

where a ship was waiting to take him on his way to Mecca. Prior to his departure he had entrusted money, weapons and other possessions to his friends in Zabīd who were Qādī 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Nāshirī, Jamāl al-Fihri, Shaykh al-Gha-zālī (see above, 36) and Shaykh Aḥmad al-Shanīnī, lord of the Qurashī tribe. The sultan ordered everything to be handed over and all agreed except Qādī 'Alī al-Nāshirī. This action was to bring about his downfall. Shaykh Yūsuf then departed to Mecca where he was warmly greeted by Muḥammad b. Barakāt (despite his having helped the latter's opponent Aḥmad b. Dīb above, 71). But if he was expecting help of any kind, he did not receive it. He went from there to Jīzān where he was well received by Sharīf al-Ghawāyir, and then returned to the Yemen and entering the territory of the B. Ḥafīṣ, sought the protection of Aḥmad b. Abī al-Ghayth. The latter not only gave him refuge but his daughter in marriage.

The B. Ḥafīṣ were long standing enemies of the Tahirids. Attempts to force them into submission were mentioned above in chapter 3. That Yūsuf should seek protection there is therefore not surprising. In 884/1479 the sultan launched an attack on the B. Ḥafīṣ to recover his cousin and punish them for harbouring him. During this campaign, the sultan's loyal cousin Aḥmad was killed.⁷ Yūsuf was captured and taken to Ta'izz then later to Radā' where he was imprisoned and eventually died. The sultan's anger against the B. Ḥafīṣ was still not satisfied for in the following year in 885/1480 he attacked them again.⁸

⁷ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 163.

⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 165; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn Ghāyah, 611, and attacked the tribe of Rimāt at the same time.

b) The Tihāmah tribes

The most serious threat to al-Manṣūr's sultanate was now over and the only other member of the Tahirid family to rebel but who was quickly restrained was Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. ʿĀmir, his cousin and one of Yūsuf's brothers in 890/1485 or 891/1486 the sultan sent Ibrāhīm to join Yūsuf in the fortress of Radā.⁹

As with his predecessor, the sultan's most serious efforts between the years 885/1480 and 894/1488 were concentrated on the tribes. These encounters can be summarised as follows. In 885/1489, there was an attack by the sultan's forces on the Zaydiyyūn as well as the attack on the B. Ḥafīṣ mentioned above.¹⁰ In 886/1480, there was another campaign against the Zaydiyyūn and against the "arab" in Bayt al-Faḳīh to obtain kharāj.¹¹ In 887/1482, the troublesome Aḥmad b. Ḥafīṣ was captured which was the cause of great celebrations in Zabīd. He was taken to jail in Taʿizz.¹² In the same year, the sultan mounted an attack on the ʿĀmirī slaves, who had been rendering the roads unsafe by attacking travellers.¹³ In 888/1483, the Zaydiyyūn attacked a number of Tahirid amirs, Hilāl and qādī Sharaf al-Aḥmar (previously head of the dīwān), and qādī al-Aḥmar was wounded. Al-Manṣūr sent ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Azīz al-Ḥubayshī to deal with them and also went himself. A number of villages of the Zaydiyyūn were destroyed including

⁹ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 175; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 165. The texts differ on the date.

¹⁰ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 164-5; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 172.

¹¹ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 166.

¹² Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 170.

¹³ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 170-1.

Bayt al-Faḳīh b. Ḥushaybar.¹⁴ In 890/1485, the Zaydiyyūn were besieged by the sultan's forces and capitulated handing over 130 horses, 40 camels and 40,000 dinars and were ordered to leave Bayt al-Faḳīh b. Ḥushaybar.¹⁵ There was a further campaign against the Zaydiyyūn in 891/1486 in Wadi Mawr under the leadership of Amir Qāsim b. Wahbān to get kharāj. He was killed as was Faḳīh 'Alī b. al-Tayyib al-Najjār known as a scholar of science. He had been in charge of the waqf relating to mosques and wells and there were with him on the campaign a number of kuttāb and slaves. The sultan sent a force under Amir 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ḥubayshī who succeeded in obtaining the kharāj from the various tribes.¹⁶ The latter had been appointed āmīl over Tihāmah principally to collect kharāj and, as has been seen, this was his principal activity.

Also in 891/1486, Umar b. 'Abd al-Azīz al-Ḥubayshī placed two scribes in Bayt al-Faḳīh b. Ḥushaybar who committed atrocities and oppressed people and were as a result attacked and killed by Arab tribesmen ('arab) of the B. 'Atīq in 892/1487. After hearing news of this the sultan sent forces to Zabīd. The tribesmen, hearing of the sultan's arrival, carried out an attack on al-Ḥubayshī. Since his forces were very few, he was defeated and escaped to the territory of the Zā' liyyūn and remained there until the sultan arrived. The sultan mounted a huge attack with

¹⁴ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 175; Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 174.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 175; Ibn al-Dayba' Qurrah, 175.

¹⁶ The tribes specifically mentioned are tribes of Wadi Mawr and Wadi Surdud, al-Wā'idhāt, al-Sāmiyyūn, al-Zā' liyyūn, and the Zaydiyyūn, who handed over 100 head of horse, Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 176; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 176; Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 614.

1,000 horses. He found al-Zaydiyyah empty of its inhabitants and set it on fire.¹⁷ In 893/1488 there were further campaigns against the Zaydiyyūn. This time no fighting to obtain kharāj was involved, kharāj was also obtained from the Rimāt and the Lamiyyūn and 70 horses were taken from them.¹⁸ In 894/1489 there was another successful campaign to obtain kharāj from the tribes including the Zaydiyyūn which was ordered by Shaykh ʿĀmir (the future al-Malik al-Zāfir) and headed by Muḥammad b. ʿĪsa al-Baʿdānī just prior to death of Sultan.¹⁹

As can be noted from the summary above, the tribe most resistant to the sultan's authority were the Zaydiyyūn. There is no mention of the Maʿāzibah or the Qurashīs on this occasion. The intention of the attacks was to obtain the kharāj, a task of which al-Ḥubayshī seemed to be generally in charge. Their refusal to give it was naturally regarded as rebellion and resulted inevitably in the arrival of the sultan's forces. The persistence on both sides is remarkable. It is also worth noting that during this period four major fires occurred in Zabīd, only one of which, in 889/1484, can probably be ascribed to natural causes.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 177-8 has the most detail; see also Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 615; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 176-7.

¹⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 180; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 177.

¹⁹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 182.

²⁰ There was a strong wind, a star was sighted and there was an earthquake and the old rows of shops outside Bāb al-Qurtub burnt down. The fire spread as far as the Ribāt of Shaykh Aflah near Bāb Shabāriq, Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 172.

A great fire is recorded in 885/1480 when much was destroyed.²¹ Another fire is recorded in 886/1481²² and another later in the year²³ was known as the fire of the grapes as so many of the vines were burnt .

It is interesting to note that in all cases shops and possessions are noted as being affected rather than houses which would therefore make these fires further examples of the economic warfare waged against the Tahirids discussed by Ṣālihiyyah above (44) .

c) A visit by the lord of Jīzān

An event of some significance was the diplomatic visit in 887/1482 by the lord of Jīzān, Sharīf Abū 'l-Ghawāyir Aḥmad b. Darīb (or Dīb see above, 71). It will be recalled that previous mention of Jīzān was in connection with its destruction by the sharīf of Mecca, Muḥamad b. Barakāt in 882/1477. It is difficult to gauge precisely relations between Jīzān and the Tahirids: in 865/1461 it was noted that Ismā'īl al-Jabartī had been caught corresponding with the lord of Jīzān.²⁴

²¹ It started from the east of the shops of Ibn al-Wajīh spreading to the east to the walls and the north to the area of Zayālī^ʿ and to the south to al-Suwayqah and many possessions were lost , Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Bughyah, 165.

²² It started opposite sūq al-Marbā^ʿ and finished at al-Suwayqah many people were killed and possessions were lost. It is regarded as one of the most famous fires, Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Bughyah, 166.

²³ It started from the Ḥāfat al-Damūt and finished at the mosque of Fawfalāh, Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Bughyah, 169.

²⁴ As a result of his alleged correspondance with the lord of Jīzān in which he had apparently encouraged him to think covetously of Yemen atma^ʿhu fī 'l balad, Jabartī had all the waqf land under his supervision seized by order of the sultan and he was punished. It turned out however that the sultan had been wrong and that Jabartī had been slandered. He was reinstated in his position, Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Qurrah, 153.

Following the sacking of Jīzān in 882/1477, Ibn Darīb's son fled and was given protection in Zabīd by Shaykh Yūsuf who was then deputy in Zabīd. Yūsuf, following his rebellion against his cousin the sultan in 883/1478 sought protection in his turn with the lord of Jīzān. This would suggest therefore that the lord of Jīzān and the Tahirid sultans were not on particularly friendly terms but the background is not given. The visit by the sharīf of Jīzān to the Tahirid sultan was a grand affair, obviously intended to demonstrate a new start in relations, and is described in some detail. The sultan had not received previous warning of the visit and on learning that the sharīf was on his way with a large army, immediately sent for his regalia (al-ālat al-sultāniyyah wa'kuhbah al-mulūkiyyah)²⁵ which was kept in the treasury (presumably in al-Miqrānah). After the formal greeting, as it was noon, the sharīf, some of his army and the amirs went to one of the gardens to rest. They met again in the afternoon, the sharīf making a grand entrance through Bāb Sh-bāriq to the Dār al-Kabīr al-Nāsirī. Outside the palace, the horses paraded. There was a reception attended by qādīs, amirs and ulema and later he was given presents and money. Here we may have the crux of the reason for the visit, the funds perhaps badly needed for the rebuilding of Jīzān.²⁶

d) A Zaydī/Tahirid confrontation

The eleven year reign of al-Malik al-Mansūr 'Abd al-Wahhāb was largely concerned, as we have seen, with extracting taxes from recalcitrant tribes in Tihāmah. We learn only of one confrontation with the Zaydī imams and that is in

²⁵ Ibn al-Dayba' Bughyah, 168.

²⁶ loc. cit

889/1484. With very little comment we learn that the Zaydīs lost control of Dhamār after having held it for 16 years. There was a battle and ʿAbdallāh son of Imam al-Muṭahhar its governor, fled to Ṣanʿāʾ. Here we have an interesting twist. The Ghāyah tells us that ʿAbdallāh was made welcome in Ṣanʿāʾ by Muḥammad ibn al-Nāṣir. The enmity between the fathers of ʿAbdallāh and Muḥammad had been extreme and the events of the years were described above. (50-1) The two Zaydīs now made it up as a result of the Tahirid action and ʿAbdallāh was to remain in Ṣanʿāʾ until ʿAmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (the future sultan, al-Zāfir) captured it in 910/1504.²⁷

e) The rise of Shaykh ʿĀmir

During 893-4/1488-9 Shaykh ʿĀmir became more prominent and his actions indicate his position as heir apparent. He arrived in Zabīd with a large army in 894/1489 and appointed in charge of it, Muḥammad al-Baʿdānī. The army was sent to al-Zaydiyyah to obtain the kharāj as mentioned above (80). Al-Baʿdānī was very successful and had agreed certain conditions with the tribal leaders, they handing over much money and horses. They all came together to Zabīd (including the tribal leaders) to whom the sultan gave ceremonial robes.²⁸ ʿĀmir then gave out generous sadaqāt and the skilled cavalry arrived from Aden and put on an impressive performance. He freed the sons of Aḥmad b. Abī ʿ-ī-Ghayth b. Ḥafīṣ at the same time honouring them. In order to guarantee good behaviour he took as hostages a number of the B. Ḥafīṣ women and children. During his stay in Zabīd, Shaykh ʿĀmir ordered the repairs of mosques and madrasahs. After which he

²⁷ Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 614.

²⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 182.

joined his father in Juban. His father was suffering from something affecting his leg which was to cause his death.²⁹ He died on 7 Jumādā 1894/1489 in Juban and was buried there. Among his good works are cited a number of monuments (see chapter 7), and irrigation works in Wadi Zabīd.³⁰ In the Qurrah it is particularly noted that one of the good things that he did was to leave the awqāf alone, the affairs of which he had placed in the hands of the chief qādī.

iii) The reign of ʿAmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Zāfir 894-923/1489-1517

a) Rebellions against the sultan

In 894/1489, according to his father's wishes the new sultan ʿAmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb took office, following agreement by consensus among the elders.³¹ He gave himself the laqab of al-Malik al-Zāfir with the additional title of Ṣafāh al-Dunyā wa 'l-Dīn. As with his father al-Manṣūr, his succession did not go uncontested. It soon transpired that the agreement by consensus was by no means a unanimous view. The struggle on this occasion was, however, more bitter and took longer to resolve. Ranged against the sultan were his uncles, sons of the first Tahirid sultan, ʿAmir, (r. 858-65/1454-60) who had already been passed over once with the succession of the third Tahirid sultan, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Manṣūr in 883/1478. Actively involved in the rebellion were ʿAmir I's sons Muḥammad, ʿAbdallāh (one of the main ring leaders), ʿUmar, Aḥmad and the latter's son Dāūd. It will be recalled that ʿAmir I's other sons, Ibrāhīm and Yūsuf, had rebelled under

²⁹ The term used is al-riyāh, rheumatism, Serjeant and Lewcock, San'a', 592

³⁰ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 183.

³¹ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 185.

al-Manṣūr and were still in jail in Radā. This doubtless increased the resentment against the new sultan. Also opposing the sultan was ʿAbd al-Bāqī b. Muḥammad b. Tāhir. On the sultan's side were his immediate cousins from the line of Dāʾūd b. Tāhir; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Dāʾūd and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Dāʾūd. (see figure 3)

Once the funeral arrangements for al-Manṣūr were over in Juban, Sultan ʿAmir went to al-Miqrānah. He obtained, so he thought, the allegiance of his cousin, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAmir, and gave him as iqṭāʿ the eastern part of the Tahirid domain (al-bilād al-sharqiyyah), it is not specified exactly where.³² The sultan soon left al-Miqrānah for Taʿizz, bothered by the crowds of people there consisting largely of army personnel and delegations of people coming to petition him. While he was in Taʿizz, he heard the news that his uncles, ʿAbdallāh, Muḥammad and ʿUmar had broken their promise of allegiance, had taken control of Juban and gathered an army comprising members of Yāfiʿ and many of the inhabitants of Juban. They captured the fortress, destroyed the 300-roomed palace built by al-Malik al-Manṣūr, houses belonging to merchants, those of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik, brother of the sultan and Amir Muḥammad b. ʿIsā al-Baʿ dānī and others. They destroyed houses in lower Juban, sparing only those of their followers. The sultan prepared a huge army of 20,000 warriors (moqātil),³³ and besieged the rebels in the citadel. When Qādī ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Salām heard of the sultan's arrival near Juban, he came out to meet him; in retaliation, Shaykh Aḥmad, one of the rebel uncles, ordered the qādī's house to be destroyed; in it was a collection of 1,500

³² Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 185; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 180.

³³ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 180; Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 616.

precious books.

With the news of the arrival of the sultan's large army at Juban, 'Abdallāh b. 'Āmir had fled to Jabal Ḥarīz,³⁴ and from there to Yāfi' territory. The sultan sent after him a force under the leadership of his cousin, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Dāūd. Aḥmad, the son of the rebel uncle Dāūd was taken prisoner and many of the rebels were killed.³⁵

An agreement drawn up by Amir 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ḥubayshī eventually resulted in peace between the sultan, and the rebels in the fortress of Juban, according to which, the rebels would receive 40,000 dinars annually from the revenues of Aden and in addition the lands of Jabal Ḥarīz and al-Shu'ayb.³⁶ The siege of the citadel which had lasted 55 days was lifted.³⁷

While in Radā' shortly afterwards, the sultan heard that the uncles had again broken the agreement and Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Āmir and al-Muntaṣar al-'Arabī

³⁴ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 180; Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 186, note 1 this is south-west of Qa'tabah.

³⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 186; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 180.

³⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 187.

³⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 617 has slightly different order of events with the capitulation of the rebels in Juban in 895/1490 just before the account of the rebellious Tihāmah tribes culminating in the defeat and capture of 'Abdallah b. 'Āmir and 'Abd al-Bāqī b. Muḥammad and Shaykh Dāūd b. 'Alī b. Tāj al-Dīn (see fig. 34) The latter is being mentioned for the first time. The rebels were in a fortress close to Juban called al-Rubay'atayn, Ḥajarī, Majmū', 355.

and the son of the lord of Mar'it³⁸ had arrived in Ta'izz and a number of the inhabitants had encouraged Shaykh Muḥammad to try and take the city. In Ta'izz was the sultan's appointee, Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Muqrī, who ordered the people to fight the rebels. The lord of Mar'it was killed and the rebels retreated. As for the amir, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (al-Ḥubayshī) who was in Ta'izz, he went out without participating in the fight. This greatly angered the sultan who arrested him after the battle of Ṣuhbān referred to below,³⁹ and sent him to jail.

While the sultan was in Radā' he received a visit from the qadī of Ibb, 'Abd al-'Ālim 'Abdallāh al-Burayhī⁴⁰ bearing a message from the people of Ba'dān that they needed him to settle the disturbances in that area. On his way he captured the fortress of the B. Sayf one of the tribes of Ibb, and from there went onto Ṣuhbān where there took place a great battle between the sultan and his uncle Muḥammad in which the Sultan's forces were victorious. This was a great victory in which 540 of the rebels were taken prisoner.⁴¹

There was now trouble in Aden. The sultan had earlier ordered the expulsion of

³⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 187, note 1, Mar'it is on Jabal Ṣabir.

³⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 188; Ṣuhbān is about 8 miles south of Ibb, Ḥajarī, Majmū', 548; Smith, Simt, II, 207.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 188.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Dayba' Qurrah, 182, describes this as the first Zāfiri victory. This was the area that was constantly being fought over by the Ḥubayshīs between 861/1457 and 886/1481, see above, 67.

the tribe of Yāfi‘ from Aden for their treachery.⁴² Another of the rebellious cousins, ‘Abd al-Bāqī b. Muḥammad obtained 100 ladders from Laḥj in order to scale the walls of Aden and take it, his army consisting mainly of dispossessed Yāfi‘. He was unsuccessful however, Shaykh Muḥammad inflicted a terrible defeat on him and he was lucky to escape with his life and a broken hand. Four hundred of his followers were captured, and his supplies taken.⁴³

This was now the virtual end of family dissent. Future minor attempts on the part of the uncles to assert themselves were equally unsuccessful.

The sultan was now able to turn his attention to trouble on another front, the inevitable opposition of the Tihāmah tribes. In Shawwāl of 894/1489 we hear of the first of a series of conflicts against the Ma‘āzibah and the Qurashīs. This is interesting as they had presented little threat during the reign of al-Manṣūr, all his efforts directed at the Zaydiyyūn. The last recorded encounter with the Ma‘āzibah had been in 879/1474. Taking the advantage of the sultan’s preoccupation with subduing members of his family, the Ma‘āzibah had been terrorising people living between Zabīd and Bayt al-Faqīh.⁴⁴ The person in charge of these tribal matters was Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik (presumably b. Dā‘ūd, see fig. 3a)

⁴² This exodus in which 500 people were expelled, was organised by Shaykh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik amir of Aden on behalf of his uncle the sultan, Ibn al-Dayba‘ Bughyah, 187.

⁴³ Ibn al-Dayba‘ Bughyah, 189; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 616; Abū Makhramah, Tā rīkh, 18 locates the incident at the foot of Jabal Ḥadīd.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-Dayba‘ Bughyah, 151 (encounter of 879/1474); Bughyah, 189; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 617

b) A scandal concerning the head of the Zabīd mint

Soon after the encounter with the Ma'āzibah a terrible scandal erupted in Zabīd concerning the head of the mint (shaykh dār al-darb) Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Muqart-s, who had embezzled the monies of the treasury. His first action had been to bribe a group of soldiers stationed in Zabīd to kill the sultan's amir, Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Ba'dānī. Ba'dānī and al-Muqart-s were related through marriage. One day, al-al-Maqart-s, accompanied by two men from Madar, came to the amir in the Dār al-Kabīr where he was alone except for a slave. Al-Maqart-s jumped on the amir grabbed the handle of his sword and indicated to the two men to act but they were afraid to move. The amir was able to indicate to the slave to hit al-Maqart-s which he did on the upper arm and the amir was thus able to make his escape.⁴⁵ Al-Maqart-s fled and took refuge in the mint, then in the house of Shaykh Ḥasan b. Abī al- ʿAbbās al-Ḥatār⁴⁶ he was however attacked and beaten by a member of the dīwān in the street and left alone to die in the street. Amir al-Ba'dānī then had his body collected and the obsequies were performed. The amir in an attempt to control what was evidently a volatile situation, then got up on the roof of his house and shouted till he could be heard outside the city. He called for the army to come to him. The city gates were closed and the dissension calmed down. The amir arrested those whom al-Maqart-s had bribed, some of them had sought refuge at Bayt al-Ghazāli, (see above p. 36) their horses were taken and they were sent to their home territory. The amir did not allow any of

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Qurrah, 182-3; Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 189-90 has the most detail.

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 190.

the army near him but sent word to the sultan to despatch him another force to help him. Meanwhile he obtained 500 mercenaries (sh-flūt) from the people of Aṣāb through the lord of al-Miṣbāh.⁴⁷

The violence meted out to the offenders was on an unprecedented level and suggests that al-Maqaṭ-s was involved in corruption on a huge scale and with a strong degree of involvement on the part of the army. The background is however not fully explained in any of the sources.⁴⁸ The use of mercenaries is interesting since it seems that they were the only people who could be trusted in a crisis. In 923/1517 we have a reference from Abū Makhramah to the sultan's use of troupes from Mahrah for similar reasons.

c) The collection of kharāj and signs of prosperity

In the first year of ʿĀmir's reign, 894/1489, as we saw above, the sultan concentrated his efforts on strengthening his position vis-à-vis the rebellious cousins and uncles. The loyal family members are in evidence in this period, Shaykh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik taking charge of Aden for instance, as well as a number of trusted amirs and qādīs. The amirs most prominent, were Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Baʿdānī, and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Ḥubayshī

⁴⁷ sh-flūt, pl. shafālīt, mercenaries, Smith, Simt, II, 124; Landberg, Glossaire, 2077, carrier of a lance; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 190, note 3 suggests that the word derives from French and entered the Arabic vocabulary through the Crusades, from the Ayyubids to the Rasulids. The closest I have been able to find in this connection is "Shavaldour" (or shivaldour), mercenary or brigand, Rothwell, Anglo-Norman Dictionary, 707. Note 3, Bughyah also says that it has become turned in common Yemeni parlance to shalfūt meaning an evil person because the Mamluks were thought to be so.

⁴⁸ Al-Akwāʿ in note 1, Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 183 also remarks on this.

until his defection over Ta'izz noted above. Both of these had served his father al-Malik al-Manṣūr. Others were Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Muqrī, who defended Ta'izz against the rebellious Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Āmir, 'Abd al-'Ālim al-Burayhī, qādī of Ibb, Amir Shams al-Dīn al-Ba'dānī, Amir al-'Ansī the Sharīf 'Abdallāh b. Sufyān, and 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Nizārī. Mention of the second group, occurs from about 900/1495 onwards.⁴⁹

The main task of the amirs was the extraction of kharāj from the reluctant tribes; this they did yearly and increasingly successfully. It was the kharāj and also the revenues from the port of Aden that provided the basis for the wealth and stability of 'Āmir's reign and the signs of prosperity are evident : the sultan's giving out of sadaqah is mentioned frequently and even given that Ibn al-Dayba' is bound to exaggerate the sultan's bounty, clearly large sums were involved.⁵⁰ Numerous building works, the construction of new monuments, aqueducts and so on and the repair of existing buildings, are mentioned.⁵¹ Also indicative of this settled period was the concern of the sultan to purchase manuscripts; in 900/1495 he spent 150 ashrafīs on an edition of al-Bukhārī, and acquired the 24 volumed work of al-Zarakshī.⁵² It seems that the first volume was lost and was found wrapped up

⁴⁹ See appendix below, 265-70

⁵⁰ This is discussed below in chapter 6

⁵¹ These are discussed in chapter 7 below.

⁵² Al-Zarakshī was a Shāfi'ī faqīh and author of several books on fiqh, Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 622. The manuscript is described as being written in script with coloured illuminations, bi'lkhatt al-rā'iq wa-'l-dībājāt al-mulawwanah. During a visit to the Library in Tarīm I was shown a beautifully illuminated volume of al-Bukhārī dedicated to Sultan 'Āmir.

down a well in 903/1497.⁵³ The following year the sultan purchased the manuscript of al-Fath al-Bārī for 150 ashrafīs.⁵⁴ Another sign that of ‘Āmir’s reign was at last showing signs of peace and stability, was how he was regarded by his contemporaries outside the Yemen. In 895/1490, he received an embassy from the Mamluk sultan Qā’it Bay. The ambassador came bearing gifts which included a robe of honour, a sword, a ring and a fan (mirwahāh) which was apparently inscribed with the name of the Abbasid caliph in Cairo.⁵⁵ In 902/1497, he received another embassy and gifts from the next Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad⁵⁶ and a present of hunting birds from the Sharīf of Mecca.⁵⁷

It is worth remarking, that this period saw profound changes taking place throughout the Islamic world about which our sources generally remain silent. It is interesting however that the Zaydī sources show more interest in the outside world than do the Sunnī sources. Only in Rawḥ al-Rūḥ or the Ghāyah, do we find the references to the Ottomans under Sulayman taking Syria in 923/1517,⁵⁸ or the accession of the Safavid Shah Ismāīl in 907/1501,⁵⁹ or the conquest of Granada

⁵³ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Fadl, 114.

⁵⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 622-3, it was given to the sultan by a group of merchants and was its first appearance in the Yemen, Ibn al-Daybā‘, Fadl, 94; Ibn al-Daybā‘, Qurrah, 193; This work was by al-‘Asqalānī d. 852/1448. The sultan ordered another copy shortly after, this must be the one he actually paid for, Fadl, 94-5.

⁵⁵ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Bughyah, 198. Qā’it Bay reigned, 872-901/1468-1496.

⁵⁶ He ruled from 901-903/1496-1498. Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 5; Ibn al-Daybā‘, Fadl, 102.

⁵⁷ Ibn al-Daybā‘, Fadl, 101.

⁵⁸ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 620.

⁵⁹ Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 7.

in 1492.⁶⁰ In the next chapter we shall see how the Yemen was to be dramatically involved in the events that affected the whole Islamic world, the coming of the Portuguese.

⁶⁰ Lutf Allāh, Rawh, 7 has quite an extensive description of the jewels, including rubies, as well as silver and white glass available in Granada, he also mentions its wonderful climate.

Chapter 5

THE TAHIRIDS FALL FROM POWER

i) Introduction; ii) The Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the Arab response and the Portuguese attack on Aden in 919/1513; iii) The effect of the Portuguese attack and events in the Yemen 907-23/1501-17, a) The Mamluk response to the Portuguese attempt on Aden, b) Expansion of Tahirid territory into the Zaydī domains, c) Rebellions against the Tahirid sultan, d) The Egyptian landing at Kamarān, iv) The aftermath: the Yemen between 923/1517 and the Ottoman invasion in 945/1538, a) Events leading to the death of Sultan ʿĀmir, b) Zaydīs and Tahirids, c) The Portuguese activities under Lopo Soares, d) Amir Murjān and the last of the Tahirids.

i) Introduction

This chapter will examine the dramatic sequence of events which led to the fall of the Tahirids in 923/1517. The catalyst which set these events in motion was the Portuguese penetration of the Indian Ocean and some space is therefore devoted to an examination both of the background to and the nature of the Portuguese expeditions, including their attempts to capture Aden. The chapter goes on to look at the Mamluk and Yemeni responses to the Portuguese threats. In this respect, one of the more noteworthy secondary effects of the Portuguese incursions - the Mamluk conquest of the Yemen - is of particular interest. The circumstances within the Yemen which enabled this to take place, will therefore be examined.

A striking feature of this period, is the relative precariousness of Tahirid rule. Even at the height of their power, the Tahirids' hold over Lower Yemen appears to have been a tenuous one. With the decline in their fortunes, the degree to which the Tahirid sultan was at the mercy of the tribes and other disaffected elements became abundantly clear. From the beginning of their rule, the Tahirids encountered resistance from such groups and the latter showed no compunction in siding with the Tahirid's enemies to bring the dynasty down. The success of the Mamluk conquest can, therefore, be explained by a number of factors. In the first place, the disaffection of the tribes with Tahirid rule, for a variety of reasons, provided the Mamluks with allies within the domains which the Tahirids had previously controlled and made the task of organising effective resistance to the Mamluks practically impossible for the Tahirid sultan. The difficulties facing the sultan were compounded by the bad advice given him by his ministers, the Mamluks' use of firepower, unknown in the Yemen before this time, and the intrigues of the Zaydīs, in the north, who at last saw the chance of advancing their own interests and influence. Lastly it is worth asking the question whether the Mamluk sultan had a premeditated plan for the conquest of the Yemen. An answer to this question may lie in the existing source material.

The final part of this chapter will deal with the period between the Mamluk conquest in 923/1517 and the Ottoman conquest of 945/1538. The most striking feature of this period was the fragmentation of the country. Zabīd was in the hands of the marine janissaries (levend), nominally pledging their allegiance to the Ottoman sultan. To the north, the Zaydīs under the dynamic imam, Sharaf

al-Dīn, were rapidly reasserting control over territory lost to the Tahirids in the previous years, and were steadily penetrating southwards. Aden remained the last bastion of Tahirid control, under its governor Amir Murjān. He also had in his power the ineffectual Tahirid princes who succeeded each other with marked rapidity. They struggled to hold on to their few remaining strongholds in the highlands and at the same time attempted, without much success, to check the growing power of Amir Murjān himself. These endeavours and the dynasty itself came to an abrupt end with the execution of the last Tahirid, Amir, by the Ottoman commander Sulayman Pashah.

ii) The Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the Arab response and the Portuguese attack on Aden in 919/1513

"In this year (908) the vessels of the Frank appeared at sea *en route* for India Hormuz and those parts. They took about seven vessels killing those on board and making some prisoner. This was their first action, may God curse them".¹ This portentous phrase repeated in all our histories² dramatically announces the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and with it the beginning of the end for the Tahirids. Nahrawālī encapsulates the anger and hatred felt against the Portuguese constantly referring to them as la'īn (accursed), and in his rhythmical prose he tells the story of how they found their way to the Indian Ocean.

¹ Tārīkh al-Shihri, 21a under the year 908/1502-3 quoted by Serjeant, Portuguese, 43. See also Denison-Ross, "The Portuguese" (1921), 545-63

² Schuman, Qilādah, 5; Ibn al-Dayba^c, Qurrah, 206 and Fadl, 167; Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 630 but not in Lutf Allāh Rawh.

It was the famous sea captain Ibn Mājid, says al-Nahrawālī who taught them how to avoid the treacherous coastal waves which had sunk many of their ships. According to him, one of the lords of the Franks had ingratiated himself with the sea captain and one night made him so drunk that he revealed the secret and told them, "Do not approach the coast on this part [of the East African coast, north of Malindi] but steer right out into the open sea and in that way the waves will not reach you".³ The Portuguese did as he suggested and as a result were able to make their way across the Indian Ocean and all the way to Hormuz; "and their evil reached as far as the Arabian Peninsula and the coasts of Yemen".⁴ Ibn Mājid's alleged culpability in this regard was perpetuated by Ferrand and subsequent authors. Ibn Mājid was reported to have bewailed himself in his old age for this terrible deed.⁵ This view has been rightly discounted by Tibbetts who believes that Vasco Da Gama's pilot was more likely to have been a moor from Gujarāt.⁶

Vasco da Gama began his great voyages in 1497/1498. At first no one viewed him with any concern. The lords of the East African colonies were friendly, but

³ Nahrawālī, al-Barq, 18-19 repeated in Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah 630 f; Tibbetts, Arab Navigation, 9.

⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 631.

⁵ Boxer, Four centuries, 14; Maqbul, "Ibn Mājid", 856-9; Tibbetts, Arab Navigation, 10.

⁶ Vasco da Gama, The three voyages, 76 f for a description of the Gujarati moor. An interesting question is, however, not who it was who showed the Portuguese their route, as they would surely have discovered it sooner or later, but why al-Nahrawālī specifically accused Ibn Mājid, succeeding in calumniating his name for the next 500 years. For various theories, see Tibbetts, Arab Navigation, 7-10.

they realised after Da Gama's second voyage in 908/1502, when he forced Kilwa to pay him tribute, that Portuguese intentions were more sinister. They felt their trading monopolies about to be threatened and their livelihood seriously at stake.

The success of Vasco Da Gama's second voyage encouraged the Portuguese in their decision to block the Red Sea to Muslim shipping. Albuquerque captured Socotra in 913/1507 and continued as far as the Hormuz kingdom, attacking and looting its ports, hoping to be able to cut the other artery of the India trade via the Persian gulf.⁷ It was not only the Arabs who feared the disruption of their livelihood. The Venetians too were worried about the implications of the Portuguese control of the lucrative trade routes.⁸ However, when Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī attempted to enlist their support, they recommended he approach the Ottoman sultan Bāyazīd II, as the Venetians did not feel able to assist openly in an attack against a Christian country.⁹ In 911/1505 Abū Makhramah noted that in this year the Franks' intrusion had become more vehement.¹⁰ However it was not until the shortages and the drop in revenues resulting from Portuguese interference in the trade began to be severely felt in India and Egypt that the Egyptians decided to act.¹¹ First of all, Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawri had sent

⁷ Serjeant, Portuguese, 13 f.

⁸ Chaudhuri, Trade, 64 quoting Venetian diarist Girolamo Priuli, expressing concern as early as 1501.

⁹ Bacqué-Grammont and Kroell, Mamlouks, 2.

¹⁰ Schuman, Qilādah, 9.

¹¹ Ibn Iyās, Journal, I, 106, remarks that one of the most acute shortages was for turban silk.

an emissary to Rome in 910/1504 appealing to the pope to intervene with the king of Portugal to stop his hostile behaviour and threatened the Christian population in the Mamluk kingdom should he not respond. This met with stony silence.¹² After an appeal to Egypt by the sultan of Gujarāt Maḥmūd Begarha (who asked particularly for weapons including cannon), and the Yemeni sultan al-Malik al-Zāfir, joint action was agreed upon, the principal players being the Mamluk sultan Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī, the Sultan of Gujarāt and the Hindu samuri of Calicut.¹³ Ḥusayn al-Kurdī was put in charge of the Mamluk operations by Sultan Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī and he was also appointed deputy of Jeddah.¹⁴

Ḥusayn al-Kurdī's first action as deputy of Jeddah in 912/1506-7 was to build a massive wall around the town.¹⁵ At the end of the year, he sailed from Jeddah and approached Aden with 6 ships and asked permission to land at Ḥuqqāt.¹⁶ Amir Murjān, governor of Aden, received him hospitably allowing him to pick up supplies.¹⁷ Abū Makhramah reports that, while in Aden, Ḥusayn al-Kurdī

¹² Schuman, Qilādah, 6, and note 42. The Portuguese had after all been encouraged in their activities by Rome. Papal Bull Romanus Pontifex, Jan. 1455 in Boxer, Four centuries, 7.

¹³ al-Nahrawālī, al-Barq, 19; Serjeant, Portuguese, 15; Ibn Iyās, Journal, I, 176 who mentions the request from Maḥmūd Shāh to Sultan Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī.

¹⁴ Smith and Zayla'ī, al-Silāh, 78-9

¹⁵ A detailed description based on a 16th century South Arabian chronicle is in Serjeant, Portuguese, 160; Ibn Iyās, Journal, I, 91, 106; Smith and Zayla'ī, al-Silāh, 9.

¹⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, note 60; see fig. .

¹⁷ Schuman, Qilādah, note 59. Ulughkhānī, History, 39

engaged in subversive activity, and his agent intrigued in the name of the Mamluk sultan. He places the blame for this squarely on Murjān's shoulders for having allowed him into Aden.¹⁸

Abū Makhramah at several junctures in his account suggests strongly that the Mamluk attack and future conquest of Yemen in 923/1517 had its seeds in such activities. The question of Mamluk intentions regarding the Yemen will be discussed below.

Ḥusayn al-Kurdī now proceeded to Diu where he joined forces with its governor and they inflicted a defeat on the Portuguese fleet commanded by Lourenco de Almeida outside Chaul in 914/1508-9. The Portuguese viceroy, Almeida, avenged the death of his son the following year however and destroyed all Ḥusayn's fortifications at Diu. Ḥusayn escaped and fled to the king of Gujarāt, as he thought Malik Iyās, governor of Diu, might hand him over to Almeida.¹⁹ Thus it was to be some time before he was able to reach Jeddah in ships belonging to the sultan of Gujarāt. The next references to him are not until 918/1512 when the Egyptian chronicler, Ibn Iyās noted his arrival after seven years absence with an envoy of the Gujarātī sultan. It seems that

¹⁸ See Schuman, Qilādah, notes 56 and 62 for further discussion of Egyptian activities. Ibn al-Daybā' Fadl, 209-210 adding the somewhat inexplicable detail that when Amir Murjān sent his emissaries to him, he asked them to convey to the amir that he had been ordered by the Mamluk sultan Qāṣawḥ not to enter Aden. This is repeated by Ulughkhānī, History, 39

¹⁹ Serjeant, Portuguese, 45 note 2.

Qānsawh al-Ghawrī bore him no ill will for the disastrous defeat at Diu.²⁰

After Vasco Da Gama's initial voyage in 1497/1498 the possibilities for Portuguese supremacy in the Indian Ocean had become quickly apparent. It is suggested that their early motivations as summarised by Boxer were: crusading zeal, desire for Guinea gold, the quest for Prester John and the quest for spices.²¹ Their strength lay in their single minded determination reinforced by manpower and guns. One principal means to their trading supremacy was the elimination of Muslim control of the trade, both in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and having the trading network entirely under their control through the issuing of naval passes (cartazes). One main aim was to divert the spice trade from Alexandria and Venice to Lisbon and Antwerp, hence the Venetian apprehension referred to above. In order to implement their grand schemes, they had to gain control of the main trading emporia, Malacca, Aden and Hormuz, and to create bases initially in East Africa and in India. A serious point of difference between Almeida and Albuquerque was how best to maintain the momentum and control of their conquests; Almeida felt this should be through superiority at sea, fearing a dilution of their forces if they

²⁰ Bacqué-Grammont and Kroell, Mamlouks, 2; the Mamluk side of the story with insight into the relations between the Mamluks and Ottomans over the affair are fully discussed in this publication; Ibn Iyās, Journal, I, 268; Schuman, Qiladah, note 56.

²¹ Boxer, Four centuries, 6; Boxer, The Portuguese, chapter 1.



had too many bases in India as Albuquerque wished.²² It was the wisdom of Albuquerque that eventually prevailed with Goa, which was to become the base of the "Estado da India" taken and occupied in 916/1510, Malacca in 917/1511 and Hormuz in 913/1507.

Having taken Socotra and Hormuz in 913/1507 and imposed on the ruler of Hormuz a yearly tribute, six years later, the Portuguese obviously felt it was time to do the same with Aden. On Thursday the 16th Muḥarram the people of Abyan saw a group of ships making for Aden. They did not know their number and their composition but the opinion prevailed that it was the Portuguese.²³ And it was indeed they. Our sources graphically describe the attempted capture of Aden in 919/1513, also portraying in the Yemeni chronicles, despite the bravado, the element of fear.

There are two main Yemeni accounts Abū Makhramah in the Qilādah and Ibn al-Daybā in the Fadl. On the Portuguese side the sources used have been the Commentaries of Afonso Albuquerque by his son and Albuquerque's letters.²⁴

²² Introduction to Vasco da Gama, The three voyages, lxii.

²³ Schuman, Qilādah, 12; the Portuguese left Socotra in 917/1511, see Serjeant, Portuguese, 43.

²⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, 69, suggests that the accounts of Abū Makhramah and Ibn al-Daybā accounts are independent of each other. The accounts are Schuman, Qilādah, 12; Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 261f; Albuquerque Commentaries, 6-58; Caesar, 207 f. The other principal Portuguese account is Barros' Asia. I am most grateful to Professor Beckingham who kindly read through the section on the Portuguese siege of Aden with me. His contemporary account based on information from a number of people actually present is more objective

The Portuguese account is much more detailed than the Yemeni sources but is corroborated in all the main details by them. The following account is therefore culled from the three sources.

The Yemenis had seen the Portuguese fleet approaching for some time and, as they grew closer, they tried unsuccessfully to lure them to a point beyond Aden by lighting fires on the cliff tops knowing that the easterly monsoon would prevent them returning. On Good Friday, 919/1513, the Portuguese fleet moored just outside the harbour and a dialogue of sorts took place between Albuquerque and Amir Murjān, the Tahirid governor of Aden, with letters going back and forth between them. At first Albuquerque pretended that he was only there on his way to Jeddah to ascertain the intentions of the Mamluk sultan. A gift of food was then sent down to him by Amir Murjān which was however refused. Albuquerque announced his conditions that the Portuguese flag be hoisted in Aden, his men garrisoned there and if the merchants applied to him he would give them safe conduct. There were in fact a number of fully laden ships in the harbour and the merchants were anxious to unload them before the Portuguese should enter but the amir refused believing he could protect the town and port adequately. All day Friday the Portuguese spent securing their ships with cables to protect them from sudden gusts and that night they planned their attack. The Yemeni sources tell us there were 17 or 18 ships (ghurābs and barshahs) the Portuguese that there were 20 ships carrying

than Albuquerque's but does not differ in the main from the latter's. Denison-Ross has translated part of this account in "The Portuguese", (1921), 545 f. See also Tārīkh al-Shihri in Serjeant, Portuguese, 47-8

1,700 Portuguese and 800 "native" sailors.²⁵ The amir wanted to use his cannon against them immediately but was discouraged from doing so.²⁶

Because of the length of the wall around the city the Portuguese resolved to concentrate on breaking through at one section in the vicinity of the main gate with scaling ladders.²⁷ With some difficulty they waded through the water carrying these ladders and placed them against the walls. This is delightfully illustrated in Correa's drawing (fig. 5) However the Portuguese were disorganised and, it seems, over enthusiastic. Too many men climbed the ladders which broke one after the other. The Portuguese were divided into several attacking forces some of which managed to make some headway against the Yemenis. Amir Murjān himself engaged in the battle. Barros devotes much space to the personalities involved on the Portuguese side, in particular Garcia de Sousa who it seems had been promised the position of captaincy of Aden. One of the first to reach the wall, he had shut himself up in a turret with a group of men and, after it had been set fire to, with great bravery he refused to save himself by jumping off the wall with the aid of ropes thrown to him by Garcia de Noronha, and was killed in the subsequent

²⁵ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Fadl, 261, has 18; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 640, has 16; Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 15 has 18, both these later accounts are based on Ibn al-Dayba^c, Fadl. Barshah, pl. birāsh, Serjeant, Portuguese, 186 galliot, long covered boat, large ship. Ghurāb, Serjeant, *ibid*, 189, "grab"; Albuquerque, Commentaries, x.

²⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 12. In note 92, he discusses Abū Makhramah's reference to the presence of firearms in Aden previous to this, the first time in 861/1456-6, the second 894/1498.

²⁷ Serjeant, Portuguese, note F, 169.

fighting.²⁸ The attack on Aden which had lasted about four hours, was a failure and the Portuguese retreated, looting and then burning the still loaded ships in the harbour. Amir Murjān's main firepower was on the island of Sīrah, slightly to the east of Aden and he fired upon Albuquerque's men as they were preparing to reembark. Garcia de Noronha, Albuquerque's nephew attacked the fortress and captured from it 36 cannon.²⁹ Albuquerque was now anxious to move on into the Red Sea because these were now the last days of the easterly monsoon. This will explain why they did not put in at any of the other ports along the Red Sea coast, Mocha, al-Buq'ah, Mutaynah etc. for example, where, in addition, the sultan's army was waiting for them. Instead, they headed directly for Kamarān, remaining there for two months looting and pillaging before making a second attempt at Aden.³⁰

Albuquerque was anxious to try and obtain the release of a number of his compatriots held by the Tahirid sultan in Zabīd "The chief city where the Xequ (shaykh) of Aden always stays"³¹ and he sent someone to negotiate for them, which proved useless. The captives however subsequently escaped.³²

²⁸ Schuman, Qilādah, 13; Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 217-221; Barros, Asia, 353.

²⁹ Schuman, Qilādah, 14; Albuquerque, Commentaries, 23; Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 219 has the capture of the cannon from Sirah on the following day.

³⁰ Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 261; Albuquerque, Commentaries, 45; Earle and Villiers, 225 f. Andrea Corsali who visited Kamarān four years after this in 923/1517 corroborates this, Lettre, 152.

³¹ Albuquerque, Commentaries, 23.

³² Albuquerque, Commentaries, 49f.; Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 235.

Sixteen ships sailed to Aden, two to Zayla^ع, where the Portuguese burnt 10 boats in the port, after which they rejoined their companions in Aden who had been struggling without success because, says Ibn al-Dayba^ع the local people had become wise to their tactics from the previous occasion. However, they burnt 20 ships in the harbour and prepared for a night attack but were surprised. During Albuquerque's absence on Kamarān, Amir Murjān had again fortified Şīrah. The Portuguese were able to capture the tower and mounting their cannon there, and on two large ships they had captured in the harbour, they turned their guns on the city and on the catapult mounted by the Yemenis on the highest point of Sirah. A great battle took place during which their commander was killed and the Yemenis emerged victorious. The Portuguese had by now lost heart and were anxious to return to Diu.³³

The Portuguese failure to take Aden on the first occasion was the result of a combination of factors: firstly it was very effectively defended by its wall. But also the Portuguese were not prepared, they were unfamiliar with the lie of the land and they were unable to make full use of the massive firepower of their ships, since the shoals prevented them from bringing their ships too close to land. The breaking of the ladders too was an important factor.³⁴ On the second occasion, despite being able to put their cannon on Şīrah, and inflict some damage to Aden, the attack seems to have been half-hearted and ineffectual. It is clear that the Yemenis had considerable firepower at their disposal in Aden.

³³ Ibn al-Dayba^ع, Fadl, 264. The name of the commander is not given and this is not mentioned in Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 251.

³⁴ This lack of preparedness is admitted in his letters. Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 255

This is in stark contrast to the situation a few years later in the hinterland, during the Mamluk attack, where it was the singular lack of firepower on the part of the Yemenis that led to their ignominious defeat.

After the Portuguese attack on Kamarān, Abū Makhramah refers once again to prior intentions of conquest of the Yemen on the part of the Mamluks. He describes the frustration felt by the local inhabitants of Kamarān at not being able to fight back, even after Sharīf Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Sufyān, a prominent companion of the Tahirid sultan, had been killed.³⁵ Abū Makhramah suggests that this was because of the sultan's fear that the Mamluks would try to oust him. It is not clear however how this fear is specifically connected with Kamarān although as we shall see below, the Mamluk forces in 921/1515, landed there without consultation with the Tahirids. A similar point about Mamluk intentions is made in Albuquerque's Commentaries, where we learn that the Tahirid sultan had written to the Mamluk sultan Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī, apprising him of the Portuguese attempt on Aden. The Mamluk sultan replied, it seems, in very dry terms, telling the Tahirid sultan ʿAmir that he must keep a watchful guard on his ports. The reason for this "dryness" says the author of the Commentaries, was that a few days previously, Qānṣawḥ had sent a message to the Tahirid sultan requesting that he hand Aden over to him as it rightly belonged to his father and his ancestors; the Tahirid sultan's answer to this demand had been that he was not

³⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, 14; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Faḍl, 263. Only Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 640, and Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 14 mention the detail about the sharīf and the information that the Tahirids had a garrison on Kamarān.

aware that Aden ever had any lord than himself.³⁶ Ulughkhānī writes that the Tahirid sultan agreed to give up territory in return for Mamluk assistance. However neither is the territory specified, although possibly Kamarān was intended, nor is this corroborated in the other sources.³¹ Altogether these comments do seem to suggest that the Tahirid sultan did have some cause to fear the Mamluks. However, as we shall see below, the opportunistic nature of the Mamluk attack, when it came, seems to contradict this.

iii) The effect of the Portuguese attack and events in the Yemen 907-

23/1501-17

a) The Mamluk response to the Portuguese attempt on Aden

This section begins with a brief account of the Mamluk response to the Portuguese landing at Kamarān followed by a discussion of the internal events in the Yemen of the few years prior to 923/1517, as these are crucial for the understanding of the Mamluk response. Our sources are the accustomed Yemeni, both Zaydī and Sunnī, chronicles. For additional information on the conquest, the texts of Nahrawālī, Ibn Iyās and Andrea Corsali's second letter to Lorenzo de Medici as well as the secondary source, Mamlouks et Portugais en mer Rouge have been used.³⁸ The key questions that will emerge are how did the conquest take place with such ease and with such a small invading army? To what extent did the conditions prevailing in Yemen contribute to this and here in particular we shall examine the internal forces ranged against the sultan who sided with the enemy. And finally we shall pursue the question of whether it was a planned operation by the Mamluks or simply opportunism on the part

³⁶ Albuquerque, Commentaries, 25; Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 257

³⁷ Ulughkhānī, History, 218; Denison-Ross, "The Portuguese" (1921), 545-563

³⁸ Nahrawālī, Barq; Ibn Iyās, Journal; Corsali, Lettre; Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks.

of Ḥusayn al-Kurdī.

Following the Portuguese attempt on Aden in 919/1513 and their subsequent retreat, the threat to the Yemen from the Portuguese was for the time being at an end, but the landing at Kamarān had caused fear and panic in Cairo.³⁹

Ḥusayn al-Kurdī was despatched to Jeddah in his capacity as governor.

Preparations for the second fleet were complete in 921/1515 with Salmān Ra'īs at its head.⁴⁰ Sources differ as to the size and composition of the fleet but it seems that there were between 15-20 armed ships and about 6,000 men in all.⁴¹ Salmān Ra'īs was Ḥusayn al-Kurdī's superior and the division of duties was such that while Salmān was commander at sea, Ḥusayn was to deal with land activities, a division that from the outset led to tension.

Ḥusayn al-Kurdī is alleged to have been a brutal commander. As deputy of Jeddah he had imposed heavy taxes on the inhabitants and had submitted them to great hardship. There is some suggestion that he was sent on this expedition in order to keep him away from Egypt. His section of the army consisted mostly of Turkomans. There were also black archers and Ethiopians who were under the command of a Maghribī, Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Maṣlatī or Maṣlahātī.⁴²

³⁹ Schuman, Qilādah, 70, note 104 quoting Ibn Iyās, Journal, I, 288; Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 4 f.

⁴⁰ Schuman, Qilādah, note 56 has already noted that Nahrawālī, Barq, 19 has got the sequence of events wrong and had Salmān Rā'īs on the first voyage to India, not the second, with Ḥusayn al-Kurdī.

⁴¹ Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 6 f.

⁴² Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, note 5.

Salmañ Rāīs was an Ottoman subject, originally from Lesbos. He became a corsair with a small fleet, making raids on the coasts of Italy and Sicily. The circumstances of his fleeing from Ottoman lands are not known but he is first mentioned in the Mamluk sources in 920/1514 as head of the Egyptian arsenal and head of 2,000 marine janissaries (levend). Salmān's men were better paid than Ḥusayn's and the consequences of this are seen below.

Ḥusayn and Salmān were instructed to build a fort on Kamarān which would act as base for Salman's exploits against the Portuguese.⁴³ It was mentioned earlier that Kamarān belonged to the Yemen and as far as can be ascertained the Egyptians landed there without prior discussion with the Tahirid sultan.

Before continuing with details of the events leading to the Mamluk invasion of the Yemen, let us now put the Egyptian landing at Kamarān in the context of events in the Yemen during the years 907/1501 to 921/1515.

b) Expansion of Tahirid territory into the Zaydī domains

In 907/1501 the Tahirid sultan, Āmir, began a concerted campaign to conquer the Zaydī held northern territories. He started in Dhamār and then proceeded on to Ṣan'ā' where he began his siege on 2 Sha'bān. The people of Ṣan'ā' appealed to Sharīf Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bahhāl, described in the Qilādah as lord of Ṣa'dah offering him some concessions over a number of

⁴³ Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, note 57.

disputed fortresses.⁴⁴ The author of the Ghāyah, does not mention al-Bahhāl here. Schuman considers him to have been the strong arm of the Zaydīs at this time. The story in the Ghāyah is that they enlisted the support of Imam Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Wushalī and Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Ḥamzī, amir of Ṣaḥdah. A battle took place headed on the Tahirid side by Amir ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Baḍānī.⁴⁵ On this occasion the Tahirid forces were defeated and retreated. Muḥammad b. al-Nāṣir, lord of Ṣanʿāʾ welcomed al-Wushalī and al-Ḥamzī into Ṣanʿāʾ, the khutbah was read out in the name of al-Wushalī and great celebrations took place; the belief was that the Tahirids had been routed permanently.⁴⁶

Three years later however in 910/1504, the Tahirid sultan made another attempt on Ṣanʿāʾ. He had gathered a vast army from among a motley collection of Tihāmah tribes,⁴⁷ numbering according to the Ghāyah, 170,000 men and three thousand cavalry. He stopped briefly in Radāʿ and then went on to Dhamār and Ṣanʿāʾ. It was in Radāʿ that the Italian traveller Ludovico di Varthema whose visit to the Yemen is mentioned further below (193), saw the army and reported accurately that it was on its way to Ṣanʿāʾ. His description of the composition of the army and the weapons they carried, is extremely significant, providing us with detail our Yemeni sources would never have thought to include. This section from his Itinerary will therefore be quoted in full. He says that the

⁴⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, 4, note 27.

⁴⁵ See appendix

⁴⁶ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 629.

⁴⁷ Schuman, Qilādah, 56-7, note 44; Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 633.

army consisted of 80,000 men .

"The sultan took to the field and marched to the said city of Sanca with his army, in which there were three thousand horsemen, sons of Christians, as black as Moors [ie Ethiopians]. They were those of Prester John, whom they purchased at the age of eight or nine years, and had them trained to arms. These constituted his own guard, because they were worth more than the rest of the eighty thousand".

Varthema continues with a description of their clothing (or lack of it) and weaponry:

"The others (these are presumably the Tihamah tribesmen) were all naked with the exception of a piece of linen worn like a mantle. When they enter into battle they use a kind of round shield, made up of two pieces of cow hide or ox fastened together. In the centre of the said round shields there are four rods, which keep them straight. These shields are painted, so that they appear to those who see them to be the handsomest and best that could be made. They are about as large as the bottom of a tub, and the handle consists of a piece of wood of a size that can be grasped by the hand, fastened by two nails. They also carry in their hand a dart and a short broad sword and wear a cloth vest of red or some other colour stuffed with cotton which protects them from the cold and also from their enemies. They make use of this when they go out to fight. They all also generally carry a sling for the purpose of throwing stones wound around their

heads, and under this sling they carry a piece of wood, a span in length which is called mesuech [Ar.miswak] with which they clean their teeth and generally from forty or fifty downwards they wear two horns made of their own hair, so that they look like young kids. The said sultan also takes with his army five thousand camels laden with tents, all of cotton and also ropes of cotton ".⁴⁸

Varthema's description raises a number of interesting questions about the composition of the sultan's army. It is clear that his standing army was quite small and consisted of a core of black slaves. In the same way as the Mamluks of Egypt, these men were more highly trusted because their loyalty was primarily to the sultan. The rest of the army were tribesmen who were gathered when they were needed and were much less reliable. This is particularly demonstrated below during the battles in 923/1517 when the bulk of the tribes fled. There is no mention here of the Mahrah who are mentioned below as a favoured and trusted guard.

The vast Tahirid army (whether 170,000 or 80,000) made its way to Ṣanī'ā' and laid siege to it for 6 months. Sultan 'Āmir started his siege of Ṣanī'ā' on 29 Rabī' II, pounding the city with mangonels and canon (manjaniqāt gharādāt and madāfi').⁴⁹ Five months later, there was a tremendous battle between the

⁴⁸ Varthema, Itinerary, 28-9; Pires, Suma, 15, comments the Yemenis fight "as we do with spurs and holding the reins in one hand and lance in the other".

⁴⁹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 633; Ibn al-Daybā', Faḍl, 182 f; Schuman, Qilādah, 6 f; Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 10.

Tahirid forces and the Zaydīs, led by Sharīf Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bahhāl, lord of Ṣa‘dah who had been involved in the previous assault on the Zaydīs by the Tahirids in 907/1501; Imam Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Wushalī and Amir Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Jawfī. They were coming to the aid of Aḥmad son of Imam al-Nāṣir who was in charge of Ṣan‘ā’. The battle took place at Thāfil, 3 miles from San‘ā’⁵⁰ and the Zaydī forces were heavily defeated. Imam al-Wushalī was captured and his death in prison is reported later in the year. The Zaydī texts state quite categorically that the Tahirids had him poisoned.⁵¹ The inhabitants of Ṣan‘ā’ surrendered and were granted protection and the Zaydī leaders Aḥmad b. al-Nāṣir and ‘Abdallāh b. al-Muṭaḥhar were honourably treated. They particularly asked that Muḥammad b. ‘Isā Shārib al-Asadī, who was directly involved in the killing of the first Tahirid sultan, ‘Āmir, in 870/1465 be spared, and this was granted. The sultan entered Ṣan‘ā’ in grand style and he stayed in the palace of Sharīfah Fāṭimah. The Tahirid army entered the city and the inhabitants suffered greatly as a result. The sultan then sent the Zaydīs, Aḥmad b. al-Nāṣir and ‘Abdallāh b. al-Muṭaḥhar along with Muḥammad ‘Isā Shārib, to Ta‘izz along with their families and possessions in order to be able to keep an eye on them. It will be recalled that during the last capture of Ṣan‘ā’, leaving the imam in the city had proved fatal.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Dayba‘, Fadl, 184, note 8

⁵¹ Luṭf Allāh, Rawh, 11; Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 634.

⁵² References to the death of sultan ‘Āmir in 870/1465, above, 6 ; to Sharīfah Fāṭimah, above, 56 ; leaving the imam in Ṣan‘ā’, above, 58.

The capture of Ṣan‘ā from the Zaydīs was an extremely important victory for the Tahirids. ‘Āmir was now at the height of his power. While in Ṣan‘ā in 910/1504, he concentrated on consolidating his position around the city and putting down any opposition among the Zaydīs.

In 914/1508 the sultan went again up to Ṣan‘ā to renew the treaty and succeeded in capturing a few more significant Zaydī fortresses close to Ṣan‘ā; Zafār B. Wahhās, al-Faṣṣayn, al-‘Arūs and al-Rīshah.⁵³ In 916/1510, while the sultan was in Radā‘, he received an embassy from the Mamluk sultan Qānsawh al-Ghawrī. The envoys were Zayn al-Dīn al-Muhtasib and the tawāshī, Bashīr, bearing gifts.⁵⁴ The Tahirid sultan reciprocated by instructing the governor of Aden, Amir Murjān, to prepare a ship heavily laden with gifts for the Mamluk sultan in return.⁵⁵ It is worth remarking here that exchanges of embassies between Egypt and the Yemen in the Rasulid period was frequent and on this scale while in the Tahirid period such embassies are rare. Another is noted in 920/1514 which the sultan received in Ṣan‘ā⁵⁶ probably deliberately in order to demonstrate the extent of his power and territorial control to the Mamluk sultan. The respect being paid by Qānsawh al-Ghawrī to ‘Āmir is rather at odds

⁵³ Zafār B. Wahhās is in a wadi close to Zafār Dhibīn, Wilson Gazetteer, 227; al-Faṣṣayn, two forts close to Dhū Marmar, Wilson, Gazetteer, 263; al-‘Arūs, fort south of Shibām, Wilson, Gazetteer, 241. I have been unable to locate al-Rīshah.

⁵⁴ Smith, Simt, II, 125, the term originally meant a eunuch but in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods it had a technical military meaning.

⁵⁵ The return of Bashīr with a magnificent robe of honour is mentioned in Ibn Iyās, Journal, I, 203, under the year 917/1511.

⁵⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 15.

with the behaviour of his generals two years later.

In 917/1511 the sultan was pushing forward his borders once again. Under his general, Amir ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Baʿdānī he conquered what the Qilādah terms maghārib Ṣanʿā.⁵⁷ It seems that east of Ṣanʿā, rather than the west, is meant as we are told he got as far as a position overlooking Mārib. On this campaign he also captured major Zaydī strongholds including Thulā and Kawkabān. In 919/1513, the same year as the Portuguese attack on Aden, the people of Ṣanʿā made an attempt on the life of the Tahirid amir al-Baʿdānī who was now in charge of Ṣanʿā.⁵⁸ The attempt was discovered and the plotters punished. Later in the year the sultan while in Taʿizz received honourably a delegation of Zaydī ashrāf from Ṣaʿdah.⁵⁹ The following year, the sultan proceeded once more to Ṣanʿā and, while he was there, the Ṣaʿdah ashrāf came to him again and this time their demands were made clear: they pledged their allegiance and offered to hand over Ṣaʿdah to the sultan. He sent a force which was surprised on the road by the son of al-Bahhāl, lord of Ṣaʿdah (who had been defeated by the Tahirids in 910/1504) and the Tahirid amir was forced to retreat. Ṣaʿdah, the bastion of Zaydism, escaped the Tahirids' grasp. It would appear likely that the Tahirids were approached to give support as a result of internal dissent among the Zaydīs. This is not the first time the Tahirids were drawn into internal Zaydī disputes as was seen above in chapter 3.

⁵⁷ Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 13 f; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 138

⁵⁸ Schuman, Qilādah, 14; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 641; Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 15.

⁵⁹ Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 16

Despite the fact that they failed to take Ṣāʿdah, Tahirid controlled territory was at its greatest extent. However, danger was about to loom on the horizon for the Tahirids. A new imam Sharaf al-Dīn had been appointed in 912/1506. He was not at this stage in a position to oppose the Tahirids, but his role in the Mamluk conquest of Yemen in 923/1517 was to prove crucial.

c) Rebellions against the Tahirid sultan

There were a number of significant rebellions against the sultan in the period under discussion. The first in 920/1514 took place while the sultan was in Ṣanʿāʾ. One Ḥaydarah b. Masʿūd al-Haythamī fled from Ṣanʿāʾ to Dathīnah and there, joined by his son from Laḥj they attacked the fortress and expelled the Tahirid garrison. Abū Makhramah clearly regards this event as ominous for he says, "that was the first instance of weakness affecting the government".⁶⁰

In the early period Tahirid control in Lower Yemen went as far as al-Shiḥr, but gradually the Kathīris the traditional rulers of the area had reasserted their power⁶¹ and the Tahirids' control seems to only have extended as far east as Dathīnah. With the loss of the garrison there their presence was curtailed further. The tribe of Hayāthim resided north of Wadi Laḥj⁶² and it is likely that the reason their leader was in Ṣanʿāʾ at this time was that he may have been one of the tribesmen recruited to fight in the siege and capture of Ṣanʿāʾ.

⁶⁰ Schuman, Qilādah, 15.

⁶¹ See above, 66

⁶² Schuman, Qilādah, 15, note 113; Luqman, Tārīkh, 247, the Hayāthim are from Dathīnah.

This event confirms once again how tenuous was the Tahirid government's hold was on the tribes.

Another rebellion occurred in the same region later in the year. This time it was led by the shaykh of the Tawāliq. In what capacity he was employed by the Tahirids is not clear but when his request for more money was turned down, he plundered the pastures of Wadi Laḥj. The government force sent against him by the amir of Laḥj, Wasan al-Zāfirī, was repulsed and it was up to the governor of Aden, Amir Murjān, to reestablish government control.⁶³

In the following year 921/1515 unrest began again in northern Tihāmah centered around the village of al-Ḍaḥī. Al-Ḍaḥī is south of al-Zaydiyyah on Wadi Surdud. Tribal infighting led to an attack by substantial numbers of Zaydiyyah 6,000 - 7,000 depending on the texts.⁶⁴ In al-Ḍaḥī was a government garrison under Amir Ḥiṣām al-Dīn ʿĪsā b. ʿAlī al-Ḥajarī, who with a small army, managed to defeat the Zaydiyyah, despite their huge numbers, and killed 500 or more of them in the process.

To summarise the internal events between 910/1504 and 921/1515, in these years, the Tahirids dramatically enhanced their territorial position at the expense of the Zaydīs capturing Ṣanʿā and important strongholds and falling just short of obtaining Ṣaʿdah. Meanwhile in the south, their control was eroded by the loss of Dathīnah and rebellions on the Tihāmah. The sultan al-

⁶³ Schuman, Qilādah, 16.

⁶⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, 17; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 274.

Malik al-Zāfir was however still at the height of his powers.

d) The Egyptian landing at Kamarān ⁶⁵

In 921/1515, the sultan appointed his son, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb deputy of Zabīd. The latter, on learning of the arrival of the Egyptian fleet under Ḥusayn al-Kurdī at Kamarān, wrote to the sultan apprising him of this news. The sultan was naturally concerned. He ordered his son to stop the shipment of supplies to the Hijaz and asked him to remain in Zabīd. He spent the ʿĪd in Radāʿ where he released a number of Tahirid rebels who had been in the Radāʿ jail.⁶⁶

The reaction of the Zaydīs to the Mamluk landing was swift. When the Zaydī Imam Sharaf al-Dīn learnt of the Mamluks' arrival, he immediately saw an opportunity to exact revenge on the Tahirids. He wrote to Ḥusayn al-Kurdī and the text of the letter is quoted in full in Rawḥ al-Rūḥ.⁶⁷ In it, the imam asked for help in liberating the Yemen from the Tahirid oppressor. He explained who he was and stated that his lands bordered on those of the Tahirids. He appealed, through Ḥusayn, to the Mamluk sultan Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī. The Zaydī envoy was Faqīh Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn b. Sharāḥ Allāh. Ḥusayn showed the letter to his officers and, after some deliberation, the view prevailed that there should be no immediate reply to the imam until contact had been

⁶⁵ Lutf Allāh, Rawḥ, 16 f; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 642; Nahrawālī, Barq, 20; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 277.

⁶⁶ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 277.

⁶⁷ Lutf Allāh, Rawḥ, 18.

made with the Tahirid sultan. It was decided therefore that two envoys be sent to the sultan asking him for assistance in the war against the Portuguese and asking him to share in the cost.

The sultan was still in Radā' and on receipt of a request from Ḥusayn al-Kurdī for provisions, he sought the advice of the Faqīh 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Nizārī⁶⁸ who advised him to help the Mamluks. The sultan, however, had great faith in his amir al-Ba' dānī whose qualities as a general he clearly admired. The latter was completely opposed to cooperation with the Mamluks seeing the request as totally humiliating for the sultan and he told the sultan that he would communicate with the Mamluks on his behalf. He demanded to see the Mamluk envoys and poured scorn on their request for assistance.⁶⁹ On their return to Kamarān, Ḥusayn began to see the point of view of the Zaydī imam and replied to him in a friendly manner. There is no suggestion however that Ḥusayn supplied him with the Mamluks he had requested.

The Qilādah does not mention al-Nizārī's conciliatory view. The passage is in fact rather confusing. In it Abū Makhramah says, "It is said that the sultan wanted to support them [Mamluks] with money and munitions after Amir 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ba' dānī had advised him to protect himself from their evil. And al-Ba' dānī undertook to supply from his own wheat and raisins in order to help the sultan. But 'Umar al-Jabartī advised the sultan to abandon this policy and that he should not show humility towards them, [arguing] that they were worth

⁶⁸ Lutf Allāh, Rawḥ, 19; Yahyā b.al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 643.

⁶⁹ Lutf Allāh, Rawḥ, 19-20. (This is 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ba' dānī)

nothing and that the sea restrained them which they could not cross. The sultan followed Jabartī's advice and ignored the envoy and refrained from sending them anything".⁷⁰

The account in the Qilādah seems garbled. None of the other sources mention Jabartī in this context. In the Qilādah, the sultan tells his son in Zabīd to hold back the supply of food to the Hijaz at this point in the sequence rather than when the news of the landing was first learnt as in the Fadl.⁷¹ Neither the Qurrah nor the Fadl mention anything about the Mamluk envoys to the sultan or the unfriendly reply. The sultan's attitude is clearly regarded as a mistake by Ibn al-Dayba' and an ignominious moment in Tahirid history on which he obviously preferred not to dwell.

The next event that takes place is the sacking of Hodeida by the Egyptian troops⁷² and we return now to the Egyptian fleet. The Mamluk troops were in dire straits. There were no supplies to be had on Kamarān, Andrea Corsali's description of the devastated island has been mentioned above⁷³ and Ḥusayn had been fully expecting to be as well received in Aden on this occasion as he had been previously in 912/1506. The troops were discontented and 700 of them deserted demanding that they be paid their salaries.⁷⁴ Ḥusayn having

⁷⁰ Schuman, Qilādah, 18

⁷¹ Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 277.

⁷² Schuman, Qilādah, 18; Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 277; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 224.

⁷³ Corsali, Lettre, 152

⁷⁴ Corsali, Lettre, 154.

received the unfriendly reply from the Tahirid sultan, decided therefore to provision the troops by force. The ships which he had sent out and which he had expected would return loaded with provisions turned on Hodeida. The inhabitants appealed to the sultan but curiously, when his troops arrived, the inhabitants refused to help the soldiers with food and water such was their fear. The inhabitants of Hodeida then fled leaving the town quite empty. The Egyptians landed and followed them, firing a cannon ball weighing over 10 ratls⁷⁵ causing complete panic. The Mamluk soldiers helped themselves even to the wooden doors and shutters of the town. These they took for the fortress at Kamarān. They returned to Kamarān and there they concentrated on building the fortress and a cemetery.⁷⁶

The Mamluks still did not have the supplies they needed. During this time, three ships came from Zaylā (it is not specified to whom they belonged but the implication is that they were Tahirid) loaded with food heading north.⁷⁷ The Egyptians asked for their contents and threatened the sultan's governor in Hodeida, whose name was Muḥammad b. Nūḥ, that, unless he let them have the provisions, he would destroy the port. Feeling secure with the sultan's troops in the town, he refused them. The Mamluks fired their cannon at the town and caused severe damage.

At the end of this year and beginning of the next (922/1516) Abd al-Ḥaqq

⁷⁵ A ratl, see below, 158

⁷⁶ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 278.

⁷⁷ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Gḥayah, 644.

al-Nizārī, the Tahirid amir, was sent out of Zabīd to gather an army whose composition was mostly old and infirm men!⁷⁸ This suggests that the Tahirid sultan was preparing himself for action.

Sultan Āmir's unfavourable response to the Mamluks and the success of their expedition against Hodeida, seem to have been strong factors in suggesting to Husayn al-Kurdī the idea of plunging further into Tahirid lands. Equally important were the activities against the Tahirids from within the Yemen itself. Mention has already been made of the Zaydī imam's attempts to obtain assistance in his fight against the sultan. More significant and indicative of unhappiness within the Tahirid state itself was the instant support given to the Mamluks, firstly of the lord of al-Luhayyah and a little later of the lord of Jīzān.

The support of the lord of the port of Luḥayyah, the Faqīh Abu Bakr b. al-Maqbūl al-Zaylāfī was crucial in the Mamluk invasion of Yemen. For if he allowed them to land, they would have easy access to the hinterland. The Mamluks came to him with gifts attempting to gain his support. He may have prevaricated at first but it was learning of the bombardment and destruction of Hodeida that led him to depart immediately for Kamarān and promise that he would show the Mamluks the "inland road from the port of al-Luhayyah".⁷⁹ Thus it was out of fear. The Qurrah does seem to imply that he was coerced in some way, "and they ordered him to give the khutbah in the name

⁷⁸ Schuman, Qilādah, 19; Ibn al-Daybāf, Fadl, 277.

⁷⁹ Schuman, Qilādah, 19

of the sultan Qānsawh al-Ghawrī".⁸⁰

He would not have been swayed in this way, however, had he felt any loyalty towards the Tahirids, so what can we ascertain of relations between them prior to this? One of his family, Mūsā b. Maqbūl, is noted as having been captured along with the shaykh of the Kā'biyyūn in 912/1506 in one of the Tahirid Amir 'Abdallāh b. Sufyān's campaigns against the Tihāmah tribes.⁸¹ He and the shaykh were despatched to Zabīd and later in the year were taken to the sultan in Ta'izz along with money captured from the Zaydiyyah, and horses and captives captured from the Kā'biyyūn. The lord of al-Luḥayyah is likely to have been related to the above mentioned Ibn Maqbūl and hence the source of animosity against the Tahirids. In addition to the fact that Tihāmah tribes, including the northern ones, had been in opposition on and off throughout the Tahirid period till now, as has been related above. The other significant opponent of the Tahirids who was to assist the Mamluks was 'Izz al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. Dārī b, brother of the lord of Jizān.⁸²

Despite Salman Rā'īs' disinclination to pursue an attack on the Yemen, arguing that Qānsawh had not instructed them to do this, and refusing to have

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 224. The lord of al-Luḥayyah assisted the Mamluks with "his religion, his person and his wealth".

⁸¹ Ibn al-Daybā', Fadl, 199.

⁸² Schuman, Qilādah, 20; Ibn al-Daybā', Fadl, 223, in 915/1509 'Izz al-Dīn had come to the Yemen bearing gifts to the sultan.

any part in the land expedition, Ḥusayn al-Kurdī now decided to proceed.⁸³ Following the destruction of Hodeida, Ḥusayn al-Kurdī sent with the lord of al-Luhayyah a grab with 100 Mamluks on board and, as promised, they were shown the way, and were led in the direction of Mawr. Waiting for them there was the Tahirid amir, Muḥammad b. Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī. The Mamluks were armed with arquebuses (aqwās al-bunduq) which were unknown in the Yemen at this time.⁸⁴ The Tahirids had no hope of success. The amir was killed and Mawr was taken. Now the Zaydiyyah tribe with their well known antipathy to the sultans, also decided to join the Mamluks. An interesting feature of the activities of the opponents of the Tahirids is this: the fact that it was an outside force coming in to attack the Tahirids and possibly taking over the Yemen clearly did not either occur to or worry them. In other circumstances it might have caused them to rally behind the Tahirids who were at least Yemeni, albeit in their eyes, tyrants, rather than supporting the foreigners.

An envoy from the Zaydiyyah went to Kamarān, pledging allegiance to the Mamluks.⁸⁵ They promised to hand over the kharāj of the area to Ḥusayn al-Kurdī. The combined forces of the Mamluks and Zaydiyyah then attacked al-Ḍahī, previously the centre of a serious engagement between the Tahirids and the Zaydiyyah. In al-Ḍahī was a small Tahirid garrison under the leadership of ʿĪsā b. ʿAlī al-Ḥajarī. Once again Mamluk firepower defeated the

⁸³ Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 9.

⁸⁴ Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 159, note 39.

⁸⁵ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 279; Schuman, Qiladah, 19.

Tahirids and they retreated to al-Ghānimiyyah.⁸⁶ The Tahirid sultan, who was in al-Miqrānah, seems at last decided to take decisive action. ʿAbd al-Malik, the sultan's brother, was despatched with the army and after passing through Zabīd made his way to al-Mazḥaf.⁸⁷ Hearing of ʿAbd al-Malik's expedition, Ḥusayn al-Kurdī decided now to enter the fray himself and arrived from Kamarān with about 1,000 armed soldiers. These troops belonged to Salmañ and were Turks.⁸⁸ Corsali says that Salmañ had with him about 2,000 men and that he paid them well. This is in contrast to the Mamluks under Ḥusayn who were badly paid and mutinied at every opportunity. At this stage the Qurrah⁸⁹ gives us some background saying that the Ottoman sultan "Suleyman" (this should be Selim, Suleyman only came to power in 926/1520) had sent to the Mamluk sultan, Qānsawḥ, a large force to assist him in fighting the Franks adding that the Turkish sultan did not know that the Mamluk sultan and Ḥusayn had a secret agenda and had been planning to conquer Yemen.⁹⁰

Ḥusayn al-Kurdī arrived with his army at Bayt al-Faḳīh b. Ḥushaybir. Ibn al-Daybaʿ marvels at the arquebuses "this is something strange. Noone can fight one armed with it without being defeated. It is like a gun (madfa) but longer and thinner. It is hollow and a piece of lead is inserted inside it like the

⁸⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 20, note 137; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 279, and note 4 has the populace retreating to a place called al-ʿAtīmah, a fortress in Jabal Wuṣāb.

⁸⁷ Schuman, Qilādah, 20 and note 137 where he suggest that al-Mazḥaf is in Wadi Surdud; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 279-80.

⁸⁸ Corsali, Lettre, 154.

⁸⁹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 226.

⁹⁰ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 226; Schuman, Qilādah, 20.

stone of nabaq fruit.⁹¹ It is filled with gunpowder (bārūd). Fire is pushed on to a fuse (fafilah) at the lower end of the arquebus and anyone it hits is killed. The bullet (bunduqah) sometimes strikes one person passes right through him to someone else and both are killed".⁹² Once in al-Mazḥaf, the sultan's brother ʿAbd al-Malik was confronted with a hostile force consisting of "Turks, Rūm and Maʿāzibah"⁹³ headed by Sharīf ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Aḥmad al-Darīb from Jīzān. A great battle ensued in which ʿAbd al-Malik's bravery won the day and became legendary.⁹⁴ A fine detail is quoted from al-Ahdal in the Qilādah who says that he heard Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik saying "I fought on the day of al-Mazḥaf wearing a coat of mail, underneath which was an oil cloth. The bullets and arrows hit me, they pierced the coat of mail and when they attained the oil cloth they were smothered because of the wax. When the fighting was over I put off the coat of mail, I took out the oil cloth and shook it and then bullets and arrows, eighteen all told tumbled out of it!"⁹⁵

ʿAbd al-Malik remained in Jubayl⁹⁶ and then proceeded onto Zabīd with the heads of fourteen slain. In Aden, news of the Egyptian defeat was greeted with

⁹¹ "About the size of a cherry stone", Smith, "The Tahirid sultans", 154. This contains a translation of Ibn al-Daybāʿ' s passage with accompanying notes on the terminology.

⁹² Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 280; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 226; Smith, *ibid*.

⁹³ Schuman, Qilādah, 20 has translated it Maghāribah, the other texts, Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 226; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 280 have Maʿāzibah. The text of the Arabic in Schuman fol, 195r is in fact ambiguous. "Turks and Rum" i.e. Mamluks and Ottoman Turks.

⁹⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, 20; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 280; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Qurrah, 226.

⁹⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, 20.

⁹⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 20 and note 139.

joy, fortresses were illuminated and there were great celebrations. However, soon after this came the news of the Mamluk attack on Zabid. After the defeat of al-Mazḥaf, the Arab tribes encouraged Ḥusayn to pursue the Tahirids to Zabīd "their hypocrisy [the tribes] became apparent".⁹⁷ Ḥusayn al-Kurḍī promised them all manner of things, and while at Bayt al-Faqīh Ibn ʿUjayl, the Maʿāzibah too came to him to pledge allegiance. Thus Ḥusayn proceeded to Wadi Zabīd to wait for reinforcements from Salmān Raʿīs. The army that arrived at Bāb al-Nakhl in Zabīd on 27 Jumāda I consisted of Ḥusayn's force of Mamluks, Ottoman Turks belonging to Salman, Turkomans, and of the Yemeni contingent, substantial numbers of Arab tribesmen of the Maʿāzibah and the Zaydiyyah. They were also accompanied by Sharīf ʿIzz al-Dīn of Jizān and his followers and the Faqīh Maqbūl of al-Luhayyah. Against this enormous force, on the Tahirid side, were the sultan's brother Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik and his son ʿAbd al-Wahhāb with the Tahirid army. After a valiant struggle, the Tahirids were overwhelmed and much of the army deserted. The enemy entered Zabīd.⁹⁸ ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was shot but entered the city and took refuge in al-Dār al-Kabīr. His uncle, ʿAbd al-Malik, followed him there and brought him out on his own horse. Having succeeded in forcing his way through the Mamluk troops they fled to Tāʿizz with a few of the remaining loyal troops. Also with them was Faqīh ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Nizārī, and al-Sharaf al-Mawzaʿī. Both Ibn al-Daybāʿ and Abū Makhramah say that the latter was the cause of the dissension (*fitnah*) and the extinction (*z̄ wāl*) because he had borne a secret

⁹⁷ Schuman, *Qilādah*, 21; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, *Qurrah*, 226.

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, *Fadl*, 281; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, *Qurrah*; Schuman, *Qilādah*, 21.

antipathy to the Tahirids.⁹⁹

The Tahirid princes were in Ta'izz only a short time before Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhāb died on 14 Jumādā II and was buried near Shaykh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Jabarī.¹⁰⁰ Al-Mawzā'ī died soon after.

After the departure of the Tahirids from Zabīd, the Mamluk army entered it pillaging and looting.¹⁰¹ They set fire to large parts of the city and caused its people untold misery. On that day the prayers were not performed. Ḥusayn al-Kurdī established himself in al-Dār al-Kabīr and ordered the army to cease their plunder, but they totally ignored him and carried on. Ḥusayn then arrested and put in irons a number of the Yemeni merchants trying to extract their wealth from them. He even arrested a qādī called al-Muzajjad believing him to be as wealthy as the qādīs of Egypt!¹⁰² On learning that he was in fact quite poor, he excused him and gave him a robe of honour. Then there appeared before Ḥusayn two Egyptians residing in Zabīd whose names were al-Jamīl and Dūghān whom he recruited to note down the names of all the house owners, exhorting them each to pay 10,000 ashrafī dinars.¹⁰³ He also persecuted Faqīh Sharaf al-Dīn b. Ibrāhīm Ja'mān in Bayt al-Faqīh who was

⁹⁹ Schuman, Qilādah, 21-2; Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 281. It is not clear how al-Mawzā'ī was responsible as he has not been mentioned before in this context. Ibn al-Dayba' is savage in his indictment of him. Repeated in Ulughkhānī, History, 43.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 281.

¹⁰¹ Schuman, Qilādah, 22; Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 281-2; Corsali, Lettre, 154.

¹⁰² Schuman, Qilādah, 22; Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 282.

¹⁰³ Schuman, Qilādah, 22-3; Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 283.

believed to hold the wealth of the Tahirid amir ʿAbd Allāh b. Sufyān. When he denied it, he was thrown in jail and beaten till he died. These descriptions are more familiar to us from the pages of the chronicles of Ibn Iyās, where the excesses of the Mamluks and their officials are graphically described but for the Yemenis this must have all been very shocking.

Ḥusayn had promised his troops that on taking Zabīd he would give them each 100 ashrafīs. He now refused to give them anything. Ibn al-Daybāʿ says that this was because the Mamluks had plundered so much that there was nothing left a statement which is hard to believe.¹⁰⁴ They revolted against him and threatened him. According to Corsali, Ḥusayn sent a letter to Salmān recounting what had occurred and the mutiny that was now taking place. Salmān replied that the troops would be paid on their return to Kamarān. This did not please the troops and they told Ḥusayn they would prefer to remain in Zabīd "where they came from".¹⁰⁵ Ḥusayn al-Kurdī found his position impossible and decided to leave, having remained in Zabīd for only fourteen days. Before his departure he appointed in his place a Mamluk named Barsbay,¹⁰⁶ with the Sharīf ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Durī b of Jīzān as his deputy. Ḥusayn went straight to al-Buqʿah and joined Salmān.¹⁰⁷ Together they sailed to Zaylāf and were given 10,000

¹⁰⁴ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 283.

¹⁰⁵ Corsali, Lettre, 154. This must be the answer given by the Yemeni tribesmen only.

¹⁰⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 23 and note 149.

¹⁰⁷ Schuman, Qilādah, 23 says al-Mutaynah.

ashraffīs, victuals and men ¹⁰⁸ by the Ethiopians, after which they sailed to Aden, where the ships were preparing to depart for India with the monsoon winds. They had already set sail but because the wind was not very strong they were not able to make much headway and were cruising idly.

Ḥusayn, with the main body of vessels, set out for Aden while Salmān caught up with the trading vessels which were laden with goods. He left them unharmed and simply exchanged his own sea captain for the Tahirid on the sultan's ship. This was in order to ensure that they obtained the revenues from the sale of the goods and he also took the precaution of sending a letter to the sultan of Gujarāt telling him that Yemen now belonged to them. The ship's captain was instructed to return with provisions, wood and iron.¹⁰⁹

Ḥusayn al-Kurdī then began his siege of Aden, heavily bombarding the city from the ships. Not achieving much success, he then turned his guns on the causeway that connected the island of Sīrah to the mainland. A great battle ensued in which Ḥusayn's forces were defeated. He retreated in his vessels.¹¹⁰ The Tahirid garrison on Sīrah had asked Amir Murjān for reinforcements, realising their vulnerability.

Amir Murjān, however, seeing the Egyptians retreating and sailing out of the

¹⁰⁸ Corsali, Lettre, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 283-4.

¹¹⁰ There were 21 vessels in all including those at this moment with Salmān, Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 284, grabs and galliots.

port, did not see any need and the garrison came back into the town. Salmān had observed all of this and decided to take over operations at this point. He ordered the ships back in and immediately took Ṣīrah and began firing at the town. His cannon shot wide of the mark and the people felt reassured. Amir Murjān took the precaution of paying the army generously to keep up their morale. Salmān renewed his attack, positioning his guns on the Ṣīrah causeway, shooting at the city wall. A large section fell down but was repaired that night with pieces of madder.¹¹¹ Very ingeniously the Yemenis threw over the damaged wall splendid garments filled with canvas. As the cannon balls pierced the canvas they got stuck in the madder. After this ineffectual attack, Salmān retreated and heard the news that Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik had arrived with reinforcements and camped at al-Tilāj.¹¹² At this news the Egyptian forces despaired of victory such was ʿAbd al-Malik's reputation after the battle of al-Mazḥaf. They removed their artillery from Ṣīrah and retreated once again. For the second time in four years Aden, though savagely attacked, survived.

The story of the return of the fleet to Jeddah and the effect the news of the Mamluk defeat at Marj Dabīq in 923/1517 by the Ottomans under Selim I had on Salmān and Ḥusayn are discussed elsewhere¹¹³ and do not belong here. We must now return to the Yemen and chronicle the movements of the Mamluk Barsbay and the final Tahirid debacle.

¹¹¹ Schuman, Qilādah, 24 and note 155 in which he point out that none of the other histories mention this ingenious use of madder.

¹¹² Schuman, Qilādah, note 158 suggests this was a point on the aqueduct built by sultan ʿĀmir. See also his note 187.

¹¹³ Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 11 f.

The Mamluk force left behind in the Yemen, it seems out of choice, was now quite a separate entity from the fleet that attacked Aden and then retreated home.

iv) The aftermath: the Yemen between 922/1516 and the Ottoman invasion in 945/1538

a) Events leading to the death of Sultan ʿĀmir

The events of the years 922-923/1516-1517 can be summarised as follows.

Barsbay settled the affairs of Zabīd, then set up camp outside the city intending to go and help Ḥusayn al-Kurdī during his seige of Aden. But it was too late, since Ḥusayn was already in Mocha where Barsbay joined him and he returned to Zabīd after plundering Mawza^c. It is now clear that the two Egyptian forces were quite separate - Barsbay had decided to remain in the Yemen while the rest of the fleet proceeded to Jeddah.

The Tahirid sultan had been in al-Miqrānah when the occupation of Zabīd had taken place. He now made his way down to Zabīd. There, he was greeted by envoys of the Egyptians suing for peace. They presented their conditions, which were that they would surrender everything on payment of a sum of money and then leave. As this event occurs shortly after Barsbay's meeting with Ḥusayn al-Kurdī at Mocha, we can suppose that this was discussed between them. The sultan was inclined to accept the proposal, but was warned that it might be a plot - we cannot be sure who advised him, but it sounds like Bā^c dānī who, it will be recalled, was the one who advised him against co-operating with the Mamluks last time. And thus the sultan sent the envoys

packing. He then marched to al-Turaybah, ¹¹⁴ pursued by the Egyptian forces. A battle took place between the two sides . Although the Tahirids got the better of the Egyptians, they were not unscathed : the Tahirid troops were wounded and hungry and the sultan according to the Qilādah, to his great discredit, would not provide food for the army from his own provisions.¹¹⁵ On the next day, there was a second engagement, with members of the Tahirid family noted as taking part in the fighting, the sultan himself and his son Aḥmad and Shaykh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ʿĀmir. However, the Tahirid army on this occasion was routed. The Egyptians plundered the sultan's camp and returned to Zabīd; the Tahirids and their supporters fled to Taʿizz. Abū Makhramah obviously had little regard for the sultan, but was quite impressed by Barsbay, whom he says had proclaimed security in the city and did no harm to anyone.¹¹⁶

By 923/1517 the sultan realised that he had problems with the loyalty of the army. For this reason Abū Makhramah says he relied on the Mahrah tribe and his slaves.¹¹⁷ The rest of the army were resentful of the Mahrah as they were paid more than the others. They considered them the "horny spot on the fore-leg of an ass".¹¹⁸ On Barsbay's pursuit of the Tahirid forces to Taʿizz, this resentment became manifest and the army, formed of a disparate collection

¹¹⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, note 167, situated in the wadi east of Zabīd.

¹¹⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, 27.

¹¹⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 27.

¹¹⁷ No other source refers to the Mahrah in this context. Ḥajāri, Majmūʿ, 725.

¹¹⁸ Schuman, Qilādah, 28.

of tribesmen, began fleeing in droves.

This brief paragraph has given us a clear picture of the composition of the sultan's army corroborated by Varthema's remarks in this regard quoted above (112).¹¹⁹

There were three elements: a core of black slaves; Varthema says there were 16,000 of them whom he maintained, the Mahrah - although we do not know how long they were in the service of the Tahirids, and disparate numbers of tribesmen who were clearly ruthlessly opportunistic and loyal only to the one who paid the most.¹²⁰

The sultan avoided a confrontation with the Egyptians in Ta'izz and went to Ibb. The Egyptians entered Ta'izz and in addition to plundering and pillaging they forced the faqīhs to utter condemnations of the Tahirids in the khutbah. The Tahirid sultan fled to al-Miqrānah reaching it a day before the Egyptians and in time to rescue his wives and some of his wealth. Barsbay waited until the sultan had departed and then entered the town, looting and pillaging. Barsbay was then deceived by the Al'Āmmār¹²¹, who promised him allegiance and whose territory he had entered. This was a trap however and they killed him with a group of his men.

The remaining Egyptians in al-Miqrānah elected another Mamluk, Iskandar, described in the Qilādah as a real tyrant, but brave. Al-Iskandar succeeded in

¹¹⁹ Varthema, Itinerary, 28-9.

¹²⁰ Varthema, Itinerary, 36; Pires, Suma, 15, "there are always many people in the country paid to fight".

¹²¹ Schuman, Qilādah, note 173, the Al'Āmmār are noted in the area south of Yarīm.

securing the five lakk of gold (coins) ¹²² which had been walled up by the sultan by intimidating Faqīh ʿUmar al-Jabartī, one of the sultans' trusted amirs. Amir Murjān speculated that the sultan must have told Jabartī where the treasure was hidden as only he, the slave and the mason knew where it was. ¹²³ Al-Iskandar then headed towards Ṣanāʿ and a confrontation with the sultans forces took place at Gh-frah. ¹²⁴ The sultan was not himself there. The Egyptians were surrounded but managed to escape by bribing ʿAbd al-Nabī b. Saʿīd and escaped to Radā. ¹²⁵

Returning now to the sultan, it is clear that his nerve had begun to fail. After he left al-Miqrānah, he was desperate to secure somewhere safe for his wives and possessions but he was so afraid of the Mamluks that when he saw a horseman, in fact one of his own cavalry men, he thought he was an Egyptian, he fled and tried to hide in one of the fortresses belonging to the tribe of Yāfiʿ, but they would not let him in. News of the Gh-frah battle, however, made him decide to attack the Egyptians. He returned to al-Miqrānah, leaving his son Aḥmad there, and headed for Ṣanāʿ. This appears strange, as it would be assumed that at least some of the Egyptian troops were still in al-Miqrānah. ¹²⁶ Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik, who was evidently more popular than

¹²² See footnote 47 chapter 2 above.

¹²³ Schuman, Qilādah, 29.

¹²⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, 29, and note 175 is unable to locate this place which is not mentioned in the other sources. I have not been able to find it either in the sources at my disposal.

¹²⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, 29 and note 176.

¹²⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 33

the sultan, remained in Laḥj reestablishing his authority there .He heard the news of attack and sack of Miqrānah and summoned the tribes, including the Hayāthim, requesting them to defend Laḥj against "the Turks" (ie the Mamluks) and he went in search of the sultan.¹²⁷

The sultan, anxious now to engage the Egyptians, headed for Ṣanʿāʾ . His brother, ʿAbd al-Malik, advised against this as he felt they were doubly vulnerable in this part of Yemen, with Egyptians on one side and Zaydīs on the other. The sultan's view, however, prevailed.

The Egyptians were at this time unsuccessfully beseiging Ṣanʿāʾ . They caught the Tahirid forces by surprise and attacked them before they had even unloaded their equipment. A great battle took place during which the sultan's brother, ʿAbd al-Malik was killed by a bullet. He had not even had time to put on the protective clothing that had saved his life at the battle of Mazḥaf. The sultan escaped to Jabal Nuqum, the mountain overlooking Ṣanʿāʾ to the east, was captured and killed ignominiously, without the Egyptians even realising at first who it was they had killed. The heads of the sultan and ʿAbd al-Malik were sent to Ṣanʿāʾ to Amir al Baʿdānī. He immediately opened the gates to them, but, despite having granted protection to the inhabitants, the Egyptians looted and pillaged Ṣanʿāʾ . Many of the ʿAl ʿĀmmār who had killed Barsbay were themselves killed. The Egyptians remained in Ṣanʿāʾ for two months and then decided to make their way back to Zabīd.

¹²⁷ Schuman, Qilādah, 33-4; for the B.Hayāthim, Schuman, Qilādah, note 194 and footnote 62 above.

Let us now look at the events of 923/ 1517 from the point of view of the Zaydīs. These are fully documented in Rawḥ and the Ghāyah.¹²⁸

b) Zaydīs and Mamluks

The arrival of the Mamluks in Ṣanī ā, who are now called "the Circassians" in the texts (al-Jarākisah), had the effect of mobilising the Zaydī Imam Sharaf al-Dīn into action. We last heard of him requesting Ḥusayn al-Kurdī for assistance against the Tahirids in 921/1515. Now he decided to act against both remaining Tahirids and Mamluks. He firstly expelled the Tahirid garrison from Thulā under its governor al-Layth al-Dawdajī, which was still there despite the death of the sultan.¹²⁹ The Mamluks then mobilised their forces to fight the imam. They enlisted the support of ʿAbd al-Malik al-Muḥarram al-ʿAnṣī, one of the Yemeni tribal leaders who had supported the Mamluks previously and who was anxious to obtain some of the Tahirid territory previously held. He besieged Thulā persistently. But during this campaign the news arrived from Egypt of the Mamluk defeat by the Ottomans at Marj Dabiq. The death of Qānṣawḥ al-Ghawrī was known, as was the assumption of power of Ṭumān Bey and his subsequent death at the hands of Selim I. The Zaydī authors remark that Ṭumān Bey and the Tahirid sultan ʿAmir were killed within twelve days of each other.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Luṭf Allāh Rawḥ, 26 f; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 650 f.

¹²⁹ Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 28; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 654.

¹³⁰ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 654; Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 29.

The effect on the Mamluks in the Yemen was to throw them into confusion. They immediately made peace with the imam and withdrew to Ṣan‘ā’, humiliated.¹³¹ Their leader al-Iskandar was afraid to tell the Ṣan‘ānīs what had happened to the Mamluk sultan, since he feared for his own life. However, he simulated allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan Selim and gave the khutbah in his name. He then prepared to depart from Ṣan‘ā’ to Zabīd. He appointed an amir named Ḥamzah and left him with a force of 300 Mamluks. He took with him the remaining Mamluks and was also accompanied by ‘Izz al-Dīn, of Jīzān, who had been helping the Mamluks since their arrival in Yemen, and his other supporter the aforementioned al-‘Ansī.¹³² Before his departure he ordered the Tahirid Amir al-Ba‘dānī to be strangled.

But disaster overtook the Mamluks on their way down to Zabīd. They were attacked by a group of the tribe of B. Ḥubaysh¹³³ who made off with the great wealth they had accumulated from their various plunders, Mawza‘, the sultan’s camp at al-Turaybah, Ta‘izz, al-Miqrānah and Ṣan‘ā’. One source suggests there were 3,000 camels laden with treasures, jewels, gold, silver, all sorts of precious things and provisions. The B. Ḥubaysh also took the Tahirid prince ‘Āmir b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Al-Iskandar arrived in Zabīd destitute.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 656.

¹³² Luṭf Allāh, Rawḥ, 30; Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 656.

¹³³ The B. Ḥubaysh resided in the area around Sumārah south of Ṣan‘ā’, Smith, Simt, 229.

¹³⁴ Schuman, Qiladah, 31.

The Mamluks remaining in Ṣanʿāʾ decided to make raids on the surrounding Zaydī territory. This culminated on a raid on the B. Bahlūl¹³⁵ and after a heavy battle the tribes defeated the Mamluks. The few of the latter remaining retreated to the qaṣr of Ṣanʿāʾ.¹³⁶ The people of Ṣanʿāʾ now invited in Imam Sharaf al-Dīn to take control of the city.

Al-Iskandar as was mentioned above, arrived in Zabīd in a sorry state. However he established himself and his force of Mamluks there and they pledged their allegiance to the Ottomans. They adopted Ottoman dress and Selim recognised al-Iskandar as his governor in the Yemen. Thus he remained for three years.¹³⁷

c) The Portuguese activities under Lopo Soares

Meanwhile, the Portuguese had sent out another fleet under the command of the ineffectual Lopo Soares in 923/1517. The aims were still as before: to secure complete control of the Indian Ocean trade, to establish a Portuguese base in the Red sea and to establish proper relations with "Prester John" of Ethiopia. None of these aims were to be fulfilled.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ They resided in the area to the east of Ṣanʿāʾ, Ḥajārī, Majmūʿ, 131.

¹³⁶ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 656-7

¹³⁷ Nahrawālī, al-Barq, 33.

¹³⁸ Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 21 f; Serjeant, Portuguese, 50; Schuman, Qilādah, 31

In one of the Portuguese ships, the Sao Pedro, was Andrea Corsali, whose letter to Lorenzo de Medici provides much detail on the Mamluk invasion of the Yemen. His description of Aden will be quoted below in chapter 7. According to Corsali the Portuguese fleet consisted of 40 ships, with 2,000 Portuguese soldiers and 700 Indians who were, Christians from the Malabar coast. They had enough food for a year. After 22 days they arrived in Socotra.¹³⁹

On arrival in Aden, in a gesture of friendship, the Portuguese fired their guns. Envoys of Amir Murjān came to Lopo Soares and they provided the Portuguese with all the victuals they required and pilots to show them the route.¹⁴⁰ Amir Murjān also gave them information about the Ottoman fleet.¹⁴¹ He recounted to them in some detail the activities of the Mamluks under Ḥusayn al-Kurḍī and Salmān all of which Corsali faithfully noted down. Thus it is clear that on this occasion, Amir Murjān saw the Portuguese as a potential ally against the Mamluks. Soares was in fact criticised later for not taking advantage of the situation, as this would obviously have been an opportune moment to establish an alliance of sorts with the Yemenis and a Portuguese base at Aden.¹⁴²

The Portuguese sailed to Jeddah where Salmān Ra'īs was waiting for them.

¹³⁹ Corsali, Lettre, 143. He has an extensive description of Socotra with its incense, ambergris and chameleons. He also mentions the Christian community and how the inhabitants were badly treated by the Portuguese. Serjeant, Portuguese, 157 f.

¹⁴⁰ There was some reluctance on the part of these pilots to do this job. Schuman, Qilādah, 32; Serjeant, Portuguese, 50

¹⁴¹ Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 27

¹⁴² Corsali, Lettre, 146; Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 27.

Corsali's description suggests that they experienced great difficulties with the wind and other problems and that it took them another 25 days to reach Jeddah from Aden.¹⁴³ They learnt on arrival that Egypt, the Hijaz and Syria were now in Ottoman control. Salmān, who was still in charge of operations against the Portuguese, had had plenty of time to make sure Jeddah was properly fortified. As the Portuguese ships got closer they were fired upon.¹⁴⁴ Soares was nervous of losing the entire Portuguese fleet and was warned by a Christian who came to him secretly that Jeddah was solidly fortified. He also received a visit from an envoy of Malik Iyās, lord of Diu, who, Corsali says, was aiding and abetting both the Portuguese and the Ottoman sultan. He advised Soares to return to Diu and collect more men and equipment. The Qilādah recounts that, as the Portuguese did not land, Salmān sent a few grabs to attack them and damaged a number of the Portuguese ships. Then Salmān's own ship was burnt, after one of his gunners threw something into the gunpowder to ignite it. According to the Qilādah, this gunner was a Christian and was using this opportunity of inciting his fellow Christians to turn against Salmān in favour of the Portuguese.¹⁴⁵ He was caught and was executed. The Portuguese retreated. Salmān pursued them as far as the Yemeni coast of al-Luhayyah. The Turks captured a grab from them, taken by the Portuguese previously. The men on board were sent to the Ottoman sultan. The Portuguese arrived in Aden and once again Amir Murjān provided them with water and rescued some captives they had taken. The Portuguese then sailed on to

¹⁴³ Corsali, Lettre, 147.

¹⁴⁴ Corsali, Lettre, 151.

¹⁴⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, 32.

Hormuz.¹⁴⁶

d) Amir Murjān and the last of the Tahirids

Amir Murjān now attempted to ingratiate himself with the Ottoman Sultan Selim. He wrote to him complaining about the activities of Ḥusayn and Salmān and the Mamluk army in the name of sultan ʿĀmir according to the Qilādah presuming him to be alive.¹⁴⁷ He told the sultan how they had wrought destruction and bloodshed on the country. He also apologised to the sultan for having helped the Portuguese, providing them with pilots and other assistance. He entrusted the letter to two envoys sending them to the Sharīf Barakāt of Mecca whom he asked for help in directing the envoys to the Ottoman sultan. The envoys were accompanied by presents both to the sharīf and to Selim I. The envoys arrived at the Ottoman court, and were well received by the sultan. After the embassy, however, one of them, Fā'ishī, died in Ottoman domains. The other, Shādhilī, who arrived with a return present at the island of Sawākin, was robbed by a party of people from Dahlak who did this out of hatred for the Turks who were in Zabīd.¹⁴⁸ Whatever Amir Murjān was

¹⁴⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 32; Corsali, Lettre, 156-7.

¹⁴⁷ The death of ʿĀmir occurred on 23 Rabi' II, 923 - 15 May 1517. The Portuguese by 12 April were close to Jeddah, Bacqué-Grammont et Kroell, Mamlouks, 27-8. If Murjān was, as Abū Makhramah says, uncertain about whether the sultan was in fact dead he would be writing sometime during the middle to end of May one month after the Portuguese departure. It is possible that he did know and may have thought that a letter signed in the Sultan's name would have more effect. All the dignitaries of Aden put their signatures to this letter.

¹⁴⁸ Schuman, Qilādah, 32.

hoping for, he clearly received nothing for his efforts.

For the next twenty years until the Ottoman conquest of Yemen in 945/1538, the country was subject to three spheres of influence: Zaydīs in northern Yemen gradually extending south; the remaining Tahirids in odd fortresses in Lower Yemen and with their major base in Aden; and the Mamluks and their allies ruled by a succession of governors¹⁴⁹ now claiming to represent the interests of the Ottomans, based in Zabīd and controlling Ta‘izz.

As far as the Tahirids are concerned, the years 924-27/1518-20 are chronicled by Abū Makhramah and are told, therefore, from the standpoint of Aden. On the death of the Sultan ‘Āmir in 923/1517, his son Shaykh Aḥmad (born in 903/1497) who had been in al-Miqrānah when his father died, became the leader of the Tahirids. In Aden, Amir Murjān continued pronouncing the khutbah in the name of ‘Āmir, the deceased sultan, until the first Friday of the year 924/1518. He then changed it in favour of Aḥmad. However, Aḥmad was not to live long after this, and Murjān soon received news of his death. In al-Miqrānah, they decided that Shaykh ‘Āmir, the son of ‘Abd al-Malik, brother of the third Tahirid sultan, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb become their next leader. (fig.3) The latter is a more appropriate word, so limited was their authority. The texts at this stage refer to these Tahirids only by their names or with the title of Shaykh. Although the last of these princes, ‘Āmir b. Dā’ūd, is referred to on his coins as al-sultān (see below, 168f.)

The selection was done with the agreement of those of the dynasty with

¹⁴⁹ Nahrawālī, al-Barq, 32 f.

authority at al-Miqrānah .In particular are cited Naqīb ʿAbd al-Nabī and the Faqīh ʿAlī al-Nizārī. Amir Murjān agreed. ʿĀmir it seems was of noble disposition, but the tribes soon turned against him. The khutbah was read out in his name in Ibb and the mountain districts.¹⁵⁰ It is clear that the Tahirids were now only in control of a small area of the Yemeni highlands. In 925/1519 there was an internal struggle for succession between the Tahirids. Shaykh Aḥmad, from another branch, son of Muḥammad who was the son of the first Tahirid Sultan ʿĀmir, rose up in Radāʿ. (fig 3a) He was defeated, but escaped to the fortress and the victorious troops plundered Radāʿ. In Ramaḍān of 925/1519, Shaykh ʿĀmir died, having reigned for less than a year. Shaykh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĀmir was invited to be leader. Neither ʿAbd al-Malik nor Amir Murjān approved of this and ʿAbd al-Malik stole away from Juban where he had been residing and sought the protection of Amir Murjān.

In the following year, 926/1519, Murjān advised Shaykh Aḥmad to take Taʿizz which was at this time held by the Mamluks. A great battle took place outside Taʿizz. Aḥmad's side was winning when he was betrayed by his alleged supporter ; Naqīb ʿAbd al-Nabī who was Murjān's son in law. He and the tribe of Hayāthim ceased fighting and when attacked by the Mamluks fled and Aḥmad was defeated.

The coalition of tribes which had been formed to fight the Mamluks to expel them from Taʿizz dissolved and Murjān was anxious to be rid of Shaykh Aḥmad and more or less stopped obeying his orders.

¹⁵⁰ Schuman, Qilādah, 35.

In this same year, the Ottoman governor of Jeddah, Ḥusayn Beg arrived at the port of Buq'ah and went to Zabīd. He had heard that there was a political vacuum in the Yemen and had ambitions to take it over. The Ottoman governor of Egypt, Khayr Beg, gave him permission to go ahead and he headed for Yemen in 926/1520. As soon as he arrived, came the news that the Ottoman Sultan Selim I had died. Al-Iskandar, who had been there since 924/1518, and was now well established in Zabīd, opposed the idea of Ḥusayn Beg taking over and plotted to kill him.¹⁵¹ Ḥusayn Beg's return to Jeddah, however, was prompted by news of Portuguese ships off the coast of al-Ārah and he hurried back to Jeddah to inform his superiors.¹⁵²

The Portuguese had about twenty ships, grabs, galleons and galliots, including a large vessel loaded with most of their provisions, cannon and wealth which they had to abandon because of the wind. Amir Murjān prepared for their arrival and troops were stationed in strategic positions. Murjān obviously did not trust them, despite their friendly behaviour on the previous occasion in 923/1517. But they did not return to Aden and sailed on to Jeddah. On approaching, they learnt that a huge force had been prepared against them and they lost heart and retreated to Dahlak and then on to Aden where Murjān once again provisioned them and they then went on to Hormuz.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Nahrawālī, al-Barq, 34.

¹⁵² Serjeant, Portuguese, 51-2; Schuman, Qilādah, 38, note 223; al-Ārah was an anchorage between Aden and Bāb al-Mandab. They landed there because their navigator had overshot Aden and the winds prevented them returning.

¹⁵³ Schuman, Qilādah, 38, 40; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 663; further accounts of Portuguese activities are in Serjeant, Portuguese, 52 f.

Returning now to the Tahirid Shaykh Aḥmad, he realised that his authority was being undermined by Amir Murjān. Such was Murjān's power and influence that the mountain people would not recognise Shaykh Aḥmad as sultan until Aden did. Amir Murjān however openly turned against him and ordered that the khutbah now be pronounced in the name of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik. Abū Makhramah is censorious of Amir Murjān for having abandoned Shaykh Aḥmad for no particular reason.¹⁵⁴

Further to this, ʿAbd al-Malik accompanied by ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbd al-Nabī, and with substantial funds, took to the mountains, presumably to reestablish Tahirid control. It appears that Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik was virtually in ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbd al-Nabī's pocket. From the description, it seems that there was a great deal of aimless wandering and with little achieved. After this sojourn, the same situation between Murjān and Aḥmad seems to have occurred between Murjān and ʿAbd al-Malik whom he had supported. The tribes wanted the assurance that Aden was in ʿAbd al-Malik's favour and he requested entry to Aden, which was refused. After much deliberation however, ʿAbd al-Malik was allowed to enter by Murjān. There then follows a period during which ʿAbd al-Malik remained in Aden, but was spied on by Amir Murjān. ʿAbd al-Malik, wearying of his untenable position started rallying the army and a number of tribal leaders. But the key were Yāfiʿ, who comprised the majority of the population and whose support he had to have in order to make any headway against the amir. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Nabī plotted to have ʿAbd al-Malik murdered in the mosque, apparently without the knowledge of Murjān, although Abū Makhramah

¹⁵⁴ Schuman, Qiladah, 39

is sceptical of this. ʿAbd al-Malik and Murjān were now in open conflict. It is in the middle of this account told in great detail that Abū Makhramah's narrative abruptly ends.¹⁵⁵ Further details on the Tahirids now are found in the Zaydī chronicles.

From 924/1518, the Zaydīs with astonishing rapidity, began asserting their authority all over the northern Yemen; expelling Tahirid garrisons where they still remained and fighting their opponents among the northern tribes. By the 930s/mid 1520s they were beginning to penetrate Lower Yemen.

In 933/1527, the Mamluks in Zabid marched on Mawza^ʿ, which was in the hands of the Tahirid Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad referred to as "lord of Ta^ʿizz". He fled to Ḥiṣn Maṣraḥ,¹⁵⁶ near Ta^ʿizz and there retreated with his family and possessions. He was betrayed by members of his family, Ṭāhir b. ʿUmar and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ʿĀmir, who fled to al-Miqrānah and re-established themselves there and in Damt and Juban. Meanwhile, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik fled Ḥiṣn Maṣraḥ no longer able to support the siege and with his family sought refuge with Shaykh al-Ghaylānī. Although the latter had previously been acting for Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik, looking after some of the fortresses, he turned against ʿAbd al-Malik and sent word to the Mamluks of his arrival. They arrived and arrested him and took him with his family to their

¹⁵⁵ Schuman, Qilādah, 43.

¹⁵⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 669. Ḥiṣn Maṣraḥ is a fortress close to Ta^ʿizz, I have been unable to locate it precisely.

amir who was in Khubān.¹⁵⁷ The shaykh was executed, but his family, among whom was the al-Ḥurrah ‘Ā’ishah, daughter of al-Malik al-Manṣūr and sister of the last sultan ‘Āmir, was spared. The news of the Mamluk occupation of Ḥiṣn Maṣraḥ and Ta‘izz threw the inhabitants of Dhamār and Ṣan‘ā into panic. Sharaf al-Dīn with his son al-Muṭahhar, were in Thulā at this time. They returned to Ṣan‘ā and calmed the people down.¹⁵⁸

In 934/1528 the Zaydīs continued their campaigns in Lower Yemen, and after reaching Ma‘bar, proceeded to the al-Miqrānah/Juban area.¹⁵⁹ The Mamluks in al-Miqrānah and Damt wrote to al-Muṭahhar pledging allegiance. al-Muṭahhar sent them two envoys the Faqīh Muḥammad al-Jassār and Shaykh Aḥmad b. Hādī al-Mawhabī to take al-Miqrānah. B. Ṭāhir, who were in Radā‘, sent ‘Abd al-Ghanī to take care of matters in al-Miqrānah. He immediately arrested al-Muṭahhar’s envoys. The Mamluks, however, proceeded to free them and arrested ‘Abd al-Ghanī, informing al-Muṭahhar of the events now occurring. Al-Muṭahhar then marched to al-Miqrānah, capturing fortresses around Damt. Once in al-Miqrānah, they captured what remained of the sultan’s treasury: specially mentioned are arms and fine inlaid metalwork which had belonged to the Rasulids (ālāt rafī‘ah min nuḥās al-ghassānī al-murassah bi-’l-fiddah) as well

¹⁵⁷ Ḥajarī, Majmū‘, 304, presumably what is meant is the Khubān in the region of Yarīm.

¹⁵⁸ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 668 f.

¹⁵⁹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 671 f. Ma‘bar is twenty miles north of Dhamār, Smith, Simt, II, 174.

as Chinese porcelain. Al-Muṭahhar then went on to al-Farīd¹⁶⁰ which the Ghāyah describes as one of the most marvellous of the Tahirid domains. It was to this place, not previously named, that the Tahirid sultan had fled from al-Miqrānah with all his possessions in 923/1517. The Zaydī amir al-Muṭahhar found precious manuscripts which the last Tahirid sultan had taken from Ṣanʿāʾ. He also found gilded doors which ʿĀmir had removed from Zafār al-Ashrāf. al-Muṭahhar ordered that these should be returned. They had apparently originally hung in the Dār al-Bayḍāʾ in al-Zafīr.¹⁶¹ The Zaydīs went on from there to Juban, which also fell into their hands, and from there to Radāʿ, where the Tahirids remaining in the fortress gave themselves up.¹⁶² In 941/1534, the Zaydī imam decided to try and recapture all of the previously held Tahirid domains. Mention is now made for the first time of the last of the Tahirids, ʿĀmir b. Dāʾūd.¹⁶³

He had as his wazir a Zaydī sharīf, called Yaḥyā al-Sarrāj who had turned

¹⁶⁰ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 671. This is likely to be Mamluk metalwork made for the Rasulid sultans inscribed with their names. A number of these have later owner inscriptions; Porter, "Art of the Rasulids", 232-236; Van Berchem, "Notes d'Archeologie". I have been unable to locate al-Farīd.

¹⁶¹ Zafār al-Ashrāf is the ancient Himyarite capital now known as Zafār Yarīm, Smith, Simt, II, 216. Zafīr, Ḥajarī, Majmūʿ, 567, a fortress in the Dhū Jiblah area.

¹⁶² Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 671. It is difficult to form a precise picture of how much hold the Mamluk forces had over al-Miqrānah. We also learnt previously that members of the Tahirid family had gone there prior to the siege of Ḥiṣn Maṣraḥ. Although the capture by the Zaydīs of these territories is portrayed as a victory over the Mamluks, it was in fact they who had asked the Zaydīs in.

¹⁶³ Schuman, Qilādah, genealogical table, (and fig. 3a) is doubtful about which branch he is from.

against Imam Sharaf al-Dīn. He urged ʿĀmir to move into imamate territory in Lower Yemen. Taking advantage of the imam's activities in Ṣaʿdah, ʿĀmir gathered the tribes under the leadership of al-Sarrāj. Also with him was ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Bāʿ dānī, otherwise known as al-Sh-rmānī.¹⁶⁴ They reached Damt and there al-Sarrāj and al-Bāʿ dānī separated. A great attack was mounted on al-Sarrāj and a terrible massacre of his forces took place; decapitated heads were sent by al-Muṭahhar to his father the imam in Ṣanʿā. A little later, Baʿ dānī's and his forces entered into battle with the imam's army and were defeated. Al-Muṭahhar then went on to Taʿizz where there still remained one of the Tahirids, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad who was ignorant of recent events and Tahirid defeats. Aḥmad was beseiged in the Taʿizz fortress al-Qāhirah but was betrayed by his slaves who opened the gates to the Zaydīs.

When the Mamluks of Zabīd learned of al-Muṭahhar's arrival in Lower Yemen they decided to try and take Taʿizz before his arrival there. They set out but learnt of his entry to Taʿizz and retreated to Zabīd. Their leader, al-Iskandar died in this year and was succeeded by the Amir Muḥammad al-Nakhūdhah.

In 942/1535, al-Muṭahhar ordered the siege of Aden ; Khanfar, Laḥj and Abyan being already in their hands.¹⁶⁵ This proved unsuccessful. In 943/1536, al-Muṭahhar's brother, Shams al-Dīn, suffered a reverse at the hands of the

¹⁶⁴ Yaḥyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 678 and see appendix, 266

¹⁶⁵ Khanfar is in the Abyan area, about 50 miles east of Aden. Ibn al-Mujāwir Tārīkh al-Mustabsir, 248. It is now called Jaʿār. I am grateful to Prof. Smith for this information.

Mamluks in Zabid, and ʿĀmir b. Dāʿūd, the Tahirid shaykh, thought that as a result his luck might turn. With a substantial army, ʿĀmir marched from Aden to Umm Q-rīsh. When al-Muṭahhar learnt of this he advanced his forces and there was a battle at a place called Ghayl Wazrān in which ʿĀmir's forces were defeated and he retreated to Aden.¹⁶⁶ The last reference to the Tahirids is in 945/1538-9 with the arrival of the large fleet of Sulaymān Pasha off the coast of Aden, en route to fight the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean.¹⁶⁷ ʿĀmir, learning of the arrival of the fleet, immediately wrote to Sulaymān Pasha asking for assistance against the Zaydīs. Sulaymān replied in friendly terms and requested permission for some his ships to enter the harbour of Aden. This was given. ʿĀmir had entrusted the letter to a Turk named Farḥān, presumably one of the Turks in the Yemen since the time of the Mamluk invasion. Sulaymān Pasha, then sent Farḥān back with a number of soldiers, with the express purpose of capturing ʿĀmir and bringing him to his ship. ʿĀmir and six of his men were taken to Sulaymān's ship and executed immediately. Sulaymān then sailed to India. He eventually returned from there having failed to do battle with the Portuguese, in order to conquer the Yemen.¹⁶⁸

ʿĀmir, whose coins are discussed at the end of the following chapter, was the last of the Tahirids, and with his death, the dynasty came to an end.

¹⁶⁶ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 682-3. I am unable to locate Umm Q-rīsh.

¹⁶⁷ Serjeant, Portuguese, 95; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 684.

¹⁶⁸ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 684.

Chapter 6

COINS AND MONEY

i) Introduction; ii) The currencies: a) Silver, b) Copper, c) Gold; **iii) Textual references:** a) Cost of goods; b) The striking of coins and the Zabīd mint; **iv) Summary; v) A group of Tahirid coins**

i) Introduction

The currency system of the Yemen during the Tahirid period was silver based as it had been under the Rasulids. This paralleled the situation in Egypt where gold, which had been the currency standard during the Fatimid period, had by Ayyubid times been displaced by silver. Thenceforth, gold coins had been relegated to a money of account.

Under the Tahirids, three currencies were in use, gold, silver and copper. To describe the gold coinage, the alternating terms, "ashrafī", or "dinar" were used as was the case in Egypt.¹ A confusion arises, however, in that in most cases in the Yemeni context, the term "dinar" was being used to mean a money of account only and actually referred to silver dirhams. It is only from the context that the meaning can be judged. The terms used to describe this money of account were, for instance, "so many dinars of silver", (dīnār fiddah) "dinar-dirhams" , or simply "dinar" on its own with the "dirham" dropped. The actual silver coins are also referred to on their own as "dirhams" or by weight in ūqiyyahs. References to copper coins (fulūs) do exist, but are found more rarely.

¹ Popper, History of Egypt and Syria, 49-50.

The source material for this chapter is rich, but problematic since there are a number of terms that are not easily understood. Nowhere for instance, are any clear indications about the ratios of gold to silver to copper. These can only be guessed at on the basis of related material.² The task of forming a clear picture of the monetary economy is rendered more difficult by the absence of a complete series of coins to which to apply the theories suggested by the historical material might be applied. This material consists of passages in the texts referring to the value of certain commodities in times of hardship; the amounts given out in sadaqah, the revenues from Aden and the amounts extracted in tax (kharāj).

ii) The currencies : a) Silver

Silver coins were reckoned either in terms of a notional value of a dinar or by weight. The most frequent term is the "dinar-dirham" and it is found in the following contexts: in 900/1495 by way of compensation for injustices committed by his officials, the sultan gave out 500 ashrafīs and 6,000 dinars worth of dirhams (wa min al-darāhim sittah ālāf dīnār).³ In 910/1505 the amount given out by the sultan in sadaqah was 10,000 dinars worth of dirhams (āsharah alāf dīnār darāhim).⁴ In 907/1501 a thief received the traditional punishment for having

² Most useful in this context have been Appendix III in Serjeant, Portuguese; Goitein's Mediterranean Society, vol. I; Popper, Egypt and Syria; and Balog, The coinage of the Ayyubids and The coinage of the Mamluks.

³ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 216. The ashrafī is discussed below

⁴ Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 202

stolen 2,000 dinars worth of dirhams (alfay dīnār darāhim).⁵

In the following references, the term "dinar" is being used on its own with the "dirham" dropped but it presumably has the same meaning as a money of account, so many dinars worth of dirhams. In 894/1488 rebels against Sultan Āmir were prepared to exchange the revenues of Aden, 40,000 dinars for control of Jabal Harīz.⁶ Sadaqah in 902/1496 amounted to 6,000 dinars;⁷ in 904/1498 12,000 dinars in addition to 100 mudd of food;⁸ and in 905/1499 10,000 dinars which he also gave out in conjunction with grain (wa mablaghuhā min al-naqd ʿasharah ālāf dīnār wa min al-taʿām miʿat mudd)⁹ Earlier in the year the sultan had decreased the amount owing in unpaid taxes.¹⁰ Taxes obtained in 903/1497 from tribes in the area of Wadi Mawr included more than 40,000 dinars. This kharāj probably extracted by force included in addition 80 arab horses, and cloth.¹¹

Another term, "dinar fiddah" is also used, further emphasising the fact that the

⁵ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 154

⁶ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 187

⁷ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 99

⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl 126-7, mudd a standard measure for dry goods which fluctuated between regions and different times, Hinz, Islamische Masse, 45-7

⁹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 140

¹⁰ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 138 (the term used is bawāqī)

¹¹ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 116-7, thamānūn farasān wa min al-naqd fawq arbʿina alf dīnār illā ghayr dhālika min al-bazz

dinar means a certain number of silver coins.¹² For instance, in 886/1481 sadaqah amounting to 40,000 gold ashrafiṣ and 65,000 dinars worth of silver (dīnār min fiddah) were given out.¹³

Examples of the use of the term "dirham" on its own occur in the following contexts: in 905/1498 the head of the mint (shaykh dār al-darb) was arrested for tampering with the silver content of the dirhams;¹⁴ and at celebrations in 912/1506, dirhams were scattered.¹⁵

Thus it is clear that the term dinar in the above mentioned contexts, referred to a certain amount of dirhams. This is further emphasised by the contrasting mention of ashrafi gold dinars in the context of the sadaqah. It would appear that when a sum was specifically mentioned, the term "dinar dirham" was used, but when the sum was unspecified the word "dirham" was used on its own.

That a fractional silver coin was also in use is suggested by the term "dirham saghīr".¹⁶ This is found in the context of price rises as in the following reference in 914/1508: five ūqiyyahs of oil and less cost a dirham saghīr (wa 'l-samn khams

¹² Serjeant, Portuguese, 139 for the use of the term in the mid 16th century

¹³ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 166

¹⁴ Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 135. (bi-sabab khiyānah zaharat fī darāhimihī)

¹⁵ Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 204, (wa min al-darāhim jumlah mustakthirah)

¹⁶ Fractional silver coins were in use in Egypt for instance during the reign of Īnāl between 857 and 865-1453-1461 half and quarter dirhams were struck. Popper, Egypt and Syria, 59

awāqī wa aqall bi-dirham ṣaghīr).¹⁷ The earliest attested use of this term has been noted in an early Zaydī context where the dirham-ṣaghīr is described as one third of a dirham qaflah.¹⁸

The qaflah was a coin weight in use in Abbasid times. It is referred to by Hamdānī in the context of his discussion of the relative weights of gold and silver, "the weight of a dirham qaflah of gold is two-thirds heavier than a dirham qaflah of silver" (hisbat al-dirham al-qaflah min dhahab mithl thulthay hisbihi al-dirham al-qaflah min al-fiddah).¹⁹ An Abbasid dirham is described as being the weight of a qaflah (approximately 2.8-2.9 gm) and a dirham qaflah meant a dirham of full weight. In the Rasulid context, Nützel cites a reference to a "Muzaffarid" dirham weighing "half a qaflah or more".²⁰

The qaflah was also used as coin weight for silver during the Tahirid period. It occurs in a somewhat complicated passage in the context of "bad" money minted

¹⁷ Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Faḍl, 213. This reference seems to suggest that whether one buys 5 ūqiyahs or less, the samn costs a dirham ṣaghīr which seems most irrational. Serjeant, Portuguese, 146 has observed frequent references to the terms dirham ṣaghīr and dirham kabīr in the texts of Shanbal and others.

¹⁸ Serjeant, Portuguese, 182

¹⁹ Hamdānī, Kitāb al-Jawharatayn, 70b, 327

²⁰ Nützel, Coins of the Rasulids, 31; (fiddah khālīṣah waznuhu niṣf qiflah aw ziyād). The coin cited by Nützel, no.20 p. 44 weighs 1.48gm. Using this and data from texts at his disposal, Serjeant, Portuguese, 181-2, has calculated that the qaflah weighed 3.12 gm, half a qaflah being 1.56 gm; another meaning of qaflah is found in Landberg Glossaire, 2518, "mesure de poudre".

in Zabīd in 914/1508 which caused the value of silver to fluctuate. In this year the "sultan's dirham coinage" in Zabīd, underwent a great change (taghayyarat sikkat al-darāhim) and bad money in the town was common (wa kathara zayfihā).²¹ The value of people's money fluctuated (talafat amwāl al-nās) and 10 1/2 qifāl became worth 12 "dinar dirhams" of silver muhallaqah (wa balaghat 'asharah qifāl wa nisf qafalah bi-ithnay 'ashar dīnār darāhim fiddah muhallaqah) despite the fact that the silver content only weighed 7 1/2 qifāl (ma'an waznihā a'nī al-muhallaqah al-ithnay 'ashar saba' qifāl wa nisf qafalah).²² The muhallaqah referred to here was a silver coin. As a result of the instability caused by the adulteration, people were getting less silver for their money.²³

When referring to silver coins by weight, the term ūqiyyah is used. An ūqiyyah (approximately one ounce) varied but in general was 1/12th of a ratl whose weight varied according to region.²⁴ In 866/1461 80 head of horse were each valued at 63 ūqiyyahs (qīmat al-faras minhā thalath wa sittūn ūqiyyah).²⁵ Bā Makhramah in the later 16th century states that by the word ūqiyyah, the Yemenis mean seven

²¹ Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 1277, gives the meaning of adulterating money. The term, the "sultan's" coinage has not been used before. Presumably this means simply the official coinage. It may suggest that a distinction between the "official" coinage and a token style currency for smaller scale transactions in copper.

²² Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 230. This is what I have presumed Ibn al-Dayba' means.

²³ Serjeant, Portuguese, 193, has suggested that muhallaq denotes a coin "presumably with a circle". For other references to muhallaq radi' and muhallaqah al-kibār see also, Portuguese, 143, 149.

²⁴ The weight of gold was also calculated by the ūqiyah, Serjeant, Portuguese, 82, 103. Popper, Egypt and Syria, 39-40. Hinz, Islamische Masse, 34-5 ; for the ratl weight, 27-33

²⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Buqyah, 132

dinars and elsewhere he states that 1 Yemeni ūqiyyah equals 10 qaflahs.²⁶

To summarise the information presented on silver coins.

Silver coins were generally reckoned in terms of a notional value of the dinar and references talk of "so many dinars worth of dirhams", often in the prestigious contexts of the sultan giving out ṣadaqah. Fractional coins were also in use, the dirham ṣaghīr is mentioned in the context of price rises, although its weight is open to question. Silver coins are also referred to by weight, the silver coin weight qaflah is recorded as is the term ūqiyyah. For individual silver coins the term "dirham" is the most common. Another term muḥallaq also appears in the sources but it is not possible to tell from the context what manner of coin this is.

b) Copper

References to copper fulūs are not common although copper coins must have been the currency for every day use. An interesting reference from the year 904/1498, occurs, once again in the context of the adulteration of the coinage. In this year, a great change occurred in the copper coins (fulūs) in Zabīd and they became commonly available. The amir ordered however that people should use them (amara al-amīr al-nās bi-l-muʿāmalah bihā) and the people received less than the original value for the coins (wa lā yaʿidūna bihā siʿrahā al-ladhī kānat ʿalayhi). Only those (ie the new ones) coins were accepted and people had to go along with this (wa lam yuqbal minhum ghayr dhālika fa-imtathalū)²⁷

²⁶ Serjeant, Portuguese, 145 (This is the nephew of the author of the Qilādah and Tārīkh Thaghr Adan, Serjeant, Portuguese, 38-9), other references to ūqiyyah, 103 and note 4.

²⁷ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Fadl, 128

c) Gold

Turning now to gold, the following three terms are found: "dinar", "ashrafi" and "shakhs".

Finds of hoards of gold coins are recorded on several occasions. In 910/1504 when the foundations of a mosque in Haqdah (between Aden and Mawza⁶) were being dug, they found gold coins struck, Ibn al-Dayba⁶ remarks, in a different way from other Islamic coins. The weight of each coin (shakhs) was 1/4 of an uqiyyah, every four amounting to one uqiyyah of gold. The type of coin found was evidently sufficiently rare for Ibn al-Dayba⁶ to remark on them. He also mentions that another hoard, found in a mosque in Aden, were inferior to them (lākinahu, [the treasure] dūna hādihā :).²⁸ The term mushakhkhaṣ according to Lane, means "a thing individuated", mashākhīs, "deenars or pieces of gold figured or stamped with effigies". The term mushakhkhaṣ was also specifically used in a Mamluk context referring to Venetian ducats which had images of the apostles on them.²⁹ That foreign coins are being referred to is clear, but whether they were Venetian ducats which had been in circulation in trade until the Mamluk coinage reform of 830/1425,³⁰ or coins from the pre-Islamic era cannot be known.³¹

²⁸ Ibn al-Dayba, Fadl, 184; ʿAydarūs, Nūr, 567 : fa wajada al-haffārūn fī-l asās kanz dhahab shukhūsan madrūbān ʿalayhā bi-sikkah la tushbih sikkat al-islām al-wazn li-kull shakhṣ minhā rub⁶ uqiyyah dhahab.

²⁹ Lane, Arabic English Lexicon, 1517; Popper, Egypt and Syria, 46

³⁰ Bacharach, "The dinar versus the ducat", 76 f.

³¹ Aksumite coins found on the Tihāmah, Munro Hay "The al-Madhāriba hoard" ; one of the problems is that we do not know what the weight of a Yemeni uqiyyah was at this time. An Egyptian uqiyyah from the 15th century was roughly 38 gms so we are looking

Another more commonly used term to describe gold coins is ashrafī. A few examples of the references will first be cited and then the meaning of this term in the Yemeni context will be examined. In 875/1470 a hoard of ashrafīs was found in the village of Wāsīt in Wadi Zabīd. People went there from far and wide and a huge amount was uncovered. The sultan al-Mujāhid allowed those who had discovered it to keep it.³² Most of the references to ashrafīs however occur in the context of sadaqah : in 867/1462 400 ashrafīs were given out by the sultan in compensation for the evil doings of a certain Abū' l Qāsim al-Hāwālī.³³ In 886/1481 an unprecedented 40,000 ashrafīs were given out by al-Malik al-Manṣūr in addition to 60,000 dinars of silver;³⁴ in 900/1495 500 ashrafīs were given out by the sultan in compensation for a very bad fire in Zabīd.³⁵ Sadaqah in ashrafīs were not only given in coins but in kind. In 880/1475 the sultan gave out sadaqah in Ta'izz which amounted to 4,000 ashrafīs worth of cloth (bazz) and coins (naqd) as well as grain (ta'ām) and rice and sugar.³⁶ It is interesting to note in passing that these references to sadaqah in ashrafīs are largely before ca. 900/1494 . After this, sadaqah of this kind is referred to generally in "dinars".

What does this term mean and how does it correspond with the dinar ? The

for a coin weighing about 9 gms, Hellenistic gold staters are 8.5 gms.
I am grateful to Dr. Michael Bates for this suggestion.

³² Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 146.

³³ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 133.

³⁴ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 166.

³⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 216

³⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 153

ashrafi was the name given to Mamluk gold coins issued in 830/1425 by the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 825-41/1422-1435) in order to displace the Venetian ducat. Thereafter it became the standard term to describe an Islamic gold coin and used in for instance in Iran, in the Ottoman domains and in India.³⁷ But we need to consider first the Yemeni coins known as ashrafīs. Hībshī suggested that the ashrafīs found at Wāsiṭ might be Rasulid coins of the reign of al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar b. Yūsuf.³⁸ The term ashrafi was certainly used to describe coins minted by the Rasulid sultan al-Ashraf Ismāʿil (779-803/1377-1400) but they were silver. In 809/1406 travelling expenses were given to the Ḥamzī sharīfs "65,000 dirhams in the new ashrafi coinage" (sittah wa khamsin alf dirham al-judud al-ashrafiyyah).³⁹ It is clear therefore that the term is being used for silver, but additionally that it is a term that lasted only the duration of a sultan's reign or for some time afterwards, as long as those coins remained in circulation. This is shown by the fact that in the reign of al-Muzaffar, (648-95/1250-95) dirhams were known as al-Muzaffarī and likewise in the reign of al-Mujāhid ʿAlī (721-764/1322-63) his dirhams were known as Mujāhidī.⁴⁰ On the basis of the comments above and in addition to the fact that Rasulid gold coins were referred to as dinars or mithqāl, it should be clear that the silver ashrafīs bore no relation to the gold ashrafi introduced by the Mamluk sultan. But can we ascertain its value and relate it to the dinar? And do we know whether when the Yemeni

³⁷ The circumstances of the introduction of the ashrafi are discussed by Bacharach, "The Dinar versus the Ducat", 77f.

³⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 146, note 3.

³⁹ Khazrajī, Redhouse, ʿUqūd,

⁴⁰ "Muzaffarid dirhams", Redhouse, ʿUqūd, 1/212; "Mujāhidī dirhams", ʿUqūd, 2/57; "Ashrafi dirhams", ʿUqūd, 2/169.

sources talk about ashrafīs they are talking about their own currency or Mamluk coins ? We have little to go on. In 900/1494 the Bughyah records the purchase of a manuscript of Zarakshī for 90 dinars. In the Qurrah, the same purchase is mentioned for 90 ashrafīs.⁴¹ However, in 867/1462 sadaqah given out in compensation is noted in the Bughyah as amounting to 400 ashrafīs, in the Qurrah 5,000 dinars.⁴² If this is not a mistake does this provide us with a possible dinar-ashrafi ratio ? We could on this basis calculate that, if 400 ashrafīs equal 5,000 dinars, then each ashrafi is worth 12.5 dinars; that is dinars worth of dirhams.

Whether these ashrafīs were Yemeni or not, a distinction is certainly made between gold coins and what are termed local coins silver coins in a reference from the year 883/1478 : In this year the sultan removed from Aden to the treasury at al-Miqrānah 5 lakk of gold and a large amount of local currency (wa mablaghuhā min al-dhahab⁵ alā khams lukūk wa min naqd al-balad al-fiddiyyah mablagh jazīl).⁴³ This is a huge quantity of gold, 1 lakk being 100,000. If this is foreign gold, perhaps Mamluk ashrafīs, would it have been melted down in the mint and used to issue their own coins as happened in Egypt ?⁴⁴ Until Yemeni gold of the Tahirid period is found it would seem safe to assume that it is Mamluk ashrafīs that are being referred to and used. Another reference to revenues of Aden which is not specific in terms of quantities describes the coins

⁴¹ Ibn al-Daybāf, Bughyah, 213-4; Qurrah, 192

⁴² Ibn al-Daybāf, Bughyah, 133; Qurrah, 154

⁴³ Ibn al-Daybāf, Bughyah, 160.

⁴⁴ Bacharach, "The dinar", 79

being transported in two loads (mā fihā min al-naqdayn waqar) :35 camel loads of gold (khamsah wa thalāthūn jamalan min al-dhahab) and silver , apart from commodities (wa 'l fiddah ma 'adā al-ūrūd).

We can only at this stage continue to raise the questions and speculate on this matter of the ashrafī.

iii) Textual references: a) Cost of goods

Let us now turn to what any of these denominations might have meant in terms of the cost of certain items. Manuscripts were purchased by the last Tahirid sultan 'Āmir. In 900/1495 is mentioned the purchase of a text of Zarakhshī for a sum variously described as 90 dinars or 90 ashrafīs.⁴⁶ In 901/1495, the sultan paid 150 ashrafīs for a copy of al-Fath al-Bārī which he had ordered from Mecca.⁴⁷

The price of basic commodities are mentioned in times of hardship and generally in terms of dirhams. Dry goods such as grain were sold by the dry measure, mudd while items such as ghee were sold by the ūqiyyah. In 905/1499 Aḥmad al-Dhayḥ bought all the food which was in the royal storehouse ⁴⁸ and he paid for it 70 Yemeni dinars per mudd (kull mudd bi sab' in dīnār). In 914/1508 sorghum

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 103.

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 213-4; Qurrah, 192

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 194. The purchase of these texts were mentioned in chapter 4, 91-2

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 139 note 7, mā qāb is a storage bin usually for grain

(dhurah) reached 10 dirhams, millet (dukṅ) , 11 dirhams - presumably per mudd and sesame cost 6 dinar-dirhams, while 5 ūqiyvahs of ghee (samn), as was mentioned above, cost at its cheapest 1 dirham saghīr .⁴⁹ It is interesting in passing to compare these prices with those of a hundred years earlier. In 801/1398 the price of dhurah was one dirham per Zabīdī mudd.⁵⁰

b) The striking of coins and the Zabīd mint

There are very few references to the striking of coins. In fact the only time we have a statement about the proclamation of the khutbah and the sikkah is in 864/1459. The circumstances were as follows. Although up until this date the two sultans al-Malik al-Zāfir and Malik al-Mujāhid were ruling jointly, al-Zāfir was the senior partner. In this year, al-Mujāhid took over the reins of power despite being the younger of the two. We learn that this was with the full agreement of al-Zāfir and that previously these had been with him. At the beginnings of the reigns of the next rulers, al-Mansūr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and al-Zāfir ʿĀmir II, there were power struggles before they became properly established and the pronouncements of khutbah and sikkah are not recorded. This is actually the case too in the Rasulid period, but there we find many more references to new coins, for example the so-called "Muzaffari" or "Ashrafi" dirhams mentioned above.

There is no doubt that coins were being minted in Zabīd; there were the two references cited above, from 904/1498 and 914/1508 to the debasement of the silver currency, and the introduction of new copper coinage; and we have

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Daybā, Fadl, 213

⁵⁰ Khazrajī, Redhouse, Uqūd, II, 276, Arabic text, 251.

references to the existence and a vague location of the Zabīd mint and on several occasions to the head of the mint (shaykh dār al-darb) showing that the post was open to abuse. The mint is mentioned in a description of the damage caused by the celebrated fire of al-Jā' shā in 865/1460 : the fire which began to the east of Bāb Sahām continued east then south towards al-Sumayqah. Its limit to the west was the mint.⁵¹ Three scandals involving corruption on the part of the head of the mint are recorded by Ibn al-Dayba'. In 894/1488 Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Muqart-ṣ tried to perpetrate a coup against the sultan's amir in Zabīd, Muḥammad 'Īsā al-Ba'dānī. He had purloined the sultan's treasury and bribed the army. The account of this was given in chapter 4 above.⁵² The second was in 901/1495 when the shaykh of the mint, Ismā'īl b. Abī 'l- Ghayth al-Sunbulī stole 10,000 dinars from the treasury. The story as told by Ibn al-Daybā is additionally interesting as it gives some insight into zāwiyahs being used as safe havens. Sunbulī had taken refuge in the Sufi zāwiyah of Shaykh al-Ghazālī b. Talḥah al-Hatār. This was a respected place which was known to provide refuge to the oppressed. It was evidently a large establishment as it contained oil-presses, shops and houses, as well as the house of the shaykh himself which was inviolable. However the amir of Zabīd, 'Alī b. Shujā' decided that the privilege of the zāwiyah was being misused. Firstly the corrupt head of the mint sought refuge there and so did a certain al-Duwalī who owed money .The amir therefore ordered the destruction of Sunbulī's house, the selling off of his possessions followed by the destruction of the zāwiyah. However both the miscreants had taken refuge in the inner sanctuary, the house of Shaykh Ghazālī and no one could touch them. A

⁵¹ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 131

⁵² Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 189

little later however, al-Sunbulī was forgiven, the sultan even advancing him money to repair his home.⁵³

The third reference to a corrupt head of the mint was in 905/1499. The official in this case was al-Hādī b. Manṣūr who was arrested for debasing the silver coinage.⁵⁴ Later in the year the sultan dispensed sadaqah ordering his officials to stop their injustices. Al-Hādī b. Manṣūr was released but had to pay a fine of 9,000 dinars against his date palms.⁵⁵

iv) Summary

From the references examined a number of points emerge :

1. The Yemeni economy was silver based, but silver coins were generally thought of in terms of gold. There was evidently a notional ratio of silver to gold but we have no firm indication what this was.
2. Gold was known and hoarded and the Aden revenues came in gold. However, regarding the terminology, it is not clear what the value of the ashrafī was and how it related to the "dinar dirham". It is noteworthy that dirhams are referred to in terms of the dinar and not of the ashrafī.
3. Copper coins were in use ; they are referred to as fulūs. Transactions at the most basic level must have been carried out with them.
4. Reference to the minting of coins is rare, but we can be sure on the basis of the

⁵³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 96-7 and note 8 p.96 on al-Ghazālī b. Ṭalḥah al-Hatār.

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 135 and see above, .

⁵⁵ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 138

textual evidence for the existence of a mint in Zabīd. That there was a mint at Aden is known from the silver coins of the last Tahirid prince 'Amir b. Dā'ūd killed in 945/1538 described below. Tahirid coins are only now beginning to emerge and are still very rare. Increased numbers will increase our knowledge of the range of mints and types of coins in use.

v) A group of Tahirid coins (plates A-C)

The following is a description of a group of 20 silver coins kindly lent for study by Mr Dick Nauta acquired in Ta'izz in the 1980s.

The coins fall into two categories: I. Two coins which appear to belong to the sultan 'Amir b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb d. 923/1517 and II. 18 coins belonging to the last Tahirid prince 'Amir b. Dā'ūd d. 945/1538.

I. nos. 1-2. The two coins in this category bear the sultans' name 'Amir on the obverse and the shahādah on the reverse. On the obverse of no. 2, the beginning of the word 'abd can be discerned which suggests that these are coins of 'Amir b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb. No mint name or date are visible.

II. Nos. 3-20. These 18 coins belong to the last of the Tahirids 'Amir b. Dā'ūd who was executed by Sulaymān Pasha, commander of the Ottoman fleet, in 945/1538. Where the inscriptions are legible, the name 'Amir b. Dā'ūd can be clearly observed with his title sultān. The dates 935/1529 and in one case 941/1534 are also visible as is the mint name Aden on a small number of the coins. The coins are poorly struck with very thin flans often cracked at the edges and vary in size and weight. Many of them are corroded. There are three principal types.

1) nos. 3-5. The obverse field is divided into three registers, at the top the word sultān, in the centre, the name 'Amir b. Dā'ūd, the word Dā'ūd split into two with dāl and alif on the left, and waw and dāl on the right. The lower register contains the date in numerals. The reverse is inscribed with the shahādah.

2) nos. 6-7. The obverse field as above, is divided into three registers. The upper one too worn to be legible, the centre one containing the name ⁶Amir, and the date, probably 935. On both coins the final numeral is not entirely clear. It is likely to be five written in the style of a figure of eight (☐) with only the upper part visible. The other possibility of it being a two can be discounted because ⁶Abd al-Malik, the previous Tahirid in power, was still in control until the following year, 933/1527. On the reverse is a star pattern, in the centre of the star of no.6 is a six-petalled rosette, reminiscent of the rosettes that appear on coins of the Rasulid sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl (r. 1377-1401).⁵⁶ Around the star is the shahāda. The beginning of the inscription can be distinguished on no. 6.

3) nos. 8-11.⁵⁷ The obverse field is divided as with the two previous groups into three registers with ⁶Amir's name clearly visible in the central one. On nos. 10-11, the name appears to be preceded by the laqab al-Zāfir while on no. 11, the title sultān is clearly visible. On the reverse is the mint name Aden in a circle. The word duriba (struck) is clearly visible on no. 11.*

The rest of the coins, nos. 12-20 are more difficult to categorise precisely because of their condition. They do all however relate to the three groups with some variation, by the similarity of their calligraphic style, the division into registers and the overall quality of the coins.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Nützel, Coins of the Rasulids, 56

⁵⁷ A further coin from this group has been misattributed by Lachman to ⁶Amir b. ⁶Abd al-Wahhāb, Numismatic Circular, Sept. 1986, 222

⁵⁸ I am most grateful to Dr. Gert Puin for his help in deciphering some of the inscriptions on Mr. Nauta's coins.

* This coin could be a muhallaq c.f. Serjeant, Portuguese, 193. "a coin presumably with a circle"

Following the Mamluk invasion in 923/1517, a confused period of history ensued in which a number of Tahirid princes are mentioned in the chronicles as having authority in the southern region of the Yemen, although it was in fact only in Aden and parts of the highlands that were in any sense controlled by them. (See above, 143f) ⁵⁹ Amir b. Dā'ūd only appears in the chronicles from 941/1534. However, the last Tahirid ⁶⁰ Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Abd al-Malik who took control in 926/1520 ⁶⁰ maintained his position until 933/1527 when he was executed. ⁶¹ No other Tahirid, or indeed any Tahirid at all, is mentioned between 933-41/1527-34 and on the basis of these coins, it is possible to suggest, that Amir b. Dā'ūd was in a position of authority in 935/1529 and may in fact have taken over on Abd al-Malik's death two years previously.

I. Coins of Amir b. Abd al-Wahhab

1. diam. 1.5cm, wt. 0.7gm

obv.

[أبى سلطان]
[أبى سلطان]
مر

rev.

.....
[الله محمد]
رسول الله

2. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 1.01 gm

obv.

عائز
عبد

rev. as above

⁵⁹ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 677

⁶⁰ Schuman, Qilādah, 39

⁶¹ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 669

⁶² Maximum dimensions are given.

II. Coins of 'Amir b. Dā'ūd

1) 3. diam. 2.5 cm, wt. 1.35, date 935

obv.

السلطان
عبد م
عاص
٩٣٥

rev.

[لا] الله الا الله
[محمد] رسول الله

4. diam. 2.2 cm, wt. 1.54 gm, date 93x

obv. as above

rev. as above

٩٣٥

5. diam. 2.3 cm, wt. 1.19 gm
as above, less legible

2) 6. diam. 1.9 cm, wt. 0.89gm, date 935

obv.

عاص
٩٣٥

rev.



7. diam. 1.5 cm, wt. 0.49gm, date 935

obv.

عاص
٩٣٥

rev.



3) 8. diam. 1.7 cm, wt. 0.14 gm

obv.

عاص

rev.



9. diam. 1.6 cm, wt. 0.79gm, date (9)41, Aden

obv.

بالقاس
٩٤١

rev.



10. diam. 1.8cm, wt. 0.9gm, Aden (9)35?

obv.

بالقاس
٩٣٥

rev.



11. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 0.80gm, Aden

obv.

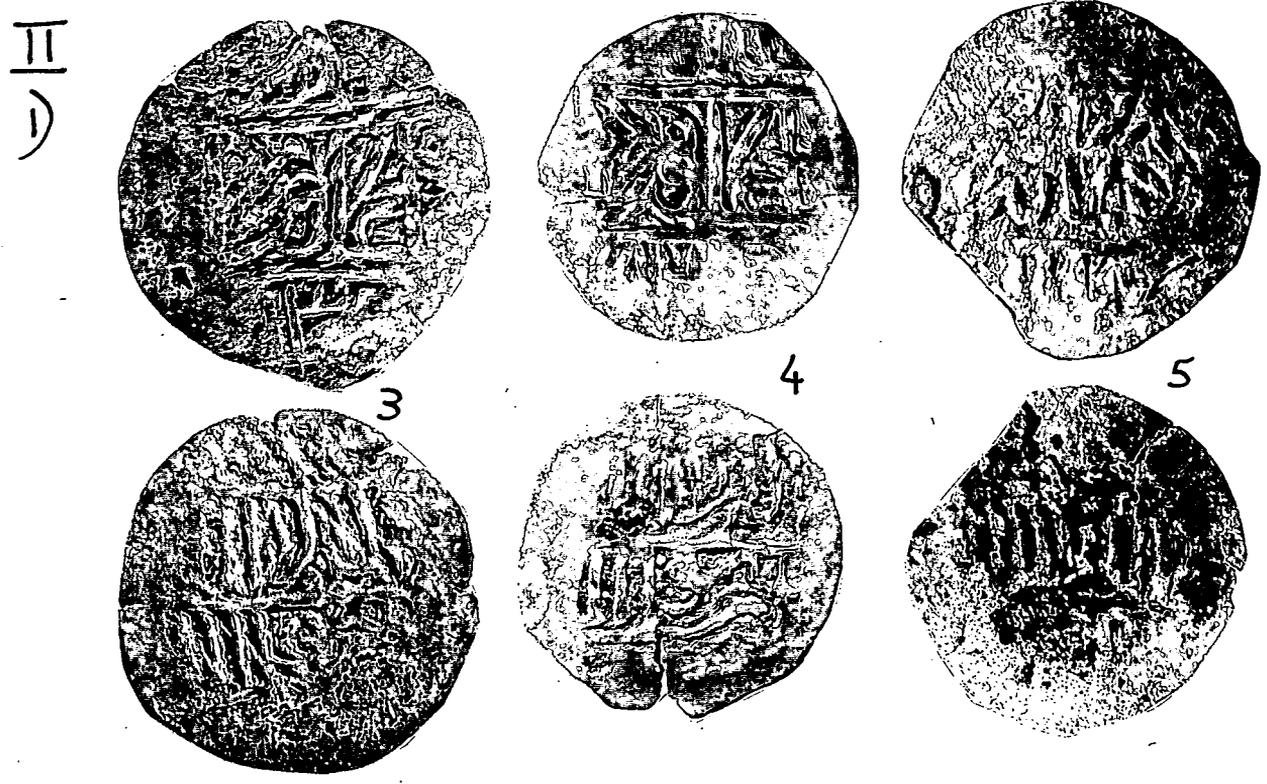
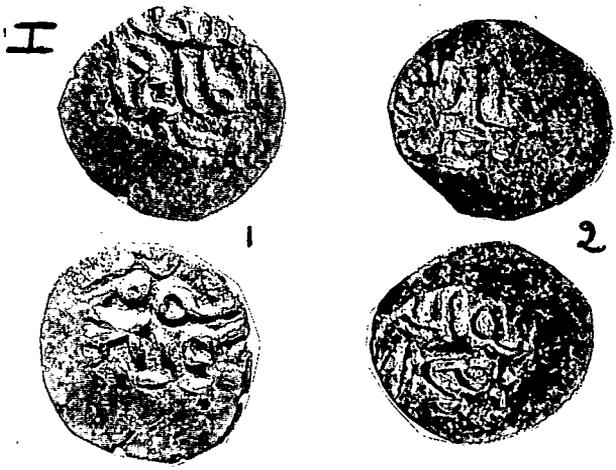
10
664
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rev.

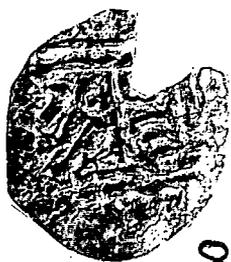


4) Miscellaneous group

12. diam. 1.5 cm, wt. 0.54, date (9) 3x
 13. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 0.75gm
 14. diam. 1.5cm, wt. 0.97, Aden
 15. diam. 1.5cm, wt. 0.42gm
 16. diam. 1.4cm, wt. 0.39gm
 17. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 0.76gm
 18. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 0.67gm
 19. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 1.06gm
 20. diam. 1.9cm, wt. 0.91gm



W



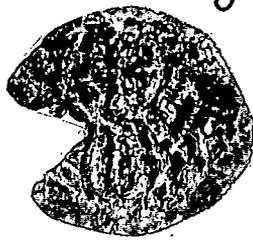
8



9



10



11



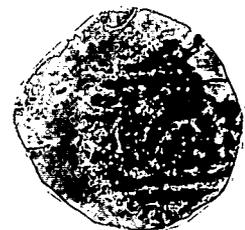
12



13



14





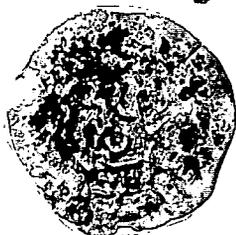
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16



17



18



19



20



Chapter 7

THE TAHIRID ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY

i) Introduction; ii) Summary of the Tahirids' public works; iii) Gazetteer of cities and settlements : a) Aden, b) Bayt al-Faqīh Ibn ʿUjayl, c) Ḥabb, d) Ḥays, e) Ibb, f) al-Janad, g) Juban, h) Khubān, i) Lahj, j) al-Miqrānah, k) Mukayras, l) Radāʿ, m) Tafizz, n) Tarīm, o) ʿUsayq/ʿAsīq, p) Zabīd, iv) Conclusion

i) Introduction

In the following chapter, another aspect of the Tahirid period is examined, the architectural legacy. The principal towns and settlements of the Tahirid domain have been listed alphabetically and the list includes contemporary descriptions of the cities and a record of the monuments constructed during this period. Where a structure is still extant, it is discussed in chapter 8.¹

This information is interesting for a number of reasons, firstly, where the Tahirids built indicates which areas were the most firmly under their control. Furthermore, the fact that it was during the reign of the last sultan, al-Malik al-Ẓāfir, that most of the building construction seems to have taken place, corroborates the impression given in the chronicles that this was a comparatively settled period, when the Tahirids were at the height of their power. As we would expect, monuments are recorded in al-Miqrānah, Juban and Radāʿ the region of the Yemen from which the family came. In these towns, as in Zabīd, the winter capital and religious centre of Sunnī Yemen, it is primarily the religious

¹ It was not possible for me while I was in the Yemen to survey comprehensiveley all the Tahirid monuments. Where I was able to, plans and photographs are included. Where I had assistance or where plans have already been published these have been fully aknowledged.

architecture which is discussed in the sources, while from Aden, as the principal port of the Yemen and bastion against the Portuguese and Mamluk invaders, it is the construction and restoration of pavilions, trading houses and fortifications that are recorded. An interesting indication of relations with Ḥaḍramawt which, apart from the Shiḥr adventure,² is hardly mentioned in the mainstream chronicles, is the funds given by al-Malik al-Zāfir Āmir for the great mosque of Tarīm. The extent of building activity recorded in Zabīd seems to suggest that there was much more construction going on here than elsewhere. A point to be aware of, however, is that Ibn al-Daybā's presence there at this time, may provide a biased view. Other cities such as Ta'izz, may have had an equal amount of activity which remains unrecorded and the evidence for which has now disappeared.

Also included here are descriptions of the cities given in the chronicles of the foreigners who visited Yemen at this time. Varthema was the only one to penetrate the Yemeni hinterland and, while he obviously did have aberrations, such as when he says that Zabīd had no city wall, when as in one case, his account is corroborated by the Yemeni texts,³ this suggests that, although prone to some exaggeration, his account is on the whole trustworthy. The other foreign accounts which provide some detail are by Albuquerque, the Portuguese attacker of Aden, and by others associated with the Portuguese Indian Ocean presence, such as Andrea Corsali and Tome Pires. Because it was all so new to them, these chroniclers sometimes offer details on the appearance of cities and the customs of

² see above, 65-6

³ see above, 111

the people which the Yemeni historians would not think to include.⁴

This chapter begins with a summary of what are termed the religious works (ma'āthir dīniyyah) of the sultans which are listed at the end of each of their reigns.

These are the public works of the Tahirids and include reference to new constructions, the restoration of old or ruined buildings and the building of dams and cisterns. We also find in these sections reference to the planting of agricultural produce such as dates or sugar cane. Much of this material is discussed elsewhere but it is included here to give a broad picture of the achievements of each of the sultans.

ii) Summary of the public works of the Tahirids

a) ʿAlī al-Malik al-Mujāhid (d.883/1478)⁵

A madrasah in Juban (B, Q)

A mosque (jāmiʿ) in Juban (Q)

A madrasah in Taʿizz (B,Q,G)

Repair to the Masjid al-Madrasah (Q) in Aden (also called Masjid al-Darsah (M) ;

A cistern in Aden (Q)

A madrasah in Ḥays (G)

Restoration of a madrasah in Bayt al-Faqīh b. ʿUjayl (M)

Dār al-Salāḥ restoration in Aden (T)

⁴ Albuquerque, Commentaries; Albuquerque, Caesar; Corsali, Lettres; Pires, Suma specific references where relevant .

⁵ Q= Qurrah, 167, B= Bughyah, 157, 119; G= Ghayah, 610 M= Madaris, 326-7; T= Tarikh, 16. The initials are given to show the source of the references.

Dār in Lahj (B)

He planted date palms in many areas of Wadi Zabīd and in the desert areas as well as in Wadi Lahj and outside Aden. He also planted sugar cane and rice in Wadi Zabīd and he repaired the water conduits in Zabīd (M).

b) ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Manṣūr (d. 895-1489)⁶

The Manṣūriyyah madrasah in Zabīd (B,Q,G)

The Manṣūriyyah madrasah in Juban (B,G)

Restoration of the Ashāʾir mosque in Zabīd (B,Q)

Madrasah in al-Miqrānah (B,Q,G)

Madrasah in Khubān (B,Q)

Extension to the mosque of DhuʿUdaynah in Taʿizz and the minbar there (B,Q)

Mosque in Ibb (B,Q,G)

Small birkah in the mosque of Zabīd (B,Q)

Extension of Dār al-Saʿādah in Aden (T)

Dār in Juban (B,Q)

Many irrigations works, cisterns and dams throughtout the country (Q).

c) ʿAmir al-Malik al-Zāfir (d.923/1517)⁷

Great mosque in Zabīd (Q,F,N)

al-Madrasah al-Zāfiriyyah opposite the door of al-Dār al-Kabīr in Zabīd (Q,F,N)

⁶ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 178; and Bughyah, 183; Yahya b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 615; Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 11; Al-Akwāʿ, Madāris, 328

⁷ Ibn al-Daybaʿ Qurrah, 233-4; F= Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 290; N= Al-ʿAydarūs Nūr, 118; Al-Akwāʿ Madāris, 344; Schuman, Qilādah, note 187.

Madrasah of Shaykh Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm al-Jabartī (Q,F,N)

The mashhad of the Faqīh Abū Bakr b. 'Alī al-Ḥaddād outside Bāb al-Qurtub in Zabīd (Q,F,N)

Two madrasahs in Ta'izz (Q,N)

Water conduits in Ta'izz (Q,N)

The Jāmi' al-Kabīr in al-Miqrānah (Q,N)

Masjid al-Qubbah in al-Miqrānah (Q,N)

Madrasah in Radā' (Q,F,N)

Masjid in Aden (Q,F,N)

Masjid in al-Mabāh, near Aden (Q,F,N)

Cistern in Aden (Q,F,N)

Cistern in 'Usayq/Āsīq (Q,F,N)

Mosques, dams in out of the way places

Aqueduct to outside Aden (Q,F,N)

d) Shaykh 'Abd al-Malik (d.923/1517)⁸

Madrasah in al-Miqrānah (Q,F)

Madrasah in Radā' (Q,F)

ii) Gazetteer of cities and settlements in the Tahirid domain

a) ADEN (map fig. 4)

Aden was the principal port of the Yemen in medieval times. The Aden peninsula is an extinct volcano. It juts out about four miles into the Gulf of Aden and is

⁸ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 234; Ibn al-Daybā', Fadl, 291.

connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus. The island of Ṣīrah is a broken off section of the lip of the volcano, and this acts as protection for the harbour. The ancient town was located in the north-east half of the crater.⁹ Its history is well known largely through the works of Ibn al-Mujāwir and Abū Makhramah and more recent works on history, aspects of the economy and trade and topography.¹⁰

In the Islamic period, Aden only began to prosper in the Zurayʿid period (473-569/1080-1173) and its importance grew under the Ayyubids, when it was heavily settled and the harbour (furdah) was built. A caravanserai (qaysariyyah), shops and market were also constructed at this time.¹¹ It continued to flourish as principal port and entrepot of the medieval Islamic world under the Rasulids¹² but suffered as a result of the Rasulid sultan al-Nāṣir's severe regulations against the merchants which led, in the 1420s, to Aden being temporarily abandoned for Jeddah as principal port.¹³ Under the Tahirids, who had been involved in trading activities in Aden prior to their rise to power in 858/1454, Aden regained its

⁹ Varthema, Itinerary, 26 remarks that five to six thousand families lived in Aden.

¹⁰ Ibn al-Mujāwir, Tārīkh; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Tārīkh; Playfair, History; Hunter, British Settlement; Norris, Aden Tanks; Serjeant, "Ports", "Yemeni merchants"; Cahen and Serjeant "Fiscal survey".

¹¹ Serjeant, "Yemeni merchants", 63.

¹² For detailed studies on the port of Aden, the goods coming in, the officials who ran it etc. see, Serjeant and Cahen, "Fiscal survey", 23 f; Serjeant, "Ports", 211 f; and "Yemeni merchants", 64 f. Ibn al-Mujāwir in Lofgren, Arabische Texte, 56 f.

¹³ See above, 31.

former status. Varthema, who arrived in Aden in 910/1504, remarks on it being the entrepot of ships from India, East Africa, Persia and that ships on their way to Jeddah docked here. He also gives an account of the procedures that took place once a ship was in port. He remarks that the ship would be boarded by officers who ascertained the nature of the cargo and where it came from, following which the masts, rudder, sails and anchors were removed to ensure that they did not depart before paying their dues. Because of the intense heat (Varthema arrived in July) the market was held at 2 in the morning.¹⁴

Albuquerque, writing from Aden in 919/1513, made a number of interesting comments. Firstly, that despite the Portuguese attempted control of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes, Aden in his day had the reputation of being the richest place in the east. Albuquerque further states his belief that Aden actually benefitted from the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean. The reason he offered was that, since the Mamluk ships were being prevented by the Portuguese blockade from sailing to Jeddah at the proper time, they were having to offload their goods and sell them in Aden. He says that Aden was full of merchants from Jeddah and Cairo and that there was no shortage of goods there.¹⁵ Aden's position as one of the principal emporia of the Indian Ocean during this period, is also confirmed by Tome Pires who describes it as one of the great trading cities of the world.¹⁶ It is thus somewhat ironic that the Yemenis were being asked by the Mamluks to fight the Portuguese whose actions were actually making Yemen

¹⁴ Varthema, Itinerary, 27

¹⁵ Earle and Villiers, Caesar , 257

¹⁶ Pires, Suma, 16. (The Suma Oriental was written in 1515)

wealthier rather than poorer .

Turning now to the physical appearance of Aden, Albuquerque notes that the houses, which were tall and built of stone and mortar, were the most beautiful he had seen in the east.¹⁷ Corsali said of Aden "à mon avis le plus noble, riche fort & beau que j'aye veu, ou que j'espère voir en ces contrees".¹⁸ All the commentators remarked on three features in particular: Aden's topography, its fortifications and the fact that its water has to be brought from outside.

Albuquerque was under the mistaken assumption that Aden was an island and it was only after scouting around the bay (prior to the second attack) that he was able to ascertain how the land lay. He regretted not having properly surveyed the area before the first attack.¹⁹ Aden was heavily fortified. There was a string of fortresses along the top of the mountain²⁰ which Albuquerque thought were more for show than for use. He also mentions that there were two towers on Huqqāt bay equipped with artillery and a catapult.²¹ The island of Şīrah was also fortified, a causeway linking it to the mainland. Abū Makhramah says of Şīrah that there was an ancient fortress there with a well in the middle of it. It was said to have a fire still burning in it which could be tested out by throwing a rope down it as it always came out singed. When this story was told to Shaykh Ālī b.

¹⁷ Earle and Villiers, Caesar , 253

¹⁸ Corsali, Lettre ; 145.

¹⁹ Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 251, 255 Aden may have been an island at one time. I am grateful to Professor Serjeant for this comment.

²⁰ Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 253; Corsali, Lettre, noted 25 fortresses; see fig. 5

²¹ Earle and Villiers, Caesar, 255

Ṭāhir during one of his stays in Aden, he was anxious to see it. However just as he was about to go he heard the news of the death of his brother Shaykh ʿĀmir outside Ṣanʿāʾ and he immediately set off without seeing the famous well.²²

Albuquerque's aim was to take the city and he reconnoitred the area systematically after the failure of the first siege in 919/1513. In his letter to the Portuguese king he considered it possible to break through the Yemeni defences, but explained that there would be a problem holding the city because of the shortage of water.²³

The problem for the fleet, as Albuquerque described it, was that, if it left India and took on water at Socotra, it could not remain in Aden longer than a fortnight, however few men there were on board. When he was there, he was only able to stay five to six days, after which it became necessary to sail into the Red Sea to obtain water before the easterly winds were over. His hopes were raised, however, when he realised that Amir Murjān was building a cistern on Ṣīrah island. He thought he would be able to capture the island without difficulty, thus solve the problem of the water shortage. As we saw earlier, he was not to achieve this.²⁴

Water Storage in Aden

Rainwater collected in three main valleys in the Aden crater, Khuṣāf, Tawīlah, and

²² Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 17; Hunter, British Settlement, 186 has further stories about the well from Ibn al-Mujāwir's Tārīkh in Lofgren, Arabische Texte, 29-30.

²³ Albuquerque, Caesar, 255.

²⁴ Albuquerque, Caesar, 255. The same problem of water shortage must have been faced by the Mamluks.

‘Aydarūs.²⁵

In order to develop the site of Aden initially as a settlement, then as a fortress town, the problem of water storage would have been the main obstacle to overcome. Wells do not appear to have provided enough water, and in pre-Islamic times, the valleys began to be dammed and a number of cisterns built, their number increasing during succeeding centuries. By the time the British saw the cisterns in the 19th century, they had fallen into disuse and disrepair .

These "tanks" as they are known, (sahārīj), were a vast interconnecting network of cisterns built of stone and mud masonry and coated on the interior with fine polished plaster.²⁶ The vastness and sophistication of this network greatly impressed the British in the 19th century and detailed descriptions of the tanks by Captain Playfair and others exist as a result of the survey and clearance work begun in the 1850s.²⁷

Albuquerque describes an ancient bridge which had a water conduit at its side. "The bridge..was built to carry the road to Zabīd...The water is taken through pipes laid alongside the road and then through another pipe fixed in the side of the bridge. This has an outlet on the Aden side at about a league from the city, from where it is fetched by camel. If there were no bridge, it would take travellers and the camels that fetch the water more than a day to make their way round the

²⁵ Norris, Aden Tanks, 11.

²⁶ Norris, Aden Tanks, 11 calls it chunam,

²⁷ Norris, Aden tanks, 12f.

lagoons and into the city."²⁸ In the list of the religious works of the last Tahirid Sultan 'Āmir, Ibn al-Dayba' remarks that it was the sultan who was responsible for bringing an aqueduct (tilāj) to the outskirts of Zabīd. This could well be the so-called Bīr Hamīd aqueduct and the aqueduct described by Albuquerque.²⁹

New tanks and repairs to the existing ones during the Tahirid period were initiated by a number of the sultans: al-Mujāhid 'Alī (d. 883/1478) built a cistern near a mosque variously called the Masjid al-Darsah or Masjid al-Madrasah.³⁰ The last sultan 'Āmir also built a large cistern in Aden "the like of which had never been seen".³¹

Playfair suggested that the gradual falling into disrepair of the tanks began as early as the beginning of the 10th /16th century. He cites a tradition that in about 906/1500 the Tahirid governor Amir Murjān succeeded in digging wells for sweet water . If these provided enough water there would have been no necessity to keep up the expensive repairs on all the tanks.³²

²⁸ Barle & Villiers, Caesar, 251. This is presumably the Bīr Hamīd aqueduct , Norris, 2. It was described by Captain Haines, quoted in Norris Aden Tanks, as it existed in 1838 being 16,320 yards long, 4ft. 6ins. wide with a depth for the water course of 19ins.

²⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 233.

³⁰ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 167.

³¹ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah , 234. 'Āmir was obviously particularly concerned with water storage see his list of his religious works above.

³² Norris, Aden Tanks, 28 ;Hunter, British Settlement, 191 on wells. Ibn al-Mujāwir on the wells of Aden in Löfgren, Arabische Texte, 56 f.

BUILDINGS

Most of the references to building construction or renovation are with regard to pavilions (sing. dār) with a few references to mosques. The dārs to which Abū Makhramah devotes a whole section, appear to have been large pavilions used by the sultans as residences and sometimes by the merchants.

Dār al-Sa'ādah³³

This was first built by the Ayyubid sultan Tughtagīn and faced the bay of Ḥuqqāt.³⁴ It was rendered famous, says Abū Makhramah, by the Rasulid sultan al-Mujāhid 'Alī (721-764/1321-63). Upon being told that he would die by the sea he extended the dār and this extension consisted of a pavilion (mufarrash) on the sea side with a floor above. It was such a beautiful building that when it was finished, the sultan was so afraid that another be built like it that he ordered the builder's hand to be chopped off. Whereupon the builder claimed that he could still describe it and so his eyes were plucked out. The dār was also used by a family of Egyptian traders called the B. al-Khuṭabā'³⁵ who were active during the reigns of the Rasulid sultans al-Afdal and al-Ashraf. During the Portuguese attack on Aden, Amir Murjān wanted to make a stand in Dār al-Sa'ādah but was dissuaded from doing so as it was not secure enough.³⁶

³³ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 11

³⁴ Ḥuqqāt bay lies to the south of Ṣīrah, see fig 4, after Norris, Aden Tanks,

³⁵ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 10; Serjeant, "Yemeni merchants", 67

³⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 13, and 14 for the capture of a dār which Schuman believes to be Dār al-Sa'ādah but which could also be Dār al-Bandar, Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 16 and see below.

During the reign of the Tahirids Dār al-Sa'ādah was extended by Shaykh 'Āmir b. Ṭāhir and then later during the reign of al-Manṣūr (or perhaps at the beginning of the reign of Shaykh 'Āmir b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Abū Makhramah is not certain).

This extension faced towards the port (furdah).

Dār al-Tawīlah and Dār al-Manẓar³⁷ are not specifically referred to as having Tahirid restorations, but were obviously in use during the time that Abū Makhramah was writing. Dār al-Tawīlah was where the clerks of the port (kutfāb al-furdah) sat. Abū Makhramah describes it as having been the trading house (matjar) of the sultans but that it was at the present time the matjar of Dār Ṣalāh.³⁸ Dār al-Manẓar built on Jabal Huqqāt was originally a Zuray'īd foundation rebuilt by the Ayyubids.³⁹

Dār Ṣalāh⁴⁰

This was named after a merchant working in Aden called Ṣalāh b. 'Alī al-Ṭā'i.

When the Rasulid sultan al-Nāṣir was oppressing the merchants,⁴¹ they fled from Aden to Jeddah and then went to India to the Malabar coast. This particular merchant had all his possessions, including his dār, confiscated by the state.

When the Tahirids began, as Abū Makhramah puts it, "to interest themselves in

³⁷ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 11-12

³⁸ Serjeant, "Yemeni merchants", 66 for matjar

³⁹ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 12

⁴⁰ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 12

⁴¹ See above, 31.

trade", ⁴² they turned the dār into a matjar. The extension built during the time of Shaykh ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir, consisted of large store houses (makhāzin) on the Huqqāt bay side. Under Shaykh ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb it was extended further on the eastern side.

Dār al-Bandar ⁴³

As its name suggests, this dār was situated in the port. It had previously been the place from where the people sat and watched the trading ships come in and out. At the end of one seasons Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ordered that a two-storied dār be built there as a pleasant place where people might stroll or sit and watch the ships. The dār was captured by the Portuguese in 919/1513 and it was from there, says Abū Makhramah, that they pounded the city with their guns. The dār was destroyed and the fortress on Ṣīrah was built in its stead.⁴⁴

Other constructions in Aden belonging to the Tahirid period include: the Maṣjid al-Darsah or al-Madrasah built by al-Mujāhid ʿAlī (d. 883/1478). A mosque in Aden and a mosque in al-Mabāh (also called al-Mabā'ah) were built by ʿĀmir al-Malik al-Zāfir. The village of al-Mabāh is described by Abū Makhramah as about four parsangs from Aden, and a stop on the caravan route. It had shops and houses and most of the inhabitants were fishermen. They also burnt gypsum there. He mentions the mosque which he suggests was an ancient construction rebuilt by the Tahirid sultan ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb who also set it up with a muezzin and

⁴² Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 12

⁴³ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 12-13

⁴⁴ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 16

a preacher for the Friday prayer. With the coming of the Turks and the collapse of the Tahirid state, al-Mabāh was plundered by the bedouins and in his day it was a ruin.⁴⁵

The Sufyāniyyah madrasah ⁴⁶

This was built by Shaykh ʿAlī b. Sufyān, trusted adviser to al-Malik al-Mujāhid.⁴⁷ It was reputed to have been a large madrasah provided with a substantial waqf. A large section of it was burnt in 914/1508.⁴⁸

b) BAYT AL-FAQĪH B.ʿUJAYL

An important town on the Tihāmah, Bayt al-Faqih is situated between Zabid and Hodeida in Zarānīq territory. Its name comes from Faqīh Aḥmad b. Mūsā b. ʿUjayl who died in 690/1291. It is frequently mentioned in the context of conflicts between the tribes and the sultans. Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nizārī, a trusted Tahirid amir built a mosque here.⁴⁹

c) ḤABB

Ḥiṣn Ḥabb, close to Manzil Ḥassān, on Jabal Bāʿdān was a strategic settlement and fortress in medieval times. Under the Tahirids, there is reference to it being

⁴⁵ Abū Makhramah, Tārīkh, 18

⁴⁶ Al-Akwāʿ, Madāris, 336

⁴⁷ See appendix , 267

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 213

⁴⁹ Ḥajārī, Majmūʿ, 636. The Zarānīq tribe incorporated the Maʿāzibah. Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 272. See appendix , 266

restored in 900/1494.⁵⁰

d) HAYS

The town of Hays in Tihāmah was an important medieval settlement south of Zabīd founded by the Najahid, Jayyāsh (d.498/1104). It was a centre of ceramic production during Rasulid times and later.⁵¹ Sultan ʿAlī al-Malik al-Mujāhid built a madrasah there.⁵²

e) IBB

1. Great mosque (fig.6)

According to the list of his religious works, al-Malik al-Manṣūr (d. 894/1489) built a mosque in Ibb.⁵³ Al-Manṣūr did not however initiate the construction of this mosque, and his contribution is at present unclear. Finster has suggested that there are at least three building phases in the mosque ; an early hypostyle stage comprising a forecourt with colonnades at the southern end of the present structure and possibly of comparable date to the 11th century Sulayhid mosque at Dhū Jiblah of al-Sayyidah Arwā . Another phase in which a domed sanctuary was added to the north, three pairs of domes flanking a large central dome to the east. An inscription on the qiblah wall states that the mosque was restored in 996/1588. The plan of this domed area is very much in the Rasulid style, and although the

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 215; Al-Akwaʿ, Madāris, 350; Smith, Simt, II, 153

⁵¹ Keall, "Dynamics", 385; Smith, "Studies on the Tihāmah", 34

⁵² Yaḥyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 610; this reference is not found in either Ibn al-Daybaʿ' s Qurrah or Bughyah.

⁵³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 183; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 178; Al-Akwaʿ, Madāris, 329; Finster, Archäologische, 241-6.

arrangement of the domes differ, comparison can be made with the domed sanctuary of the Jāmi' al-Muzaffar in Ta'izz.⁵⁴ Finster has however suggested that the decoration seems to belong to the Tahirid period and on the basis of this suggests that this entire section could be Tahirid.⁵⁵

2. The Nizāri Madrasah (plate 1)

The Nizāri madrasah was built by Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ma'ān al-Nizāri (d. in Ibb, 921/1515)⁵⁶ a number of the Nizāri family were prominent during the Tahirid period. The author of al-Nūr al-Ṣāfir states that Jamāl al-Dīn was one of sultan Āmir's most important advisers and that when news of his death reached Zabīd, prayers were said for three days attended even by the sultan himself.⁵⁷ His religious works included a mosque in Bayt al-Faqīh Ibn 'Ujayl and this madrasah in Ibb to which he granted a substantial waqf and precious manuscripts. The madrasah, which still stands and is well maintained, is situated at the foot of Jabal Ba'dān overlooking the city of Ibb. A foundation inscription in his name is in the lintel above the doorway to the sanctuary. Other members of the Nizāri family built monuments in Manzil Ḥassān after the fall of the Tahirids.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Lewcock and Smith, "Three medieval mosques", I.

⁵⁵ Regretably, I cannot comment on this as I was not able to enter the mosque.

⁵⁶ Al-Akwa', Madāris, 348 and see appendix.

⁵⁷ Al-Āydarūs, Nūr, 104-5

⁵⁸ Al-Akwa', Madāris, 350-351

f) Al-JANAD

Al-Janad, situated about 20 kms north of Ta^ʿizz, was important early in the Islamic period because of its Great Mosque which was reputedly founded by Mu^ʿadh b. Jabal al-Anṣārī on the instructions of the Prophet himself. In an article on the Great Mosque,⁵⁹ Paolo Costa has suggested on the basis of local tradition in Radā^ʿ that the ḥammām adjoining the Great Mosque of al-Janad was built by the first Tahirid sultan ʿĀmir b. Ṭāhir (858-64/1454-60). In support of this, Costa remarked that the al-Janad ḥammām bore a striking similarity to one he saw near the ʿĀmiriyyah which he said was also locally believed to have been built by ʿĀmir b. Ṭāhir. In particular he noted the absence of a developed apoditerium. I have not been able to find corroboration in the sources for this however; no building activity is recorded for the reign of ʿĀmir b. Ṭāhir and the ḥammām in Radā^ʿ that Costa must be referring to was built by ʿĀmir II (d. 923/1517) and has since been knocked down.⁶⁰ I would venture to suggest that if the Janad ḥammām is indeed Tahirid, then it too was built by ʿĀmir II.

On a visit to al-Janad in 1982 I was able to make a plan of the bath complex. (plate 2, fig.7)⁶¹ Unfortunately the mosque has been renovated and the evidence of the various building phases of the mosque have now gone. The baths could well be Tahirid but none of the distinctive Tahirid details of decoration are visible.⁶² Al-Janad was probably only a relatively small town during the Tahirid

⁵⁹ Costa, "The Mosque of al-Janad", 51

⁶⁰ See below, 230

⁶¹ With the assistance of Rosalind Haddon to whom I am most grateful

⁶² See below, 238f.

period. For the reign of ʿĀmir II references are sparse; there is one reference to the sultan staying there in 910/1504 on the way to Taʿizz.⁶³

g) JUBAN

Juban lies about 40km almost directly due south of Radāʿ. That there was a settlement here in pre-Islamic times is suggested by burial places in the hill surmounting the town to the east. None of these have been surveyed to my knowledge. As both the sources and extant architecture indicate, this was a town that only came to prominence under the Tahirids and it seems to have been particularly favoured by al-Malik al-Manṣūr whereas al-Malik al-Zāfir ʿĀmir appears to have preferred Radāʿ. After the Tahirids' demise, Juban returned to relative obscurity.

The buildings referred to in the texts are largely still standing and are discussed in detail in the following chapter. These are the Great Mosque built by al-Mujāhid ʿAlī,⁶⁴ the Tahirid mausoleum,⁶⁵ and the Manṣūriyyah madrasah.⁶⁶ No longer extant are the Mujāhidiyyah madrasah⁶⁷; and a dār built by al-Malik al-Manṣūr.

⁶³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 193. For other references to the Great Mosque at al-Janad cf. Lewcock, "The medieval architecture", 206; King, "Astronomy in Medieval Yemen", 307 for discussion of the stone gnomon in the courtyard of the mosque.

⁶⁴ It is mentioned as part of his religious works, Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 167; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 157

⁶⁵ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 615; al-Akwaʿ, Madāris, 327

⁶⁶ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 183; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 178; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 615; Al-Akwaʿ, Madāris, 328

⁶⁷ Al-Akwaʿ, Madāris, 326

This is referred to in 894/1478 upon the accession of al-Malik al-Zāfir Āmir.

During the rebellion against him,⁶⁸ it was plundered and partly destroyed. It is described in Ghāyat al-Amānī as a wondrous building, said to have comprised 300 rooms.⁶⁹

h) KHUBĀN

Al-Malik al-Manṣūr built a madrasah here.⁷⁰ Al-Akwaʿ is doubtful about Qāḍī Muḥammad al-Akwaʿ' s reading of Khubān in the Qurrah and suggests that it could be Hubān near al-Nādirah or Ḥabbān near Radāʿ. He adds that there is however no trace of a madrasah in any of these places despite the fact that Ibn al-Daybaʿ describes it as a madrasah ʿazīmāh.

i) LAḤJ ⁷¹

Laḥj was the name given to both town and region which in medieval times comprised an area to the north and north-west of Aden and formed a joint fief with Abyan. Varthema visited Laḥj during his sojourn in the Yemen. He described it as heavily populated and fertile commenting on its large number of date palms and the fields of animal fodder. He noticed that there were no grapes growing and

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 178 and see above, 85

⁶⁹ Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah 616. The local people of Juban point to holes in the rock on the west side of Juban where they say the dār was located. I was not able to go up and see for myself.

⁷⁰ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 183; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 178; Al-Akwaʿ, Madāris, 329

⁷¹ Smith, "Laḥdj", 601-2

very little firewood. He is disparaging about the population , "the city is uncivilised and the inhabitants are Arabs who are not very rich".⁷² Shaykh ʿAlī b. Ṭahir built a dar in Lahj in 858/1454.⁷³

j) Al-Miqrānah (plates 3-8 and fig. 8)

Al-Miqrānah is located north-east of Damt about 20kms from it. It can be described as the official Tahirid residence. The origins of the family can be traced to here as described in chapter 2 above. It is always referred to as Tahirid bilād and was the city to which the sultans always returned after visiting other areas of their domain. Our only description of al-Miqrānah is from Varthema's Itinerary. Varthema visited it in 910/1504 after having extricated himself from the clutches of the Tahirid queen in Radāʿ. On his way to al-Miqrānah, he passed through Damt about which he remarked:

"It is an extremely strong city situated on the top of very great mountain and is inhabited by Arabs who are poor because the country is very barren".

The journey from Damt to al-Miqrānah took two days and Varthema's important description of the city is quoted here in full:

"It is situated on the top of a mountain, the ascent to which is seven miles, and to which only two persons can go abreast on account of the narrowness of the path. The city is level on the top of the mountain and is very beautiful and good. Food enough for the whole city is collected here and for this reason it appears to me to

⁷² Varthema, Itinerary, 33

⁷³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Bughyah, 119

be the strongest city in the world. There is no want of water there nor of any other necessities of life, and above all there is a cistern there which would supply water for 100,000 persons. The sultan keeps all his treasure in this city because he derives his origin and descent from it. For this reason the sultan always keeps one of his wives here. You must know that articles of every possible kind are brought here and it has the best air of any place in the world. The inhabitants are more white than any other colour. In this city the sultan keeps more gold than a hundred camels could carry, and I say this because I have seen it."⁷⁴

The present village of al-Miqrānah (plate 3) consists of a few hundred houses perched on the edge of the mountain. It is reached by a long narrow winding road rather as Varthema described. Above the village are everywhere the ruins of the Tahirid city, mostly in the form of heaps of cut red stone, suggesting systematic destruction, traces of the Yemeni mortar qadād. Corroborating Varthema's statement about the water, there are numerous large cisterns, one of which, in the centre of the village, is still in use. In fact these cisterns were also built at regular intervals on the road between Juban and al-Miqrānah. The sketch ⁷⁵ (fig8) gives some idea of the extent of the remains and the structures still standing. There is a small mosque in the village itself, a large enclosure outside the village, perhaps an outdoor mosque (musallā) and the remains of an arched structure described below.

⁷⁴ Varthema, Itinerary, 34

⁷⁵ I am grateful to Jolyon Leslie for this sketch of al-Miqrānah

The site looks as though the destruction of the Tahirid city was systematic possibly carried out by the Mamluk forces in 923/1517 or later, by the Zaydīs during their plunder of al-Miqrānah in 934/1528.

References to buildings in al-Miqrānah in the texts are as follows:

Dār al-Nā'im

This was built for the Tahirids as a gesture of the esteem in which they were held by the Rasulids. The Rasulid sultan al-Nāṣir, ordered its construction in 817/1414 and it cost 20,000 dinars.⁷⁶

Religious buildings erected after the Tahirids took power consist of a madrasah, mentioned as one of the religious works of al-Mansūr's.⁷⁷ The Jāmi' al-Kabīr and the Masjid al-Qubbaḥ built during the reign of al-Malik al-Zāfir Āmir (894-923/1489-1517),⁷⁸ and a Madrasah built by Shaykh Ābd al-Malik d. 923/1517.⁷⁹

The mosque still used by the villagers of al-Miqrānah (described below, 234) could be anyone of the three structures said to have been built by the Tahirids. An inscription in the mosque, according to oral tradition, is alleged to have been removed and taken to Ṣan'ā'.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 103; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 122; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 563-4 and see above, 20

⁷⁷ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 183; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 178; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 615

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 234; Āydarūs, Nūr, 118

⁷⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 234

k) MUKAYRAS

Al-Dhubayyat : Dār al-Āfif ⁸⁰

This house which is thought to be about 650 years old, is believed by Lewcock to belong to the Tahirid period (ca. 1510-1540). Evidence for this is provided by statements from the family who told Lewcock that they thought one of the last Tahirids took refuge here, and on stylistic grounds, from the decoration on the woodwork of the two diwans.

l) RADĀ^c

The name Radā^c applied to both the district and the town. According to Ḥajari, this large district included Mikhlāf al-Ārsh, Mikhlāf al-Riyāshiyah and Mikhlāf al-Ḥubayshiyah, as well as the district of Juban, Damt and Radmān.⁸¹ In the chronicles the town of Radā^c is usually referred to as Radā^c al-Ārsh.

A settlement existed here in pre-Islamic times. The citadel, (plate 9) built on a rocky outcrop has, on its lower levels, the characteristic cyclopean masonry of pre-Islamic South Arabian constructions.⁸² The area around the town of Radā^c, displays much evidence of pre-Islamic settlements; ancient dams and quantities of graffiti in the mountains around. The fortress was in use during the Tahirid period as a jail, as it still is today and therefore impossible of access. Varthema,

⁸⁰ A study of this house is found in a Unesco report prepared by Professor Lewcock in the 1980s and to which he kindly gave me access. The house was at that time in a bad state of repair. I was unfortunately not able to visit Mukayras when I was in Ḥadramawt in 1982.

⁸¹ Ḥajari, Majmū^c, 359

⁸² Al-Radi, forthcoming, chapter 3

suspected of being a Portuguese spy, was imprisoned there and, as is still the practice, he was allowed out during the day, but shackled. Rebels against the sultan, often members of his family were also imprisoned here.⁸³

Radā', like Juban came to prominence during the period of the Tahirids, and the extant monuments date largely from that time. There is no suggestion either from the sources or from surviving monuments that the Rasulids built anything of note here. There is the possible exception of a Friday mosque (plates 35-6) which was redecorated by the Tahirids and a portico added. The date of its original construction however, is unknown.⁸⁴ Radā' seems in fact to have been particularly favoured by the last sultan, 'Āmir, perhaps because Juban was too full of associations with the rebels who had attempted to unseat him at the beginning of his reign. He is often mentioned on visits to Radā'. The texts refer to two monuments built in the town by the Tahirids, a "madrasah 'azīmah" built by Sultan 'Āmir,⁸⁵ and a madrasah built by his brother 'Abd al-Malik.⁸⁶ The first of these is the Madrasat al-'Āmiriyyah built in 904/1510. The second is likely to be the building known locally as the Ribāṭ although there are no inscriptions to corroborate this. There are two other buildings belonging to the Tahirid period still standing in Radā', the first is the so-called al-Baghdādiyyah, according to local tradition built by one of the Sultan 'Āmir's wives who is alleged to have come

⁸³ Varthema, Itinerary, 28

⁸⁴ Lewcock, "Medieval architecture", 210

⁸⁵ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 233

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 235

from Baghdad, and the second, the Friday mosque mentioned above.⁸⁷ Evidence of another building from this period is provided by a wooden panel, now placed above the doorway to the southern entrance to the ^Āmiriyyah. It bears an inscription in the name of amir Muḥammad al-Ba^ʿda^{nī} and dated 899/1494. According to al-Akwa^ʿ, the mosque was situated N.E. of the ^Āmiriyyah and was knocked down to build a road.⁸⁸

m) TA^ʿIZZ

Ta^ʿizz was the capital of Rasulid Yemen and it was here that the Rasulids built their most splendid and influential religious monuments.⁸⁹ Under the Tahirids, Ta^ʿizz remained an important city but the sultans spent much less time here preferring their own domain of al-Miqrānah. Consequently not a great deal of building activity is recorded here under the Tahirids. Varthema found it extremely beautiful and learnt that it was very ancient : "there is a temple there built like Santa Maria Rotonda of Rome and many other ancient palaces". He also noted that many merchants lived there and that rose water was in great supply.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Al-Akwa^ʿ, Madāris, 338 suggests that the reason for the poor state of the ^Āmiriyyah prior to its recent restoration was the appropriation of its waqf. He adds that it was saved from total destruction by Qādī al-Samāwī d. 1117/1705.

⁸⁸ Al-Akwa^ʿ, Madāris, 347. These monuments are all discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

⁸⁹ See the following chapter.

⁹⁰ The temple he is referring to is that which Niebuhr, Travels, 335-8 described as the tomb of "Ismael Mulk" at the foot of the rock of the fortress (al-Qāhirah) and is probably the Ashrafiyyah madrasah.

The first reference to Tahirid monuments in Ta'izz in the Yemeni sources, is to a madrasah built by 'Alī al-Malik al-Mujāhid listed under his religious works.⁹¹

'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Manṣūr (883-894/1478-1489) built an extension to the 'Udaynah mosque and installed a new minbar there.⁹²

The 'Udaynah mosque, one of the most important mosques in Ta'izz, now no longer extant, was built by the Rasulid sultan al-Muzaffar and was extended and restored several times.⁹³

The last sultan 'Āmir, built two madrasahs in Ta'izz which are listed in his religious works.⁹⁴

n) TARĪM

Restoration of the Great Mosque in the Ḥadramī city of Tarīm took place during the reign of Sultan 'Āmir al-Malik al-Zāfir.⁹⁵ The circumstances of this occurred as follows. In 902/1496, Shaykh 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Rahmān Bālhāj Bā Fadl

⁹¹ Ibn al-Daybā', Bughyah, 157; Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 167; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah, 610; Al-Akwa', Madāris, 328

⁹² Ibn al-Daybā', Bughyah, 183; Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 178. 'Udaynah was a suburb of Ta'izz. Niehbur, Travels, 338 saw the remains of it near the citadel; Smith, Simt, II, 212

⁹³ Khazrajī, Redhouse, Uqūd, has various references to the mosque : 1/174; 2/49, 108, 197, 286-7

⁹⁴ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 283-4; Al-'Aydarūsī, Nūr, 118; Al-Akwa', Madāris, 346, only mentions one called al-'Āmiriyyah.

⁹⁵ Bukayr, al-Jāmi', 29 f and 30 note 1. His sources are the Tārīkh Shanbal of Ibn Shanbal (d.920/1514), Serjeant, "Materials" I, 291, Sayyid, Masādir, 196, and a MS in the library of Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Shaykh al-Kāf in Tarīm.

wrote to Sultan ʿĀmir telling him that the mosque was too small for the congregation. The sultan then sent money for its extension with Muḥammad Bā Sakūtah who organised the reconstruction and extension. In 917/ 1511 the Tahirids provided the funds for a ḥammām and the sultan granted a large waqf for the upkeep of the mosque. It seems that the Tahirid sultan ʿĀmir had very good relations with Muḥammad Bā Sakūtah and was as a result very generous towards Tarīm.⁹⁶

This was the fourth extension to the mosque since its original construction by Ḥusayn b. Salāmah between 375-402/985-1011 and there were to be several more phases of restoration subsequently, the last before the Tahirid phase was in 1390/1970. Bukayr remarks that the Tahirid extension is still standing.⁹⁷

o) ʿUSAYQ/ ʿĀSĪQ

In his religious works, al-Malik al-Zāfir ʿĀmir II, is noted as having built a reservoir (ṣahrīj) here. According to Qādī Muḥammad al-Akwaʿ, this place is no longer known.⁹⁸

p) ZABĪD

The history of Zabīd is known from the source material, from the works of Ibn al-Mujāwir, ʿUmārah and Khazrajī. More recent works on the city include studies

⁹⁶ Bukayr, al-Jāmiʿ, 31

⁹⁷ Bukayr, al-Jāmiʿ, 29. I am not aware of any plans of the mosque from which the various phases may be studied.

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 234 note 4. I have not been able to locate it either.

by Chelhod, al-Akwa^c and from the archaeological and architectural standpoint, survey and excavation work has been carried out by the Royal Ontario Museum headed by Keall and ISMEO has published plans of some of the mosques.⁹⁹

Chroniclers attribute the founding of Zabīd to the Abbasid governor of Yemen, Muḥammad b. Ziyād, appointed in 205/820. Varthema described it as a "large and excellent city of considerable extent" and that sugar and fruit were in abundance.¹⁰⁰ Sugar cane was planted in Zabīd by Sultan al-Mujāhid (d. 883/1478)¹⁰¹ and Ibn al-Daybā^c in his introduction to the Bughyah describes the many varieties of fruits grown in Wadi Zabīd.¹⁰² He also talks of a great trade in spices. Rather surprisingly he says is that it had no walls around it which was clearly not the case as is shown by Ibn al-Daybā^c's description¹⁰³ and references to repairs of the wall. One can only assume he wrote the description later and had forgotten.

During the Tahirid period, Zabīd was the winter residence of the sultans.

Albuquerque in 919/1513 was, in fact, under the impression that the sultan spent

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Mujāwir, Tārīkh, ٤٣٩: 'Umārah in Kay, Yaman, numerous references; Chelhod, "Introduction"; Al-Akwa^c, Madāris (see index for Zabīd madrasahs; Keall, "Dynamics", "A few facts", "A preliminary report", "Bringing the dome", "Arabia Felix"; Ismeo, "Preliminary reports".

¹⁰⁰ Varthema, Itinerary, 35

¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Daybā^c, Qurrah, 167

¹⁰² Ibn al-Daybā^c, Bughyah, 34

¹⁰³ Ibn al-Daybā^c, Bughyah, 135

most of his time here.¹⁰⁴ But Zabīd's primary significance was that it was a centre of religious learning in Sunnī Yemen. Important religious scholars studied and taught here. Some even travelling from Egypt the Hijaz and Iran for the privilege.¹⁰⁵ During the height of Rasulid power, a count of the mosques and madrasahs came to 230.¹⁰⁶ The Tahirids too expressed similar concern for the upkeep of these mosques, al-Malik al-Zāfir Amir in 900/1494 ordered a survey of the religious buildings to assess their state of repair.¹⁰⁷

Zabīd's further significance was that it was the political capital of Tihāmah and symbolised Tahirid control of the area. Once the Tahirids had conquered Aden in 858/1454, they then turned to Zabīd. It was from here that expeditions to claim the taxes or to do battle with the tribes or the ʿabīd started.

It is ironically the references to disasters such as fires, naturally caused or otherwise that provide us with incidental information about the topography and the inhabitants of the city at this time. The fire of al-Jā shā for instance in 865/1460 destroyed nearly half the city starting at Bāb Sahām spreading to the east, south through the sūqs, its furthest limit to the west, was the mint.¹⁰⁸ In 915/1509, a fire in the Indian quarter (hāfat l-hunūd) caused the death of

¹⁰⁴ Albuquerque, Caesar, 251

¹⁰⁵ For example a scholar named al-Shirāzī was in Zabīd in 868/1464, Ibn al-Dayba, Bughyah, 134

¹⁰⁶ Khazrajī, Redhouse Ūqud, II/244

¹⁰⁷ Ibn al-Dayba, Bughyah, 213

¹⁰⁸ Ibn al-Dayba, Bughyah, 131

Indian children. They are presumably Banyans.¹⁰⁹ We learn that palm fronds were used as building material from incidental information. In 872/1467, the sultan banned their use for house building after a particularly bad fire, such was their vulnerability.¹¹⁰ Details of the positions of the buildings are given incidentally; a trench was dug in 883/1478 all the way to Dār al-Silāḥ on Bāb Shubāriq.¹¹¹

Ibn al-Mujāwir's 12th-13th century plan of the city is disappointingly vague basically telling us that it was a walled, round city.¹¹² Ibn al-Dayba' in his introduction to the Bughyah is hardly any more informative. He tells that the original wall was built by the Ayyubid Tuḡtagīn in 589/1201 and that it was still in position in his day. He names the four principal gates and the wadis and villages they lead. (fig.9) To the East, Bāb al-Shāriq (Sh-bārīq) (3) (which leads to the village in Wadi Zabīd called al-Shabāq; to the North, Bāb Sahām (2) leading to Sahām and Wadi Rima'; to the West, Bāb al-Nakhl (1) which had been previously known as Bāb Ghulayfiqah. Ghulayfiqah on the coast had been previously the port of Zabīd. In Ibn al-Dayba's day it had been superseded by the coastal village of al-Ahwāb which was known as al-Buq'ah. Finally to the south,

¹⁰⁹ Ibn al-Dayba', Fadl, 247; Serjeant and Lewcock, "The Hindu Baniyan", 432-6; Indian merchants also resided in the major ports such as Aden and Zafar.

¹¹⁰ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 141; Albuquerque, Commentaries, 13 on palm fronds being used for houses in the vicinity of Aden.

¹¹¹ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 162

¹¹² Ibn al-Mujāwir, Tārīkh, plate 3 facing p. 76

was Bāb al-Qurtub (4) which led to Wadi Zabīd and the village of al-Qurtub.¹¹³

Ibn al-Daybaʿ, being a native of Zabid, is naturally proud of it saying that it is greater than Ṣanʿā. He describes how blessed it was with water; underground channels feeding the orchards in the wadis and inside the city, and in addition every house had its own well. The irrigation system he says, was planned by a famous qādī.¹¹⁴ He gives a long list of the fruits and flowers. And this is of course Zabīd's further importance, that it was the centre, if properly maintained, of a very fertile area. We have already noted references above (175) to the planting of date palms, sugar cane and rice.

Obviously the succession of the Rasulid rulers by the Tahirids cannot have had an immediate impact on the life of the inhabitants. As was discussed earlier the last years of the Rasulids and the first decades under the Tahirids seem to have been equally chaotic. An indication of continuity is provided by the lack of change in the pottery production. Finds of "blue mountain" ware made by the Royal Ontario Museum project from Rasulid to Tahirid periods, show that the workshops continued producing this ware up until ca. 906/1500.¹¹⁵ There must have been continuity in the form of the administration and of course the same

¹¹³ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Bughyah*, 34 f. Here, he also quotes the measurements of the city from Ibn al-Mujāwir and Khazrajī. This is discussed by Chahod in "Introduction", 21-2. See plan of Zabīd after Keall, fig. 8. The numbers refer to the gates marked on the plan.

¹¹⁴ Ibn al-Daybaʿ, *Bughyah*, 34-5, al-Qādī Rashīd Abū 'l Ḥasan who died in 565/1169

¹¹⁵ Keall, "Dynamics", 383 f, and lecture published PSAS forthcoming, 1992

school of Shāfi'ī law school was being followed.

There are no references to building activity under the Tahirids, before the reign of al-Mansūr and the greatest period of restoration and construction was, as to be expected, when the Tahirids were at their height during the latter part of the reign of the last sultan 'Āmir.

Reign of al-Mansūr (883-94/1478-98)

The Mansūriyyah madrasah was begun in 883/1478 and completed by 885/1480.¹¹⁶ In 883/1478 is reported the digging of a trench (khandaq) inside the city wall going around as far as the fortress (ḥiṣn) of Dār al-Silāh on Bāb al-Qurtub.¹¹⁷

The Ashā'ir and the Jāmi' madīnat Zabīd

In 891/1491 is reported the restoration (tajdīd) of the Ashā'ir mosque reputedly founded during the Ziyadid period. There is disagreement as to whether it was founded by Abū Mūsā, who allegedly brought Islam to the Ashā'ir tribe, or Ḥusayn b. Salāmah, who may have built the walls of Zabīd and numerous other monuments.¹¹⁸

Reference to the restoration of a mosque which Ḥibshī believes to be the Ashā'ir

¹¹⁶ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah 162; Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 170; Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, Ghāyah 615; Al-Akwā', Madāris, 328

¹¹⁷ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 162

¹¹⁸ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 183; Chelhod, "Introduction", 54 f.

occurs in the Bughyah in the section of his chronicle on the Ayyubids.¹¹⁹ He cites an interesting story that while Sayf al-Dawlah al-Mubārak b. Munqidh was governor in 576/1180, a sufi named Mubārak b. Khalaf rose up against the Ayyubids and was killed on the governor's orders. The governor then complained to the fuqahā' of terrible nightmares. They advised him that these would be cured if he were to return the khutbah "to the old mosque built by the Ḥabasha". (This presumably means to turn this back into the Friday mosque.) He followed the advice and did as suggested. Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ says that the mosque referred to is what was known as jāmi' madīnat Zabīd (ie the Friday mosque), in his day. He places it inside the city, near Bāb akl-Nakhl. It was first constructed, he goes on, by Ḥusayn b. Salāmah, and then destroyed by the Mahdids and lay derelict for 500 years. It was subsequently restored by al-Mubārak b. Kāmil whose name was inscribed in stone to the right of the mihrāb but it was so covered up with plaster that nothing of it was visible. Mubārak b. Kāmil's restoration consisted of a wooden pillared surround (al-muhīt bi-'l-asātīn al-khashab). Further restoration was undertaken by Sayf al-Islam Tuḡtugīn which was completed in 582/1186. This one consisted of two extensions to the east and west, rear prayer hall (mu'akhkhar) and the minaret. I am not confident that this is as Ḥibshī suggests, the Ashā'ir for several reasons: firstly because it is not referred to as the Ashā'ir but just "the mosque of Zabid" (jāmi' madīnat Zabīd); secondly the Ashā'ir is in fact in the centre of the city in the middle of the sūq and thirdly when the Ashā'ir is mentioned by name as cited below, no connection is made with this passage. .

One possibility is that this is the Great Mosque which is close to Bāb al-Nakhl. (fig. 9)

¹¹⁹ Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, Bughyah, 70 and note 1.

We are on firmer ground with the following references to a mosque which is definitely the Ashā'ir. In 832/1429 the Treasurer (khāz ndār), the Rasulid amir Barqūq al-Tāhirī rebuilt Masjid al-Ashā'ir. This, Ibn al-Dayba^c says, was the first time it had been restored after its original construction by Ḥusayn b. Salāmah. (There is no reference to the restorations described above.) The work consisted of extensions to the east, west and north; a maqsūrah for the women and a store room. The whole was painted with gypsum and it was decorated with paint and gold and lapis (blue). The qiblah wall was decorated (possibly carved plaster is meant here) (zukhrifa jidārāhu al-qiblī bi-anwā' al-nuqūshāt wa'l dhahab) and painted with gold. A minbar, beautifully carved with the Muqaddimah (from the Qur'ān) was installed and a reader of the Qur'ān employed to read before prayers. It was granted a large waqf for its upkeep and a certain builder (mi' mār) called al-Siddīq b. 'Umar al-Mawza'ī was appointed to look after it.¹²⁰

By the reign of the Tahirid sultan al-Manṣūr, the Ashā'ir had apparently become derelict and the sultan spent a huge sum restoring it. He ordered that it should be pulled down and rebuilt. This was begun in 891/1486 in Jumādā I. It was built up to a height of 7 cubits (adhṛā), extended on the south side, and in the qiblah wall were placed two great iron windows. He replaced the columns which had become damaged. The birkah already had a colonnade on the east side and another one was added on the south side. He added a door to the birkah outside the mosque so that when it rained it meant that all the dirt did not come into the

¹²⁰ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 110-111

mosque.¹²¹

There is stucco work on the qiblah wall of the Ashā'ir, and the form of the mihrab with its long columns on either side resemble the mihrab in the Wahhābiyyah. (see below) The squat minaret with its crosshatching is a smaller version of the Minaret of the Great Mosque.

Finally with reference to Zabīd in the religious works of Sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr, is noted the construction of a small birkah in the Jāmi' Zabīd.¹²²

Many more references to building activity are noted during the reign of al-Malik al-Zāfir Āmir. (895-923/1498-1517)

In 896/1490 while he was in Zabīd, the sultan ordered the construction of a palace on Bāb Shubāriq which was called Dār al-Salām.¹²³ There is no mention of where this was in relation to the Dār al-Silāh which was also mentioned as being on Bab Shubāriq.

The Great Mosque restoration.

In 897/ 1492 is recorded the restoration of the Great Mosque (al-Jāmi') of Zabīd.

This date is mentioned both in the Bughyah, and in an inscription in the mosque

¹²¹ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 111. The Ashā'ir is being studied by the Royal Ontario Museum project and little can be said at present therefore on the various stages of restoration.

¹²² Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 183. It is not clear which this mosque is, possibly the Masjid al-Manākh discussed below, Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 72.

¹²³ Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 196

itself.¹²⁴ Exceptionally the name of the architect/builder ʿAlī b. Ḥasan al-ʿĀkbār or al-ʿĀkbāz is also mentioned in both the texts and in the inscriptions.

The Bughyah reference in the year 897/ 1492 states that al-Malik al-Zāfir "ordered the Masjid al-Jāmiʿ to be pulled down and rebuilt as we have described it in chapter 6 ".¹²⁵ The restoration of two mosques is described in the Bughyah, chapter 6, that of the jāmiʿ madīnat Zabīd discussed above, and another mosque called Masjid al-Manākh. As I hope to show, it is the Masjid al-Manākh to which Ibn al-Daybāʿ is referring.

The Bughyah states that the Masjid al-Manākh was originally founded by Ibn Munqidh , who is mentioned earlier in connection with the rebuilding of another mosque, the jāmiʿ madīnat Zabīd described above. In his day, says Ibn al-Daybāʿ, this was the foremost mosque in Zabīd. Towards the end of the 9th/15th century it was seen to be in need of extensive repair. The Sultan ʿĀmir ordered that the mosque should be pulled down and rebuilt. They began to pull it down on saturday, 18 Shawwāl 897/1492 and to rebuild it eight days later on Sunday, 25.

"A wonderful building without parallel" was constructed under the supervision of the architect/chief builder (al-muʿallim) ʿAlī b. Ḥasan al-Miʿmār who was known as ʿĀkbāz and was from the mountains (min ahl al-jabal). The translation of the extensive description which contains specific details of construction, the materials and the decoration is given below in the appendix to this chapter.

¹²⁴ The inscription is in stucco on the qiblah wall, Keall, "A Preliminary report", 53; Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 200

¹²⁵ Ibn al-Daybāʿ, Bughyah, 200

Once the restoration was complete, the mi'mār turned his attention to the birkahs. There were already two old birkahs, one that had been constructed in the Rasulid period by al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl and the other by the Tahirid sultan al-Malik al-Mansūr and cited among his religious works.¹²⁶ The mi'mār thought another birkah was necessary and proposed to build it on the site of an old ruined house. He was prevented from doing this however. While working on the foundations on the northern and western sides of the mosque, they came across the buried foundations of a large birkah with washrooms, thought to have been part of Ḥusayn b. Salāmah's construction. It was decided to rebuild it as it had been. The statement that the street lay to the south and east of it presumably means that this is the birkah on the north-east of the building (see plan, fig. 9)

Extensive reference to the restoration of a mosque referred to as Masjid al-jāmi' the occurs in the Qurrah.¹²⁷ That the same mosque described in the Bughyah as Masjid al-Manākh is also being discussed here is confirmed by the following details: The Qurrah mentions the same name of the architect, Shams al-Dīn 'Alī b. Ḥasan al-Akbāz (except here it is al-Akbār), and recounts the story of the discovery of the old birkah. The only difference is that the Qurrah has the reconstruction beginning in 899/1493 and not 897/1491. The description of the restoration of the Masjid al-Manākh is the most extensive description of a mosque from this period. Since it was clearly such a major work, it is unlikely that it should have no mention in the list of religious works of Sultan 'Amir, while the Great Mosque is mentioned in the following way "he built al-Jāmi' al-A'zam

¹²⁶ Ibn al-Daybā', Bughyah, 72

¹²⁷ Ibn al-Daybā', Qurrah, 188

which has nothing to compare with it and on which he spent a great deal of his own money".¹²⁸ We can only surmise therefore that the mosque was at some point given the name of Masjid al-Manākh, but that after its renovation, it reached the status of Friday mosque and was henceforth called the Masjid al-Jāmi' or the Jāmi' al-A'zam.

Two further references to the Masjid al-Jāmi' occur in the Bughyah. In 899/1493 the sultan made provision for the costs of the clay, (tīn), brick (ājūr), wood, (akhshāb) and iron (hadīd) for its repair.¹²⁹ Was further work intended or could this be a statement of payment for the work which could have been completed in 899/1493? (It will be recalled that the Qurrah reference to the rebuilding occurred under the year 899/1493).

A short time after paying for the materials of the mosque restoration, the sultan appointed as the chief qādī of Zabīd Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qammāt and on the same day he made over as waqf for the Great Mosque valuable land known as Umm al-Rizq whose yearly yield amounted to 100 Zabīdī mudd¹³⁰ and other land as well. He installed 30 teachers in the mosque and three servants to look after it and ordered that it be furnished with rugs. He also appointed al-ʿAfif ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥusayn al-Sharʿabī to oversee it all.¹³¹ The mosque is

¹²⁸ Ibn al-Daybā, Qurrah, 233 manākh is a camel park, c.f. Serjeant and Lewcock, Sanʿā', 584

¹²⁹ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 206

¹³⁰ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 207.

¹³¹ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 208. Sharʿabī's father was also employed by the Tahirids as an adviser to al-Mujāhid. His death was reported in 874/1469, Bughyah, 143

referred to here as al-jāmi al-mubārak al ladhī ansha'ahu bi madīnat Zabīd . It is more than probable that the Great Mosque is referred to. It seems unlikely to be his own Zāfirīyyah which was probably the size of the Mansūriyyah discussed below (23) and which is unlikely to have been able to accommodate 30 teachers and three servants.

A final and most interesting reference to the Great Mosque, is to its furnishing. In 900/1494 the sultan purchased a Ka'bah cloth (burqu' al-Ka' bah) from the estate of a certain Hārūn who was the wakīl al-waqf of the Haram at Mecca. This was hung on the mihrāb door (bāb al-mihrāb).¹³² Again the name of the mosque is not given and simply described as with the reference to the waqf above, as "the mosque whose construction he had initiated ". That this is most likely the Great Mosque can be argued first because of the detail of the mihrāb door which corresponds to the plan and secondly because a gift of this magnitude would not be given to a mosque unless it had the status of Great Mosque. It also offers an interesting insight on the use made of old Ka'bah cloths.

Thus to summarise, three major restorations of mosques were undertaken in Zabīd during the Tahirid period. The first is to a mosque called jāmi' madīnat Zabīd. The second was to Masjid al-Ashā'ir and the third to the Great mosque which is referred to in three different ways: Masjid al-Jāmi', Jāmi' al-A'zam and Masjid al-Manākh.

¹³² Fig. 9 after Keall, the entrance to this maqsūrah is immediately to the east of the mihrāb. Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 211

As Keall has pointed out,¹³³ Tahirid restoration to the Great Mosque consists very obviously of the entire qiblah aisle and probably much more, judging by Ibn al-Dayba's description though we must bear in mind that he is likely to be prone to some exaggeration. There is no trace for instance of the gold and lapis though this could of course be buried under layers of gypsum but the qiblah wall is extensively decorated with stucco¹³⁴. Other features that can be correlated with the description are the domes at either end of the qiblah aisle and a maqṣūrah to the east of the mihṛāb.

The one extraneous feature in the mosque is a tile panel to the left of the mihṛāb. (plate 10) The use of tilework in medieval Zabīd appears to have been limited to monochrome floor tiles.¹³⁵ We do not find the same extensive use of tiles as from Iran during the Saljuq, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. The occurrence of the tile panel in the Great Mosque is therefore surprising.

It consists of a single panel about 4ft. high made up of hexagonal turquoise tiles banded by narrow black ones, with a large polylobed rosette in the centre and a damaged inscription cartouche at the top. The whole is framed by a narrow border of alternating lozenges of varying size.

Both the technique and the style of decoration is typical of tilework from

¹³³ Keall, "Preliminary report", 53

¹³⁴ The style of the stucco decoration is discussed in the following chapter.

¹³⁵ Personal communication from Ed Keall on basis of as yet unpublished finds in Zabīd.

9th/15th century Timurid Iran and Central Asia.¹³⁶ It would seem unlikely that this panel was made in Zabīd. It bears absolutely no similarity to the techniques of pottery production during Rasulid and Tahirid periods¹³⁷ and it could possibly have been brought to the mosque by one of the visiting ulema, brought in pieces and assembled in situ. A possible mid 9th/15th century date for the panel would suggest that it was put in during the Tahirid period restoration though this is by no means certain.

Further references to building activity in Zabīd under the Tahirids are as follows :

In 898/1492 the repair and strengthening of the city wall is noted.¹³⁸ The year 900/1494 was a year of unprecedented activity in Zabīd. There was the repair of *al-Dār al-Kabīr al-Nāṣirī*¹³⁹ and the restoration of the mosque of Ibn Kharāj . This had collapsed and its *waqf* had been appropriated by a certain *ʿUmar al-Hajām* who was forced by the sultan to pay for its reconstruction.¹⁴⁰ Also in this year the sultan, al-Malik al-Zāfir, ordered the restoration of a mosque called *Masjid al-Sābiq*, which became known as *Madrasat al-Zāfiriyyah*. In the *Bughyah*, Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ says that it was situated west of the square of *al-Dār al-Kabīr al-Nāṣirī*. In the *Qurrah* he is more specific describing it as facing the door of

¹³⁶ It can be compared with tiles from the *Masjid Chahār Manār* in Yazd dated 1445-6 for instance ,O'Kane, "Tiled minbars" , and if in Iran it would not have been in isolation but part of a larger scheme.

¹³⁷ Keall, "Dynamics".

¹³⁸ Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, *Bughyah*, 204

¹³⁹ Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, *Bughyah*, 211. This was presumably on the site of the present day *Dār al-Naṣr* close to the *Iskandariyyah* mosque where the Royal Ontario Museum team have been working.

¹⁴⁰ Ibn al-Dayba^ʿ, *Bughyah*, 212

al-Dār al-Kabīr.¹⁴¹ Ibn al-Dayba^c describes it as a beautiful building and says that the sultan paid for it himself.¹⁴²

Among other constructions ordered by the sultan, was an aqueduct to take dirty water out of the city away from "the mosque built by his father". Without proper drainage away from the ablutions area, it was proving troublesome for the neighbours. This aqueduct was paid for by the sultan himself, says Ibn al-Dayba.¹⁴³ The madrasah referred to is presumably the Manṣūriyyah described below.

Like his Rasulid predecessor al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl, Ḍāmir decided to survey all the mosques and madrasahs of Zabīd to see what state they were in and which ones were in need of repair.¹⁴⁴ At the same time as this programme was initiated, the upper dome of al-Dār al-Kabīr al-Nāṣiri fell down.¹⁴⁵ This had just been finished and was being covered with gypsum (nūrah). It fell down immediately after the sultan and his retinue had passed under it and a number of the people working on it were killed.¹⁴⁶ The final monuments referred to as

¹⁴¹ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Qurrah, 233

¹⁴² Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 212; Al-Akwa^c, Madāris, 346. The statement that he paid for it himself is one often found presumably to show the piety and generosity of the sultan. A mosque described as Masjid al-Sābiq al-Nizāmī is noted as built before 658/1259, Finster, "Rasulid architecture", 260.

¹⁴³ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 212-3

¹⁴⁴ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 213

¹⁴⁵ A Dār al-Naṣr was built by the Rasulid sultan al-Ashraf Ismā'īl in 779-80/1377-8, Qurrah, 105

¹⁴⁶ Ibn al-Dayba^c, Bughyah, 213

being constructed during Sultan Āmir's reign are the madrasah of Shaykh Ismā'īl al-Jabartī and the mashhad of Abū Bakr al-Haddād outside Bāb al-Qurtub.¹⁴⁷

iv) Conclusion

Of the principal cities in the Tahirid domain, it is only Aden, al-Miqrānah and Zabīd that are described. The fullest description with both overview and specific details of constructions is reserved for Aden. A similar mass of detail on buildings is provided by Ibn al-Dayba' for Zabīd but general impressions of the city itself can only be gleaned from incidental information. For al-Miqrānah we have an accurate but only general impression from Varthema's Itinerary. Apart from Abū Makhramah there are no specifically topographical works, Ibn al-Dayba' and the Zaydī chroniclers were essentially historians and as a result, provide lists of public works only. The only extensive description of a building is that of the Masjid al-Manākh which, as has been argued is likely to be the Great Mosque of Zabīd. However, although the description gives a superficial impression of detail, Ibn al-Dayba' is more concerned with quantities such as the numbers of arches and pillars. Only a very few features make it possible to correlate the description with the plan.

The Tahirid constructions according to the sources are relatively few in number when compared to those of the Rasulids who admittedly ruled for a much longer period and had longer in which to consolidate their domain.¹⁴⁸ The lack of major building activity during the reigns of the first three Tahirid sultans, is attributable

¹⁴⁷ Ibn al-Dayba', Qurrah, 233 and appendix.

¹⁴⁸ Finster, "The architecture of the Rasulids", 260-4

to the fact that their preoccupations were with survival, the revenues from Aden and kharāj likely to have been going to pay their army and in timely sadaqah rather than expensive monuments. It is only under the last sultan Āmir that we see an increase in building activity. Of the monuments recorded, only a small proportion survive and these only where there was evidently sufficient waqf provided for their upkeep which was not appropriated as happened with the Āmiriyah, and where the settlement continued in existence and the buildings remained in constant use. Some sites where there were substantial monuments such as the elusive Khubān have disappeared altogether. In the next chapter, the extant monuments and the Tahirid style of architecture and decoration is discussed.

Appendix

Description of the Masjid al-Manākh ¹⁴⁹

One of Ibn Munqidh's works is the Masjid al-Manākh in Zabīd and its foremost mosque now. During our time it came close to falling into ruin towards the end of the year 900/1495. Al-Malik al-Zāfir Ṣalāḥ al-Dunyā wa-'l-Dīn Abū 'l-Naṣr Āmir b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. Dā'ūd b. Ṭāhir ordered it to be pulled down and rebuilt. This was begun on Saturday 18th Shawwāl 897/1482, its reconstruction began on Sunday 25th. A splendid building was erected the like of which has never been seen. It was overseen by the mu'allim, 'Alī b. Ḥusayn al-Mi'mār known as Al-'Akbāz, who was from a mountain tribe. He raised it up to the height of seven

¹⁴⁹ This is a loose translation of Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 70 f. Part of it has been translated by Chelhod in "Introduction", 79.

adhrā and built a front hall built on pillars (muqaddam) over the first building. The two wings and the rear prayer hall (al-mu'akhkhir) he constructed out of broad arches (asātīn fāsīhah) on baked brick columns (amidah min al-ājūr) and gypsum (nūrah). At the entrance of the northern portico (riwāq), he added a court (shamsiyyah) and he added the remaining porticos to widen the court. This increased the size of the mosque greatly. The part one entered from the northern portico in the front of the mosque was called a ziyādah. The roof was done in a wonderful manner with many kinds of decoration and the walls of the qiblah and the mīhrāb were decorated in gold and lapis lazuli and other than that. He placed in front of it [the mīhrāb] two great domes to the east and west and these were embellished with different kinds of decoration. The eastern dome had a lot of gold and lapis. He added two wooden walls (dā'irīn) and doors and a locked place (gh-lq-an) where the sultan could pray when he came to Zabīd. He replaced the wooden columns (asātīn) that were in a bad state of repair, and added seven columns in the above mentioned ziyādah.

Some of my learned friends told me that when it was finished, the building included 270 arches, 90 wooden columns, 140 pillars (dā'ā'im) made of brick and plaster on which sat the arches, 12 domes, 13 doors, 5 of which were the principal ones. Two staircases were constructed at the door on the qiblah side and the eastern door from which one ascended to the two doors mentioned above. He also installed 40 iron windows and 7 chambers (maqāsīr).

This mosque became a delight on the onlooker and those who prayed in it and visited it. When work was nearly completed, the mu'allim had an idea about the

birkah. He decided to have it as an extension of the mosque on top of the old one. The eastern birkah had been built by the Rasulid al-Ashraf Ismā'īl b. al-Zāhir Yaḥyā al-Ghassānī. The other one had been built by al-Malik al-Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. Dā'ūd, father of our present sultan. There was attached to the mosque a piece of land (or ruins dimnah). Between the house and the mosque was a road. So the mu'allim said, "Let us build the birkah on this dimnah". But he was prevented from doing so and told "Do not change the path of the Muslims". He was offended by this and much discussion ensued.

While they were digging the foundations of the mosque on the western and northern sides, the foundations led them to buried foundations in the street which ended up in the ruined dwelling. The mi'mār ordered those digging to follow the foundations and to uncover what was there. This led them to a large birkah which was long and wide. Around it there were large washrooms and lavatories. The mi'mār was amazed and the people said that this was a blessing for al-Malik al-Zāfir may God strengthen his victory. The birkah and the washrooms were then built according to the scheme of the old birkah and it was joined to the mosque. The street appeared to the south and east of it. The mosque was the height of beauty and perfection and this can be attributed to the concern of the sultan, his good intentions and he created this for the sight of God and in the hope of his mercy.

People differed in their opinions as to who founded the original birkah. Most thought it was probably Ḥusayn b. Salāmah who founded the aforementioned mosque as Ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd gave us to understand in his history Bahjat al-Zaman

where he says "It was Ḥusayn who founded the large mosques in most of the cities of Yemen".¹⁵⁰ And he [presumably Ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd] said , I saw his name written on the wall in the mosque of Zabīd.

¹⁵⁰ Ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd, Bahjat, 28-9, "He [Ḥusayn b. Salāmah] founded large mosques and tall minarets and wells in inaccessible desert areas and milestones and postal stops all along the road from Ḥadramawt to Mecca."

Chapter 8

ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION DURING THE
TAHIRID PERIOD

(i) Introduction; (ii) the principal architectural types : a) Multi-domed Great Mosque, b) Madrasah with raised clerestory, c) Single-domed mosque-madrasah, d) Tomb; **(iii) ; Summary of architectural features; (iv) description and analysis of the architectural decoration:** a) The painted ceiling of the ^ĀAmiriyyah, b) Carved stucco, c) Carved qadād, **(v) The question of Indian influence**

(i) Introduction

The religious monuments built and restored during the Tahirid period have a number of features in common in their plans and architectural decoration which together create a coherent and distinctive style. Four types of buildings are represented by the extant monuments: a multi-domed Great Mosque type, a madrasah type with raised clerestory and six equal sized domes; a small mosque/madrasah with single domed sanctuary and finally a tomb.

These four groups and the common features of architectural detail will be analysed with some discussion of architectural origins and antecedents. In the final section of this chapter, the question of Indian influence on the architecture will be discussed.

The Tahirid architectural style did not of course appear out of nowhere. Directly influenced by the architecture of the Rasulids, it continued the same tradition of

domed architecture with associated stucco and/or painted decoration. The change from trabeate to domed architecture in the medieval period reflected the change in the orientation of the dynasties ruling the Yemen. Yemeni mosques until this time, from as early as the 2nd/8th century had flat, often coffered painted wooden ceilings; a style of architecture found in the large mosques of Ṣanāʿ and Shibām-Kawkabān and continued into the 7th/13th century with the Zaydī mosque of Ṣafār Dhībīn and the smaller mosques at Khaw, Asnāf and others.¹ The Ayyubids, who came as conquerors from Egypt in the late 6th/12th century and the Rasulids, who succeeded them, introduced into the Yemen the madrasah and a style of architecture current in the Near East. Little Ayyubid architecture remains in the Yemen and the fulfillment of the style is most visible in the architecture of the Rasulids. For it was during their reign that an unprecedented period of artistic patronage led to vast numbers of monuments being built. Fortunately, some of their most important foundations survive in Taʿizz, Zabīd and al-Mahjam² and in the following discussion it will be clear how influential the Rasulid style actually was on the Tahirids. The Rasulid style is itself an eclectic mixture of influences. Lewcock has drawn attention to the presence of elements of Syro-Anatolian architecture in the plans and architectural decoration, in particular that of the madrasah-mosque of Jāmiʿ al-Muzaffar, and the Mamluk influences present in the painted ceiling of the Ashrafiyyah madrasah.³ This eclecticism may have been the

¹ Serjeant and Lewcock, Ṣanāʿ, 232-51; Lewcock, "The medieval architecture of Yemen", 206; Lewcock and Smith, "Two early mosques", 117-9; Finster, see Bibliography, articles.

² Finster, "The Architecture of the Rasulids", 254-265

³ Lewcock, "Three medieval mosques" (I), Lewcock, 6-7; "The painted dome of the Ashrafiyyah", 100-107.

result of foreign craftsmen working in Yemen in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries. A group of these, whose origin is unspecified, are known to have worked on the palace at Tha' bāt close to Ta' izz constructed by the Rasulid sultan Dā' ūd in 709/1309.⁴

The theory of how the process of the imposition and absorption of a foreign style could take place, has been succinctly described by Terry Allen in an essay on regionalism in Islamic architecture. His discussion centers on late Ayyubid and early Mamluk architecture, where building techniques and materials foreign to an area are found, as a result of the importation of foreign craftsmen. This is exactly what happens in the Yemen under the Rasulids. A foreign and new idea, Anatolian-Syrian architectural forms and techniques, arrive in the Yemen possibly by the hand of foreign craftsmen. These work with Yemeni craftsmen in a country with a strong architectural tradition of its own. The resultant style, while unique, shows clear signs of indebtedness to the obviously foreign elements. "One would expect impressive new monuments to generate considerable local imitation".⁵ Over a hundred years later, the Rasulid style has been completely absorbed and is quite familiar and subject to new sets of artistic influences. It was this familiarity with the form which meant that, when the Tahirid sultan al-Mansūr came to decide what plan to adopt for his madrasah in Juban, he chose for inspiration the Mu'tabiyyah in Ta' izz. Elements of the style are still evident in the

⁴ Smith, "The Yemenite settlement of Tha' bāt", 119-34; al-'Umari, Masālik, 156; Porter, "The Art of the Rasulids", 234-5.

⁵ Allen, "The concept of a regional style", 106

architecture of the Zaydīs and the Ottomans.⁶

(ii) The principal architectural types

a) Multi-domed Great mosque type ⁷ (fig. 11, plates 11-13)

There is only one extant example of this form from the Tahirid period, the Great Mosque in Juban, built, as suggested above (175) by ʿAlī al-Malik al-Mujāhid (d.883/1478). Built of stone and rubble infill, the mosque originally consisted of five bays running parallel to the qiblah wall and seven aisles. The westernmost aisle collapsed some years ago and was closed up (plate 12) The aisles are domed, except for the central mihṛāb aisle which has a flat roof. The domes are supported on squinches. The arches are pointed and sit on heavy pillars almost one metre square. The mihṛāb is a simple undecorated niche (1.87 m high) which projects out at the back. (plates 40-4) This is a characteristic feature of Tahirid mihṛābs, and it is decorated with three rows of blind niches decreasing in size as they go up. A fragment of internal stucco remains, immediately to the west of the mihṛāb and suggests that the qiblah wall and possibly the mihṛāb itself may originally have had stucco. (plate 14)

The single minaret sits on a square base. (plate 48) Faced with stone, it is octagonal tapering upwards with tiers of blind niches. The domes are unevenly

⁶ For example the 10th/16th century 'shamsiyyah in Dhamār built by the Zaydī imam Sharaf al-Dīn with internal bands of stucco decoration. The presence of Tahirid style stucco work in the mosque of al-Filāḥī in Ṣanʿā has been drawn attention to by Lewcock ; Serjeant and Lewcock, Ṣanʿā, 365 f and in the late 10th/16th century Ottoman mosque al-Bākiriyyah, Ṣanʿā, 375 f.

⁷ I am grateful to Dr. Selma al-Radi who helped me draw up the plan of the Great mosque

constructed, roughly ogee shaped, straight then tapering sharply to a point. The entrance to the mosque was originally from the east side where there are four doorways with foliate arches. The mosque is now entered from the south.

Much less ornate than the Tahirid madrasahs, it nonetheless shares many of their diagnostic Tahirid features : doorways with lobed archways, the form of the domes just described, simple squinches and the use of blind arcading. At the Great Mosque blind arcading is found in the central mihṛāb aisle and can be compared with similar blind arcading in the western entrance of the Mansūriyyah (plates 13 & 16)

b) Madrasahs with raised clerestory and six equal sized domes

The two extant Tahirid madrasahs of this type are the Mansūriyyah in Juban, built by al-Malik al-Manṣūr in 887/1482 and the Āmiriyyah madrasah in Radā⁶ built by al-Malik al-Zāfir in 904/1510.⁹ The dates of both of these are inscribed in stucco inside both the sanctuaries. (plate 15) Neither is described in the texts, and are simply referred to in the list of the sultans' religious works.

The Mansūriyyah madrasah (plates 14-17)

The Mansūriyyah (fig.12) is a two storied building, the ground floor built to accommodate shops and possibly students' rooms.⁹ The first floor is entered up

⁸ Presumably this is the date of completion although we cannot be sure as reference to its construction only occurred in the summary of religious works listed after the sultan's death, see above, 176.

⁹ This area was closed off when I visited it with Dr. Selma al-Radi and we were unable to survey it. It is to her and to Jolyon Leslie that I am indebted for the plan (not to scale) of the building.

steps from the east side, through a modern ablutions area which leads to the entrance to the courtyard on the south side. There is another entrance, with a foliated arch, opening into the south western corner of the colonnade. (plate 16)

The colonnaded courtyard, its columns clearly of foreign origin (see below,251) has classrooms to the east and west sides. The sanctuary has a colonnade on either side, the eastern one which has lost its dome is restored . The western colonnade has three arched openings facing out to the town and its dome at the far end is supported on stepped pendentives (plate 128)

The raised sanctuary ¹⁰ has six equal sized domes supported on two pillars.¹¹

The mihrāb now heavily overpainted ¹² is elaborately carved in stucco with intricate geometric decoration (plate 49). Engaged columns in the form of candlesticks are on either side. The domes are decorated with stucco (see below 245) much of which has been restored and there are stucco calligraphic bands around the arched recesses of the sanctuary. The single minaret, (plate 49) similar in form to the Rasulid minarets of the Ashrafiyyah (plate 50) sits on a rectangular base ¹³ with three concentric blind niches on each side, the inner one mihrāb shaped. The minaret goes up in three succeeding tiers, at the top of which is a domed kiosk. There are crenellations along the top of the sanctuary and courtyard walls. The mihrāb projects out at the back and is carved with elaborate geometric patterns. It

¹⁰ The sanctuary is approximately 7.0 x 10.0 m wide

¹¹ The circumference of the pillars is 1.25m; with 3.5m between the pillars

¹² The measurements of the mihrāb are 1,25m deep, 2.85 m. wide

¹³ The base is 3.95m x 4.68m wide

is topped by a domed kiosk (plate 14).

The scheme of this building, and its sister madrasah, the Āmiriyyah, were modelled, as mentioned earlier, on the Muʿtabiyyah in Taʿizz. The Muʿtabiyyah will now be considered to see how its plan and character have changed under the Tahirids.

The Muʿtabiyyah situated at the foot of al-Sirājīyyah hill west of the al-Qāhirah citadel in what was once the quarter of al-Wāsiṭah, was built by the wife of the Rasulid sultan al-Ashraf Ismāʿīl, Jihat Jamāl al-Dīn Muʿtab.¹⁴ She died in Zabīd and was buried near the tomb of Ṭalḥah al-Hattār in 796/1393.¹⁵ A year before her death, she commissioned the Muʿtabiyyah madrasah. The date 795/1392 is recorded in an inscription in the prayer hall.¹⁶ Lewcock has suggested a possible derivation of the plan of the Muʿtabiyyah from the so-called canopy tomb form, as defined by Creswell, such as the Mashhad al-Qiblī at Shallāl (built in 534/1139).¹⁷ (fig.14)

When we compare the plans of the Muʿtabiyyah and the Mansūriyyah, it is interesting to examine the changes that have taken place. For the Mansūriyyah is by no means a straightforward copy. The basic plan (fig.13) remains the same, the

¹⁴ Lewcock and Smith, "Three medieval mosques" II, 192-203; Sadek, "Rasulid women power and patronage", 125 f.

¹⁵ Khazrajī, Redhouse, Uqūd, II, 223-4

¹⁶ Sadek, "Rasulid women power and patronage", 125

¹⁷ Lewcock and Smith, "Three medieval mosques", II, 203; Creswell, Egypt, I, 151.

central courtyard, the raised clerestory with six equal sized domes over the sanctuary and open ambulatories to the east and west. The principal differences, however, are the following: the Mansūriyyah has lost the high entrance portal on the south side and the vaulted area beyond and its entrance is up steps on the east side in place of the ḥammām.

The question of a lower storey is interesting. Lower stories do exist in Rasulid structures. Nuha Sadek discovered that a lower storey in the Muṭabiyyah had been sealed during the reign of Imam Aḥmad. She has suggested that the body of an official whose death is recorded in 811/1408 and who is known to have been buried in the madrasah may lie there. She also discovered that the Ashrafiyyah and the Jāmi' al-Muzaffar also had lower levels, the entrances to which were situated in the exterior mihrāb projection on the north wall. The Asadiyyah Ibb also has a lower storey and Finster has suggested that this use of lower stories in the Yemen may have had a Cairene prototype in the mosque of al-Ṣāliḥ Talā'ī where a ground floor for shops provided revenue for the mosque.¹⁸ The lower storey in the Tahirid madrasahs is given prominence by the arched openings which mirror the arches above of the colonnade. Until its restoration, the lower storey in the Āmiriyyah did in fact have little shops in the arched openings, a likely reflection of their earlier use.

The architect of the Mansūriyyah was not content with mere plagiarism; he took the Muṭabiyyah plan and grafted onto it elements from earlier Rasulid mosques in

¹⁸ Sadek, "Rasulid women power and patronage", 125; Finster, "Architecture" 255; Behrens Abousseif, Islamic architecture in Cairo, 76

Ta'izz. Choosing to have a minaret, there being none at the Mu'tabiyyah, he copied the form of the minaret of Jāmi' al-Muzaffar which has now fallen down (built between 647/1249 and 694/1295) and which we see in the extant twin minarets of the Ashrafiyyah. (plate 50) The projecting mihrab of the Mansūriyyah, with its open sided kiosk, is almost a carbon copy of the facade of al-Muzaffar. (plate 18) There are interesting small differences, however: the dome of the Mansūriyyah kiosk is plain, while that of al-Muzaffar is ridged; the plaited motif running in a wide band along the facade is replaced by an overlapping star motif similar to the star shapes in the Farḥāniyyah madrasah in Zabīd. (plates 19-20)¹⁹ Otherwise the details of the crenellations, the wide deeply cut "basket weave" pattern and the blind arcading have all been borrowed in the Mansūriyyah.²⁰

The Āmiriyyah madrasah²¹ (fig.15, plates,21-25)

The Āmiriyyah was built 23 years after the Mansūriyyah in 910/1504.²² Its construction supervised by the amir of the sultan Āmir al-Malik al-Zāfir, Ālī b.

¹⁹ The Farḥāniyyah was built by Jihat Farḥān d. 836/1432, Sadek, "Rasulid women power and patronage", 124. Jihat Shukr, the daughter of al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl was buried there in 879/1474 Ibn al-Dayba', Bughyah, 150.

²⁰ Both the "basket weave" motif and the blind arcading have been compared by Lewcock to the architecture of eastern Anatolia ' Lewcock, "Three medieval mosques" I, 7.

²¹ This building is the subject of a monograph by Dr. Selma al-Radi who in the 1980s was engaged in the restoration of the Āmiriyyah. Her book (forthcoming in 1992-3) contains detailed descriptions of the architecture and the techniques employed in its restoration. I shall confine myself therefore only to brief remarks showing how the structure fits into the Mu'tabiyyah/Mansūriyyah model. Dr al-Radi has kindly made her text available to me and given me permission to use her plan of the madrasah.

²² Al-Akwa', Madāris, 337

Muḥammad al-Ba⁴dāni. Its plan, the main features of which are the raised clerestory and six equal domes, remains principally the same, but with a few significant differences that change the character of the building profoundly. The first of these which alters the external appearance of the qiblah wall is the colonnade which runs along its full length . The mihṛāb still projects out, but the deeply carved patterns and the blind arcading have moved to the east wall, and have been replaced by a fine stucco panel hardly visible from the street. The colonnade has fluted domes at either end whose interiors are carved with stucco. It has a deep pool with scalloped edge in the centre and this area may have been used by the sultan for his private ablutions. An aqueduct led from a now demolished ḥammām in the north-west which fed into the pool.(plate 26)²³ The photographs show that the single dome has stepped pendentives of the same type as in the Maṣṣūriyyah and in the western colonnade of the ʿĀmiriyyah. (These are discussed further below,²⁵⁰) The ḥammām also contained a deep pool or basin of similar form to the extant one in the ʿĀmiriyyah colonnade.

Among the other changes to be found in the ʿĀmiriyyah, the cupola that externally crowned the mihṛāb at Juban has moved to the entrance to the courtyard, its mushroom dome now replaced by a fluted one. The lack of minaret is another major change. The Burkhardt photograph of the ʿĀmiriyyah (plate 51) shows that there was a small minaret next to the dome above the entrance portal. This is quite different to the three tiered Mamluk style minaret of the Maṣṣūriyyah and closer to the small minarets of the Tihāmah type such as are found in the

²³ I am grateful to Professor Lewcock for the photographs of the demolished ḥammām.

Wahhābiyyah in Zabīd. (see below) The ground floor as mentioned earlier probably had a function as shops or housing for students. The chamber under the sanctuary contains two massive pillars which support it. On the south west side, is an elaborately decorated ḥammām. Fourteen individual ablution cubicles lead off a central passage and a channel running along the four walls has an open spout positioned above each of the cubicles. A wider channel sunk below the floor level took the dirty water away. The remarkable feature of the ḥammām are the extremely fine decorated panels carved into the qadād. This is described in more detail below .

c) The single domed mosque/madrasah type

The Mansūriyyah madrasah also known as the Wahhābiyyah (Zabīd) ²⁴

(plates 27-9)

In the texts, the construction of this building is noted as starting in 883/1478 and being completed in 885/1480. A tract of land in Wadi Zabīd was made over to it in waqf for its upkeep and it was looked after by the sons of al-Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ b. ʿUmar al-Bazzār. ²⁵ Al-Akwaʿ suggests that this was the restoration of an earlier building. He bases this primarily on al-Sakhāwī who says that a well

²⁴ References in the texts to this building are the following :Ibn al-Daybaʿ Bughyah, 162; Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Qurrah, 170; Yahyā b. al-Husayn, Ghāyah, 615; al-Akwaʿ Madāris, 328

²⁵ Ḥibshī in the introduction to his text of Ibn al-Daybaʿ Bughyah, 10 and 162 note 4. In Ibn al-Daybaʿ, Fadl, 214 under the year 914/1508 is recorded the death of ʿAfīf al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ b. ʿUmar al-Bazzār (the dot of the zay presumably left off in the manuscript) who is described as the nāzir of the Madrasat al-Wahhābiyyah. His son al-Sharīf ʿAbd al-Rahmān continued in this task after him.

known cleric, by the name of Nūr al-Shāfi'ī had taught fiqh in the madrasah that had been renovated by 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. Tāhir and that he had recited Bukhārī there in 885/1480.²⁶

The mosque still stands today and is situated on the western side of Zabīd. It is a simple structure : a courtyard with study room along the south side, three arched openings onto the courtyard and domed at either end. It has elegant carved panels in the recesses (plate 28) which recall the plaited motifs of the Rasulid facades. The sanctuary has three doors with foliate arches leading into it. The interior was restored in the early part of this century according to local sources. The large brick dome rests on squinches, the zone of transition has a row of blind niches (as at the Ribāt in Radā'). In the triangular interstices of the arches are decorative brick patterns recalling stepped pendentives. (plate 29)

In the south western corner of the courtyard is a minaret of the Tihāmah type discussed in more detail below, decorated with simple qadād patterns of fleur-de-lys finials. There is a well in front.

Al-Ribāt (Radā')²⁷ (fig.16, plates 31-2)

This is the name given by the local people of Radā' to the small mosque, which may also have served as a madrasah, east of the 'Āmiriyyah and reached via the sūq. It was suggested earlier that it may have been built by Shaykh 'Abd al-Malik,

²⁶ al-Akwa', Madāris, 328-330. He also adds that according to the Nafā'is al-Nafā'is the building had been constructed as a mosque by al-Tawāshī Fakhīr and had been turned into a madrasah subsequently

²⁷ I am grateful to Professor Rex Smith who assisted me in measuring up the mosque

brother of the last Tahirid sultan, al-Malik al-Zāfir. (see above, 197)

The mosque is entered from a door in the south-east corner into the courtyard, the walls of which are crenellated. On the north side is a colonnade, three arches supported on two antique columns. In the north-western corner is another door, leading down to an entrance and ground floor chamber (which I was unable to get permission to enter). On the north-east side is a door leading down to a ḥammām and steps leading up to the roof. The sanctuary consists of a single almost square domed chamber, with two narrow rooms at each end with flat wooden ceilings. The dome sits on squinches with small blind niches in the zone of transition. The dome is elaborately decorated with stucco. (see below, 246) The mihrāb, decorated in stucco has a foliate arch, a dentillated inner arch and engaged columns at either side. (plate 32) Decorated qadād panels are found in the courtyard and the ḥammām.

That both the Ribāt and the Baghdādiyyah (plate 33) probably date from the reign of al-Malik al-Zāfir is suggested firstly by the reference that ʿAbd al-Malik built a madrasah in Radāʿ which could in fact have been either of these buildings.²⁸ Secondly, there is the strong stylistic similarity between these two monuments and the ʿĀmiriyyah in terms of some of the architectural detail: the two storied structure of the Baghdādiyyah, its colonnades with arched openings, the crenallated walls and the qadād panels in the courtyard. In the Ribāt it is the decorated qadād panels in particular that bear the strongest resemblance to the ʿĀmiriyyah.

²⁸ I was regrettably unable to survey the Baghdādiyyah.

²⁹
The mosque at al-Miqrānah (fig. 17 plate 34)

At least four religious structures are known to have been built in al-Miqrānah as mentioned above (195): two madrasahs built by al-Mansūr (d. 894/1489), and Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 923/1517); and al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr and a Masjid al-Qubbah built during the reign of al Malik al-Zāfir (d.923/1517). The extant building, still used by the present inhabitants of al-Miqrānah, is only a fragment of the complete building and it is included here although its original form is unclear.

As it stands, the mosque is rectangular, the flat roof supported by two pillars. It sits in the northeast corner of a large courtyard in the south western corner of which is a large stepped ablutions pool. The tops of the wall are crenellated and the mihrāb juts out at the back. (plate 47)

d) Tomb (plates 37–9)

The tomb of the Tahirids in Juban is the only extant tomb definitely attributable to the Tahirid period.³⁰ It is a simple structure, still standing a little way outside the town. It is built of stone with rubble infill, approximately 10.0 m square with crenellations at the four corners. The four domes are of equal size, the same shape as those in the Great Mosque at Juban and supported on squinches. The tomb is entered from a small courtyard with an arched entrance. Inside there are four wooden sarcophagi. The first of the Tahirids to be buried there was ʿAlī al-Malik al-Mujāhid who died in Juban in 883/1478. Other members of the family buried

²⁹ I am grateful to Jolyon Leslie for the sketch plan of the mosque

³⁰ The mashhad of Faqīh al-Haddād is mentioned in the list of religious works of al-Malik al-Zāfir above,¹⁷⁷. I was not able to ascertain whether this is still extant.

there were al-Malik al-Manṣūr (d.894/1498) and Shaykh ʿAbd al-Malik (d.923/1517). A fourth sarcophagus in the tomb according to local tradition belonged Shams al-Din al-Muqrī.³¹ The best preserved of the sarcophagi belongs, I believe, to al-Malik al-Mujāhid. Plate. 39 shows detail of the woodwork and the Qurʾānic inscription .

(iii) Summary of the architectural features

Looking first at the mihṛābs (plates 40-7), similar to the Rasulid mihṛābs they are characterised by their lobed or dentillated arches, and stucco frames and they generally have box like projections at the back. An undecorated mihṛāb niche is found in the mosque at al-Miqrānah and in the Great Mosque in Juban. The remains of stucco further along the qiblah wall in the latter may suggest however that here, the mihṛāb too was once decorated, as are those of the Manṣūriyyah or ʿĀmiriyyah. With the more elaborate mihṛābs, a candlestick shape was built into the sides.

The external projection of the mihṛāb is also decorated. In the Great Mosque at Juban there are rows of blind niches. At the Manṣūriyyah the deeply cut designs form part of the scheme of the whole qiblah facade following closely the Rasulid model. At al-Miqrānah, the projection is decorated with abstract designs carved in qadād. At the ʿĀmiriyyah there is a stucco panel. The mihṛāb of the Wahhābiyyah

³¹ Al-Akwaʿ Madāris, 327; Shams al-Dīn Muqrī was one of the close advisers to the Tahirids. Al-Akwaʿ is sceptical about him being buried in the tomb in Juban preferring to follow al-Burayhī who states that al-Muqrī was buried in Zabīd in the Madrasat al-Nizāmiyyah. I was not able to remain long enough in the tomb to study all the inscriptions but I was reliably informed that plate 38 was that of al-Mujāhid ʿAlī.

in Zabīd is of a completely different type. It has strongly Indian looking foliate arches of a type common in Mughal India from the 11th/17th century and tall engaged pillars.³² This is unlikely to be contemporary with the original or even the Tahirid refurbishment of the building and is likely to have been added when the mosque was restored early this century.

Turning now to minarets, Tahirid minarets are of three types. (plates 48–52). The first of these is the octagonal minaret of the Great Mosque of Juban. A cylindrical form but very different in style and using brick, is found in the Ayyubid minaret of the Great Mosque of Zabīd and the Rasulid minaret of al-Mahjam.³³ With its square base, octagonal shaft and lantern top, the Juban minaret seems to contain elements of both the cylindrical type, and the later Rasulid type found in the Manṣūriyyah. The Manṣūriyyah minaret is the second type and when comparing it with the Rasulid Ashrafiyyah minaret, it will be seen that there are only a few minor differences between them. The Ashrafiyyah minaret is articulated with two octagonal shafts while that of the Manṣūriyyah only has one. The form is inspired from Egypt, although as Lewcock has pointed out, it is the generic type which has been influential and it is difficult to find a specific prototype.³⁴

³² Brown, *Indian Architecture*, plate 4 . It is striking that the mihṛāb of the Asha ir is in a similar style.

³³ Keall, "A preliminary report", plates 1 & 2

³⁴ Lewcock, "Three medieval mosques" I, 7 citing for example the minarets of the madrasah of Sultan Ṣāliḥ, (643/1245), the mabkharah of Zāwiyat al-Hunūd ca 648/1250; Behrens Abouseif Minarets , 67, 69

This minaret form was not repeated but was replaced by a short minaret scarcely above roof level (plate 51) such as the no longer extant minaret of the ʿĀmiriyyah. Close to the portico on the south side, it had a lantern top and rounded dome. Short minarets are also found on the Tihamah and may have originated there. The Wahhābiyyah (plate 52) has one of these and they also occur in more recent mosques in Saudi Arabia.³⁵ Whether the choice of its size was originally the result of religious proscription against tall minarets cannot be known.³⁶

Turning now to domes, the ogee shaped Rasulid dome form continued in use into the Tahirid period. The ʿĀmiriyyah domes differ, however, from these by having a higher shoulder sloping at a much shallower angle towards the finial. Internally, as before, the domes sit on squinches. Another more striking innovation is the adoption of fluted domes in the ʿĀmiriyyah. This style was used for the dome of the kiosk above the entrance to the courtyard and the side domes, the interiors of which are decorated with elegant stucco motifs. A number of these side domes are supported on stepped pendentives. These are found at the Manṣūriyyah and in the ʿĀmiriyyah and prior to this they were used in the late Rasulid Iskandariyyah in Zabīd³⁷ and are discussed further below (250).

The only other occurrence of a fluted dome is in the portico of the Radā masjid referred to above. (plate 35)

³⁵ King, Historical Mosques, 198

³⁶ Bloom, "Minaret symbol of Islam", 99

³⁷ Keall, "Preliminary report", 53

(iv) Description and analysis of the architectural decoration

The materials employed in the architectural decoration of the Tahirid monuments were carved stucco, carved qadād and painting on plaster. With the exception of qadād whose decorative possibilities were only fully exploited by the Tahirid craftsmen, these materials were not new to this period and had been used by the Rasulids.

a) The Āmiriyyah painted ceiling

Turning first to the painted ceiling of the Āmiriyyah, this is the only one of the Tahirid religious monuments to be decorated in this way. There was in Yemen already a strong tradition for painted ceilings; between the 9th and the 12th century, a series of mosques exist with painted coffered ceilings³⁸. There is no evidence however of painting directly on plaster until the domed architecture of the Rasulid period. The Āmiriyyah follows in this tradition in fact seeming to hark back deliberately to the high period of Rasulid architecture with its combined use of painting and stucco. Because of the importance of the Rasulid elements in the Āmiriyyah paintings, some space is devoted first to the Rasulid painted ceilings.

There are four Rasulid buildings with surviving painted ceilings, The Jāmi' al-Muzaffar, the Ashrafiyyah and Mu'tabiyyah madrasahs and the late Rasulid Iskandariyyah in Zabīd. As with the Rasulid style of architecture itself, the art of painting on plaster was undoubtedly the result of outside influence. There are

³⁸ for references see above note 1

painted plaster ceilings in Egypt and Iran from the medieval period³⁹ and parallels of detail in the Yemeni ceilings suggest the probability that foreign craftsmen may have been actively involved in the design and execution of the Rasulid mosques. Striking for instance is the appearance in the Ashrafiyyah of a star and spiral pattern found in the north-west corner of the painted interior of the Gunbad in the 15th century shrine complex of the Turbat-i-Shaykh Jam, (plate 53) which reappear in the Ashrafiyyah and the Āmiriyyah (pl.55-6) Lewcock drew attention to the presence of elements from Mamluk art in the central dome of the Ashrafiyyah and the popularity of Mamluk works of art at the Rasulid court is well known.⁴¹ Among the foreign craftsmen mentioned in connection with the Tha'bat palace built by the Rasulid sultan Dā'ūd in 1309, were gilders and painters.⁴² Although the nationality of the Tha'bat craftsmen is not mentioned they can be presumed to have come from Egypt or Syria on the strength of the

³⁹ For painting in Iran see O'Kane *Timurid Architecture*, 62-64; for an example of a painted ceiling in Egypt see for instance the early 15th century madrasah of al-Āini, Ibrahim and O'Kane "The madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-Āini", plate 54. In the dense overall patterning but not individual motifs it is comparable to the Rasulid style

⁴⁰ Golombek, "The chronology of Turbat-i-Shaykh Jam", plate IIIa

⁴¹ Lewcock, "The painted dome of the Ashrafiyyah"; Van Berchem, "Notes d'archéologie arabe", 1904; Porter "The Art of the Rasulids", 232-253; Manuscript illumination was one of several sources for the dissemination of designs and the texts contain numerous references in the Rasulid and Tahirid periods for the import of manuscripts. The Rasulid Sultan Dā'ūd was reputed to have had a library containing 100,000 volumes "brought to him from everywhere", Ibn Abd al-Majīd, *Tārīkh* 132. One such manuscript acquired by al-Malik al-Mujāhid Ālī (1321-63) is an Ilkhanid *Qur'ān* copied in Tabrīz in 1334 endowed in 1375 by the wife of Jamāl al-Dīn Farḥān to the Farḥāniyyah *madrasah* in Ta'izz, James, *Qurāns*, fig. 113; al-Akwa' *Madāris*, no. 121, 214.

⁴² Khazrajī, Redhouse, *Uqūd*, I, 286-7; Smith, "The Yemenite settlement Tha'bat", 121 f.

assertion by ʿUmarī (died in 1349) who says that craftsmen from Egypt and Syria were constantly in demand because there was such a shortage of them in Yemen.⁴³

Very little of Thaʿbāt and certainly nothing of the work of these foreign craftsmen survives. There is no documentary evidence to suggest that such craftsmen came again to Yemen to paint the sanctuaries of the Ashrafiyyah or the Muʿtabiyyah at the end of the 14th century although the possibility is there.

By the time we reach the Tahirid ʿĀmiriyyah in 910/1502, the tradition for painted plaster with its principally Mamluk inspired range of decoration was already about 200 years old and the style of painting as we shall be discussing below has developed to include an extraordinary composite mixture of elements. At its basis is the general Rasulid style evident with many elements drawing particularly from the Ashrafiyyah and from the Iskandariyyah. There is however quite a different general treatment of the surface. While many of the elements have remained the same some have undergone radical transformation. A new set of designs have been introduced which are entirely different in form and suggest strongly the influence of Indian textiles. The possibility of this is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

In general terms the ceiling of the ʿĀmiriyyah presents us with a bewildering variety of designs. These can be loosely divided into several groups of ornament: inscription, geometric and vegetal designs.

⁴³ al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik*, 156

The painted inscriptions are in a cursive script with a single example of Kufic discussed below. The cursive calligraphy is well pointed and comprises verses from the Qur'ān. Not all the verses have been precisely identified but those that have follow in the appendix to this chapter. The style is assured and the execution highly proficient, decorative as well as legible, while the consistency of style suggests that the inscriptions were laid out by the same calligrapher. There are throughout characteristic elongations of letters, for instance at the end of a cartouche (plate 63) adhhab ʿannā al-hizn; the bā of adhhab; a curious knotting of the tā marbūtah of al-maqāmah and the final hā of fadlihi (plates 64). The inscriptions are largely reserved in white and are contained in cartouches and lie against a foliate coloured ground. They are placed in bands below the squinches and in the spandrels of the arches and on four of the domes occupy the centre of the dome itself.

There is only a single example of a Kufic inscription. This is the repetition of the word ʿALĪ used to form wide decorative bands. (plate 65) The word occurs in pairs creating a rectangle. The closest form to this Kufic ʿAlī is found in 15th century Iranian banāʾī technique (tile mosaic and glazed brick) for example in the shrine of ʿAbdalfah Anṣārī at Gazargāh near Herat built between 1425 and 1429. (plate 66)⁴⁴

The implications of the use of a clearly Shiʿite reference in one of the principal madrasahs of the Tahirids who were unequivocally Shāfiʿī Sunnīs cannot at present be resolved. Qāḍī Ismāʿīl al-Akwāʿ in a private communication to Selma

⁴⁴ Lentz and Lowry, Timur the Princely vision, 86

al-Radi suggested that it could imply the presence of Iranian craftsmen, nearer at hand were the Shi'ite Zaydīs in the northern part of the Yemen and the craftsmen could have come from there. However there are no extant Zaydī monuments with painted ceilings to prove the point.

Most striking about the Āmiriyyah paintings is the density of design and the wealth of different motifs combined together. There are four schemes of domes with a symmetry established by domes 1 & 5 and 6 & 2 having the same designs. A wide and rich variety of colours are used but it is red which is the dominant and generally the ground colour creating a warmth absent in the Rasulid mosques. Other colours are shades of blue, green, a purply pink and orange. Black is often used for emphasising or outlining a design as is white which is also used for the inscriptions.

Turning specifically to the designs of the domes, in the centre of **dome 1**, plate 67 is a boldly drawn spiral surrounded by a fragmentary inscription, outside that, a wide band made up of an eight pointed star filled with a regular pattern of hexagons and oblongs. In the centre of **dome 2**, plate 68, is a star pattern filled with minute filigree like arabesques, with a continuous circular scroll and leaf pattern in the outer border. Up to the edge of the dome are large scale arabesques and medallions filled with leaves, the spaces containing minute continuous stems and tri-lobed leaves. **Dome 6**, plates 75-7, has a similar design. **Dome 3**, plates 69-70 is the mihṛāb dome. In the centre it has a ten-petalled rosette surrounded by a wide calligraphic band. In a narrower band are continuous scrolling stems creating hexagons in the centre of the scrolls. The outer band consists of a star pattern, the

points of which lead into large oblongs filled with floral motifs. These floral motifs are strongly reminiscent of a manuscript of c. 1470 al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah of al-Būsīrī made for the Mamluk sultan Qāitbāy.⁴⁵ The centre of **Dome 4**, plates 71-2, has a circular inscription on a speckled ground surrounded by a narrow band of arcading. Continuing to the edge of the dome are linked roundels of various sizes, the large ones filled with complex geometric star designs, the smaller ones with trompe l'oeil stars, the background is a mass of arabesques forming medallions as in **dome 2**. The scheme of **dome 5**, plates 73-4, is similar to that of **dome 1** with the inscription containing fragments of the shahādah.

The squinches are decorated with four designs: (plates 78-9) hexagons filled with tiny arabesque patterns, **domes 1 and 5**; interlocking roundels each with trompe l'oeil stars, **domes 2 and 5**; arabesque leaves and a trefoil, **dome 3** and flutes of feathery leaves, **dome 4**. The soffits of the arches, plates 82-4, are either decorated in stucco which will be described below or painted with two designs: a complex interlocking star design with continuous spindly scroll and arabesque border and a pattern of hexagons and oblongs with a continuous border of scroll and lobed leaves.

It is clear that a number of complex sources contribute to the painting style of the Āmiriyyah. As has been discussed earlier, the style in general comes out of the Rasulid painted ceiling tradition, it in turn, inspired by motifs prevalent in the Mamluk period on metalwork or manuscript illumination. A similar eclecticism of sources is noted for Iranian painted ceilings where carpets are suggested as one

⁴⁵ Atil, The Renaissance of Islam no.9, 46 here, plate 70a

possible source of design.⁴⁶ But, while some individual motifs of the Tahirid ‘Āmiriyyah are closer to those of the Ashrafiyyah, (plates, 88-9) there is a strong similarity both in the overall scheme and specific details with the later Rasulid Iskandariyyah.⁴⁷ This is not surprising as the latter stands midway between the more directly Mamluk inspired early Rasulid paintings and the ‘Āmiriyyah. Compare particularly with the Iskandariyyah the flutes fanning out from the base in the squinches in the ‘Āmiriyyah, plates, 90-1.

Another source for the ‘Āmiriyyah patterns is the stucco ceiling of the early 16th century Ribāṭ from which several elements were clearly transferred. (plates 92-3). It is interesting to see how designs in one medium are transferred to another. We shall see below how the designs in the painted side domes of the Ashrafiyyah are found in stucco in the Tahirid Manṣūriyyah. There is in addition a new element to add to this already complex cocktail of designs in the ‘Āmiriyyah ceiling, and that is the undoubted influence of Indian textiles. This is discussed with the other examples of Indian influence below.

b) Carved stucco

Carved stucco was adopted in Rasulid times echoing its use in other regions of the Islamic world particularly Egypt and Iran. The extant Tahirid buildings show that the craftsmen had a great versatility with the medium and a variety of styles are

⁴⁶ O’Kane, Timurid Architecture in Khurasan, 63 he refers to Golombek’s analysis of the Zarnigarkhanah at Gazurgah.

⁴⁷ I am most grateful to Dr Ed Keall for making available to me the Iskandariyyah paintings designs.

in evidence.

The earliest extant building with stucco is the Great Mosque in Juban. (plate 94)

This only has a small fragment remaining to the left of the mihrāb, but as mentioned there may once have been more. The stucco here is in a frame in the same way that it is found in bands in the Ashrafiyyah. The design is a Kufic inscription, difficult to decipher with plaited bands and mushroom heads along the top with a trefoil centre. No parallels for this design have yet been found in a Rasulid or Tahirid context.

At the Mansūriyyah in Juban, built in 887/1482, two schemes for the ceilings were employed the first of these, (plates 95) has a six-pointed star pattern with a rosette in the centre, each of the flanges of the star alternately filled with arabesque or honeycomb designs. The interstices are honeycombed as well. An outer band is dominated by large cartouches filled with geometrically arranged star patterns. The stucco was originally painted but has in recent times suffered at the hands of the restorers. A second scheme dominates three other domes (plates 97-8) which are decorated with a central roundel and four lobed cartouches joined together; each lobe containing a trefoil design. Around the central roundel are pole end medallions with trefoil terminals. This scheme harks back unmistakably to the painted side domes of the Ashrafiyyah. Thus here we have an interesting transference of design from painting to stucco. This use of Rasulid motifs should not surprise us given the borrowings already described on the exterior of the building. It is curious however that it was stucco that was chosen for the scheme and not painting. Could it be that the skills were not available at this time? The

last extant Rasulid building with painted ceilings was the late Rasulid Iskandariyyah. There is thus a fifty year gap or more between the Iskandariyyah and the Āmiriyyah and the skills which had been lost would have had to have been re-learned.

The scheme of the stucco decoration of the Manṣūriyyah sanctuary walls is in bands framing the windows and the doorways. The designs are difficult to see as they have been covered with many layers of plaster but appear to resemble similar bands of stucco in the Ashrafiyyah and the Āmiriyyah. On one of these the date, 887 can be discerned (plate 15)

Stucco is found again in the Ribāṭ (plates 99E) in the interior of the large single dome. Here the scheme is quite different and in general more highly accomplished than the Manṣūriyyah work. In the centre are four trefoils pointing into the centre linked by scrolling stems with arabesque leaves. A narrow outer band is made up of linked trefoils alternately facing up or down. An outer band bears an inscription⁴⁸. Revolving around this central area are wide flanges with elongated trefoil terminals. The flanges and the interstices between them are filled with scrolls and a variety of arabesque designs all in a highly structured and tightly knit composition. The stucco is deeply cut and was painted. The trefoil as we have seen is the central motif in the decoration, which, as with the use of inscriptions, and a number of other motifs will reappear in the Āmiriyyah painted ceilings.

⁴⁸ The inscription contains the following phrase Bismillāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm la ilāha illā Allāh Muhammad Rasūl Allāh sallā Allāh ʿalay-hi.

In the 'Āmiriyyah, stucco is found in three different areas of the madrasah. (plate 102) In the interior of the sanctuary and combined with painted plaster as in the Rasulid buildings; in the colonnade immediately outside the sanctuary, and outlining an arch at the western end of this colonnade, and in the colonnade running behind the qiblah wall in the fluted domes and on the back of the projecting mihṛāb. Inside, stucco outlines the windows, frames the mihṛāb and is found in the soffits of the arches. The scheme is quite unlike that of the Mansūriyyah and Ribāṭ ceilings much closer to the designs found in the Ashrafiyyah. (plate 106) In addition, the links with Cairene stucco of the early 14th century seem to be more clearly in evidence here, than in the two previous monuments discussed for example, a key pattern found in the Zāwiyyah of Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn Yūsuf ca 1320 (plate 107) a motif also commonly found on Mamluk metalwork can be compared. The use of a trefoil outline on the stucco panel outside the sanctuary has distant echoes of such an outline on the stucco on the minaret of Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad (1296-1304) (plate 110) in other respects in a rather different style.

The fluted side domes of the north colonnade have an interesting design of a vase with a long neck, trefoil terminal and splayed feet in each of the flutes. (plate 113) In the row of blind niches below the vases are designs of petals fanning out from a central point, also found in the Ashrafiyyah. This design much magnified is the central motif in the stucco panel on the mihrab wall projection. (plate 115) The panel consists of an inscription which lies against tightly knot arabesque scrolls and leaves.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The inscription is from Qur`ān, 61, 12-13

The style and execution of the Āmiriyyah stucco bears strong resemblance to the stucco panels on the mihrāb wall of the Great Mosque in Zabīd which are part of the restoration undertaken during the reign of al-Malik al-Zāfir in 897/1492.⁵⁰ (plates 116-7)

c) Carved qadād (plates, 118-125)

Another popular material for architectural decoration under the Tahirids was carved qadād. This was a material used in the Yemen since ancient times as a protective outer layer on buildings.⁵¹ The Mārib dam for instance still has much of its qadād in place. It was only under the Tahirids that the full decorative possibilities of this material were fully exploited and in subsequent centuries this decorative use of qadād was to continue.

The early monuments such as the Mansūriyyah in Juban or the mosque at al-Miqrānah only have a small amount of decorated qadād. At the Mansūriyyah it was used to form the elegant trefoils at the points of the arches and in the interstices, in simple panels around the courtyard and there is also some decoration in qadād on the projecting mihrāb. At al-Miqrānah it is again the projecting mihrāb which is decorated in qadād here, with curious vegetal designs. (plate 119)

It was in Radā^c however that the craftsmen were fully able to demonstrate their skills. Many of the designs are found in both the Ribāṭ and the Āmiriyyah which suggests that the same group of craftsmen may have been involved. The designs tend to employ a different repertoire of motifs to both the stucco and the painting.

⁵⁰ See above, 208

⁵¹ Serjeant and Lewcock, San'ā', 590

The Ribāṭ qadād panels are in the courtyard and the hammām outside. (plates, 120-3) While in the Ḥamiriyyah, qadād is used on the exterior facade of the clerestory in the blind niches, outlining the crenellations and in the courtyard panels. On the ground floor it was used to outline the external mihrābs with trefoil terminals and split trefoils at the edge of each arch. A similar design is found on the minaret of the Wahhābiyyah in Zabīd (plate,52). The most dramatic use of carved qadād is found in the hammām. In the entrance passage is a double panel closely resembling one of the Ribāṭ panels (plate, 124) and inside the hammām itself, further panels, the tops of the columns and the capitals are all carved generally with geometric repeat patterns. One column however has a motif of a lamp (plate 125) hanging on chains within a niche. This motif of lamp hanging in a mihrāb niche is a popular motif in Islamic art.

v) The question of Indian influence on Tahirid architecture ⁵²

Indian influence in the architecture of the Tahirids is clearly discernible and can be divided into two categories: into the first category are features which are part of a generic influence, specific to a region but without specific prototypes. While the second category contains very specific Indian elements which have been incorporated into the architecture.

Into the first category we can place a number of architectural features of the Ḥamiriyyah, in particular the form of the large domes, possibly the fluted domes

⁵² It has been suggested vaguely that Indian influence is present in Tahirid architecture eg. East and West, 35, 1985, 384. It is only al-Radi, The Ḥamiriyyah Madrasah, who has attempted to trace specific sources.

which we shall discuss below, and the style of the facade. The closest parallel to the shape of the large Āmiriyyah domes are those of the Jāmi' Masjid at Gulbarga in the Deccan (ca 789/1367). It is also at this mosque that we find the stepped pendentives (pls. 18f) found in the Mansūriyyah and the Āmiriyyah which Merklinger describes as "beam and brick" pendentives.⁵³ Indian domes in general also have the characteristically tall finials that are found on the Āmiriyyah. The fluted domes of the Āmiriyyah are more problematic. Not commonly found in India from this period, there is an isolated example at Gulbarga.⁵⁴ More common however is their appearance in Egypt from as early as the 5th/11th century at the Aswan mausolea⁵⁵ and in Cairo with the "incense burner" tops of the early minarets.⁵⁶ These early examples were made of brick and plaster and in the Mamluk period their form was copied in stone.⁵⁷ In the Yemen, fluted brick domes are found among the tombs south of the entrance to the Great Mosque at Sa'dah, the earliest of which belong to the 7th/13th or 8th/14th century.⁵⁸ Another possible example of Indian influence suggested by al-Radi may be in the facades of the Tahirid madrasahs, the Mansūriyyah and the Āmiriyyah. It was mentioned that the use of a lower storey was known before this time. What is different here, is the emphasis made of it, with the entrances marked by arches

⁵³ Brown, Indian Architecture, plate V; Merklinger, The Architecture of the Deccan, 78

⁵⁴ al-Radi, The Āmiriyyah madrasah, forthcoming chapter 5

⁵⁵ Ettinghausen and Grabar, The Art and Architecture of Islam, 179

⁵⁶ Abouseif, The Minarets of Cairo, 36

⁵⁷ Kessler, The carved masonry domes, plates 1-11

⁵⁸ Lewcock, "The medieval architecture of Yemen", 208

which, though slightly smaller, echo the arches of the colonnades above. A parallel can be hazarded with the false two-storied appearance of the 9th/15th century Lodi tombs in Delhi created by two rows of blind arches on either side of the monumental entrances.⁵⁹

Into the second category which covers the specific Indian elements we can put the courtyard columns of the Mansūriyyah in Juban (plate 132). Three of the marble columns are decorated with bands and hanging chains and come straight out of the art of Gujarāt. This style of decoration dates back to the pre-Islamic period in western India, seen for instance in the stepwells, and continued in use in the Islamic architecture.⁶⁰ The Mansūriyyah columns cannot be indigenous and must have been shipped to the Yemen from Gujarāt or possibly made in the Yemen by Indians residing in the Yemeni ports. This same phenomenon of an isolated element of Gujarātī art is found in a group of 14th century tombstones from Zafār. Their style is that of tombstones in Cambay.⁶¹ As with the tombstones, what suggests that they are imports rather than the product of Western Indian craftsmen working in the Yemen, is that they are unique, there are no other examples of Gujarātī work, at least none that are extant, nor is there any evidence of the influence of the very distinctive Gujarātī style on Tahirid architecture in other ways.

⁵⁹ al-Radi, The Āmiriyyah madrasah, forthcoming; Brown, Indian Architecture, the Shish Gunbad for example, plate XVI and chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Jain-Neubauer, The stepwells of Gujarat, plates 60 & 228, here plate 133

⁶¹ Smith and Porter, "The Rasulids in Dhofar", 32 f

A description of the restoration of the Jāmi' al-Ātiq in the 10th/16th century account of Jeddah, al-Silāh, shows that the transport of building materials from India was not uncommon at this time.⁶² The text recounts that in 944/1537, a merchant called Muhammad Ālī, arrived from India bringing with him a supply of "wood and pillars with their plinths fashioned in India in their present form"⁶³ for the refurbishment of the mosque. This mosque, reputedly founded by ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb, had lain derelict since its last restoration under the Rasulid sultan al-Muzaffar in the 7th/13th century.

Another example of the specific Indian influence can be seen in the wall paintings of the Āmiriyyah which, in addition to Rasulid the elements discussed above, appear to show an indebtedness to Indian textile designs.

Indian printed and woven cloth from Gujarāt and Bengal were one of the principal commodities of the Indian Ocean trade.⁶⁴ Yemen's involvement in the Indian textile trade goes back at least to the 12th century when Yemen imported from India both dyeing materials and cottons.

References abound throughout the medieval period to this flourishing trade, to the appreciation by the Rasulids and Tahirids of fine textiles and to Yemen itself

⁶² As it has been in recent years with Hadramīṣ bringing over carved woodwork for their houses from Indonesia. According to Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan were imported to Aden. I am grateful to Professor Serjeant for

⁶³ Smith and Zayla'ī, al-Silāh, 15. The emphasis has been added. this information

⁶⁴ Chaudhuri Trade and Civilisation, chapter 3

being a textile and dye producer both for export and home consumption.⁶⁵ A significant reference for our purposes is from Varthema in the early 16th century who records textiles being sent from Cambay and Bengal to Aden for export throughout Arabia Felix.⁶⁶ For, it is Indian textiles from the 15th and 16th centuries that seem intriguingly to present many parallels with the Tahirid wall paintings and Varthema's statement implying that these textiles would have been widely known and used, should make it no surprise that their designs should somehow have found their way into the paintings of the Āmiriyyah. Textile fragments dateable to the 15th century have been found at excavations in Fustāṭ and at the Red Sea port of Quseir al-Qadīm.⁶⁷ Examples of these are also to be found at the Calico Museum in Ahmēdabād and a large collection of over 1,000 fragments collected in Egypt is at present being studied by Ruth Barnes at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.⁶⁸

The similarities between the textiles and the wall paintings lie in the use of the colours, specific designs and the way designs are combined. The predominant colours in the Indian textiles are red and blue. In the Āmiriyyah a wide variety of colour is used but the predominant ground colour is dark red in contrast to the Ashrafiyyah for instance where at least in the side domes much more of the ground has been left white. For specific motifs we may compare with the

⁶⁵ Baldry, Textiles in Yemen, 22 f.

⁶⁶ Varthema, Itinerary.

⁶⁷ Eastwood, "Textiles".

⁶⁸ Barnes, "Indian Trade cloth", in press.

Ashmolean fragments, a trefoil band and a pattern of interlocking circles. (plates 135-7) With a fragment in the Textile museum in Washington⁶⁹, (plate 139) we may compare the treatment of the curving leaves of the stylised trees with the arabesque pattern in the squinch, (plate 138) of particular note here are the oblique strokes within the leaves. Aside from the specific motifs, a striking feature of comparison is that the textiles similarly juxtapose many different motifs side by side in a small area.

Further research is also needed to try and glean any information from the sources about the wider use of textiles in the Yemen at this time and it may be that fragments of cloth may turn up in the Zabīd excavations.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Gittinger, Master dyers, no. 42

⁷⁰ There is a reference from 900/1494, Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 211 (noted above, 212) two years before the completion of the Āmiriyyah, of the Sultan bought of Ka'bah cloth from the bequest of Hārūn the wakīl of the waqf of the Mecca Ḥaram. No description is given of the cloth and while I am not suggesting that the cloth was necessarily Indian it is interesting to speculate what the designs on such a Ka'bah cloth may have been like.

Appendix to chapter 8

The painted inscriptions in the Āmiriyyah

Dome 1, centre

al-shukr li-'llāh al-'izzatu li-'llāh [lā ilāha] illā Allāh

Thanks be to God, glory to God, [there is no God] but Allāh

Walls inscriptions:

sūrah 112 (al-Ikhlās), v. 1-4

Dome 2, There are no inscription in the centre. The wall inscriptions include:

sūrah, 35 (Fātir or Malā'ikah) v.33-5

Dome 3, centre

sūrah, 72 (al-Jinn)v.18

Wall inscriptions:

sūrah 2 (al-Baqarah) v. 127-8; sūrah, 39 (al-Zumār) v. 74-75; sūrah 3 (al-Imrān) v. 15-16

Dome 4, centre

sūrah, 17 (al-Īsrā') v. 84 line 1

Wall inscriptions:

sūrah 24 (al-Nūr) v.36 -7

Dome 5, centre

la ilāha illā Allāh Muhammad Rasūl Allāh

(there is no God but Allah, Muhammad is His Prophet)

Wall inscriptions:

sūrah 29 (al-^ʿAnkabūt) v.101-2

Dome 6 No inscription in the centre ⁷¹

⁷¹ I have no adequate photographs of the walls in this section of the madrasah from which to decipher the inscriptions

CONCLUSION

The rise of the Tahirids and their coming to power in 858/1454 is attributable to a number of different factors, both internal and external. The geographical position of their tribal base, the Juban/al-Miqrānah/Radā' area, undoubtedly provides the initial reason why they became involved in the Rasulid-Zaydī struggle. Their territory, which lay at the fringes of the Zaydī controlled domain, was a frontier the Zaydīs were constantly trying to push forward. Their robust resistance to the Zaydīs as time went by, led the Rasulids increasingly to regard them as important allies. The culmination of their standing, in the eyes of the Rasulids, was reached with the very public gestures made to them of the gift of the palace at al-Miqrānah, and intermarriage between the two houses.

This alone, however, would not have been enough for the Tahirids to succeed the Rasulids as rulers of southern Yemen. Other circumstances were in their favour. Firstly, the gradual and complete disintegration of the Rasulid domain and secondly, the surprising lack of outside interest in the Yemen on the part of the Mamluks in Egypt. It might have been supposed that the collapse of the Rasulid state would have provided them with a good opportunity to invade. Mamluk intentions at other moments during the Rasulid period had been aggressive and, later in the 10th/16th century, the Mamluks as well as the Ottomans saw the Yemen as an important prize. However, the Mamluks in the 9th/15th century clearly had other preoccupations. The Zaydīs too were evidently not strong enough to make the most of the opportunity. Thus, it was left to the Tahirids to fill a power vacuum. They were able to do this because of their strong tribal and

territorial base , both in the Juban/al-Miqrānah area and in Aden and Lahj, where they had forged important trading connections in the latter part of the Rasulid period.

Another factor was clearly the desperation of the people of Zabīd which was, with Aden, the most important city in Sunnī Yemen. Faced with the general anarchy in Tihāmah and a succession of weak Rasulids backed by gangs of ʿabīd, the elders of Zabīd supported the Tahirids who represented the only strong Sunnī leadership visible anywhere in the chaos. Once the Tahirids had taken the two principal cities of Aden and Zabīd, there was no holding them back.

It is curious that no more is heard of the Rasulids once the Tahirids come to power. There are no pretenders acting as the focus of rebellion. Attempts to unseat the Tahirids or to challenge their authority came, instead, either from disaffected members of their own family, or from the tribes and slaves at different times. However these revolts were never linked with members of the fallen Rasulids.

What were the preoccupations of the Tahirids during their 80 year rule ? What is common to them all is the constant fight for survival, whether against their own family or against the tribes. However, the struggle against the tribes had not only a political, but also an economic purpose. The treasury was financed from two sources: revenues from the port of Aden, and taxes. Economically, the Yemen appears to have been in a bad state at the end of the Rasulid period and it was necessary for the new rulers to establish regular sources of revenue quickly. The tribes with whom they had the most trouble resided in one of the most fertile parts

of their domain, Wadī Zabīd and northwards up to Wadī Mawr. They were thus an inevitable target for tax demands. The tribes did not give in easily, the demands for the kharāj often ended up in bloody battles. It seems that it was only under the last Tahirid sultan, ʿĀmir al-Malik al-Zāfir, that funds began to flow regularly into the treasury.

Another feature of the Tahirid period, is the struggle against the Zaydīs. The relationship between Zaydīs and Tahirids is, however, not a straightforward one. On several occasions, the Tahirids became involved in internal Zaydī rivalries which brought them clear advantages. Their ability to push their boundary northwards at Zaydī expense and gain Ṣanʿāʾ was due as much to Tahirid determination and strength, as to Zaydī weakness of leadership. It is striking to contrast the last half of the 9th/15th century, characterised by rivalries between pretenders to the imamate, as well as opposition from Zaydī tribal leaders with the early 10th/16th century under the dynamic leadership of Imam Sharaf al-Dīn.

There is still much to be explored in the search to discover how the inhabitants of the Zaydī and Tahirid domains lived side by side. Although there were basic sectarian differences between them, the Zaydī and Shāfiʿī doctrines are not, in fact, so far apart. There is no sense in their struggles of any element of jihad, or of one side was being cast in the role of infidel, as has happened with sectarian differences in the Islamic world during this century. The struggles were a matter of territory and tribal allegiances. It would be interesting to know to what extent, in the peaceful periods, there was easy freedom of movement between the two domains for traders or artisans, and whether Tahirid coins could be used in Zaydī

territory or vice versa. These are points on which the sources remain silent.

When the Rasulid and Tahirid periods are compared, there are, in general terms, clear similarities and differences. The Tahirids followed their predecessors in matters of pomp and in the style of their government, although they were not dependent on mamluks to the same extent. The principal difference is, however, one of outlook. The Rasulids were a powerful and brilliant dynasty who, because of their origins, saw themselves as part of the western Islamic world. The diplomatic visits particularly between themselves and the Mamluk rulers of Egypt, their love of foreign objects, and use of foreign craftsmen sets them apart from the Tahirids. It is in their architecture that the Rasulids' links with the western Islamic world, their wealth and their view of themselves can be so clearly seen. The most important of their surviving monuments were built at the height of their powers and contain strong stylistic links with the Mamluks. The proud display of the Rasulid emblem, the rosette, on their painted ceilings, the dramatic positioning of some of their monuments; this is the art of wealthy and confident patrons.

For their part, the Tahirids were preoccupied with survival. There are few contacts with the rest of the Islamic world, except between Aden and the outside trading network as well as the movement of religious scholars. The Tahirids built religious monuments, of course, since that was an important demonstration of religious piety. If the ruler paid for the construction or restoration himself, as Ibn al-Daybā' often records, that was all the better.

There are two principal points about Tahirid architecture. The first is that the

monuments are on a much smaller scale than the Rasulid ones, both in the actual number of constructions and in the lavishness of the constructions themselves. Secondly, the style very much reflects the preoccupations of the dynasty itself. As with everything else Rasulid, the architectural style has been absorbed, but still forms an important element. Absorbed and reworked, Tahirid architecture turns into something highly individual, recognizably different from the Rasulid style and demonstrating artistic influences from a new direction, India. Nevertheless, it is striking how different is the the *Āmiriyyah*, the last sultan al-Malik al-Zāfir's most important surviving monument, from the Tahirid buildings of his predecessors. Before the dramatic events set in train by the advent of the Portuguese, his reign was a period of relative calm and stability. It was also marked by his determination to extend his boundaries well into the Zaydī domain. There are indications that he was beginning to emulate the most powerful of his Rasulid predecessors, al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl (d. 803/1400) One of these indications is the style of the *Āmiriyyah*. It is not so much in the plan of the building, which, like the *Mansūriyyah* built 20 or so years before in Juban, is taken from the *Muṭabiyyah* in Ta'izz. It is particularly the re-introduction of painting as the principal method of decorating the sanctuary, the combination of painting and stucco, and the overall lavishness that suggest a deliberate link with the high period of Rasulid architecture.

What were the reasons for the Tahirid downfall ? How was it that they were able to resist the might of the Portuguese so well and the small Mamluk force not at all? The Portuguese were intent on capturing Aden and it was here that they focussed their attack. Under the strong governorship of Amir Murjān, Aden was a

strong city and, except for occasional difficulties with the rebellious tribe of Yāfi^c, was generally united. Amir Murjān pledged allegiance to the Tahirids, but seems to have had fairly autonomous power, as far as can be judged. The city was well protected with strong defences. The failure of the attack was also due in part to the Portuguese lack of preparedness, a failing readily admitted by Albuquerque.

As far as the Yemen was concerned, the Portuguese incursions into the Indian Ocean and their attempt on Aden simply acted as a catalyst for the downfall of the Tahirids. The Yemen itself did not suffer from the Portuguese. One positive effect in fact, was that it gave Amir Murjān the confidence to resist the Mamluk bombardment from the sea a short time later. Amir Murjān, it would appear, was an astute leader and a highly significant personality in the history of the Tahirid period. He conciliated the Portuguese when he regarded it as appropriate, even providing them with pilots to take them to Jeddah when the fleet came again under the ineffectual Lopo Soares. He paid the army well and showed no lack of courage himself during the Portuguese attack. It is notable that the sources record no sign that Amir Murjān attempted to help the Tahirid sultan in any way during the Mamluk invasion and the rout of the Tahirid forces.

The general attitude to the Mamluk invasion was markedly different to the attitude shown in combatting the Portuguese. Because of the hatred felt against the Portuguese, all efforts were put into repelling them. There was no dissent. On the other hand, the Mamluk force was assisted at every turn by Tihāmah tribesmen, the lords of Luḥayyah, Jīzān and others, and encouraged from the outset by the Zaydīs. The sultan's lack of resistance can almost be put down to incompetence.

As became evident, the stability of his reign was superficial and can be attributed in large part to the strong arm tactics of his amirs. These men, in particular Amir al-Ba[‘]dānī pushed him, against his own instincts into an aggressive position during the first approach by the Mamluk Amir Ḥusayn al-Kurdī. The paradox is that the Tahirid sultan actually asked the Mamluks for their support in countering the Portuguese threat, and if the author of the Arabic History of Gujarat is to be believed, actually struck a territorial deal with the Mamluks.

So what turned [‘]Amir against them ? Had he had hints of covetous Mamluk intentions towards his own domain ? Abū Makhramah was firmly of the belief that the Mamluks had evil intentions from the outset. This seems to be disproved by a number of indications, principally Salmān Ra’īs’s statement that his refusal to join Ḥusayn al-Kurdī in the attack on land was due to the fact that it was not part of Qānsawh al-Ghawrī’s initial instructions. On the other hand, Qānsawh’s gestures were not particularly friendly. He instructed Salmān and Ḥusayn to make their base on Kamarān without any prior consultation and the message that the Tahirid sultan received following the Portuguese attempt on Aden was so curt that its tone was even remarked upon in the Portuguese accounts. Another factor against attributing prior motives on the part of the Mamluk sultan, was that the Mamluk attack has about it an air of opportunism and there was perhaps some surprise on their part that the Yemeni hinterland fell to them so quickly. The Mamluks use of fire power was undoubtedly their greatest asset, but the sultan formulated no strategy to fight back. Had it been up to his brother, [‘]Abd al-Malik, who the sources suggest, was the braver and more popular of the two, and who rightly attempted to discourage the sultan from fighting the Mamluks in Sa[‘]nā,

there might have been a different outcome.

The lack of a loyal standing army was another disadvantage suffered by the sultan. In the attacks on Ṣarīf ā, the sultan had recruited tribesmen who would stay as long as they were paid. Troops personally loyal to him were small in number and consisted of a core of black slaves and, in the final debacle, of Mahrah tribesmen who were unpopular with the other tribes. The speed and force of the Mamluk attack, the sultan's lack of preparedness and foresight and the unreliability of the army were all factors in his eventual defeat.

One can speculate finally that perhaps the circumstances were no longer conducive for an independent Sunnī dynasty ruling southern Yemen at this time. Even without the lack of foresight of the last sultan Āmir, the tenuous Tahirid hold on so much of their domain might not, perhaps, have enabled them to hold out against the strong and dynamic Zaydī leadership of Sharaf al-Dīn or indeed to resist the powerful force of the Ottomans determined to incorporate the Yemen into their empire. The Tahirids faded quickly into oblivion. Their artistic legacy, however, lived on for longer and can be glimpsed in the architecture of the later periods.

APPENDIX

Biographical notes on some prominent personalities during the Tahirid period

The aim of this short appendix is to bring together information on a number of important figures who have been mentioned in the historical section of the thesis.

Four families are particularly prominent: those of Jamāl al-Dīn b. ʿĪsā al-Baʿdānī, the Faqīh ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Nizārī, Sharīf ʿAlī b. Sufyān and Jayyāsh b. Sulaymān al-Sunbulī.

Jamāl al-Dīn b. ʿĪsā al-Baʿdānī comes to prominence during the Tahirid's capture of Ṣanʿā' in 865/1461 where he was appointed as nā'ib an appointment he shared with the Zaydi amīr Yaḥyā al-Karāz.¹ It was his departure from Ṣanʿā' to collect kharāj that provided the opportunity for the Zaydīs to attempt to retake the city in 869/1455.² Until 894/1489 he is frequently mentioned as supporting the Tahirids, in particular ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb whom he helped during the rebellions against him at the beginning of his reign in 894/1489. He had a house in Juban which was destroyed by the rebels during the troubles. He was governor of Zabīd during the period of the scandal concerning the corrupt head of the mint Aḥmad al-Maqart-s who was his brother-in-law.³ He built a madrasah in Radā' of which all that remains is a wooden panel set into the door of the ground floor courtyard leading to the ʿĀmiriyyah madrasah. It is inscribed with his name and bears the

¹ Text p. 57.

² Text p. 58f.

³ Text p. 89-90.

date 899/1494.⁴ His sons Shams al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Baʿ dānī was also a prominent amir under the Tahirids. It was under his supervision that the ʿĀmiriyyah madrasah was built.⁵ He starts being mentioned with frequency from 907/1501 during ʿĀmir's attempts to capture Zaydī domains.⁶ A threat was made against his life in 919/1513 while he was in Ṣanʿā.⁷ During the debacle with the Mamluks, it can be argued that his uncompromising attitude led to the fall of the Tahirids.⁸ He was murdered by the Mamluks in 923/1517 shortly after the death of the sultan.⁹ Another ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Baʿ dānī who was also known as al-Sharmānī is mentioned under the year 941/1534 as one of the supporters of the last of the Tahirids ʿĀmir b. Dā ʿūd.¹⁰

The family of Faqīh Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maʿ ān al-Nizārī were prominent amirs and advisers to the sultans and were based in Ibb and its environs. He was appointed amir of Zabīd in 919/1513.¹¹ Jamāl al-Dīn d. 921/1515 built a madrasah in the town of Ibb.¹² His son ʿAlī b. Muḥammad was particularly prominent during the reign of the last sultan ʿĀmir and attempted to

⁴ Text p. 198.

⁵ Text p. 229-30.

⁶ Text p. 110f.

⁷ Schuman, Qiladah, 14

⁸ Text p. 120f.

⁹ Text p. 139.

¹⁰ Text p. 151.

¹¹ Schuman, Qiladah, 15.

¹² Text p. 189, Schuman, Qiladah, 17.

persuade ʿĀmir to be conciliatory with the Mamluks.¹³ He was very successful in obtaining kharāj, particularly during the year 921/1515.¹⁴ Several family members endowed religious monuments in the Ibb region.¹⁵ A final reference to ʿAlī b. Muḥammad occurs in 925/1519 during the troubled period after the death of the last sultan ʿĀmir.¹⁶ Another son, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Muḥammad al-Nizārī is mentioned in 921/1515, as taking his father's position as amir of Zabīd.¹⁷

Sharīf ʿAlī b. Sufyān was prominent during the Tahirids' seizure of power in 858/1454.¹⁸ He also defended Aden against Abū Dujānah in 861/1457¹⁹ and was amir of Zabīd in 870/1465. His ties with the Tahirids were particularly close on account of the marriage of one of his daughters to the sultan ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in 874/1469.²⁰ Abū Makhramah expresses doubt over his sharaf.²¹ His death is noted in the year 875/1470 when he was killed during a battle against the Zaydiyyūn tribe in Tihāmah in which the sultan al-Malik al-Mujāhid and Sulaymān b. Jayyāsh al-Sunbulī were also involved.²² The family base was Aden.

¹³ Text p. 120.

¹⁴ Text p. 91, Schuman, Qilādah, 17.

¹⁵ Text p. 189.

¹⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, 37.

¹⁷ Schuman, Qilādah, 17.

¹⁸ Text p. 38.

¹⁹ Text p. 38 & 49.

²⁰ Ibn al-Daybā, Bughyah, 143.

²¹ Schuman, Qilādah, 47 note 4.

²² Text p. 69f.

and he built a madrasah there called the Sufyāniyyah madrasah.²³ His son ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī b. Sufyān was governor of Zabīd in 912/1506²⁴ and he was also a key figure in the collection of kharāj from the tribes under the last sultan al-Malik al-Zāfir. His death is recorded in 918/1512 in Bayt al-Faqīh b. ʿUjāyī and he was buried in the tomb of the Faqīh Aḥmad b. Mūsā.²⁵ Other members of the family mentioned are a brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī b. Sufyān whose death is noted in Ṣanʿā in 920/1514²⁶ during the period of the Tahirid occupation of the city. Sharīf Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Sufyān was in charge of the garrison at Kamarān and was killed in 919/1513 during the Portuguese occupation.²⁷

Jayyāsh b. Sulaymān al-Sinbulī first appears during the latter part of the Rasulid period in charge of Zabīd under the Rasulid pretender al-Masʿūd.²⁸ In the run up to the Tahirid seizure of Zabīd in 858/1454 he was driven out of Aden and was then instrumental in gaining access to Zabīd for the Tahirids.²⁹ He was appointed governor of al-Shiḥr in 863/1459³⁰ and assisted in its recapture from the family of Abū Dujānah in 865/1461.³¹ His son ʿAlām al-Dīn Sulaymān b. Jayyāsh al-

²³ Text p. 187.

²⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, 8 and note 4.

²⁵ Ibn al-Dayba, Fadl, 253.

²⁶ Ibn al-Dayba, Fadl, 281.

²⁷ Text p. 107.

²⁸ Text p. 27.

²⁹ Text p. 36-7.

³⁰ Text p. 50.

³¹ Text p. 66.

Sunbulī is also mentioned during the recapture of al-Shihr³² and was subsequently prominent in struggles against the Tihāmah tribes. His death is mentioned under the year 890/1485 in Zabīd and he was buried in the family vault at Bāb Sahām.³³

Umar al-Jabartī was prominent during the reign of the last sultan ‘Āmir. He is stated in the Qilādah and Rawh al-Rūh to have been close to the sultan and to have advised him during the Mamluk debacle.³⁴ During the Mamluk sack of al-Miqrānah it was he who was alleged to have given away the secret of the hiding place of the sultan’s treasure³⁵ which amounted to 5 lakk of "old gold coins" (Khamsah lukūk dhahab qadīm).

The most important of all the amirs of ‘Āmir al-Malik al-Zāfir (II) was the governor of Aden, Amir Murjān b. ‘Abdallah al-Zāfirī³⁶ He is first mentioned in this capacity in 913/1507 and figures prominently in both Yemeni and Portuguese chronicles in the defence of Aden against the Portuguese. Barros suggests that he was an Abyssinian convert, the name Murjān (meaning coral) is frequently given to slaves. His death is recorded in al-Nūr al-Sāfir under the year 927/1531 with ‘Abd al-Malik taking his place as amir of Aden. The Nūr also mentions that he was buried in Qubbat al-‘Aydarūs, whose construction he had ordered and that his

³² Text p. 66f.

³³ Ibn al-Dayba, Bughyah, 174.

³⁴ Schuman, Qilādah, note 127.

³⁵ Text p. 136-7. Schuman, Qilādah, 28-9.

³⁶ Schuman, Qilādah, note 59.

bravery and good character were renowned.³⁷

³⁷ Al-Āydarūs, Nūr, p. 132-3.

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- I) Abbreviations
- II) Manuscripts and theses
- III) Articles
- IV) Books and monographs

I. Abbreviated titles

All titles are abbreviated. The following are the works most commonly used and are abbreviated as follows:

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THE RASULID SULTANS from 778-858/1377-1454

VII.	al-Ashraf Ismā'īl	778-803/1377-1400
VIII.	al-Nāṣir Aḥmad	803-27/1400-24
IX.	al-Manṣūr ʿAbdallāh	827-30/1424-7
X.	al-Ashraf Ismā'īl	830-1/1427-8
XI.	al-Zāhir Yaḥyā	831-42/1428-1438
XII.	al-Ashraf Ismā'īl	842-5/1438-41
XIII.	al-Muzaffar Yūsuf	845-58/1441-54

The Rasulid pretenders

al-Malik al-Afdal Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. ʿUthmān	846/1442
al-Malik al-Nāṣir Aḥmad b. al-Zāhir b. Yūsuf b. ʿAbdallāh	846/1442
al-Malik al-Masʿūd Ṣalāh al-Dīn b. al-Ashraf b. al-Nāṣir	847-58/1443-54
al-Muʿayyad Ḥusayn b. Ṭāhir	855-8/1451-4

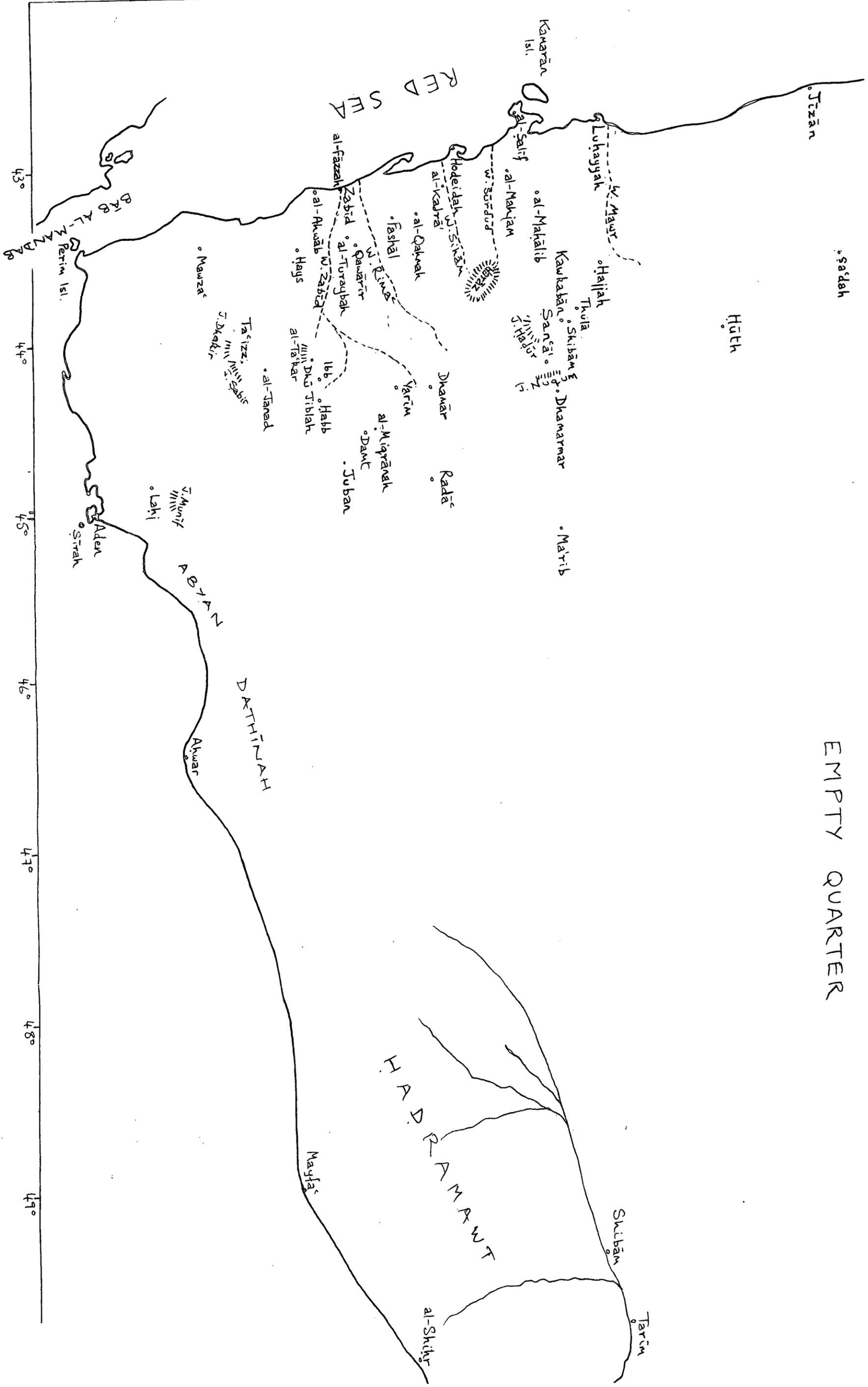
THE TAHIRID SULTANS

I.	ʿĀmir al-Malik al-Zāfir	858-64/1454-60
II.	ʿAlī al-Malik al-Mujāhid	864-83/1460-78
III.	ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Manṣūr	883-94/1478-89
IV.	ʿĀmir al-Malik al-Zāfir	894-923/1489-1517

After their fall from power 923-45/1517-38

V.	Aḥmad (b. 903-1497)	924/1518
VI.	ʿĀmir	924-5/1518-19
VII.	Aḥmad	925-6/1519-20
VIII.	ʿAbd al-Malik	926-33/1520-9
IX.	ʿĀmir	935-45/1529-38

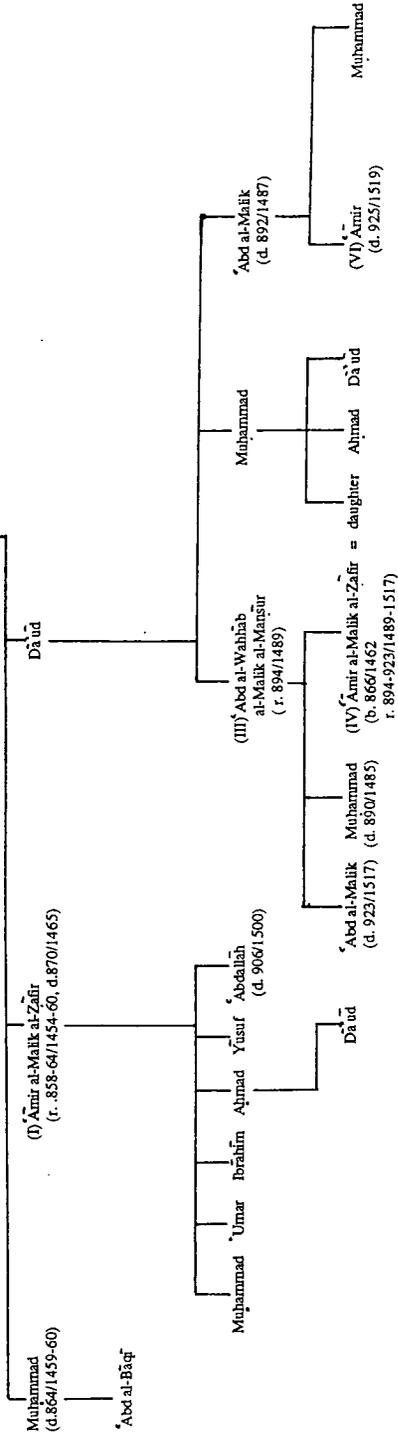
FIG. 1 MAP OF THE YEMEN



43° 44° 45° 46° 47° 48° 49°

EMPTY QUARTER

Tahrid Rebels



During the reign of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Malik al-Mansūr

- Yūsuf b. 'Amir (see text, pp 74-77)
- Ibrāhīm b. 'Amir (see text, p 78)

During the reign of 'Amir al-Malik al-Zafīr (see text, pp 84-88)

- 'Abdallāh } tried to take Juban
- Muḥammad }
- Aḥmad: taken prisoner in Ta'izz
- Dā'ūd: taken prisoner in Juban
- 'Abd al-Bāqī: tried to take Aden

Supporters of Sultan Amir during the rebellion of 894/1489

- Aḥmad b. Muḥammad
- Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik

