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The First Layer of the Sīrat Baybars:  
Popular Romance and Political Propaganda

We know quite a lot about the setting of the Sīrat Baybars and of other popular siyar, the Arabic popular romances. European travellers and scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, among others Carsten Niebuhr, Edward William Lane, and the authors of the Description de l’Egypte, reported that storytellers recited in the coffeehouses of the big cities. In Damascus and Cairo, for a “trifling sum of money,” they related different sorts of entertaining stories, especially the popular siyar, Sīrat ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād, Sīrat Banī Hilāl, Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan, and the Sīrat al-Malīk al-Zāhir Baybars. This last text is the subject of this essay.

We know next to nothing about the genesis and the development of these texts. Most of the complete sīrah manuscripts at our disposal are relatively late versions of these texts. Of the older layers of the sīyar sha’biyāh only fragmentary remnants have survived. The nature of the siyar texts poses further problems: the sīyar sha’biyāh are clearly anonymous stories, created by several authors who regularly revised and recreated their texts, thus adapting them to the expectations and taste of their audience. In this sense, the popular romances are the structural opposites of texts representing classical Arabic literature, which were created by single authors and which show the influence of their socio-political milieu.

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1Plural of sīrah, meaning in this context account of life history, biography. The most famous example of a learned sīrah is the Sīrat al-Nabī, the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. See Marco Schoeller, Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie (Wiesbaden, 1998), 37–49. The term sīyar sha’biyāh (popular sīyar) was “coined by Arab folklorists in the 1950s for a genre of lengthy Arabic heroic narratives that in Western languages are called either ‘popular epics’ or ‘popular romances.’” See Peter Heath, “Sīra Sha’biyya,” The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., 9:664.

2Carsten Niebuhr, Beschreibung von Arabien aus eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande selbst gesammelten Nachrichten abgefasst (Copenhagen, 1772), 106–7.


5Lane, Modern Egyptians, 2:103.
In order to establish the time, place and social context of the genesis of a text such as the Sīrat Baybars, we have to rely on the indirect evidence provided by the text itself, such as specific references to the social or political points of view of its creators. Such an analysis gives us insight into the different functions that the sīrah acquired in the course of its development.

Evidence shows that the Sīrat Baybars is a composite text in which three layers of text development can be distinguished; those layers originated in three different eras and social environments that merged in a process we can no longer reconstruct. For this article, we will not concentrate on the ‘adventure-romance’ from the fifteenth century, which forms most of the sīrah. Nor will we talk about Baybars’ youth and ascent in the sīrah, a part of the text in which Baybars is built up as a counter-image to the despotic sultans of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and in which the ummah’s anger found its expression regarding corruption and abuse of power at the time of the great crisis of the Mamluk Empire (at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century). Instead, we shall concentrate on the oldest layer of the legendary biography of the great Mamluk sultan Baybars I. Although initially assumed to be a product of the second half of the fourteenth and of the fifteenth century, we established in the course of our investigation that—judging by the representation of Sultan Baybars and of several other historical figures—the sīrah seems to have been inspired by the spirit of the second half of the thirteenth century, thus the early period of the Mamluk Empire. Our line of argument is based essentially on two elements: first on the representation of Sultan Baybars as the virtuous guardian of Ayyubid legitimacy, and second on the representation of a series of historical rivals to Baybars and the Zāhirīyah Mamluks.

One of the greatest problems facing the Mamluks at the beginning of their rule was that of legitimacy. If the Ayyubid house, which had ruled before them, had been legitimized by its descent and by investiture by the caliph of Baghdad, the military slaves that finally came to power with Baybars could not legitimize themselves either by descent—having been born in non-Islamic lands—or, for a transitional period after the Mongol seizure of Baghdad, by the religious authority of the caliph. In this context, if we examine the representation of Baybars in the sīrah, his origins, his rise, and how he finally took over power, details that at first seem merely to glorify the hero of an adventure story suddenly form a coherent unity.

Indeed, from his introduction in the romance, the representation of Baybars seems entirely motivated by the idea of the legitimation of Mamluk rule. Although

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6For this, see my Ph.D thesis to be published in 2002 ("Genese, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sīrat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext").
he is shown as a military slave—it would have been unconvincing to try to disguise it—Baybars is in the sīrah Muslim by birth, bears the name of Maḥmūd, and is the son of the king of Khurasan, who became a slave after he had been betrayed by his brothers. Baybars does not stay a slave for long: in Damascus, where he is first brought after having been enslaved and where he is serving as a house slave, a rich widow “adopts” him because he resembles her deceased son. She names him after her son Baybars and makes him the master of her fortune. It is in Damascus that the four aqtāb, in Sufi belief the mystical poles of the universe (in the sīrah ʿĀḥmad al-Badawī, al-Dasuqī, al-Jīlānī, and the šāhib al-waqt), appear to Baybars and pray for him. It is also in Damascus that during the Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Destiny in which people believe that God determines the fate of men for the following year, the gates of heaven open to Baybars. He is told that he will become sultan of Egypt and Syria. Having come to Cairo, Baybars quickly rises in rank, becomes commander of a Mamluk regiment, wāli, muḥtasib, and governor of several provinces. Finally, Baybars is “adopted” by the Ayyubid sultan al-Šāliḥ and his spouse in the sīrah, Shajarat al-Durr, thus recovering a

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7 Siyar al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars, ed. Jamāl al-Ghitānī (Cairo, 1996), 469. This is a re-edition in five volumes with new pagination of the first edition by al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Amīn Dirbāl (Cairo, 1326–27/1908–9) and the second edition by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Ḥijāzī (Cairo, 1341–44/1923–26). Whereas the betrayal of Baybars’ brothers shows obvious borrowings from the story of Joseph in the Bible and the Quran (Genesis 37:4 and Quran 12:5), Baybars’ fictitious origins go back to the origins of his predecessor Qutūz al-Muṭaffar as related by some Arab historians. Ibn Iyās reports, citing Ibn al-Jawzī, that Qutūz had once been beaten by his master Ibn al-Zaʿim, over which he bitterly wept. Being asked why he wept so bitterly because of a single blow he answered: “I only weep because he cursed my father and my grandfather, whilst they are more deserving than he is.” He was asked: ‘But who are your father and grandfather, aren’t they Christians?’ He said: ‘No, on the contrary, I am a Muslim son of a Muslim and my name is Maḥmūd, son of Mamdūd, nephew of the Khwarizm Shah, from the progeniture of the kings of the east. The Mongols took me as a boy, after they had defeated them.’ This is why Qutūz was not a slave.” (Ibn Iyās, Badaʿi’ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾī al-Duhūr, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā asDie Chronik des Ibn Iyās [Cairo/Wiesbaden, 1960–84], 1:1:303). See also: Donald P. Little, “Kūṭūz,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., 5:571.

8 We put the word “adopts” in quotation marks, because in Islamic law full adoption does not exist.

9 ʿĀḥmad al-Badawī, al-Dasuqī, al-Jīlānī, and the šāhib al-waqt, the temporary qutb (pole, axis; the head in the hierarchy of the “saints”). See de Jong, “Al-Kūṭūb,” EI 7 5:543.

10 Saḥib al-waqt or “Šāhib al-zamān,” the temporary qutb (pole, axis; the head in the hierarchy of the “saints”). See de Jong, “Al-Kūṭūb,” 543. It is also one of the names of the mahdī. See Heinz Halm, Shiism (Edinburgh, 1991), 77.

11 Siyar al-Malik al-Zahir, 159 ff.

12 Ibid., 462.
double royal descent, that of his father, king of Khurasan, and that of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb, the last great Ayyubid on the throne of Egypt.

It is interesting to observe how the sirah’s authors relate the upheaval during the transition from Ayyubid rule to that of the first great Mamluk sultan, al-Ẓāhir Baybars: as al-Šāliḥ dies, it is Baybars to whom he limits his succession, asking God to have all those who were due to become sultan before Baybars die by an unnatural death.14 By this strategy, the sirah takes into account the historical succession of rulers and simultaneously confirms Baybars as the true heir and undoubted guardian of the Ayyubid dynasty’s legitimacy. In fact, Baybars refuses the sultanate each time a successor to al-Šāliḥ is nominated—Īsā al-Mu’azzam Tūrānshāh, al-Ashraf, al-Šāliḥ al-Ṣaghīr ibn al-Ashraf (a fictive sultan), Aybak al-Turkumānī, and al-Mużaffar Qutţuz, who are all shown as Ayyubids in the sirah—with the vehement words: “God forbid that I take the dignity of a sultan under the eyes of the Ayyubid princes! Who am I to divest them of their right to the throne, I who once used to be their slave?”15

It is equally interesting to observe how the sirah diverts historical responsibility from Baybars for the murder of two of al-Šāliḥ’s successors, Īsā al-Mu’azzam Tūrānshāh and Qutţuz. The case of the first of al-Šāliḥ’s successors is that of Īsā al-Mu’azzam Tūrānshāh, al-Šāliḥ’s son and immediate successor. He was apparently more interested in the fine arts and wine than in government or the army, and he was murdered by the Bahriya Mamluks under the leadership of Baybars following the battle of al-Mansūrah against the Crusader army of Louis IX. According to a number of historians it was a group probably headed by Baybars himself which carried out the assassination of the young sultan.16 The authors of the sirah,

15Bohas/Guillaume, Roman, 6:83 f.
16The following historians state that Baybars was the leader of the group that murdered Tūrānshāh or, alternatively, that he assassinated him personally: Muḥammad ibn Sālim ibn Wāṣil, “Mufarrij al-Kurūb fī Akhbār Bani Ayyūb,” Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Ar 1702, fol. 371a–b; Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, Al-Rawḍ al-Zāhirī fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhirī, ed. ‘Abd al-Azīz Khuwayṭīr (Riyadh, 1396/1976), 50; Ismā’īl ibn ‘Alī Abū al-Fidā, Al-Mukhtāṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar
however, do not make ʿĪsā al-Muʿazzam Tūrānishāh die directly by Baybars’ hand but rather show his death as God’s punishment for a sinful way of life. In the sīrah, ʿĪsā becomes completely drunk while sitting on an elevated seat he had built in order to be able to watch the battle of al-Manṣūrah against the Frankish troops and falls, breaking his neck.\(^{17}\)

The case of the second successor of al-Ṣāliḥ for whose death Baybars is responsible is that of al-Muzaffar Qut uz, the hero of the battle of ʿAyn Jalūt against the Mongols, a Mamluk just like Baybars. While the historical Qutuz was trapped by Baybars in an ambush and killed in cold blood,\(^{18}\) the sīrah’s Qutuz is murdered by Frankish spies.

Obviously the sīrah had to convince its audience of Baybars’ innocence; it could not entirely suppress his historical role in these events, but it skilfully integrated the allegations against Baybars and invalidated them. So ʿĪsā does not die at the hands of the future sultan, but gets caught in the ladder of his elevated seat, stumbles and falls while fearing the anger of Baybars, who furiously approaches him in the middle of the battle, having seen him drinking while watching the battle. In the case of Qutuz, Baybars’ historical responsibility for the murder finds expression in the account that the Frankish spies who murder Qutuz leave by the side of the corpse a slip of paper on which Baybars declares his responsibility for the crime.\(^{19}\)

Further, the account of al-Ṣāliḥ’s different Ayyubid successors in the sīrah not only depicts Baybars as the altruistic guardian of Ayyubid legitimacy, it also shows that after al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb the Ayyubids could no longer provide a sovereign able to rule the empire and thus rightly lost their power to the Mamluks. All the

\(^{17}\)See: Sirat al-Malik al-Zāhir, 984; British Library MS, fol. 28a–b; Staatsbibliothek Berlin MS We 562, fol. 78a (catalogue listing: Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse, no. 9155 [We 561–586]); Gotha MS 2628, fol. 19a–b.


\(^{19}\)Sirat al-Malik al-Zāhir, 1079: "It was no one else but the amir Baybars who accomplished these deeds and attained this destiny, [my] writing and seal testify to this." Nota bene the proximity to the account of Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, Rawd, 68, cited above.
successors of al-Ṣālih that the sīrah calls Ayyubids are shown to be either unworthy of the sultanate (ʿĪṣā Tūrānshāh, Aybak), or unsuitable for it due to their youth (al-Ṣālih al-Ṣaghīr), gender (Shajar al-Durr20), or finally to be entranced saints (awliyā’) (al-Ashraf Khalīl, Qutūz) who were equally unsuited for the office of sultan of the Ayyubid Empire. So the sīrah depicts the transition from the Ayyubids to the Mamluks not only as legitimate, but also as consistent.

In my opinion, the important place that Ayyubid legitimacy occupies in those parts of the sīrah dealing with the transition to the Mamluks points to the beginning of the Mamluk period. Whereas the vita of Baybars composed by the court biographer Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir shows him as the spiritual heir of al-Malik al-Ṣālih Najm al-Dīn Ayūb,21 the picture of the great sultan that Ibn ‘Abd al-Ẓāhir’s nephew Shāfiʿ ibn ‘Alī draws some thirty years after his uncle22 already shows the consolidation of Mamluk power. As P. M. Holt put it, “The Baybars of Ḫusn al-manāqib is still an impressive, even an heroic figure, whose military achievements secured the future of Islam in Syria against the threats from the Mongols and the Franks. He appears, further, as an autocratic but just ruler, who was (to use a cliché) the true founder of the Mamluk sultanate. What he has lost is the aura of legitimacy as the true heir of al-Ṣālih Ayūb, by which Ibn ‘Abd al-Ẓāhir sought to disguise his twofold usurpation. But when Shāfiʿ wrote, Ayyubid legitimacy had long ceased to be a political issue, and Baybars could stand justified by his deeds.”23

It is not only the picture of Baybars drawn by the sīrah that makes us presume that a first layer of the Sīrat Baybars dates from early Mamluk times. If we look at the representation of several historical characters of the sīrah, we note that they are shown in a certain number of purely fictitious episodes of the romance in an extremely negative light. This evidence gains further importance since these characters were all historical rivals or opponents of Baybars and his Zāhirīyah Mamluks. Their negative representation thus faithfully reflects the conflicts of interest and power of the time of Baybars’ rule or of those of his immediate successors and that from a “Baybarsian” point of view.

The most prominent examples of this representation are those of al-Muʿizz Aybak and of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn. Al-Muʿizz Aybak, who was, like Baybars, a Mamluk and before him—from 648/1250 to 655/1257—sultan, is shown in the

20 Although she is not of Ayyubid descent, the sīrah represents her nearly as such.
21 Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir, Rawd, 46.
sīrah as a crypto-Christian and ally of the Franks, who nourishes in his heart hatred towards Muslims. He is introduced into the romance as king of Mosul, who wants to attack al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb’s empire, but finally enters into the sultan’s service and conspires against the Muslims from the heart of their state.24 After the death of al-Šāliḥ he wants to seize power and pretends that Baybars had murdered his master, but his words turn out to be lies.25 Nevertheless, Aybak threatens to “make the blood cool in floods” if Baybars should become sultan.26 After the death of Ţū’rānshāh, Khalīl ibn Ṭū’rānshāh al-Šāliḥ al-Šaghīr ibn al-Šaghīr successively become sultan, and Aybak poisons both of them and seizes power.27 He finally tries to assassinate Baybars as well.28 Baybars leaves for Syria where he installs a counter rule.29 It quickly comes to a conflict between Baybars and Aybak as the coins minted by Baybars in Damascus have a higher value and render those minted by Aybak worthless in the market.30 People mock Aybak, who falls in love with a Bedouin girl and no longer shows any interest either in state affairs or in his spouse Shajarat al-Durr, who finally murders him out of jealousy.31

This extremely negative and, except for his death, totally unhistorical representation32 of Aybak in the Siḥrat Baybars goes back, in my mind, to the historical struggle for power, to the time between the death of the last great Ayyubid sultan al-Šāliḥ and the first great Mamluk sultan Baybars. Al-Malik al-Mu’izz Aybak, the first Mamluk on the throne of Egypt, recognized the Bahriyay Mamluks, one of whose leaders was Baybars, correctly as a permanent threat. It is true that the Bahriyay did not dare to seize power immediately after the assassination of Ţū’rānshāh and preferred to accept temporary and unstable

24Siḥrat al-Malik al-Zāhīr, 71–75, 87–92. During Baybars’ rise to power in Cairo, Aybak acts regularly on the side of the qadi Jawān, a crypto-Christian and the main evil character of the romance, trying to get Baybars executed (e.g., ibid., 270ff., 744ff.). The corrupt wa‘l Hasan Āghā and his nephew the muḥtasib (market-superintendent) Qarājūdah are also crypto-Christians from Aybak’s entourage (ibid., 506 ff., 586 ff.) who try to harm Baybars. According to his status as crypto-Christian, Aybak deserts the Muslims during the battle against the Mongols and tries to collaborate with the latter (ibid., 773 ff.).
25As Aybak pretends after al-Šāliḥ’s death to become the future sultan, the vizier Shāhīn reprimands him, saying that someone like him could never merit the sultanate: “And the vizier said: ‘Please preserve a sense of decency in this matter. Somebody like you will never deserve the sultanate.’” (ibid., 966ff.).
26British Library MS, fol. 14a.
28Ibid., 1007 ff.
29Ibid., 1034 ff.
30Ibid., 1061 ff.
31Ibid., 1069–74.
32Aybak’s rule over Egypt, his marriage with Shajarat al-Durr, and his neglect of her for another woman are the only historical elements in the sīrah’s account of Aybak.
solutions such as the rule of the female Shajarat al-Durr with Aybak as *atabeg.*

But this circumstance did not hinder them enough to cause them to deny soon afterwards the legitimacy of Aybak’s sultanate and to act more and more in a self-assured and arrogant way. Fāris Aqtay, the leader of the Bahriyah-Jamdāriyah Mamluks, began to act as the true ruler of Egypt and finally asked Aybak and his spouse to leave the citadel, in order to permit him to accommodate his own spouse, the daughter of the ruler of Hamāh, in keeping with her station. Aybak then decided to eliminate Fāris and his Mamluks. On 1 January 1254 (10 Dhū al-Qa’dah 651), he ordered Fāris Aqtay to visit him at the citadel. As soon as Fāris entered, he was captured and murdered by a troop of Aybak’s personal Mamluks. In spite of Aybak’s immediate attempt to capture the remaining Bahriyah-Jamdāriyah Mamluks, the majority managed to flee.

Al-Mansūr Qalāwūn is the second historical figure whose extremely negative representation in the *sirah* makes me believe that parts of the *Sīrat Baybars* go back to the struggle for power in the early Mamluk period. Qalāwūn, who historically was one of Baybars’ comrades, is depicted in a number of manuscript and printed versions of the *sirah* as a Mamluk who hates Baybars from their first encounter. On their way with a slave caravan from Bursa to Damascus, Baybars and Qalāwūn share the same mount. Baybars, who is severely ill, suffers from diarrhea and asks Qalāwūn to help him to dismount. Qalāwūn is disgusted by Baybars and pushes him at dawn from the animal and so Baybars nearly dies in the desert.

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33 A Turkish term used from Saljuq to Mamluk times designating a military leader mostly of slave origin who was acting as a tutor for a young prince. He typically married the mother of the minor prince and thereby acquired great power. The tutorate of Aybak for Shajarat al-Durr as regent-spouse of the heir and widow of al-Sa`lih Ayyūb is a special case. See Cahen, “Atabak,” *EI* 2:731.


35 Amalia Levanoni (“The Mamluks’ Ascent to Power in Egypt,” *Studia Islamica* 72 (1990): 143–44) writes: “Being the accepted candidate of the Bahriyya-Jamdariyya Emirs, Aqtay began behaving like a pretender to the throne. Riding through Cairo, he acted like a sovereign. His Mamluk comrades already called him al-Malik al-Jawād among themselves and addressed their requests of Iqta’ to him. The climax of this process came when Aqtay asked Aybak al-Turkmānī, Atābak al-‘Asākir, and his wife Shajar al-Durr to leave the palace of Qal’at al-Jabal in order to house his bride, daughter of the ruler of Hamah, in a residence befitting a princess.”

36 See Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt,* 47.

37 See, for instance, Staatsbibliothek Berlin MS We 561, fol. 39b (catalogue listing: Ahlwardt, *Handskripten-Verzeichnisse,* no. 9155 [We 561–586]).

38 “Baṭnatuhu māshiyyah,” ibid.

39 See also Vatican Library MS Barberiniani Orientali 15, fol. 4a (catalogue listing: Giorgio Levi Della Vida, *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della biblioteca vaticana: Vaticani, Barberiniani, Borgiani, Rossiani* [Vatican City, 1935]); Gotha MS 2628, fol. 5b; and Bohas/Guillaume, *Roman,* 1:80–81.
permanent opponents. He tries to seize power by any means, even murder. So he poisons Baybars\textsuperscript{40} and then his two sons al-Saʿīd\textsuperscript{41} and Ahmad Salāmish.\textsuperscript{42} When, after the murder of al-Salāmish, the people of Cairo hear that Qalāwūn has become the new sultan, they decide to kill him on his triumphant entry into the city.\textsuperscript{43} They throw stones at Qalāwūn even before he enters Cairo, so the vizier Shāhīn advises him to enter the city by night from behind the citadel. After having entered the city secretly, Qalāwūn sends the army, which slaughters one third of Cairo’s population. The vizier advises Qalāwūn to declare peace, but the latter does not listen to him. The vizier responds: “This man is a traitor. He cannot hope for anything else than the sword from us. [Indeed] he must be put to death!”\textsuperscript{44} Following the printed version of the sīrah, the people of Cairo make fun of Qalāwūn at his entry into the city: “Who for heaven’s sake has put this one on the throne?” Furious, Qalāwūn orders the ulama to draw up a fațwā declaring that such behavior is to be punished by the sword, and he lets his soldiers loose on the people of Cairo for three days. Qalāwūn himself tries to rape Tāj Bakht, Baybars’ spouse, but she flees to a poor woman who gives shelter to her and her children.\textsuperscript{45} The famous hospital Qalāwūn constructed in Cairo is also shown as a diabolic invention: having realized his sinful way of living,\textsuperscript{46} Qalāwūn builds a hospital. In spite of healing sick people, Qalāwūn forces the doctors to concoct a poison, which he gives to a man who tries to approach one of his concubines. The man dies in a spectacular way and the sultan’s concubine is driven crazy. There is little doubt that this story excited the erotic imagination of the storytellers’ audiences. Qalāwūn then builds a hospital for lunatics where the patients are healed by music.\textsuperscript{47}

According to the sīrah, the son of al-Mansūr Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Khalīl, who reigned after his father’s death from 689/1290 to 693/1293, did not inherit his

\textsuperscript{40}Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir, 3078–80.
\textsuperscript{42}Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir, 3109–10.
\textsuperscript{43}Gotha MS 2609, fol. 70a–b: “We’ll kill him, if he enters [the city].”
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., fol. 70b: “This man is a traitor. The only thing he can await from us is the sword. He must be killed.”
\textsuperscript{45}Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir, 3111–14.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 3112: One of the ulama who interpreted his dream for him said: “You did wrong and you used unlawful violence against your Muslim subjects.”
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid.
father’s wickedness, but was inclined to the *dawlat al-Zahir* and is therefore placed by his father in the relatively remote post of governor of Damascus.

In searching for the reasons for this extremely negative representation of Qalāwūn in the *sirah*, we can first ascertain that it neither corresponds to the historical record nor does it go back to an actual enmity between Baybars and Qalāwūn. On the contrary, Qalāwūn enjoyed Baybars’ full confidence. According to Shāfi’ ibn ‘Alī, Baybars made a great effort to consolidate Qalāwūn’s position. Therefore, he had raised the number of soldiers under his command, given a better *iqtā* to him, and increased his salary. Baybars had made Qalāwūn his chief counsellor (*ra’s al-mashūrah*) and had “depended on him as no king had ever depended on an amir and as no sultan had ever depended on a counselor.”

Matters become clearer only if one establishes a link between Qalāwūn’s relations to al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars’ Mamluks. Qalāwūn had indeed deposed the young sultan al-Sa‘īd with the backing of the Šāliḥydh Mamluks and had therefore kept the younger Žāhīryah Mamluks away from state power. During the next sultanate of Baybars’ underaged son al-Salāmish, Qalāwūn *de facto* already ruled the empire and made use of the time to place his men from among the Šāliḥydh Mamluks—his comrades in having served al-Malik al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb—in a series of key positions. Having thus consolidated his power, Qalāwūn finally put himself on the throne through the Šāliḥydh amirs, who definitely invited the enmity of the Žāhīryah Mamluks. Indeed, he suffered during most of

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48Ibid., 3115: Khalīl asks the Ismailian Ibrāhīm al-Ḥawrānī what he should do against his father’s behavior: ‘O my commander, my father used violence and did wrong against the dynasty of al-Zahir; he is anxious to turn me away from the dynasty of al-Zahir. [So] he banished me to Damascus and made me [his] governor there. Indeed I hate injustice and immoderateness! Al-Malik al-Zahir did not harm us in any way; he even let my father kill his sons.’ See also *Sirat al-Malik al-Zahir*, 3118: “The deeds of King Khalīl after his father [s death] and how he was inclined to the dynasty of al-Malik al-Zahir.”


52Ibid, 78–83.

his regency from their opposition.\textsuperscript{54} It is for this reason that Ibn Taghrī Birdī reports that the Mamluks despised Qalāwūn, for they believed that Qalāwūn had poisoned al-Saʿīd.\textsuperscript{55} In fact, Qalāwūn did not assassinate al-Saʿīd after his deposition, but banished him to al-Karak, where the latter died in March of the following year (1280) under unclear circumstances. The following year Qalāwūn authorized al-Saʿīd’s mother to bury her son in Baybars’ mausoleum in Damascus, a ceremony that took place during Qalāwūn’s stay in the city. It is highly probable that this public \textit{mise en scène} of his attachment to the deceased and his family was supposed to stop rumors of Qalāwūn’s responsibility for al-Saʿīd’s death.\textsuperscript{56}

Not only the Žāhirīyah Mamluks, but also a certain number of elderly Šāliḥīyah amirs had reason to feel themselves ignored. It is true that they had been rewarded by Qalāwūn for their backing, but in principal they had the same rights to the throne as he had. It is not astonishing then that al-Maqrīzī reports that Qalāwūn, having become sultan, did not dare to ride out in public because of his fear of the Šāliḥīyah and the Žāhirīyah Mamluks’ jealousy. According to al-Maqrīzī, the people heard about it and began insulting him at night, shouting in the dark under the citadel. They defiled his coat-of-arms and insulted his amirs, so that he finally avoided contact with the people.\textsuperscript{57}

As we can see, the authors of the episodes focussing on al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn have adopted quite faithfully the critique of the Žāhirīyah Mamluks, who felt betrayed by Baybars’ successors. It seems as if these authors belonged to the milieu of the Žāhirīyah or the Šāliḥīyah Mamluks who were mourning their old sultan.

It is of course possible that the negative image of Qalāwūn did not focus on Qalāwūn as the rival of the Žāhirīyah Mamluks but was rather created only at the end of the thirteenth century and aimed at Qalāwūn as the ancestor of the Qalawunid “dynasty.” This view is expressed by Ibn Iyās at the beginning of the sixteenth century in his commentary on the seizure of power by the first Circassian sultan, al-Žāhir Barqūq, in 1382. He notes that the last sultan of the Qalawunids, al-Malik al-Šāliḥ al-Ḥajjī, took the regnal name of al-Manṣūr as did his ancestor Qalāwūn and that Barqūq had snatched power from the descendents of Qalāwūn just as Qalāwūn had snatched it from Baybars’ sons with the words: “Just as one takes, it is taken from him.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54}Northrup, \textit{From Slave}, 87.
\textsuperscript{56}Northrup, \textit{From Slave}, 89.
\textsuperscript{58}See Ibn Iyās, \textit{Kitāb Tārikh Miṣr al-Mashhūr bi-Badā’i’ al-Zahhūr fī Waqa’ī’ al-Duhūr} (Būlāq,
The thesis that parts of the *Sīrat Baybars* initially go back to a propaganda text of early Mamluk times, and the view that they aimed at legitimizing Barquq’s seizure of power by shedding a negative light on Qalāwūn, are not mutually exclusive. Texts like the *Sīrat Baybars* are complex structures in constant development. They integrate new elements, conserve or eliminate old evidence, and interpret such elements in new contexts and in a new manner.

In my view, the evidence indicates that the first layer of the *Sīrat Baybars* was created in the last decades of the thirteenth century by persons or their descendants whose accounts obviously still testify to the conflicts of the time of Baybars and his immediate successors, and who therefore clearly take a political stand in them.

1311/1893/94), 1:290, lines 5–8. I thank Jean-Claude Garcin for identifying this passage.