Conclusions

In this work we have attempted to examine the *ʿayyār* phenomenon afresh, by adopting the following methodological innovations: a) limiting ourselves only to those people specifically and explicitly designated as *ʿayyārs* in the sources; b) broadening our source base to include not only the Arabic chronicles almost exclusively relied upon by many previous scholars, but many other genres of Arabic literature, and Persian writings as well; c) arraying our evidence in chronological order in order to discover whether any change or development in the use of the term could be detected; d) taking into account the social provenance and outlook of our sources in order to understand differences in their portrayal of the *ʿayyārs*; and e) contextualising the disputed actions of the *ʿayyārs*, both in their own specific milieu (i. e. with whom did the *ʿayyārs* associate, particularly when they were committing their more unappealing actions; and who else habitually did the kinds of things they did) and in the larger context of comparative medieval history.

We began this work by reviewing the treatment which the term has received at the hands of modern scholars, comparing and contrasting this treatment with the origins and meaning assigned to the word in the medieval lexicons, which scholars had not previously utilized in elucidating the signification of the term. This lexical examination revealed that there was no negative denotation at all to the word until the late Buyid period, and that the dominant dictionary definition of *ʿayyār* in our period was "errant."

Next, in Chapter Two, we examined the ideological and religious milieu in which the *ʿayyārs* developed and first appeared. In that chapter we saw that not only is the word *ʿayyār* employed interchangeably with *mutaṭawwiʿ*, but the earliest appearances of *ʿayyārs* occur in unmistakably Sunni holy warrior contexts: fighting infidels on the border and heretics (*videlicet*, non-Sunnis) at home.

Afterwards we analyzed at length the careers of Yaʿqūb and ʿAmr b. al-Layth, history's best-known and -documented *ʿayyārs*, demonstrating that there are two alternative and mutually exclusive understandings of their lives and actions: the first (which Nöldeke promulgated on the basis of a very limited source base, and which has been the standard interpretation ever since), which holds a negative view of the Ṣaffārids as grasping adventurers, devoid of principle; and a contrasting, positive view, one that is clearly present in the sources, which reveals the Ṣaffārids – and particularly Yaʿqūb – as devoted warriors for the faith, allied with leading proto-Sunni and proto-Sufi religious figures.

We determined that the latter, holy warrior interpretation is more persuasive, for several reasons. First, the holy warrior interpretation is earlier; it chronologically precedes the negative portrayal in the sources. Second, while we can discern the motives for bias in the negative portrayal, we can unearth no such motive for

the positive one – on the contrary, we often find later, consciously anti-Ṣaffārid authors quoting earlier, positive material, thereby undermining their own claims and lending credence to the positive material they are citing. Third, the positive portrayal is far more coherent, and is also the only explanation which can possibly account for the Ṣaffārids' many religious associates and supporters, and also for their consistent nature: respectable members of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* who had deep and intimate connections to the scholarly side of the *mutaṭawwiʿī* tradition. The holy warrior explanation is also the only explanation that logically accounts for the two first Ṣaffārid rulers' career trajectories, especially the numerous Eastern campaigns and, in particular, Yaʿqūb's otherwise puzzling lack of interest in taking over areas such as Fārs the first two times he campaigned there.

Finally, there is the cumulative and combined effect of the explicit statements equating the Ṣaffārid *ʿayyārān* with volunteer warriors for the faith, together with the demonstrably militant Sunni Traditionist nature of their affiliates and supporters: when taken together, there is a preponderance of evidence in favour of the holy warrior version found in the sources. The reason why and how previous scholars overlooked these strong proto-Sunni connections of the Ṣaffārids is clear: although they were careful and painstaking scholars, they never utilized the prosopographical material. In particular, they failed to consult the biographical literature to ascertain just who were the Ṣaffārid supporters named in the chronicles, and whether or not these men shared a common ideological or religious denominator.

We also began to see, commencing in ʿAmr's reign, the emerging *ʿayyār*-Sufi connection (Chapters Six and Seven). As a result of our having examined and elucidated the religious meaning and origins of the *ʿayyārs*, and in particular the connection of the *muṭṭawwiʿī* movement to both the Sufis and the *ʿayyār*s, this connection is far more logical and comprehensible than earlier scholars found it to be. Also, once we have understood the *muṭṭawwiʿī* origin of the *ʿayyārs*, the *ʿayyār* connection with *futuwwa*, what Taeschner called the Islamic *Edelmannsideal*,[1] becomes more comprehensible as well. For Taeschner himself long ago pointed out that the development of the concept of the *fatā* in Islamic times strikingly parallels that which we have shown the concept of *ʿayyār* to have undergone:

> Erstens erhielt der Begriff der *futuwwa* eine teilweise religiöse Färbung als Tugendkomplex der Kämpfer "auf dem Wege Gottes", das hei t im Heiligen Kriege (*ǧihād*) zur Ausbreitung der Herrschaft des Islams, und zweitens nahm er bisweilen bündische Formen an, indem sich Kreise bildeten, die sich das mit dem Worte *fatā* ausgedrückte Edelmannsideal und den im inzwischen aufgekommenen Worte *futuwwa* ausgedrückten Tugendkomplex zur Richtschnur für ihr leben nahmen.[2]

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1 Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften*, p. 14.

2 *Ibid*. Note that Hammer-Purgstall already suggested a connection between Islamic chivalry (*futuwwa*) and Jihad in 1849 (J. von Hammer-Purgstall, "Sur la chevalerie des arabes anté-

We then examined the question of chivalry (*futuwwa/javānmardī*), in both the Sufi and the *ʿayyār* contexts, and asked why there are such radically different depictions of a chivalric group such as the *ʿayyārān* in works of secular culture on the one hand, and the clerically-authored chronicles on the other. We have suggested that there are two related factors contributing to clerical hostility: First, the fact that the *ʿayyārs* were one of what Jürgen Paul has termed the "non-statal" military groups, whose "cooperation [with the central authorities] is limited by the purposes given for military action."[3] As we have seen in the case of *ʿayyār* behaviour throughout the Buyid period, that cooperation did indeed have limits. The *ʿayyārs*, as militant Sunnis, had a definite interest in combating Shiʿites – particularly the presumptuous ones of the Buyid era, who actually had the temerity to publicly express their religion in the streets of Baghdad – while the Buyids had a definite opposing interest, both in allowing at least minimal Shiʿite public religious expression, but also (and more importantly) in maintaining public order.[4]

The *ʿayyārs* of the Buyid period were a classic illustration of what happened when the loyalties of men to the multiple social categories to which they belonged conflicted with one another: "If ... loyalty to one category overwhelmed their other feelings of obligation, then the interest which created that loyalty would feed itself at the expense of the rest of society, which would be oppressed." The corresponding need for a ruler who was not part of that society and had no loyalties within it (and was therefore at least theoretically free from the intense partisanship by which the medieval eastern Islamic world was riven) "explains why, in many situations in which modern historians might expect Near Eastern Communities of this period to yearn to be free, they instead yearned to be ruled."[5] Bids for lordship or independence by autochthonous groups such as the *ʿayyārs*, as Mottahedeh shows, never met with widespread support from their compatriots. Such bids were seen as bringing disorder, despite the sympathy that a large segment of the populace must have had with the goals of certain groups – particularly militant Sunni ones – attempting to arrogate power unto themselves.

The *ʿulamā'*, ideologically, were always on the side of the government. Although this might at first glance appear paradoxical (why would a fanatical

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rieure à celle de l'Europe et sur l'influence de la premiére sur la seconde," *Journal Asiatique*, 4th series, 13 (1849), p. 12.

3 Paul, *The State and the Military*, p. 7.

4 As Mottahedeh notes, "The Buyids were Shiʿis, but kept their Shiʿism undefined and adaptable to the expediencies of their political lives." (Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 187) The present author reached much the same conclusion in earlier research, noting that the Buyids' political expression of their religious affiliation found its utmost manifestation in their permitting public Shiʿite religious practices – although they never provided that public expression with the necessary protection from Sunni partisans – and entrusting important missions to Shiʿite religious leaders. (D. Tor, *The Status of the Shiʿa in ʿIraq During the Late Buwayhid Period*. Unpublished M. A. Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996)

5 Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, pp. 175-176.

Ḥanbalite such as Ibn al-Jawzī not favor Sunni brotherhoods over the Shiʿite Buyids?), it is actually in keeping with the political philosophy of the times in which the chroniclers lived; even Miskawayh was already living in the age of al-Māwardī, and by the time of the later chroniclers, disorder was feared above all else.[6]

Second, while the clerics may have liked in theory the idea of Sunni paramilitary bands, especially when those bands were far away at the frontiers fighting infidels, their actual presence in the midst of the city, stirring up dissension and disorder which inconvenienced Sunnis as well, was quite another matter. Even when the merchants and townsmen (among whom, after all, the *ʿulamā'* are numbered) agreed with the aims and purposes of such groups, the way in which the power of such groups was wielded was not always to their liking. In practice, the *ʿulamā'* expressed the same distaste for the *ʿayyārs* as for the Turkish soldiery.

This dislike of the clerics toward those who wielded military power, and of the settled, commerce-oriented populace generally toward the military elite that exacted taxes and tolls from them, whether by governmental appointment or not, is a common feature of medieval Christian as well as medieval Islamic society. Thus, a letter from the famous cleric Peter of Blois

> ... develops a general criticism of knighthood. [Peter] makes the following accusations: Knights slander and malign clerics; their speech is scurrilous; their behavior is inordinate; they esteem most him whose speech is filthiest and whose curses are foulest, who fears God and the Church the least; they claim the license to rob and slander; hardly girded with the sword, they turn to plundering the church, persecuting the poor and suffering mercilessly; they let their exorbitant lusts and desires run wild; they are slothful and drunken; corrupted by otium, they neglect the practice of arms; they go to battle as if to a banquet, their pack animals laden with wine, cheese, sausage and roasting forks instead of weapons ...[7]

But, whereas scholars of Islamic history have tended to uncritically accept this sort of clerical valuation, scholars of the medieval West have understood that such scathing commentary is a product of "the tensions between knights and clerics [which] are a reality of social life in the period ... Peter of Blois is speaking in the interests of his own social group. He has not fabricated the social tensions in which the letter originates, [but neither] is he standing back from a disengaged distance."[8]

Mīrkhwānd's or Ibn al-Athīr's texts, in the same fashion as Peter of Blois's, engage in caricature because they exhibit an unbalanced focus on some aspects of the behaviour of the armed part of Islamic society, to the exclusion of other,

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6 See A. K. S. Lambton, "Islamic Political Thought," *The Legacy of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Schacht and Bosworth, pp. 410-415 (reprinted in *Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government*); also C. Hillenbrand, "Islamic Orthodoxy or Realpolitik? Al-Ghazali's Views on Government," *Journal of Persian Studies* 26 (1988), pp. 81-94.

7 C. Stephen Jaeger, "Courtliness and Social Change," *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. T. N. Bisson, Philadelphia, 1995, p. 291.

8 Jaeger, "Courtliness and Social Change," pp. 291-292.

at least equally essential aspects of the armed elite's conduct and goals. The failure of scholars to understand the partisan, biased nature of the text they are reading results in what one medieval Europeanist has called "the mimetic fallacy":

> This is the assumption that a text like Peter of Blois's letter … operates in the mode of empirical, mimetic observations, that it wants to reproduce reality ... [Yet much] medieval writing that brings disapproval to bear on a social group or practice is speaking a polemical language ... The statement, "knights are slothful brutes" has the historical value of the statement, "police are violent racists." Both comments conceal an agenda of social change beneath an appearance of an objective observation ... They mask the imperative or optative mode in the indicative."[9]

To be perfectly fair, the Islamic scholars faced a more difficult task than did the Europeanists when confronting the problem of chivalric groups that engaged in violence. Firstly, because many of the analytical tools the Islamicists employed were invented for a very different age and civilization – the modern Western one – and were therefore unsuited to the use being made of them; in the words of Bernard Lewis:

> It is difficult enough to relate religious movements to social conditions when both are well documented and thoroughly explored; very much more so when one is trying to relate the little-known to the unknown – and with intellectual tools forged for another purpose.[10]

Secondly, while every Western scholar who ever approached the problem of medieval European chivalric groups was familiar with popular romances such as the works of Chretien de Troyes, and therefore had a fairly good idea of what chivalry meant to those who practiced it, regardless of what the clerics and other outsiders thought of it, most medieval Islamicists were not equally familiar with Islamic courtly and popular productions, such as *Samak-i ʿayyār* and the *Qābūs nāma*, which were invariably written in Persian.

That is, the vast majority of surviving medieval Islamic works are clerically authored, and share the social outlook and values of that class. There is not only far less courtly material preserved in the medieval Islamic corpus; virtually all of it that is preserved is written in Persian rather than Arabic – and very few of the scholars working on defining the *ʿayyārs*, from Nöldeke to Cahen, read these Persian works. This has resulted in a seriously skewed definition of who and what the *ʿayyārs* were, one based entirely upon the views of those who disliked certain aspects of their behaviour. The Europeanists, in contrast, found both kinds of sources, the clerical and the courtly, in one language and literature, Latin, and in fair abundance.

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9 Jaeger, "Courtliness and Social Change," p. 295. Jaeger demonstrates that in other contexts Peter himself paints a very different portrait of knights, and acknowledges that he had been exaggerating in what he wrote previously.

10 Bernard Lewis, "On the Revolutions in Early Islam," *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970), p. 219.

The importance of understanding, and taking into account, the social context and provenance of sources when conducting historical analysis cannot be overemphasized; just as no one would dream of defining kingship or knighthood in the medieval West solely from the writings of popes, bishops and monks, so scholars of Islamic society should be equally chary of defining chivalric military organizations solely from clerical fulminations against them – particularly when those very same sources show us other, unquestionably elite and respectable elements of society both fraternizing with the *ʿayyārs* and engaging in exactly the same kinds of unsavoury activities in which the *ʿayyārs* engaged.

Georges Duby captures the essence of the courtly sources' importance to the historian when writing of the *chanson* that was commissioned by the heirs of William Marshal, the foremost exponent of Western chivalric ideals in early-thirteenth century England:

> He [the author of the *chanson*] drew upon other sources that, without him, would have remained inaccessible to us, for they are located on the secular side of [medieval] culture. Of this aspect of cultural creation, almost everything has evaporated … The work of a man who did not belong to the clerical intelligentsia, or who at least turned away from it during the course of his work, it bears exceptional witness to what was, among the knights of the period, the meaning and knowledge of history. It is the determination of a memory that I shall not even call courtly, for in the great princely courts the weight of ecclesiastical influences on secular ways of thinking was notably greater than in William's household. What is given us is infinitely precious: the memory of chivalry in an almost pure state, about which, without this evidence, we should know virtually nothing.[11]

In short, in order to analyze any historical phenomenon, it helps greatly to weigh and consider the full range of evidence; hitherto this has not been done with the *ʿayyārs*, and the aim of this work has been to take a first step toward rectifying this partial, and therefore skewed, analysis.

There was yet another pitfall that awaited scholars of medieval Islamic society: the fact that, subsequent to the Mongol invasion, *ʿayyārī*, like many other institutions of Islamic society, fell into decay; and, undoubtedly, from some undetermined point between the Mongol cataclysm and the nineteenth century, the meaning of "*ʿayyār*" really did, at least in popular parlance, become something quite disreputable and *déclassé*; this does not, however, mean that such was the word's connotation or denotation half a millenium earlier.[12]

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11 Duby, *William Marshal*, p. 33.

12 Although note that modern day Sunni *mutaṭawwiʿa* still use the word in precisely this sense, and even still equate *ʿayyārūn* and *futuwwa*; see ʿAbdallāh ʿAzzām, *Fī'l-taʿmmur al-ʿalamī*, Peshawar, 1990, pp. 94-5, where in 1929 an *ʿayyār* in the time-honoured *mutaṭawwiʿa* tradition, castigates the reformist Afghan king and summons him back to the Sunna from his heretical ways in much the same terms as Ibn al-Mubārak or Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth might have used. Even more telling is an article in al-Qāʿida's journal *al-Jihād* (October 1993, pp. 34-36), on an Afghani jihadist of the 1920s, possibly the same one as

Then again, Western scholars researching the phenomenon have been so influenced by their own contemporary outlook (e. g. the late nineteenth – and early twentieth-century German scholars seeing "Aryan male brotherhoods" in the *futuwwa*; Sabari the fervid Marxist seeing proletarian "liberation movements" in the *ʿayyārs*, and so forth) that it has predisposed them to a particular, preconceived understanding of the *ʿayyārs*.

This anachronistic projection of modern political and social sensibilities has, in a different fashion, continued, despite the more cautious approach of contemporary researchers; for the activities in which all wielders of military power in medieval societies, both Islamic and Christian, habitually engaged are so alien and so reprehensible to modern Western sensibilities, that there is a scholarly tendency to attribute such behaviour to lawless aggression and outlaw elements, rather than to what were considered in their own time to have been eminently respectable and even elite members of society. Referring to the pillage and rapine wreaked by European lords and knights, one Europeanist has cautioned against this tendency to judge a very different era by our own values and standards: "The temptation to seize or encroach on lordship seems to have been a constant factor in these local situations ... we might be pardoned for supposing from our outlook in a vastly different world that such ambitions and temptations molded a type of manipulative power … but that would be to lose sight of the deeper lesson …"[13]

In order to understand what the *ʿayyārs'* activities meant in their own times and places, we need to historically recontextualize the *ʿayyārs*. All the evidence we have seen, when arranged in its proper chronological order, shows that the original meaning of the term *ʿayyār* when it first appears in the Islamic sources was "member of an errant band of Sunni holy warriors for the faith," and, while never during the period under our examination entirely losing this aspect, the word gradually acquired new shades of meaning, first a Sufi one but then, overwhelmingly, a chivalric one. Next, our recontextualization has shown both with whom the *ʿayyārs* associated (always a good indication of someone's social standing; the social equivalent of janitors and investment bankers, for instance, are rarely friends, not only in today's world, but in any age; and never systematically so in the way that people of the same social milieu, such as bankers and lawyers, are); and, secondly, who else was engaging in the sort of activities in which the *ʿayyārs* were occupied (namely, the Turkish military elite and, as the sources tell us over and over again, the officials of the government).

This evidence is gleaned not only from the pro-*ʿayyār* courtly sources, but from the very same clerical sources that so vehemently deplore this same *ʿayyār* activity. Obviously, if the sources are telling us that most other armed elites in

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ʿAzzām mentioned, who is referred to as "*ʿayyār min Khurāsān*." The present author is indebted to David Cook for both these references.

13 Bisson, *Tormented Voices*, p. 95.

society (including undeniably legitimate ones such as the government's own Turkish troops and the Banū ʿAbbās) not only often aided, abetted, and befriended the *ʿayyārs*, but also frequently engaged in precisely the kinds of activities in which the *ʿayyārs* also engaged, oftentimes together with them, then there is no reason for assuming that *ʿayyār* violence per se indicates either outlaw practices and status, or proletarian rage or maladjustment.

While no one can state for certain who constituted the membership of the *ʿayyār* bands, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that various scholars' (most notably Sabari's) assumption of proletarian – let alone criminal – origins or affiliation are unsupported. No king would exhort his son to be a "perfect *ʿayyār*" if this were the case, as did the kingly author of the *Qābūs nāmah*; nor would important Baghdadi officials and religious notables be consorting with *ʿayyārs*, as we find repeatedly occurring in the sources. In short, the *ʿayyārs* were a far more integral and respectable part of the social fabric of the pre-Saljuq Eastern Caliphate than has hitherto been acknowledged.[14]

There remains, of course, much research to be done on the various aspects of the *ʿayyārs* raised in this work. The geographical and chronological scope of inquiry could very well be extended to other times and places; this work has focused entirely on the Eastern Caliphate, the culturally Iranian lands, yet we know that *ʿayyārs* existed in at least some of the more westerly realms of the Caliphate as well – and their social importance did not cease with the coming of the Saljuqs. Another fruitful area of further inquiry would be to document the relations between the *ʿayyārs* and the official military forces in different periods and areas: in this work we saw them both integrated in the military ranks of certain states, such as the Sāmānid one, and alternatively allies and rivals of the official military forces, such as the Turkish armies stationed in Baghdad during the Buyid period.

Limited as this work has necessarily been, however, its findings possess a significance beyond simply an understanding of the meaning of the term *ʿayyār*. First, they uncover the integral and deep-rooted – yet hitherto overlooked – role that ideological religious warfare continued to play in medieval Islamic civilization during the ninth and tenth centuries. This continuing border warrior tradition, moreover, had deep connections with the nascent, fervently orthodox Ḥanbalite movement and the rise of proto-Sunnism generally.

Second, the findings prove that Islamic chivalry arose earlier than has previously been traced, and had its origins as a religious movement – at least in part, in these militant Sunni circles. This fact also explains why Islamic chivalry, *futuwwa*, was and remained a Sunni phenomenon, at least until the Mongol inva-

[14] Most probably, in this aspect as well the *ʿayyārs* resembled the European knights of the High Middle Ages, who were recruited from diverse social backgrounds ranging from well-to-do peasants to the upper echelons of society; *vide* e. g. Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble*, pp. 5-6.

sions – a fact which has also been little remarked until now. Moreover, the discovery that the *ʿayyār* phenomenon developed into a chivalric order may call for a total reassessment of not only the *ʿayyārān*, but also of the entire history of chivalry, which would now have to be dated several hundred years earlier – and more eastward – than heretofore. Most curiously, it would highlight the fact that, albeit in very different ways, in both East and West deep religious conviction gave rise to organized brotherhoods espousing a very similar standard of noble conduct. Perhaps it will then be possible to convincingly show that when the European crusaders arrived in the Islamic world in the eleventh century, their encounter with the world's first chivalrous society gave them some sort of model to bring back home with them.[15]

Finally, this work's findings regarding the *ʿayyārs'* social milieu and associates, and the historical context of their activities, demonstrate that the *ʿayyārs* occupied a central and respectable place in the social fabric of the Eastern Caliphate in pre-Saljuq times. The revised understanding of the social role and position of the *ʿayyārs* laid forth in these pages will enable us to better recognize, trace, and contextualize both this and other manifestations of that native Muslim military and political initiative whose seeming absence has so baffled scholars until now. There is a vast treasury of unexploited material in the medieval sources relating to extra-governmental armed groups; and, although there have been a few scattered attempts to examine the role and impact of such groups,[16] no one has yet undertaken a comprehensive, systematic study of the larger place and function of organized paramilitary bands of free Muslims in classical Islamic civilization. The present author hopes that this book has, at the very least, demonstrated that one cannot really understand most aspects of the medieval Islamic world without first comprehending the role and nature of such paramilitary groups. These bands were far more pervasive, and far more integral to Islamic religious, political, and social history, than scholars have hitherto acknowledged.

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15 This is what J. von Hammer-Purgstall attempted to demonstrate in 1849 ("Sur la chevalerie des Arabes," *passim)*.

16 E. g. Richard Bulliet's *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Cambridge, MA, 1972; Jürgen Paul's Sāmānid study, frequently cited by the present author; and, more recently, Paul's "The Seljuq Conquest(s) of Nishapur: A Reappraisal," and David Durand-Guédy's "Iranians at War under Turkish Domination: The Example of Pre-Mongol Isfahan," both of which appeared in *Iranian Studies* 38:4 (2005), pp. 575-585 and 587-606 respectively.