5. The ʿ*Ayyār* and the Caliph

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
> Rides upon sleep …
> O but we dreamed to mend
> Whatever mischief seemed
> To afflict mankind,
> But now
> That winds of winter blow
> Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.
>
> – William Butler Yeats

A few months after the Caliph al-Muʿtamid broke with Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth in the year 262/875, the most controversial deed of history's most famous ʿ*ayyār* – and the one which probably cost him his reputation with posterity – occurred: Yaʿqūb's march on ʿIrāq against the Caliph al-Muʿtamid. This chapter, based on a review of the primary source evidence regarding Yaʿqūb's campaign against al-Muʿtamid, will show that Yaʿqūb intended not to abolish the ʿAbbāsid caliphate, but rather to replace the ineffectual al-Muʿtamid with another ʿAbbāsid contender. In particular, we shall show that there is explicit testimony in several sources that Yaʿqūb entered ʿIrāq with the collusion and encouragement of the power behind the throne, the caliph's brother al-Muwaffaq, who apparently wanted to lure Yaʿqūb into a military trap. Finally, we shall examine Yaʿqūb's reaction to this ʿAbbāsid betrayal; what his further actions reveal about his goals, values, and the nature of his career; and what those in turn reveal about ʿ*ayyārs* and ʿ*ayyārī*.

Traditionally, scholars have viewed the campaign against al-Muʿtamid as Yaʿqūb's personal bid for dominion, in keeping with their opportunist image of him,[1] despite their awareness of the persistent hinting in the sources at collusion between him and the Caliph's brother al-Muwaffaq, who was the real power behind the throne. Nöldeke, in fact, dismissed these reports in the primary sources solely because of his pre-conceived image of Yaʿqūb: if the latter were merely out for self-aggrandizement, why would he ever agree to stage a coup to put a powerful caliph on the throne, one whom he would not have been able to dominate?[2] But if one posits that Yaʿqūb really was serious about the ideals he had, at least according to all his declarations, spent his life fighting for, and that he therefore sought a partnership with a caliph who would restore Islam's glory, then the reports cannot be so lightly dismissed.

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1 Thus, for instance, Bosworth writes that "the dominant motive behind Yaʿqūb's action, in addition to … hatred of the ʿAbbāsids, seems to have been a sheer love of military conquest." (Bosworth, "The Armies of the Saffarids," p. 536)

2 Nöldeke, *op. cit.* , pp. 190-191.

The first issue we must analyze, however, is one briefly touched upon in the last chapter: namely, how someone who was apparently a fanatical Sunni could possibly go about switching caliphs, given that later Sunni dogma, at least, is supposedly quietist.[3] The first point to note is that it has not been established that this later Sunni norm was even extant in the ninth century; nor that, if present, it was universally accepted, particularly among the more radical proto-Sunnis. In other words, although current scholarly consensus maintains that only Khārijites and Khurāsānian Murjiʾites were politically activist at this time, there are many indications that this modern scholarly belief needs to be revised, and there are indeed several scholars who have taken issue with it, particularly insofar as it pertains to proto-Sunnism, let alone later times.

Sourdel goes so far as to assert categorically that in the early ʿAbbāsid period, at least, "Nothing had been resolved … [regarding] to what degree the sovereign must be unconditionally obeyed."[4] Bernard Lewis has noted, first, that

> While the predominant view among jurists in general supported the authoritarian tradition, there was always another strand in Islamic thought and practice, which was radical and activist, at times even revolutionary. This tradition is as old and as deep-rooted as the first, and its working can be seen through the centuries, both in Islamic political thought and in the political actions of Muslims.[5]

Lewis goes on to observe, moreover, that it was only as the political situation deteriorated, and the limitations imposed upon the ruler were trampled, that "the subject's duty of obedience was correspondingly strengthened" by jurists; indeed, our first clear formulation of this quietist principle among hard-line Sunnis dates only from the tenth century, well after the Ṣaffārid *ʿayyār* period.[6]

It is far from clear, moreover, not only whether or not there were proto-Sunni traditions at this time condemning activism against unjust rulers, but also how widely accepted such traditions were, if they were indeed already extant at this date. On the other hand, one certainly does find the opposite: namely, activist traditions preserved in eminently respectable sources such as al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, which states specifically, for instance, that "If the ruler judges with injustice or contrary to the people of knowledge, then he is rejected."[7] In short, not only are we completely ignorant as to how widespread quietist theories were at this time, but we also do not know how commonly such theories – assuming they were

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3 Although see Ahmed Abdelsalam, "The Practice of Violence in the *ḥisba* Theories" *Iranian Studies* 38:4 (2005), pp. 547-554

4 Dominique Sourdel, *l'État imperial des califes abbassides: VIIIe-Xe siècle,* Paris, 1999, p. 46.

5 Bernard Lewis, "The Limits of Obedience," *The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago, 1988, p. 92.

6 Lewis, "The Limits of Obedience," p. 99.

7 Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. b. Ibrāhīm al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Beirut, 1411/1991, vol. 8, p. 150. Interestingly, this tradition is related by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, who, as we have already seen, had strong connections to the militant *mutatawwiʿī* tradition.

both extant and widely accepted at that time – were translated into practice. As one scholar has noted,

> … Even in the Sunni community there was no one universally accepted doctrine of the caliphate. The assumption that any such general acceptance existed finds little to support it either in the writings of the jurists themselves, or in the psychology of Sunni Islam … But this is not all … As is so often the case in Islam, the inner reality is quite other than would appear from the external formulations of the jurists. Between the real content of Muslim thought and its juristic expression there is a certain dislocation, so it is seldom possible to infer the reality from the outer form …[8]

Gibb's words are especially apposite regarding the Ṣaffārid period; for the quietist dogma, if it indeed existed before the tenth century, was invariably honoured in the breach during this earlier time. In the case of caliphal appointments this seems to have been a non-issue: no political figure of this time seems to have felt the slightest compunction about setting aside by force of arms anyone short of the caliph. We can see this in the unusual proliferation of revolts in the early ninth-century – including anti-caliphal revolts – many of which were emphatically Sunni.[9]

Deposing the Caliph, while a bit more complex than deposing other political figures, was of course frequently done in the third/ninth century, and proto-Sunni religious scholars could always be found to justify the deed. The ʿAbbāsids themselves began the trend in the eighth century with their violent overthrow of the entire Umayyad dynasty, but they found numerous emulators in the generals and courtiers who spent much of the ninth and tenth centuries elevating, deposing, and executing various ʿAbbāsids (with the blessings of various cooperative ʿ*ulamāʾ*); indeed, it was no doubt partly in response to the ensuing political chaos that this doctrine was even formulated. The decade preceding Yaʿqūb's rise to power had witnessed the murder of no fewer than four caliphs, and nobody accused the various actors concerned – including the Sunni ʿ*ulamāʾ* who gave their stamp of approval – of being anything but religiously orthodox. Clearly, if any such Sunni ideal existed at this point, it was rather theoretical. In fact, what is perhaps most striking about the proto-Sunni reaction to the deposition of caliphs in this period is that the various *coups d'état* met with virtually no legitimist reaction on the part of the ʿ*ulamāʾ*, many of whom, as we saw in Chapter Two, were quite outspoken when it came to the duty of reproving those in power for religious misconduct.

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8 H. A. R. Gibb, "The Sunni Theory of the Caliphate," reprinted in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, Princeton, 1982, pp. 148-149.

9 For several Sunnī revolts in this period, including the ʿAbbāsid one against al-Ma'mūn and his religious policies, see D. G. Tor, "An Historiographical Re-examination of the Appointment and Death of ʿAlī al-Riḍā," *passim*. No one at that time accused the ʿAbbāsid family of having been bad Muslims for rising against their caliph.

The research of one modern scholar, Khaled Abou El Fadl, seems to suggest, moreover, that the commonly-held assumption that the prohibitions against *fitna* apply to religiously-motivated rebellion is mistaken. Abou El Fadl, a legal scholar, examined this issue at some length from a juristic standpoint. He noted that there is an inherent ambivalence, even in later Islamic law as it was finally codified, around the whole question of the legitimacy of rebellion or political activism:

> … There is a tension in the fitna discourse between the fear of civil strife and the historical precedent of political activism. Precedents for both political passivity and activism existed in Islamic history. The tension, however, was created because of the theological need to uphold the credibility of the Companions who adopted diametrically opposed positions on the use of force against fellow Muslims.[10]

Abou El Fadl notes further that

> The Qurʾān does command Muslims to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, which could imply a duty to resist injustice. Furthermore, some of the most notable figures in Islamic history rebelled against those in power. The Umayyads and ʿAbbāsids came to power through rebellions as well.[11]

Finally, he points out that the ultimate position of the jurists, in light of the contradictory Prophetic traditions on this subject, was that "the traditions condemning rebellion apply only to those who rebel without a plausible cause or interpretation."[12] Under the laws dealing with rebellion, *aḥkām al-bughā*, a Muslim who honestly believed that his duty of enjoining the good required him to rebel, would be religiously obligated to do so. Furthermore, "Muslim jurists insisted that the articulated rules of *aḥkām al-bughā* are binding **whether a ruler is [actually] just or unjust.**"[13] A rebel need only be convinced – correctly or erroneously – that his cause is just in order for him to be considered **religiously obligated to rebel**.[14]

Abou El Fadl, of course, as a believer in the authenticity of the Prophetic corpus, was assuming that all the traditions he examined were equally early, and that both of these positions – the activist and the quietist – must therefore have been coeval, existing in creative tension together since the founding days of Islam. Although the present author finds Gibb's position (i. e. , that the quietist position was a later historical development) more convincing, this point is not germane to our discussion: what is essential is that Abou El Fadl proves that the activist position was not only religiously approved in the earlier centuries, but that it has even survived in Sunni Islam down to the present day.

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10 Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 45.
11 Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence*, p. 61.
12 Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence*, p. 326.
13 *Ibid.* , emphasis added.
14 Noted by Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence*, pp. 44-47.

Finally, Lambton is another scholar who has both noted the religious imperative to rebel, and warned against the anachronistic projection of later concepts and norms into early Islamic times in this specific context:

> We must be careful not to underrate the reality of religious convictions, whatever their political, social, or economic dimensions; and we must also beware of anachronistic attempts to force mediaeval thought into the mould of modern concepts of authority. Piety was often linked with armed opposition to authority and was sometimes an expression of alienation, but it was none the less real for all that.[15]

The actual *mutaṭawwiʿī* attitudes we have seen and examined in Chapter Two seem to suggest that, while recognizing the essential function and role of the caliph's political authority, the *mutaṭawwiʿa* attached no particular reverence or religious weight to either the office or the person of the actual office-holder. There is a statement ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak is said to have made regarding Mālik b. Anas that encapsulates this utilitarian and prosaic view of the political authorities, while emphasizing the sacred character of the pious *muḥaddith*. Ibn al-Mubārak notes that, paradoxically, while Mālik did not seek power and prestige, that is precisely what his piety ended up winning for him: "… The way of dignity and the glory [*ʿizz*] of the authority [*sulṭān*] of the pious one/ – he [the pious one] is the venerable one and not the wielder of power [*dhī'l-sulṭān*]."[16] What this statement is baldly asserting is that real power and glory, in the eyes of the militant proto-Sunnis, belonged to the pious scholars, not to the caliphs or their representatives; those were simply necessary but inglorious functionaries.

The actions of eminent proto-Sunnis show that this attitude was carried through into practice; for instance, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal himself, while not personally joining in the rising against the caliph al-Wāthiq, considered the leader of the abortive uprising against that caliph to be a *shahīd*.[17] Likewise, the strongly Ḥanbalite religious associates of Yaʿqūb appear to have been completely unfazed by Yaʿqūb's militant Islamic activism. We saw in the last chapter the irrefutable fact that both Yaʿqūb and his fraternal successor, ʿAmr, enjoyed the strong and unwavering support in Khurāsān of impeccably Sunni figures (i. e. people associated with and respected by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, listed in Ḥanbalite biographical literature, and generally reported to have been irreproachably orthodox and Traditionist in outlook); this is inexplicable unless certain circles, at least, among the

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15 A. K. S. Lambton, "Concepts of Authority in Persia: Eleventh to Nineteenth Centuries," *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 26 (1988), p. 95.

16 Abū ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Rabbihi al-Andalusī, *Kitāb al-ʿiqd al-farīd*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, no date, vol. 2, p. 194. Note that Ibn al-Mubārak deliberately plays upon the word *sulṭān*, which, as Hugh Kennedy has noted, was used frequently at this time to denote the Caliph.

17 Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, p. 105.

third /ninth century *ahl al-ḥadīth* regarded the government and Caliph as subject to "*al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf*" and, if need be, removal.[18]

In fact, this activist, radical interpretation of the duty of *al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf* is a hallmark of the whole *mutaṭawwiʿa* movement, and in particular of ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak and the militant – and militantly orthodox – school we have traced above; nobody ever appointed Ibn al-Mubārak to go on any raids or to lead the Jihad; yet he did so, because according to his own lights it was right to do so.[19] In the words of one of Ibn al-Mubārak's more famous traditions: "Behold! God sent me with a sword, just before the Hour [of Judgment], and placed my daily sustenance beneath the shadow of my spear, and humiliation and contempt on those who oppose me …"[20] Although later scholars – and later Sunni Muslims – might regard independence and military disobedience to caliphal rule as dangerously akin to Khārijism, the behaviour of the *mutaṭawwiʿa* in the eighth and ninth centuries suggests that in fact their view of the duty of *al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf* was actually very close to the Khārijite position, certainly in practice.

Even assuming that a quietist ideology existed at this time which was somewhat akin to the English Renaissance ideal of the "divine right" of rulers, Yaʿqūb would most certainly have been confronted with the same conundrum faced in so many other times and places by people holding such ideals: what was the proper course of action for a pious person to pursue when one's lawful and legitimate ruler consistently failed to uphold and enforce God's rule and laws? This dilemma would have been all the more profound for a Muslim, of course, than it was for a Christian faced with a similar situation, because the former believed that "religion was actually meant to put things right for people in this world no less than the next."[21] The Sunni law books are full of discussions of the duty of enjoining the good and forbidding evil; the means of doing this was, as we saw in Chapter Two, through the complementary duties of *ḥisba* within the

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18 Note also that, regarding the problem of disobedience toward his lawful commander, Yaʿqūb – apart from the ʿAbbāsid example itself – had very good authority for disobeying a legitimate commander if the exigencies of religion so dictated; see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1950-1956), vol. 2, pp. 47-48, no. 622. In this tradition, the Prophet himself has appointed a particular commander over a group of the Anṣār, and commanded them to obey him. When the commander orders the troop to cast themselves into a fire, however, they balk and inquire of the Prophet, who says to them: "If you had entered it you would never have left it forever, for obedience is only in [what is] good [*al-maʿrūf*]." The question of actively putting aside a legitimately appointed ruler is a different matter, however. Yet the historical record of the ninth century, with its multiple caliphal depositions, would suggest that compunctions about setting aside caliphs by force of arms were rather scarce, too.

19 See *supra*, chapter 2.

20 ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, pp. 89-90, cited and translated in D. Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihad," p. 75. For a slightly different translation, see Kister, "Land, Property and Jihad," p. 281.

21 Crone, *God's Rule*, p. 11.

borders of Islam and *jihād* outside of them. Yet it was precisely these two duties that the caliphs were no longer fulfilling.

To a ninth-century Muslim, the world must have seemed a shambles: the Islamic oecumene, which had started out full of bright promise, carrying God's word and order in strength and conquest, had fallen into disorder and confusion. Evil was rampant, heresy was rife, enemies were gnawing at the borders – and the caliph was doing nothing to rectify the world. The anguish voiced by Europeans at the collapse of their orderly world in the early twentieth century surely addresses equally well the anguish felt by the inhabitants of the ninth-century central and eastern Islamic lands:

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

It is too facile to dismiss the reality of this dilemma for a Sunni of that time by citing later jurisprudential theories. Since the time of Antigone, thoughtful citizens have been vexed by the problem of what a person who wishes to be righteous should do when a moral imperative clashes with a legal or political one. Yaʿqūb seems to have solved this problem much in the fashion prescribed by John Donne: "… States and matter of government … are somtimes surprizd with such *accidents*, as that the *Magistrat* asks not what may be done by *law*, but does that, which must *necessarily* be don in that case."[22] If Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal himself, who was certainly no Khārijite, could declare a rebel against an ʿAbbāsid caliph to have been an Islamic martyr, how much more compelling, for a *mutaṭawwiʿ* of that same time, must the religious imperative have seemed to attempt to exchange a venal, ineffectual, and remiss ʿAbbāsid caliph for one he believed would be, if not able to enjoin the good himself, at least supportive of those Muslims who were anxious and eager to do so, thereby restoring God's rule.

For what has been overlooked or downplayed by prior scholarship is the ample historical evidence that Yaʿqūb invaded ʿIrāq in order to replace one ʿAbbāsid ruler with another, more competent and (hopefully) more godly and cooperative one, not in order to seize the caliphate for himself. Yaʿqūb had actually been sheltering an ʿAbbāsid in his camp – ʿAbdallāh b. al-Wāthiq – who died in 261/875, half a year before the invasion of ʿIrāq.[23] One tenth-century source tells us, in fact, that "ʿAbdullāh b. al-Wāthiq went to Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth to ask him for aid against al-Muʿtamid, and this is what encouraged him to be-

22 John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, IX, "Meditation."
23 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 512.

take himself toward Baghdād."[24] It seems that Yaʿqūb had intended to install this protégé on the throne, was stymied by the latter's death, and had then opened contacts with al-Muwaffaq afterwards as the most fitting surviving candidate.

There are many pieces of evidence which strengthen this supposition. First of all, we know that Yaʿqūb was unhappy with al-Muʿtamid's weak rule on religious grounds; Masʿūdī, a very early source, states that Yaʿqūb composed verses on his journey, "condemning al-Muʿtamid and the *mawālī* who were with him for their neglect of religion and remissness in the matter of the Zanj," and declaiming:

> I now have possession of Khurāsān and the regions of Fārs, and I have high hopes of conquering ʿIrāq.
> For the interests of religion have been damaged and neglected and have become disordered, and they have become like effaced and disappearing traces (sc. Like those of e. g. a desert encampment)
> I have gone forth, with God's aid, with fortune and victorious, whilst the upholder of the banners of right guidance (or: "true religion," sc. The caliph) is not guarding [what he is supposed to].[25]

Given all the wars that Yaʿqūb had had to fight because the Caliph could not do so successfully himself (the Khārijites, the Zaydīs, and so forth), Yaʿqūb's disenchantment is not surprising. Moreover, this evidence corroborates the *mutaṭawwiʿī* motive which we have been positing underlay all of Yaʿqūb's campaigns: the restoration of Islam under a fit ruler. Furthermore, we know that al-Muwaffaq was actually the person who controlled whatever power the caliph was able to wield at this time; in the words of Ibn Khallikān, "Al-Muwaffaq was master over all matters, and al-Muʿtamid possessed nothing apart from the name of caliph."[26]

Evidence of Yaʿqūb's having entered ʿIrāq with al-Muwaffaq's encouragement is, in fact, found in many of the literary sources. The *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* is not only convinced that this was so; it purports to quote the actual letter that al-Muwaffaq sent inviting Yaʿqūb to come:

> Abū Aḥmad al-Muwaffaq heard the news [of Yaʿqūb's successes], that matters stood this way, that the people of the world were attached to him because he was just, and that wherever he turned, no one opposed him. So al-Muwaffaq addressed a letter to Yaʿqūb, [asking] would he please come in order that they could see him, "and we shall entrust the world to you, in order that you may be the world keeper [or protector] – for the whole world has become obedient to you. As for us, that which you command, I shall obey completely. Know that I am satisfied with the *khuṭba* – for we belong to the *Ahl bayt* of Muṣṭafā [=the Prophet Muhammad] and you constantly strengthen his religion. There are to you[r credit] many *ghazāt* in the Abode of the Infidels; you enter India, Ceylon, and the remote region of the ocean;[27] and entered

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24 al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa'l-Ta'rīkh*, vol. 6, p. 125.

25 Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. 5, p. 229; tr. Bosworth, *Saffarids*, p. 157.

26 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 354.

27 This is very possibly a reference to Yaʿqūb's earlier *ghāzī* activities, of which we know virtually nothing. We do know, however, that there was active *ghāzī* activity in the Indian

> China,[28] Turkestān and Byzantium (*Rūm*). Upon the Infidels of the world, in every place, the effect of your sword is clear. Your claim over all of Islam has become compelling. We have commanded that in the Two Holy Places they should continually make the *khuṭba* in your name, for these deeds [i. e. Yaʿqūb's holy wars] are the best in the world. There has not been to [the credit of] anyone in Islam, after Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, such good works and justice as there has been during your period. Now we and all the [true] Muslims are your supporters, so that all the world, in your hands, will return to one religion – and that religion is Islam."[29]

While the letter itself may well be spurious, passages such as this are significant because they reflect, in however apocryphal a fashion, contemporary understanding of the actual course of real events, as well as contemporary perceptions of the Ṣaffārids.[30]

Likewise, Gardīzī, too, whose work is not pro-Ṣaffārid, shows the same insistence that there was collusion between Yaʿqūb and Muwaffaq:

> [Yaʿqūb] wanted to go to Baghdād, to remove al-Muʿtamid from the Caliphate and to instate al-Muwaffaq; and al-Muwaffaq apprised al-Muʿtamid of the situation. Yaʿqūb would write letters addressed secretly to al-Muwaffaq, and al-Muwaffaq would show those letter to al-Muʿtamid, until Yaʿqūb came to Dayr al-ʿAqūl, near Baghdād, upon the Euphrates water course, and [his] army encamped there. Muwaffaq ordered that the waters of the Tigris be opened upon him, Yaʿqūb's army was for the most part destroyed, and he was defeated and retreated. From this disgrace he contracted dysentery and when he arrived in Jundishāpūr … he died; he had never [before] been defeated by any adversary …[31]

Ocean at what would have been the time of Yaʿqūb's early career. We read in Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ's *Ta'rīkh*, for instance, of a *ghāzī* expedition whose ship went down in the Persian Gulf in the year 230/844f. There were also very active trade relations between the Muslim Persian Gulf ports and the far east at this time (Sulaymān al-Tājir and Abū Zayd Ḥasan b. Yazīd al-Ṣirāfī, *Akhbār al-Sīn wa'l-Hind*, Cairo, 1999, p. 63; see also G. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Princeton, 1951, pp. 61-79). "Hind" here may simply refer to the pagan areas in eastern Afghanistān/western Pakistān conquered by Yaʿqūb; this is certainly the usage in Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, ed. Īraj Afshār, Tehran, 1965, p. 60.

28 The phrase used, *chīn u māchīn*, is also used in Persian literature to indicate any really remote and exotic locale; for instance, in *Samak-i ʿayyār*, *passim*. It is, of course, also possible that Yaʿqūb actually went on raids at other points in the far east aside from Ceylon, and that these places were indiscriminately labelled "China." Or, "China" may refer to areas in Central Asia slightly to the northeast of the Zunbīl's territory in eastern Afghanistān, to which Yaʿqūb may have penetrated. See Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 68, where he discusses the sea route from Sīrāf to Canton.

29 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 231.

30 One finds this accurate historical reflection of popular perception (however apocryphal or garbled the narrative or document) not only in other Islamic contexts – for example, Ṭabarī's purported correspondence between al-Manṣūr and Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, which is important not for the letters' verbatim content, but because they reflect the actual ʿAbbāsid and Shiʿite ideological positions of the time – but also in other medieval historical works, e. g. Notker's "biography" of Charlemagne.

31 Gardīzī, *Zayn al-akhbār*, pp. 8-9. Even certain much later reports of these events are presented in a fashion which is in accordance with the interpretation we are proposing; e. g. Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, vol. 20, p. 8.

These reports of an al-Muwaffaq-Ṣaffārid conspiracy are given added weight by several accounts which, by bearing witness to Yaʿqūb's complete lack of even the most basic military preparations, appear to be alluding to such an agreement. In these accounts Yaʿqūb is asked how he, a general so skilled that he was until then literally undefeated, could have embarked on such an ambitious project in such an unprepared, lackadaisical fashion:

> "I never saw you plan a war in this way; how could you beat these people after placing in your front the baggage, the treasure, and the prisoners, and seeking a country you knew very little, going into its marshes and canals without a guide … You took forty days to march from al-Sūs to Wāsiṭ, with deficient provisions for the army. Then, when they received provisions and money and their affairs were put in good order, you advanced from Wāsiṭ to Dayr al-ʿAqūl in two days, and then hesitated at the auspicious moments, and advanced too rapidly instead of proceeding cautiously." Al-Ṣaffār replied: "I did not know that I should have to fight; I had no doubt of success, and I believed that the envoys would return to me, bring the matter to fruition, and I would obtain what I had aimed for."[32]

This testimony is particularly valuable because it comes from Ibn Khallikān, a hostile, anti-Ṣaffārid source. Yet, despite his animus toward the Ṣaffārids, Ibn Khallikān appears to have transmitted uncorrupted all the traditions that undercut his own interjections and opinings.[33]

The same holds true for al-Dhahabī, who relates a very similar tradition about the complete lack of military preparedness in Yaʿqūb's army within the context of an account that, like Ibn Khallikān's, while openly hostile to Yaʿqūb,[34] yet faithfully copies wholesale many positive earlier traditions:

> Abū'l-Sāj said to Yaʿqūb: I never saw on your part any planning for war; so how could you defeat anyone? For you let your baggage and your prisoners be in front of you, and you made for a country while ignorant of its rivers and its fords. Yet you hastened, while the state of your army was disordered?" He replied: "I did not think that I would be fighting, and I did not doubt of success."[35]

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32 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 356.

33 This is by no means the only instance where Ibn Khallikān has done so. For example, he repeatedly refers to Yaʿqūb as a volunteer in the Holy War – *mutaṭawwiʿ* – (Ibn Khallikān,*Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, pp. 345-346) then follows these statements with the bizarre accusations that Yaʿqūb fought the Caliph with crosses on his banners and infidels [*ahl al-shirk*] in his army, and "broke the laws and tenets of Islam." (*loc. cit.* , p. 358) This latter statement simply appears scurrilous in light of Ibn Khallikān's earlier one; and, since Ibn Khallikān's avowed attitude toward Yaʿqūb is negative, the reader is forced to conclude that his former statement (which stands in direct contradiction to Ibn Khallikān's conscious attitude) is true and the latter a mere product of the writer's hostility. One also wonders why he employed such a patently risible accusation, rather than accusing Yaʿqūb of being, say, a closet Shiʿite, Khārijite, or other Islamic deviant.

34 Thus claiming, for instance, that part of Yaʿqūb's army was Christian, and that he aspired to "rule the world." (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, vol. 12, p. 515)

35 *Ibid.*

Here, again, it does appear somewhat unusual, to state the case mildly, that such a seasoned and successful military commander, while leading a military invasion at the head of an army, should be under the impression that he would not have to fight – unless, of course, al-Muwaffaq had assured him of this.

In any case, al-Muwaffaq was either never serious about using Yaʿqūb to gain the Caliphal throne, having intended merely to lure Yaʿqūb into a trap; or else his plans were detected by the Turkish commanders, who forced him to betray Yaʿqūb.[36] Yaʿqūb was not delivered the province, but rather met with a stinging defeat, as well as the bitter realization that al-Muwaffaq had behaved perfidiously.

There is one final story in our sources which seems to indicate that al-Muwaffaq had, in fact, been planning from the start to lure Yaʿqūb into ʿIrāq and then betray him: the peculiar episode of Ibn Mamshādh. Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Mamshādh was a former boon companion of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (he is actually known as "al-Mutawakkilī") and a member of the ʿAbbāsid court. He is called the most eloquent man in ʿIrāq; we are told that he wrote a long panegyric extolling al-Mutawakkil, "which is made frequent use of by the scribes of ʿIrāq until the present day."[37]

There are two versions regarding how Ibn Mamshādh ended up with Yaʿqūb. According to the first, "he became annoyed with the company of the children of al-Mutawwakil, so he left them and joined Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth."[38] It is doubtful that this version could be correct; for it would have been unlikely that Ibn Mamshādh suddenly and inexplicably tired of the rulers with whom he had lived happily for so many years, conveniently arriving at Yaʿqūb's court just when the latter was contemplating an invasion of ʿIrāq.

The second version, most interestingly, says that Ibn Mamshādh was sent as an emissary by al-Muʿtamid and al-Muwaffaq to Yaʿqūb:

> He was one of the most eloquent men of his time, so [much so] that no one surpassed him; [therefore] he was sent in the days of al-Muʿtamid **as his emissary, and al-Muwaffaq's**, to Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth. [Yaʿqūb] kept him with him, and advanced him over everyone else in his gate, so that Yaʿqūb's commanders and entourage envied him; so they informed Yaʿqūb that he was in secret correspondence with al-Muwaffaq, and [Yaʿqūb] killed him.[39]

In other words, according to Yāqūt, Ibn Mamshādh was executed for being an ʿAbbāsid spy.

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36 Al-Muwaffaq certainly did want the caliphate to pass to his own progeny, and, in the end, successfully ensured that it did.

37 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 262. "Until now" most probably refers to the time of Ḥamza, the source Yāqūt was basing himself on. Ṣafadī (*Kitāb al-Wāfī bi'l-Wafayāt*, vol. 1, p. 149), cites Yāqūt, mostly word for word, but combines the two different versions the latter gives.

38 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 262.

39 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 263; emphasis added.

While these most interesting facts were noted by Stern, he was so anxious to attribute Persian national sentiment to Yaʿqūb that he failed to realize the significance of Ibn Mamshādh's known ʿAbbāsid connections and his execution.[40] In fact, the whole interpretation of Yaʿqūb as Persian nationalist rests largely upon one poem of Ibn Mamshādh's, which unabashedly extols the old Persian kings and excoriates the Arabs and ʿAbbāsids. The poem is worth citing in full, since it is so strikingly different in tone and content from the ones we have examined previously, and which we know to have been recited in Yaʿqūb's presence.[41] The poem, in Stern's translation, runs as follows:

> I am the son of the noble descendants of Jam, and the inheritance of the kings of Persia has fallen to my lot.
> I am reviving their glory which has been lost and effaced by the length of time.
> Before the eyes of the world, I am seeking revenge for them – though men have closed their eyes and neglected the rights of those kins, yet I do not do so.
> Men are thinking about their pleasures, but I am busy with directing my aspirations
> To matters of high import, of far-reaching consequence, of lofty nature.
> I hope that the Highest will grant that I may reach my goal through the best of men.
> With me is the banner of Kābī, through which I hope to rule the nations.
> Say then to all sons of Hāshim: ʿAbdicate quickly, before you will have reason to be sorry:
> We have conquered you by force, by the thrusts of our spears and the blows of our sharp swords.
> Our fathers gave you your kingdom, but you showed no gratitude for our benefactions.
> Return to your country in the Ḥijāz, to eat lizards and to graze your sheep;
> For I shall mount on the throne of the kings, by the help of the edge of my sword and the point of my pen![42]

Interestingly, Stern himself is aware of the problematic fact that we do not know if Yaʿqūb ever even *saw* the poem, let alone approved of its Shuʿūbī sentiments:[43]

> The poet puts his verses into the mouth of Yaʿqūb the Coppersmith himself, and this fiction raises the question how far the ideas expressed in the poem are really those of the ruler and how far those of the poet. Put, however, in this form the question rather misses the point. We have here a piece of political propaganda, and as in all cases of

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40 Stern, "Yaʿqūb the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," p. 541, dismisses the accusations of Ibn Mamshādh's being an ʿAbbāsid spy as being the invention of these supposedly envious rivals, who may, in fact, simply have been doing their utmost to uncover anything negative about Ibn Mamshādh, and who happened to have stumbled upon the man's secret. Note that the source does not claim that the informants invented the information, nor that they lied. So far as we know, the informants were giving Yaʿqūb solid information.

41 See *supra*, chapter 4.

42 Stern, "Yaʿqūb the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," pp. 541-542.

43 "The … *shuubis* [*sic*] proclaimed the superiority of the Persians … to the Arabs, and defended their claim by social and cultural … arguments." H. A. R. Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shuubiya," *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, p. 67.

> propaganda it is more important to ask what effect it was meant and expected to achieve among the public than to try to assess how seriously it was taken by the ruler whose interests it promoted or by the poet who actually wrote it.[44]

What Stern took for granted, of course, was that this poem – written by a man who spent most of his life at the ʿAbbāsid court, came to Yaʿqūb as an emissary of the caliph and was even executed for being an ʿAbbāsid agent – was **Yaʿqūb's** propaganda. In fact, he goes so far as to assert that "the poem is not merely a general piece of propaganda aiming to boost Yaʿqūb's prestige, but a political manifesto with a quite particular objective[:] … Persian national restoration."[45]

Given Ibn Mamshādh's history and probable allegiances, however, together with the tone of this poem, which is so radically different from all other surviving poems from Yaʿqūb's circle (and which, unlike this one, we know to have been approved of – or at least heard! – by Yaʿqūb), it is far more likely that the poem was written as a piece of **ʿAbbāsid** disinformation. The aim of this propaganda would have been either to discredit Yaʿqūb and besmirch his Islamic reputation, or it may simply have been a crude attempt to goad him on to his disastrous invasion of ʿIrāq through grandiose visions and flattery. Of course, there is still another possibility, without attributing such underhanded motivation to the ʿAbbāsid agent Ibn Mamshādh: namely, that he was so accustomed to the ʿAbbāsid court style, and so out of touch with the whole religious atmosphere of Yaʿqūb's circle, that he simply wrote what he thought someone in Yaʿqūb's position would want to hear, based on his own experiences with the genealogically conscious and grandiose ʿAbbāsids.[46]

There is yet further proof in support of the contention that this poem was never written for Yaʿqūb. The *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* tells us specifically that Yaʿqūb did not know Arabic; therefore, aside from the very first poem composed for him by Muḥammad b. Wāṣif a decade previously, which Yaʿqūb complained that he did not understand, all subsequent court poetry was written in Persian. In fact, these compositions by Yaʿqūb's poets are said to have constituted the very beginning of Persian poetry.[47] This Arabic poem is therefore very much *not* in the style of Yaʿqūb's circle; and, in fact, Yaʿqūb would not even have understood such a poem if it had been recited to him.

Yāqūt's neat solution to this problem (namely, that Ibn Mamshādh composed the poem and sent it to al-Muʿtamid on Yaʿqūb's behalf) is also problematic. For, as we have seen, even in al-Muʿtamid's propaganda efforts after the failure of

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44 Stern, "Yaʿqūb the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," p. 543.

45 Stern, "Yaʿqūb the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," p. 545. Bosworth took up and elaborated this idea further in "The Heritage of rulership in early Islamic Iran and the search for dynastic connections with the past," *Iran* 11 (1973), in particular pp. 59-60.

46 It does not seem to this author to be unwarranted to term people who called themselves "the Shadow of God on Earth" grandiose.

47 See *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, pp. 209-213.

Yaʿqūb's ʿIrāqi campaign, he does not accuse the latter of being Zoroastrian, or Arab-hating, or of longing for pre-Islamic Iran, but rather of being a *Christian*.[48] Surely he would have made good use of the anti-Islamic sentiments in this poem if such a thing had ever been addressed to him on Yaʿqūb's behalf or at his behest.

Yaʿqūb's behavior in the aftermath of his defeat in ʿIrāq – particularly his refusal to unite with the anti-ʿAbbāsid Zanj rebels in order to avenge himself on the Caliph – provides further support for our interpretation of Yaʿqūb's character as a ruler.[49] In fact, Yaʿqūb responded to the Zanj overtures to make an alliance against the Caliph with the Qurʾānic verses "Say: 'O Infidels, I worship not that which you worship. '"[50]

Yaʿqūb does seem to have understood that he had been betrayed – in fact, this must have been the reason for his statement on ʿAbbāsid shiftiness that is reported in the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*:

> He used often to say that the ʿAbbāsids had based their rule on wrong-doing and trickery: "Haven't [*sic*] you seen what they did to Abū Salama, Abū Muslim, the Barmakī family and Faḍl b. Sahl, despite everything which these men had done on the dynasty's behalf?"[51]

Bosworth's contention that this statement shows mere antipathy or hatred on Yaʿqūb's part does not really seem to fit the accusations Yaʿqūb is levelling against the ʿAbbāsids. These accusations focus, namely, on *betrayal*; on the ʿAbbāsids' using loyal people for their own ends and then turning upon them unjustly, in a sneaky and underhanded fashion.[52] This type of behaviour is, of course, precisely what some of our sources claim that al-Muwaffaq did with Yaʿqūb: first he exploited his *ghāzī* zeal and used him to get rid of all sorts of undesirable characters (from an ʿAbbāsid perspective), then he lured him into a trap and attacked him.

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48 See *supra*, especially the accounts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Khallikān.

49 As von Grunebaum points out, "One wonders whether Muwaffaq would have succeeded in mastering the Zanj if at the decisive moment the leader of the Sijistānī ʿayyārūn had not refused the alliance proposed to him by the Zanj." (G. von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History 600-1258*, tr. K. Watson, New York, 1970, p. 106)

50 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, pp. 291-292. The Qurʾānic quotation is from Sura 109, "The Infidels." The complete Sura reads as follows: "Say: 'O Infidels,/I worship not that which you worship/ And you worship not that which I worship;/ And I worship not that which you worshipped/ And you worship not that which I worship. /You have your religion and I, mine. '"

51 Translated by Bosworth, "The Ṭāhirids and Ṣaffārids," p. 125.

52 There is a striking corroboration of Yaʿqūb's perception of the ʿAbbāsids in Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā's characterization of them: "Know that the rule of the ʿAbbāsids was one of trickery, political manoevre and deceit, and that there appertained to it more of opportunism and subterfuge than of force and strength, especially in its later period, for those of them who came at the end abandoned force, strength and intrepidity and had recourse to opportunism and trickery." Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, trans. C. E. J. Whitting (London, 1947), pp. 142-143.

Yaʿqūb's immediate reaction to his defeat in ʿIrāq was to plan his next holy war – again, behaviour that supports the *mutaṭawwiʿī* interpretation of Yaʿqūb's career: "Yaʿqūb then returned to Jundishāpūr, intending to raid Byzantium – for every year he would undertake Holy War against the Land of the Infidel …"[53] He seems to have simply washed his hands of ʿAbbāsid affairs in disgust; he no longer tried to replace al-Muʿtamid (probably because he had no suitable candidate), nor to lift a hand against the ʿAbbāsids; but neither did he let them push him out of the lands which had formerly been granted him. In fact, his ability to expel caliphal troops from those areas which he had been granted previously further underscores the hypothesis that Yaʿqūb's defeat could not have been so very great, nor the caliphal army particularly strong; Yaʿqūb had no difficulty holding his own against it.[54] Yaʿqūb also commenced minting coins again shortly thereafter, on all of which he steadfastly continued to recognize the ʿAbbāsid caliph.[55]

We are not given much further information about Yaʿqūb's final few years in the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*; for

> If all his virtues [*manāqib*] were to be written down, it would consitute many stories, and this book would become lengthy. However we have recalled some of those wars which he fought against the notables of Islam [*buzurgān-i Islām*]. His uprightness and justice are famous, because of what he did for the people of the world during his time.[56]

Apparently, though, Yaʿqūb still retained the admiration of many. We are told, for instance, that in 265/878f. Muḥammad al-Muwallad, one of the top ʿAbbāsid commanders, defected to Yaʿqūb.[57] This is the same man who had led a major expedition to Baṣra in 257/871 against the Zanj rebels,[58] and in 259/873 had been appointed to head the anti-Zanj forces in Wāsiṭ.[59] He must have been deeply trusted by the caliph: in 261/874f. he was the caliphal emissary sent to appoint Mūsā b. Bughā as deputy over all the western parts of the caliphate;[60] and in 262/875f. he had been left, together with the heir-apparent, in charge of Samarraʾ when the caliph had departed the city to fight Yaʿqūb.[61]

Yet in 265/878f. this man joined Yaʿqūb – forfeiting all of his money and lands, which were confiscated by the caliph after he had gone over to Yaʿqūb.

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53 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 232.

54 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 307. Al-Dhahabī notes (*Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, vol. 20, p. 11) that Yaʿqūb's first action after the battle was to go al-Ahwāz, "and he took prisoner the Amīr Ibn Wāṣil, and took over al-Ahwāz."

55 See e. g. R. Vasmer, "Über die Münzen der Saffariden und ihrer Gegner in Fars und Hurasan," #8; G. C. Miles, *Un Tresor de Dirhems du IXe Siècle*, Paris, 1960, e. g. #92-95; D. Tor, "Numismatic History," pp. 298-300.

56 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 233.

57 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 543. Al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, vol. 20, p. 16.

58 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 488.

59 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 502.

60 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 514.

61 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 516; Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām.* , vol. 20, p. 8.

Moreover, Ṭabarī specifically employs the word "joined," [*laḥiqa bi*] not "fled to."[62] We are not told of any disgrace of Muḥammad's in the caliph's eyes (it is true that he had lost a battle with the Zanj the previous year, but caliphal commanders frequently lost battles with the Zanj, and we are not told that this had any ill effects upon their standing);[63] there would thus seem to have been no motive for his joining Yaʿqūb – particularly now that Yaʿqūb appeared to be devoting all his attentions once more to *ghāzī* campaigns – apart from personal conviction. We are thus provided once again with circumstantial confirmation that Yaʿqūb must have had some kind of appealing message; such a prominent figure as Muḥammad al-Muwallad would not have been willing to forfeit all his influence and his possessions otherwise.

Yaʿqūb died, according to most sources, in Jundishāpūr in 265/879.[64] Certain sources relate dramatic deathbed scenes – somewhat reminiscent of the spurious legends of Beethoven's deathbed storming against the heavens, in fact – in which the caliph sends a messenger in an attempt at reconciliation, while Yaʿqūb remains defiant.[65] While none of the earliest and most reliable sources – Ṭabarī, Masʿūdī, *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir – relates any such scene, Ibn al-Athīr does give the following account:

> al-Muʿtamid had already sent to him a messenger, [together with] a letter trying to win him over and gratify him, and bestowing upon him the districts of Fārs. The messenger reached Yaʿqūb when he lay ill. He gave him an audience, placing before him a sword, a loaf of coarse bread, and onions. The messenger was brought in, and delivered his message. Yaʿqūb replied: Say to the caliph: "I am sick; and if I die, then I have found rest from you and you have found rest from me. But if I recover, there cannot be anything between you and me but this sword, until either I take my revenge or you break me and reduce me to poverty, and I return to this bread and onion. The messenger returned [to the caliph] and Yaʿqūb did not tarry long before he died.[66]

This tradition bears all the marks of being spurious. Yaʿqūb lived for three years after the ʿIrāqi campaign, and never once did he try to march on the caliph –

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62 Al-Dhahabī's much later version is also quite clear on this point: "In [this year] Muḥammad al-Muwallad conspired [*khāmara*] with Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth and became one of his personal retainers [*min khawāṣṣihī*].

63 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 9, p. 539.

64 Ibn al-Jawzī (*al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 12, p. 206), almost the sole exception, has Yaʿqūb dying in al-Ahwāz. Perhaps he read that Yaʿqūb had died in "Khūzistān," –i. e. the province in which Jundishāpūr is located – and understood by that the city of Khūzistān; that is, al-Ahwāz. Ibn Khallikān also gives this variant tradition (*Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 360).

65 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 361. Interestingly, in al-Dhahabī's statement regarding the sending of a caliphal emissary, it sounds as though reconciliation was actually effected; Dhahabī writes that "al-Muʿtamid had already sent a messenger for the purpose of conciliating [Yaʿqūb] and uniting with him." (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, vol. 12, p. 515)

66 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, pp. 325-326. Quoted by Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 361. A variant is also cited by Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīda*, p. 332.

even though the latter was in a very hard-pressed situation due to the Zanj.[67] Moreover, we know that Yaʿqūb lived on extremely simple fare at all times anyway.[68] Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that the caliph would have sent a messenger to Yaʿqūb, who was in any case a dying man, granting him so much honour and legitimacy, if he had even a suspicion that Yaʿqūb nursed implacable enmity and harboured military ambitions toward him. In fact, his purported speech seems designed merely to dramatize and exaggerate Yaʿqūb's complicated relations with al-Muwaffaq and al-Muʿtamid.

Another two late (eighth/fourteenth century) reports of a different kind of deathbed scene – one in Persian, one in Arabic – involve one of the greatest early Ṣūfī shaykhs, al-Tustarī, and establish a personal connection between al-Tustarī and the Ṣaffārid ruler. According to the first of these accounts,

> At the time Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth became ill; his illness was strong upon him, such that the doctors were powerless [to heal him]. They said: Everything that we know we have [already] done, however nothing will avail [with] this illness except prayer; [for] no remedy remains that we have not tried. Then someone sent to call Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh al-Tustarī. When he came, they said: "Pray for the Amīr." He held his hand, and said: "O God, you have already showed him the ignominy of sin; show him the glory of obedience." Immediately recovery came to [Ibn] Layth, such that not one particle of sickness remained upon him. Afterwards the Amīr commanded that they bring much money together with gifts and place [them] before him.
>
> Al-Tustarī, however, refused to accept a reward, in order to preserve the power of his pious prayer and to demonstrate his reliance on God's dispensations.[69]

This account is somewhat puzzling, since it depicts Yaʿqūb's recovery. There are two possibilities: either it was referring to a different, earlier incident entirely; or, the recovery mentioned was merely a fleeting improvement, which was soon followed by a final relapse. The latter possibility seems more likely, given the second account of al-Tustarī's attempt at faith healing.

The second account, while similar, is not identical. According to this account, Yaʿqūb during his final illness personally ordered al-Tustarī summoned to him as he, Yaʿqūb, lay ill in al-Ahwāz:

> His illness thwarted all the doctors, [so] he sent to Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh al-Tustarī, who was brought to him in litters. When he reached his presence, [Yaʿqūb] asked that he pray. Sahl raised his hands and said: "O God, you showed him the ignominy of sin; now show him the glory of obedience. Solace him in his hour, and impress these words in his heart, so that he may propagate good and spread justice." [This being] said, he [presumably Yaʿqūb] returned to Shīrāz and died there, and it is mentioned in the histories that he died in Jundishāpūr in the year 265/879 and that is correct.[70]

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67 Not to mention the fact that Yaʿqūb kept recognizing the caliph on his coinage.

68 A point we shall be discussing presently.

69 ʿUmar b. al-Ḥasan al-Samarqandī, *Muntakhab-i rawnaq*, pp. 252-253.

70 Junayd Shīrāzī, *Shadd al-izār*, pp. 285-286.

These reports, true or fictional, confirm yet again the picture of the pious *ghāzī* whose *tawakkul* leads him to rely on the power of prayer for healing. In fact, other sources state specifically that when Yaʿqūb lay ill on his deathbed, he refused to take the doctors' medicaments for this reason.[71]

This second account of the Yaʿqūb-Tustarī connection also gives what it purports to be Yaʿqūb's epitaph:

> Peace be upon the people of the crumbling graves/ as if they had never sat in the *majlises*
> And did not drink a sip from the cold of water/ and did not eat from all [things] moist and dry.
> Peace be upon the world and its good delights/ as if Yaʿqūb had never been ruling in it.[72]

However, there are several other reports of Yaʿqūb's supposed epitaph – naturally, they say different things, and at least some, therefore, are necessarily spurious. One of these other reports, given by al-Tawḥīdī, is somewhat similar in the first verse to the one we have just seen, and runs as follows:

> Peace be upon this world and its good delights/ [it is] as if Yaʿqūb had never been in it, endowed with regal power.
> As though he had never led an army of Fate and never desired that which men desire, while being wretched.[73]

Another three sources, however, claim that Yaʿqūb's tombstone was engraved, first, with the enigmatic saying "This is the grave of Yaʿqūb *al-miskīn*." This latter word, meaning poor or humble, can often have religious connotations;[74] in fact, the archetypal *mutaṭawwiʿ* himself, ʿAbdullāh b. al-Mubārak, supposedly enjoined: "Let your seat be with the *masākīn*; and woe unto you if you sit with an innovator!"[75] The fact that at least two of the writers who record that Yaʿqūb's epitaph described him as a "*miskīn*" – namely, Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Khallikān – have preserved such an epithet, despite their own personal poor opinion of Yaʿqūb, lends credence to their reports.

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71 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 325; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 360.

72 Shīrāzī, *Shadd al-izār*, p. 286.

73 ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir wa'l-dhakhā'ir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, Beirut, 1408/1988, vol. 7, p. 141. The author wishes to thank Wolfhart Heinrichs for his assistance with the translation of this, and even more particularly of the next, poem.

74 See e. g. under the biography of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in Ibn ʿAsākir (*Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 5, p. 334): Abū Bakr said: "I awakened and I washed and I prayed two *rakʿas* in thanks to God, may he be exalted, and I put on my garb, and gave alms to the *fuqarā'* and the *masākin* for the sake of the Messenger of God [or simply: of the messenger of God – *al-masākīn li-rasūli'llāh*]; and in this the [most] reliable, the [most] trustworthy [is] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, may the mercy of God be upon him. So then after this I made a pilgrimage, and I visited the grave of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in Baghdad, and I visited and sat, remaining at his grave for the space of a week."

75 Al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, vol. 8, p. 178, #11797.

Also written on the grave, supposedly, was the following:

> You thought well of the days, when they were good to you/ and you did not fear the evil that destiny would bring [to you];
>
> The nights were at peace with you, so you let yourself be deceived by them/ in the serenity of the nights turmoil comes.[76]

The third supposed epitaph – which, again, bears a resemblance to the first – runs as follows:

> You ruled Khurāsān and the regions [lit: sides – *aknāf*] of Fārs
> And you did not despair of becoming ruler of ʿIrāq.
> Peace [is] upon the world and the fragrance of its fresh breeze
> As though Yaʿqūb had never been seated in it [*idhā lam yakun Yaʿqūbu fī-hā bi-jālisi*].[77]

These last purported epitaphs seem to be the type of moralistic commonplaces that were popular among medieval Islamic poetasters; they do not tell us much about Yaʿqūb, if authentic, apart from his – or his eulogist's – penchant for a sort of melancholy, humble emphasis on the smallness, powerlessness, and evanescence of men.

Far more can be learned of Yaʿqūb's character and the nature of his rule from the direct depiction in our sources. There are, of course, the jaundiced views with which we are familiar. These, it should be noted, come entirely from late sources. Qazvīnī, for instance (who, as we saw above, has some fairly incredible anecdotes) passes on the following evaluation:

> Yaʿqūb ruled for a period of ten years and [in] every place that there was a sign of money, he acted with injustice and violence. The monies of the world were collected for him. He endeavoured to procure ʿIrāq and Māzandarān, and embarked in a war upon *al-Dāʿī ilā'l-Ḥaqq* Ḥasan b. Zayd al-Bāqirī and was victorious. After that he desired Baghdād, so he turned towards a war with the caliph al-Muʿtamid. The caliph sent his brother, al-Muwaffaq, to fight him. They fought at Hulwān[*sic*]. Yaʿqūb, defeated, went to Khūzistān and returned to his former habits. On the fourteenth of Shawwāl in the year 265/ninth of June, 879 he passed away there. Thus the account went.[78]

Another late, implicitly negative evaluation of Yaʿqūb, which we have already examined, comes from the Shiʿite writer Ibn Isfandiyār: "In this time that the caliphs and Ṭāhir b. ʿAbdallāh were occupied with [the Zanj rebellion], many *fitnas* arose in Khurāsān; *runūd* and *ʿayyārān* operated openly, and on every side someone rebelled; and the most fortunate of all [of these] was Yaʿqūb b. al-

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[76] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, *loc. cit*. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 360, and al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, vol. 20, p. 17, also give this complete tradition, including the "*miskīn*" epithet.

[77] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 5, p. 360. He points out that the hemistich "And you did not despair of ruling over ʿIrāq" was said to have been authored by Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān.

[78] Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīda*, p. 362.

Layth al-Ṣaffār."[79] Obviously, Yaʿqūb is not placed in very flattering company here; nor are the *ʿayyārs* depicted in a complimentary light (although, considering that they were Sunni *mutaṭawwiʿa*, they could not have been very popular among Shiʿites). Not only is this source late and Shiʿite; it is also, as we noted previously, factually wrong on several points. The negative statements of these several sources are outweighed, moreover, by the positive evidence, for several reasons.

First, the image painted in the positive depictions is more detailed and more coherent than the nebulous accusations of greed, rebellion, and heresy. In fact, the actual negative character references appear to consist almost entirely of hopelessly broad – and often contradictory – aspersions which were dutifully hurled at him by historians who adopted the official ʿAbbāsid-Sāmānid line (e. g. Ibn Khallikān's accusations of both Khārijism and Christianity, simultaneously), and which are often admixed with opposing, positive attributes preserved from the sources on which these writers based themselves. Moreover, we have examined in detail the last two accusations – rebellion and heresy – and seen that that of heresy, at least, was completely baseless; the religious company Yaʿqūb kept was irreproachable.

The charge of rebellion we have been able to disprove in every case apart from Yaʿqūb's deposition of Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir and attempted deposition of the caliph al-Muʿtamid, in which two cases we have been able to explain the historical circumstances and motives surrounding those two events. In the first instance, the gross incompetence of Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir, the critical deterioration of the situation in Khurāsān, and the urgent requests for Yaʿqūb's intervention on the part of many former Ṭāhirid supporters (not to mention some Ṭāhirids) demonstrate that Yaʿqūb's actions in this case had some very good justification, or at least respectable motives, underlying them; this was not ruthless self-aggrandizement.

In the case of Yaʿqūb's campaign against al-Muʿtamid, we have seen that he probably undertook it at the behest of the caliph's brother al-Muwaffaq, as stated explicitly in several sources. This assertion is bolstered by the fact that, after realizing that he had been tricked and that there was no worthy ʿAbbāsid to take the place of the ineffectual al-Muʿtamid on the throne, he never again marched on ʿIrāq, despite the caliphate's being in its severest state of military vulnerability due to the Zanj rebellion. We know that Yaʿqūb would have had the power to do so, because he was easily able to drive out of Fārs and other areas the caliphal troops that tried to press their advantage after the ambush of Yaʿqūb's army at Dayr al-ʿAqūl.

79 Ibn Isfandiyār, *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān*, p. 245.

Second, all of our earliest sources attribute either positive or neutral characteristics to Yaʿqūb (even the ones which disapprove of his ʿIrāqi campaign).[80] We saw adduced and elucidated above the abundant mass of material supporting the *ʿayyār*-as-proto-Sunni-holy warrior interpretation, from the positive adjectives in the very spare early accounts of Yaʿqūbī and the geographers, to the sentences which can be gleaned from Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khallikān. There are, however, two works, one quite early and the other based on very early materials, which actually contain real discussions of Yaʿqūb's character.

There is, foremost, the testimony of the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*. Its positive portrayal is given credibility, first, by the fact that it does not sing these same praises with regard to ʿAmr – in other words, this is not simply a formulaic panegyric. Also, while some of the claims it makes regarding Yaʿqūb's sterling qualities may have been standard fare (i. e. his bestowal of generous alms) others, such as his engaging in excessive amounts of supererogatory prayer and his chastity, are far more unusual and difficult to manufacture. One could not have tried to claim chastity, for instance, with someone like Maḥmūd of Ghazna, whose homosexual dalliances were open,[81] or impeccable devotional practices for a pleasure-loving ruler such as, say, the caliph al-Amīn.[82] It mentions first and foremost Yaʿqūb's trust in God [*tawakkul*] and his devout orisonal habits: "In the course of a twenty-four hour period he would pray one hundred and seventy *rakʿas*, both mandatory and customary … every day he would give a thousand dinars in charity."[83]

The writer goes on to extol Yaʿqūb's generosity (a standard theme in eulogies) and then, exceptionally, Yaʿqūb's chastity, including a very detailed story of how Yaʿqūb withstood temptation in the form of a handsome young *ghulām*.[84] Finally, the writer relates concrete anecdotes illustrating Yaʿqūb's involved concern with justice and the responsible, sober administration of public order. Both in this context and when speaking of Yaʿqūb's military activities, the writer emphasizes Yaʿqūb's personal accountability and involvement with the execution of these duties: "Moreover, he himself would for the most part go as a spy or in the vanguard on campaigns."[85]

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80 Of course, not all of our late sources are negative either – see Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Khallikān, and Ibn Funduq, who says nothing either positive or negative about the Ṣaffārids (Ibn Funduq, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, pp. 66-68); most of his entry, in fact, is devoted to the anti-Ṣaffārid rebel Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Khujistānī, about whom see below, chapter 6.

81 For a discussion of the subject, see C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, p. 103. Niẓāmī ʿArūḍī Samarqandī (*Chahār maqāla*, Tehran, 1375/1955f. , p. 55) refers to this particular passion of Maḥmud's as "famous and well-known." ["*maʿrūf ast ū mashhūr*"]

82 See, for instance, the accounts of al-Amīn's frivolity and self-undulgence, Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 4, the entire section on al-Amīn's caliphate.

83 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 263. Obviously, the numbers themselves are unreliable; what is important is Yaʿqūb's reputation.

84 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, pp. 264-265.

85 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 268.

In fact, the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* has a great deal to say generally about Yaʿqūb's religiosity, including his religious warfare. At one point, we are told that:

> Never did he draw a sword against any of the Believers who had not [first] targeted him. Before beginning to fight he would remonstrate, and would call upon God Almighty as witness. He would not wage war in the Land of the Infidel until he had first offered them Islam; and when anyone converted to Islam, he would not take his property and his children. If after that [i. e. the battle] someone became a Muslim, Yaqʿūb would give him a robe of honour, and return his property and his children to him. Furthermore, [Yaʿqūb] would not take the *kharāj* from any one in his dominions who had fewer than five hundred dirhams; rather, he would give [that person] alms.[86]

At least part of this picture we have seen confirmed in the accounts we have already seen, a number of which depict Yaʿqūb's scrupulous observance of the religious rules requiring that he first summon infidels and heretics to Islam and repentance before fighting them, and his embrace of such people when they did in fact declare their penitence.[87]

Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* is another early source containing information on Yaʿqūb's character and lifestyle. In particular, it has a special section on Yaʿqūb's unusually good relations with his armies – uniquely so, according to Masʿūdī – due to his kindness and generosity towards them:

> Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth's policy toward those troops who were with him was one whose like has never been heard of among those kings who came before him … their obedience to his command was perfect, and their perseverance in obedience to him, because he included them in his beneficence, showered his munificence upon them, and [thereby] filled their hearts with respect for him.[88]

Masʿūdī then adduces anecdotal detail to demonstrate just how perfect the obedience of Yaʿqūb's troops was;[89] the unique system of communal living and of supplying all his soldiers' wants which Yaʿqūb instituted in his army; and Yaʿqūb's generosity toward his soldiers. Masʿūdī also indicates Yaʿqūb's extraordinary involvement in the running of his army, and his accessibility; evidence confirmed by the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*'s description of this same sort of behaviour toward even the meanest of his subjects.[90]

Yaʿqūb was not, however, an extroverted, convivial character. When one of his trusted associates was asked about how Yaʿqūb conducted himself in private and in social gatherings with his inner circle, and how he chatted individually, the confidant responded: "He does not apprise anyone of his secrets, nor does he divulge his plans and aims to anyone. Most of his waking hours he spends reflect-

86 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 268.
87 Vide *supra*, the preceding two chapters.
88 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, pp. 229-230.
89 Further on, he relates how astonished the caliphal envoys were by the obedience and loyalty of Yaʿqūb's troops; one of them even exclaims to Yaʿqūb that he had never seen anything like it before (Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, p. 231).
90 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, pp. 230-232; *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 265.

ing upon what he wishes … [he] does not share his planning with anyone …"[91] Masʿūdī goes on to relate that Yaʿqūb spent much of his spare time educating and training his young mamlūks.[92] He was careful and vigilant; he kept close surveillance over his officers, and only his brothers and one of his *khāṣṣa* had free entrance to his tent.[93]

Masʿūdī also discusses Yaʿqūb's ascetic lifestyle; he would sit on nothing but rough sackcloth, and would lean upon his shield for support; in fact, he would also sleep upon the latter, pulling down a flag to wad up and use as a pillow. There was nothing else in his tent. His clothing was simple, as was his fare.[94] Generally, his austere practices were remarked upon; one emissary from Samarraʾ inquired of him why he had nothing but his weapons and sackcloth in his tent. Yaʿqūb responded:

> The companions of a leader of the people follow his example, both his deeds and his behaviour. If I were to use the furnishings you mentioned we would weigh heavily upon the animals and whoever is in my army would follow my example. We cross every day wide deserts, wastes, dry canyons and lowlands; nothing but lightness is fitting for us.[95]

Finally, al-Masʿūdī states that "Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth al-Ṣaffār and his brother ʿAmr b. al-Layth both had a wondrous policy and behaviour, and tricks and stratagems in battles, which we have already related … in our two [lost] books *Akhbār al-zamān* and *al-Awsaṭ*."[96] Again, this rings true; we know (from both the lexicons and works such as *Samak-i ʿayyār*) that one of the signs of the *ʿayyār* was his wily employment of ruses in order to achieve his ends.

Ibn al-Athīr, apart from his mention of Yaʿqūb's piety and asceticism,[97] states that

> Al-Ḥasan b. Zayd the ʿAlawite used to call Yaʿqūb "the anvil" because of his firmness … Yaʿqūb was intelligent, resolute, and he used to say: "Whomever you have associated with for forty days, and do not [yet] know his character, you will not know it in forty years." Enough has been related of his life that demonstrates his intelligence.[98]

Yaʿqūb, in short, comes across as a pious, unsparing, unrelenting and single-minded fighter, a Cromwellian figure. It has already been noted by others that he was somewhat grim; he was not given to smiling or laughter, and is described as having been stern-faced.[99]

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91 His taciturnity would be fully in accordance with *mutaṭawwiʿ* precepts; note that al-Awzāʿī is reported to have said: "The Believer says little and does much, whereas the Hypocrite says much and does little." (Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 6, pp. 152-153)

92 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, p. 231.

93 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, p. 232.

94 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, p. 232.

95 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, p. 233.

96 Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 5, p. 233.

97 *Vide supra*.

98 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 326.

99 Bosworth, *Saffarids*, p. 170.

While Bosworth disagrees with Bāstānī-Pārīzī's point that no historical source ever mentions Yaʿqūb as having had a wife or any relations with women, preferring the lone tradition in the late Ibn Khallikān that Yaʿqūb was married to an unnamed Sīstānī Arab woman,[100] the present writer agrees with Bastani-Parizi, for several reasons. The woman has no name, and the circumstances are vague. It seems peculiar that all of the early sources, and in particular the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, which is so much better informed regarding Yaʿqūb's life, and in particular his personal life, than any other source, should have been unaware of this important fact. In fact, the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* does specifically mention his romantic life – to state that he was chaste, and that he "never gazed with a shameless glance upon anyone, neither woman nor young boy."[101]

Finally, his chastity would fit perfectly with his *ghāzī* dedication and its concomitant ascetic practices. As was noted by Bonner, many of the founding fathers of the *mutaṭawwiʿi* tradition practiced an asceticism which included sexual abstinence.[102] The idea here is deeper than that of sexual purity, however; the one who wishes to dedicate himself completely to Jihad and the service of God should not encumber himself with goods and family, which could only detract from the single-minded remembrance of God.[103] In fact, there is a tradition of Ibn al-Mubārak's illustrating the problem with worldly ties. In it, ʿAbdallāh b. Qays relates how he went out on a campaign, and overheard a man addressing his own soul, castigating it for always having reminded him, every time he wanted to become a martyr, of his children, dependents and family, upon which the man lost heart and returned.[104] The message is clear: family, home life, and worldly ties are distractions from the good fight and the attainment of martyrdom *fi sabīl Allāh*.[105]

To conclude our examination of Yaʿqūb b. al-Layth's career: we have seen that Yaʿqūb, the most prominent *ʿayyār* of his time, was first and foremost a religious

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100 Bosworth, *Saffarids*, pp. 170-171, basing himself upon Ibn Khallikān's statement: "Yaʿqūb had married a woman from among the Arabs of the country of Sijistān, and when Yaʿqūb died his brother ʿAmr had married her, then she died without leaving sons …"

101 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 264.

102 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, p. 127.

103 See M. J. Kister, "Land, Property and Jihad," particularly p. 276. On the importance of the remembrance of God, see ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa'l-raqā'iq*, pp. 340-341.

104 ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*, p. 116 (tradition #142).

105 Purity of motive is considered key in the Jihad; vide e. g. "Muḥammad b. Fuḍayl related to us from ʿUmāra from Abū Zurʿa from Abū Hurayra. He said: The Messenger of God … said: God has charged the one who goes out in His path, [that] he not go out except [for the sake of] the Jihad in My path, and the belief in Me, and faith in My Messenger. He is a warrantor upon me that I shall bring him into Heaven, or that I shall return him to the dwelling from which he set out, possessing that which he acquired of wages or plunder, which itself is praiseworthy in his hand. Whatever wounds he has been wounded with in the path of God, yet when the Day of Resurrection arrives [he will be] as his form [was] the day he was wounded, his colour the colour of blood, and his smell the smell of musk …" (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 12, pp. 140-141, no. 7157).

figure. The terms used to describe him – ascetic, *ghāzī*, *etcetera*; his actions – unceasing campaigns for the orthodox faith; and his practices – chastity, extreme austerity – all form a coherent picture of the ultimate *mutaṭawwiʿī*. It is not a new discovery that medieval Islamic writers had their own political agendas. Yet many scholars who have written about the Ṣaffārids seem to have forgotten this vital point when going about their tasks. This is especially surprising considering the radically opposing portrayals of Yaʿqūb; sometimes, as we have seen, even within the same source. Yet once we take into account the ʿAbbāsid need to discredit Yaʿqūb's motives and actions – a need which was aided and abetted by the Sāmānids in order to establish their own legitimacy and credentials – the Gordian knot simply unravels.

The character portraits of Yaʿqūb preserved in our sources indicate that the nature of Yaʿqūb's aims and motivations were seriously distorted by some subsequent authors.[106] We have suggested that the reason why many excellent modern researchers failed to discern this was their acceptance of Nöldeke's original ill-founded and off-handed definition of the meaning of the word *ʿayyār*. Based upon the historical evidence from this period – rather than upon the much later and unrepresentative source base used in many previous deductions – of what the word *ʿayyār* meant in the ninth century, we have been able to unearth from the sources the material which does not fit the official, negative picture promoted by the ʿAbbāsids and Sāmānids, and to construct a coherent, viable alternative interpretation of the career of the greatest and most famous *ʿayyār* of all. In summation, the strength of the original Ṣaffārid state lay precisely in its single-minded *mutaṭawwiʿī ʿayyār* nature.

Yaʿqūb was in many ways the *ʿayyār par excellence*, the epitome of at least the word's early meaning. He was concerned with restoring Islam to a position of unified strength and fighting wars for the faith; not in building palaces, bureaucracies and other state machinery. This last, rather Cromwellian aspect of Ṣaffārid *ʿayyār* ideology has, however, contributed to the systematic misunderstanding of the whole nature and *raison d'être* of Ṣaffārid rule. Modern historians have, for instance, viewed Yaʿqūb's lack of interest in the more luxurious or magnificent aspects of rulership not as a manifestation of single-minded religious devotion and asceticism, but rather as an indication of Yaʿqūb's supposed crudeness and lack of refinement. They have, indeed, therefore condemned Yaʿqūb for not having engaged in activities which would actually have been antithetical to his ideology and deepest principles. Ironically, Yaʿqūb's brother ʿAmr, who is regarded with greater approbation by those same historians for having paid more attention to worldly power consolidation, was, as we shall see, eventually abandoned by his army for precisely that reason: he was perceived as having betrayed *ʿayyār* ideals.

106 Even when, as in the case of Ibn Khallikān, it appears to be the same author writing contradictory things, we are of course in reality dealing with a later author toeing the official ʿAbbāsid-Sāmānid line, but who is copying unexpurgated material from earlier writers.