8. The *ʿAyyārs* in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Chivalry (*Futuwwa*) and Violence

> Who does not know that kings and princes derive their origin from men ignorant of God who aspire to lord over their equals by pride, plunder, treachery, murder, and lastly by every kind of crime, at the instigation of the Devil, the prince of this world?
>
> – Gregory VII to Hermann, Bishop of Metz[1]

At the very beginning of this work, we saw that scholars have tended to set up a dichotomy when researching the *ʿayyārs*: **either** they were chivalric knights, **or** they engaged in all sorts of distasteful, violent activities *which necessarily meant* that they were low-class ruffians, robbers and brigands. That is, scholars of the medieval Islamic world have implicitly assumed that shady behaviour denoted a particular social status. Thus, they have been puzzled by the conflicting descriptions and reports of *ʿayyārs*. What is one to make of these errant "youths" [*javānmardān/fityān*] who are described as noble practitioners of chivalric virtues [*javānmardī/futuwwa*],[2] as a group to which rulers such as the Ziyārids were proud to belong, and yet also as engaging in, for instance, the extortion of protection money? What is one to make of noble dynasties such as the Samānids, whose biographies proudly proclaim that the dynasty's eponymous founder was an *ʿayyār*?

The answer to this question becomes clearer when one examines a parallel group of militant errant 'youths' who exhibited many of the same traits as these Islamic *javānmardān*, and yet were by no means low-class ruffians and brigands: namely, the chivalric knights of medieval western Europe. "Youths" [*juvenes*] figure prominently in twelfth-century French sources;

> ... the description applied to warriors and was used to assign them to a clearly determined stage in their careers ... the 'youth' ... was already an adult person ... The stages of 'youth' can ... be defined as the period in a man's life between his being dubbed knight and his becoming a father.[3]

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1 Cited in Philippe Buc, "*Principes gentium dominantur eorum*: Princely Power between Legitimacy and Illegitimacy in Twelfth-Century Exegesis," in T. N. Bisson, ed., *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Philadelphia, 1995, p. 310.

2 Literally, "Youth[ness]"; see F. Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa*, Zurich, 1979, p. 13.

3 G. Duby, "Youth in aristocratic society," *The Chivalrous Society*, tr. C. Postan, Berkeley, 1977, pp. 112-113.

William Marshal of England, for instance, was considered a "youth" until age forty-five.[4] One of the most important aspects of the life of these "youths" was that they were **errants,** engaging in trouble-making as well as high adventure in the course of their wanderings;[5] moreover "This life of vagabondage was originally considered to be a necessary part of a young man's development ... A 'youth's' journey was not usually a solitary one ... the 'youth' found himself caught up in a band of 'friends' who 'loved each other like brothers. '"[6] These bands usually had a leader, who was also a 'youth. ' In these qualities – errantry, banding together in a sworn brotherhood with a leader – we see once again a strong parallel to *ʿayyār* behavior.[7]

Of course, what not only these 'youths', but also their aristocratic parents, did most was engage in predatory violence for their own profit and goals.[8] In fact, Louis the Fat's advisor Abbot Suger (d. 1151) sings the praises of his king for never having brought disorder in the realm "as is the custom of other *juvenes*." Louis, moreover, frequently fought to protect and maintain public order – not from the violence of ordinary bandits and low-class ruffians, but from that of nobles, such as Eudes, Count of Corbeil, enumerated among those who "take pleasure in endless pillage, trouble the poor, destroy churches."[9] It thus sounds as though – at least according to the clerical chroniclers – *ʿayyārs* behaved in much the same fashion as their Christian knightly counterparts.[10]

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4 Note that in the enormous twelfth-century Persian romance *Samak-i ʿayyār* the eponymous hero's foster father and fellow "youth," Shoghāl Pīl Zūr, must be at least that age.

5 See Chapter One on the meaning of the word *ʿayyār* as errant.

6 Duby, "Youth in Aristocratic Society,"pp. 113-114. Cahen describes the Islamic "youths" as having lived at this time "en petites collectivités ... et ... en dehors de toute attache familiale ... s'associant pour mener en commun la vie la plus confortable possible, dans l'ambience de solidarité, de dévouement mutuel, de 'camaraderie' ..." ("Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain," pp. 32-33. Cahen also hazards a guess that there was no religious program to the *fityān/javānmardān*. This author knows of no Shiʿite *fityān*, however; and the discussion below of *ʿayyār* violence demonstrates a clear Sunni partisanship – as do, ironically, nearly all of Cahen's and Sabari's examples.)

7 The communal brotherhood aspect of the *ʿayyārs* appears in sources as diverse as Ibn al-Jawzī's *Talbīs Iblīs* and *Muntaẓam*, on the one hand, and the *Qābūs-nāmah* and *Samak-i ʿayyār* on the other.

8 *Vide* C. Bouchard, "*Strong of Body, Brave and Noble": Chivalry and Society in Medieval France*, Ithaca, 1998, p. 81, "Sometimes they just rode around in gangs, terrorizing the countryside, until reined in by the local bishop or by fathers whose patience had finally snapped."

9 R. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Oxford, 1999, p. 16.

10 Taeschner and von Hammer-Purgstall were convinced of this point, at least with regard to the *futuwwa* generally if not the *ʿayyārs* specifically; *vide* F. Taeschner, "Die islamischen Futuwwabünde. Das Problem ihrer Entstehung und die Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* N. F. 12 (1934), p. 7, and J. von Hammer-Purgstall, "Sur la chevalerie des Arabes antérieure à celle de l'Europe, sur l'influence de la première sur la seconde," *Journal Asiatique* 4th series, 13 (1849), p. 1.

In medieval Burgundy, "secular elites are among those most frequently blamed" for violence, robbery and pillage, to the point where the viscount of Macon, for instance, is characterized as "the morning-, evening-, and night-wolf of our land."[11] Stories of armed robbery, illegal extortion, and violent behaviour on the part of the medieval knightly class abound. Bernard Grossus, lord of Brancoin, was reputed to have made a spectral appearance before a Cluniac monk, shortly after his death in 1072, in order to beg prayers on his own behalf. According to this nobleman's own ghostly testimony, "'more than anything, the thing that torments me is the construction of that castle nearby,' whence, according to the story, 'robbers often used to burst out and plunder at large, any way they could. '"[12] Obviously, these "robbers" were not some proletarian underclass, but Bernard's own knights.

Despite the lugubrious example of his father's posthumous torment, Bernard's heir (and subsequent descendants, for many generations) continued Bernard's knightly practices; Bernard's son, the new lord of Brancoin, "confessed to seizing merchants and their goods who were passing through his land, a sin that he then compounded by extending his exactions to all travelers, including pilgrims to Cluny."[13] Similarly, Simon de Montfort, the greatest English lord of the thirteenth century, was said by the chroniclers to have extorted money "wherever he could;" and he himself confessed in his last will and testament to having taken illicitly the goods of his own peasants.[14] Leading retinues of armed men, stealing oxen and other valuables from peasants, taking a cut from merchants, levying illegal tolls and exactions upon those over whom one had no legal jurisdiction[15] – all of this sounds terribly familiar to the reader of the Islamic chroniclers' accounts of *ʿayyār* activities.

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11 G. Smith, "*Sine rege, sine principe*: Peter the Venerable on Violence in Twelfth-Century Burgundy," *Speculum* 77 (2002), p. 12.

12 Smith, "*Sine rege*," p. 12.

13 Smith, "*Sine rege*," p. 13.

14 J. R. Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 58.

15 For numerous examples of this in the European context, see T. N. Bisson, *Tormented Voices: Power, Crisis and Humanity in Rural Catalonia 1140-1200*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998, *passim*. Bisson also shows how in certain instances the violent behaviour of the knightly class was in effect a contest for lordship, somewhat similar to the kind of conflict we have seen in the Islamic context between the *mutaṭawwiʿa* and the Buyid governor of Rayy regarding the right to the revenues. On p. 82 Bisson treats the case of one particular lord who, for example, seized donkeys and pigs, sheep and goats: "This is hardly the account of a raid. Guilelm has moved in on the Count's lordship in force, demanding maintenance for his knights, and importing his own bailiffs … to carry out his distraints. Making exception for a few violent incidents, what shocks here is the audacity of a lord-baron claiming the fullness of lordship in a comital domain where people believed he had no right …" Similarly, Simon de Montfort had no qualms about extorting 500 marks from a burgess; this was just one among the many "tyrannical practices of oppression and extortion which seemed to inform Montfort's government of Gascony …" (Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 99).

The salient point is that this activity was, as Cahen himself pointed out so long ago,[16] not limited to the *ʿayyārs* at all but was, rather, common to the entire upper stratum of society. We know that all the ruling class of Christendom was engaging in these practices, from the lowliest knight, through middling castellans and on up to the great dukes and kings – and this parallels what we see in the Islamic world. It was not the *ʿayyārs* alone who were unjustly exacting money from the poor and the middle class; we are told explicitly, more than once, that everybody else of any social or political standing was doing it too, from Turkish officials to the "*sulṭān*."

One might well wonder why, such being the case, scholars have not defined other societal positions (such as "*sulṭān*," for instance) as 'bandits' or proletarian ruffians as they have done with the *ʿayyārs*. The reason for this lack of consistency, of course, is that scholars feel that they understand the role and meaning of, say, a Turkish *ʿamīd*; therefore, regardless of how many of these men they have seen accused of unjust practices in the sources, they do not try to define an *ʿamīd* or a *shiḥna* as a bandit.

In the case of the *ʿayyārs*, on the other hand, since none of the early scholars trying to define the term from scratch was reading the more courtly literature – written almost entirely in Persian – they accepted unquestioningly the scathing remarks of the Arabic chroniclers, simply took at face value the latter's fulminations against the *ʿayyārūn*, and interpreted these according to their own understanding of what kind of people, and what layer of **modern** society, engages in such practices. What they have done is, in essence, equivalent to defining the word 'king' from Gregory VII's definition of the word given in the epigraph to this chapter. While such an approach can tell us a lot about the attitudes of certain segments of medieval society towards kings and secular rulers generally, or about the practices of certain kings, it completely misses the prime function and essence of kingship. In the same way, by their uncritical attitude toward clerical remarks regarding the *ʿayyārūn*, modern scholars have completely misapprehended who and what the *ʿayyārs* were, and the role they played in society.

This is not to say that lower-class crime did not exist; merely that this is not what the *ʿayyārs* were nor what they were engaging in – common crime normally does not interest our sources. Again, this closely parallels what one finds in the medieval European record:

> Of course, ordinary crimes of the sort to be expected – robbery, assault, and the like – and committed by the most ordinary farmers and carpenters, clearly [occurred] … Yet the common concern of our evidence points unmistakably in another direction. What particularly worries all our witnesses is not primarily common or garden crime … but the violence of knights … As Europeans moved into one of the most significant periods

16 Cahen notes the *ʿayyār* imposition of protection money "which, *following the example of certain great men*, they extended over the sūqs for the sake of the spoils that fell to them." (s. v. "Futuwwa", *EI²*, cited in Chapter One; emphasis added)

> of growth and change in their early history, they increasingly found the proud, heedless violence of the knights, their praise for settling any dispute by force, for acquiring any desired goal by force on any scale attainable, an intolerable fact of social life … chivalry could be praised to the heavens at the same time it could be so feared as a dark and sinister force …[17]

Keeping this contemporaneous historical context in mind, we are better able to understand *ʿayyār* activities that strike the modern Western mind as discordant or alien to chivalric conduct.

There is a description, for instance, in the Persian mystical treatise *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* regarding the beginnings of the career of the illustrious Sufi and important member of the volunteer holy warrior (*mutaṭawwiʿ*) tradition, Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ:[18]

> *shāh* of the people of the [Divine] presence ... Abū ʿAlī Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ, among the *ṣaʿālīk*[19] of the Sufis, and among their great ones … In the beginning he was an *ʿayyār*, and he held the road [*rāh dāshtī*] between Marv and Bāvard. He had at all times an inclination for virtue, and magnanimity and chivalrousness were joined in his nature, such that if there was a woman in a body of travelers he would not attack it, nor would he take the goods of anyone who was of narrow means; he let remain something with each one in proportion to his means, until the time when a [certain] merchant went from Marv. They said to [the merchant]: "Take a guard, because Fuḍayl is on the road." He said: "I have heard that he is a God-fearing man."[20]

The text goes on to inform us that this intelligent man hired a Qurʾān reader instead of a guard to intone the holy text aloud during the journey; Fuḍayl became a penitent upon hearing the words of the Qurʾān, gave up his old life and the world generally, and headed off to become a Sufi ascetic in Mecca.[21] Nicholson translates the key words "*rāh dāshtī*" as "practicing brigandage,"[22] but that would be, rather, "*rāh zadan*". "Holding the road" probably means here just what it says: that Fuḍayl commanded or commandeered control of the road, either at his own or someone else's behest, and took a toll or protection money (whichever one chooses to call it) for keeping the road safe. In both Christendom and the Islamic world at this time, this was a very common practice among knights, and one universally loathed and condemned by everyone else.[23]

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17 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 28-29.

18 *Vide supra*, Chapter Two.

19 Nicholson translates this as "paupers." Like the word *ʿayyār*, *ṣaʿālīk* is another unclear and poorly understood term. The present author does not presume to define it.

20 Al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjub*, p. 120.

21 This is yet another example of the close sufi-*ʿayyār* connection we discussed in the previous chapter.

22 R. A. Nicholson, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, p. 97.

23 For merchant and peasant complaints in the European context about the illegal lordly and knightly imposition of tolls and exactions, *vide* Bisson, *Tormented Voices*, pp. 23, 72, 85, and so forth. Even when toll-taking was practised by someone with an undisputed, rather than a self-arrogated, right to do so (e. g. the king), payment was grudging and evasion common

The line between legitimate and illegitimate violence was far blurrier in the Muslim world during the period we are examining (800-1055); for, in contrast to the High Medieval European example, the trend during this period was *not* toward greater centralization and development of the state, but rather toward greater fragmentation and centrifugalisation.[24] In the tenth century, "as far as military affairs are concerned, there was no direct rule, not even in the central lands controlled by the Sāmānids." There are instead "strata" of intermediaries – both the *dihqāns* and "religious dignitaries and leaders of religiously legitimated (and at least sometimes religiously motivated) fighters."[25]

This point – the great weakness of the state, and the limited extent to which it was able to provide security – is exceedingly important, because it creates the historical context necessary for comprehending the consequent existence of the societal forces that arose to fill in this gap militarily – Paul's "legitimierte Gewalt." This was an era which regularly saw official governmental troops supplemented by extra-governmental paramilitary organisations, in many cases with the blessing of both the government itself and of the larger society. Recognising the large role played by extra-governmental forces in this period, however, goes against the common instinct of scholars to focus overwhelmingly on the *mamlūk* slave-soldier institution and to view it, in effect, as the only legitimate military force (with the exception of the Buyids' Daylamite troops) from the ninth century onwards. The corollary of this strong focus on the *mamlūks* has been that the native Muslims are viewed as having been passive sheep.[26]

While it is true that the military slaves known as *mamlūks* were undoubtedly central to Islamic society, they were never the only force in the field, least of all in the troubled times between the beginning of ʿAbbāsid *faineance* and the com-

(for examples of evasion of kingly tolls, see M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300-900*, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 275; 678). In the Islamic context, note for example the tradition, cited in Anon., *The sea of precious virtues (Baḥr al-Favā'id): a medieval Islamic mirror for princes*, tr. and ed. Julie Scott Meisami, Salt Lake City, 1991, p. 139: "When you see a toll-taker, draw your sword and kill him;" for more inveighing against toll – and tithe-taking, *vide ibid.*, p. 150.

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

25 Paul, *The State and the Military*, pp. 9-10.

26 See, for instance, M. Cook, "Islam: A Comment," in *Europe and the Rise of Capitalism*, ed. J. Baechler *et alii*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 132-133: "... the systematic tendency [was] for military force in Islamic history to be imported from outside civil society ... With regard to the *mamlūk* phenomenon, we have to do with a pattern that has again been remarkably prominent in Islamic history – it lasted from the ninth into the twentieth century, and in its heyday extended from Spain to central Asia. It is rather as if the core of the Hanoverian troops at the battle of Culloden had been black slaves, freshly imported from West Africa in each generation ... To put the point the other way round: it is remarkably hard to find in Islamic history instances of what might be called citizen armies – armies locally recruited, by a state identified with the area in question, from a settled population that was not tribal. (One of the rare exceptions is perhaps the military basis of the Ṣaffārid state in ninth-century Sīstān.)"

ing of the Saljuqs. Jürgen Paul has drawn attention to this crucial point in his response to the questions of Boaz Shoshan and others regarding the alleged absence of military and social initiative commonly attributed by researchers to native Muslim populations in the medieval period:[27]

> ... It has not been proved that Muslims, town dwellers and even rural people, were not, at least at times, in some places and to a certain extent, able, and sometimes even entitled, to look after their affairs (including problems of internal and external security). The stress laid on military slavery tends to obfuscate the degree to which free Muslims wielded weapons.[28]

Paul also subsequently demonstrated empirically that the Eastern lands of the Caliphate, at least, witnessed a wide array of native-born, free Muslim leadership groups and initiatives, particularly armed ones,[29] confirming in this both the tenor of Mottahedeh's research and Bulliet's observation that "Popular political quietism and secure, bureaucratized, imperial rule … have no place in the history of this period."[30] This whole question has otherwise been terribly underresearched, no doubt partly because such groups of armed free Muslims appear to have been most prominent in precisely those periods of Islamic history (the Ṣaffārid, Sāmānid, Būyid and Ghaznavid eras) that have been most neglected by modern scholars.[31] The persistent testimony in our sources (some of which we shall be examining below) regarding military forces comprising large groups of armed *mutaṭawwiʿa* and *ʿayyārān*, in the Sāmānid period in particular, tend to confirm Paul's analysis and his evidence, for these groups were clearly not composed of slave warriors.

In short, to properly categorize the *ʿayyārs*, we must first understand and contextualize their violence historically, particularly in those cases where such violence met with the disapproval of the religious clerics, the *ʿulamā'*. For it is important to remember that not every case of *ʿayyār* violence occurred during the course of internecine civil warfare (*fitna*), nor did every such exercise of force

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27 *Vide e. g.* B. Shoshan, "The 'Politics of Notables' in Medieval Islam," *Asian and African Studies* 20 (1986), p. 210: "Why is [it] that despite the uninterrupted existence of urban life in the House of Islam, town dwellers were not entitled nor were they able to claim the right to handle their own finances and taxation, to supervise public works, to decide about matters such as fortifications and food provisions, to control weights and measures in the markets and, above all, to make war and conclude peace."

28 Paul, *The State and the Military*, p. 5.

29 *Vide* the section on "legitimate" and "illegitimate" movements in Paul's *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler*, pp. 93-139.

30 R. Bulliet, "The Political-Religious History of Nishapur in the Eleventh Century," D. S. Richards, ed. *Islamic Civilisation 950-1150*, p. 71. Mottahedeh's entire monograph, *Loyalty and Leadership*, is an analysis of the pervasive societal urge to band together into extra-governmental common associations during this period.

31 It is thus not surprising that Paul, one of the very few researchers to have extensively studied the Sāmānid period, should have been the one to have raised this question.

meet with clerical disapproval. Even during those years and in the same sources where the *ʿayyārs* are excoriated, we still find clear cases of the *ʿayyārs* acting as volunteer holy warriors, *mutaṭawwiʿa*, particularly in "commanding the good and forbidding wrong" (*al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf wa'l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*), in a manner approved by the authors of those same sources.

One such example of *ʿayyārūn* acting as a military force for the good, at least in the eyes of the chroniclers, can be found in the year 265/878f. In this year the Arab tribes of the area around Dimimmā[32] murdered Jaʿlān the *ʿayyār* because "he used to go out to protect the caravans." Moreover, the government (*al-sulṭān*) was irked enough by the assassination of this *ʿayyār* to send out "a group of the *mawālī*" in search of the beduin perpetrators.[33] Here, then, we see an *ʿayyār* engaged in protecting the roads – one wonders whether he took tolls, legally or illegally, for his services. In any case, it certainly appears as though his activities were officially sanctioned, at least *post facto*.

We can find other cases of *ʿayyārs* acting for the common welfare that were clearly independent of organized authority, however. In the year 352/963 there was a power struggle between Sayf al-Dawla b. Ḥamdān, ruler of the city of Ḥarrān, and his nephew Hibatallāh. The latter came to the people of Ḥarrān, pretended his uncle was dead, and induced them to swear an oath of allegiance to him. Sayf al-Dawla then sent his slave Najā to Ḥarrān seeking Hibatallāh, who fled to Mosul. Najā, as a punishment for the city's innocent support of Hibatallāh, fined Ḥarrān one million dirhams. As a result, the inhabitants

> … brought out their possessions; everything that was worth a *dīnār* [they sold] for a *dirham*, for all the people of the city were selling; there was no one among them to buy because they were being mulcted, so the companions of Najā bought whatever they wanted. The people of the city became poor, and Najā went to Mayyāfāriqīn, leaving Ḥarrān unprotected without a governor; so the *ʿayyārūn* ruled over its people …"[34]

Here, again, the *ʿayyārs* are not in any way being portrayed as exploitative or lawless; on the contrary, they stepped into the leadership vacuum when Ḥarrān was left without a governor, thereby saving the city from anarchy.

In the preceding chapter, we noted the royal author of the *Qābūs Nāmah*'s exhortation to his son to be an *ʿayyār*. This is not the only historical instance of royal *ʿayyārī*; the eponymous founder of the Sāmānid dynasty, Sāmān himself, is proudly proclaimed by a sympathetic chronicler to have begun his illustrious career when, having been moved by a poem exhorting him to greatness, he therefore "became occupied with *ʿayyārī*. After a short time he became ruler over the town of Ashnās."[35] This passage is particularly intriguing because it comes from

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[32] According to Yāqūt (*Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. 2, p. 471), "A large town on the Euphrates near to Baghdad ... A large group of *ahl al-ḥadīth* and others traces its ancestry to it."

[33] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 9, p. 543; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 327.

[34] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, pp. 547-548; Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 2, p. 200.

[35] Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīda*, pp. 376-377.

an anti-Ṣaffārid source, one which is very careful never to refer to the Ṣaffārids as *ʿayyārs*. The fact that it has reserved this term for the Sāmānids, for whom it entertains nothing but approbation, reinforces the sense one has that "*ʿayyār*" must have been a positive, complimentary term at this time. It is also clear from the context of this and other Sāmānid-period references that *ʿayyārī* is primarily connected to knightliness, to the bearing of arms in a military – not a professional bandit – context.

Thus, the same source, when speaking of the Sāmānid ruler Naṣr b. Aḥmad, mentions Naṣr's cousin and rival Abū ʿAlī Ilyās, "who in the beginning engaged in *ʿayyārī*. He became powerful by gaining mastery over Kirmān, and he reigned over it for thirty-seven years."[36] This same Ilyās is also depicted as acting in a highly chivalric manner when fighting with the Būyids, who were trying to wrest control of Kirmān from him. When the puzzled Daylamites inquire why he is treating them so well, Ilyās responds: "During the day, you are my enemies … but at night, in this realm you are my guests; from *muruwwa* I proffer hospitality."[37]

The *ʿayyārūn* are reported, moreover, in several different sources as having continued to play an integral role in the Sāmānid military forces. One curious eleventh-century Arabic work, *al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf*,[38] deals with an incident occurring in Bukhārā under the Sāmānids. In the episode in question, the ruler of China sent envoys to the Sāmānid ruler Naṣr b. Aḥmad. Naṣr sent a commander to meet and escort them, accompanied by *muṭṭawwiʿa*.[39]

The glory of the Sāmānids, their riches, and their multitude of intrepid fighters, are expatiated upon. When the envoys and their escort reach Bukhārā,

> The flags of Bukhārā came out. Bukhārā had one thousand seven hundred banners, and between two hundred and a thousand *ʿayyārs* went out with each flag, *ʿayyārs* alone [*ʿayyārīn khāṣṣat*^{an}], between the standards of the *ghaza*.[40] They [the emissaries] looked at the banners lined up in rows, covering the earth, so that neither cavalryman nor infantryman could be seen for the banners.[41]

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36 Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīda*, p. 380.

37 Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīda*, p. 412.

38 Al-Qāḍī Aḥmad b. al-Rashīd b. al-Zubayr (attributed), *al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf*, ed. M. Ḥamīd Allāh, Kuwait, 1959.

39 Other sources as well confirm that the *mutaṭawwiʿa* were active in Sāmānid campaigns against the infidels; *vide* e. g. Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 7, p. 533, for an account of Ismāʿīl's campaign in 291/903f. against the Turks with the *mutaṭawwiʿa*.

40 The word could be either "*ghazā*" – the raids on infidels, or "*ghuzā*" – the holy warriors themselves. It is also possible to translate the passage "aside from the standards of the holy warriors." In any case, the meaning is the same: the *ʿayyārūn* are in some way connected with the holy warriors in the official Sāmānid forces.

41 *al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf*, p. 145. Note that the English translation of Ghāda al-Ḥijjāwī al-Qaddūmī (*The Book of Gifts and Rarities*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996) is inaccurate here on the most crucial point.

The envoys then walk through the city, which is adorned with silk and costly fabrics, and see more magnificent and awe-inspiring sights. They are convinced that "There cannot be a greater king in all Islamdom."[42]

There are several important points to note in conjunction with this passage. Obviously, if a ruler wants to impress people with his magnificence and military prowess he does not trot out his highwaymen and brigands for an organized exhibition. The fact that the *ʿayyārs* took part in this demonstration of the ruler's might – and in a very prominent fashion – suggests, on the contrary, that they had a specific and valued place either at court or in the army. This role, moreover, is explicitly stated to have been connected to holy warfare. Also, the *ʿayyārs* are here said to have comprised both cavalry and infantry – and one must have money to be a cavalryman.

Under this same Naṣr b. Aḥmad (who had great difficulties with various rebellious relatives),[43] the *ʿayyārān* continued to play an important, legitimate military role. For instance, the *ʿayyārān* of Herat apparently constituted an important part of the pro-Naṣr forces resisting the takeover of the city by Naṣr's brother and rival, Abū Zakariyyāʾ Yaḥyā b. Aḥmad b. Ismāʿīl; they are singled out for exemplary punishment in order to break the back of the resistance to Abū Zakariyyāʾ's rule:

> ... the amīr Abū Zakariyyāʾ arrived and gave the governorship to Qaratekin [?], and in the city there was great disturbance, so they seized [some] of the *ʿayyārān* and killed all of them [viz. all of the ones they had seized], and they set on fire the gates of the market-places of the town and the fortress, and they destroyed one of the walls in order to render the city tranquil.[44]

The Persian literary sources from this period confirm the historical accounts. We mentioned Rūdakī's poem already in the last chapter, but the *Shāhnāmah* as well contains an *ʿayyār*. We find there a story about an indigent man named Haftvād and the mythical worm that gives him preternatural luck and success. In the course of the story we are introduced to Haftvād's son Shāhūy, described as "ill-made and ill-spoken."[45] Firdawsī goes on, though, to describe the brave fighting of Shāhūy and his army. After Shāh Ardashīr has managed to kill the luck-

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42 *al-Dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf*, p. 148.

43 *Vide* R. Frye, *Bukhara: The Medieval Achievement*, Costa Mesa, 1996, pp. 51-52.

44 al-Isfizārī, *Rawḍat al-jannāt fī Ta'rīkh madīnat Harāt*, vol. 1, p. 385. The *ʿayyārān* apparently played an important part in the armies of Naṣr's brothers and rivals as well. Ibn al-Athīr (*al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 209) reports that in the year 317/929 there was a jailbreak in Bukhārā, which released the three brothers of the Sāmānid ruler al-Saʿīd Naṣr b. Aḥmad, "with a group of those who were with them of the Daylamites, the ʿAlids, and the *ʿayyārūn*. They gathered together, and there gathered to them those who supported them from the army; their leader was Sharwīn al-Jīlī and others from among the officers." *ʿAyyārs* here are obviously important, key people – on a par with Daylamite military figures, ʿAlids and army officers.

45 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, Moscow, 1968, vol. 7, p. 145.

bringing worm by stratagem, he vanquishes Haftvād's army and takes Haftvād prisoner along with "Shāhūy his *ʿayyār*, who was his eldest son and his general (*sālār*)."[46] Here, *ʿayyār* must mean some kind of military commander, roughly parallel to *sālār*. It seems unlikely that either Shāhūy's social background or his being uncouth is of significance; the word does not appear in the context of his personal qualities. The fact is that he is not called an *ʿayyār* until he leads armies, and the word appears in close proximity to *sālār* as well.

One can extrapolate a fair amount from these historical examples – for instance, that *ʿayyārs* constituted a legitimate military force, one the ruling dynasty was proud to belong to. When added to the testimony we saw in the previous chapters regarding *ʿayyār* connections to volunteer Sunni religious warfare, to Sufism, and to chivalry (*futuwwa/javānmardī*), the picture becomes much clearer, and stands in sharp contrast to the typical view of *ʿayyārī* currently prevalent among scholars, and to the largely-negative depiction in the Arabic, clerically-authored chronicles from which that view was lifted wholesale.

But if this is what *ʿayyārī* was and stood for, were the Baghdadi *ʿulamā'* who seem to be so critical of the *ʿayyārūn* unaware of all this? That they were, on the contrary, well-aware that there was more to the *ʿayyārūn* than they chose to include in their chronicles becomes apparent in the passages from the chroniclers cited in the previous chapter regarding *ʿayyār courtoisie* toward women. Given the awareness of clerical authors of this aspect of *ʿayyār* behaviour, and of the principles of *futuwwa* motivating the *ʿayyārūn*, one must ask why the portrayals of the *ʿayyārūn* in these authors' historical accounts are so negative, to the point where Ibn al-Jawzī, for instance, never mentions in his chronicle (which, as we have just seen in the previous chapter, he freely does elsewhere) that there was any kind of ideology involved in their way of life. Indeed, one could very well take the issue a step further and ask why the attitude of virtually **all** the Arabic-writing clerics (for instance, al-Tanūkhī) toward the *ʿayyārūn* is so condemnatory, while the Persian books of courtly provenance, such as the *Qābūs Nāmah* and *Samak-i ʿayyār*, are, on the contrary, so laudatory.

Close consideration of the problem shows that Jürgen Paul's explanation of conflicting loyalties, which we addressed briefly in Chapter Two, is key to answering the question:

> If the state, in order to build military might, has to rely upon active participation of non-statal groups, it will most probably have to look for a legitimizing rationale: it has to give reasons for participation in military activities that are liable to convince a satisfactory number of volunteers and to ensure sufficient motivation ... Loyalty, however, is not to the state as such and not even to the ruler, but to the legitimizing purpose and eventually to the persons embodying this purpose (leaders of volunteer troops or specialists for legitimation as [*sic*] e. g. religious leaders ...).[47]

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46 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, vol. 7, p. 153.
47 Paul, *The State and the Military*, p. 6.

That is, the various paramilitary groups considered by both society and the rulers to be legitimate always had their own agenda and loyalties. So long as their aims coincided with those of the authorities, matters ran smoothly and relations between the two sides were harmonious. Wherever the loyalty and the agenda of these groups conflicted, however, with state interests (as in the many cases where Sunni holy warriors wreaked havoc in major cities by all-out warfare upon the Shiʿites), the ruler and his supporters condemned the groups.[48]

Now we begin to understand one of the sources of *ʿulamāʾ* objection to the *ʿayyārūn*; for perhaps the most important supporters of the idea and theory of central government, at least from the tenth century onwards, were the mainstream religious clerics. The reason for this was not that the clerics necessarily approved of the rulers, but that they abhorred *fitna* and civil disturbances.[49] Thus, it should not surprise us that in every case where groups such as the *ʿayyārūn* were in conflict with officialdom, the clerics employ harsh words in condemning them.[50] The incident cited above of the holy warriors and the havoc they wreaked in Rayy in the year 355/966 is a case in point: if the *mutaṭawwiʿa* had simply obediently proceeded to the frontier and fought infidels, no one would have had any problem with them.

According to the government and the supporters of the ideal of central government (i. e. the *ʿulamāʾ*), the violent power of the holy warriors should have been obedient to the established authorities, even if those authorities preferred to use the *kharāj* to pay their heretical Shiʿite troops, hold large parties, give political payouts, or use this money in whatever other way they preferred, rather than hand it over for use in the Jihad during this time of dire Islamic need, when Tarsus had just fallen to the Christian enemy. Once the holy warriors used that violent power against government officials, in order to fight what they saw as an evil within (i. e. the withholding of the money from the Jihad – by Shiʿite

48 Mottahedeh seems to make a similar point: "If, however, 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." (Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 175)

49 Gibb attributed this to economic reasons: "Partly, I think, this can be related to the growing prosperity of the cities and the expansion of a mercantile bourgeoisie who feared a revolution above all things, and wanted only to see the control of the central government (or at least of locally organized political institutions) remain undisturbed." (H. A. R. Gibb, "Government and Islam under the Early ʿAbbasids: The Political Collapse of Islam," *L'Élaboration de L'Islam: Colloque de Strasbourg 12-14 Juin 1959*, ed. C. Cahen, Paris, 1961, p. 118). Although Gibb's specific context was the political quiescence of Shiʿites, his remarks are equally applicable to the Sunni *ʿulamāʾ*, who belonged overwhelmingly to the mercantile bourgeoisie to which he refers. Mottahedeh, too, notes the *haute-bourgeosie* background of most of the *ʿulamāʾ*, in *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 135.

50 It is therefore significant that all of our chronicles of events for this period were composed by people who were either religious clerics (e. g. Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Kathīr), government functionaries (e. g. Tanūkhī, Miskawayh), or both.

Daylamites, no less), once they challenged the authority of the central authorities, the *ʿulamāʾ* became opposed to these people. Yet, as Paul pointed out, any non-slave who wielded power had his own loyalties; these loyalties inevitably conflicted not only with the ideas of at least some government functionaries, but also with the ideas of the clerics.

In other words, the dichotomy that we find between Arabic and Persian sources was not an ethnic or linguistic difference, but rather a divide in mentality. Whereas the Arabic sources are almost entirely clerically- and bureaucratically-authored chronicles, many of the Persian ones are, in contrast, authored by men of the court. The divide is, in effect, to use Islamic terminology, between "men of the pen" on the one hand and "men of the sword" on the other. The social provenance of these sources, the milieux in which they were written, the difference in goals, interests and values between the clerics and bureaucrats on the one hand and the courtiers on the other, accounts for the gulf in outlook across which the Arabic and the Persian sources confront one another on the issue of the *ʿayyārs*.

This striking contrast in outlook is found throughout the medieval world, both Islamic and Christian, between the clerical and the courtly – and this brings us to yet another reason, related to the first yet distinct from it, for this great divergence in outlook between the sources authored by clerics and those authored by courtiers. Ibn al-Jawzī's problem with the *ʿayyārūn* lies in his deep ambivalence – in the ambivalence of all clerics – toward *futuwwa* itself, and its attitude toward violence.

The ʿAyyārūn *and Violence*

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, chivalry and violence, despite the rosy glow in which Western popular culture has enshrouded the chivalric knight, are inseparable in both the Medieval West and the Islamic world. In the words of one scholar of the Medieval West,

> However glorious and refined its literature, however elevated its ideals, however enduring its link with Western ideas of gentlemanliness … we must not forget that knighthood was nourished on aggressive impulses, that it existed to use its shining armour and sharp-edged weaponry in acts of showy and bloody violence.[51]

Moreover, this violence was not something that was conveniently contained and heroically controlled, a weapon directed only against the outward enemies of the societies in which the chivalric knights lived; on the contrary, it posed a constant and ever-present threat to and burden upon public order, and to the peace and

51 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, p. 5.

well-being of the civilian populations upon whom the knights frequently preyed. "… In the problem of public order the knights themselves played an ambivalent, problematic role. … The issues are built into some of the very ideals of chivalry, not merely in the lamentable inability of fallible men to attain them."[52]

While it is perhaps impossible to answer the question of the extent to which society's warriors engaged in pillage, extortion, and coercion rather than in chivalrously defending the weak and battling the infidel, this question is also irrelevant, for it is clear enough that the former behaviour was sufficiently pervasive, troubling, and widespread to figure prominently in the non-knightly records of the time, in both Christendom and the Islamic world. In the words of one scholar, "Were knights threatening? Or only some knights? There were enough of them, even if not all knights were terrifying, to ensure that their habits bore heavily on the social outlook ... Violence was familiar and constant ..."[53]

In other words, despite Ibn al-Jawzī's protestations to the contrary, the clerical problem with the *ʿayyārūn* did not stem from an incongruence between the chivalric ideals of the *ʿayyārs* and the effects its actual practice had;

> The fighting, let us remember, was not merely defensive, not simply carried out at the royal behest in defense of recognized national borders, not only on crusade, not really (despite their self-deceptions) in the defense of widows, orphans, and the weak, never (so far as the historian can discover) against giants, ogres, or dragons. They fought each other as enthusiastically as any common foe; perhaps even more often they brought violence to villagers, clerics, townspeople, and merchants.[54]

It is precisely this power of coercion, employed against "clerics, townspeople, and merchants," that the Islamic sources deplore in the *ʿayyārūn*. Merely demonstrating that a plausible parallel exists does not, of course, prove the validity of that parallel; that is, when one examines some of the more random or self-interested violence of the *ʿayyārs*, the fact that medieval European knights and lords engaged in similar behaviour does not in itself prove that *ʿayyārs* were not ruffians or bandits, it merely proves that the flower of European chivalry frequently acted in a ruffianly fashion.

For let there be no mistake about this point: there are certainly examples of brutal *ʿayyār* behaviour that seem to have had no deeper motive than self-interest and unbridled willfulness – from instances (albeit in an exceedingly salacious source) of homosexual pedophilic gang-rape,[55] to cases of *ʿayyār* plunder behind

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52 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 3.

53 Bisson, *Tormented Voices*, pp. 64-65.

54 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 8.

55 Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Tīfāshī, *Nuzhat al-albāb fī-mā lā yūjadu fī-kitāb*, ed. Jamāl Jumʿa, London, 1992, p. 288. Presumably the *ʿayyārs* did not think forcing a young male would violate their code of behaviour in the same way that comparable violence toward a woman would have done, assuming that the whole incident was not simply an invention of Tīfāshī's lascivious imagination.

which the reader can discern no greater principle than profit;[56] and killing – including the killing of *ʿulamāʾ* – for unspecified reasons.[57]

Interestingly, though, this sort of completely self-interested or arrogant violence, in which the reader cannot discern any political or ideological motive, is far rarer among the *ʿayyārs* than among the knights and nobles of high medieval Europe. A careful examination of most of the Arabic chronicles' accounts of Baghdad in the tenth and eleventh centuries – and nowhere is the violence of the *ʿayyārūn* more apparent than in these accounts – reveals two characteristics of *ʿayyār* violence that have been overlooked by scholars, and which serve to confirm that the current scholarly paradigm of the *ʿayyārs* as lower-class criminals is simply incorrect.

First, like much European chivalric violence, *ʿayyār* violence frequently occurred in the context of power struggles within the ruling elite. That is, the *ʿayyārs* are allied with political or military officials or other powers of the ruling elite during their frequent clashes with rivals, and the *ʿayyārs* are apparently involved in such clashes as some kind of allied or auxiliary force. Sometimes the clashes are with the forces of the organized political authorities – examples of the clash between the autochthonous forces and outsider rulers predicted by Jürgen Paul – and appear to be a struggle for dominance; occasionally (as in the case of the *mutaṭawwiʿa*'s clash with the Buyid governor of Rayy) we are given the underlying reasons and causes; most frequently, however, we are not. Since it

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56 E. g. the events of the year 315/927f. (Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 1, p. 179; Ibn al-*Athīr*, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 173), when the *ʿayyārs* are said to have been concerned only with realizing their own opportunities for profit and plunder. Note, however, that in this case there was a Qarmatian invasion of ʿIraq which had almost reached Baghdad; one cannot discount the possibility that the behaviour and disorder the sources so deplore was actually due to typical *ʿayyār* harassment of Shiʿites; this would not be the only instance in which the sources neglect to mention this salient point (*vide infra*). This surmise is strengthened by Miskawayh's casual reference to the fact that, **after** the authorities issued their decree suppressing the *ʿayyārs* and the latter went into hiding, the populace of three Sunni neighbourhoods that were prone to battle with adjacent Shiʿite quarters (Bāb al-Muḥawwal – described by LeStrange, *Baghdad During the ʿAbbasid Caliphate,* p. 337, as "inhabited by Sunnis who were always at feud with their Shiʿah neighbours ..."; Nahr Ṭābiq, *ibid.,* p. 84; and al-Qallāʾīn [on its Sunni composition *vide Yāqūt*, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. 5, p. 322]) locked up their possessions, thus implying that these Sunni neighbourhoods felt **less** secure after the suppression of the *ʿayyārs*.

57 Ibn al-Athīr, (*al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 483), when discussing Tughril Beg's conquest and plunder of Nīshāpūr in 1040, remarks: "The damage of the *ʿayyārūn* had already been great; their power strengthened, and the misfortune they inflicted upon the people of Nishāpūr increased: they plundered property, killed people, committed breaches of the private family quarters [probably in search of hidden treasures], and did everything they wanted to without any impediment preventing them from doing so, and no obstacle to hold them back. But when Toghril Beg entered the city the *ʿayyārūn* feared him and desisted from what they had been doing; the people [*al-nās*] became calm and enjoyed tranquillity." For an example of the *ʿayyār* killing of an *ʿālīm* for which the source states no cause see e. g. Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī b. Yusuf al-Fīrūzābādī al-Shīrāzī, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ*, Baghdad,, 1356/1937, p. 98.

is improbable that members of the elite would not have been able to find any force or allies to back their claims other than proletarian bandits, or that they would have wanted to be associates and familiars of such people in the manner we see depicted in the sources, this type of alliance once again provides a good indication that the current scholarly consensus regarding the *ʿayyārs'* social status stands in need of revision.

Second, unlike European chivalric violence, *ʿayyār* violence seems frequently to have possessed an ideological component that the chroniclers do not remark upon, but which is unmistakable from the context: *ʿayyār* activity, when it was not a partisan battle for one political leader or another, almost invariably occurred in the context of the sectarian conflicts between Sunnis and Shiʿites that were rife, most prominently in ʿIraq, during this period, and the neighborhoods that suffered from *ʿayyār* exactions and depredations were invariably Shiʿite ones.

Both of these aspects – the sectarian and the *ʿayyār* connections with officialdom or the elite – can be seen in one of the early appearances of *ʿayyār* violence in Baghdad, during the period of the Baghdadi strongman Ibn Rāʾiq, whom the caliph al-Rāḍī had made *amīr al-umarāʾ* in return for his assuming all the expenses of government.[58] In the year 327/938f., we are told, Ibn Rāʾiq appointed one of his officers, Ibn Yazdād, over the *shurṭa*, or police force, in Baghdad.[59] The latter, in turn,

> … appointed a group of the *ʿayyārīn*, gave them many *dīnārs* … received them favourably and promised them whatever they wished. Then he sent to Abū'l-Qāsim al-Kalwadhānī and took from him money that he had gathered for the caliph [*al-sulṭān*]; and the *ʿayyārūn* ruled over the city …[60]

Here the *ʿayyārs* are very clearly an officially appointed group, part of the *shurṭa*. That they abused their power and office, and had to be disciplined by Ibn Yazdād,[61] does not change this fact.[62]

The *ʿayyārs* apparently continued to be strongly associated with Ibn Rāʾiq's cause against his rival, the tax-farmer Abū ʿAbdallāh Aḥmad al-Barīdī.[63] A further incident reveals that there was, moreover, a clear religious component to this struggle as well: around the year 330/941f. the Turkish troops revolted against Ibn Rāʾiq and joined al-Barīdī; when news arrived at Baghdad that al-

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58 On Ibn Rāʾiq *vide* Mottahedeh, "The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate in Iran," pp. 83-84.

59 "Originally the term probably meant simply 'choice troops,' but it soon developed by usage to mean police or security forces." Kennedy, *Armies of the Caliphs*, p. 13.

60 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī, *Kitāb al-Awrāq*, Beirut, 1401/1982, p. 219.

61 Ṣūlī informs us (*Kitāb al-awrāq*, p. 220) that "the power of the *ʿayyārūn* grew stronger in Baghdad, and they took the people's garments from the mosques and roads, until Ibn Yazdād rode, took a group of them, and beat them with whips …"

62 Note that almost exactly one hundred years later, after the *ʿayyārs* have already been the cause of terrible sectarian violence and much ruin in Baghdad, we still find the authorities anxious to draft them into the police force (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 231).

63 *Vide* Mottahedeh, "The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate in Iran," p. 84.

Barīdī intended to come to Baghdad – with Qarmatian Shiʿite troops – for a trial of strength, Ibn Rā'iq, the Caliph, the caliph's son, the vizier and the army set forth,

> Qurʾāns and the *qurrāʾ* before them, and called upon the people to go out to fight the Barīdīs; then they withdrew to his house … Then a group of the *ʿayyārīn* gathered with unsheathed knives in all the eastern quarters of Baghdad; and on Friday, Banū Barīdī were cursed from the *minbar* in the Friday mosques in Baghdad.[64]

During the course of the ongoing struggle between Ibn Rāʾiq and al-Barīdī, the latter at one point had the upper hand and appointed one of his own slaves to head the *shurṭa* of Baghdad; one of the new police-chief's first actions was to arrest the *ʿayyārūn*: "... he summoned the *duʿʿār*, arrested a group of the *ʿayyārs*, and went about the two sides [of Baghdad]; then the city quieted down after great rioting."[65] Furthermore, as part of this same struggle, in the year 330/941f., "Ibn Rāʾiq summoned the *ʿayyārīn*," although the source considers this to have been "a great error of his judgment." Apparently, al-Ṣūlī did not like the tactic Ibn Rāʾiq had them employ; in order to create havoc in Baghdad so that al-Barīdī would have difficulty controlling the city, "the *ʿayyārūn* opened the prisons, and this was of the doing of Ibn Rāʾiq, as preparation for what al-Barīdī was planning, in order to create great disorder among the commonalty."[66]

This same combination of an *ʿayyār* alliance with official forces, infused with a religious element, can be seen shortly after the Buyids' takeover of Baghdad in the year 334/945 and their deposition of the Caliph al-Mustakfī soon thereafter, which led to general turmoil as several leaders sought to dislodge the Buyids and restore the dethroned caliph. One of the anti-Buyid leaders "appealed for aid to the general populace and the *ʿayyārs* of Baghdad to battle Muʿizz al-Dawla and the Daylamites"[67] – and, so we are told, succeeded in enlisting a group of them.

The salient point to note is that the *ʿayyārs* seem to have been very well-connected, not only in Ibn Rāʾiq's time, but well afterwards. Thus, in the year 389/999, when there was a very strong rivalry between two Baghdadi notables, and one managed to get his rival arrested and placed in custody in his own house, it is the *ʿayyārs* who serve as his allies and who kill the man for him.[68] While one could argue that perhaps these *ʿayyārs* were merely hired guns, it is impossible to discount the episode of the year 392/1001f., when one Ibn Musāfir al-ʿAyyār, fleeing from a new army commander who was trying to quell the en-

64 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 2, pp. 23-24.

65 Ṣūlī, *Kitāb al-Awrāq*, p. 221. It is unclear who the *duʿʿār* were; one is tempted to speculate that they were perhaps the Shiʿite counterpart to the *ʿayyārūn*.

66 Ṣūlī, *Kitāb al-awrāq*, p. 223. Note, moreover, that on the next page (p. 224) the caliph appears to be on Ibn Rāʾiq's side.

67 Misakwayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 2, p. 91.

68 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl Tajārib al-umam*, vols. 3-4, p. 338. Note that this episode may also be connected to the Sunni-Shiʿi *fitna* of this year (recounted in Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 14).

demic Sunni-Shiʿi warfare (in which, as we shall see, the *ʿayyārs* played a very large role), "took refuge in the house of the *amīn* Abū ʿAbdallāh, and [the latter] received him and hid him."

The army commander (*ʿamīd al-juyūsh*) from whom this *ʿayyār* was fleeing, in order to avoid a confrontation with the *amīn* who was sheltering the fugitive, waited until the *amīn* was out of the house in order to break into it and kill the *ʿayyār*.[69] The *amīn* then remonstrated with the *ʿamīd al-juyūsh*, who apologized. It is difficult to imagine the Baghdadi elite consorting with mere proletarian bandits and offering them extended hospitality inside their houses, or military commanders having to apologize for killing them.

In another episode from this year, which took place in Mosul, both the *ʿayyārs*' political connections and their involvement with political factions are apparent. A man named Ibn al-Ḥīrī was in charge of finances for and then secretary (*kātib*) to the *amīr* of Mosul, who divided the revenues with the Shiʿite ʿUqaylid strongman, Qirwāsh. Ibn al-Hīrī appears to have harboured Sunni religious bigotry toward his ʿUqaylid counterpart: "Ibn al-Ḥīrī displayed arrogance toward [Qirwāsh's *kātib* Abū'l-Ḥusayn b. Shahrūya] in Islam [*bi'l-Islām*] and because his lord was the *amīr*." Finally, piqued over the rivalry, Ibn al-Ḥīrī decided to eliminate Ibn Shahrūya and the tax collector whom the latter had appointed. Since Ibn al-Ḥīrī conveniently "had with him a group of infantry who bore weapons and followed the path of *ʿiyāra*," Ibn al-Ḥīrī used these men to kill Ibn Shahrūya and his protégé.[70] These *ʿayyārs* evidently had an ongoing association with the *kātib*; from the description they seem possibly to have formed part of Ibn al-Ḥīrī's retinue. Note, also, the religious overtones once again – *ʿayyārs* are consistently found on the side of Sunni hostility directed against Shiʿites.

Not only in Mosul and Baghdad, but also in Damascus we see *ʿayyārs* associated with and in the retinue of powerful notables and political leaders. In the year 368/978f. Ḥumaydān or Ḥamdān b. Khirāsh al-ʿUqaylī was named governor of Damascus after having ousted his predecessor by main force. He had difficulties, however, with one of the notables of the city named Qassām:

> ... it was not long until [disagreement] arose between him and Qassām, so that the *ʿayyārūn* from among the companions of Qassām drove [Ḥumaydān] out. He fled from the city, they plundered his house, and the power of Qassām became strong; and Abū Maḥmūd al-Maghribī became governor after Ḥumaydān.[71]

Here we have a specific statement that the *ʿayyārūn* were companions and associates of a leading local notable. As we see in all of the above examples, whenever we are told with whom the *ʿayyārs* associated, those associates are prominent, powerful people – not proletarian outlaws. This does not necessarily mean that

69 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl Tajārib al-umam*, vols. 3-4, p. 439.
70 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl Tajārib al-umam*, vols. 3-4, pp. 444-445.
71 Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 15, p. 248.

the *ʿayyārs* did not also associate with proletarian outlaws – but it is surely significant that the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence in our sources shows the *ʿayyārs* in the context of a very different social milieu entirely. Of course, once the *ʿayyārs* had managed to kindle a really good sectarian *fitna* everybody else usually joined the battle; but in the cases where we have detailed evidence for the course of events, the populace's participation is almost invariably something separate and distinct from the *ʿayyārs'*.

Further confirmation of the explanation of *ʿayyār* violence that we are here positing – namely, that their violence must be contextualized within the endemic violence and extortion practised by the powerful, not by the underclass – can be found in the following revealing anecdote. In the year 417/1026f., in the absence of a Buyid figurehead, "the sway of the Turks in Baghdad grew, and they constantly exacted [money] from people [*aktharū muṣādarat al-nās*]," assessing a special fine upon al-Karkh of 100,000 dinars.

> The matter grew more serious; wickedness increased, and the burning of houses, the alleys, and the markets; the commonalty and the *ʿayyārūn* began to be emboldened, so that they would enter upon a man and demand of him his treasures, **as the ruler [al-ṣulṭān] would do with those whom he mulcted**. So the people [*al-nās*] made gates on the alleys, but nothing helped; there was war between the army and the populace [*al-ʿāmma*], and the army won. They plundered al-Karkh and other places, and took great wealth from it; the good and modest people were destroyed.[72]

We have here an explicit statement that the *ʿayyār* practices so condemned by the sources were, in fact, those practised by the legitimate and undisputed rulers; in other words, what our sources are objecting to is not the behaviour itself, but the arrogation of the prerogative to act in such a fashion; that is, like their slightly later counterparts in Europe, the *ʿayyārs* "usurped lordly powers, imposed uncustomary taxes, and constrained people to the point of capricious violence."[73]

A different source, in its accounts of the events of both this and the previous year, confirms that these *ʿayyār* activities represented some kind of a bid for lordship or challenge to the authority of the Turks, and also shows the *ʿayyārs* as allied to the rest of the local populace (at least the Sunni populace). Ibn al-Jawzī, when narrating the events of the year 416/1025f., states that

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[72] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 353, emphasis added. Christopher Melchert ("The Piety of the Hadith Folk," *International Journal of Middle East Sudies* 34 (2002), p. 434), claims that the chroniclers of this period used the term *ʿāmma* to signify "traditionists": "Chroniclers usually refer to [the ḥadīth folk's] 10th-century successors in Baghdad as the *Ḥanābila* or simply *al-ʿāmma* (the general), periodically rioting against the Shiʿis." Even if the text is here using the term not in Melchert's sense, but rather implying that the *ʿayyārs* were in this case allied with the Sunni commonalty, this does not necessarily indicate that they were themselves "*ʿāmma*;" there are many historical cases from medieval European urban settings (in particular, the municipal revolts) where the military and civilian leadership of a town mobilized the commonalty against their lord.

[73] Bisson, *Tormented Voices*, p. 21.

> The power of the *ʿayyārūn* grew. They would surround people's [*al-nās*] houses both during the day and at night, with lamps and trains of attendants; then they would enter upon the man and demand from him his provisions/treasures [*dhakhāʾir*] and extract them from him by blows, **as the impounders** [*al-muṣādirūn*] **would do**, and the one who called for help would find no helper. They killed openly and let loose against the Turks [? *inbasaṭū ʿalā al-atrāk*], so that the members of the police force left the city, and many of those connected to them were killed ... and the house of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā was burned down in al-Karkh ... The Turks had already burned down Ṭāq al-Ḥarrānī because of the *fitna* that occurred there between them [on the one hand] and the *ʿayyārs* and the commonalty [*al-ʿāmma* on the other].[74]

Not only was this clearly a bid for lordship; these *ʿayyārs* already live and act like lords – note the trains of attendants. Time and again we see the sources commenting on the fact that the *ʿayyārs* were imitating governmental practices and acting in an official manner; nearly thirty year later, in the list of the events of the year 444/1052f., we read that in the midst of a Sunni-Shiʿite *fitna* the "*ʿayyārūn* spread out and held sway, levied taxes on the markets, and took what the governmental officials [*arbāb al-aʿmāl*] used to take."[75]

The account of the complex relations between the *ʿayyārūn* and the Turkish forces continues under the entry for 417/1026f; in this year the Iṣfahlariyya returned to Baghdad, "and corresponded with the *ʿayyārs*, who had multiplied with their [*videlicet*, the Isfahlariyya's] departure from the city."[76] The *ʿayyārs*, however, ignored this goodwill overture, marched to the camp of the cavalry, and proceeded to shout insults at the soldiers. A battle ensued, which lasted an entire day (presumably, the outcome was indeterminate); the next morning the army awoke in a rage, and promptly vented their aggressions and wounded pride by marching to al-Karkh and burning and looting the place.

At this point in the narrative, events become somewhat unclear; we are told that there was great looting in two nearby Sunni neighborhoods, in one of which "the house of Abū Yaʿlā b. al-Mawṣilī, *raʾīs al-ʿayyārīn*, was situated," but the source does not inform us who did this (although it may very well have been the Turkish soldiery). Indeed, Ibn al-Jawzī's account states quite clearly that the *ʿayyārs* played no role at all in the looting of the Sunni neighbourhoods; he writes only of mobs and Turkish soldiery having done so.

No *ʿayyārs* are mentioned at all in this latter part of the account; but what is clear from the earlier part is that they must have been a paramilitary force sufficiently well-organized, trained, and equipped to be a force for the *Iṣfahlariyya* to reckon with – and that the *Iṣfahlariyya* treat them as equals, corresponding with them and (so one can infer from the fact that the *ʿayyārs* are said to have "paid no heed" to this correspondence when they marched out to the *Iṣfahlariyya* camp and began taunting the soldiers) making friendly overtures toward them.

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74 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 175.
75 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 592.
76 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 175.

Nowhere is this equality – and even mutual relations – between the Turkish governmental forces and the independent, autochthonous *ʿayyār* forces more visible than in the accounts of the career of the Baghdadi *ʿayyār* leader of the 420s/1030s, al-Burjumī. The Turks are said not to have interfered with his activities at all, even when these took place within their own neighbourhoods.[77] On the contrary: in the year 424/1032f., when al-Burjumī raided a storehouse, the *Iṣfahlariyya* came out to give him food and drink.[78] In this same year, after a particularly fierce Sunni-Shiʿi *fitna*, the *ʿayyārs* allied with the army in order to expel the Shiʿi Buyid ruler Jalāl al-Dawla to al-Karkh.[79] Also in this same year, the populace of the Shiʿite and Christian neighborhoods al-Ruṣāfa, Bāb al-Ṭāq and Dār al-Rūm were so terrified of al-Burjumī that they no longer dared mention him by name, referring to him instead as "The Commander Abū ʿAlī."[80] Note once again that all of the *ʿayyār* al-Burjumī's victims are non-Sunnis.

The following year, the official in charge of the upper tollhouse [*al-ʿāmil ʿalā al-maʾṣir al-aʿlā*] came to an agreement with al-Burjumī that the latter would receive a percentage of the tolls taken. The official also put at al-Burjumī's disposal two large boats into the bargain, in return for his promising to preserve order in the area.[81] Furthermore, in that same year one finds the *ʿayyārs* completely assuming the local police functions of protecting the city, levying taxes in the markets "which the members of the armed forces would exact, and receiv[ing] that which was due to the commander of the police ... they were addressed as 'commanders'."[82] Again, the description is one of the arrogation of lordship and of law-enforcement functions, not of criminal license.

Even when the *ʿayyārs* are engaged in activities that the chroniclers deplore, we find them in close relations with the Turkish military elite; when wreaking havoc at one point by night in Shiʿite neighborhoods, they are reported to have sheltered during the day in the houses of the Turkish soldiery.[83] Ibn al-Jawzī comments acerbically at one point that "The *ʿayyārs* ruled the city;"[84] and there is every sign that this is precisely what they intended to do. That is, we have here an example of local people, part of a municipal or regional paramilitary force, trying to assume mastery of their own municipal affairs; they come in for attack in the sources when those attempts cause disorder, particularly when *ʿayyār* Sunni mili-

77 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 200.
78 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 233.
79 Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 9, p. 431. After much debate they gave up their insurrection for lack of a suitable alternative candidate and permitted Jalāl al-Dawla to return.
80 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 233.
81 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 239. On the tolls in the Buyid period *vide* Mafizullah Kabir, *The Buwayhid Dynasty of Baghdad (334/946-447/1055)*, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 153-154.
82 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 240.
83 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 245.
84 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 246.

tancy causes or enflames inter-communal warfare between Sunnis and Shiʿites. We shall be returning to this important aspect of *ʿayyār* activities presently.

Moreover, it was not just the Turkish military elite that associated with the *ʿayyārs*. Perhaps the most informative story in terms of revealing with whom the *ʿayyārs* associated is found in al-Tanūkhī's account of a confrontation between the *wazīr* Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī and the Hashimite notables in the wake of a great Sunni-Shiʿite *fitna* that occurred around the year 350/961f. In this account, we find that the *ʿayyārs* were allied with the Sunni Hashimites in a dispute that arose between them and the ʿAlīds.[85]

> ... The *ʿayyārūn* were risen up in Baghdad, and caused a great *fitna*, at whose root was the Banū Hāshim, and they closed the mosque in the City [of al-Manṣūr] and the prayers were not held in it that Friday.
>
> The reason for this was a riot that had occurred between an ʿAbbāsid man and an ʿAlīd man, over wine, in Khandaq Ṭāhir. The ʿAlīd was killed, and his family rose up to avenge him; *fitna* broke out and the *ʿāmma* entered into it. The matter grew worse, until the Daylamites were sent to encamp in the [various] quarters, and the matter was dreadful.
>
> The *fitna* did not die down, so Abū Muḥammad [al-Muhallabī] seized many of the Banū ʿAbbās, the respectable notables [*al-wujūh al-mastūrīn*], the *ʿayyārīn* among them and the *duʿār*, until he had seized among the group of them a number of Hashimite *qāḍis* and witnesses and pious people [*ṣulaḥā'*], and among those whom he seized was Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.[86]

The wazīr Abū Muḥammad then spoke with these men personally,

> … He demanded of them that they name to him the *ʿayyārs* among them, and the *aḥdāth*, and the bearers of knives [*ḥamalat al-sakākīn*], in order that he might seize them, and separate them from the rest, and that he might appoint as his surety the pious ones for the wicked ones, and [that the former] take them [i. e. the latter, the "wicked ones"] into their hands, in order to put out the conflagration of the *fitna*.
>
> The *qāḍī* Abū'l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ the Hashimite was present, and he began to speak apposite words in repudiation of this, and friendship of al-Muhallabī, and he was courteous to him.
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> Then Ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz objected, and spoke words to him of roughness, vanity, and rudeness.[87]

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85 Although the commonalty eventually joined the fray, as inevitably occurred whenever sectarian strife broke out, they were not the instigators, and were clearly a separate group from the *ʿayyārs*. The *ʿayyār*-Sunni notable alliance can be seen in particular in the events of the arrest, and in the refusal of the Hashimite *qāḍī* to name the *ʿayyārs* among the group.

86 Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, vol. 1, p. 86. Note that Ibn al-Jawzī (*al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 14, p. 126) ascribes this *fitna* to the year 349/960f., not 350/961f., and does not mention the *ʿayyārs* at all; merely that there was "a *fitna* between the Sunna and the Shiʿa ... a group of the Banū Hāshim were arrested, and were bound and confined as prisoners in the house of the *wazīr*, because they were the cause of the *fitna* ... "

87 Tanūkhī, *loc. cit.*, pp. 86-87, for the following quotation as well.

The *wazīr* then soundly berated the *qāḍī*, warning him:

> "Do you not know that the master of the throne today is the *amīr* Muʿizz al-Dawla the Daylamite? He views the shedding of your blood as good work for the sake of God, and your buzzing has with him the weight of a dog. Hey, slaves, drag him out by the legs!"

Al-Muhallabī had Ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz dragged out and shipped to exile in ʿUmān, but the caliph al-Muṭīʿ intervened and obtained forgiveness for him. al-Muhallabī, however, continued to round people up:

> He gathered a group of the Hashimite *aḥdāth*, together with others from among the *ʿāmma*, and the people of wickedness and partisanship [*ʿaṣabiyya*], placed them in boats, closed them over them, fastened [the covers] with nails, sent them to [two towns near al-Ahwāz], and jailed them in cramped jails there; many of them died in jail[88] … but the *fitna* continued until the present.[89]

This account is enormously valuable, because it reveals to us much about the social milieu of the *ʿayyārs*: first, they were associated with the ʿAbbāsid, Sunni camp against the Shiʿites. Second, they were on such terms with the Hashimite "*qāḍis*, witnesses, and pious men" that the latter refused to hand over the *ʿayyārs* to the Buyid vizier. Third, this particular group of *ʿayyārs*, at least, must have been indistinguishable in both manners and appearance from the Sunni notables arrested – otherwise, the *wazīr* would not have needed to have them pointed out to him; the class and cultural difference would have been evident in the same way that it would be today if one took into custody a group of people consisting of modern gang members or mafiosi on the one hand and a group of respectable upper-middle class citizens on the others – the hairstyles, dress, vocabulary, and social manners would differ strikingly between the two groups. It therefore seems highly unlikely, once again, that this particular group of *ʿayyārs* was lower-class.

The last element revealed in this tale, one which we can no longer ignore, is that the overwhelming preponderance of *ʿayyār* violence occurred in sectarian battles against the Shiʿites. For, although there was plenty of disorder during the Buyid era, it is striking that we do not read of *ʿayyār* violence taking place randomly – let alone in a Sunni neighborhood – during the course of non-sectarian upheavals.

These civil wars appear to have been particularly endemic during the Buyid period, most likely due to the fact that the Buyids were themselves Shiʿites[90] and permitted the Shiʿites to openly express their religion, most particularly on the

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88 The remainder were freed after al-Muhallabī's death several years later.

89 Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, vol. 1, p. 88.

90 See Kabir's chapter "The religious background to the rise and fall of the Buwayhids," in *The Buwayhid Dynasty*; H. Busse, "Iran Under the Buyids," *The Cambridge History of Iran. Volume IV: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed R. N. Frye, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 250, 253; and Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 38.

ʿĀshūrāʾ, the anniversary of the death of Imam Ḥusayn.[91] The traditional Sunni religious supremacy and monopoly on public religious expression was thereby challenged; it is therefore not surprising that sectarian tensions – and Sunni resentment – should be higher during the period of Buyid rule. During these years, Baghdad seems to have resembled a tinderbox, with sectarian conflagrations constantly being set off by the slightest arousal of partisan fervour.

Sometimes, as in the year 361/971f., the outpouring of religious fervour was magnified by the Jihad and Sunni volunteer-warrior enthusiasm. At this time, in the wake of Byzantine raids and successes, a group of Muslims from the border areas came to Baghdad, "summoned the Muslims to war in the Friday Mosques and the markets, speaking about how the road was open before the Byzantines, and that there was no obstacle to prevent them from reaching their houses, which were adjacent to ʿIrāq."[92] Joined by many Baghdadis, the group proceeded to the caliph al-Muṭīʿ li'llāh's residence, where they attempted to break in, reviled the caliph, "accusing him of ineptitude in that which God rendered obligatory upon the Imams; they went [even] beyond this, to [the point where] what [they said or did] is [too] ignominious to relate." The notables of Baghdad, for their part, condemned the Buyid ruler for having neglected the Jihad, and he consequently announced that he would go on a raid (which he never did), and sent to his *ḥājib* Sebuktegin, "rousing him to go on a *ghazw* with him, and commanding him to convoke to war whomever longed for the Jihad. Sebuktegin accepted this with a hypocritical acceptance, then rode to Baghdad with the army, and convoked the Muslims to war."

The enthusiastic response among the populace [*al-ʿāmma*] to this summons astonished Sebuktegin who, however, instead of preparing these people for the Jihad, decided to keep them as his own reserve force; unsurprisingly, *fitnas* and *ʿaṣabiyya* soon became rife among them, "and the ruler [*al-sulṭān*] lacked the strength to pacify them and to extinguish their flame of war, which he had raised, until this became the reason for the ruin of Baghdad …" Baghdad is described as being

> ... destroyed by the multiplying of *fitnas*, the commonalty's [*al-ʿāmma*] becoming presumptuous, and the occurrence of wars in it … The multiplying of chiefs appearing among them, until there was in every quarter a number of chiefs of the *ʿayyārūn*, defending their quarter and appropriating monies [*yajbūnahum al-amwāl*] and fighting those who were nearby to them. In consequence, they [presumably, the opposing neighbourhoods] hated one another, would raid one another by day and night, and burn one another's houses; each group would raid its brothers and neighbors."[93]

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91 The frequency of Sunni-Shiʿi clashes under the Buyids has already been remarked by H. Laoust, "Les agitations religieuses à Baghdad aux IVe et Ve siècles de l'hegire," *Islamic Civilisation 950-1150*, D. S. Richards, ed London, 1973, p. 169.

92 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam*, vol. 2, p. 303.

93 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam*, vol. 2, p. 303.

Although Miskawayh does not say so explicitly, it seems fairly clear from the continuation of his story that, once again, Sunni/Shiʿi fitnas are being spoken about.[94] What one can only infer from Miskawayh's account is explicitly confirmed by Ibn al-Athīr's version of the same events, in which he states explicitly that al-Karkh was attacked because it was the Shiʿite stronghold, and names the Sunna and Shiʿa (along with the *fityān* and the *ʿayyārūn*) as among the warring groups:

> In this year [361/971f.] there was a great *fitna* in Baghdad. They manifested immoderate *ʿaṣabiyya*, people [*al-nās*] took sides, and the *ʿayyārūn* appeared and manifested wickedness, and took people's money.
> The reason for this was what we have mentioned, the calling out of the *ʿāmma* to go to the raids; they gathered together and became numerous, and there arose ... the *fityān*, the *sunna*, the *shiʿa*, and the *ʿayyārūn*; property was plundered, people were killed and houses burned down; and among everything that was burned [was] the quarter of al-Karkh, which was the place of the merchants and the Shiʿa ...
> Then Bakhtiyār sent to al-Muṭīʿ li'llāh demanding from him money in order to spend it on the raids. Al-Muṭīʿ replied:" Lo, the raid, the outlay upon it, and other matters of the Muslims apart from [the raid], would be incumbent upon me were worldly matters [*al-duṇyā*] in my hand, and were the monies levied for me; but since my condition is such [as it is], none of this is incumbent upon me, but rather incumbent upon him in whose hand the country is, for I have nothing but the *khuṭba*; and if you wish that I should resign [even from that], I shall do so.[95]

The *ʿayyār* appearance the following year, though not so explicit, is suggestive, since it takes place in the context of Shiʿi riots; "the *ʿaṣabiyya* of the *Sunna* was strong," and they burned down al-Karkh.[96] In this context, with the *wazīr* "oppressing the subjects, public affairs thrown into disorder in his hands, the surrounding districts ruined," and a rift having occurred between the Turkish soldiers and Buyid ruler, the *ʿayyārs* appeared and "did whatever they wished to do."[97]

This supposition of sectarian tensions is confirmed by the events of the subsequent year, when there was once again a renewal of the Sunni-Shiʿite *fitna*. According to Miskawayhi, the Sunni *ʿāmma* developed at this time closer relations with the *ḥājib* Sebuktegin, and were therefore able to begin to oppress and make war upon the Shiʿites. The Shiʿites, being outnumbered, fortified themselves in al-Karkh:

> The wars continued uninterruptedly until blood was shed, illicit actions were considered licit, and al-Karkh was burned a second time. … The merchants were impoverished; the

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94 Since the *fitnas* reignite when it becomes clear that the person whom Sebuktegin has appointed to head the *shurṭa* is aligned with the partisan Sunnis (*ibid.*, p. 306).

95 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 619. After threats and intimidation, Bakhtiyār managed to extract 400,000 dirhams from the caliph, who needed to sell his own clothing in order to raise the sum; "when Bakhtiyār took possession of the money he diverted it to his own affairs, and stopped the talk of the holy war raid." (*Ibid.* p. 620)

96 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 619, p. 628.

97 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 619, p. 629.

> *ʿayyārūn* deprived them of their wealth, their goods, their wives, and their houses, and they required that they have "protection" of them; and whichever party was under [the *ʿayyārs*'] protection attacked the other party … The *ʿaṣabiyya* between the two sides became a matter of both religion and the world, after it had been one of religion particularly; and this was because the Shiʿa rose to the war-cry of Bakhtiyār and the Daylamites, while the people of the Sunna rose to the war cry of Sebuktegin and the Turks.[98]

Note that according to this account, however, even though the *ʿayyārs* apparently began their activities by persecuting the Shiʿites, they appear to have been bought off at some point, and to have sold their protection to the highest bidder. It is impossible to verify this account, though, since Miskawayh is the only author who mentions *ʿayyārs* in the Sunni-Shiʿi *fitna* of this particular year.[99] Equally difficult of interpretation is Miskawayh's earlier, all too terse statement that when the Ḥamdānid ruler of Mosul, Abū Taghlib, advanced to Baghdad this year, "he found it embroiled in *fitnas* by the *ʿayyārūn*, so he subdued them and killed a group of them …"[100]

But in many, many cases the connection between *ʿayyār* activities and anti-Shiʿite activities is quite clear. In the year 380/990f., for instance, the moment the Buyid ruler Bahāʾ al-Dawla left Baghdad for Khūzistān, the *ʿayyārs* took advantage of his absence to rekindle the *fitna*:

> The *ʿayyārūn* arose in the two sides of Baghdad; *fitnas* broke out between the Sunna and the Shiʿa, and there was much killing between them; obedience ceased, some shops were burned, goods were plundered, and dwellings were destroyed. This lasted several months until Bahāʾ al-Dawla returned to Baghdad.[101]

Of course, when Bahāʾ al-Dawla returned to Baghdad the *ʿayyārs* did not go unpunished for having stirred up the sectarian troubles; once the *fitna* had subsided, "*ʿayyārūn* were pursued unremittingly, caught, and killed, so that the people [*al-nās*] enjoyed tranquility, and reverential fear [of the government] was established." Even under these circumstances, however, when the government was trying to suppress *ʿayyār* activity, it did not treat the *ʿayyār* leader as a bandit – and, indeed, the behaviour in which he was said to have engaged does not appear very bandit-like:

> Among the *ʿayyārs* captured was a man known as Ibn Jawāmard [i. e. "Ibn Javānmard"], one of their leaders. He had shown pity in the days of Ṣamṣām al-Dawla, and guarded the markets; so when Bahāʾ al-Dawla was asked about his matter, he granted him amnesty – and whoever has [himself] shown mercy, has mercy done to him …[102]

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98 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 2, p. 338.

99 Also, as we have seen in the discussion on chivalric ideals, part of the *futuwwa* code of conduct enjoined honouring one's word and extending protection to those who threw themselves upon one's mercy.

100 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 2, p. 337. The most exhaustive account of this dynasty remains Fayṣal Sāmir's *al-Dawla al-Ḥamdāniyya fī Mawṣil wa-Ḥalab*, Baghdad, 1970-1973.

101 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, pp. 75-76.

102 Al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 3, p. 199.

Apart from noting the extremely chivalric name of the *ʿayyār* leader, we need note only that, while one frequently finds legitimate military forces raiding the markets whose safety they are supposed to be ensuring, it is unusual, to say the least, to find supposed bandits actually guarding the markets, rather than pillaging them.

The outbreak of Sunni-Shiʿite *fitna* in the year 384/994f. is causally linked to *ʿayyār* activities as those related to sectarian tension between the main Shiʿite and Sunni neighborhoods: "In [this year] the power of the *ʿayyārūn* in Baghdad grew stronger, so that *fitna* broke out between the people of al-Karkh and the people of Bāb al-Baṣra, and many of the shops were burned down; then they made peace."[103]

Several years later, in the year 391/1000f., when a man reputed to be a Fatimid *dāʿī* (missionary) returned to Baghdad from Egypt, the *ʿayyārs* killed him – and then pillaged his house. This was not random and indiscriminate robbery; it was the deliberate targeting of a Shiʿite proselytizer:

> People [*al-nās*] related that [Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir al-Kātib] came with the agreement of the lord of Egypt [i. e. the Fatimid caliph], in order to begin to undermine on his behalf the ʿAbbāsid dynasty. So when it was the afore-mentioned night, the *ʿayyārs* attacked him in his house … and struck him with swords in order to kill him. His slave girl stood before him in order to protect him, but they struck her hand a blow which severed it, struck him a number of blows by which he died, then took all that they found of his money and movable goods and withdrew.[104]

In that same year, although there is unfortunately a lacuna in the text, it is unmistakably clear that there was a Sunni-Shiʿite *fitna*, in which the two opposing groups were the ʿAlīds and the *ʿayyārs*.[105] If Rūdhrāwarī's account had been more abbreviated, it would have looked like those of the major chroniclers, which simply inform one that the "*ʿayyārs* pillaged," apparently without any reason or objective other than robbery. As we see here, though, whenever historical context and motivation are supplied, they invariably reveal a sectarian, anti-Shiʿite context.

In other words, sometimes the chroniclers, in their dislike of the *ʿayyārs* and the disorder they caused, omit the most salient information about their activities – that is, its sectarian religious aspect. A comparison of Ibn al-Athīr's and Miskawayh's accounts of the events of the year 392/1001f. will serve to illustrate this. Ibn al-Athīr writes merely that the situation in Baghdad

> ... became disordered, and the power of the *ʿayyārūn* returned and gained the upper hand; the evil-doing intensified, people were killed, property was plundered, and houses were burnt down. [News of] this reached Bahāʾ al-Dawla, so he sent Abū ʿAlī b. Abī

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103 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 106.

104 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, vol. 3, p. 398.

105 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, vol. 3, p. 408. Ibn al-Jawzī does not list a *fitna* for this year (*al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, pp. 26-27).

> Jaʿfar, known as "Ustādh Hurmuz," to ʿIraq in order to guard it, and gave him the title Head of the Armies [*ʿamīd al-juyūsh*] … Abū ʿAlī reached Baghdad, established order [*aqāma al-siyāsa*], and restrained the evil-doers, so that the *fitna* abated and people were safe [*amina al-nās*]."[106]

His account makes it sound as though this were just a case of random or self-interested violence; but we never hear of large-scale *ʿayyār* violence (that is, killing people, burning down many houses, and so forth, as opposed to mere extortions or limited violence directed against an individual) when this is not in the context of a Sunni-Shiʿite fitna. And, in fact, in al-Rūdhrāwarī's fuller account, we discover that this particular incident is no exception:

> In the month of Ramaḍān the *fitna* intensified in Baghdad ... the power of the ʿAlīds [on the one hand] and the *ʿayyārs* [on the other] increased; they killed people, continued performing thefts, and took monies, so that the people of high rank [*ashrāf al-nās*] were in a difficult situation because of them.[107]

Our judgment that Rūdhrāwarī rather than Ibn al-Athīr has been giving the correct account is confirmed by Ibn al-Athīr himself in his entry for the following year (393/1002f.), when he discusses the quelling of this *fitna*, and confirms that the context of the *ʿayyār* violence in the prior year had indeed been a Sunni-Shiʿite *fitna*, which he had neglected to mention in his earlier entry:

> ... the *fitna* in Baghdad grew strong, and the *ʿayyārūn* and the evil-doers spread, so that Bahāʾ al-Dawla sent the head of the army [*ʿamīd al-jaysh*], Abū ʿAlī b. Ustādh Hurmuz, to ʿIraq in order to arrange its affairs. He arrived in Baghdad … curbed the evil-doers, **prevented the Sunna and the Shiʿa from manifesting their *madhhabs***, and banished, after this, Ibn al-Muʿallim, *faqīh* of the Imāmiyya, so that the country was in order.[108]

Ibn al-Athīr again commits the same sin of omission when he reports on *ʿayyār* activities in the year 409/1018f. :

> In this year the power of the Daylam weakened in Baghdad, and the *ʿāmma* was emboldened against them, so that they [i. e. the Daylamites] withdrew to Wāsiṭ. [Wāsiṭ's] *ʿāmma* and its Turks went out against them, and battled them; but the Daylamites repelled them from themselves, killing many of the *ʿāmma* and Turks of Wāsiṭ. The power of the *ʿayyārūn* grew strong in Baghdad; they acted wickedly and plundered money.[109]

A reader whose only source of information was Ibn al-Athīr's chronickle would never know that there was a religious component to this strife. From Ibn al-Jawzī's account of the same year, however, we discover the background to these events; that "the *fitna* between the Shiʿa and the Sunna grew grave," that there was fighting between the Sunni neighborhood of Nahr al-Qallāʾīn on the one hand and the Shiʿite neighborhood of al-Karkh on the other, and that when the

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106 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 171.
107 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 3, pp. 436-437.
108 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 178. Emphasis added.
109 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 304.

commander of the *shurṭa*, Abū Muqātil, attempted to enter one or both of the neighborhoods,[110] both the inhabitants and "the *ʿayyārūn* who were in it" prevented him from doing so, and ended up setting a conflagration.[111]

As in our previous instance of Ibn al-Athīr's neglecting to mention the social context of the *ʿayyārs'* violence, he himself confirms the sectarian nature of the disorders in his entry under the following year (409/1018f.); when the new governor of ʿIraq, Ibn Sahlān,[112] heard of "the worsening of the *fitnas* in Baghdad ... he went there ... The *ʿayyārs* fled from him, he banished a group of the ʿAbbāsids and others, banished Abū ʿAbdallāh b. al-Nuʿmān the *faqīh* of the Shiʿites,[113] and sent the Daylamites to encamp on the borders of al-Karkh and Bāb al-Baṣra."[114] This was unmistakably a Sunni-Shiʿite war, and it was apparently not limited to street gangs, either, given the prominence of the people banished ("a group of ʿAbbāsids" and the leading jurisprudent of the Shiʿites).

On many other occasions, though, despite our clerical chroniclers' distaste for the *ʿayyārs*, they do give us enough information for us to be able to discern, through the condemnatory verbiage, the pattern of anti-Shiʿite violence. Ibn al-Athīr's account of the year 416/1025f., for instance, though it starts out with a pontification against *ʿayyār*-induced disorder, by enumerating the burning of al-Karkh among the *ʿayyārs'* crimes, makes clear that the other activities, as well, were probably also carried out against Shiʿites: "In this year the power of the *ʿayyārūn* gained the upper hand in Baghdad, and their wickedness grew stronger; they killed people, plundered money, did whatever they pleased, and burned down al-Karkh, so that prices in it increased …"[115]

Thus, in the *fitnas* of 420/1029 and 421/1030, although Ibn al-Athīr, for instance, notes merely that "There was a *fitna* in Baghdad in which the power of the *ʿayyārūn* and the thieves [*al-luṣūṣ*] became strong, and they would take

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110 The editor assumes it is al-Karkh which they tried to enter, which would also explain why the source speaks of "*al-ʿayyārūn alladhīna fī-hā*" rather than "*ʿayyārūhā*"; there were no Shiʿite *ʿayyārs*.

111 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 125.

112 As Kabir notes, at this time "not only Baghdad but Wāsiṭ became the scene of incessant conflicts between the Shiʿah and the Sunnah with consequent heavy loss of life and property." The Buyid ruler therefore appointed the brutal Ibn Sahlān, "'a man of tyranny and violence.'" (Kabir, *The Buwayhid Dynasty of Baghdad*, p. 95)

113 This is the famous Shiʿite religious scholar and leader Abū ʿAbdallāh b. al-Nuʿmān al-Baghdādī al-Karkhī, known as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd. Ibn Kathīr (Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol. 12, p. 17) describes his importance as follows: "[He was] Shaykh of the Rāfiḍis and defender of their interests. He had influence with the rulers of all sides, because of the propensity of the people of this time to partisanship, and a great number of the *ʿulamā'* of all the sects would attend his *majlis*. Among his students were al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and al-Murtaḍā." On his religious and theological importance to the Imāmī Shiʿites, see M. J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid*, Beirut, 1978.

114 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 307.

115 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 349.

money openly,"[116] there is strong evidence, both from Ibn al-Athīr and from other sources, that this, too, was a Sunni-Shiʿite sectarian *fitna*. First, in the course of this *fitna* the Shiʿite Friday prayer was stopped in the Barāthā mosque, which had a long history of clashes with the Sunni authorities because of its Shiʿite tendencies.[117] In fact, at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century the mosque had been razed by the Caliph:

> At the place known as Barāthā there was a mosque frequented by the Shiʿites ... When it was called to the attention of al-Muqtadir that the Rāfiḍites assembled at that mosque in order to slander the Companions [of the Prophet] ... and rebel against the state, he ordered the mosque surrounded on a Friday during the time of prayer ... Everyone found there was seized, punished, and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The mosque was razed to the ground and all traces of it were erased as the area became part of the adjoining burial ground ...[118]

The mosque was rebuilt in 328/c. 940 with the intention of assuring its orthodoxy; however, in our *fitna*, in the year 420/1029, the Caliph replaced the regular speaker of the mosque, because of his " Shiʿite *ghuluw*" [extremist Shiʿite beliefs], with one of his own. The sources diverge regarding what followed. According to Ibn al-Jawzī, this caliphally-appointed speaker closed his sermon by saying "[May] Allah forgive the Muslims and those who pretend that ʿAlī is His Friend [*mawlāhu*];"[119] all the sources are agreed that the congregation pelted the preacher with bricks and that thirty men attacked and plundered the preacher's house.[120] Additional confirmation of the sectarian nature of this *fitna* – and of

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116 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 393.

117 Shiʿite tradition held that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had prayed on that site in the year 37/657, on his way to the battle of Nahrawān (Le Strange, *Baghdad During the ʿAbbasid Caliphate*, p. 154). For Shiʿite *faḍā'il* of Barāthā see Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, 1377/1957-, vol. 52, p. 218; and ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. Ṭāwūs, *al-Malāḥim wa'l-fitan*, Beirut, 1988, pp. 117-118.

118 Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 97. See also Le Strange, *loc. cit.*

119 In relation to the Imams, "*wilāya* ... means that God has bestowed upon the family of the Prophet special honour and qualities, thereby making them the ideal rulers, and that through their presence on earth His grace is disseminated." S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shiʿa Islam*, London, 1979, p. 180.

120 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, pp. 393-394; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 198; according to Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol. 12, p. 30, they broke his nose and dislocated his shoulder. Prayers were restored in this mosque only after a delegation of notables from al-Karkh, headed by the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, had apologized to the Caliph and begged personally for the resumption of divine worship. The Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and his brother, the Sharīf al-Raḍī, were at this time the most prominent Shiʿi leaders; "As Naqībs of the ʿAlīds and as illustrious members of the Prophet's family these Sharīfs occupied a prominent rank in the ʿAbbāsid court. They threw in their lot with both the Caliphate ... and the Amirate of the Buyids and thus exercised a moderating influence in the state, which made it possible for the Sunni Caliphate and Shiʿi Amirate to work in collaboration, for which they in their turn won the goodwill of both. During the most serious days of Sunni-Shiʿi riots in Baghdad that characterised the entire Buyid period they co-operated with the administration in maintaining peace and amity. In the disputes between the Caliph and the

ʿ*ayyār* involvement in such strife – is evident from the further course of it, during which time the Sunni quarter of al-Qallāʾīn and the Shiʿite quarter of al-Daqqāqīn began battling one another, with the ʿ*ayyārs* joining the fray.[121]

Sectarian tension during these years was also surely heightened by the religious fervour aroused by the situation at the frontiers; in 421/1030 there was a Byzantine raid, and in 422/1031 Byzantium conquered al-Ruhā, "killed the Muslims, and destroyed the mosque."[122] As a result, a Sufi shaykh named al-Khazlajī received the caliphal banner and permission to gather volunteers for the holy war. The Shaykh then proceeded to pass through the Shiʿite neighborhood of Ṭāq al-Ḥarrānī with his retinue of would-be Sunni holy warriors, "and they cried loudly in remembrance of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar … saying: 'This is the day of Muʿāwiya. ' But the people of al-Karkh contradicted them, and pelted them, so *fitna* broke out."[123]

The next day pandemonium broke loose; Sunnis from both sides of Baghdad, together with many of the Turkish soldiers, went to al-Karkh and burned and demolished the markets.

> The fighting within the districts of the city occurred on both sides [of the river]. The people of al-Karkh and Nahr Ṭābiq fought one another, and al-Qallāʾīn and Bāb al-Baṣra; on the East side the people of Sūq al-Thulāthāʾ and Sūq Yaḥyā, and Bāb al-Ṭāq and al-Asākifa … The bridge was cut off in order to separate between the two sides, the ʿ*ayyārūn* entered the city, and there was much doing of evil deeds in [the city], and of theft, night and day. … then the expulsion of the ʿ*ayyārūn* was proclaimed in al-Karkh, and they left ...[124]

Once again, ʿ*ayyār* violence was clearly part of a larger Sunni-Shiʿite war, and this violence was explicitly directed against Shiʿites (hence the only neighborhood from which the ʿ*ayyārs* have to be expelled is Shiʿite al-Karkh).

Amīr they often worked as arbitrators." (M. Kabir, "A Distinguished ʿAlīd Family of Baghdad During the Buyid Period," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, vol. 9, no. 1 [1964], p. 51).

121 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, pp. 208-209. Ibn al-Jawzī deplores the ʿ*ayyārs*' "wicked deeds" in the course of this *fitna*, but that may very well have been – particularly in light of the passage we have seen from *Talbīs Iblīs* – because he expected better behaviour from them.

122 On the earlier raid, *vide* Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 404; on the conquest of al-Ruhā by the Byzantine Infidel, p. 413.

123 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 418; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, pp. 213-214; an abbreviated version can be found in Ibn Kathīr, *al-bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, vol. 12, p. 35. Presumably, the meaning of "*yawm*" here would be the archaic one of the Prophet's time – that is, "battle," with the implication that the Sunnis were doing battle in the name of, or in defence of the reputation of, Muʿāwiya. According to Ibn al-Jawzī's version the Sunni volunteers shouted "this is the day of the *maghāzī*," but Ibn al-Athīr's version seems to be more in line with the other Sunni partisan cries and the reaction of the inhabitants of Ṭāq al-Ḥarrānī.

124 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, pp. 419-420.

The next *ʿayyār* manifestation we shall examine occurred in the course of a *fitna* in the year 425/1033f. Ibn al-Athīr's account once again omits crucial pieces of information:

> In [this year] al-Basāsīrī[125] was appointed to the protection of the western side of Baghdad, because the matter of the *ʿayyārūn* had become more severe; their evil-doing [*fasāduhum*] had become great, and the government's representatives lacked the strength to do anything to them; so they installed al-Basāsīrī for the sake of his protection and his power.[126]

Yet in Ibn al-Jawzī's account we discover that at the heart of this "evil-doing" of the *ʿayyārs* was once again sectarian: first, al-Burjumī's raiding of Shiʿite Bāb al-Ṭāq; and, more seriously, the spreading of the *fitnas* between Shiʿite al-Karkh on the one hand and staunchly Sunni Bāb al-Baṣra and al-Qallāʾīn on the other, so that other Shiʿite and Sunni neighborhoods were pitted against one another (Shiʿite Bāb al-Ṭāq against Sunni Sūq Yaḥyā – the neighborhood, incidentally, where al-Burjumī's sister lived; and Sunni Nahr Ṭābiq versus Shiʿite Bāb al-Arḥāʾ and Christian Bāb al-Dayr, a *fitna* in which the Turkish soldiery soon joined).[127]

Then, in the beginning of Ramaḍān, the two Ibn al-Iṣbahānī brothers, "commanders of the *ʿayyārs* of the *ahl al-Sunna*," made a pilgrimage to the grave of Muṣʿab b. al-Zubayr,[128] as a counterstatement to the pilgrimage "that the *ʿayyārs* of al-Karkh would make" to the tomb of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī.[129] Predictably, this set off a fierce *fitna*, in the course of which the al-Iṣbahānī brothers managed to cut off al-Karkh's water supply.[130]

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125 Who later declared for the Fatimid caliph (*vide* Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 16, pp. 32-34).

126 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 437.

127 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, pp. 239-240. Bāb al-Dayr is the quarter also known as Dayr al-Rūm. According to Le Strange (*Baghdad During the ʿAbbasid Caliphate*, p. 207), "The Dar-ar-Rumiyin, more generally called the Dar-Ar-Rum (the House of the Greeks), was the Christian quarter of Medieval Baghdad ... situated in the neighbourhood of the Shammasiyah Quarter and at no great distance from the tombs of the Caliphs in Rusafa." Sabari (*Mouvements populaires*, p. 12) mistakenly lists this neighbourhood as Shiʿite, probably because of this *fitna*.

128 One often sees Sunnis cultivate reverence for a personality known to have opposed prominent Shiʿite figures, as a reaction to the veneration accorded the latter by the Shiʿa. This phenomenon has been analysed by C. Pellat, "Le culte de Muʿawiya au IIIe siècle de l'Hégire," *Études sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam (VIIe-XVe s.*), London, 1976, pp. 53-66. Muṣʿab b. al-Zubayr was especially appropriate for Sunni purposes in this case, not only because of his role in crushing Mukhtār's rebellion, but also because the anniversary of his death fell just eight days after the *ʿĀshūrāʾ*, the primary Shiʿite religious observance.

129 The text says "*al-mashhad bi'l-ḥā'ir*." On the identity of this with the tomb of Ḥusayn, "Lord of Martys," *vide* Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. 2, p. 208.

130 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 241. This tactic became popular among the Sunnis generally; the very next year the inhabitants of Sunni Sūq Yaḥyā prevented the bearing of water to the people of Shiʿite Bāb al-Ṭāq and al-Ruṣāfa, without any interference on the part of the Turkish soldiery or the government [*al-sulṭān*]. (*Ibid.* p. 246)

Ibn al-Jawzī's statement regarding "the *ʿayyārs* of al-Karkh," together with Ibn Kathīr's account of the same events,[131] and a passage in Rūdhrāwarī,[132] are the only indications we have in all the literary corpus that there were Shiʿite *ʿayyārs*. There are several possible explanations for the anomalous statements: first, that they are descriptively accurate, and that the Shiʿites actually formed a parallel counter-group to the Sunni *ʿayyārs* – although one assumes that if that were the case one would have heard a lot more about them in the sources if they had been a genuine *ʿayyār* organization, and that one would have seen the same kinds of depredations taking place in Sunni neighborhoods that we see the *ʿayyārs* inflicting upon Shiʿite ones. Second, the term is perhaps being applied incorrectly, for lack of a better designation, to some kind of Shiʿite counter-group formed to defend al-Karkh from the Sunni *ʿayyār* groups;[133] or that the sources simply got carried away in their reporting and desire to be "even-handed,"[134] at the cost of historical accuracy. If there were indeed Shiʿite *ʿayyārs*, they must have been extremely marginal and not very numerous, since there is **no** case in the sources where a Sunni neighborhood is attacked, robbed, or otherwise preyed upon in the way that the Shiʿite neighborhoods were, in every known case of *ʿayyār* violence where the geographical location is named.

There are many, many additional examples of *ʿayyārs* participating in Sunni-Shiʿite *fitnas* and wreaking havoc in Shiʿite neighborhoods; in fact, these include nearly all the recorded *ʿayyār* appearances in Baghdad during the Buyid period.[135] We have already seen sufficient evidence, however, to understand that

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131 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, vol. 12, p. 40: "There was a *fitna* between the *Sunna* and the *Rawāfiḍ*, so that [it reached even] between the *ʿayyārs* of the two parties ..." Of course, from Ibn al-Jawzī's far more detailed account, it would appear that this particular *fitna* actually began with the *ʿayyārs*.

132 al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, vol. 3, p. 439. In this passage a new army commander comes to put order into ʿIraq in the year 392/1001f., "And he sought the *ʿayyārs* from among the ʿAlīds and the ʿAbbasids, and when they were found he ordered that they join the ʿAlīd and the ʿAbbasid together and drown the two of them during the day at an assembly of the people [*al-nās*]." While, of course, "ʿAlīd" could simply mean "of ʿAlīd descent," it seems far more likely in this context that the epithet is being used to designate either a group of Shiʿite *ʿayyārs* – or, alternatively, that al-Rūdhrāwarī is using the word *ʿayyār* for lack of a comparable epithet for a Shiʿite group or organization intended to counter the Sunni *ʿayyārūn*. Note also that this same punishment – drowning – was also meted out to corrupt Turkish officials; the *ʿayyārs* were in illustrious company here.

133 We speculated earlier that perhaps *duʿʿār* might have been the term used for Shiʿite counter-groups.

134 Particularly since they were Sunni, and therefore may not have been happy to let the Sunnis be depicted as the only party inflicting grievous harm – although in this last conjecture the present writer may well be drawing unjustified inferences from some inverse modern-day journalistic practices.

135 E. g. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 76 (mentioned also in Mīrkhwānd, *Rawḍat al-ṣafā'*, vol. 4, p. 163); vol. 9, pp. 575-577; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 15, p. 336; and so forth.

the *ʿayyārūn* had close if not always conflict-free ties to official bodies,[136] particularly official military bodies, and that their activities in Baghdad – or, rather, those activities which interested the clerical chroniclers – concentrated largely on anti-Shiʿite belligerence. This *ʿayyār* absorption in Sunni partisanship suggests that even after the term *ʿayyār* had acquired a chivalric component, the *ʿayyārūn* – at least in Baghdad – were still preoccupied, at least to some degree, with *mutaṭawwiʿ* concerns.[137]

Also clear from our sources, from the very language they employ, is that the clerical-bureaucratic authors' camp did not like much of *ʿayyār* behaviour.[138] This salient point is clearest whenever we compare sparser accounts with more detailed ones, as we did above; invariably, when a chronicler is summarizing *ʿayyār* activities he confines himself to brief, condemnatory statements such as Mīrkhwānd's regarding *ʿayyār* activities during the great sectarian *fitnas* of the 420s/1030s ("the *ʿayyārs* and people of wickedness and mischief gained mastery over Baghdad. They set their hand to plunder, spoil and mulcting; the money of the rich they extracted, and every one who had a little power seized the occasion of opportunity …" and "they plundered and wreaked havoc"[139]), whereas the fuller accounts give us enough contextual information to make it unmistakably clear that the *ʿayyārs* were actually preying upon Shiʿites.

Yet it becomes difficult for the reader to accept uncritically the chroniclers' fulminations, and by extension to sustain the traditional concept of the *ʿayyār* as outlaw or bandit, after having seen in this chapter the historical context in which the *ʿayyārs* operated and in which their activities took place. Most telling is how the sources repeatedly contextualize their activities for us, by telling us that they plundered and extorted "as the government officials would," and naming their companions and accomplices in these activities – the Turkish officials, army troops, Banū ʿAbbās and the Hashimites, and various other social elites. These kinds of activities were, in other words, something in which respectable and

136 But then again, no set of public relationships in the Buyid period seems to have been conflict-free.

137 One can find some confirmation of this in the sources, in the way the *ʿayyārūn* are sometimes reported as acting both in *al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf* as well as against non-Sunnis. For instance, in the year 392/1001f. "the *ʿayyārūn* attacked the house of Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Mālikī in order to kill him. He oversaw the inheritances and some of the commercial transactions of *abwāb al-māl*, and in this [capacity] he acted in commercial transactions without weights or measures [*jāzafa fi'l-muʿāmala* – that is, he cheated]. They did not find him, but they found [his son-in-law] Abū Ṭāhir … and killed him [instead]. " The account then states that "the *ʿayyārūn* also killed on this day … one of the chiefs of … the people … of *ʿaṣabiyya*." (al-Rūdhrāwarī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, vol. 3, p. 447).

138 There is a great abundance of negative statements about and depictions of *ʿayyārs*, aside from the above examples in both this chapter and the previous one (e. g. Tanūkhī's statement at the beginning of *Nishwār*, cited in Chapter Seven); see e. g. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Kitāb al-akhlāq wa'l-siyar fi mudāwāt al-nufās*, ed. Ṭāhir A. Makkī, Cairo, 1981, p. 171.

139 Mīrkhwānd, *Rawḍat al-ṣafā'*, vol. 4, p. 175.

powerful people habitually engaged, often together with the *ʿayyārs*; in the case of the *ʿayyārs*, moreover, such activities often proceeded from ideological religious motives.

In short, it is striking how well-connected the *ʿayyārs* were, how freely they consorted with the social and political elites, and how the overwhelming preponderance of their violent activities which can be traced contain a partisan Sunni component. Although what the chroniclers are telling us about the *ʿayyārs'* violence was surely real, the meaning of that violence, what it says about the *ʿayyārs*, cannot be comprehended divorced from the context that the chroniclers themselves supply. Furthermore, *ʿayyār* violence and its contribution to disorder in Baghdad, although it undeniably made a deep impression upon the chroniclers, was not the whole picture, nor even the most essential picture, of *ʿayyār* activity, any more than Gregory VII's definition of kings and rulers is a good basis upon which to define the nature and role of medieval kingship.