

ZÂHIR BIEMRILLAH

-Ebû Nasr Muhammed er-Zâhir
biemrillah b. en-Nasr -

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Zahir biemrillah

Muhammed b. Ahmed

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HISTORY OF ISLAM

(Classical Period 571–1258 C.E.)

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Al-Zahir

1225-1226 C.E.

Succession of Al-Zahir

An Nasir was succeeded by his son Abu Nasr Muhammad who assumed the title of Al-Zahir on succession.

Policies of Al-Zahir

Al-Zahir came to power at the age of fifty-two. He was a man of a religious bent of mind, and power had little attraction for him. He adopted the Caliph Umar b Abdul Aziz as his model and tried to follow in his footsteps. When he succeeded to the throne he did not give expression to any joy. He was asked "Dont you rejoice?" He replied, "Verily, the harvest is blighted". His courtiers said, "May God prosper you!" He said "What can a man earn who opens his shop later in the afternoon".

This dialogue has a dual meaning. It implies that Al-Zahir came to the throne in the afternoon of his life, and much could not be expected of him. It also signifies that by this time the harvest of the Abbasids stood blighted and it was too difficult to restore the glory of their earlier rule.

He led a simple life, and enjoined upon others around him not to indulge in pomp and show. His father was a man of the world. He had levied numerous taxes, and had taken pains to fill up the treasury. He had confiscated the properties of many persons, and all those against whom there was any suspicion of disloyalty were lodged in jails. Al-Zahir reversed the policies of his father. He opened the gates of the prisons, and most of the prisoners were released. He personally looked into all cases about the confiscation of properties, and most of the confiscated properties were restored to their owners. He remitted all the oppressive taxes. He was solicitous of the welfare of the poor and the distressed. He distributed large sums out of the state treasury among the poor and the

References :

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3. *History of the Caliphs* : Suyuti.

classified as extremist Shī'a by the Muslim heresiographers (see 'Abd al-Kāhīr al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firak*, ed. M. Muḥyī al-Dīn, Cairo n.d., 281 ff.; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl wa 'l-nihāl*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Wakīl, Cairo 1968, i, 192; al-Ghazālī, *Fadā'ih al-bāṭiniyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, Cairo 1964; I. Goldziher, *Streitschrift des Gazālī gegen die Bāṭiniyya-Sekte*, Leiden 1916; Abū Muḥammad al-Yamanī, *'Aḳā'id al-thalāth wa-sab'ina firka*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ghāmīdī, Medina 1414/1993, ii, 477). The Zaydīs are opposed to *Bāṭinī ta'wīl* as practiced by Ismā'īlīs and Imāmīs. Druzes [see DURŪZ], on the other hand, affirm that the Bible, the Qur'ān and their own scriptures have esoteric as well as exoteric meanings. They further maintain that in addition to these two levels of meaning there is yet another level, called "the esoteric of the esoteric" (Samy Swayd, *The Druzes. An annotated bibliography*, Kirkland, Wash. 1998, 36).

The Ṣūfīs also maintain this principle of *zāhīr* and *bāṭin* with regard to the Qur'ān. The *tafsīr* of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896 [q.v.]), one of the oldest extant works representing mystical interpretation of the Qur'ān, is a good case in point. At the basic level of interpretation al-Tustarī's division is twofold: *zāhīr* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric). The former aspect comprises mostly traditions (*ahādīth*) explaining religious law, occasions of revelations, and other obvious matters, while the latter aspect comprises mystical explanations. Referring to the Qur'ān, at the beginning of the *tafsīr*, al-Tustarī states, "Its apparent meaning (*zāhīr*) is beautiful and its inner meaning (*bāṭin*) is profound, and no mind is capable of comprehending it" (*Tafsīr al-Kur'ān al-'azīm*, Cairo 1326/1908, 2; G. Böwering, *The mystical vision of existence in classical Islam. The Qur'ānic hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī*, New York 1980, 139). Further explaining the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses, he states, "Each verse has four levels of signification: a *zāhīr*, a *bāṭin*, a *ḥadd* and a *maṭlā'* (or *muṭṭalā'*). The *zāhīr* is the recitation of that verse, the *bāṭin* is its [proper] understanding, the *ḥadd* defines what is lawful and what is unlawful, and the *maṭlā'* (the point of transcendence) or the *muṭṭalā'* (anagogical meaning) is the spectacle of the heart and its meaning intended by God" (see also al-Sulamī, *Ḥaḳā'ik al-tafsīr*, in Böwering, *The mystical vision*, 140; this fourfold division is attributed by al-Sulamī to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in *Itkān*).

Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Ḥaḳā'ik al-tafsīr*, which holds a unique place in the history of Ṣūfī *tafsīr*, also uses the distinction of *zāhīr* and *bāṭin* (Böwering, *The Qur'ān commentary of Sulamī*, in *Islamic studies presented to Charles Adams*, ed. W. Hallaq and D.P. Little, Leiden 1991, 41-56; al-Sulamī, *Ziyādāt ḥaḳā'ik al-tafsīr*, ed. Böwering, Beirut 1995, I, 24, 38, 42, 43, 101, 106.) This trend of Ṣūfī esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān was continued by Rūzbihān al-Baḳlī (d. 606/1209), Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), and others.

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407-25; H. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*, Paris 1958, Eng. tr. R. Manheim, *Creative imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, Princeton 1969; Sezgin, *GAS*, i, 19-49; Hanna Kassis, *A concordance of the Qur'an*, Berkeley 1983, 345-6, 1338; Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Speaking Qur'an and the Silent Qur'an. A study of the principles and development of Imāmī Shī'ī tafsīr*, in *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. A. Rippin, Oxford 1988, 177-98; Ismail Poonawala, *Ismā'īlī Ta'wīl of the Qur'an*, in *ibid.*, 199-222; Naṣr Ḥamid Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-ta'wīl. Dirāsa fī ta'wīl al-Kur'ān 'inda Muḥyī al-Dīn b. 'Arabī*, Cairo 1983; Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa 'l-mufasssīrūn*, Cairo 1995, esp. vols. ii and iii (his views on the Shī'a and the Ṣūfīs reflect the standpoint of a modern orthodox Sunnī); Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, *Ta'yīyat al-Durūz, ta'rīkhuhā wa-'aḳā'iduhā*, Cairo 1962; Nejla Abu-Izzeddin, *The Druzes. A new study of their history, faith and society*, Leiden 1993. (I. POONAWALA)

AL-ZĀHIR [see BARKŪK; BAYBARS I].

AL-ZĀHIR BI-AMR ALLĀH, ABŪ NAṢR MUHAMMAD b. al-Nāṣir, 35th 'Abbāsīd caliph, r. 622-3/1225-6. In 585/1189 he was designated by al-Nāṣir [q.v.], as his father's elder son, to succeed him, but in 601/1205, probably under the influence of the Shī'ī vizier Ibn Maḥdī, the caliph changed his mind and made his heir his younger son 'Alī, more favourable towards Shī'ism than the elder one, who was very attached to Sunnī orthodoxy. To explain and justify this decision, a letter was produced, signed by two witnesses, in which the prince Abū Naṣr Muḥammad asked his father to relieve him of the function of *walī al-'ahd*, which he felt incapable of assuming. However, 'Alī died in 612/1215-16, and since the caliph had no other heir, Abū Naṣr was restored to his former status but kept under close surveillance until 615/1218-19 or 618/1221-2.

On his father's death, he was hailed as caliph at the end of Ramaḳān 622/beginning of October 1225 when he was more than 50 years old, and chose the regnal *lakab* of al-Zāhīr. His reign was only 9 months and 14 days, since he himself died on 14 Raḳḳab 623/11 July 1226; but he is unanimously praised by the historians as a just, generous and pious ruler who gave extensive alms, freed unjustly-confined prisoners and restored to their owners lands confiscated by his father.

In the political and religious fields, he had hardly any time to accomplish any major work. The influence of the Ḥanbalīs increased in Baghdād, whilst as his external policy, the caliph tried to end the fratricidal strife of the Ayyūbid princes in Syria and Egypt, hoping to make them his own vassals. To this end he despatched Muḥyī al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn al-Djawzī, son of the famous Ḥanbalī theologian [see IBN AL-DJAWZĪ] with robes of honour and investiture diplomas. In the economic and fiscal spheres, he undertook a series of important measures, at the risk of diminishing the state revenues, by forbidding uncanonical taxes (*mukūs*), abolishing the increases in land tax made by his father and attacking the frauds that were rife within the public treasury. He further combated the excessive price rises of staple foods, especially at the time of the great famine which affected all of Upper Mesopotamia during the year of his reign. Within Baghdād, he had constructed a second bridge of boats across the Tigris and abolished the espionage and intelligence service set up in every quarter of the city by his father, to the great relief of the population.

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