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Daniel Mahoney* Evolving Rasūlid Narratives of Opposition to Sultan al-Manṣūr Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar (d. 647/1250) in Yemen

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Abstract: The Rasūlid chronicles of the reign of al-Manṣūr Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar b. 'Alī b. Rasūl depict its first ruler as steadily consolidating the political foundation of the sultanate. Most of these reports clearly portray the dominance of the sultan in Yemen during this period. But a few reveal the limitations of his power in a more complex political landscape, such as an aborted military campaign against a local tribe, an insurrection by a Zaydi *sharīf*, and the sultan's assassination by his own military. These specific narratives of opposition to the sultan, however, progressively change over the course of their production from the late 13th century until the first half of the 15th century, as the strength of the sultanate initially peaks and then slowly declines. As a result, the ambiguity of al-Manṣūr 'Umar's authority in these narratives is largely reduced, and the historical memory of the sovereignty of the emergent Rasūlid sultanate solidifies in increasingly ideological ways.

Keywords: Rasūlid, Yemen, Ayyūbid, political history, historiography

Introduction

In Jumādā II 626/April–May 1229, Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar b. 'Alī b. Rasūl, learned that the former Ayyūbid ruler of Yemen, al-Mas'ūd Yūsuf, had died in Mecca while travelling north to take up the governorship in Damascus. As a trusted officer in al-Mas'ūd Yūsuf's military, he had been left in charge of the administration in Yemen until a new ruler from the Ayyūbid sultanate in Egypt could be sent from Cairo. This replacement, however, never arrived, and as a result the course of Yemeni politics began to shift. Upon hearing the news of this death, he first took military action to assert his ambitions in Lower Yemen, although outwardly he still maintained the appearance of Ayyūbid loyalty. After securing Zabīd, he took over the port of Aden and appointed a new governor, and then besieged the highland town of Ta'izz until a truce was concluded. Alongside his ongoing

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Introduction: Rasūlid Entanglement in the Medieval Islamic World and Beyond

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The Rasūlid Sultanate emerged within a complex set of social, political, and economic entanglements extending from the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula during the late medieval period. The Rasūlid family first appears in the historical record as Turkmen officers in the Ayyūbid military during its occupation of Yemen at the turn of the 7th/13th century, although fictitious South Arabian tribal origins are claimed in a genealogy constructed by a Rasūlid sultan a century later. Gaining recognition within the administrative apparatus, they were appointed governors to various provinces along the coastal plain and in the highlands. In 626/1229, in preparation for his departure to another post in Syria, the Ayyūbid ruler of Yemen al-Mas'ūd Yūsuf appointed the Rasūlid Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar to oversee administration of the region until the next Ayyūbid ruler arrived from Egypt. In an unexpected turn-of-events, however, al-Mas'ūd Yūsuf died in Mecca on his way north, and his Ayyūbid successor never arrived. Consequently, Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar began to establish personal control of various cities and regions across South Arabia and send diplomatic missions to Mecca, challenging the Ayyūbid influence in the Hijaz. In 632/1234, he received formal recognition of his independent authority in Yemen from the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir.

During the 7th/13th century, the Rasūlid sultans strove to consolidate their power through numerous conflicts against various Zaydi factions and tribes extending all the way to the coastal city of Ḥafār (contemporary al-Baleed in Oman), as well as the patronage of religious elites and the construction of numerous mosques and madrasas. An extensive taxation system was developed for both the interior highlands and the flourishing trade passing through Aden between the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. However, after a succession crisis in 721/1321, the Rasūlid Sultanate slowly began to lose its hold over many parts of Yemen and the wider interregional commercial networks. Over the course of the next century, they endured both repeated tribal rebellions and Zaydi incursions, as well as the increased influence of the Mamlūk Sultanate in the Red Sea and the Hijaz. As a

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The Rasūlids and the Bountiful Sea: Marine Resources, State Control, and Maritime Culture in the Southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (626/1229–854/1454)

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Abstract: Relying on textual, ethnographic, and environmental scholarship on Yemen and the comparative insights of research into fisheries in the premodern Mediterranean world, the present study surveys the types of marine resources that appear across a wide range of literary and documentary sources pertaining to Yemen during the reign of the Rasūlids from the early 7th/13th to the mid-9th/15th century. Although Rasūlid-generated texts pay relatively scant attention to fishing, they clearly demonstrate the interest of the Rasūlid state in both the subsistence and commercial economy that fishermen procured. Moreover, when combined with the testimony of travelers and chroniclers and of iconography on a series of Rasūlid coins from the port city of Aden, these sources shed light on the inclusion of fish in Yemeni non-elite and elite diets, the place and roles of fisherfolk in Yemeni society, the maritime symbolism current in Rasūlid times, and ultimately the relationship between shores and inland centers of Rasūlid power. In aggregate this material suggests that the Rasūlid state maintained a symbiotic political and cultural relationship with fishing communities, which had direct access to and the primary role in harvesting and processing the resources in question, yet remain in the shadows of recorded history.

Keywords: Rasūlids, Yemen, fishing, economy, foodways, iconography

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