

Imad Al-Din Zanki and His Hostile Policy toward the Saljuqid Sultanate and the Abbasid Caliphate in Iran and Iraq. Expanding His Frontiers 1127-1146

Taef el-Azhari

Associate professor of medieval Middle Eastern history
Dept. of International affairs
Faculty of Arts, Qatar university

‘Zanki was trying very hard to gather all of the information he could get about the remote lords of the Muslim lands and what was happening to them even when they were hidden away, especially what took place in the palaces of the Saljuqids, and he spent lavishly on this. He was kept well informed and he received endless letters reporting every single move the sultans made, night and day, in times of war and peace, both serious matters and frivolous matters. Zanki received several reports like that every day from his spies. He used to say: If the smallest things are not known about and dealt with, they will grow and get out of hand’ (1).

This is the opinion of Ibn al-Athir, which was shared by Ibn al-Adim in *bughyat*, and Ibn Khallikan in *wafyyat* in their biographies of Zanki.

Zanki's career from start to finish was a long perplexing relationship with the Saljuqid sultanate. In the Iranian world supreme Saljuqid sultan Sanjar b. Malik Shah ruled from 1118 to 1157, while his grip over Khurasan was being weakened by different Turkmen slave commanders. In Iraq, western Persia and Azerbaijan Zanki had ensnared vassalage relationships with four different Saljuqid maliks, sons and grandsons of Muhammad I b. Malik Shah (d.1118) (2).

The last element on this side is his relationship with the Abbasid caliphate. Although Zanki is considered a mujahid due to his legendary victory in Edessa in 1144, he was following a realpolitik policy all through his career, which had seriously affected his jihad policy, for example, in 1132–33 when the Abbasid caliph al-Mustarshid besieged him in his own principality, Mosul, and when al-Mustarshid sent Zanki at the walls of Damascus in March 1135, ordering him to withdraw to Iraq and join him against the Saljuqid sultan Masud (3). One cannot understand the failure of Zanki to capture Damascus between 1128 and 1140 or his hesitating to make a full attack on the Crusaders without understanding his rebellious changing relationship with the Saljuqid sultans or the Abbasid caliphate, during which time Zanki claimed to carry the banner of jihad under their names and get legitimacy from them. Additionally, one should bear in mind the geopolitical weight of the East on Zankid policy.

In June 1128 Zanki entered Aleppo after his commanders had seized it in January of the same year. During that same summer the supreme Saljuqid sultan Sanjar had ordered his nephew and son-in-law Malik Mahmud II b. Muhammad of western Persia and Iraq to oust Zanki from Mosul and to appoint Dubays b. Sadaqa in his place (4). Zanki did not have time to establish himself in Mosul and its vicinity, or in Aleppo, and he had to pay the price of the rapprochement between Sanjar and Mahmud II, and the instruction of Sanjar to his nephew to reconcile with the caliph al-Mustarshid. In addition, Dubays was supported by Mahmud's wife, the daughter of Sanjar (5).

In Muharram 523/January 1129 Mahmud II had written to Zanki ordering him to surrender Mosul to Dubays. As soon as he learned this he marched swiftly to Mahmud II, who was astounded by the sudden presence of Zanki. After making the oath of allegiance again and paying one hundred thousand dinars, in addition to giving magnificent presents, Zanki received the robes of honour and was reinstated in Mosul. In addition, as mentioned in chapter one, Zanki was also invested in al-Gharb Kullaho, or the entire West, according to Ibn al-Adim (6). This ambiguous diploma by the sultan did not clarify exactly what the West meant here; in addition, it contradicted the diploma of 1115 by sultan Muhammad I, who granted the rule of Damascus, Hims and Hamah to Tughtakin (d.1128) of Damascus and to his dynasty afterwards (7). One has to say that Zanki never used this diploma in his expansion in Syria against the Saljuqs of Damascus.

It has been mentioned that one finds that the caliph stood with Zanki against Dubays, as the latter was accused of making a pact with the Crusaders in 517/1123 at the wall of Aleppo. Meanwhile, the caliph ignored Zanki's *modus vivendi* with Jocelin of Edessa in 1127 and the truce for two years between him and Edessa or his attempt to make a pact with Princess Alice, the widow of Bohemond II of Antioch, against her father in Jerusalem in 1130 (8) (please see the chapter on Zanki against the Saljuqs and the Crusaders in Syria).

For the next two years until the death of sultan Mahmud II in 525/1131 Zanki had harmonious relations with the sultanate and the caliphate, especially since he was expanding his zone of influence in 1129–1130 in al-Jazira against the Turkmen Artukids, against the Crusaders of Antioch at al-Atharib and Harem, and against the Saljuqs of Syria, capturing Hamah and attacking Hims.

On 14 Shawwal 525/28 August 1131 the Saljuqid sultan of western Persia and Iraq, Mahmud II, died. For nearly four years Zanki was heavily involved in the politics of Iraq, which witnessed devastating civil war between five different Saljuqid kings to dominate the realm. This was in addition to the involvement of al-Mustarshid the Abbasid, who was very ambitious politically, trying to use his status as a religious leader to influence the current affairs in Iraq. All of this had been reflected on Zanki, who had neglected the Syrian affairs and focused on this civil war to protect his power base in Mosul from any harm. He left his deputy in Aleppo to maintain the *modus operandi* with the Crusaders. The only activity that Zanki could afford to do outside this area was a few campaigns against the Artukids and other Turkmen in Upper Euphrates and Armenia in 1133/1134, mainly to secure Mosul and his line of commercial-military communications (please see chapter three).

Although the nature of the military history of the Turkmen led by the Saljuqs is very confusing and not the main aim here, I will try to cover the career of Zanki in these civil wars. It should be mentioned that the Saljuqid fighting kings were Masud b. Muhammad I (d.547/1152), Tughril b. Muhammad I (d. 528/1134), Saljuq Shah b. Muhammad I (d. 538/1143) and Alp Arslan b. Mahmud II. One should not forget Sanjar in central Asia, the dean of the Saljuqid dynasty.

After Mahmud II one finds that his son Dawud declared the *khutba* for himself in Azerbaijan and Armenia and fought his uncle Masud in Tabriz in the autumn of 1131. Both fighting lords had sent separate requests to al-Mustarshid in Baghdad asking him to declare the *khutba* in his name (9). At the same time Zanki had sent a message to the Abbasid caliph requesting him to give the *khutba* to Alp Arslan b. Mahmud II, as Zanki was his atabek (regent) and the emir who had raised him according to the Turkmen tradition (10). Zanki tried to use this situation to gain more power, prestige and legitimacy. Ibn wasil and Ibn al-Athir had mentioned that al-Mustarshid had replied to the three messengers that only sultan Sanjar could decide to whom the *khutba* would be given. They wrote to him and were still waiting for his diploma. Sanjar was the dean of the empire (11).

It seems that in the case of Zanki, al-Mustarshid did not want to give the ambitious lord more legitimacy which would be against the caliph's advantage in Iraq, especially when we see how Zanki spied on al-Mustarshid for Mahmud II for years and defeated and humiliated al-Mustarshid, as mentioned in chapter one.

Another Saljuqid candidate for the sultanate, Saljuq Shah b. Muhammad I, Lord of Khuzistan in western Persia, the closest to Iraq, arrived suddenly in Baghdad with his atabek Qaraja al-Saqi and a large army. This show of force made the caliph submit to Saljuq shah who occupied Dar al-Sultan, or the sultanate compound in Baghdad. Additionally, al-Mustarshid turned down the threatening request of Masud to declare the *khutba* for him (12). During the chaos sultan Sanjar declared his support for the insignificant Tughril b. Muhammad I and appointed Zanki as the *shihna* (prefect of police) of Baghdad. Additionally, Masud had surrendered the strategic city of Irbil, east of Mosul, to the deputies of Zanki in return for a political-military pact against al-Mustarshid and Saljuq Shah (13). What is striking here is the appointment of Zanki as *shihna* by Sanjar, which reflects the supreme sultan's full trust in and need of his ability and loyalty to help to impose his candidate Tughril in 526/1131–32.

Bosworth (in 1968) went even further on the subject in his unparalleled study *The political and dynastic history of the Iranian world* by stating that Sanjar came to Jibal in person and put Tughril on the throne. He invited Dubays b. Sadaqa and Zanki to invade Iraq (14). The sources do not furnish us with more information on how Zanki was cooperating at the same time with two Saljuqid sultans, Sanjar and Masud. The only interpretation is that Zanki was taking a risk with the remote Sanjar and the nearby Masud at the same time.

Very complex warfare followed. One can give a summary, stating that Zanki tried to advance south of Mosul, marching on Baghdad in 1132, but near Samarra he was heavily defeated by Saljuq Shah, his atabek Qaraja and al-Mustarshid, who led a force of tens of thousands of Turkmen cavalry. Zanki managed to save his life by taking refuge in the town of Tikrit, which was under the command of Saladin's father najm al-Din Ayyub (15), and then he returned to Mosul.

Masud tried to have a confrontation with the army of Saljuq Shah, but no clear winner came out of that. Masud sent to the caliph asking for détente, trying to form a new pact against Sanjar, who had just arrived at Rayy in northern Iran. Al-Mustarshid, who had claimed before that Sanjar was the commander of the whole empire, turned against him and struck a deal with Masud. Ibn al-Athir wrote: 'They agreed that Iraq will be governed by the deputy of the caliph, Masud will be declared sultan, and Saljuq Shah walyy Ahd' (16).

The three men met in Baghdad in Jumada I 526/April 1132. One understands that this nominal authority of the Saljuqs over Iraq and the de facto caliphal rule of it was a turning point in giving more secular power from the divided Saljuqid institution to the caliphal one (17). In Rajab 526/June 1132 Sanjar confronted and heavily defeated Masud the Saljuq Shah near Hamadhan.

The caliph did not take part with his allies, fearing leaving Iraq to Zanki in Mosul, who was contacted by Sanjar telling him to attack Baghdad again (18). After the battle Sanjar made peace with Masud as he had to return to Nishapur to confront the Qarakhanid, Ahmad Khan, in Transoxania. It has been said that Sanjar had declared the khutba before his departure for his original candidate, Tughril, and imposed on him his own men in the administration, with the agreement of Masud (19).

Zanki followed his own interests and Sanjar's order to march on Baghdad with Dubays in the same month to confront al-Mustarshid on 27 Rajab 526/20 June 1132 at Hisn al-Baramika, north of Baghdad. According to Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Wasil, Zanki's troops were larger than the caliph's, yet they were defeated due to the recklessness and over-confidence of Zanki and the bravery of al-Mustarshid, who resumed the glory of the Abbasid caliphate which had been lost since the Buwayhids in the 10th century AD (20). As a result, the expansionist dreams of Zanki were halted and he was forced to return to his home city of Mosul, especially when Dubays, his long time ally, was also defeated.

Due to Sanjar's departure to Central Asia, as mentioned earlier, to reassert his authority in Khurasan and Khwarrazm, his imposed candidate Tughril lost power in Ramadan 526/July 1132 in Wahan near Hamadhan to Dawud b. Mahmud II (21). A few months later in Muharram 527/November 1132 Masud entered Iraq and he forced his way into Baghdad the following month, where he was declared by the caliph as the legitimate sultan of the West, and Dawud his nephew as his Walyy Ahd. Masud managed to declare the khutba in Isfahan, Hamadhan, Azerbaijan, Iraq and Hijaz by mid-1133 (22). This outcome reflected negatively on Zanki. Masud was busy reorganizing Persia, and al-Mustarshid had a free hand in Iraq to avenge and subdue Zanki, especially when several Saljuqid commanders resorted to the Abbasid court in the military confusion that was taking place in the Middle East. Al-Mustarshid did not waste this chance to subdue Zanki in Rabi I 527/February 1133. The caliph marched north of Baghdad in a large army and he sent his envoy al-Isfraini to Zanki in Mosul, reprimanding him and submitting him to his authority. Zanki refused the caliph's demands and hugely insulted his personal envoy (23). In Shaban 527/June 1133 al-Mustarshid was approaching Mosul. Zanki left the city to have free movement and left his deputy Nasir al-Din Chuqar to defend Mosul. Zanki was in the vicinity of Sanjar following the situation in the open field. The colossal army of 30,000 soldiers under al-Mustarshid besieged Mosul for 80 days and managed to gain support from the chiefs, such as the commander of the Hamidiyya Kurds, Isa (please see chapter three for details). Al-Bahir reported: 'Chuqar had defended the city bravely, while Zanki kept dispatching scouts to cut the line of communications and supplies of the caliph'. Finally, al-Mustarshid lost hope due to the formidable position of Mosul and returned to Baghdad after sending a message to Zanki asking for peace (24).

If one examines and evaluates the outcome of this arduous military activity in 1132–33 and how it influenced Zanki's career, one will see the following:

Zanki was a key figure in Iraqi- Iranian politics for more than one Saljuqid sultan.

Zanki lacked any strategy for a jihad against the Crusaders as he was trying to expand in a very bold manner against several Muslim powers in Iraq, al-Jazira, Persia and Azerbaijan.

Ironically, while al-Mustarshid was besieging Zanki's base in Mosul in Ramadan 527/July 1133, one finds that Ismail b. Buri, the Saljuqid king of Damascus, was besieging Hamah, which had been under Zanki's control since 1129, and he managed to recapture it for Damascus (25). Zanki's deputy in Aleppo, Sawar, could do nothing to save Hamah and he was retaining the modus vivendi with the Crusaders of Antioch and Edessa due to their lord's diffused policy. In fact, Aleppo did not respond to King Fulk of Jerusalem when he attacked Zankid Qinnasarin to the south in the spring of 1133 (26).

Since the start of his career Zanki had not found any irony and conflict in being a Sunni Muslim and he continued to fight the Abbasid caliph, the head of the Sunni world, in order to survive politically.

At the end of the caliph's unsuccessful campaign in Mosul one finds al-Mustarshid seeking conciliation with Zanki, especially when sultan Masud was on his way back to Baghdad in early 528/November 1133. Zanki warmly welcomed such a request and he sent an important envoy to Baghdad to give an oath of obedience and to offer a huge sum of money and a collection of extravagant presents to al-Mustarshid. In return the caliph had sent his chief qadi to Mosul with a positive reply to this gesture (27).

Relations between the two men reached a pinnacle when in early 529/October 1134 Zanki dispatched his son Saif al-Din Ghazi to the court of the caliph as a sign of full loyalty, following medieval tradition. The caliph ordered a special welcome for this distinguished envoy, taking the young prince in a parade across Baghdad (28). Such expected steps, only by pragmatic logic, were for two reasons. At the same time Sultan Masud was consolidating his power in Central Iraq and Western Persia, assuming a new title, Ghiyath al-Dunya wa al-Din – reliever of religion and the secular world – and he managed to stay a relatively undisputed lord until his death in 1152. As a result, al-Mustarshid and Zanki tried to make a pact to preserve their interests, especially since according to al-Bahir, Masud was 'the most powerful sultan, owned the largest number of troops, and was the one who despised Zanki most' (29). Secondly, after this long Saljuqid civil war Zanki was aiming to consolidate his power outside Iraq, mainly in Syria and al-Jazira, so he wanted to safeguard his iqta in Iraq while campaigning elsewhere.

During most of 1134 Damascus was witnessing the bizarre political conduct of its Saljuqid king Ismail, leading to his murder by his mother Zumurrud in mid-Rabi II 529/February 1135. During that time ibn al-Adim, ibn al-Qalanisi and Ibn Asakir, among other Muslim sources, had reported that Ismail strangely enough had contacted Zanki, inviting him to march and take Damascus (30) (please see chapter four for details). As a result of this unexpected event Zanki needed to focus on Syria. Thus, we see him in late 1134 in Aleppo preparing for his campaign on Damascus, which was attacked and besieged by him in February 1135.

On 28 Jumada I 529/15 March 1135, while fiercely attacking Damascus, al-Mustarshid's envoy Abu Bakr al-Jazri arrived in Damascus, ordering Zanki to make peace with the new Saljuqid lord of Damascus, Shihab al-Din Mahmud, and to return to Iraq at once to assist him against sultan Masud (31). The question that should be asked here is what made Zanki leave his prize, Damascus, with a weak new king in power and withdraw to Iraq? His pact with the caliph was not enough for Zanki politically. For this reason we see al-Mustarshid cancel the khutba in Iraq for Masud and declare it for Alp Arslan, who was put forward by Zanki and was still in his company. Zanki also managed to force the Saljuqs of Damascus to give the khutba to his candidate, too, the new sultan Alp Arslan, before leaving the walls of Damascus (32).

Now for the first time Zanki could act in full confidence supported by the legitimacy as the atabek of the sultan, in whose name the khutba was declared not only in Iraq and parts of al-Jazira, but in Syria, too, from Aleppo in the north to Damascus in the south. None of the sources explain why Zanki sent the reinforcements needed to the caliph, but he himself retired to Northern Syria first. It seems that the Zankid forces continued to be highly disciplined even in the absence of their leader.

On 10 Ramadan 529/24 June 1135 at a place called Daimerj near Hamadhan al-Mustarshid, together with many Saljuqid princes and Turkmen cavalymen, confronted Masud. A large part of the caliph's army deserted him and he was captured with all of his entourage without a fight (33). This bad news for Zanki's camp had meant that Masud installed his own shihna in Baghdad, bak Abah, who arrived in the same month and swiftly confiscated all of the wealth and treasures of al-Mustarshid. Due to the massive extent of the Saljuqid empire we see that the supreme sultan Sanjar did not interfere in this war as he was busy securing Ghazna from a domestic rebellion (34).

Al-Mustarshid, who remained in captivity for nearly two months, accepted an agreement imposed on him by Masud stating that he had to return to Baghdad and pay an annual large sum of money of 400,000 dinars to the sultanate treasury. In addition, al-Mustarshid could never have an army again or try to muster one in the future, and he would be confined to his palace. As if this was not enough humiliation and punishment of the caliph as an individual and as an institution, to challenge the Saljuqid sultanate politically, one finds that Masud changed his mind and allowed 24 Batini assassins to infiltrate the unprotected tent of the captive caliph in the city of Maragha and brutally mutilate his body (35).

One has to say that it was not normal for a very large group of assassins to carry out such a murder and that in the majority of their murders they do not move in groups of more than four or five men in order not to draw attention and suspicion. This added to the accusation made openly by many sources that Masud was the one who hired them and that the locals disrespected the sultan (36).

Two outcomes of al-Mustarshid's defeat that affected Zanki could be mentioned here. One is that Zanki's relationship with Masud became extremely suspicious as Zanki supported the caliph militarily in this confrontation. Secondly, Zanki lost his chance to keep the khutba in Iraq and Syria for his candidate Alp Arslan. As a result, in the same month Masud swiftly ordered his new shihna in Baghdad to declare the khutba for al-Rashid, son of al-Mustarshid (37). This strongly asserted Masud's situation in Iraq against Zanki. In addition, Masud tried to get rid of Zanki by summoning him to Isfahan for a consultation. However, the real goal was to kill him but Zanki refused to go, according to Ibn-al-Adim (38), and he made a new pact with the caliph.

Following the same strategy of subduing Iraq, one finds Masud dispatching al-Zakawi to al-Rashid in Baghdad in Muharram 530/October 1135 to collect the 400,000 dinars that his father had agreed to pay. Al-Rashid declined and claimed sultanate force because he wanted to search the caliph's palace. After defending his palace with help from the locals of Baghdad al-Rashid sent to Zanki in Mosul urging him to come to Baghdad at once to help him against Masud.

To guarantee this, al-Rashid agreed with Zanki that the khutba would be given in Iraq, al-Jazira and Syria to his candidate Alp Arslan, who was in his custody. Zanki would be in charge of the sultanate and the caliphate (39). At the same time many Saljuqid lords, mainly from Western Persia, Isfahan and Qazwin, including Dawud b. Mahmud II, agreed to declare rebellion against the authority of Masud and they marched to Baghdad to make a pact with al-Rashid and Zanki, who arrived in Baghdad in early Safar 530/November 1135 and received a very prestigious welcome from the caliph in person, in addition to his wazir and the chief qadi of Baghdad, who all were at the reception ceremony (40). Surely this reflects the status of Zanki and the need for him at such a time as the chief player in Iraq who owned enough troops to confront Masud.

Between 1135 and 1137 many military clashes took place, not only between these two camps, but also among other Turkmen Saljuqid factions, which added to the tribal division occurring. Our focus here is how Zanki's relations with the caliph and the sultanate affected his expanding policy in Syria against the Crusaders and the Saljuqs at the same time.

Zanki and al-Rashid spent most of 530/1135–1136 defending Baghdad. In Rabi I 530/December 1135, when Dawud's request to declare the khutba in his name was refused, he started to attack and plunder different areas of Baghdad, which made the locals rush with their treasures and money to the caliph's palace. After a show of military strength by Dawud, Zanki, together with the caliph, reconciled with him and agreed to declare the khutba for Dawud (41). Although Zanki had promised earlier to give it to Alp Arslan, we find that he agreed to unite against the bigger danger that sultan Masud represented. In addition, we find that Dawud installed his own shihna in Baghdad, while the caliph paid Zanki 30,000 dinars to spend on the city's fortifications (42).

In Jumada I 531/February 1136 another candidate for the sultanate, Saljuq Shah b. Muhammad I, forced his way into Wasit in Central Iraq. He commanded a large army. The Abbasid caliph paid Zanki military expenses to march and fight Saljuq Shaha. Zanki contacted the atabek of Saljuq Shah, al-Baqsh, and paid him to desert his master and join Zanki's side. In this way Saljuq Shah was forced to welcome peace with Zanki: 'The martyr Zanki returned to Baghdad. In his company was atabek al-Baqsh, among other commanders. Zanki's reputation and prestige increased immensely in the eyes of everyone. No one in Baghdad conducted any matter without his order or consultation' (43).

It is very probable that this move managed to alienate Saljuq Shah from the sultanate race or pose a threat to Baghdad, and it united al-Rashid's camp in focusing on fighting the arch-enemy Masud. If one looks panoramically in the Middle East, one will see that the Zankid dominions in Syria were not fully paralyzed by their master's engagement on the Iraqi front. At the same time Ibn al-Qalanisi tells us that Sawar, the Zankid deputy in Aleppo, led a few thousand seasonal Turkmen mercenaries and attacked the Crusaders in Lattakia, plundering its countryside completely. He attacked Hims as well in an economic war to force the sons of Ibn Qaraja, its Turkmen lord, to surrender the city, which had been a target of Zanki for a long time (44).

One can argue that Zanki had to give priority to Iraq, so his jihadist policy of uniting Syria under his banner to fight the Franks came second. At the same time his iqta, mainly Aleppo and Hamah recaptured by Zanki in March 1135, could act on his remote orders from Mosul or Baghdad – not to have a full-scale war against the Franks, but to use such a seasonal attack politically in Iraq and Persia against his enemies and to look like a mujahid against the Crusaders.

While the Byzantine emperor John II Comnenus (d.1143) was crossing Anatolia heading for northern Syria in summer 1136 wishing to restore the long-lost Byzantine dominions, one finds Zanki at the same time leading a coalition of the caliph, sultan Dawud, from Baghdad to march to fight Masud in Persia in early Ramadan 530/July 1136 (45). A few days out of Baghdad Zanki was informed that sultan Masud had left Hamadhan to fight the caliph in Baghdad. The caliph's troops returned at once to the Iraqi capital to reorganize their defences and fight behind the city's walls. Masud arrived at the end of Ramadan 530/August 1136 and sent a message to threaten his enemies in Baghdad – either they surrendered and declared the khutba in his name or his forces would besiege and storm the city. For more than 50 days Masud surrounded all of his enemies inside Baghdad and managed to bribe a large number of the al-Ayyarun, or the local corps, inside the city to start a rebellion and loot the capital. In addition to the task of organizing the resistance of the capital, Zanki met several elite merchants who came to him complaining about the looting of the city (46). This reflects the status of Zanki in Baghdad at that time. When Masud was about to lose hope and depart to Persia, he received huge military aid from the Turkmen lord of nearby Wasit, Tarantay, who offered the necessary land supplies and a flotilla to attack the city at the end of Shawwal 530/September 1136.

Masud's forces managed to penetrate Baghdad from the land side and the river side, which made his nephew Dawud leave the opposition and depart to his dominions, especially since Masud's success brought disagreement among the fighting commanders about the strategy they should follow to resist Masud (47). Zanki, who proved very skilful in organizing and leading the defences of Baghdad for nearly two months, thought of a daring idea, which was asking caliph al-Rashid to desert Baghdad and travel back to Mosul with him. The caliph, who was weak enough, agreed to Zanki's idea and left for Mosul with his wazir and the rest of his entourage. In Dhu al-Qida 530/October 1136 Masud had full control of Baghdad and he installed his own Abbasid caliph, al-Muqtadi, brother of the murdered al-Mustarshid (48).

Here one should look into Zanki's daring attempt as a step towards controlling the caliphate, thus gaining supreme legitimacy despite the declining political power of the Abbasid caliphate, which still represents an immense spiritual religious power in the Muslim community. If a comparison is made here, one has to mention that the first Turkish mamluk commander in Egypt, Ahmad Ibn Tulun (d.884), tried the same thing by inviting the Abbasid caliph al-Mutamid from Iraq to Egypt as Ahmad was fighting the caliph's brother al-Muwaffaq (49).

Ibn Tulun also wanted to look like a mujahid in northern Syria against the Byzantine Empire. The situation did not differ or change at the end of the 12th century, when we see that the prestige of the Abbasid caliphate still represented the cornerstone of any legitimacy, for example, when Saladin invaded Syria after the death of his master Nur al-Din b. In 1174 Saladin wrote to the caliph al-Mustadi informing him of his jihad against the Crusaders and requesting the caliph to recognize Saladin's authority over the Zankid dominions in Syria, but the caliph refused and recognized his power only over what he already governed, thus giving indirect political support to Zanki's grandson in Aleppo (50).

The Middle East witnessed two khutbas, one for al-Rashid in northern Iraq, al-Jazira and Syria, and the other for al-Muqtafi in Baghdad, southern Iraq and western Persia. That is, of course, in addition to the Shii Fatimid caliph in Egypt.

Zanki and al-Rashid realized the superior power of Masud and each had sent his envoy to the new caliph in Baghdad requesting the cessation of hostilities. Al-Rashid's messenger was denied entry, but Zanki's envoy Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri was warmly welcomed by the caliph (51), which reflects the political-military position of Zanki. According to Ibn Wasil and Ibn al-Athir, Zanki's envoy was asked: 'Do you give the Bay'a to the new caliph?' Al-Shahrazuri replied: 'How can I do that if I have just left the caliph in Mosul and we already gave the oath to him (as Ibn Wasil mentioned in Mufarrij). After secret contacts with the envoy later he changed his mind and asked the caliph and the sultan for a prize in return for dropping the khutba of al-Rashid. Qadi al-Shahrazuri had a free hand in his negotiation, especially as Zanki was the one who asked for peace and knew that Masud was the master of the situation, while Zanki had other tasks in northern Syria, such as protecting his dominions from the Byzantine campaign and the Crusaders.

The new caliph al-Muqtafi gave a few small villages as iqta to Zanki in different places in Iraq. This iqta was from the private lands of the caliph (Khas al-khalifa), and al-Muqtafi had commented that this was the first time that an emir was granted iqta from the private lands and ordered that Zanki should be granted a new title as well (52). The sources do not mention this new title bestowed upon Zanki. One should say here that these few villages allocated to Zanki had no strategic advantage as they were not all in northern Iraq, closer to Zanki's base, but they had more a honorary prestigious effect on the Turkmen commander.

In Rajab 531/April 1137 Zanki declared the khutba for al-Muqtafi in his dominions, and the deposed al-Rashid was forced to leave Mosul upon orders from sultan Sanjar and Masud to Zanki. Al-Rashid left Zanki's base and he was killed by Batinyya assassins in Isfahan the following year (53).

Ibn al-Athir gave us a fascinating account of Zankid military importance at this stage: 'In this year sultan Masud had permitted his forces in Baghdad to return to their lands or dominions in the East for rest, only after he was informed that the deposed caliph al-Rashid had left Zanki and departed from Mosul completely. Sultan Masud had been gathering all of his armies up to that moment out of the fear that Zanki could march southwards and attack and seize Baghdad' (54). These lines, even with slight exaggeration, reflect the continuous mistrust between the two men, although Zanki's envoy had recognized the new caliph, but Masud had to wait for practical moves on the ground.

Between Jumada I 529/15 March 1135 and Shaban 531/May 1137 Zanki was totally influenced by the Iraqi-Persian civil war and he was absent from the Syrian affairs, even if that meant using one caliph against the other while the Byzantine emperor was threatening his dominions in northern Syria.

In Shaban 531/May 1137 Zanki resumed his expansionist unionist policy against the Saljuqs of Syria in Hims and Damascus until September 1137. He was very capable of confronting different powers in Syria until the beginning of the following year. On 25 Rajab 532/9 April 1138 emperor John II Comnenus, with a colossal army, made a pact with the Crusaders of Jerusalem, Tripoli, Edessa and Antioch. He marched to capture Buza'a, only a day and a half march to the north-east of Zankid Aleppo (55).

Zanki received a plea from his deputies in Aleppo while he was besieging Hims. Such a Byzantine pact was beyond their capacity. One finds that Zanki had to send an envoy to sultan Masud requesting urgent substantial help. The envoy qadi al-Shahrazuri, who had skillfully negotiated the problem of al-Rashid before, had clear orders from Zanki to explain to Masud that if the Byzantine-Crusaders alliance managed to capture Aleppo, the road would be wide open for them to march across the Euphrates and attack him personally in Baghdad (56). Sultan Masud was pleased to offer any assistance to Zanki. As a result, one sees that al-Shahrazuri orchestrated a very careful deceptive plan against the sultan. He agreed with some of his friends to hire and bribe some ruffians (awbash) from Baghdad and to plant them in both the sultanate and the caliphal mosques for the coming Friday prayer. These mobs were ordered to wait for the imam to start delivering his Friday sermon and then start crying out 'wa Islamah' or 'alas Islam'. The trick went as planned and the leaders of the mobs started throwing their turbans on the floor. The public started to shout and called off the prayer, and they demanded to march to the sultan's palace. There they found another angry crowd doing the same thing (57). The locals of Baghdad started to condemn the sultan for not sending troops for a jihad.

Sultan Masud feared that the matter could get out of control and he summoned al-Shahrazuri to his palace, where he asked him about the cause of this rebellion. Al-Shahrazuri replied: 'I have nothing to do with this crisis.

The public is zealous for Islam, and fears the consequences of such delay'. Sultan Masud answered: 'Get out to the crowd and try to pacify them away from the palace, and return tomorrow and take as much as you want from the forces and supplies' (58).

Al-Shahrazuri managed to get 20,000 knights. He immediately wrote to Chuqr, Zanki's deputy in Mosul, warning him that the movement of such a huge army might get out of control and seize the dominions of Zanki. Chuqr replied that it was better to have the dominions fall into Muslim hands than into the control of the infidels – the Crusaders (59). Such doubts by the chief qadi in the Zankid realm reflect the reality of the Zankid political aims, which used jihads to achieve their realpolitik goals. Al-Shahrazuri dispatched a messenger to his master Zanki in Syria to get his final permission for the advance of the troops on Syria. Zanki approved and the army crossed to the western side of Baghdad to find a special messenger arriving in Baghdad urging Zanki to cancel the march as the Byzantine emperor had lifted his siege of Aleppo and withdrawn empty-handed. Sultan Masud refused to cancel the campaign and insisted on a jihad against the Franks and the recapture of all of the dominions they had occupied. After diplomatic efforts with the wazir of the sultan and other leading men in his administration he was finally convinced to return the army.

Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Wasil after him both accused sultan Masud of trying to send such a huge army to Syria not to perform a jihad, but to subdue Zanki or to strip him of his power. They both elevated Zanki to the level of a saint for his successful attempt to manipulate the sultanate by al-Shahrazuri (60).

Two related matters should be raised as a result of these developments. Firstly, why did sultan Masud not fully support the dispatching of such an army for a jihad since it had been assembled in a relatively short time? One sees that at the same time news started to gather at Masud's palace that rebellions and challengers to his throne were appearing again in Persia, Azerbaijan and Khuzistan, led mainly by Dawud and Saljuq Shah. Thus, Masud was preoccupied with his Eastern front from Shaban 532/May–June 1136 (61).

Secondly, Zanki had been brought up at one time by Mawdud, lord of Mosul (please see chapter one), who commanded a large army in Syria and in Muharram 507/28 June 1113 at al-Sinnabra in Tiberias, which made the Saljuqid lord of Damascus hire Batinyya or assassins to kill Mawdud weeks later. Mawdud represented a political–military threat to the Syrian dominions and their independence (62). The Muslim rulers of Syria realized that a modus vivendi with the Crusaders was better for them than allowing the geopolitical influence of the Iraqi-Persian world to dictate to them. Despite the continuous mistrust between Masud and Zanki one finds that Masud and his installed caliph al-Muqtafi made a good gesture by sending two envoys to Zanki, while he was besieging Saljuqid Hims in Ramadan 532/end of May 1138, with robes of honour, which Zanki gladly wore in public (63) as a sign of full trust and legitimacy from these two institutions in his fight against fellow Sunni Muslim Saljuqid powers and not the Crusaders, as it was mentioned by the sources.

Between 532/1138 and 538/1143 one sees a long period of composure in Zanki's relations with the Saljuqid sultanate and the caliphate. Zanki was occupied by expanding his realm in Syria in al-Jazira against the Turkmen, the Kurds and the Arabs. Concurrently, sultan Masud was engaged in endless skirmishes in Persia, while the supreme sultan Sanjar was busy in Khwarazm in Central Asia (64).

In 538/1143 sultan Masud finally had the chance to impose his authority over his state and he decided to march in a large army from Iraq to punish Zanki for the old hostilities between the two men. Masud was going to start with Mosul then the rest of the Zankid lands. Ibn al-Athir in al-Kamil and al-Bahir, who greatly influenced other medieval sources, had proudly written: 'Since Masud had come to the sultanate, he faced endless counts of revolts by the commanders of the provinces, especially those in the remote ones. Each time Masud was faced by such a case, he attributed or blamed Zanki for orchestrating such a plot. Sultan Masud always had a suspicion that different commanders resorted to Zanki and collaborated with him because of his wisdom, his long experience and his possession of vast lands and huge forces. Well, his suspicion was correct. Zanki always resorted to such methods to keep the sultan occupied in order to have the chance to expand and consolidate his power' (65).

Such a description by the most pro-Zankid historian shows that Zanki and Saladin after him, especially between 1171 and 1186, were following their own personal plan in which a jihad was just one element among many. Following the same pattern of behaviour, we see that al-Isfahani wrote that Masud wanted to punish Zanki as he accused him of hiring assassins to murder Dawud b. Mahmud II his nephew and his son-in-law, lord of Tabriz. That took place when Zanki heard that Dawud was going to be appointed as king of Syria (66).

Zanki tried hard through several envoys to restore such lost confidence with Masud, although Zanki's son Ghazi was living in Masud's court as a sign of submission following medieval tradition. Finally, Zanki agreed under the following conditions:

Zanki would pay an annual tribute of 100,000 dinars to the sultanate

Zanki should travel to Baghdad in person to make an oath of allegiance to sultan Masud.

Zanki feared the second condition and he managed to represent himself as a mujahid against the Crusaders, thus he could not leave his duty. Masud accepted this excuse but instructed him to capture Edessa (67). In 1143 the Byzantine emperor died, as did King Fulk of Jerusalem, so Zanki started to use the relative vacuum of power in the area and started to attack a few castles in the vicinity of the Crusaders' Edessa, which had made a pact with the Artuqids of Hisn Kaifa (68).

Al-Bahir grossly exaggerated that Masud did not fight Zanki because he was deeply convinced that Zanki was the sole Turkmen commander capable of defending his lands against the Crusaders without requiring any aid from the sultanate, unlike the previous Turkmen lords of Mosul, including Mawdud and al-Bursuqi. One can easily compare Zanki with Mawdud, Tughtakin of Damascus (d.1128), Il-ghazi of Aleppo (d.1122), and Balak the Artukid (d.1124) (69), who were all mentioned by Ibn al-Athir as great achievers, but in the more balanced book, al-kamil.

In a show of full submission to sultan Masud, Zanki secretly ordered his eldest son Ghazi, who was serving in the entourage of Masud, to escape from Baghdad to Mosul. Zanki ordered his deputy in Mosul, Chuqr, to prohibit Ghazi from entering. Then Zanki sent an escort to accompany his son back to the sultan's court, saying: 'My son left your service without permission. I refused to meet him, and here I am sending him back to your doorstep'. This gentlemanly deed was very well received by the sultan, who pardoned the father and the son. He also abolished most of the annual tributes he had ordered previously (70).

One cannot agree with the opinion of Alptekin in his study *The reign of Zangi*, which states that Zanki was loyal to the Saljuqid sultans most of the time, especially when he realized that 'any government of an independent state would inevitably be given a member of the Saljuq family' (71). One can argue eminently that Zanki, like Tughtakin of Damascus, was given a sultanate diploma to rule Damascus and central Syria from 1115 without any Saljuqid king (72).

When relations between Zanki and sultan Masud were about to improve, as we have discussed in the events of 538/1143, one sees an unexpected shift the following year in Dhu al-Qida 539/May 1145 from the Saljuqid malik or king, Alp Arslan b. Mahmud II, raised by Zanki in Mosul. The young boy Alp Arslan who had turned into a mature man decided to take the opportunity of Zanki's absence in al- Jazira, and ordered the murder of his deputy, Chuqr(Turkmen for gray eyes) in Mosul. Some of Alp Arslan's entourage had advised him, saying: 'If you murder Chuqr, you sieze Mosul and other territories. Zanki then will not be able to challenge you, and will not have one single knight on his side' (73). This action or manoeuvre failed due to the courage of Zanki's forces in Mosul, who fought Alp Arslan's forces at once, and he was captured and jailed in the citadel while Zanki was fighting the Bashnawyya Kurds near Jazirat Ibn Umar, north of Mosul (74).

If one examines such events, one will see the following:

Zanki never hesitated to turn against his own Saljuqid candidate, to whom he should submit as a Saljuqid royal. Secondly, the timing of Alp Arslan's move was unwise, especially when it came after Zanki had captured Edessa a few months earlier and became a hero across large parts of the Muslim world. The move also shows us how Zanki was in full command of his principality although he was away from it, and how loyal his deputies and forces were there even if that meant arresting a Saljuqid malik and putting him in prison.

From 1127 when he became lord of Mosul to his murder in 1146 Zanki had skillfully challenged five Saljuqid sultans in addition to defying three different Abbasid caliphs, all of which was in order to remain independent and to expand in Iraq, Syria and al-Jazira.

One can confidently state that the politics of jihad carried out by Zanki against the Crusaders greatly affected most of his life and career by his other jihadi campaigns against the institutions of both the Saljuqid and the Abbasid caliphate.

One can add that Zanki was over-ambitious, moving on three or four fronts at the same time or in a short period of time against the Saljuqs of Iran, Syria, the Crusaders, the caliphate, the Turkmen and the Kurds, which resulted in consuming most of his time and resources away from the Frankish front.

Notes

- 1- Ibn al-Athir, al-Bahir,p.78
- 2- C.Bosworth, The new Islamic, p.185,191
- 3-Ibn al-Qalanisi, p.392
- 4- Ibn al-Athir, vol.10, p.651,2
- 5- Ibid, vol.10, p. 654,55
- Dubays was lord of Hilla, near Baghdad, and rebelled against the authority of The Abbasid caliph.
- 6- Ibn al-Adim, Zubdat, vol. 2,p. 242
- 7- T.K. el-Azhari, The Saljuqs of Syria, Berlin 1997, p.207
- 8- S.Runciman, A history of The Crusades, Cambridge,1981,vol.2,p. 182,3
- 9- Ibn al-Athir,vol.10,p. 674
- 10- Please refer to my art.Atabeg in Encyclopedia of the Crusades, ed: A. Murray, California 2006
- 11- Ibn Wasil, Mufarrij al-Kurub, ed: G.al-Shayyal,Cairo,1957.vol.1,p.46
- 12- Ibid,p.47,8
- 13- Ibn al-Athir, vol.10,p.675; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.48
- 14- C.Bosworth, The political and dynastic history of the Iranian world -1000/1217, in Cambridge history of Iran,vol.5,ed: J.A.Boyle.pp.1-202,p.124.
- 15- al-Muntazam,vol.10,p.25
- 16- Ibn al-Athir,vol.10,p.676
- The post of the caliphal deputy here is not clear, and not often mentioned.
- 17- C.Bosworth, The political,p.121
- 18- Ibn Wasil, vol.1,p.49,50
- 19- Ibn al-Athir,vol.10,p.676,77
- 20- ibn al-Athir,al-Bahir,p.46; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.50,5121- Ibn al-Athir,vol.10,p.681,2
- 22- Ibid,p.686,7
- 23- Ibn al-Athir, al-Bahir,p.47
- 24- Ibid,p.47,8
- Ibn Wasil have reported that the deputy of Zanki had crucified those who collaborated with al-Mustarshid to surrender Mosul during the siege.vol.1,p.52,3
- 25- T.el-Azhari,Saljuqs,p.240
- 26- Ibn al-Athir,vol.10,p.685
- 27- al-Muntazam, vol.10,p.34,5
- 28- Ibid,p.41,2
- 29- C.Bosworth, The political,p. 125; al-Bahir,p.80
- 30- Ibn al-Adim,Zubdat,vol.2,p.256; Ibn al-Qalanisi,p.390
- 31- Ibn al-Qalanisi,p.391
- 32- al-Muntazam,vol.10,p.45
- 33- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.15; Ibn al-Adim,Zubdat,vol.2,p.250
- 34- Ibid,p. 16; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.60
- 35- al-Muntazam,vol.10,p. 47. Al-Bahir reports that they were 14 Batinis, while in al-Kamil, vol.11,p.22, reports that they were 24.
- 36- al-Bindari,al-Isfahani, Tarikh dawlat al-Saljuq, Beirut 1980,p.166; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.61
- 37- Ibid,p.166,7
- 38- Ibn al-Adim, Zubdat,vol.2,p.251
- 39- Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.62,3
- 40- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.23
- 41- Ibid,p.23

- 42- Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.64
- 43- al-Bahir,p.52
- 44- Ibn al-Qalanisi,p.402; Abu al-Fida, al-Mukhtasar fi akhbar al-Bashar,N/D vol.3,p.10
- 45- Ibn al-Adim,Zubdat,vol.2,p.262; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.65
- 46- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.41,2
- 47- Ibn al-Qalanisi,p.403; al-Muntazam,vol.10,p.57
- 48- Ibid,p.402,3; al-Bahir,p.53
- 49- Ibn Said, al-Bayan al-Mughrib fi tarikh al-Maghrib, Beirut,1987,p.126
Al-Ballawi, Sirat Ahmad Ibn Tulun, Beirut, 2001,p.290
- 50- Abu Shama, al-Rawdatain,vol.1,p.24
- 51- Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.68
- 52- Ibid,p.70; Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.45
- 53- al-Bahir,p.54
- 54- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.48
- 55- Ibn al-Adim,Zubdat,vol2,p.265; Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.56
- 56- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.56,7
- 57- Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.80
- 58- Ibid,p.80
- 59- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.59,60
- I.Khalil in his master thesis attributed that to Zanki himself, which could not be found in al-Bahir or al-Kamil which he cited. Ibn Wasil put the force at 10,000 only.
- 60- Ibid,p.60; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.81
- 61- al-Bahir,p.65; C.Bosworth, The Political,p.127,8
Sultan Sanjar in Khurasan was always occupied with Transoxania
- 62- Ibn al-Qalanisi,p.295; Ibn al-Athir,vol.10,p.497
- 63- Ibn wasil,vol.1,p.83
- 64- C.Bosworth,The Political,p.130,131; Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.90; al-Isfahani,tarikh Saljuq,p.179
- 65- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.94; al-Bahir,p.65
- 66- al-Isfahani,Tarikh,p.179
- 67- al-Bahir,p.6568- Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.92; Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.95
- 69- Ibid,p.65; T.el-Azhari,art.Balak,Encyclopedia of the Crusades,ed.A.Murray,2006
- 70- Ibn Wasil,vol.1,p.91
- 71- C.Alptekin,The reign of Zangi,Ph.D thesis,London university,1972,p.76,77
- 72- T.el-Azhari,The Saljuqs,p.208
- 73- Ibn al-Athir,vol.11,p.101
- 74- al-Bahir,p.72,3