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## AL-MALIK AL-MUAZZAM TURANSHAH'S YEMEN CAMPAIGN (570/1174): THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS IN AYYUBID POWER STRATEGY

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the causes and strategic significance of the Yemen campaign (570/1174) carried out during the founding period of the Ayyubid State. The primary objective of the research is to reveal the religious, political and economic motivations behind the Ayyubid dominion over Yemen, which began under the leadership of Salah-al-Din's brother Turanshah and lasted approximately sixty years. The study evaluates the accounts found in classical Islamic historical sources in conjunction with the critical approach of modern historiography. Classical sources present four fundamental factors as the causes of the Yemen campaign: the heretical activities of the Mahdids' ruler Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi, the encouragement of the Yemeni poet Umara al-Yamani, the search for an alternative homeland against Nur al-Din Zengi's possible Egyptian campaign, and the inadequacy of Turanshah's iqtas. Modern historiography, however, emphasizes more complex motivations such as control of commercial routes, elimination of the Fatimid threat, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Abbasid caliphate, and security of southern borders. The main finding of the research is that the Yemen campaign has such a complex structure that it cannot be reduced to a single cause. When Turanshah's actions in Yemen are examined, it has been determined that the campaign was a planned and strategic move. The study reveals that the Yemen campaign was a strategic component of the Ayyubid state-building process and that religious, political, and economic motivations functioned as mutually complementary elements. Yemen's central position in Red Sea trade, its proximity to the Hejaz, and the potential threat posed by the Shiite presence in the region in the post-Fatimid period became the main determinants of Turanshah's Yemen campaign. In conclusion, the Yemen campaign should be evaluated as a pre-planned strategic initiative serving multi-dimensional objectives in Ayyubid power strategy.

**Keywords:** Islamic History, Ayyubids, Yemen Campaign, Turanshah, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, Red Sea Trade.

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## EL-MELİKÜ'L-MUAZZAM TÛRÂŖŞÂH'IN YEMEN SEFERİ (570/1174): EYYÛBÎ İKTİDAR STRATEJİSİNDE DİNÎ, SİYASÎ VE İKTİSADÎ MOTİVASYONLARIN KESİŞİMİ

Bedrettin BASUGUY<sup>1</sup>

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Eyyûbî Devleti'nin kuruluş döneminde gerçekleştirilen Yemen seferinin (570/1174) nedenlerini ve stratejik önemini incelemektedir. Araştırmanın temel amacı, Selâhaddîn-i Eyyûbî'nin ağabeyi Tûranşâh öncülüğünde başlayan ve yaklaşık altmış yıl süren Eyyübîlerin Yemen hâkimiyetinin arkasındaki dinî, siyasî ve iktisadî motivasyonları ortaya koymaktır. Çalışmada, klasik İslam tarih kaynaklarında yer alan veriler ile modern tarih yazımındaki yaklaşımlar birlikte değerlendirilmiştir. Klasik kaynaklar Yemen seferinin nedenleri olarak dört temel faktör sunmaktadır: Mehdîler hükümdarı Abdünnebi bin Mehdî'nin sapkın faaliyetleri, Yemenli şair Umâre el-Yemenî'nin teşviki, Nûreddin Zengî'nin muhtemel Mısır seferine karşı alternatif yurt arayışı ve Tûranşâh'ın iktidarının yetersizliği. Modern tarihyazımı ise ticari güzergâhların kontrolü, Fâtımî tehdidinin bertaraf edilmesi, Abbâsî hilafeti nezdinde meşruiyet kazanma ve güney sınırlarının güvenliği gibi motivasyonları vurgulamaktadır. Araştırmanın temel bulgusu, Yemen seferinin tek bir nedene indirgenemeyecek kadar kompleks bir yapıya sahip olduğudur. Tûranşâh'ın Yemen'deki icraatları incelendiğinde seferin planlı ve stratejik bir hamle olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışma, Yemen seferinin Eyyûbî Devleti'nin inşâ sürecinde stratejik bir karar olduğunu ve seferin arkasındaki dinî, siyasî ve iktisadî motivasyonların birbirini tamamlayan unsurlar olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Yemen'in Kızıldeniz ticaretindeki merkezi konumu, Hicaz'a komşuluğu ve Fâtımî sonrası dönemde bölgedeki Şîî varlığının oluşturduğu potansiyel tehdit, Tûranşâh'ın Yemen seferinin temel belirleyicileri olmuştur. Sonuç olarak, Yemen seferi Eyyûbî iktidar stratejisinde çok boyutlu hedeflere hizmet eden, önceden planlanmış stratejik bir girişim olarak değerlendirilmelidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam Tarihi, Eyyübîler, Yemen Seferi, Selâhaddîn-i Eyyûbî, Tûranşâh, Kızıldeniz Ticareti.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the political history of the medieval Islamic world, the expansion strategies and conquest policies of states are important indicators that reflect the power balances and concepts of authority of the period. In this context, the Yemen campaign carried out during the founding phase of the Ayyubid State emerges as a multi-dimensional event that contains the characteristic features of both regional power struggles and the state-building process. The Ayyubid dominion that began under Turanshah's leadership in 570/1174 and lasted approximately twenty years constitutes an important turning point in Yemen's history, although it has not received the attention it deserves in Islamic historiography.

Yemen's strategic position was one of the fundamental elements that attracted the attention of regional and international powers in the 12th century. Located at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, at the crossroads of Indian Ocean trade, and neighboring the Hejaz, Yemen possessed not only economic but also religious and political critical importance. After the end of the Fatimid caliphate in 567/1171, the presence of Shi'ite-characterized local dynasties such as the Sulayhids, Zuray'ids, Mahdids and Hamdanids active in Yemen constituted a potential threat element for the newly established Sunni Ayyubid authority (Can, 2024:32). This situation is important for understanding the fundamental dynamics behind Salah al-Din Ayyubi's strategic move toward Yemen.

Examining the reasons that drove the Ayyubids to the Yemen campaign is important both for its contribution to understanding Salah-al-Din's political vision and for shedding light on understanding Yemen's strategic importance. Was the Yemen campaign an impulsive event undertaken as a result of favorable circumstances, or was it a planned move based on a specific strategy? If it was a move carried out within the framework of a specific strategy, what was this strategy? What were the factors behind the campaign? Classical sources dealing with the Ayyubids' Yemen campaign have tried to answer these questions from different perspectives. Various reasons such as Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi's heretical activities, Umara al-Yamani's encouragement of Turanshah, the search for an alternative homeland against Nur al-Din Zengi's possible Egyptian campaign, and Turanshah's economic expectations were put forward by the authors of the period. In modern historiography, however, the view that these reasons alone are insufficient and that there is a more complex network of motivations behind the campaign has gained weight. Strategic objectives such as control of commercial routes, elimination of the Fatimid threat, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Abbasid caliphate, and ensuring the security of southern borders reveal the multi-layered structure of the Yemen campaign.

This study aims to re-evaluate the reasons for the Ayyubids' Yemen campaign by analyzing the data presented by classical sources and then blending them with the critical approach of modern historiography. The study argues that the campaign has such a complex structure that it cannot be reduced to a single cause, and that religious, political and economic motivations function as mutually complementary and reinforcing elements. In this context, Turanshah's actions and practices in Yemen provide critical data for understanding the real objectives of the campaign. Concrete steps such as the liquidation of the Mahdid dynasty, the conquest of Aden and the preservation of its economic potential, and the elimination of Ismaili dynasties show that the Yemen campaign was a planned and strategic move. The main argument of the study is that the complex structure of the Yemen campaign, which cannot be reduced to a single cause, can only be understood when evaluated together with Turanshah's actions in Yemen, that the Yemen campaign was a strategic component of the Ayyubid state-building process, and that the religious, political and economic motivations behind the campaign should be evaluated within a complementary wholeness.

## 2. CAUSES OF THE YEMEN CAMPAIGN ACCORDING TO PRIMARY SOURCES

Various related religious, political, economic and psychological reasons are mentioned in the sources dealing with the Ayyubid conquest of Yemen. While some of these sources provide information about only one reason for the campaign, others mention several reasons together. When these sources are examined, it emerges that four reasons are mentioned regarding the Yemen campaign.

### 2.1. The Activities of Abd al-Nabi bin Mahdi

According to a letter that Salah-al-Din sent to the Abbasid caliph in 570/1175, a campaign was organized to Yemen to put an end to the tyranny of Ibn Mahdi, the ruler of the Mahdids who ruled in Tihama. The letter states that the Yemen campaign was carried out to put an end to the tyranny that Ibn Mahdi, described as heretical and deviant, inflicted on the people, that large amounts of money were spent to meet the needs of the army prepared for this purpose, and that the army was equipped with extraordinary weapons (Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 236-237; Qalqashandi, 1914, 13: 86).

A group of historians including Ibn Shaddad, Abu Shama and Ibn Wasil, among the historians of the Ayyubid period, consider the activities of the heretic named Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi as the main reason for the conquest of Yemen. According to this, when Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi, who was trying to establish dominance by force in

Yemen, banned reading the khutba in the name of the Abbasid caliph and had the khutba read in his own name, and occupied Yemen and oppressed the people, Salah-al-Dîn sent Turanshah to the conquest of Yemen (Ibn Shaddad, 1375: 33; Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 178; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 238; Ibn Khallikan, 1968, 1: 306).

‘Imād al-Dîn al-Isfahānī states that ‘Abd al-Nabī b. Mahdī claimed the imamate and attempted to establish his sovereignty by force and the oppression of Muslims. Furthermore, he acted in violation of the Shari‘a by legalizing intoxicants and having the khutba delivered in his own name, but eventually died while on a military campaign to occupy Mecca. (Isfahani, 1955, 3: 64-65).

Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi puts forward the heretical activities of Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi, whom he describes as an oppressive da‘i supporting the Fatimids, as the main reason for the Yemen campaign (Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, 21: 193).

The Yemeni historian Ibn al-Dayba‘, while viewing Turanshah's Yemen campaign as a result of Ibn Mahdi's activities, states that Salah-al-Dîn undertook the conquest of Yemen upon the request of the Abbasid caliph. According to Ibn al-Dayba‘, when Ibn al-Nusah, one of Yemen's famous scholars, sent a letter to the Abbasid caliph describing Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi's heresies and the tyranny he inflicted on people, the caliph asked Salah-al-Dîn to intervene in Yemen. Upon this, Salah-al-Dîn sent an army to Yemen under the command of his brother Turanshah (Ibn al-Dayba‘, 2006: 266).

According to another Yemeni historian Ba Mahrama, when Ibn Mahdi killed Wahhas ibn Gann, the leader of the Sulaymanis, one of his brothers went to Baghdad and asked the caliph for help against Ibn Mahdi, whereupon the caliph sent a letter to Salah-al-Dîn asking him to kill Ibn Mahdi. Ba Mahrama points to this event as the reason for the Ayyubids' entry into Yemen (Ba Mahrama, 1987: 159-160).

Ibn Abi Tayy states that at a time when Turanshah decided to set out on the Yemen campaign, when the Yemeni Sharif Hashim ibn Gann asked for help due to the tyranny committed by Ibn Mahdi, Turanshah began campaign preparations with Salah-al-Dîn's approval (Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 180).

## **2.2. Umara al-Yamani's Encouragement of Turanshah**

The encouragement of the Yemeni poet Umara al-Yamani to Turanshah is shown in our sources as another reason for the conquest of Yemen. Umara, of Qahtani origin, was born in 515/1121 in the city of Murtan in Yemen, studied Shafi‘i jurisprudence in Zabid, and after completing his education, taught there. Umara's poetic talent, which became evident in Aden under Fatimid influence, soon opened the doors of fame for him in Fatimid Egypt. Umara, who was honored with the favor and generosity of the Fatimid caliphs and viziers through the panegyrics he wrote for them, although belonging to the Shafi‘i school, did not hesitate to praise Ismaili thoughts and concepts in his poems to maintain the comfortable life he had obtained. When the Ayyubids came to power in Egypt, he also wrote panegyrics for the kings belonging to the Ayyubid dynasty, especially Salah-al-Dîn, but could not receive the attention he expected from Egypt's new owner (Ibn Shaddad, 1375: 200; Ibn Khallikan, 1968, 3: 431-436; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 212, 243-246; Alwash, 1967; Smoor, 2000: 836; Kilic, 2012: 145-146).

When Umara could not receive the attention he desired from Salah-al-Dîn, he turned to his brother Turanshah, wrote poems praising Turanshah in hope of gaining his protection, and succeeded in influencing him (Isfahani, 1955, 3: 101-140; Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, 21: 198-199). Ibn al-Jawzi states that Sultan Salah-al-Dîn wanted to kill Umara while Turanshah was still in Egypt, but Umara's status and Turanshah's protection prevented this (Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, 21: 201).

While Umara al-Yamani was writing panegyrics praising Turanshah on one hand, on the other hand he wrote poems encouraging him to conquer Yemen. Historians of the period, starting with Ibn al-Athir, including Ibn Abi Tayy, Abu Shama and Ibn Wasil, state that Umara encouraged Turanshah to conquer Yemen by describing Yemen's wealth and beauty, and that Turanshah, influenced by what Umara told him, began conquest preparations by gathering soldiers and supplies (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 52; Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 179; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 238). Our sources have also indicated what Umara aimed for when encouraging Turanshah to conquer Yemen. According to this, Umara told his Fatimid supporter friends who had come together to overthrow Salah-al-Dîn that "while directing Turanshah to Yemen, he aimed to remove him from Egypt and divide Salah-al-Dîn's army, thus ensuring the success of the plot they would develop against Salah-al-Dîn" (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 54; Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 186; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 244). However, Umara could not achieve his goal. While Turanshah was on the Yemen campaign, the plot organized to eliminate the Ayyubids and re-establish the Fatimid caliphate was crushed while still in the planning stage thanks to Salah-al-Dîn's effective intelligence network, and Umara and his friends were executed on 2 Ramadan 569/6 April 1174 based on the fatwa given by scholars (Ibn Shaddad, 1375: 200; Isfahani, 1955, 3: 101-104; Ibn Khallikan, 1968, 3: 431-436; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 212, 243-246; Smoor, 2000: 836; Kılıç, 2012: 145-146).

### 2.3. The Desire to Find a New Homeland Against Nur al-Din Zengi's Possible Egyptian Campaign

According to a view developed by Ibn al-Athir and taken from him by Ibn Wasil, the Ayyubids organized a campaign to Yemen with the desire to find a homeland where they could settle against Nur al-Din Zengi's possible Egyptian campaign against them (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 52; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 237). Ibn al-Athir states that Salah-al-Din and his family feared that Nur al-Din would enter Egypt and take it from them, and that against the possibility of Nur al-Din removing them from Egypt, they began to look for a place where they could settle and acquire property, and for this purpose they first turned to Nubia, then to Yemen. Ibn al-Athir, who attributes the main reason for the conquest of Yemen to the fear of Nur al-Din removing the Ayyubids from Egypt, contradicts himself by stating in the continuation of the narration on the subject that Salah-al-Din asked Nur al-Din for permission for the Yemen campaign and that Nur al-Din also gave permission (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 52).

### 2.4. The Inadequacy of Turanshah's Iqtas in Egypt

Imad al-Din al-Isfahani and Ibn Abi Tayy state that the inadequacy of his iqtas in Egypt for Turanshah, who was distinguished by his generosity, drove him to the conquest of Yemen (Bundari, 2004: 69; Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 179). Al-Isfahani states that Turanshah was famous for his magnanimity, that his wealth in Egypt was insufficient for his generosity, and that Qus no longer satisfied him as before (Bundari, 2004: 69), giving the impression that this situation was the main factor that drove Turanshah to the Yemen campaign. The Yemeni historian Ibn Hatim also supports this view by stating that Salah-al-Din allocated a place to his other brothers except Turanshah and sent Turanshah to Yemen (Ibn Hatim, 1974: 15).

## 3. THE YEMEN CAMPAIGN IN MODERN STUDIES

A significant portion of Western studies dealing with the conquest of Yemen have chosen only one of the reasons given in the sources. British historian Stanley Lane-Poole, in both of his books dealing with Turanshah's Nubia and Yemen campaigns, states that Salah-al-Din organized these campaigns with the aim of finding a place where they could take refuge against Nur al-Din's threat to occupy Egypt (Lane-Pool, 1898: 124-126; Lane-Pool, 1901: 197), thus adopting Ibn al-Athir's narration.

Steven Runciman, who states that the disagreement between Salah-al-Din and Nur al-Din turned into a crisis, also states that the Yemen campaign was organized with the aim of finding a place of refuge. Runciman states that Salah-al-Din, against whom Shiite aristocrats were developing intrigues by contacting the Franks, was not safe in Egypt and therefore sent Turanshah to Sudan, but when Sudan proved unsuitable as a place of refuge, he sent him to the south of Arabia (Runciman, 1995: 397-398).

Claude Cahen, who wrote the Ayyubids article in the Encyclopedia of Islam, although avoiding making a definitive judgment about the main reasons for the Yemen campaign, states that the main motive of the campaign might be the desire to besiege Fatimid supporters in Yemen or to build Yemen as a possible place of refuge. Cahen states that the goal of developing commercial relations that are of vital importance for Egypt and Yemen is an indubitable fact regarding the Yemen campaign (Cahen, 1986: 800).

Stephen Humphreys, known for his studies on the Ayyubids, deals with the Yemen campaign in the context of the relationship Turanshah established with his brother Salah-al-Din. According to him, Turanshah, one of the experienced and prestigious members of the Ayyubid dynasty, led this campaign within the chain of complex reasons that led to the Yemen campaign at a time when he was trying to create an individual career for himself. Humphreys states that Turanshah's desire to build a kingdom for himself was the main reason for this campaign without mentioning these "complex reasons" of the Yemen campaign (Humphreys, 1977: 44).

One of the different views on the reason for the Yemen campaign belongs to H. A. R. Gibb. In his article titled "The Armies of Salah-al-Din," Gibb states that the Ayyubids' large-scale army in Egypt and the increasingly growing jihad expenses strained Egypt's financial resources, and that Salah-al-Din took a step to reduce the number of soldiers by sending a large unit to Yemen (Gibb, 1962: 40). Gibb, without mentioning other reasons for the Yemen campaign, based the real reason for the campaign on the desire to reduce the enormous expenses arising from the constantly increasing number of soldiers.

The most detailed evaluations regarding the reasons for the Yemen campaign in the West belong to G. R. Smith. In his study *The Ayyubids and Early Rasulids in the Yemen* prepared on Ibn Hatim's "Kitab al-Simt," Smith states that the campaign was conducted for two main purposes after analyzing the information given in sources and research about the Yemen campaign: According to this, the first of the main motives behind the campaign was commercial. For an Ayyubid presence positioned in the south of the Red Sea would guarantee the continuity of commercial activities between East and West as well as protect trade between Yemen and Egypt. Smith mentions the need to find a safe place to take refuge in case any danger emerges that would threaten the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt as the second reason for the Yemen campaign. Smith, who states that the desire to expel the Ismailis from

Yemen can also be added to these two reasons, states that other reasons given in sources, though insignificant, can be evaluated as reasons that reinforce the main reasons when considered together (Smith, 1978, 2: 45-47).

In the East, the most comprehensive evaluations regarding the reasons for the Yemen campaign were made by Egyptian historian Jamal al-Din Sayyal. Sayyal stated his thoughts on the subject in a footnote in Ibn Wasil's *Mufarrij al-Kurub* published in 1953, and later dealt with the subject comprehensively again in his book *Tarikh Misr al-Islami* published in 1967. Sayyal, criticizing the view that Salah-al-Din organized the Nubia and Yemen campaigns to find a place of refuge out of fear of Nur al-Din, states that this view was put forward by Ibn al-Athir, who was known for his anti-Ayyubid, pro-Zengi stance, and that Ibn Wasil also took this narration from him. Sayyal states that Ibn al-Athir, who attributes the main reason for the Yemen campaign to the fear of Nur al-Din removing the Ayyubids from Egypt, contradicts himself by stating in the continuation of the subject that Salah-al-Din asked Nur al-Din for permission for the Yemen campaign and that Nur al-Din also gave him permission (Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 237-238, footnote 2). Jamal al-Din Sayyal listed the reasons for the Yemen campaign in four points in his book *Tarikh Misr al-Islami*. Sayyal's arguments are as follows:

**A.** Yemen was at that time one of the places where Shiites lived intensively. Dynasties active here such as the Sulayhids (1047-1138), Zuray'ids (1080-1175), and Mahdids (1159-1174) had established close relations with the Fatimids. Fearing that Fatimid supporters would gather in Yemen and threaten Egypt economically and militarily, Salah-al-Din aimed to eliminate this danger with the Yemen campaign.

**B.** Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi, who ruled in Yemen at that time, was an oppressive ruler who had banned the hajj and claimed prophethood. When a group of people who were horrified by what Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi did complained about him to the Abbasid caliph, the caliph sent a letter to Salah-al-Din asking him to intervene against Ibn Mahdi, whereupon Turanshah set out on the Yemen campaign.

**C.** All sources dealing with the Yemen campaign mention that Salah-al-Din asked Nur al-Din for permission to organize this campaign and that he also gave permission. It does not seem reasonable for Nur al-Din to knowingly give permission to Salah-al-Din, who organized this campaign to escape from him and look for a new place.

**D.** With the Yemen campaign, Salah-al-Din aimed to keep his authority economically and militarily secure by capturing the southern coast of the Red Sea. For the Red Sea was at that time the sole route of commercial transport between East and West, and Egypt collected significant customs duties from this transport. While still vizier of the Fatimid caliph al-Adid, Salah-al-Din had captured Ayla Castle, ensuring the security of the Red Sea's northern entrance. After the capture of Ayla, taking Yemen to control the southern entrance of the Red Sea and thus keeping the entire trade route secure had become a necessity. Likewise, the Red Sea was a route leading to the holy lands. Fearing that the crusaders would infiltrate the holy lands by ship, Salah-al-Din accepted keeping the northern and southern parts of the Red Sea under control as an important responsibility (Sayyal, 1966: 30-31).

Sayyal states that the plot organized by Fatimid supporters to eliminate Salah-al-Din and re-establish the Fatimid State was also related to the Yemen campaign. According to him, the plotters who were in contact with Franks and Assassins had assigned Umara al-Yamani to encourage Turanshah to the Yemen campaign. The plotters' aim was to weaken Salah-al-Din and eliminate him by sending a significant part of the Egyptian army to Yemen under Turanshah's leadership (Sayyal, 1966: 31). With this thought, Sayyal accepts that Umara al-Yamani's encouragement of Turanshah to the campaign was a pre-planned action by the plotters, giving the impression that this was not Umara's own idea.

Egyptian historian Muhammad Abdul'al Ahmad states in his book *al-Ayyubiyyun fi'l-Yaman* that the Yemen campaign aimed to eliminate the Mahdid dynasty ruling in Zabid and establish Sunnism, and to break the influence of Shiites who centered in Yemen after the fall of the Fatimid State in Aden and Sanaa. According to him, the need to establish an Arab-Islamic front unity that would eliminate the Crusader threat also necessitated this campaign. For with the Yemen campaign, the southern entrance of the Red Sea would be brought under dominion and the security of the southern borders would be ensured, thus preventing a Crusader attack that could be directed toward the holy lands (Abdul'al, 1980: 80).

Ramazan Şeşen, known for his studies in the field of Ayyubid history, has not categorized the reasons mentioned in sources regarding the Yemen campaign in his work *Salahâddîn Eyyûbî ve Devri*. After stating that Yemen had been a region of strategic importance for Egypt since ancient times, Şeşen states that Turanshah set out on this campaign upon the increasing strength of Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi, the extensive activities of Fatimid supporters in Yemen, and the Yemeni people's request for help from Salah-al-Din (Şeşen, 1983: 54).

#### 4. THE MULTI-LAYERED STRUCTURE OF THE YEMEN CAMPAIGN: AN EVALUATION IN LIGHT OF TURANSHAH'S ACTIONS

When examining the reasons behind the Yemen campaign, two points need to be considered. First, without reducing the realization of the campaign to a single cause, the reasons expressed in primary sources need to be addressed with a holistic approach. First, the divergent accounts of the Yemen campaign in primary sources can be attributed to the varied geographical and political contexts of the medieval chroniclers. Historians residing in Egypt or Bilād al-Shām often relied on information filtered through their distance from the Yemeni frontier, leading them to prioritize reasons that seemed most plausible within their own regional and political horizons. For instance, Ayyubid-centered chroniclers like Ibn Shaddād, Abū Shāma, and Ibn Wāṣil focus on religious legitimacy, framing the campaign as a necessary intervention against the 'heretical' and oppressive rule of 'Abd al-Nabī b. Maḥdī. In contrast, the Zengi-leaning historian Ibn al-Athīr provides a distinct historiographical perspective by suggesting that the campaign was driven by the Ayyubids' desire to find an alternative homeland due to their fear of Nūr al-Dīn Zengī's potential intervention in Egypt. Furthermore, the varied emphasis on secondary motives—such as 'Umāra al-Yamanī's poetic encouragement or the inadequacy of Tūrānshāh's *iqṭā*'s—reveals how authors prioritized information according to their proximity to the events and their specific intellectual motivations. Second, it is necessary to evaluate the objectives behind the campaign by taking into account the activities of Turanshah, who carried out the campaign, in Yemen. For Turanshah's activities and actions in Yemen provide important data about the reasons for the campaign. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the information given in sources together with Turanshah's practices in Yemen. This analytical framework allows us to move beyond surface-level explanations and penetrate the deeper strategic calculations that shaped Ayyubid foreign policy.

When Turanshah went to Yemen, his first action was to put an end to the Maḥdid dynasty by uniting with the forces of the Sulaymani sharifs who had requested help from Salah-al-Dīn (Ibn Hatim, 1974: 15). Turanshah's putting an end to the Maḥdid dynasty is important as a development that confirms the claim that the campaign was conducted "to put an end to the tyranny of the Maḥdids' ruler Ibn Maḥdi." The developments that occurred after the elimination of the Maḥdid dynasty show that this objective was aimed at gaining the appreciation of the Abbasid caliphate and ensuring the legitimate justification of the campaign, and that it played a facilitating role in the realization of other objectives behind the campaign. Turanshah's next move after putting an end to the Maḥdid dynasty and bringing Zabid and its surroundings under his dominion was the conquest of Aden (Ibn Hatim, 1974: 18; Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 53; Bundari, 2004: 69). The conquest of Aden, which was the center of a vast trade route extending from the Red Sea to the African coasts, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean, had critical importance both for ensuring the continuity of the Ayyubid dominion to be established in Yemen and for ensuring the continuity of commercial operations between Egypt and Yemen. Indeed, Turanshah, aware of Aden's economic potential, did not allow his soldiers who wanted to destroy the city after the conquest, telling them that "they had come to develop Aden and benefit from its income" (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 52). Therefore, ensuring the security of commercial activities and dominating Aden's economic potential constitutes one of the dominant reasons for the Yemen campaign. The sequential pattern of operations—religious legitimization through eliminating the Maḥdids, followed by economic consolidation through capturing Aden—reveals an integrated strategy where ideological justification and material objectives reinforced each other systematically.

Although not mentioned in primary sources, the potential of Shiite dominion, which was quite strong in Yemen before the Ayyubids and shaped under the influence of the Fatimid caliphate, to threaten the security of Egypt, the center of the Ayyubid State in its founding phase, constitutes another important reason for the Yemen campaign. The intensive activities that resulted in the liquidation of the Ismaili Zuray'id and Hamdanid dynasties during the periods of Turanshah and Tughtegin (Ibn Hatim, 1974: 17; Hazraji, 1981: 148; Maqrizi, 1997, 1: 162; Abdul'al, 1980: 86) can be evaluated in the context of realizing this objective. This preventive approach aligns with Salah-al-Din's broader policy of Sunni consolidation across territories formerly under Fatimid influence.

Umara al-Yamani's encouragement of Turanshah can only be evaluated as a subsidiary reason that helped realize the main objectives we have listed above. The fact that what Umara emphasized when encouraging Turanshah was about his country's wealth also gives the impression that Yemen was primarily worthy of conquest because of the material assets and resources it contained. Therefore, Umara's rhetorical strategy of highlighting Yemen's economic prosperity rather than its strategic or religious significance suggests he understood what would most effectively appeal to a military commander seeking to establish an independent power base.

Accepting the inadequacy of Turanshah's *iqṭas* in Egypt as one of the motives for the Yemen campaign is quite difficult. For after Turanshah came to Egypt, Salah-al-Dīn gave him the fertile lands of Qus and Aswan in addition to the Port of Aydhab, which had significant trade potential, and later added to these Giza where the pyramids were located and Samannud in the Damietta region in Upper Egypt (Abu Shama, 2002, 2: 100; Rabie, 1972: 43). Therefore, claiming that the campaign was conducted because these places, which had serious income, were

insufficient for Turanshah does not seem rational. The narrative of insufficient resources may have served as a convenient explanation that avoided exposing the campaign's broader geopolitical calculations.

Ibn al-Athir's claim that "the Yemen campaign was organized with the aim of finding a new homeland against the possibility of Nur al-Din Zengi removing the Ayyubids from Egypt" is inconsistent with historical facts. For Nur al-Din's sending Salah-al-Din's brother Tughtegin and his older brother Turanshah to Egypt in 1169, then sending his father Ayyub to Egypt in 1170, and requesting from Turanshah to obey Salah-al-Din in any case (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 52; Ibn Wasil, 1960, 1: 237), is both an expression of Nur al-Din's trust in Salah-al-Din and refutes claims that there was a major crisis between the two at that time. Moreover, Ibn al-Athir, who attributes the main reason for the conquest of Yemen to the Ayyubids' fear of being removed from Egypt by Nur al-Din, contradicts himself by stating in the continuation of the narration on the subject that Salah-al-Din asked Nur al-Din for permission for the Yemen campaign and that Nur al-Din also gave permission (Ibn al-Athir, 2003, 10: 52). The formal permission-seeking protocol itself indicates that both parties viewed the Yemen expedition within the framework of legitimate imperial expansion rather than as a clandestine escape plan.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the causes and strategic significance of the Yemen campaign (570/1174) carried out during the founding period of the Ayyubid State have been examined by evaluating together the data presented by classical Islamic historical sources with the critical approach of modern historiography. As a result of the research, it has been determined that the Yemen campaign has such a complex structure that it cannot be reduced to a single cause, and that religious, political and economic motivations functioned as mutually complementary and reinforcing elements.

The four main reasons put forward by classical sources for the Yemen campaign - Abd al-Nabi ibn Mahdi's heretical activities, Umara al-Yamani's encouragement, the search for an alternative homeland against Nur al-Din Zengi's possible Egyptian campaign, and the inadequacy of Turanshah's iqta - each illuminate different aspects of the campaign's multi-layered nature when evaluated in their own context. However, none of these reasons alone is sufficient to explain the campaign's true nature. Strategic objectives put forward by modern historiography such as control of commercial routes, the potential threat posed by the Shiite presence in Yemen in the post-Fatimid period, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Abbasid caliphate, and security of southern borders reveal the deeper motivations behind the campaign.

Turanshah's actions in Yemen provide concrete evidence proving that the campaign was a planned and strategic move. The systematic liquidation of the Mahdid dynasty created the legitimacy ground for the campaign, while the conquest of Aden and the preservation of its economic potential clearly show the importance of Yemen's central position in Red Sea trade in Ayyubid strategy. Turanshah's intervention against soldiers who wanted to destroy Aden, saying that "they had come to develop Aden and benefit from its income," reveals how important the economic dimension of the campaign was. Additionally, the elimination of the Ismaili-characterized Zuray'id and Hamdanid dynasties shows that the objective of eliminating the Shiite threat that emerged in Yemen after the end of the Fatimid caliphate in 567/1171 was systematically implemented.

Yemen's geostrategic position further clarifies the strategic importance of the campaign. Located at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, at the crossroads of Indian Ocean trade, and neighboring the Hejaz, Yemen possessed not only economic but also religious and political critical importance. Salah-al-Din's capture of Ayla Castle while still Fatimid vizier to ensure the security of the Red Sea's northern entrance and then his control of Yemen to dominate the southern entrance should be evaluated as part of a strategy to completely control the main artery of East-West trade. This strategy aimed both to secure transit trade taxes, which were one of the main sources of income for the Egyptian economy, and to prevent Crusader attempts to reach the holy lands by sea.

In conclusion, the 570/1174 Yemen campaign should be evaluated as a pre-planned strategic initiative serving multi-dimensional objectives in Ayyubid power strategy. The multi-layered motivational structure behind the campaign - ending the heretical activities of the Mahdids, liquidating the Shiite presence in Yemen, controlling Red Sea trade, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Abbasid caliphate, and ensuring the security of southern borders - functioned as mutually complementary and reinforcing elements. This complex structure reveals that the Yemen campaign was not merely a conquest movement in the political history of the medieval Islamic world, but also a strategic component of the state-building process. The findings of the study show that single-cause explanations are insufficient for understanding the expansion strategies of medieval Islamic states, and that religious, political and economic factors need to be evaluated together.

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### **ETHICAL APPROVAL OF THE STUDY**

In this study, all rules specified within the scope of the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of The Council of Higher Education (YÖK)" have been followed. None of the actions specified under the heading "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which constitutes the second section of the Directive, have been performed.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION RATE**

The contribution rate of the first author to the research is 100%.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

There are no financial or personal connections with any individual or institution in this research. There is no conflict of interest in this research.

### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE STATEMENT**

During the writing process of this study, the author utilized artificial intelligence tools to assist in areas such as text improvement, language and grammar checks. All artificial intelligence tools used served solely as a support mechanism to help develop the author's existing ideas and express them more effectively. The research question, methodology, data collection and analysis, scientific findings obtained, interpretations, and all conclusions are the author's own intellectual contribution. The author holds themselves ultimately responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the academic content of the study, as well as for any instances contrary to academic ethics, including plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence.