

## THE NATURE OF THE RELATION BETWEEN SULTAN AL-ZAHIR BAIBARS AND BERKE KHAN

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### Abstract

Relation between any two rulers is usually determined by common interests, which may or may not last for long. Those common interests may disintegrate if a party breaches the conditions for one reason or another. Historians addressing the relation between the Mamluk Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars (ruled between 658 AH/ 1260 CE and 676 AH/ 1277 CE) and the Mongol Berke Khan noticed how this relation fluctuated between good and troubled at times. This fluctuation is maintained throughout the current research to reveal the historical truths regarding this relation. Many writers described this relation between Al-Zahir Baibars and the Mongol Berke Khan as good and unblemished overall, which was further strengthened when Berke Khan converted to Islam<sup>1</sup> and waged many wars against his cousin Hulagu, especially in the year 653 AH (1255 CE), which was probably the most well-known war between the two. After Berke Khan's accession, Al-Zahir Baibars treated him according to Muslim codes of conduct with true support and friendliness to the extent of naming his eldest son Berke. This research will address the details of their relation, and how it was affected, positively or negatively. Moreover, the research will probe into Al-Zahir Baibars' alliance with Berke Khan and others and the incidents that clearly displayed Baibars' admiration for Berke Khan.

**Keywords:** Mamluks, Mongols, Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars, Berke Khan, Middle East History

### Introduction

Relations among states require skillful politicians to run efficiently, since these relations are often dependent on intricate mutual benefits. These relations vary between friendly and peaceful at times and political maneuver for private interest at other times. We cannot fairly assess these relations through an overview of events. For our assessment to be objective we need to go into details and minutely analyze stances and views pertinent to these events. In this research we present a model of these relations between two rulers from widely different environments but whose political agendas converged in such a way that calls for profound study and analysis.

### First: Al-Zahir Baibars' Alliance with Berke Khan and Others

The Mamluk Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars seized the opportunity to form an alliance with Berke Khan after the latter had converted to Islam. The two leaders conferred often and Berke Khan welcomed delegates that Baibars sent him, glorified Muslim clerics, hosted many visitors from Hijaz, built mosques, and joined Baibars in his war against their common arch enemy Hulagu, ruler of the Alikhani State in Persia. Though Hulagu was Berke Khan's cousin, the latter waged war against him, especially after Hulagu invaded Baghdad in 656 AH, (1258 CE), killed the Muslim Caliph Al Musta'sim Billah, and infuriated the whole Muslim world.<sup>2</sup> Afterwards, many Mongol followers of Berke Khan came to Egypt and were welcomed by Al-Zahir Baibars who convinced them to convert to Islam. Many did so at his own hand.<sup>3</sup> These incidents led to a weakening of the expansionist Mongol empire and a strengthening of the Mamluks who became the strongest power of the Muslim world then.

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<sup>1</sup> Al Eini (1987), *Aqd Al Juman fi tarikh Ahl Al Zaman*, Vol. 1, annotated by Mohammad Mohammad Amin, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, pp. 91-92. See the story of the conversion of Berke Khan to Islam at the hand of Sheikh Nijm El Din Al Kabraa'. See also, Peter Jackson (2014), *The Mongols and the West: 1221-1410*, New York: Routledge; Smith Jr, John Masson (2015), "Mongol Armies and Indian Campaigns," Mongolian Culture, retrieved on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.mongolianculture.com/MONGOL-ARMIES.htm>; John Joseph Suanders, (2001), *The History of the Mongol Conquest*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; John Masson Smith Jr. (1984), "Ayn Jalut: Mamluk success or Mongol failure," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 44, no. 2, pp 307-345.

<sup>2</sup> Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima 'rifat duwal al Muluk*, Vol. 1, annotated by Mohammad Mustafa Ziyadah & Said Abdel Fattah Ashour, Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, p. 465; Baibars Al Mansouri (1987), *Al Tuhf Al Mulukia fiddawla al Turkia*, annotated by Abdul Hamid Saleh Hamdan, Cairo: Egyptian Lebanese Printing, p. 36; Ibn Kathir (1979), *Al bidaya wal nihaya*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 13, Beirut: Maktabat Al ma'aarif Publishing, p. 249; Ibn Taghri Birdi (1963-1972), *Al Njum al Zahraa'*, Vol. 7, Cairo: Egyptian General Organization for Authoring, Translation and Printing, p. 222; Al Birzali (2006), *Al muqtafa 'ala Kitab Arrawdatain*, Vol. 1, annotated by Omar Abdel Salam Tadmuri, Beirut: Modern Bookshop, pp. 167-168; Al Safdi (1981), *Al Wafi bilwafiyaat*, Vol. 10, annotated by Jacquelyn Suweilah & Ali Emarah, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Printing, pp. 117-118.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold, Thomas (1971), *Al Da 'wah lil Islam*, Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, Abdul Majid Abdin, & Ismail Al Nahrawi (trans.), Cairo: Al Nahdah Bookshop, pp. 259-260; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima 'rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 495.

### **Alliance with the Sons of Berke Khan**

Despite the strong alliance between Al-Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan, it seems that the former did not really trust that this thin alliance alone was enough to destroy the Mongol power once and for all. This became obvious later on in his relationship with Berke Khan's sons who took office after their father's demise. Baibars secretly cemented his ties with his arch enemy Abgha Khan. This change of tactics was obvious when he welcomed delegates that Abgha Khan sent to Egypt. In exchange, Al-Zahir Baibars sent his own delegates to Abgha Khan with a letter expressing his wish to end all hostilities between the two nations and broker a lasting peace. If Berke Khan or any of his sons had known of this move, they would have considered it outrageous.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the many delegates between the two parties, they were unable to reduce mutual hostilities, especially in view of the conditions that Al-Zahir Baibars set for Abgha Khan before normalizing relation with him. Foremost among these conditions was for Abgha Khan to set free all Muslim hostages. Of course, Abgha Khan rejected this condition. The whole matter seemed contradictory for Al-Zahir Baibars to ally himself with Berke Khan and his sons and seek peace with Abgha Khan. There are no sources that mentioned that Berke Khan or his sons sought peace with Abgha Khan.<sup>5</sup>

### **Alliance with the Rum Sultan**

In his attempt to rival the Mongols' cunning and waywardness, Al-Zahir Baibars secretly allied himself with the Deputy of Ma'in El Din Suleiman, Sultan of the Roman province, also known as Perwane, a Mongol ally and also an ally of Berke Khan. He encouraged this deputy to plot against his master knowing that he craved for power to replace Sultan Perwane. Baibars did not confide with Berke Khan as to his intention to get rid of all his enemies, including those who allied with Berke Khan, such as Perwane. This behavior shows clearly that Al-Zahir Baibars was only preoccupied with his own interest.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Zahir Baibars alliance with Perwane was not without a price. He easily occupied and got control over Sis<sup>7</sup> in the Roman province in return for his alliance with Perwane against Ajaie Bin Hulawoun, brother of Abaqa Khan who wanted to kill Ma'in El Din.<sup>8</sup>

After the demise of Berke Khan in 676 AH (1266 CE), Baibars did not maintain his hostility towards the Rums but collaborated with them against the Mongols. He strengthened his alliance with Ma'in El Din as shown in the battle of Elbistan<sup>9</sup> in which Baibars attacked the Mongols led by Abaqa Khan. The battle took place in 676 AH (1277 CE) when Baibars' secret alliance with Ma'in El Din led to an outright defeat of the Mongols who suffered huge losses. In return, Abaqa Khan punished Ma'in El Din by attacking the Rum city of Qaisariyeh in which around 200,000 people were slaughtered.<sup>10</sup>

The two incidents above indicate Baibars' clear policy of putting his own interest high above any other consideration in his alliance with the Rum Sultan. It was a common interest that brought him close to Ma'in El Din to stop the Mongol threat to Egypt and expand the Mamluk territory as in his invasion of the Rum city of Sis. As if this was not enough, Baibars corresponded with many Mongol local princes, friends or foes of Abaqa Khan, and made them promise to stand up against Abaqa Khan. Many did so publicly.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn Shaddad (1983), *Tarikh Al Malik Al-zahir*, annotated by Ahmed Hatit, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Printing, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>7</sup> Sis: was a big city known for its citadel and surrounding wall. It was situated on a rectangular mountain, with parks and a small river, and was in those days the seat of the residence of the Armenian king and the capital of his kingdom. Describing it, Ibn Battuta wrote: "It was a city with beautiful architecture, wide streets and busy markets. It has a building that looked like a school and was known as the sovereignty house". See Abul Fida (1840), *Taqwim al buldan*, Paris: Dar Al Sulania, p. 256; Ibn Battuta (n.d.) *Tuhfat Al Nuzzar fi ghra'ib al amsar wa Agayeb al asfar*, Beirut: Lebanese Book Printing, p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, pp. 106-107. See also D'Ohsson (1924), *Histoire des Mongols*, Paris: unknown publisher, pp. 471-474.

<sup>9</sup> Ablistin: was a famous city in the Rum country, and was subjected to the rule of the Seljuk king Qalj Arsalan. It was situated near Absus, the city of Ahl Al Kahf (Cave People). See Yaqut Al Hamawi (n.d.) *Mu'jam Al Buldan*, Vol. 1, Beirut: Dar Sader Publishing, p.75.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, pp.181-182; Ibn Al Emad Al Hanbali (n.d.), *Shazharat Al Zhahab fi Akhbar man Zhahab*, Vol. 5, Beirut: Arab Heritage Restoration, p. 317; Ibn Ayas (1982-1984), *Badaai' al Zhuhur fi waqaai' al Duhur*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 1, annotated by Mohammad Mustafe Ziyadah, Cairo: Center for Annotating Heritage, Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, pp. 337-338.

### **Alliance with the Turkoman**

Turkoman princes bore no hostility towards Al-Zahir Baibars as the latter bought their allegiance with money. He offered them money and precious presents. These included Ali Bek and Shams El Din Mohammad Bek Bin Qurman who gave in to his demands and together with other Turkoman princes joined Baibars in his hatred towards Abaqa Khan. They announced their readiness to wage war against Abaqa Khan, which actually broke out in 676 AH (1277 CE).<sup>11</sup>

Al-Zahir Baibars then had to request assistance from Berke Khan and the Turkoman princes, a move that did not cost much from the Mamluk money. Moreover, Baibars had good relations with Frankish rulers, especially southern Italians, Venetians and the bays traders who controlled most of the trade between Italy, Egypt and Bilad al-Sham, and subsequently the trade between the Eastern and Western worlds.<sup>12</sup> The good relation between Sulan Al-Zahir Baibars and the Frankish rulers was a direct response to the already established alliance between the Mongols, led by Menko Khan, Abaqa Khan and even Berke Khan, and the Frankish leader Haithoum the First, who personally visited Monko Khan Qaraqum in 651 AH (1253 CE)<sup>13</sup> and succeeded in securing a binding commitment from the Mongols for the latter to help him gain control over Jerusalem and Bilad al-Sham in return for his help for the Mongols in taking over Baghdad.<sup>14</sup>

### **Alliance with Byzantine Empire**

Furthermore, Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars improved his relations with the Byzantine Empire that had the strongest fleet available then. He was also apprehensive of recurring crusades against the Middle East, with possible attempts to target Egypt as it is the heart of the Middle East. The strength of the Mamluks defeated the Crusaders in the battle of Ein Galut in 658 AH (1259 CE), but there was always the threat of another incursion by the crusaders against Egypt and Bilad al-Sham.<sup>15</sup>

### **Alliance with the Mongol Enemies of Berke Khan**

It is only logical to conclude that Baibars' relation with Berke Khan was only one of his plots against the Mongols in general and against Hulagu, his arch enemy, and Abaqa Khan who was the strongest Mongol personality then. This shows clearly his broad view of politics and his opportunist concept of turning public and secret alliances into his own interest. He made use of growing dissatisfaction with Mongol behavior against Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Berke Khan was very much favored and welcomed by Muslims including Al-Zahir Baibars, especially after his conversion to Islam with most of his tribe. However, Baibars' ultimate objective was to divide the Mongols into warring factions to weaken their unity and resolve and thus wipe them out of Muslim territory.

The destruction that the Mongols caused to Muslim countries, starting with incursion into Transoxiana (Mā warā' an-Nahr), which then belonged to the Khwarizmi State, and the defeat of Alaa' Al Din Mohammad Khwarimshah, and later his son Jalal Al Din Mankabarti, and the subsequent fall of Khwarizmi cities; such as Atrar, Jind, Banaket, Khjind, Bukhara, Samarqand, Khwarizm, Maro, Jirjania, Nesapour, Maragha, Ghazneh, Mazindran, Alrai, Hamadan, Azerbaijan, Khurasan, which ended with their invasion of Baghdad in 656 AH (1258 CE). They later invaded Bilad al-Sham and Upper Mesopotamia in 657 AH, and city by city fell to their hands, starting with the Emirate of Miafarqin, then Mardin, Nasibian, Haran, Raha, Aleppo, Harem, Hama, Al Mu'arra, Hums, Damascus, Ghaza, Ajloun. These incursions were not acceptable to Muslims as the destruction they caused to Muslims and their culture was devastating.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, pp. 179-181.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, pp. 35-36 & 127-128.

<sup>13</sup> Qaraqum: in Turkish it meant 'black sand'. 'qara' meant 'black', and 'qum' meant 'sand'. It was a city founded by Oktai, the Mongol Khan in Mongolia and made it the capital of his kingdom in 632 H (1235 AD). It was later used as the capital for subsequent Mongol khans. It was situated on the river Orkhon in Mongolia. Al Qalqashandi (1963), *Subh Al A'sha'fi Sinaa'it Al Insha*. Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, pp.48-481; Al Sayyed Al Baz Al Oreini (1986), *Al Maghul*, Beirut: Dar Al Nahdhah Al Arabiya, pp.160-161.

<sup>14</sup> Al Sayyed Al Baz Al Oreini, (1986), *Al Maghul*, pp.198-199; Setton (1958), *History of the Crusades*, Pennsylvania: unknown publisher, p. 652.

<sup>15</sup> Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima'rifat duwal al Muluk*, pp. 430-431; Ibn Taghri Birdi (1963), *Annujum al Zharaa'*, Vol. 7, Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Arabshah (1859), *Fakihat al Khulafaa' wa Mufakahat al Zhurafaa'*, Cairo: Bulaq edition, p. 360; Al Juweini (1911-1937), *Tarikh Jihangshai*, Vol. 1, Leiden: Mohammad Al Qizwini, pp. 71-74, pp. 80-81, pp. 95-96, & p. 140; Al Juweini (1911-1937), *Tarikh Jihangshai*, Vol. 2, Leiden: Mohammad Al Qizwini,

The Mongols' intentions were not to stop there. They planned to attack and destroy Egypt after occupying Bilad al-Sham. The rising Mamluk state in Egypt had to gather all Muslim powers and unify Egypt, Bilad al-Sham and Iraq to face impending Mongol threat, and this what Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars did, and Berke Khan was a means to fight the Mongols after the latter's conversion to Islam and his alliance with Muslims against their arch enemy Hulagu. The interests of both parties converged on one purpose which was just that.<sup>17</sup>

An incident that clearly shows that Al-Zahir Baibars was also courteous towards Hulagu, at the expense of his alliance with Berke Khan, happened when Hulagu besieged Mayyafariqin, in Silvan in Sothern Turkey today, in the month of Muharram of the year 657 AH (1258 CE), Baibars sent him the historian Ibn Shaddad to negotiate peace with the Mongols and the messenger was ordered to take with him presents and a message to Yashmut, son of Hulagu. The present was an expensive one that cost 1500 dinars, a *haiasah*<sup>18</sup> (saddle belt) ornamented with jewels and a sword ornamented with jewels. Upon his arrival, Ibn Shaddad handed Hulagu's son the welcoming message which included also a blame for the Mongols' pointless massacre of the citizens of Al-Jazeera and requested that the Mongols return what they had looted from the people of Haran or compensate its people as a condition for peace with the Mongols. The latter refused and almost killed his messenger.<sup>19</sup>

This incident indicates Baibars' awareness of the strength of Mongol army and Berke Khan's inability to stop them from invading Bilad al-Sham. Hence, he wanted to win the Mongols over with presents to prevent them from causing further destruction in Bilad al-Sham. However, Hulagu who had achieved many victories, found it hard to respond to Baibars' peaceful offer through his messenger historian Ibn Shaddad, who finally returned to Egypt in 659 AH (1260 CE) with disappointment at the failure of his mission. Al-Zahir Baibars welcomed him cordially.<sup>20</sup>

In an equally important incident, Al-Zahir Baibars corresponded with the Tatory Prince Samghar Nuwein who was appointed by Abaqa Khan, son of Hulagu, to rule Rum province. Samghar's messengers arrived a day before Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars entered Damascus in 670 AH (1271 CE). The messengers included Majd El Din Dolat Khan, Sa'ad El Din Al Turjuman and Sulaiman Ibn Muhazhab Al Din Ali Bin Mohammad, the Sultanate deputy in Rum province and representative of his master Ma'in Al Din Sulaiman Perwane. When admitted to Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars court, the latter enquired about the purpose of their visit. They told him that they came with greetings and a message from Prince Samghar who offered to mediate between Baibars and Abaqa Khan. Hearing this, Baibars was very generous with them and welcomed the initiative. He sent them back with two of his messengers; Prince Faghr El Din Ayaz Al Maqri and Prince Mubariz El Din Al Touri who took with them presents, a 'Jawshan'<sup>21</sup> (a shield) for Abaqa Khan and a bow<sup>22</sup> for Samghar.

Upon arrival at the city of Qunya, they were taken by Ma'in El Din Perwane to Abaqa Khan who met them to inquire about the purpose of their visit. They first gave him Baibars' greetings and told him about Prince Samghar's messengers and his wish to act as a mediator between Abaqa Khan and Baibars and the latter's offer of peace in return for the Muslim land he had occupied. The offer angered Abaqa Khan as it was impossible to implement as he wanted to keep this land under his control. They returned to Damascus in the month of Safar of the year 671 AH (1272 CE) and informed Baibars of Abaqa Khan's response to his offer.<sup>23</sup>

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p. 113; Ibn Al Athir (n.d), *al Kamel Fil Tarikh*, Vol. 12, Beirut: Dar Sader, pp. 361-370, pp. 372-374, pp. 379-383 & pp. 390-398; Fouad Abdel Mu'ti Al Sayyad (1970), *Al Maghul fil Tarikh*, Vol. 1, Beirut: Dar Al Nahdhah Al Arabiyya, pp. 293-297. See also Howorth (1876), *History of the Mongols*, London p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> Ashour, Said Abdul Fattah (1976), *Al Asr Al Mamaliki fi Misr wal Sham*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Vol. 1, Cairo: Dar Al Nahdha Al Arabiya, p. 30; Fouad Abdel Mu'ti Al Sayyad (1970), *Al Maghul fil Tarikh*, pp.299-300; Ahmad Mukhtar Al Abbadi (1969), *Qiam Dawlat Al Mamalik al Oula fir Masr Walsham*, Beirut: Dar al Nahdha Al Arabiyya, pp. 235-236.

<sup>18</sup> 'Al Hayyasah': literally meaning 'belt', but it meant the belt that tightens a saddle to a horseback. Al Qalqashandi (1963), *Subh Al A'sha fi Sinaa'it Al Insha*, p. 134; Mohammad Ahmad Dahman (1990), *Mu'jam al Al fazh al Tarikhiya fil al Asr Al Mamluki*, Damascus: Dar Al Fikr, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Shaddad (1978), *Al A'laq Al Khatirah fi zikr Umaraa' al Sham wal Jazirah*, Vol. 2-3, annotated by Yehia Abbara, Damascus: Publications of the French Institute, pp. 491-494.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Shaddad (1953), *Al A'laq Al Khatirah fi zikr Umaraa' al Sham wal Jazirah*, Vol. 1, Damascus: Publications of the French Institute, pp.1-2.

<sup>21</sup> 'Al Jawshan' literally means 'shield'. See Mohammad Ahmad Dahman (1990), *Mu'jam al Al fazh al Tarikhiya fil al Asr Al Mamluki*, p.57.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

These events reveal the following:

1. In this stage, the Mongols wanted to hold a truce with the strong Mamluk Sultanate led by Al-Zahir Baibars, especially after the defeat of the Mongols in the battle of Ein Galut in 658 AH (1259 CE).
2. Abaqa Khan did not want to reveal his weakness in front of Al-Zahir Baibars, and did not want to lose the Muslim lands he occupied. Therefore, he did not send a messenger to negotiate for peace directly but waited for a mediator to take that step. That mediator was Prince Samghar, son of Hulagu, who sent two messengers that did not reveal they were sent by Abaqa Khan.
3. The messengers that Prince Samghar, son of Hulagu, sent indicated his wish to inform him that the hostility between Baibars and Hulagu can be resolved at the expense of Berke Khan, Baibars' ally and without his mediation.
4. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars welcomed Samghar's mediation and was generous with his messengers, He further sent his own messengers to Abaqa Khan with presents to express his desire to hold peace between them. He knew only too well that if Berke Khan had known of that, he would have rejected it in view of his strong hatred of his cousin Hulagu.
5. The incident reveals Baibars' bias towards his own and the Mamluks' interest in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham against a distinguished personal relation with Berke Khan.

We cannot deny Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars' appreciation of Berke Khan and his relatives and the rest of his people who converted to Islam. Proofs are many including the arrival by sea of messengers to Berke's family from his Mongol nephew Prince Menkotamar Bin Taghan Bin Sartaq Bin Batwa to Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars during his stay in Damascus in the month of Zhul Qai'dah of the year 670 AH (1272 CE) requesting his help to stop Hulagu and destroy him. Those messengers were attacked by Italian Pirates from the city of Pisa who took them hostage to the city of Acre where they robbed them of their money. However, the senior merchants of Acre renounced this act as they had good trade relations with the Mamluk Sultanate. They told the pirates that as allies of Al-Zahir Baibars they cannot prevent messengers from reaching him. The pirates agreed to set them free but without returning their money. Upon reaching Damascus, they told Baibars about their ordeal and that they carried presents for him but the pirates took them. Baibars punished Italian merchants in Alexandria, confiscated their goods, and prevented them from travel until they compensated those messengers for the money and presents their kinsmen had looted.<sup>24</sup>

In the last ten days of the month of Sha'ban of the year 671 AH (1273 CE), Sultan Al-Zahir Babars dispatched Menkotamar messengers together with the two Mamluk princes Badr El Din Aziz Al Kurdi and Seif El Din Al Sawabi Al Mahindar<sup>25</sup> to accompany them all the way back home.<sup>26</sup>

This incident reveals the following:

1. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars held Berke Khan and his family in high esteem, and was always thriving to bolster relations with him, especially as Hulagu was then their common enemy. Berke Khan's family was being sought and chased by Hulagu but knew only too well that when they took refuge with Baibars they were safe.
2. The trade relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and Italian merchants were very strong as senior Italian merchants knew that it was in their interest to maintain good relations with the Mamluks. Thus, they resented the pirates' attack on Berke Khan's messengers and mediated their release.
3. The Italian community in Alexandria realized that the Mamluks could suspend trade relations with them and prevent them from leaving Egypt. Therefore, they became aware that it was their role to secure safe sailing of trade ships between the two nations by putting an end to Italian piracy to avoid any negative impact on their businesses.
4. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars was keen on pleasing Prince Menkotamar knowing that he was the nephew of his close friend and ally Berke Khan. Hence, he was courteous and generous with his messengers and gave them expensive presents that were worthy of his status.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibn Aybak al Dawudi (1971), *Kinz al Durar wa Jame' al Ghurar*, Vol. 8, annotated by A. Harman, Cairo: German Archeological Institute, p. 167; Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>25</sup> 'Al Mahmindar', literally means an officially appointed person to welcome delegates coming to see the Sultan, accommodate them in the guest house, and attend to their comfort. Al Qalqashandi, (1963), *Subh Al A'sha fi Sinaa'it Al Insha*, p. 459.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, p. 58.

Al-Zahir Baibars also maintained good relations with the Rums and the Seljuks and did interfere directly in an incident that almost marred their mutual relations. Berke Khan had offered refuge to Ezz al-Din Kaikaos Bin Ghesero who fled to Constantinople<sup>27</sup> with a group of his followers, their families and valuables, after his brother, Rukn al-Din Qilij Arslān had defeated the Rum king. Upon arrival there in the year 660 AH (1261 CE), he was arrested by the local king, imprisoned and his money was confiscated. He remained in jail until Berke Khan's army attacked Constantinople. The local king was scared and requested a truce. Berke Khan agreed on the condition that Ezz al-Din Kaikaos be freed with his group and his money returned. When Ezz al-Din was returned to Berke Khan, the latter was very generous with him and offered him an army of about 20,000 warriors to attack Constantinople and punish its king. When this army marched on Constantinople, their arrival there coincided with the arrival of a messenger, called Faris Al Din Akush Al Su'udi, from Al-Zahir Baibars to the local king. Knowing the army's intention of attacking Constantinople, the messenger interfered and told them that the local king was an ally of Baibars and that their attack on the city should be stopped. Ezz al-Din gave in and returned with his army to Berke Khan and remained there until his death.<sup>28</sup>

This incident reveals the following:

1. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars' relation with Berke Khan, the Rums and the Seljuks was mainly dependent on common interest, and there might be stronger peaceful relation with one ally without the others knowing. Berke Khan did not know that the Rum king of Constantinople was an ally of Baibars, and Berke Khan at the same time had strong ties with the Seljuks as seen in the incident of his interference to set free their deposed Sultan Ezz al-Din Kaikaos and gave him refuge.
2. Berke Khan's sympathy with Seljuk Sultan was reflected not only in giving him refuge, but also in providing him with an army of 20.000 warriors to attack Constantinople.
3. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars generally maintained good relations with the Byzantine Emperor of Constantinople (though the latter was at times in contact with Hulagu) and his messenger interfered to stop attack on the city.
4. Berke Khan did not venture to mar relations with Baibars, thus he agreed with Ezz al-Din Kaikaos to stop the attack on the city. It may be a weak inference that Berke Khan also feared military interference by the Mamluk army to save the city.

If Baibars' alliance with Sulaiman Perwane was for an interest he saw, he may have also seen some interest in his alliance with Berke Khan and his sons. The proof is that when Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars settled in Kirk in 657 AH (1258 CE), he was visited by many princes with an army of a thousand warriors and more. These included Berke Khan's sons who were well treated and allowed to march on Gaza with Baiabars' army where fighting broke out until they defeated Al Naser Dawood's army.<sup>29</sup> From this incident we infer the following:

1. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars used the strength of his army when he reached Kirk to show off the power of his army to Berke Khan's sons who arrived there and were welcomed by him.
2. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars wanted to secure his own interests and make use of the presence of Berke Khan's sons. He wanted to show them that the alliance between the two parties produced results. Hence, he allowed them to join his strong army in fighting his enemy Al Naser Dawood until the latter was defeated.

## **Second: Al-Zahir Baibars' keenness to show his love for Berke Khan in Egypt**

We need to take note of the fact that Al-Zahir Baibars' strong ties with Berke Khan were mainly justified by his fear of a Mongol attack on Egypt, especially after the Mongols invaded Baghdad and Bilad al-Sham. He saw in Berke Khan's character a strong ally that he can trust to stop his cousin Hulagu, especially after Berke Khan's conversion to Islam. The correspondence between Al-Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan proves this beyond doubt. For example:

1. In 660 AH (1261 CE), Al-Zahir Baibars sent letters to Berke Khan, urging him as a Muslim convert to wage war against his cousin Hulagu, the infidel, reminding him that Prophet Mohammed waged war against Quraysh. He also incited him against Hulagu who introduced Christianity to the Mongols as his wife was Christian, and that he had to stop him.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Constantinople was named after the Great Constantine, and was the seat of the Rum King. The name now has changed to Istanbul, Yaqut Al Hamawi (n.d). *Mu'jam Al Buldan*, pp 347-348.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al-Zahir*, pp. 77-78, Al Yunini, op.cit, Vol. 3, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, annotated by Abdul Aziz Al Khweitar, Riyadh: unknown publisher, pp. 58-60.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

2. The strong tie between Al-Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan had diverse manifestations. It was not the correspondence between the two men, but also the joyful celebrations that Al-Zahir Baibars held at the arrival of delegations from Berke Khan which were truly excessive. We list the following to clarify this point:
- In the month of Zul Hijja in 660 AH (1262 CE), a delegation of more than 200 Tatar knights arrived in Cairo. They were followers of Berke Khan whom Al-Zahir Baibars hosted himself. Many Cairo citizens went out to welcome them, before their arrival, Al-Zahir Baibars had sent letters to chiefs in Bilad al-Sham urging them to welcome them generously. He further sent them sheep, sugar and barley, took care of their women and ordered builders to build them homes near Alluk (a suburb of Cairo),<sup>31</sup> and as Ibn Abdel Zahir wrote, "It was a great day".<sup>32</sup> This incident reveals that Cairo citizens saw in the arrival of those Mongols an unprecedented occurrence and a show to behold for all people. This justifies the great number of people who went out to welcome them, and shows that Al-Zahir Baibars, who exaggerated in his welcome, viewed himself as a protector of Islam. He also wished that those Mongols tell their folks back home and Berke Khan in particular, of Baibars' generosity and happiness with their visit.
  - As if this was not enough, Baibars had a great celebration held in their honor on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Zul Hijja in Alluq district of Cairo, played the ball with them<sup>33</sup> and gave each knight 100 horsemen<sup>34</sup> to be at his service. Some were even integrated in his fleet and mixed with his warriors and attendants. He even paid them salaries and their conversion to Islam was good.<sup>35</sup> This particular incident showed Al-Zahir Baibars' excessive hospitality in welcoming Mongol delegations. The ball games he held for them indicate his friendliness and absence of any differences between them. The horses he gave them with other presents, the salaries he paid them, were all necessary items for a better life, which they knew they could enjoy as long they stayed in alliance with him and obeyed his orders.
  - Moreover, later in the month of Zul Hijja in 660 AH (1262 CE), Baibars sent with Berke Khan's delegation the Faqih Majd El Din Al Ruzrawdi, Prince Seif Al Din Kasha Bek who was a Turkish man, and Kan Jimdar<sup>36</sup> Khurazmishah who was well versed in countries and their languages. Two Tartar men also accompanied them. They sent letters regarding the state of Islam and their proclaimed allegiance to the Abbasid Caliph Al-Hakim Bi'amr Allah Abi Al Abbas Ahmad (Al-Hakim I) who proved his ancestral relation to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). These letters were taken by the messengers to Berke Khan who was also urged to fight Hulagu knowing the strength of the Muslim army whose ethnicity varied from Kurds, Turkoman and Arabs, together with their allies of Muslim and Frankish kings. The purpose of all this was to urge him to fight Hulagu and downsize his strength in comparison with all those forces. He also made sure that his exceptional welcome of Berke Khan's delegation was highlighted.<sup>37</sup> This incident reveals a lot; Al-Zahir Baibars was keen on selecting the right man for the job. The interpreter Seif Al Din Kasha Bek knew the country and spoke its language. Thus, he could convey exactly what the Sultan told him to convey to Berke Khan and could accurately bring back his reply. The Faqih Majd El Din was appointed for his religious knowledge and ability to tell them about correct Islam, urge them to fight its enemies and pledge allegiance to the Muslim Caliph. Moreover, Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars was also proclaimed Sultan by the Abbasid Muslim Caliph Al Hakim I and should therefore be obeyed by all devout Muslims including Berke Khan who was a convert to the faith. Top of the duties of all devout Muslims was to fight Hulagu and Frankish leaders, the enemies of Islam.
  - Al-Zahir Baibars formed the delegation to Berke Khan, put them on Tarayid<sup>38</sup> (speed boats) and gave them generous donations. The letter sent to Berke Khan was read twice; once in presence of all princes in the Ewan and when the Caliph arrived he pledged allegiance and all attendees listened to his speech and were given a verbal message regarding the welfare of Muslims and Islam and the necessity to fight

<sup>31</sup> Alluq: is a Cairo gate founded by King Al Saleh Nijm El Din Ayub, and was intended as an arena for horsemanship parades. Later in the Mamluk era, its huge square became the exhibition grounds for sorcerers, illusionists and magicians. Al Maqrizi (n.d) *Al Mawa'izh wal I'tibar Bizikr Al Khutat wal Athar*, Vol. 2, Beirut: Dar Sader, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 37; see also Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima' rifat durwal al Muluk*, p. 459.

<sup>33</sup> Al Kurah, also known as 'Al Akrah' and the Scepter. This was a game played on horseback, similar to the modern polo, wherein players hit the ball with a long four-meter wooden stick (mallet) with a conical head of a little more than half a meter. See Soud Mohammad Al Asfour (2005), *Al Al'ab wa Wasail Altasliya fil Asr Al Mamluki*, Vol. 17, Egypt: Helwan University, p. 928.

<sup>34</sup> Imrat Ma'at Faris, a military rank for swordsmen, also known as Muqaddim Alf, which literally means the head of a thousand soldiers. The Emir had a hundred of these under his authority during wars. Al Qalqashandi, (1963), *Subh Al A'sha fi Sinaa'it Al Insha*, p. 28, pp. 50-51 & pp. 63-67.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 137-138; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima' rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 459.

<sup>36</sup> Jimdar, was the Sultan dress man, Al Qalqashandi (1963), *Subh Al A'sha fi Sinaa'it Al Insha*, p. 459

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>38</sup> Al Tara'id, warships for carrying soldiers, their horses and armaments. These were also speed boats that sailed at great speed, Mohammad Ahmad Dahman, (1990), *Mu'jam al Al fazzh al Tarihiya fil al Asr Al Mamluki*, p. 107.

its enemies. He also announced his love for Berke Khan and that he prayed for his victory over his enemies. The delegation was dispatched to Berke Khan in the month of Muharram in the year 661 AH (1262 CE).<sup>39</sup>

What we mentioned earlier about Al-Zahir Baibars' exceptional welcome of delegations that Berke Khan sent him was also an opportunity for him to show his love and great respect for Berke Khan. He even had the courage to provide immediate military power for him to fight his cousin Hulagu. Moreover, in the month of Jumadi Al Akhar in 660 AH (1262 CE), Berke Khan's delegation including Prince Jalal El Din Al Qadi, Sheikh Nour El Din Ali arrived with a letter from Berke Khan listing those Tatars who accepted Islam as a faith, together with their families and kinsmen, soldiers, juniors and seniors. Al-Zahir Baibars met them all in his castle, read the letter from Berke Khan in which he expressed his greetings and gratitude and requested help to fight Hulagu. Berke expressed his difference with the legislation of Jenghis Khan and his people and his commitment to Islam and its rules of prayers and recitation of the Quran. He asked Baibars to send his army to the Euphrates to intercept Hulagu's army and stop their advance. Al-Zahir Baibars thanked the delegation and was generous as their host. He gave them valuable presents, expensive cloth, and threw a big party in their honor in Alluq district of Cairo. He used to check on their comfort on Saturdays and Tuesdays when on these days they played some ball games.<sup>40</sup> When Berke Khan asked for help to fight his cousin Hulagu, he also meant to show Baibars his true Islam and his keenness on Muslim rituals to the extent of fighting his own cousin if the latter was an enemy of Islam. He not only asked for military support to fight him, but also planned how to stop Hulagu's army from advancing.

The historian Ibn Shaddad wrote a letter to Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars in which he included some Quranic verses and the Prophet's Hadith to urge him towards Jihad, and listed references to Egypt in the Quran and Hadith. He further mentioned reference to Egypt's strong army dedicated to leading Islam to victory. Ibn Shaddad read the letter himself in front of the Sultan and in presence of princes to which the Sultan added some text to complement it. Preparation of the Sultan's presents to Berke Khan included a precious copy of the Quran, colorful rugs, silver-plated swords, Khwarizmi saddles and bridles, silver lamps, silver-coated candle holders, silver chains, pots, servants and women slaves, cooks, race horses and camels, precious ornaments and the like. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars commissioned Prince Faris Al Din Aqush Al Mas'oudi and the honorable Emad Al Din Al Hashimi to carry these presents to Berke Khan. He ordered them to wear their best clothes and allowed them to attend the Caliph's speech, pray and meet with him to urge them to uphold the duty of Jihad. He sent with them his greetings and gratitude to Berke Khan for supporting Islam and fighting the infidels. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars ordered prayers for Berke Khan in Friday prayers in Makkah, Madinah and Bayt al-Maqdis, and appointed someone to perform Omrah on his behalf. The delegation was dispatched on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan in the year 661 AH (1263 CE).<sup>41</sup> Since Ibn Shaddad the historian was appointed to write the letter himself, the content was accurate and genuine and was fraught with useful and noteworthy remarks. He requested that the letter be read aloud to him and amended it to make sure it included everything he wanted Berke Khan to do. The valuable presents dispatched with the letter were carried by no less than a notable prince and an honorable personality.

The arrival of a Mongol delegation in Egypt on Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> of Dhu'l Qai'dah, 661 AH (September 1263 CE). News of the delegation came from Al Bayrah<sup>42</sup> and Aleppo that a group of more than 1300 Mongols and Bahaderiya<sup>43</sup> were granted peaceful entrance by the Sultan, and instructed that they be welcomed.<sup>44</sup> Another big group of Tatar princes arrived in the same month of Zil Hijja 661AH (October 1263 CE) who were welcomed by the Sultan himself. Their notable princes included Kermun Agha, who occupied the whole Turkish territory, Amta'a Agha, Noukah Agha, Jubrak Agha, Qannan Agha, Taishour, Tashieh, Sajati, Khogla, Ajqarqa, Araqran, Salahgia, and Musdim. They all joined those Tatar princes who arrived before them, Sraghan Agha and his comrades. Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars offered them Islam, and they all agreed to be converted, were purified and circumcised.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 138-140; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima'rifat duwal al Muluk*, pp. 495-496.

<sup>40</sup> Al Eini, (1987), *Aqd Al Juman fi tarikh Ahl Al Zaman*, pp. 360-361; Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 170-171

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 171-174; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima'rifat duwal al Muluk*, pp. 497-498; Al Eini (1987), *Aqd Al Juman fi tarikh Ahl Al Zaman*, 361-362.

<sup>42</sup> Al Bairah, a town close to Sumaisat between Aleppo and Rum ports, Yaquout Al Hamawi (n.d). *Mu'jam Al Buldan*, p. 526.

<sup>43</sup> Al Bahaderiya, a sect of people in India who were pagans and believed in reincarnation, Al Maqrizi (n.d) *Al Mawa'izh wal I'tibar Bizikr Al Khutat wal Athar*, p. 344.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 177; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima'rifat duwal al Muluk*, pp. 500-501.

<sup>45</sup> Al Eini (1987), *Aqd Al Juman fi tarikh Ahl Al Zaman*, pp. 364-365; Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 108; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima'rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 501.



The two incidents above, which referred to the arrival of so many Mongol princes and Emirs, and Baibars' warm welcome of them, show clearly the strength of the alliance between Baibars and Berke Khan and his people, who felt safe in the Mamluk Sultanate, having fled the injustice of Mongol leaders especially Hulagu. Moreover, Baibars' intention of converting them to Islam, showing them mercy to guarantee their allegiance and loyalty, especially as they included high ranking Mongols such as the invader of the whole Turkish territory.

On Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> of Zil Hijja, 661 AH (October 1263 CE) Berke Khan's son passed away, and Al-Zahir Baibars walked in his funeral to show sympathy.<sup>46</sup> This incident shows how keen Baibars was to show sympathy to Berke Khan since the deceased was the latter's own son.

The conversion to Islam at the hand of Baibars of so many Tatars, followers of Berke Khan, was met with celebrations and Baibars, as a sign of his happiness, gave them horses as presents. This incident took place in Jumadi Al Oula, 662 AH (March 1264 CE).<sup>47</sup> This last incident reveals Baibars' intention to appear as the custodian of Islam who cared about the welfare and happiness of all faithful followers and giving them horses as presents was a gesture of his joy at winning them over.

In the month of Jumadi Al Oula, 662 AH (1264 CE), Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars formed a delegation to send to Berke Khan. In the month of Ramadan, the Sultan was informed that his delegation was captured by the Rum King Mikhail Al Ashkuri in a move intended to please Hulagu. This was a breach of deal between Al Ashkuri and Al-Zahir Baibars which infuriated the latter. Baibars wrote to King Mikhail, "If the capture of my delegation is retaliation for King Berke's corruption of your land by his soldiers, I can mediate and settle your differences."<sup>48</sup> Baibars then wrote to Berke Khan a letter which he sent with Prince Faris Eldin Aqush Al Mas'oudi along with a present and ordered Prince Faris El Din to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the issue. The matter was settled and Al-Zahir Baibars messengers were all released unharmed.<sup>49</sup>

It is noteworthy that Baibars had good relations with both parties, Berke Khan and King Mikhail Al Ashkuri, thus he was able to negotiate peace between them. As mentioned earlier, Berke Khan's enemies may differ from Baibars' enemies. As a statesman, he may form alliances with whoever will serve his purposes.

Berke Khan was keen on showing his observation of Muslim rituals to Al-Zahir Baibars. He welcomed delegations coming from Al-Zahir Baibars and showed them how a good Muslim he was. Every prince and every Khatoun<sup>50</sup> had a Mu'azzin and an Imam, and the junior ones recited the Quran in offices. That was in Zil Qi'dah, 662 AH (1264 CE).<sup>51</sup>

Berke Khan's keenness on showing his strict observation of Muslim rituals to Baibars' delegates was meant to inform Baibars that his conversion to Islam was still maintained in his observation of Muslim prayers as a main pillar of the faith. Not only princes and Khatouns had a Mu'azzin and an Imam, but even princesses had the same. The juniors were taught to recite the Quran to make sure they grow up as devout Muslims. That was a sure sign Berke Khan wanted to prove he was a dedicated convert.

The historian Ibn Abd al-Zahir had some words to say about Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars after the arrival of the Tatars who witnessed his greatness. He said, "Our duty is to pray for the king who made Islam victorious and such a great faith."<sup>52</sup> There is a difference between a king in whose presence Tatar kings kneel and kiss the ground before him while he was on his horseback, and a king whom the Tatars requested the presence of women during their drinking bouts, there is a difference between a king with whom Muslim kings made peace and the infidels requested remission and forgiveness, and kings who made peace with the infidels. There is a difference between a king whose land was

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 178

<sup>47</sup> Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima 'rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 511.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 203.

<sup>49</sup> Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima 'rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 514; Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>50</sup> Khatoun, a ladies' title, originally a Turkish word denoting wives or relatives of Sultans. It could be appended by 'Al Sayyedah' to form 'Sayyedah Al Khawatin', meaning 'lady of Khatouns', Al Qalqashandi (1963), *Subh Al A'sha fi Sinaa'it Al Insha*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 215-217.

<sup>52</sup> Al Ihtidham, literally meant 'injustice' and usurpation of one's rights. 'Al Hadhim' meant someone who was unfairly treated. Ibn Manzhur (n.d.), *Lisan Al Arab*, annotated by Abdullah Ali Al Kabir, Mohammad Ahmad Hasab Allah & Hashim Mohammad Al Shazli, Vol. 6, Cairo: Dar Al Ma'aarif, p. 4672.

free of infidelity, and kings who gave in to it.”<sup>53</sup> He then mentioned that Tatars saw the head of Kitbugha Nuwein, chief of the Tatar army, and other Tatar leaders hanging on the Bab Zweilah after the defeat of Tatars at Ein Gallut.<sup>54</sup> This statement by historian Ibn Abd al-Zahir we can deduce that he greatly respected him for his stance in protecting Islam and fighting for it, and that he truly deserved all devout Muslims to be loyal to him.

Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars intentionally showed the Berke Khan’s delegates the strength of his army and how well organized and disciplined it was. In the month of Zil Qi’dah, 662 AH (1264 CE), Sultan Al-Zahir sat at Dar El Adl (Ministry of Justice), to witness a military procession of his army. Berke Khan’s delegates arrived and joined him. They were very impressed by the soldiers’ uniform, discipline, and well-groomed horses. They stood beside the Sultan throughout the show and saw the soldiers’ nimbleness, horsemanship and skillful marksmanship. It took them days to witness all their skills.<sup>55</sup>

In Rajab, 666 AH (March 1268 CE), the news arrived that the king of Anjar, one the kings of Karj, became an ally of Berke Khan, when he knew of his friendliness with Al-Zahir Baibars.<sup>56</sup> This incident unequivocally proves that Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars was a great statesman, and his good relations with the King of Anjar were seen as conducive to the stability of his Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham. Al-Zahir Baibars was keen on maintaining excellent trade relations with Berke Khan. The historian Ibn Shaddad mentioned that this alliance had also an economic dimension to it. Traders visiting Kufjaq lands where Berke Khan was ruler, and also his nephew Menkotamar’s homeland were exempted from paying taxes on all imports to the Mamluk Sultanate. There were also similar mutual trade agreements with Persia and Kerman.<sup>57</sup> It was only the interest of his Sultanate that was the driving force behind all these trade agreements. Al-Zahir Baibars gave to Persia and Kerman the same tax exemption privileges he gave to the Mongols of Kufjaq whose leader was Berke Khan.

It is noteworthy that the good relations between Baibars and Berke Khan continued to flourish even after the demise of Berke Khan. Baibars had similar friendly relations with Berke Khan’s successors. In the month of Safar, 669 AH (October 1267 CE), his letter of condolence to King Menkotamar, the king designate, was meant to express his condolences, wish to continue their good relations, and urge Menkotamar to continue fighting Hulagu’s descendants.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Bisou Nujai, the most senior leader of Berke Khan’s army, sent a letter to Baibars in the beginning of the year 669 AH (1270 CE). In that letter he greeted Baibars and wished him peace. He also mentioned his gratitude to Allah that he became a Muslim and a devout follower of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Together with his family and others who converted to Islam, were keen on maintaining the same cordial relations with Al-Zahir Baibars as did their deceased leader. He pledged a continued alliance with Al-Zahir Baibars, to make peace with his friends and wage war against his enemies. Sultan Al-Zahir wrote back to express his gratitude and appreciation of Bisou Nujai, praised Berke Khan, his memory, and his Jihad for Islam and the Muslims.<sup>59</sup>

There were many exchanged letters which testified to the depth of the continued relations between the Mongols of Kufjaq and Al-Zahir Baibars. Of these, there was one in the month of Zil Qai’dah, 670 AH (May 1272 CE) when delegates from Menkotamar Bin Toghan, who became ruler after the demise of his uncle Berke Khan, arrived at Baibars’ court with a letter stating that they were enemies of his enemies and that they still wished to maintain the same friendly relations their uncle had with Baibars.<sup>60</sup>

This and other matters including Al-Zahir Baibars’ urging of Menkotamar to fight their common arch enemy Abgha Khan, led the former to prepare a strong army and fight Abgha Khan until the latter was defeated. He thus fulfilled a long-awaited desire of Baibars to weaken the Mongols and stop their threat to Egypt.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima ’rifat duwal al Muluk*, pp. 517-519; Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 210-213.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 299.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Shaddad, *Tarikh Al Malik Al Zahir*, p. 307.

<sup>58</sup> Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima ’rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 563.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, pp. 371-373; Baibars Al Mansouri (1987), *Al Tuhf Al Mulukia fiddawla al Turkia*, p. 71; Al Maqrizi (1934-1973), *Al Sulouk lima ’rifat duwal al Muluk*, p. 590.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Abdul Zahir, (1976), *Al Rudh Al Zaher fi sirat Al malik Al Zahir*, p. 400. Also see Baibars Al Mansouri (1987), *Al Tuhf Al Mulukia fiddawla al Turkia*, p.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn Kathir (1979), *Al bidaya wal nihaya*, p. 249.

<sup>61</sup> Al Birzali (2006), *Al muqtafa ’ala Kitab Arrawdatain*, p. 168; Al Safdi (1981), *Al Wafi bilwafiyat*, p. 118

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the relation between Sultan Al-Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan was, overall, an ideal one. Their alliance stood the test of time even after their demise. Common religion and interest bolstered that relationship, despite differences on certain issues inside or outside their respective states. The conclusions that this research reveals are: Firstly, Al-Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan, though different with regard to their respective environments, were actually similar in their military background that required discipline. Both leaders put their peoples' interests above everything else. Secondly, there is no such thing as absolute peace and friendliness among statesmen, as in the case of Al Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan. Sometimes a national interest may require alliance with an enemy of one party. Finally, the apparent friendliness between Al-Zahir Baibars and Berke Khan continued to show even after the death of Berke Khan. Al-Zahir Baibars maintained friendly relations with his sons. Historical sources claim that this friendly relationship was maintained even after the death of Al-Zahir Baibars.

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