

The Foreign Policy of the Mamluk State in the Early Bahri Period (650-699 AH / 1252-1299 AD): statistical approach

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ABSTRACT

The preset article is based on an early Bahri chronicle ‘Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t) fī Tārīkh al-Hijra(t)’ by Baybars al-Mansūrī. A statistical approach is applied to a traditional Mamluk narrative dealing with mainly military campaigns in the Middle East during the struggle between the Mamluk state in Egypt and al-Shām and the Ilkhanid rulers in the second half of the 13th century. The article proposes methodology for ‘quantifying’ pure narrative text for further statistical analysis.

Keywords: Mamluks, Egypt, foreign policy, Bahri period, statistics

السياسة الخارجية للدولة المملوكية في أوائل فترة البحري (650-699 هـ / 1252-1299 م): نهج إحصائي

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الخلاصة:

تستند هذه المقالة على النص من العصر المماليك البحرية المبكرة "زبدة الفكرة في تاريخ الهجرة" لبيبرس المنصوري. تم تطبيق نهج إحصائي على السرد المملوكي التقليدي الذي يتعامل بشكل أساسي مع الحملات العسكرية في الشرق الأوسط أثناء الصراع بين الدولة المملوكية في مصر وحكام الشام والإلخانيين في النصف الثاني من القرن الثالث عشر. تقترح المقالة منهجية "قياس" نص السرد الخالص لمزيد من التحليل الإحصائي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المماليك، مصر، السياسة الخارجية، العهد البحري، الإحصاء

The foreign policy of the Mamluk State in the early Bahri period belongs to the number of in details discussed issues in the Mamluk historiography. In general, we may suggest that it is one of the best studied aspects of the Mamluk State political development.

The Mamluk Bibliography Online by the Chicago University provides 1880 items (summer 2020) on the ‘Foreign relations’ of the Mamluk State through all history of its existence. Among these items 117 papers are devoted to the foreign policy in the discussed period. This number does not include general reviews or works, it includes only the papers

which deal with specific issues of the Mamluk foreign policy within the period of second half of the 13th century.

The thematic subjects of these papers are presented in the following table:

Thematic subject	Number of papers	Share
Relations with the Mongols	58	45%
Relations with al-Rum and / or Lesser Armenia	12	9.5%
Relations with the Crusader states	29	23%
Relations with the Italian states	8	6.5%
Relations with Byzantine	10	8%
Other	10	8%
Total	127 ¹	100%

The presented table clearly illustrates the emphasis on the relations between the Mamluks and Mongols². That was the reason to prepare a separate chapter on this issue in the present research. However, the comprehensive analysis of the foreign policy in the discussed period is absent in the historiography, methods of statistics to the events of the Mamluk foreign policy have never been applied.

Among the most significant researchers of the Mamluk State history, as well as its foreign policy Peter Holt should be mentioned. In particular, he thoroughly discussed the relationship between the Mamluks and the Crusade States. For example, in his article '*Mamluk-Frankish Diplomatic Relations in the Reign of Qalāwūn (678-89 / 1279-90)*' the scholar considers this issue in details. P.Holt, as well as the author of the present paper, mentions significant fall in the foreign activities in the first years of al-Mansur Qalawun's reign, which was related to the complicated internal political struggle (p.280). Further, the researcher describes the content of truce treaties signed between al-Mansur Qalawun and various 'Frankish' rulers. Since the texts of these treaties are present in the Mamluk chronicles, including the chronicle by Baibars al-Mansuri (which is the main source for this paper), the discussion on the content of these treaties has become a usual practice in historiography.

However, the general view on the Mamluk foreign policy, as well as its dynamics, is not considered in this context. Alongside with all of that, the detailed view on certain aspects or directions of the Mamluk foreign policy, as well as its comprehensive understanding, require further research.

The present paper is based mainly on the statistical analysis of the events, related to the foreign policy and covered by the chronicle '*Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t) fī Ta' rīkh al-Hijra(t)*'.

A serious methodological problem lies in understanding the concept of 'foreign policy' by the Mamluk State elite. While the term '*politics – siyāsa(t)*' is widely used in the Mamluk chronicles, including the '*Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t)...*', the term 'foreign policy' is completely absent in the sources. It is also necessary to consider the specific of the 'state', which was perceived by the ruling elite as the '*World of Islam – Dār al-Islam*', consisting of a number of 'Islamic Kingdoms' with different degrees of loyalty towards the sultan in Cairo. Thus, the question is, for example, whether we should consider the activities of the Kingdom of Aleppo or Egyptian troops campaign against al-Karak in order to subdue the city as a part of the Mamluk foreign policy.

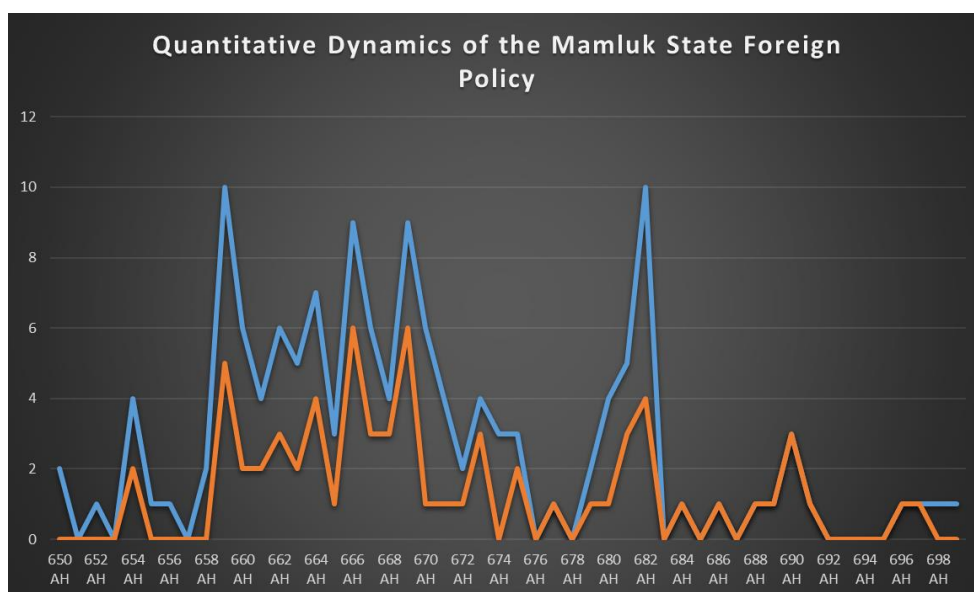
The present paper considers as a part of the Mamluk State foreign policy the activities conducted by those political entities, where, according to the sources, the names of the Mamluk sultans were mentioned in *khutba(t)*. Suppressions of revolts, exchanging letters between the Mamluk sultans and appointed rulers etc. are not counted as foreign policy acts. P.Holt, although in different formulation, proposed the similar criteria. He argued that, contrary to the Ayyubid state, the Mamluk state had been more integral and monolithic. According to the scholar, the division of the lands under the Mamluks control into 'the Egyptian territories and the Syrian provinces' was technical and was applied 'merely as affection of rhetoric' (p.237).

In the end of the year 650 AH 'Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t)...' describes the international situation as follows: *'This year is over, and the status of the maliks has become as we are going to mention. Regarding the rulers of the Tatars, Mongke Khan is in Karakorum, Sartaq Khan is in the Lands of the North, Hulagu Khan is in Iraq. While [the sultan Ghiyath al-Din Kaykhusrev, a son] of the sultan Ala al-Din Kayqubad the Older is in al-Rum, his capital is Konya. Al-Muizz Izz al-Din Aybek al-Salihi is in the Egyptian lands, al-Nasir Salah al-Din Yusuf ben al-Aziz [ben al-Zahir al-Ghazi] ben al-Nasir al-Kabir is in the land of al-Sham, he has Damascus, Aleppo and Homs. [The malik al-Ashraf Mudzaffar al-Din Musa ben al-Mansur, sahib of Homs] is in Tadmer and al-Rabha, which he obtained from the malik al-Nasir in exchange of Homs. In al-Karak there is the malik al-Mughith Fath al-Din Umar ben Sayf al-Din Abu Bakr, a son of the malik al-Kamil. The malik al-Salih Imad al-Din Ismail ben al-Adil is in Baalbek, Busra and al-Suwaida. The malik al-Mansur Nasir al-Din Muhammad ben al-Mudzaffar Taqa al-Din Mahmud ben al-Mansur ben Mudzaffar Umar ben Shahinshah ben Ayyub is in Hama. The malik al-Kamil Nasir al-Din Muhammad ben al-Mudzaffar Ghazi ben al-Adil Sayf al-Din Abu Bakr ben Ayyub is in Miyafarakin. And in Mosul there is the malik Badr al-Din Lu'lu'. And in Baghdad there is the khalif al-Mustasim bi-l-lahi, Commander of the Faithful'.*

One can notice that this list does not mention the Crusader states, as well as Lesser Armenia, while their rulers are described as 'maliks'. Due to obvious reasons, the Ismailites were not mentioned, the Mamluks did not consider them as full-pledged actors.

In the end of the considered period no independent (i.e. who did not recognize the authority of the sultan in Cairo) rulers remained in Syria and Palestine. Al-Rum was subordinated to the Ilkhanate, the Crusader states, except Cyprus, were conquered.

The period from 650 AH to 699 AH witnessed 136 events identified as events of the foreign policy. Among them 67 events (49.3%) were initiated by the Mamluks. The following graphics represents the dynamics of the foreign policy activities.



The graphic clearly illustrates the synchronicity between the foreign policy activities in general and Mamluks foreign initiatives. Moreover, while during the first years after taking the power (650-653 AH) the Mamluks were more an object of the foreign policy activities from abroad, in 683-697 AH (what in many aspects was a result of the first battle at Homs in October 1281) and further intensive domestic struggle inside the Ilkhanate, the Mamluks dominated in the region facing practically no resistance.

Besides that, the graphic demonstrates the absence of any statistical regularity in the Mamluk foreign policy activities in the considered period. It can be interpreted as an absence of any established system of regional relations, as well as apparent absence of a hegemon in the region. An additional argument in favor of this statement can be found in the events occurred within the history of the Mamluk state foreign policy – in spite of a number of significant victories and complete defeat of one of the rivals – the Crusader states in Palestine – the end of the discussed period was marked with a large defeat of the Mamluks in the second battle at Homs (1299 AD).

The chronological distribution of the Mamluks foreign policy activities is presented in the following table:

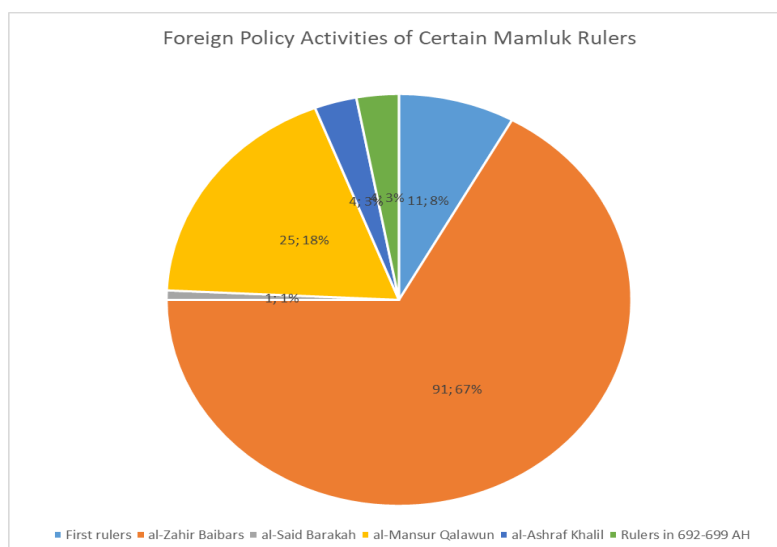
Number of events in a year	Number of the years, in which this number of events took place
0	12
1	13
2	4
3	4
4	6
5	2
6	4
7	1
8	0
9	2
10	2

The mean is 2.72 foreign policy events per year. The median is 1.5 events per year, while the standard deviation is 2.843. Correspondently, the outliers (mean plus two standard deviations) – i.e. the years of the maximum foreign policy activities – start from nine events per year, while the years of moderate and minimum foreign policy activities are the years with three or more events per year (the mean and below).

The year of the maximum and minimum foreign policy activities are presented in the table below:

The years of maximum foreign policy activities	Ruler	The years of minimum foreign policy activities	Ruler
659 AH	al-Zahir Baibars	650-653 AH	Shajara(t) al-Durr, al-Ashraf Musa, al-Muizz Aybek
666 AH	al-Zahir Baibars	655-658 AH	al-Muizz Aybek, al-Mansur Ali, al-Mudza'ffar Qutuz
669 AH	al-Zahir Baibars	665 AH	al-Zahir Baibars
682 AH	al-Mansur Qalawun	672 AH	al-Zahir Baibars
		674-679 AH	al-Zahir Baibars, al-Said Barakah, al-Adil Solamish, al-Mansur Qalawun
		683-699 AH	al-Mansur Qalawun, al-Ashraf Khalil, al-Adil Kitbugha, al-Mansur Lajin, al-Nasir Muhammad

The foreign policy activities of certain Mamluk rulers are illustrated by the following diagram:



The diagram clearly demonstrates that the most active ruler from the point of view of foreign policy activities was al-Zahir Baibars. These results are particularly significant in the light of the fact that the author of '*Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t)*...', Baibars al-Mansuri al-Nasiri, was a mamluk of the sultan al-Mansur Qalawun, he was promoted during the latter's reign and continued his career under Qalawun's sons – al-Ashraf Khalil and al-Nasir Muhammad. The main military events in the early history of Mamluks – the battle at Ayn Jalut (1261), capture of Akka (Acre) and final defeat of the Crusader states in Palestine (1291), two battles at Homs (1281 and 1299) did not take place under al-Zahir Baibars rule as well.

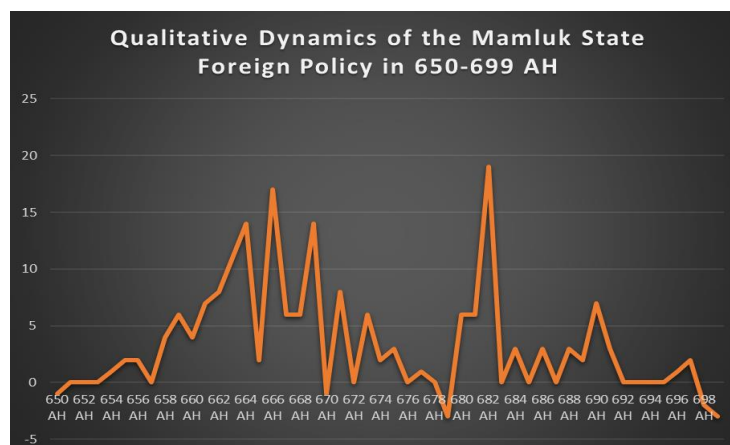
Both the table and the diagram point out an excessive peak of the foreign policy activities under al-Zahir Baibars. The year 659 AH was an attempt of the new malik to reformat the political and military influence in the region under the conditions when a part of the traditional centers of power was destroyed during the Mongol invasion, while the invasion itself was stopped in the battle at Ayn Jalut (1261). This reformatting of political and military influence was occurring simultaneously with the active attempts of the new malik al-Zahir Baibars to legitimize his rule by restoring the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo. This restoration itself with Cairo as the new capital of the Caliphate can be considered as a part of the process of this reformatting.

It is interesting to evaluate the foreign policy activities in the considered period not only with the quantitative indicators but with qualitative indicators as well. For this purpose we suggest to apply a widely used by historians of international relations and political scholars the method of evaluating every single event with a number of points. In Belarus this method has been widely applied initially to the Index of Belarus Foreign Policy (developed by the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies in Vilnius) and later on to Minsk Barometer (developed by Minsk Dialogue Initiative).

We propose the following scale to evaluate the foreign policy events:

Event	Mamluks' initiative or their advance	Damage for Mamluks
Significant victory, capture of a city or a fortress	+3	-3
Raid, military campaign	+2	-2
Embassies exchange	+1	-1
Other event	+1	-1

All foreign policy events were evaluated according to this scale. The total amount of points is +169, their distribution according to particular years is presented in the following graphic:



The presented graphic illustrates a number of interesting observations. For instance, it is generally positive (above zero), demonstrating a general picture of undoubted success of the Mamluks foreign policy activities. In this context it clearly does not correlate to the graphic of quantitative dynamics which demonstrates that the Mamluks initiated only 49.3 per cent of the fixed foreign policy activities.

Taking into consideration this mathematic proportion one may expect more a less similar graphic of the qualitative dynamics but definitely not the apparent foreign policy supremacy of the Mamluks. The Pearson's R correlation coefficient between the quantitative and qualitative indicators of foreign policy activities is zero.

In general this situation corresponds to the genre specifics of the source, as well as to the perception of history by the Mamluk authors – from sufferings and pain experienced by the agent of the historic process (according to Baibars al-Mansuri, that are Kipchak Turks, who finally became the leaders of the umma(t)) to the glory of Islam and this very agent (Turks). In such scheme certain falls and defeats are quite possible and acceptable since they only emphasize the total general success of the foreign policy, creating allusions with the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

From the statistics point of view, the graphic of the qualitative dynamics of the Mamluk foreign policy in 650-699 AH has much less any statistical dependence, comparing to the graphic of quantitative dynamics. Thus, the mean is 3.38 points, while standard deviation is 4.869 and medium is 2, i.e. the gap between the mean, median and standard deviation is larger than in the quantitative dynamics. The outliers are the years when the foreign policy index has 15 and more points. These years (including two years with little bit fewer points) are presented in the following table:

AH	Number of points	Brief description of the events
664	14	Large military campaign by al-Zahir Baibars with capture of Qaliat, Safed and Sis
666	17	Large military campaign by al-Zahir Baibars with capture of Jaffa, al-Shaqif (Beaufort castle) and Antioch
669	14	Large military campaign by al-Zahir Baibars with capture of Hisn al-Akrad (Krak des Chevaliers), Akkar, Aliqa, al-Karin, however, with failed attack against Cyprus
682	19	Large military campaign by al-Mansur Qalawun with a number of Armenian troops defeats, capture of the fortresses Katin and al-Kahta, as well as a number of diplomatic missions from the Crusaders and Ilkhan Ahmad-sultan, who became a Muslim

The table demonstrates that the peaks of the foreign policy success of the Mamluk rulers were related mainly to their military campaigns against the Crusader states in the Middle East. Moreover, these military campaigns became possible only during the period of decrease in the Middle Eastern activities of the Ilkhanate. Thus, the years 663-664 AH witnessed a serious conflict between Abaqa Khan, who had recently came to power, and Juchi's Ulus (Golden Horde). The year 665 AH was the beginning of a major conflict between Abaqa Khan and Baraq Khan in Central Asia. The year 669 AH was the end of this

conflict with Abaqa Khan's victory (and next year there was a united military campaign of the Tatars and the Crusaders against the Mamluk state). The year 682 AH witnessed serious domestic rivals in the Ilkhanate, while the Ilkhan Ahmad Sultan, who had become a Muslim, made an attempt to establish alliance with Mamluks.

It is important to look at the years of minimum foreign policy activities as well. Statistically, that are the years with below zero points, which correspond to the difference between the mean and one standard deviation. The years with the total amount of points equal to the difference between the mean and two standard deviations are not fixed³. These years presented in the table below:

AH	Number of points	Brief description of the events
650	-1	Mamluks ascent to power. Their conflict with the Syrian Ayyubids
670	-1	Coordinated attack by the Tatars and the Crusaders
679	-3	Al-Mansur Qalawun's ascent to power. Failed military campaign against the Crusader States. Sunqur al-Ashqar is contacting the Ilkhanate.
698	-2	Beginning of the large military campaign by the Tatars which will result in Mamluks defeat in the battle at Homs
699	-3	Mamluks defeat in the second battle at Homs

It is important that in the four cases from five the fail in the foreign policy occurred simultaneously with the change of power in the Mamluk state. Definitely, there is an idea to interpret this fact as an argument for the significant role of malik as a military commander. However, we also may assume that this a part of the genre specifics – a new ruler, as Turks in general, comes from the fails and hardships to his personal glory and to the glory of Islam⁴.

Besides that, the years of quantitative and qualitative peaks and downfall in general correspond to each other. The following table illustrates this fact:

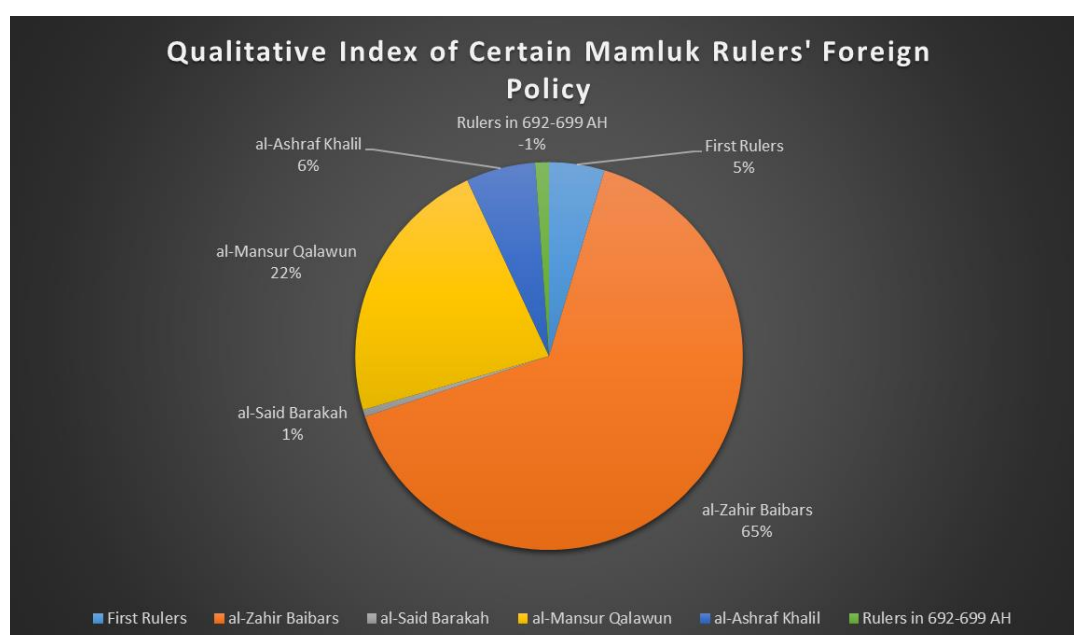
Quantitative peaks	Qualitative peaks	Quantitative downfalls	Qualitative downfalls
659 AH		650-653 AH	650 AH
	664 AH		670 AH
666 AH	666 AH	674-679 AH	679 AH
669 AH	669 AH	683-699 AH	689 AH
682 AH	682 AH		699 AH

It is necessary to remind that this corresponding and similarity occur within the zero statistical correlation between the qualitative and quantitative indicators of the Mamluk state foreign policy in the discussed period. It seems that these years can be considered as the key period in the development and implementation of the Mamluk foreign policy. As it has been mentioned above, it is related to more active steps of the Mamluks towards the Crusader states in the Middle East during the domestic conflicts or general instability in the Ilkhanate or, vice versa, to more active measures of the Ilkhanate together with the Crusader states

towards the Middle East. Thus, at least in the Mamluk foreign policy the Ilkhanate and the Crusader states were perceived as more or less united and sustainable system.

The qualitative index of foreign policy according to the Mamluk rulers is presented in the following table and diagram

Ruler(s)	Number of points
First rulers	8
al-Zahir Baibars	113
al-Said Barakah	1
al-Mansur Qalawun	39
al-Ashraf Khalil	10
Rulers in 692-699 AH	-2



From the point of view of distribution between rulers the qualitative points are corresponding to the quantitative points with the exception of increase in the qualitative share of al-Mansur Qalawun (22 per cent versus 18 per cent in quantitative distribution) and small decrease in the share of al-Zahir Baibars (65 per cent versus 67 per cent). However, even in the qualitative distribution al-Zahir Baibars remained the main agent of the Mamluk state foreign policy in the considered period.

Thus, we can make the following conclusions:

The discussed period witnessed an absence of any established system of regional international relations, the foreign policy of the Mamluk state in many aspects had a reactive nature as a response to the danger from the Tatars (mainly, from the Ilkhanate).

The Crusader states in the Middle East and the Ilkhanate were perceived by the Mamluks as parts of the one danger, regardless the real relations which de-facto existed between these polities.

The concept of the narrative of the foreign policy applied by the author of the 'Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t)...' remains within the general frames of the Mamluk elite's perception on the nature of the historic process. The emphasis made on the foreign policy activities of al-Zahir Baibars serves as a kind of the beginning of a new cycle, which will reach its peak during the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad.

Footnotes:

¹The total number is larger than the number of publications because some papers discuss more than one thematic subject.

² Further on in the present paper we use the term 'Tatars', as it appears in the Mamluk sources.

³This fact can be considered as an additional proof of artificial narrative about the foreign policy in the 'Zubda(t) al-Fikra(t)...'.

⁴In this context it is apparent that for Baibars al-Mansuri the rule of al-Zahir Baibars is a logical continuation of the rule of the first Mamluk rulers, while the rule of al-Mansur Qalawun is a beginning of a new period, the period of his family ruling, where the first peak is the Tatars defeat at the first battle at Homs and Crusaders final defeat in the Middle East and the maximum peak – the further success of al-Nasir Muhammad's foreign policy.

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