



The crusades. The conflict of “the sea and the river” in the 12th and 13th centuries

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Abstract

This Paper does spotlight on the Age of Crusades which witnessed an opposition between the Mediterranean Sea, as the Crusaders came from its western Shores and the Rivers of Syria, Iraq and Egypt. The crusaders Wanted to subdue the Arab rivers, The Arab rivers, we noticed that in principalities of Edessa which located in Euphrates and Antioch in Orontes. The invaders tried to expand The Asian domain into Africa, but the Nile Stood firmly of their targets. that eventually, was one of the most important factors of failure crusader's movement.

Keywords: Crusades, The Conflict of the sea and river, The Mediterranean, The river Nile

Introduction

This paper deals with what could be described as “The Conflict of the Sea and River “during crusades’ Era throughout the 12th and 13th centuries.

Actually, the geographical interpretation represent a basic element to understand that bloody era of the East-West conflict throughout those two centuries, men vanished and time is passed, only the land on which that conflict occurred is remained. The confirmed view here is that geography directs the history, and history is a conflict on geography, without neglecting the importance of the other interpretations of course.

Notably, the crusades (Croisades, Kreuzzuge) is a Mediterranean phenomenon (Paul, 2000) (Rahmouni and Salawi, 2020) (Fahmi, 1997) (al-Gouhary, 1984) (Broadwill, 2001) (Rickman, 2008), because France does locate on its shore, which is considered the source of theses crusaders par excellence. Also, the Italian trade cities located on its extended shore, like Genoa, Pisa and Venice, as well as Syria, Egypt and Tunisia. Hundred thousands of vessels had sailed in its waters back and forth, carrying on their boards the fighters, pilgrims and merchants reaching out to its whole destinations, in particular its own Eastern part, the Levant.

Thus, we should shed lights on the Mediterranean Sea. We can present that as follows:

1- The Mediterranean:

The Mediterranean is one of the most important continental sea, as the land encircles it from all sides, and it does not connect with the open oceans except via narrow passageway: Gibraltar.

The Mediterranean is divided into two sections; eastern and western, and a shallow region separated those sections, which locates between Tunis and Sicily in southern Italy.

The Mediterranean Basin has many islands, most of them were posts of the political and military domain, such as Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete, Malta, etc.

The Roman writer Caius Julius Solinus was the first person who named it as “Mediterranean “, which is in Latin ” Mediterranus “, because it locates in the middle of the old world’s continents.

Its area is 1145000 square mile (al-Gouhary, 1984), evidently as a far wide sea.

The Arabs called it “sea of the Romans “, or in Arabic “Bahr al-Room “. However, the romans named it as: “our sea “, or in Latin: “ Mer Nostrum “.

The Mediterranean had the priority of development of the sea navigation, because of the zigzag of its shores, as well as the stillness of its water and the rarity of storms blowing over it (al-Gouhary, 1984). That led to its active impact in the advancement of the navigation, as multi-volume vessels and ships crossed its water, with various objects, either peaceful or military ones, between its eastern and western shores and posts.

We also do not neglect to note that the Mediterranean, throughout the crusades' era, was a central sea, via which the international trade lines connected with other seas, such as Caspian sea, black sea and Baltic sea, which indicated its own appropriation as a unique geographical phenomenon.

The Mediterranean witnessed the rise of the most ancient civilizations that the humanity history has ever known, i.e. the ancient Egyptian civilization. It was also a field of the conflict of all international major powers over it throughout the ages of history, such as : the Egyptians, Greek, Byzantines, Muslims, crusaders, up to England, France, Italy, Spain, USA, all of them had conflicted over it due to its major strategic importance as a connection link between East and West.

The Mediterranean also witnessed the Crusades' Era, and a European political competition between France, England and Italy for dominating its Eastern part. Although there were other seas like the red sea, Baltic sea, Caspian sea, black sea and others, the Mediterranean, particularly, had its own distinctive reputation, confirming its own geographical and historical pivotal position, and that it does worth to be studied, due to its unique geographical location as a rare central sea.

We can say that Heartland in that age linked to the area located in Eastern Mediterranean Linked to the area located in eastern Mediterranean, which extended from San Simon Port of Antioch in the north, to Gaza in the south.

Beside the aforementioned, we should shed light on the rivers located in the region of east and south of Mediterranean, especially the rivers of Iraq, Syria and Egypt, for their own historical leading role in the conflict issues at that time.

2- The rivers of Iraq, Syria and Egypt :

Thus, we have to deal, briefly, with the rivers: Tigris, Euphrates, Al- Assi (Orontes) and Nile.

Tigris:

As for Tigris, it rises from Taurus mountains in southern east Anatolia, its course length is nearly 1718 K.M. It is noted that 1400 K.M of the rivers course is within the Iraqi soil (wikapedia). Two main cities are located on its shore; Baghdad, the old historical capital, and Mosul the metropolis of northern Iraq, in addition to Tikrit, Samara, etc.

Euphrates:

Regarding Euphrates, it is one of the big rivers located in south –west of Asia. The main information about it as follows:

It rises from Taurus Mountains in Asia Minor. It consists of two tributaries: Maurat Su and Kara Su. It rises from Lake Van and Mount Ararat in Armenia. Kara Su, which means "the black water", rises from north eastern Anatolia. The river Euphrates extends between Asia Minor, Syria and Iraq.

The length of Euphrates from its source to its mouth 2490 is K.M. Its basin's area is 388 000 K.M. square.

Its width is ranging between 200 to more than 2000 meters (Mukhaimer and Hejazi, 1996).

Orontes:

Regarding Orontes River in Syria, it is called in English " Orontes ", and in Arabic : " AL-Assi ", because it flows from south to north, different from Syrian rivers. It is also said that Arabs named it in such name because it "disobeys" them and enters into the region of the Romans, their enemies.

It rises from Beqaa Valley in Lebanon. There are many sources of it, which are Ain Ezzarqa, Hermal, shaufair in plains of Western mountains of Lebanon. In addition there are Ras Baalbek, Ain Falakiya, Al-Labwah in in plains of eastern mountains of Lebanon. Orontes River extends to the north until reaching cities of Homs and Hamah until reaching Samadag, where it flows into the Mediterranean

The length of Orontes River is 571 K.M.

There are many tributaries of that river, which are : River Al-Kafat, Nahr al-Aswad (The Black River), River of Afrin, River Al-Bared, River Abu Qubays, River Sahlab, River Qastun, River Sarut and Zarqa River (Fatellus, 1897) (Awad,2001) (Ali, 2024).

Rivers of Lebanon:

In addition to the aforementioned, there are many various rivers in Lebanon, we mention them as follows :

1- River Oustwan, rises from Giebelakkaar, and flows into Akkaar Gulf. Its length is 44 K.M. The area of its basin is 161 K.M.

2- River Arqa, rises from Giebelakkaar, and flows into Akkaar Gulf. Its length is 27 K.M. The area of its basin is 121 K.M.

3- River Bared, rises from Jabal al-Makamel, Jabal al-kinninah and Giebelakkaa. Its length is 24 K.M. The area of its basin is 277 K.M.

4- River Abu Ali, rises from Grotto Kadesha mountain and from Mar Sarkis. Its length is 44.5 k.M. The area of its basin is 277 K.M.

5- River Jaouz, rises from Al-Munaitera mountain, close to Tannourine. Its length is 38 K.M. The area of its basin is 189 K.M.

6- River Abraham, rises from Afqa Grotto and from Manoura Spring.. Its length is 30 K.M. The area of its basin is 330 K.M.

7- River Kalb, rises from Jeita Grotto.. Its length is 38 K.M. the area of its basin is 260 K.M.

8- Damour River, Rises from Nabaa Al-Safa and Ain Dara Spring and al Gaboon Spring. Its length is 37.5 K.M. The area of its basin is 288 K.M.

9- Zahrani River, rises from Al Tasah Spring at the bottom of Mount Niha.. Its length is 25 K.M. The area of its basin is 88 K.M.

10- Awali River. Its upper stream is known as Barouc River, and its tributary is Jezzin. Its length is 48 K.M. The area of its basin is 302 K.M.

11- Al-Litani River. Its length is 170 K.M. The area of its basin is 2168 K.M. It is the longest rivers of Lebanon (Mudallal, 1989).

The River Nile:

Regarding river Nile, its most distinctive features are as follows:

Its name is derived from the Greek name: "Nelos ".

Its length is about 6825 K.M., i.e. 4142 Miles approximately. Therefore it is considered as the longest river in the world (al-Zayyati,2005)(Kassim,2012) (Sami, 2016) (Said,1993) (Muhammed,1962) (Farah,1995) (abul Fotouh,2011) (Himdan, 2001) (Cooper,2014) (Mauply, 2015). Though, the Mississippi river may surpass it if its own tributaries added to the length's calculations.

The river Nile receives its own water from two main sources; which are: African tropical Region and the Abyssinian Plateau, from which it does flow until entering into Egypt, and eventually flows in the Mediterranean via Damietta and Rasheed Branches.

The most ancient civilization in the world was raised on its shores, as witnessed by the American Egyptologist James henry Breasted, as he said: "The Dawn of Conscious was born in Egypt "(Breasted, 2017).

One of the eminent western geopoliticians, Robert Kaplan, said in his valuable book "The Revenge of Geography ":

"Deserts gave the land of Egypt clear-cut and easily defensible boundaries; while the Nile provided it with a natural backbone and nervous system. Frontier defense against outlanders was scarcely a serious problem for the king of Egypt. Egypt was shut off from the south, where there is nothing but bare desert on either side of the river; while in the north there is the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile, moreover, was easily navigable, with the flow of the river carrying boats northward, even as the winds generally blowing from north to south carried boats, with the help of sail, southward. Thus was civilization able to dawn in Egypt" (Kaplan, 2015) .

That is the "Field of Conflict ", i.e. The Mediterranean

and the rivers range in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, which could be described as a net of rivers.

Generally speaking, the crusades adhered to subdue the Syrian coast, which was considered by them as "a matter of life and death." They took the years (1099-1153) to domain it, being the connection link with their European Patria, in which the financial, humanitarian and political support is available. That indicates they consumed quarter of their settlement period in the East to accomplish this very object. They used the Italian coastal cities to accomplish that.

When we read the book of the eminent crusader's Historian William of Tyre, we see that it is entitled as " *Historia Rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* ". i.e. "The history of the deeds done beyond the Sea ". He means "the Mediterranean sea", which indicated its own centrality.

The crusaders adhered to dominate the Syrian coast cities from the earliest time of their campaigns, such as Acre in 1104, Sidon and Beirut in 1111. However, the fall of Tyre was late as 1124 A.D. in the era of Baldwin II (1118- 1131) (Tyre, 1943) (Othman, 2008) because of its natural and artificial inviolability, as well as the Fatimid maritime support.

Regarding the last city of the Syrian coast which fallen in the hands of the invaders, that was Ascalon in 1153, in the era of Baldwin III (1130-1162) (Tyre, 1943) (al-Sayyed, 1990). Thus, the crusaders' dominance over that strategic geographical range had been completed. many result had been accomplished by the fall of Ascalon, of them are:

First : The last Fatimid stronghold in that coast had been fallen, and the maritime boundaries of the kingdom of Jerusalem extended from Suadiye Port and Antioch in the north, to Ascalon and Gaza in the south. That led to exaggerate the crusaders' danger on Egypt more than before.

Second: The fall of Ascalon showed how far was the weakness of the Fatimid state in that period, which made it an invasion aim to the Crusaders, which already happened via the Expedition of the King Amalric I (1163-1174) on Egypt.

Third: The Islamic powers in Syria became restricted in the land, and economically bound, and became of

need to the Crusaders to market and distribute its own commercial products and goods. Therefore, the Muslims obliged to deal with their enemies as commercial brokers. That situation continued until the re-capture of the Syrian coast by the Muslims as a definite result of the decisive battle of Hattin in 1187.

Fourth: By the fall of Ascalon, Noor al-Din Mahmoud sought to expand to the south, for Damascus, the old historical metropolis of Syria. That was successfully accomplished in 1154, the very next year of the fall of Ascalon. That success was very important, because when the conflict of the Fatimid ministers in Egypt occurred, Noor al-Din could intervene, supporting Shawar against Dirgham, in a way showed his efficiency in practicing his own role via an active and ambitious foreign policy.

Although of the Importance of subjugation the Crusaders of the Syrian coast, the risks came to them from the side of those rivers and their plains and valleys of the high population, on which stood many Islamic cities, such as Cairo, Homs, Hamah and Musil. Those cities acted, in addition to Aleppo and Damascus, as an economic and political significance, which could not be underestimated in the balance of strategic powers.

3- The crusaders and the rivers of the area:

The Crusaders could establish their presence in the Syrian coast, whenever they sought to exit from "the Syrian cocoon ", they failed. The most complicated knot in their own history, which they couldn't solve, is that they succeeded in Asia but failed in Africa.

Thus, Muslims had strategic advantage via the presence of these rivers in the area, which were lacked in their enemies', as well as the high population ; a matter we can see via the writings of the Muslim geographers and travellers, as cited by al-Idrisi (d. 1160) (Al-Edressy, N/D), Ibn Jubair (d.1217) (Ibn Jubair, N/D) and Abul-Fida (d.1330) (Slan, 1848).

We cannot overlook here the importance of the human factor, as the humans were the axis of the conflict; they were the source of the production and fighting. The machines that take the place of men were absent. In contrast, the Crusaders underwent the dilemma of lacking of the human element, which

was an adherent matter of them throughout their presence in Syria. They sought to compensate it by bringing forward the European men to settle in the region, as well as by establishing military structures.

We don't ignore here to note the importance of those rivers located in Euphrates Peninsula, Syria and Egypt, due to the existence of eminent cities over their shores which contained significant high populations, such as Musil, Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo. Those cities constituted axial centres of Jihad movement via mobilization of people against invaders, as well as being vital fields of soft power of Muslims as contained hundreds of schools and thousands of scholars and Juristic Scholars (Faqeeds).

The crusaders aspired, from the earliest times of their campaigns, to dominate the sources, courses and mouths of those rivers the best they could. Hence, we note the foundation of Principality of Edessa (Elganzouri, 1986) in 1097, which was located over the Euphrates, and was the first Crusader Principality. Also, the principality of Antioch (Cohen, 1940), located over Orontes River, which was the second of those principalities, founded in 1098.

The invaders, also, sought to dominate Tabariya (Tiberias) Lake (Badr, 2023), which is the widest fresh-water surface in Palestine. Its area is 170 K.M square, its length is 21 K.M and its width is 12 K.M. Also, Golan Heights had its own importance as contained 80 springs and massive volumes of rain fall over them (al-Keelani, 2001). Al-Sheikh Mountain (Mount of Herman), which is the main source and base of Palestine water, does stand in its region.

The Crusaders sought to support their power over the aforementioned water sources via establishing the well-fortified crusader castles (Kennedy, 1994), such as Al-Sabiyya or Nimrud Castle (Prawer, 1972) (Boase, 1967) over Golan Heights, as well as Shteef Arnon Castle (Abdul-Mona'im, 1997) which located over Orontes, the longest river in Lebanon.

One of the outcomes of the decisive battles of Hattin in 4 July 1187 (Kedar, 1992) (Group of Researchers, 1989), beside destruction of the Crusader Army and re-capturing of the Syrian coast's cities by the Muslims as well as freeing of Jerusalem from the crusaders' arm, the control of the Muslims over the sources of the fresh water in Syria.

The invaders sought to control the sources of fresh water as much as they could in Euphrates peninsula and Syria, but the situation was difficult in Egypt's Nile. The Crusaders wanted to extend their domain outside Asia into Africa, but history proved already that Egypt was "the Grave of Invaders", and the Nile was hard to fall in their own hands.

As such, the Fifth Crusade (1218-1221) (Padenborn, 1948) (Powell, 1986) (Omran, 1985) led King Jean de Birene (1210 – 1225) and the Vice Pope Pelagius, set off to invade Egypt. in its course, Ayyubid King al-Kamel (1218 – 1238), after accomplished his plan to repel the Crusaders, directed to al –Mansoura in August 1221, and cut the Crusaders' return line by destroying their naval power, as well as sieging them by his infantrymen in the Northern area of the Crusaders' camp. He chose the right time to strike them with deathblow by using the Nile inundation (al-Maqrizi, 1943). We see here that the Crusaders had no idea about the Geography and Topography of Egypt. King al-kamel ordered his troops to cross to the areas dominated by the Crusaders and to cut the dams over the Nile, hence the water covered those lands. Thus, all the roads were closed up, and the Crusaders had no choice except to go through the narrow way over the shore of Nile. So, king al-Kamel ordered to establish a fence immediately over the Nile at Ashmom Tanah (Ibn Wasel, 1972), over which the Islamic troops crossed to face the Crusaders. That act was one of the reasons of the failure of that Crusade.

Regarding the 7th Crusader (1249 -1250) (Joinville, 1946) (Ziyada, 1961), led by King Louis IX (1226 – 1270), King Najm al-Deen Ayyub, after the Crusaders' capture of Damietta, had to retreat to Mansoura as his father al –Kamel did before, specially that its location is fortified naturally by the Damietta Branch of Nile and the very sloped Ashmom Sea.

The Crusaders needed a massive river fleet (Eskandar, N/D). So, Faraskour Battle had out broken and the Crusade failed, and the River Nile witnessed the defeat of the French king, who was taken a captive in the House of Kadi Ibn Lockman, in Mansoura.

Thus, it became clear to us that Crusaders tried to expand towards Egypt, but the Nile defeated them thanks to the resistance of the Egyptians and the leadership of the Ayyubids and by external support

received from Syria. It was confirmed to history and to us that the Crusaders succeeded in Asia, but failed in expanding their dominance into Africa.

Conclusions:

1) The Era of Crusades witnessed an opposition between the Mediterranean, as the Crusaders came from its western shores, and the Rivers in Iraq, Syrian and Egypt, via a colonial scheme in the Middle Age, concluded under the motto of the Cross (Croix, Crux).

2) The Crusaders directed to subdue the Arab rivers the sources, streams or mouths. We noticed that in principalities of Edessa, Antioch and Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

3) The invaders tried to expand beyond the Asian domain into Africa, but the Nile stood firmly in front of their advancement, and blocked them from accomplishment of this aim. That, eventually, was one of the most important factors of failure of the Crusades' scheme.

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