CONCEPTIONS OF THE CRUSADES IN THE SAUDI HISTORIOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION: THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT OF UMM AL-QURĀ UNIVERSITY AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This contribution is concerned with the study of the Crusades at the history department of Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It includes analysis of students' theses, publications of faculty members, and course descriptions in order to reveal some of the ideological assumptions that underpin the understanding of the Crusades in this institution. It will also show how the political and religious stances taken by the Saudi authorities have influenced historical instruction and research in the university, particularly with regard to sensitive topics like the Crusades and East-West relations in general. We will see that the history department has a highly Islamo-centric world view and that some of its members even maintain the position that the Crusades never really ended but are rather ongoing.

Introduction

The study of history in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has developed progressively over the last century. It began during the reign of the founder

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of the state ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Suʿūd (1932-1953). Three historiographical trends resulted from this movement. The first of these is the writing of so-called royal or official history, which focuses on the history of the Saudi state and its kings from the early stages of its inception. The second trend is local history, which sheds light on the history of a particular city, region, or tribe. Finally, the third trend is the writing of social history.

Despite the great progress that has occurred in Saudi historical writing, it continues to be heavily influenced by political developments. One of the most important issues in Saudi historiography, upon which it is necessary to shed some light, is the study of the history of the Crusades in Saudi universities. We will focus in this study on Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca.

How have Saudi historians in the Umm al-Qurā University Faculty of Sharīʿa, the university's oldest faculty which was established in 1369 A.H./1950 A.D., dealt with the study of the Crusades? Has the writing of the history of the Crusades in Saudi Arabia remained hostage to the intervention of the state in academic affairs? What are the most important characteristics which comprise their ideological orientations? How have political conditions and circumstances been reflected in these orientations in light of the relation between the ruling ideology and the historians? Has the lightening of the ideological burden of the Crusades truly been mirrored in these orientations?

The Influence of the Religious Mentality on the Writing of the History of the Crusades

Marc Bloch (d. 1944) was concerned with the history of mentalities between religious positions and social realities on the basis of a dialectic of influencer-influenced from which it is possible to understand and make manifest the ideological background of the group. Bloch erected the structure of his approach on his openness to the methods of sociology, by which he was able to study the process in which the unconscious of the group was embodied through religious rituals and social practices which combine in themselves the inherited with the present, necessitating regard for the fascination of the sacred-worldly, its semiotic duality and the bursting forth of accumulated group mental images around it.[1] Therefore, we must ask ourselves whether it

[1] For example, see: D. Chirot, "Social and Historical Landscapes of Marc Bloch", in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology. Conference on Methods of Historical Social Analysis*, ed. T. Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) pp. 22–46;

possible for us to understand the historiography of the Crusades in Saudi Arabia without drawing attention to the religious mentality in Umm al-Qurā University, the context in which it arose, and its influence on the writing of the history of Islam and the Middle Ages.

From a first reading, it is possible to say that facts are lurking in the ideological background of the historiographical and manuscript studies undertaken by both Saudi and non-Saudi researchers at Umm al-Qurā University which are closely connected to the consensus of the historians at this university regarding the political and religious uses of history. From the 1950s until shortly before the beginning of King Salmān's reign (2015-), Saudi Arabia was among the strongest supporters of the entire spectrum of Sunnī Islamist groups, using them to reinforce its position in regional and international conflicts and rivalries. In the light of this radicalism, Saudi historians at Umm al-Qurā University (which attracted many of the leaders and figureheads of these religio-political movements) embraced the study of history and heritage from the perspective of "Islam and the Other" or what the sociologists describe as a "self-defence mechanism". The influence of these political movements led to the spread and dominance of Islamic subjects in the university's historical curriculum and was mirrored in the courses on Islamic history and the period of the Crusades that were taught by many members of the teaching staff in the history department of Umm al-Qurā University (located within the Faculty of Sharīʿa and Islamic Studies). Perhaps the most prominent of them were Jamāl ʿAbd al-Hādī (1937-2024) and the many students who were trained by him and influenced by him as well as by the writings and ideas of Muḥammad Quṭb (1919-2014), who created the nucleus of the school of thought which promoted the "Islamization" of history, the sciences, and Islamic civilization and the establishment of a methodology for interacting with the cultural, intellectual, doctrinal, and civilizational aspects of the Islamic phenomenon.[2]

R. R. Davies, "Marc Bloch", *History*, vol. 52 (1967), 265–282; H. Baulig, "Marc Bloch, Géographe", *Annales d'Histoire Sociale*, vol. 8 (1945), 5–12; ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Bilmuʿṭī, "Min al-Tārīkh ilā Dhihnīyāt al-Tārīkh", *Arshīf al-Mudawwanāt al-Tārīkhīya*, vol. 22 (August 2016).

[2] Jamāl ʿAbd al-Hādī Masʿūd was one of the icons of political Islam in Egypt and a professor in the history department of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities in King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz University in Jedda from 1973-1981, and then professor in the history department of Umm al-Qurā University until 1987. He called for using an Islamic

Jamāl ʿAbd al-Hādī took over the teaching of courses on Islamic history and Islamic influence on the West. He treated the period of the Crusades as a continuation of the Christian West's military and ideological offensive against the Muslims in reaction to the success of the Islamic conquests and the capture of many lands and regions of the Christian World of that time, and as revenge for the conquests achieved during the reign of the caliph ʿUmar. Despite ʿAbd al-Hādī's ideological agreement with his colleague ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī (1950-),[3] a clash between the two peers swiftly occurred after al-Ghāmidī wrote a series of articles in the Saudi newspaper ʿUkāẓ in which he accused ʿAbd al-Hādī of adopting the ideas of Sayyid Quṭb in his courses on Islamic history and the European-Islamic conflicts and attributing them to himself!

The ideological assumptions of the religio-political movements were reflected in particular in the academic courses concerning the Crusades. Thus the term "Islamic Nation" (al-Ummat al-Islāmīya) was used instead of "Arab Nation" (al-Ummat al-ʿArabīya). This led ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī to reject the definitions and terms proposed by the great Egyptian historian of the Middle Ages ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Saʿīd ʿĀshūr for the Crusades, because in al-Ghāmidī's opinion they did not reflect the true nature of the Crusades and did not express the Islamic point of view. Al-Ghāmidī believed that it was necessary for Muslims to have an Islamic perspective on history, especially the history of the Muslim struggle against the Christian West.[4]

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and Qurʾānic interpretation of history and he was against teaching the history of any non-Islamic civilization or state save from through an Islamic perspective in keeping with the teachings of Sayyid Quṭb. His most famous work was entitled *Errors that Must be Corrected in History: Methodology for Writing Islamic History, Why and How?* Jamāl ʿAbd al-Hādī Masʿūd, *Akhṭāʾ Yajib an Tuṣaḥḥaḥ fī al-Tārīkh: Minhaj Kitābat al-Tārīkh al-Islāmī: Limādhā wa Kayfa?* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafāʾ, third edition 1994). Muḥammad Quṭb Huṣayn Shādhilī was an Egyptian Islamist writer and academic, the brother of Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966). He received political asylum in Saudi Arabia from King Fayṣal where he became the main theoretician for his brother's ideas. He resided in Mecca and taught in Umm al-Qurā University where he trained many of the intellectuals of the Salafī-Jihādist school, most notably Safar al-Ḥawālī (1950-) who was considered the theoretician of Al-Tawaqquf wa al-Tabayyun, one of the Quṭbist groups.

[3] For more on him see his biography here: https://alghamdiprof.com/ali/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%8A/, accessed on October 30, 2024.

[4] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-Muslimūn wa al-Ghazw al-Ṣalībī fī al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (Mecca: Markaz al-Marwah li al-Khidamāt al-ʿIlmīya, Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, nd), pp. 2-4.

He believed that the Crusades were nothing more than episodes in a series of eternal world wars waged by the Christians and Jews against Islam from the time of the latter's inception. He further argued that the Crusades would continue until the descent of Jesus son of Mary at the end of time when he would break the cross and refuse to accept any religion save that of Islam, citing verses from the Qurʾān to indicate the correctness of his opinion as an objective extension of the Wahhābī discourse, which rests upon the direct citation of Qurʾānic verses without exegesis, and calls for the purification of belief and oneness of God, and the excommunication of all who contradict the literal meaning of the religious text.[5] Indeed the works that were composed by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792), the founder of the Wahhābī movement, consist of excerpts from *sharīʿa* sources (namely the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*) and it should be noted that he avoided all commentary and interpretation, deeming that the religious text was completely clear and did not require any further explanation or interpretation.

These developments occurred at the expense of social and economic history, in opposition to materialist interpretations of history, and were reflected in the names and descriptions of the courses and curricula taught by some of the professors at Umm al-Qurā University, and even by changing the name of the Department of History and Archaeology to the Department of Islamic History and Civilization.[6] The latter change occurred because for ideological reasons it was deemed un-Islamic to study archaeology! Such a position was maintained by a vision whose point of departure was the belief in an Islamo-centric religious perspective which disapproved of historical periods prior to it or different from it.

The location of the history department in the Faculty of Sharīʿa meant that it was influenced by this general ideological background and especially by Quṭbist ideas in its methodology for approaching Islamic Civilization. The approaches of the orientalists in dealing with the non-material aspects of Islamic Civilization were considered biased and thus to be avoided. Islamic thought was presented with an air of privilege and superiority such that the sources of its peculiarity emanate from the fact that it derives its strength from divine revelation.

[5] He refers to Qurʾān 2:120 and 3:69.

[6] Yūrik Mātiyās Dītirmān, *Kitābat al-Tārīkh fī al-Mamlakat al-ʿArabīya al-Suʿūdīya: Al-ʿAwlama wa al-Dawla fī al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, trans. ʿAbdallāh b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAskar (Beirut: Jadāwil li al-Nashr, 2015), p. 215.

Following the logic of this conception of history, the intellectual group mentality of Umm al-Qurā University becomes clear to us, using the methodology of Marc Bloch. It is apparent to us in the very names of the courses that concern the Crusades, which reveal the historians' assimilation of the mentality of contemporary Saudi society in their approach to teaching the history of both the Crusades and Ancient Persia (which they treated as a precursor to modern Iran). This example of group behavior reflects the group's mentality according to the proposition of Marc Bloch, which is by necessity the result of medieval historical accumulations as well as contemporary social and political behaviors and events.

The Descriptions of Courses on the Crusades in Umm al-Qurā University

The courses in the history department focused on the history of Islam. Whenever the study of the history of the Other was concerned, the starting point was always from a Sunnī Islamic perspective, far from the concerns of tribalism and avoiding the writings of non-Sunnī historians. The university offered courses that lacked a clear scientific or methodological vision and which bore farcical titles and descriptions, made no use of non-Arabic sources, and directed the students to non-specialist electronic sites such as Islam Online and Wikipedia!

In addition, until 2023, the works of non-specialist, non-academic, popularizing historians such as Rāghib al-Sirjānī and ʿAlī al-Ṣallābī were relied upon.[7] The main problem with these historians is not that they are non-specialists, for they did after all hold chairs as professors of history rather than of Islamic jurisprudence, but rather that they allow their ideology and whims to trump historical facts. They represent a political movement with a religious

[7] Rāghib al-Sirjānī is a physician and an assistant professor of urology at Cairo University, with a strong interest in Islamic history, who supervises the *Qissat al-Islām* (*Story of Islam*) website. He was born in Al-Maḥalla Al-Kubra in 1964 and has published over thirty-eight books on history, including *Qiṣṣat al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya* (*The Story of the Crusades*) and *Qiṣṣat al-Mughūl* (*The Story of the Mongols*). See https://www.islamstory.com/ accessed on October 31, 2024. ʿAlī Al-Sallābī, born in Benghazi, Libya, in 1963, initially studied engineering at Qaryūnis University before earning a PhD in Islamic Studies from Omdurman Islamic University in Sudan. He was influenced by the ideas of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and others. His notable works include Mawsūʿat al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya (*The Encyclopedia of the Crusades*) and Al-Khilāfa al-Fāṭimīya (*The Fatimid Caliphate*).

façade which uses history as a vehicle for its ideology. They use the study of history to promote that which they believe to be the absolute truth, while they erase from history those events which do not accord with their ideological tendencies. Their interpretations of events are governed by no principle save for their ideological goals and they adhere to a romantic vision of history which revolves around the duality of good and evil.

This attitude becomes clear from the history course descriptions which were employed at Umm al-Qurā University such as "The Muslims and the Crusader Invasions in the Middle Ages", "The Muslims and the European Invasions in the Modern Period", "The Muslims and the Mongol Invasions", "The Muslims and the European Invasions in the Modern Period", "Islamic Minorities in the World", "Centers of Islamic Civilization", "The Influence of Islamic Civilization on the Sciences", and "The Influence of Islamic Civilization on Europe".[8] All of these courses reveal an Islamo-centric world-view which sees history in terms of an endless struggle between Islam and the Crusaders, extending into modern times.

Between Scylla and Charybdis

For more than sixty years relations between the U.S.A. and Saudi Arabia developed in an atmosphere of warm friendship and strategic cooperation on a number of political issues such as combating the spread of communism in the Middle East and Central Asia and containing the influence of the Iranian Revolution. This was especially the case following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the resulting war which lasted for over a decade. During this time, Mecca became, with the blessing of the Saudi state, a bastion of support for the Afghan mujāhidīn. The historians of the Crusades at Umm al-Qurā University adopted the principle of continuously searching the Islamic past for glorious events and periods from which they could draw feelings of pride and participation in shaping the present and future through the above-mentioned Islamo-centric history courses which they created at that time and by propagating the idea of a universal conspiracy against Islam. Members of

[8] The author was a member of the curriculum review committee in the Department of History at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, and he contributed to the development of the medieval curricula in the College. The above-mentioned courses were approved in the official meeting of the committee reviewing Islamic history curricula in the Department of History at Umm al-Qurā University on the third day of Dhū al-Ḥijja, 1442 A.H/ October 20, 2020 A.D.

the history department such as Musaffir al-Ghāmiḍī, ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmiḍī, and, in particular, ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmiḍī, expressed these sentiments in publications with such titles as "The Universalist Project and the Distortion of Islam in the West", *The Perso-Roman War in Light of Sūrat al-Rūm*, *The Influence of Islamic Civilization on the West*, and "The Assault of Western Thought against Islam and its Prophet Muḥammad".[9] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmiḍī believed that he possessed the means to destroy the conceptions of the Western imagination about the Orient through the Crusades, which he considered to be part of a hegemonic system. Through his various publications he not only sought to deconstruct and demolish this system but also to create an alternative system in its place in order to correct what he regarded as the colonialist tendency inherent in the hegemonic Western system. To this end, he wrote works such as "Raymond Llull and his Attempts to Spread Christianity in North Africa", "The European Vision of the Arabs and Islam during the Middle Ages", and "John of Damascus, the First Intellectual Enemy of Islam".[10] In fact, most of his works were concerned with defending Islam and the image of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and with related issues, both medieval and contemporary.

In his writings on the Crusades, ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmiḍī invoked the characterization of the Crusaders in the Arabic primary sources as "infidel enemies" and he described them with a harshness bordering on savagery. He also asserted that their level of civilization was far beneath that of the Arabs, and claimed that there were many historical incidents which justified the description of the Other as "savage and uncivilized". In this context it was natural that the historical publications from Umm al-Qurā University dealt with the European Crusader from a standpoint of hostility, even though the

[9] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, "Al-Mashrūʿ al-Kawnī wa Atharuhu fī Tashwīh al-Islām fī al-Gharb", from his official website https://alghamdiprof.com, last visited April 22, 2023; Idem., *Al-Ḥarb bayn al-Rūm wa al-Furs fī Ḍawʾ Sūrat al-Rūm: Al-Iʿjāz al-Tārīkhī fī Sūrat al-Rūm* (Mecca, 2015); Idem., *Athar al-Ḥaḍārat al-Islāmīya ʿalā al-Gharb* (Mecca, 2015); Idem., "ʿUdwān al-Fikr al-Gharbī ʿalā al-Islām wa ʿalā Nabīhi Muḥammad", from his official website https://alghamdiprof.com, last visited April 22, 2023.

[10] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, "Al-Rāhib al-Fransīskī Raymund Lull wa Muḥāwalātuhu li Nashr al-Naṣrānīya fī Shimāl Afrīqīya", *Majallat al-Muʾarrikh al-ʿArabī*, vol. 6, no. 6 (1998) pp. 134-169; Idem., "Al-Ruʾyat al-Ūrūbīya li al-ʿArab wa al-Islām khilāl al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā", *Majallat al-Muʾarrikh al-ʿArabī: Nadwat Ittiḥād al-Muʾarrikhīn al-ʿArab bi ʿUnwān Al-ʿArab wa Ūrūbā ʿabra ʿUṣūr al-Tārīkh*, no. 7 (Cairo, 1999) pp. 59-87; Idem., *Yuḥannā al-Dimashqī: Rāʾid al-ʿUdwān al-Fikrī ʿalā al-Islām* (Mecca: Umm al-Qurā University, 2015).

Crusades were wars like any other war despite being clothed in the garb of religion. In fact, the works on the Crusades produced by the history department at Umm al-Qurā University were frequently less objective than the medieval Arabic sources in their treatment of the Crusaders, for the medieval Arab historians respected the bravery, fighting skills, and endurance of their opponents.

Another reflection of this attitude was the description of the Crusading expeditions by the Saudi historians at Umm al-Qurā University as "Christian Expeditions" or "Christian Invasions" and of their forces as "the Armies of the Cross whose chief motivations were to spread the Christian creed and recover the True Cross which they slanderously and unjustly claimed to have contained drops of the blood of the noble Messiah, not to mention the story of the Crucifixion itself which the Christians believe in while we oppose them over this false claim". The historians of Umm al-Qurā arrived at the conclusion that the Crusades were "…religious, doctrinal wars waged by Christian Europe which aimed to occupy the holy places in Bilād al-Shām and expel the Muslims from al-Andalus which later took the form of a great missionary movement and a secular intellectual assault which sought to turn the Muslims from their religion and destroy their beliefs".[11]

Even though the term "Crusades" is a purely Western term which the leaders of the expeditions applied to their actions, the Saudi researchers at Umm al-Qurā University have emphasized the religious character of these expeditions while referring to the Europeans with disdainful terms like *Nuṣārā* (Nazarenes) and *kuffār* (infidels) which are early Islamic terms that recall the payment of the *jizya* (poll tax). They have adopted the view of the inevitability of the revival of Islamic Civilization and they invoke the concept of *jihad* against the West, which they view as the enemy of Islam, as well as the liberation of the Al-Aqṣā Mosque and of Palestine. Such ideas are espoused by ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghāmidī in his doctoral thesis on the Mamluk jihad in which he also praises the Mamluks for their attention to the holy war and for implanting its values in the hearts of their soldiers, emphasizing that jihad is a duty for every Muslim and that it is no less important than the five pillars of Islam![12] Ibn Khaldūn made a distinction between "unjust wars of

[11] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, *Muḥāḍarāt Al-Muslimūn wa al-Ghazw al-Ṣalībī fī al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (Mecca: Markaz al-Marwa) p. 4.

[12] ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghāmidī, "Jihād al-Mamālīk ḍidd al-Mughūl wa-al-Ṣalībiyyīn fī Bilād al-Shām fī al-niṣf al-thānī min al-qarn al-sābiʿ al-hijrī," (PhD Thesis, Umm al-Qurā University, 1986), pp. 2, 459.

aggression" and "holy war" which is useful in understanding the reception of the Crusades by the Saudi scholars.[13]

They do not take into account that in the present time there are internationally-agreed means of dealing with aggression and occupation by framing it as illegal under international law and addressing it in the United Nations. Unfortunately, religious radicalism remains deeply embedded in our Islamic society, and it is necessary to deconstruct the extremist religious discourse in order to build a more open society capable of participating in the present and building a common future for all of mankind.

The historians at Umm al-Qurā interact with the dominant political and cultural climate and have plunged into the extremist sectarian religious conflicts of our time. They present themselves as representatives of their sects and ideological schools and of Sunnī Islam which forms the basis of their ideological identity. This sectarian tendency finds strong expression in the titles and contents of the History Department's courses concerning Shīʿism and Iran. The professors in the department have taken a hostile stance towards all of the Shīʿī dynasties in Islamic history, denying them any positive role in Islamic civilization and in the resistance to the Crusades.

The "Vengeance" Reading of History

The theses from Umm al-Qurā on the Crusades focus on the idea of vengeance in the history of relations with the Shīʿa and with what they refer to as "The Christian West". An example is "The Influence of the Esoteric Movements in Hampering the Jihād against the Crusaders", by Yūsuf Ibrāhīm al-Shaykh ʿĪd al-Zāmilī.[14] There is also the thesis by Al-Bundarī Muḥammad al-Sharīf entitled "Saladin's Efforts to Eliminate the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī Sect in Egypt" in which the author attempted to prove that the Fatimids and the Crusaders conspired together against Islam and in which she called for a revival of the project of Saladin in the modern world to defeat the enemies of Islam.[15] She adheres fervently to the sectarian Wahhābī outlook of her mentors such as

[13] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Khaldūn, *Al-ʿIbar wa Dīwān al-Mubtadaʾ wa al-Khabar*, eds. Khalīl Shahāda and Suhayl Zakkār, 8 vols. (Dār al-Fikr: Beirut, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 181, 334.

[14] Yūsuf Ibrāhīm al-Shaykh ʿĪd al-Zāmilī, *Athar al-Ḥarakāt al-Bāṭīnīya fī ʿArqalat al-Jihād ḍidd al-Ṣalībīyīn* (Jordan: Dār al-Maʿālī, 1998)

[15] Al-Bundarī Muḥammad al-Sharīf, "Juhūd Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī fī al-Qaḍāʾ ʿalā al-Madhhab al-Shīʿī al-Ismāʿīlī fī Miṣr (564-589 h./1169-1193 m.)", (MA thesis, Umm al-Qurā University, 2022).

ʿAlī ʿAwdat, Musaffir, and ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī and it is through their influence that the jihadist discourse has entered modern studies on Saladin and the Crusades.

This historian emphasised that Egypt returned once again to the Sunnī sect under the banner of the Abbasids in 1171 even though this is inaccurate.[16] For the bulk of the Egyptian Muslim population remained Sunnī even under the rule of the Fatimids, and Egyptian jurists played a major role in the development of Sunnī law, such as the Awlād ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, Layth b. Saʿd, and the great Al-Shāfiʿī himself.

Musaffir al-Ghāmidī's thesis is concerned with the "Islamic Jihad against the Crusaders during the Zankid Period (1097-1173)", and he has published a book entitled "The Islamic Jihad against the Crusaders in the Islamic East before the Establishment of the Ayyubid State in Egypt", which discusses the role of the Ismāʿīlīs in hampering the efforts of Sunnī Muslim leaders in repulsing the Crusades as well as the fall of Tripoli into Fatimid hands in 1107, which he believes paved the way for its conquest by the Crusaders two years later. In these works, he expounded at length on the religious duty of jihad against the Crusaders. He examined the position of the Abbasid caliphate towards the question of fighting the Crusaders, focusing in particular on the caliph Al-Mustarshid Billāh (1118-1135) and the latter's role in reviving the authority of the Abbasid Caliphate as well as in encouraging jihad against the Crusaders. He contrasted this with what he perceived as the weakness and duplicity of the Fatimids in the face of the Crusades, which led to the fall of Tyre and Asqalān. He also looks at the important role played by the Artuqid dynasty of Mosul (est. 1102) in resisting the earliest wave of Crusader invasions in the Jazīra, noting their important victory against the Crusaders in the battle of Ḥarrān in 1103, and the continuation of Muslim resistance to the Crusaders in the same region under the Zankids, culminating in the conquest of the County of Edessa by ʿImād al-Dīn Zankī in 1144. Some students of the department have written about jihad in contexts apart from the Crusades such as Wafāʾ ʿAbdallāh Sulaymān al-Mazrūʿ whose thesis concerns "The Jihad of the Muslims beyond the Pyrenees from the First to Fifth Century A.H.",[17] ʿĀʾisha bint ʿUthmān's "The Ribats of the Ulema and

[16] Yūsuf Ibrāhīm al-Shaykh, *Athar al-Ḥarakāt al-Bāṭinīya fī ʿArqalat al-Jihād ḍidd al-Ṣalībīyīn*, (Jordan: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1998), p. 167.

[17] Wafāʾ ʿAbdallāh bin Sulaymān al-Mazrūʿ, *Jihād al-Muslimīn Khalf Jibāl al-Burtāt min al-Qarn al-Awwal ilā al-Qarn al-Khāmis al-Hijrī* (Cairo: Maktabat Ẓahrāʾ al-Sharq, 2003).

their Jihad on the Syrian Frontier against the Byzantines during the Time of the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (785-809)",[18] and Fāṭima bint Ḥāy bin Yaḥyā al-Ḥajjī al-Sufyānī's "The Raids of the Danish Normans on the Kingdom of the Franks and al-Andalus (756-1009)".[19]

The researcher Nabīl Riḍwān agrees with ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī in his study on the "Crusades in the Modern Era" that the idea of the Crusades continued to exist even after the end of the formal Crusading wars in the Near East during the medieval period.[20] He divides the modern Crusades into three fronts: the Maghrib, the Mashriq (Middle East), and the South (represented by the colonization of Islamic lands in sub-Saharan Africa). The historian Al-Muʿtaṣim Billāh Ibrāhīm has written a thesis on the "Jihad of the Ottomans against the Byzantines (1354-1453)" which also describes how the existence of the Ottoman Empire blocked European colonization of the East for a long time.[21] Ḥayyāt bint Munāwar al-Rashīdī wrote a thesis on the American missionaries in the late Ottoman Empire.[22] It is noteworthy that ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī himself is always very careful to add the title "mujāhid" before any Muslim leader who was involved in fighting against the Crusaders.[23]

All of these theses and studies are anchored in the themes of jihad, the role of the caliphate, and the concept of (Sunnī) Muslim unity in opposition to the

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[18] ʿĀʾisha bint ʿUthmān bin Muʿallim Yūsuf al-ʿAbbāsī, "Ribāṭ al-ʿUlamāʾ wa Jihāduhum fī al-Thughūr al-Shāmiyya ḍidd al-Rūm Zamān al-Khalīfa al-ʿAbbāsī Hārūn al-Rashīd raḥimahu Allāh (170 H - 193 AH / 785 M - 809 CE)", (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Umm al-Qurā University, 2017).

[19] Fāṭima bint Ḥāy bin Yaḥyā al-Ḥajjī al-Sufyānī, "Ghārāt al-Nūrmān al-Dānīyīn ʿalā Arāḍī Dawlat al-Firanjah wa Bilād al-Āndalus fī ʿAṣr al-Imāma wa al-Khilāfa (138 - 399 AH/ 756 - 1009 CE)" (Unpublished PhD Thesis Umm al-Qurā University, 2002).

[20] Nabīl Raḍwān, *Al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya fī al-Mashriq wa al-Maghrib wa al-Janūb al-ʿArabī* (Curriculum of Umm al-Qurā University, academic year 1435–1436 AH), p. 126; Al-Ghāmidī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-Muslimūn wa al-Ghazw al-Ṣalībī*, p. 6.

[21] Al-Muʿtaṣim Billāh Ibrāhīm Shaʿṭ, "Jihād al-ʿUthmānīyīn ḍidd al-Bīzantīyīn ḥattā Fatḥ al-Qusṭanṭīnīya (755 - 857 H / 1354 - 1453 M)", (Unpublished MA Thesis, Umm al-Qurā University, 1980).

[22] Ḥayāt bint Munāwar bin Farḥān al-Rashīdī, "Al-Irsāliyyāt al-Tanṣīrīyah al-Amrīkīya fī al-Dawla al-ʿUthmānīya wa Āthāruhā", (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Umm al-Qurā University, 2011).

[23] ʿAlā ʿAwdat al-Ghamdī, "Al-Rūḥ al-Ṣalībīyah, wa al-Ṣaḥwah al-Inǰīlīya, wa al-Budhrat al-ūlā li al-Fikrat al-Ṣahyūnīya", *Official website for ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghamdī*, accessed on January 07, 2024: https://alghamdiprof.com/ali/category/ %d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%aa/

Crusaders both in the Islamic East and al-Andalus, on the path to realizing the Salafi dream of reestablishing an Islamic caliphate in the modern world. This is an unmistakably Wahhābī narrative, though it does not mean that the field of historical studies at Umm al-Qurā University is necessarily an organic outgrowth of Wahhābism, but it is, without doubt, an objective extension of Wahhābī thought, for it is based on the study of the literal meaning of the text without any attempt to interpret it.

The Crusades between Wahhhābism and Jihadist Thought

The historical studies from Umm al-Qurā University concerning the history of the Crusades and the notion of jihad present us with a number of ideas worthy of consideration regarding the continuity or "osmosis" between Wahhābism (as origin) and Salafi jihadism (as representation). They also provide an abundance of evidence which affirms that Wahhābism is the intellectual authority upon which these studies and their vision of civilizational clash are based and the organizing principle behind the selection of thesis topics in the history department. However, the emotional and hostile character of the language in which these theses are cast negatively affects their contents and deprives them of much of their authority. They appear to be polemical ideological writings rather than academic theses that aim to shed light on obscure aspects of the history of the Crusades.

We must not forget the political climate in the background of the works of these Saudi historians who are concerned with what they see as confronting the spread of Shīʿism. For example, in the history department at Umm al-Qurā University, no theses have been written and no courses have been offered concerning the history of the Fatimid Caliphate or its role in the Crusades. This coincides with a general contempt for the Shīʿa, who are described as "khawārij" (those who secede from the Muslim community), and with an exaggeration of the "Shīʿī threat". For example, the Shīʿī threat to the Abbasid Caliphate, represented by the Buwayhids, is grossly exaggerated while all other factors in Abbasid weakness and decline are minimized.[24]

These attitudes were extended into the field of manuscript studies as well. When the Institute for the Revival of the Islamic Heritage was founded in 1976, with the participation of the History Department, its mission was restricted to editing manuscripts of the Prophetic biography (*al-sīra al-*

[24] Nabīl Riḍwān, "Al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya fī al-Mashriq wa al-Maghrib wa al-Janūb al-ʿArabī", in *Muqarrarat Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā*, Academic Year 1435-1436 A.H., p. 128.

nabawīya) and accounts of the Islamic holy cities by Sunnī scholars.[25] The goals of the institute were stated in numerous proclamations by the Department of History such as the following:

> To preserve and revive our heritage which was bequeathed to us by the earliest generations of pious Muslims, fearing its loss…to enable us to protect our cultural heritage from change and distortion…to collaborate in benefiting the umma by protecting its Islamic heritage from distortion or alteration… preventing its enemies, the Christians in Western Europe, from, in their own words, attempting to distort and slander its history, and disparage it, because they realize that a documented history aids in knowing truths…against the continuous and unending attempts of the enemies of our umma, the Christians and the khawārij, to alter and distort history.[26]

Likewise, in their studies on the historiography of the Crusades and the editions of Arabic primary sources, members of the history department at Umm al-Qurā University are always careful to state the religion and sect of the author whose work is being studied or edited, for in order for the topic to be approved, the author whose work is being studied or edited must be a Sunnī Muslim. For sectarian reasons, the department has completely neglected topics such as the study of the period of Fatimid rule over the Hejaz and the role of the militant Sufi volunteers who defended the frontier zones during the Crusades. In addition, it has undertaken several manuscript editing projects lacking in academic impartiality such as the editions of the works entitled *Al-ʿAylam al-Zākhir* and *ʿUqūd al-Jumān*. The editors of the manuscripts saw themselves as presenting a great service to the Islamic *umma*

[25] Mawjiz ʿan Kullīyat al-Sharīʿa wa al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīya min al-Fatra 1425-1430 h., (Mecca: Maṭābiʿ Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, 2010), pp. 9-11.

[26] Īmān ʿUthmān al-Barnāwī, "Al-ʿAylam al-Zākhir fī Akhbār al-Awāʾil wa al-Awākhir li Muʾallifihi Muṣṭafā b. Ḥasan al-Hāshimī al-Mashhūr bi Al-Jannābī (d. 1590) min Bidāyat Kitāb fī Dhikr Aḥwāl Nabīnā al-Muṣṭafā Ṣallā Allah ʿalayhi wa Sallim wa Dhikr Ghazawātihi wa baʿḍ Khaṣāʾiṣihi al-Sharīfa: Dirāsa wa Taḥqīq" (MA thesis, Umm al-Qurā Univ., 2018), p. 8; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʿAlī Fāliḥ al-Basharī, "Al-ʿAylam al-Zākhir fī Akhbār al-Awāʾil wa al-Awākhir: Dawlat al-Mamālīk min Bidāyat Ḥukm al-Muʿizz Aybak ḥattā Nihāyat Ḥukm al-Ashraf Barsbāy" (MA thesis, Umm al-Qurā Univ., 2017), pp. 3-5, 16-17.

in editing and publishing these works because the works displayed the efforts made in the study of history by authors who held correct religious beliefs.[27]

In his treatment of the role of the Fatimids during the Crusades, ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī accuses the Fatimids for ideological reasons of not being concerned with the fate of the Muslims in Bilād al-Shām, especially following the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders (1099).[28] He is influenced in this interpretation by the article of his colleague, ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, entitled "The Concern of Saladin and Nūr al-Dīn with the Establishment of Sunnī Colleges to Defeat the Esoteric Shīʿī Creed Promoted by the Fatimids". He refers to the Fatimids disparagingly as *Al-ʿUbaydīya al-Shīʿīya wa al-Khawārij*, avoiding any sense of scholarly objectivity and neutrality, instead embracing the interpretation of history as vengeance and fanning the flames of the Sunnī – Shīʿī conflict in the region. He neglects the distinction made by the medieval historian Ibn al-Khaṭīb al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1374) between the Fatimid caliphs who ruled in the Maghrib and those who ruled in Egypt and the Hejaz. Ibn al-Khaṭīb labelled the former "ʿUbaydids" from the name of the founder of the dynasty, ʿUbaydallāh al-Mahdī (909-934), while he called the latter "Fatimids".[29] We find the influence of both ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī and ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī on the narrow-minded outlook of their student ʿĀʾisha Marshūd al-Ḥarbī in her study entitled "The Influence of the Crusades on the Handcrafts in Alexandria during the ʿUbaydid and Ayyubid Periods" where she states that the reason for the coming of the Crusaders to the Near East was a conspiracy to revive the "ʿUbaydid" state and that the high officials of the ʿUbaydid palace were in contact with the Crusaders.[30]

[27] Al-Basharī, "Al-ʿAylam al-Zākhir", p. 5.

[28] ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī, *Istirdād Bayt al-Maqdis fī ʿAṣr Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn*, (Mecca: Al-Fayṣalīya, 1985), p. 150.

[29] See Ibn al-Khaṭīb al-Gharnāṭī, *Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, eds. Aḥmad Mukhtār al-ʿAbbādī and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Kinānī, 3 parts (Casablanca: Dār al-Kitāb, 1964), part 3, p. 46; Aḥmad Khalīl al-Shāl, *Ḥukm Qarāqūsh* (Cairo: Al-Dār al-Dhahabīya, 2000); Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Hilālī, "Qarāqūsh: al-Muftarā ʿalayhi", *Majallat al-Dawḥa*, no. 3 (March 1977, pp. 132-133); ʿAmr Munīr, *Al-Fashūsh fī Aḥkām Qarāqūsh* (Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma al-Miṣrīya li al-Kitāb, 2021).

[30] ʿĀʾisha Marshūd Ḥamīd al-Ḥarbī, "Taʾthīrāt al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya ʿalā al-Anshiṭa al-Yadawīya fī al-Iskandarīya khilāl al-ʿAṣrayn al-ʿUbaydī wa al-Ayyūbī", *Majallat al-ʿUlūm al-ʿArabīya wa al-Insānīya – Jāmiʿat al-Qaṣīm*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2023) p. 1341.

The Religious Interpretation of the History of the Crusades

It is no exaggeration to say that much of the history of Bilād al-Shām during the medieval period is studied at Umm al-Qurā University from the perspective of the Islamic jurist rather than that of the professional historian. We see this clearly in ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī's book entitled *Historical Falsehoods and Errors: Critical Views of the Book "The Influence of the Crusades on Sunnī – Shīʿī Relations"*. According to his own words the author seeks to "…describe the bitter betrayals which the Shīʿī traitors have attempted to portray in a positive light, to reject the glorification of the past of the Imāmī Shīʿa and stand against the lies that they have created about their imagined heroism during the Crusades, and to refute the claim that they stood with the Sunna in the same trench against the Crusaders, a falsehood that is proclaimed in order to promote the Khomeini regime in Iran".[31] He criticizes the Lebanese historians of the Crusades in particular, claiming that they deserve no place among the distinguished historians of the Arab World.[32]
At times, Al-Ghāmidī turns his historian's gaze to contemporary events, attempting to compare the Crusades to the Russian intervention in Syria. According to him: "There is no doubt that the Russian war in Syria is a Crusade. It is an attempt to compensate for Russia's lack of involvement in the medieval Crusades. Russia and the Magians [*majūs* is a derogatory term used to refer to the Shīʿa and to Iran] are against the Muslim people of Syria today just as the Crusaders were during the Middle Ages".[33] Parallels are also drawn by Al-Ghāmidī between Crusader-Muslim truces during the medieval period and modern Arab-Israeli peace agreements. He is particularly vehement in his condemnation of the Ayyubid sultan Al-Kāmil's (1218-1238) peace agreement with the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1220-1250), the so-called Treaty of Jaffa of 1229, which restored Crusader rule to Jerusalem for the last time while allowing the Muslims to retain control of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf. Al-Ghāmidī likens this treaty to the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1979.[34]

[31] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, *Abāṭīl wa Akhṭāʾ Tārīkhīya: Naẓārāt Naqdīya fī Kitāb Athar al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya ʿalā al-ʿAlāqāt al-Sunnīya al-Shīʿīya* (Mecca, 2020), p. 5.
[32] Ibid., p. 6.
[33] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, "Ḥarb Rūsīya al-Ṣalībīya fī Sūrīyā", from his official website https://alghamdiprof.com, last visited January 9, 2024.
[34] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, *Bilād al-Shām qubayl al-Ghazw al-Mughūlī*, p. 269.

The first generation of historians at Umm al-Qurā University took it upon themselves to promote the Saudi view on the Crusades and to criticize the studies on the Crusades that have been written by Western historians, orientalists, and objective Arab historians. The goal behind such activities is to employ the history of the Islamic world for political goals, chiefly in order to promote an Islamist worldview in place of a more secular Arabist worldview.

Cities during the Crusades

Some of the medieval Islamic cities and frontier districts (*thughūr*), especially those in southern Asia Minor, have been the subject of detailed studies by the historians of Umm al-Qurā University. ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī has contributed a study on Antalya during the period of the Crusades with a rich bibliography. He gives special attention to the Crusader expedition against Antalya in 1361 which was led by King Peter I of Cyprus. Al-Ghāmidī takes up the question of why the Antalya expedition has received so little attention compared to the expedition against Alexandria four years later which was led by the same king. According to him, the disparity can be explained by the fact that Egypt had a number of historians who were active at the time and who witnessed the Crusader assault on Alexandria, while southwestern Asia Minor in the 1360s did not have any notable historians who could have written about the Antalya expedition.[35]

ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī has written a study on the relations between the Mamluk sultans and the strategic port of Ayās in Lesser Armenia. He notes the important role that it played as a logistical base for the Crusaders from the time of the First Crusades onwards. He also discusses how European merchants were able to draw the Orient trade away from the Red Sea route with its outlet in Alexandria, to an overland route that passed through Central Asia and Iran before reaching the Mediterranean at Ayās, and how this negatively impacted Egypt's economy.[36] ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī has studied other cities from the period as well. He has contributed a work on the small but important city of Shayzar in central Syria from the middle of the twelfth

[35] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, *Anṭālīya fī ʿAṣr al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya* (Mecca: Umm al-Qurā, 1997), p. 9.

[36] ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī, "Siyāsat Salāṭīn Dawlat al-Mamālīk al-Baḥrīya izāʾa Mīnāʾ Ayās al-Armanī", *Majallat Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad b. Suʿūd al-Islāmīya*, vol. 39 (2003), p. 794.

century, when it ceased to be ruled by the famous Arab dynasty of the Banū Munqidh, until the end of the thirteenth century. He focuses in particular on how it was incorporated into the Zankid state and the role that it played in repelling Crusader offensives.[37]

The history of the military frontier regions or *thughūr* in northern Bilād al-Shām and southern Asia Minor has also been a popular topic of study at Umm al-Qurā University. ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī has written about the *thughr* of al-Maṣṣīṣa from the Islamic conquest until the end of the eleventh century.[38] This was an important region of the Byzantine-Islamic frontier in northern Bilād al-Shām. He wrote another study about the evolution of the *thughr* of Adhana (Adana) during the same period, highlighting how in the eleventh century this region became a theatre of conflict between the Armenians, Byzantines and Seljuk Turks, to which a new element was added at the end of the century with the arrival of the Crusaders.[39]

ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī has written a study on Ḥiṣn Baghrās and its role in the Crusades. This fortress was crucial for securing the route between Cilicia and Antioch; al-Ghāmidī calls it the "key to Antioch". He describes its initial capture by the Crusaders in 1097 and its subsequent purchase and use as a base by the Templars, followed by its conquest by the sultan Baybars and its service to the Mamluk sultans as a marshalling point for their armies during the long drawn-out conquest of Lesser Armenia, which was not concluded until 1375.[40]

The Use of European Sources

Despite the diversity of intellectual production in the field of Crusade studies by the faculty of the History Department, it is noteworthy that the authors suffer from a lack of competency in foreign languages and neglect to exploit

[37] ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī, "Shayzar mundhu Zawāl Ḥukm Banī Munqidh ḥattā Awākhir al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ al-Hijrī/al-Thālith ʿAshar al-Mīlādī", *Majallat Jāmiʿat al-Azhar: Kullīyat al-Lughat al-ʿArabīya bi Asyūṭ*, no. 19 (2000) pp. 191-240.

[38] ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī, "Thughr al-Maṣīṣa mundhu al-Fatḥ hattā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Khāmis al-Hijrī", *Majallat al-Muʾarrikh al-Miṣrī,* vol. 22 (1999) pp. 211-263.

[39] ʿAbdallāh al-Ghāmidī, "Thughr Adhana mundhu al-Fatḥ ḥattā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Khāmis al-Hijrī", *Majallat Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā*, vol. 66 (2016) pp. 257-285.

[40] ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, "Ḥiṣn Baghrās wa Dawruhu al-Ḥarbī fī ʿAṣr al-Ḥurūb al-Ṣalībīya", in *Nadwat Ittiḥād al-Muʾarrikhīn al-ʿArab bi al-Qāhira* (Cairo, 1995) pp. 261-314.

the medieval European primary sources on the Crusades. For example, ʿAlī ʿAwdat al-Ghāmidī, in his study on the condition of Bilād al-Shām prior to the Mongol invasion, makes use of no European primary source save for William of Tyre's *Deeds Done beyond the Sea*. His third chapter, on Ayyubid relations with the Crusaders from 1193 to 1258, does not cite a single European source! Likewise, in his study on the Battle of Myriocephalon (1176), which cemented the Seljuk Turkish presence in Asia Minor, he did not refer to a single Byzantine source, not even to Kinnamos' composition on *The Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, which is an indispensable source for that battle. Unfortunately, the neglect of non-Arabic primary sources remains a characteristic feature of studies concerning the Crusades by the students and faculty members of the History Department at Umm al-Qurā University.

Conclusion

The writing of the history of the Crusades at Umm al-Qurā University is intermixed with various political, religious, sectarian, and other ideological concerns and it is in no way objective. The Saudi historians at Umm al-Qurā University have produced hundreds of studies over succeeding generations which revolve around a specific religio-political discourse. These studies treat the Crusades both in general and in detail. They include several forays into important specialized topics such as the cities of Asia Minor and their role in the Crusades, which perhaps make the Saudi school of Crusade studies unique. Nonetheless, we can safely say that the historians of Umm al-Qurā University have not made any significant contribution to the efforts of Arab historians elsewhere in the study of the Crusades. Nor have they departed from the study of political and military history to the more spacious fields of social and economic history. They have also failed to open new horizons by exploiting Arabic literary sources such as belles lettres, poetry, and popular literature, and they have neglected to make adequate use of the medieval European primary sources, even though some of them have been translated into Arabic. Also striking is their inability to make any clear contribution to our knowledge of the Hejaz during the period of the Crusades.

In popular imagination, the image of the Crusades is intertwined with images of blood-soaked violence and savagery, leaving memories of barbarity and religious fanaticism which are exceptional even by medieval standards. Unfortunately, it is this popular understanding of the Crusades which dominates the approach to the subject at Umm al-Qurā University. In that context the study of the Crusades remains a captive of distorted history, and

a popular imagination that idolizes strength and exceptional stories of individual bravery, with no regard for the disastrous consequences that such sterile martial contests can have on humanity.

Translated by Amar S. Baadj