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The Other Frankish (the Europeans) in the Crusades According to Usama Ibn Mungidh and Ibn Jubayr

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Abstract

This current study examines the image of the "Frankish other" (the European) in the Crusades according to Ibn Munqidh in Kitab al-I'tibar and Ibn Jubayr in Risalat al-Nasik fi Dhikr al-Athar al-Karimah wa al-Manasik, known as Ibn Jubayr journey. The study explains how the image of the European was formed in the Arab mindset during that period. This paper dealt with religious tendencies, customs, and traits of the Franks, their medical treatments and the image of women. The researchers adopted the descriptive-analytical methodology to illustrate this image. The study reached several results, the most important of which were Arab travelers had a relatively consistent view of Europeans, often perceiving them as the opposite of the Muslim Arab, as many European customs were surprising and curiosity to Arab travelers. The Crusades represented a defining moment in shaping the Muslim Arab's perception of the European other.

Keywords: *Travel Literature, Religious Tendencies, The Frankish Other, Arab Travelers, Crusades.*

Introduction

Arab travels never stopped, whether undertaken individually for exploration or through diplomatic missions and political delegations, as the practice of travel among Arabs boomed with the rise of the Islamic state in the early 7th century CE, making these journeys with all their images an essential source to understand the "other" up close and strengthening trade relations and political alliances.

The researchers selected two early travel models as case studies: Kitab al-I'tibar by Usama ibn Munqidh, a prince, knight, and diplomat who documented his observations and experiences with the Franks in the Levant, where he lived under Crusader rule, and Risalat I'tibar al-Nasik fi Dhikr al-Athar al-Karimah wa al-Manasik by Ibn Jubayr, the Moroccan traveler who visited the Levant during the Crusader presence and recorded his observations, including those from Sicily. Given the significance of studying the image that Arab travelers set to Europeans during the Crusades—assessing whether these portrayals were stereotypical or reflected reality, the researchers adopted the descriptive-analytical methodology to examine the study subject.

Preface

Arab travels bloomed alongside the emergence and expansion of the Islamic state. These journeys were exploratory, safari, political, and scientific, and they were intended to explore

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specific regions, strengthen cooperation, and establish political and commercial ties with some neighboring emirates and kingdoms under Muslim rule.

One example of political safari travels and diplomatic missions includes the exchanges between Caliph Mohammed al-Mahdi and his son Harun al-Rashid with Charlemagne, the Frankish king (Beckler , 2012 ,p43 - p66). In the scientific aspect, Al-Khwarizmi undertook two travels with the permission of Caliph al-Wathiq (d. 232 AH/847 CE): the first travel was in 227 AH/842 CE to Byzantium, where he examined the Cave of al-Raqim between Amorium and Nicaea in order to verify the existence of mummified bodies (Qandil , 2002 , p85), and the second one was to the land of the Khazars, accompanied by Salam, the translator (Shakatreh , 2023, p31).

In addition, Ibn Fadlan undertook travel to the lands of the Turks, Rus, and Saqaliba in (309 AH/922 CE) commissioned by Caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 320 AH/932 CE) (Shakatreh , 2023, p33). He documented several observations, which contributed to forming an image of the cities, regions, and peoples he visited.

Usama ibn Munqidh (488–584 AH / 1095–1188 CE) also played a significant role in forming a clear perception of the Crusaders during their occupation of parts of the Levant, as he served as an envoy for Mu'in al-Din Unur to the Crusader states, where his observations were accuracy, vividness, and dynamic. Many of his observations were documented during his direct military encounters with the Crusaders, his diplomatic missions to their states, and his interactions with local inhabitants, which conveyed the most accurate details about their living conditions during peacetime (Sharqawi ,2017,p. 100-103).

As for ibn Jubayr (540-616 AH / 1145-1217 AD), he was a Moroccan geographer and traveler who visited the Levant during the Crusader rule. he described the regions he visited, then returned to his homeland as he documented his impressions about the Levant in general, including the Crusader presence. On his way back, he stopped in Sicily. Arab travelers commonly address the main features of their journeys, which can be summarized as follows: religious tendencies, customs and traditions, methods of treatment, and the image of women.

First Topic: The Concept and Origin of Travel Literature

The definition of travel literature, as found in the Dictionary of Arabic Terms, is: "A collection of works that dealt with the author's impressions of his travels to different countries that may include descriptions of customs, behaviors, ethics, as well as detailed recordings of the natural landscapes he observes, or he may also retell the stages of his journey or combine all these aspects at once ". (Wahba ,1984,P.17) Thus, travel literature forms an encyclopedic work that includes the author's impressions of the lands he visited, along with geographical and demographic information related to the inhabitants of these regions and their customs (Sdaira , 2018 ,p11-21).

Saeed Alloush defines travel literature as "a literary type that permits the establishment of a tradition of comparison between two spaces, two values, and two images, even in cases where the journey is limited to merely describing the new world, since this description, whether consciously or unconsciously, is formed by the perspective and culture of the traveler, who brings about a qualitative and conceptual transformation of viewpoints (Alloush , 1989,p.19) ". The principle of comparison that Saeed Alloush refers to is a present principle in human thought, where travelers naturally compare what they are accustomed to in their homeland with what they observe in the foreign lands they visit, even if this comparison is not made directly (Bu Shayeb , 2003,p. 457-479).

This information related to different peoples, nations, geography, and demographic distribution has helped form perceptions of various civilizations since ancient times since travel is as old as humanity itself, and just as it played a role in geographic discoveries, it also made it easy to contact between people and mutual understanding, mainly related to true regarding language, traditions, and customs. In other words, this knowledge set the foundation for ethnography, which, in turn, serves as an essential basis for comparing social systems to human and theorizing about their historical evolution (Fahim ,1990 ,p. 18). Thus, travel literature is a narrative issued from a central figure—the traveler—who narrates events and experiences encountered, describing places, their peoples, nations, and kingdoms, and their behaviors and actions during times of peace and war (Niya & Khalfha , 2019 , p. 56).

The emergence of the Islamic State in (11 AH / 632 CE) and the expansion of its territory played a significant role in the emergence of Arabic geographical literature since there was an urgent need to acquire as much information as possible about the newly incorporated regions. In addition, tax collection required tax officials to have extensive geographical knowledge, necessitating the creation of a geographical guide. The vast expansion of the Islamic Caliphate and the consolidation of its authority in the eighth and ninth centuries led to the emergence of numerous administrative tasks, particularly in financial and taxation affairs (Halifax ,2003 ,p. 19). Thus, taxation records (Kutub al-Kharaj) were like the nucleus that paved the way for the emergence of travel literature. These records were not restricted to financial aspects of tax collection but also contained practical guidance for tax officials to facilitate their duties and make them more efficient.

Second Topic: Features of Arabic Travel Literature

Religious Tendency

Ibn Munqidh described certain Crusader religious beliefs and perceptions, particularly regarding the Divine. He recounted an incident that occurred during a visit to Jerusalem with the Emir of Damascus, Mu'in al-Din Unur (d. 543 AH / 1149 CE): "I saw one of them approach Emir Mu'in al-Din—may God have mercy on him—while we were at the Rock. He asked, ‘Do you want to see God as a child?' The Emir replied, 'Yes!' The man walked ahead of us until he showed us an image of Mary with Christ; peace be upon him, as a small child in her lap. Then he said, 'This is God as a child'—Exalted is God above what the unbelievers claim (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 154) ". Ibn Munqidh narrated this scene to highlight the stark contrast between Islamic monotheism and the Crusaders' depiction of the Divine. This representation astonished him, as it diverged significantly from the Islamic understanding of God’s nature.

At this stage, both the Crusaders and the Muslims were used to labeling each other as infidels to such an extent that it became a widespread phenomenon between the two sides, as the religious authority and the intensification of military conflict played a significant role in perpetuating and spreading this practice. Ibn Munqidh mentioned an incident between the Arabs and the Crusader ruler of Antioch, stating: "The ruler of Antioch—may God curse him—descended upon us with his cavalry and infantry... "(Ibn Mungidh, 2009 , p. 65). In another instance, he mentions the ruler of Antioch by name but does not forget to curse him: "Then Denqari said to them: 'May God curse him! '" (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 89). The cursing is not restricted to the ruler alone but extends to the Crusaders. He refers to them as devils in other instances: "Then a devil from among their knights came to Denqari " (Ibn Mungidh, 2009 , p. 93). The army leader, Uzba, accompanied by three thousand cavalrymen, attacked. Roger—may God curse him—confronted

them at dawn and defeated them by divine will. The Franks—may God curse them—retreated to Kafr Tab, rebuilt and resettled (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 99).

Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217 CE) observed the condition of the Crusaders and the trade caravan routes during his travel to the Levant. He described the woman of the Castle of Tibnin in Lebanon as a "sow" and her son as a "pig" and "accursed":

"We arrived at a fort belonging to the Franks, known as Tibnin, which serves as a caravan checkpoint. Its mistress is a sow known as the queen, the mother of the pig king of Acre—may God destroy her. Merchants gather there to seek the accursed king's position "(Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 247).

Ibn Jubayr depicts the religious "other" in his travelogue as a usurper and aggressor against religious boundaries, engaging in looting, pillaging, and conspiracies. The Crusaders symbolize an assault on Muslim lands and holy places (Shraita, 2018, p. 244). Because of this, he describes Acre, the Frankish stronghold in the Levant, as a place filled with infidelity and tyranny, overflowing with crosses, filth, and impurity (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 249). The same applies to other cities still under Crusader control, such as Tyre.

Moreover, this perception did not change much later, as in Ibn Khaldun's (1332–1406 CE) travel to the King of Castile, Pedro, son of Alfonso XI, in (1363 CE)—undertaken to negotiate peace with the enemy kings—he conveyed his impressions of what he witnessed on his journey. He described the state of the lands in Andalusia, which were forcefully held by the Castilians, as follows: "I encountered the tyrant in Seville, observed the traces of his predecessors there, and he treated me with unparalleled courtesy, showing delight at my presence" (Ibn Khaldoun, 2004, p. 87). However, despite this honor and warm hospitality, Ibn Khaldun did not hesitate to label him a tyrant for the wars he had waged, the plunder, and the displacement he had caused in the lands of Islam (p.87).

The Image of Women:

Arab travelers devoted significant attention to the European woman in their accounts of the stark contrast between the image of the Arab woman in the Arab collective unconscious—as reflected in Arabic literature—and the image of the European (Frankish) woman, a contrast that shocked some of the travelers.

Ibn Munqidh mentions the character and customs of the Crusaders—especially those related to women—because he observed a vast difference between the two societies, as he relates an incident involving a Frankish man who encountered another man with his wife: "One day, he came upon a man in bed with his wife and said to him, 'What makes you come to my wife?' The man replied, 'I was tired and came in to rest.' The first man asked, 'So how did you end up in my bed?' The other answered, 'I found a neatly made bed and slept in it.' The first man inquired, 'And was the woman asleep with you?' The reply was, 'The bed belongs to her—how could I possibly stop her from using her bed?' Then he said, 'By my religion if you do that again, we will be at odds' (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 154-155). Ibn Munqidh expresses his astonishment at the Frankish man's lack of jealousy, noting that his response was nothing more than a single rebuke that ended the matter—a reaction that, in Arab and Muslim society, would never be tolerated .

The Arabs and the Franks coexisted long during the Crusades, and encounters were every day in marketplaces and public baths where the Crusaders began to get to. Ibn Munqidh also

describes an incident highlighting the stark cultural differences between the two groups. He mentioned how privacy was so lacking in these baths that a husband might request the bathhouse attendant to wash his wife or daughter and cleanse her body (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 155-156). Such occurrences were condemned in Arab society and greatly astonished Ibn Munqidh—so much so that he felt compelled to document and write about them, but they were considered normal in Crusader society.

Ibn Fadlan had previously referred in his journey to the lands of the Turks, Slavs, and Russians to similar customs, especially when he witnessed a woman displaying sensitive areas of her body in front of them or when he observed men and women swimming naked in the river. These were unusual and shocking scenes to him. However, he did not pass judgment on these people as being decadent or infidel but, instead, listened to their explanations for each scene. He did not interfere or object, based on the diplomatic nature of his mission (Shakatreh , 2023, p. 77-79).

As for ibn Jubayr, he only recorded specific scenes because of his limited encounters with Crusader women due to his brief passage through Crusader-controlled cities in the East. He provides an image of a Frankish wedding in Tyre, where the bride appeared in beautiful clothing, wearing a golden band on her head, and strolling like a dove; surrounding her were women in their finest attire, accompanied by music. Muslims were also present at the event, and ibn Jubayr concluded his description by seeking protection from temptation (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. p. 251).

Ibn Fadlan had previously noted such customs during his journey to the lands of the Turks, Slavs, and Russians. He described, for example, a scene where a woman exposed sensitive parts of her body in their presence or instances of both men and women swimming naked in the river. All of these sights were astonishing and reprehensible to him. However, he did not pass a definitive judgment on these peoples—labeling them as either degenerate or unbelieving—but instead, he listened to their explanations for each scene, refraining from intervening or objecting given the nature of his diplomatic mission (Shakatreh , 2023,p. 77–79).

As for ibn Jubayr, the Frankish woman appeared in his accounts only in specific contexts, owing to his brief passage through cities controlled by the Crusaders in the Levant. He presented us with an image of a Frankish wedding in Tyre: he paused at the sight of the bride, who emerged in beautiful garments with a band of gold adorning her head and walked gracefully like a dove. Women dressed in their finest attire and accompanied by music, with some Muslims in attendance, surrounded her. He concluded this description by seeking refuge from sedition (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 251).

As for the women in Sicily, ibn Jubayr presented a radiant image of Sicilian women—whether Frankish or Muslim. He also commented on the concubines in the court of King Guilham. This image appears to reflect his admiration for Guilham—to the point that he even thought Guilham might have embraced Islam, considering the city's policy of religious tolerance and the justice that prevailed during his reign (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 274). Thus, he offered a beautiful depiction of his court, reminiscent of the courts of the Andalusian rulers, with its palace set amid orchards and staffed by many concubines and male pages from Andalusia. Finally, he depicted the Christian women as exceptionally beautiful, resembling Muslim women who wore the niqab, dressed in silk and gold, with abundant perfume and henna, and spoke eloquently (Gharbi, 2003, p. 189).

Medicine among the Crusaders:

Honka focused on the methods employed by the Crusaders to treat patients, which he regarded as primitive. In addition to using magic and sorcery—which often led the patient to death—when drugs and medications were available, the patient was required to confess before a priest prior to receiving any medication, as he could not take the medicine until after the confession. The church prohibits the healer from administering treatment to a patient without a confession, justifying this by claiming that sin was the cause of illness and that confession eradicated sin and, consequently, the illness. In this view, the medicine was secondary—worthless without the confession—and a physician was even punished if he treated a patient without first obtaining the confession (Honka, 1993, p. 215–226). Arab travelers narrated several observations regarding the Crusaders' treatment methods, some recounted in humorous derision.

Ibn Munqidh mentions a remarkable episode illustrating the crude state of Crusader medicine, their lack of knowledge, and poor management—a clear indication of the backwardness and ignorance they suffered. He narrates: “Among the strange aspects of their medical practice is what Kalima Dabbur, the master of Tiberias, told us while I was with him. He related 'In our land, a knight of considerable stature once fell ill and was on the verge of death. We went to one of our priests and said, "Will you come with us so that you may see the knight, so-and-so?" He replied, "Yes." So he walked with us, and we confirmed that he would be healed whenever he placed his hand on the knight.” When he saw him, he said, "Give me some wax." We brought him a small amount of wax, and he molded it like a ring—fashioning one piece on each side of the knight’s nose. The knight died. When we said to him, "He has died," he replied, "Yes, he was suffering terribly; I blocked his nose until he died and finally found rest." (Ibn Mungidh, 2009 , p. 156-157) This incident offers a clear picture of the state of Frankish medical science, knowledge, and treatment methods—without even mentioning another perception that highlights the role of priests in treating and healing patients despite their lack of genuine expertise.

Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (1138–1193 CE) once sent a physician to treat the King of Jerusalem, and Usama ibn Munqidh’s father also dispatched a doctor to care for some Crusaders. When the Arab doctor returned from the Crusaders' camp, he was asked why he returned so quickly. He explained: "They brought a knight with a boil on his leg and a woman suffering from dryness before me. I applied a poultice to the knight, which opened the boil and healed him, and I prescribed a diet to moisten the woman’s temperament. Then a Frankish doctor arrived and said to them, ‘This man does not know anything about medicine.’ He turned to the knight and said, ‘Would you rather live with one leg or die with two?' The knight replied, 'I would rather live with one leg.' So, the Frankish doctor ordered a strong knight and a sharp axe to be brought. I was present as they placed the knight's leg on a wooden block. The Frankish doctor told the knight, 'Strike his leg with one blow and cut it off.' The knight struck, but the leg was not severed. He struck again, and the marrow of the leg gushed out, and the patient died immediately. Then the doctor examined the woman and said, ‘A demon has possessed her head and is in love with her, so have her hair.’ They shaved her head, and she was made to eat garlic and mustard, which worsened her condition. The doctor then declared, ‘The demon has now entered her head.’ He took a razor, cut a cross into her scalp, peeled away the skin until the skull was exposed, and rubbed it with salt. She died on the spot" (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 152).

Many Arabic and Western books have mentioned this and similar events due to their significance in showing the scientific level of the Crusaders and their medical skills, as well as the vast

disparity between their methods and the advanced medical practices developed by the Arabs at that time. This contrast became a motivating subject for travel writers.

Ibn Jubayr pointed to King William of Sicily's keen interest in physicians and astrologers and his commitment to them. Whenever he heard of a physician or astrologer passing through his city, he insisted on staying with him and increased payment until they forgot their homeland—what we would today call "talent acquisition," specifically attracting doctors and astrologers to care for him and his subjects (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 267). This admiration extended to King Guilham and his policies, as he was known for his respect for Muslims and their beliefs, his deep trust in them, and his ability to speak and read Arabic—all of which earned him great appreciation (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 267–269).

The Frankish "Other" between Usama Ibn Munqidh and Ibn Jubayr

The image of the Frankish "Other" was not negative, as Usama ibn Munqidh pointed to the Crusaders' chivalry and bravery. However, they lacked nobility and were sometimes accompanied by treachery and cruelty toward Muslims when they gained the upper hand (Afaya, 2000, p. 223). He also noted their barbaric behavior and mistreatment, even toward the elderly. One incident he recounted took place in Tiberias during one of their festivals. Although it appeared to be a game, it revealed a lack of respect for the elderly: "I was in Tiberias during one of their feast days, and the knights came out to joust. Alongside them were two older women, whom they placed at the starting line of the arena. At the other end, they roasted a chain and set it on a rock. The knights then arranged a race between the two older women, each pulled along by a group of equestrians who tugged at them as they struggled to move forward, stumbling and falling with every step while the spectators laughed. Finally, one reached the chain first and claimed it as her prize" (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 157). Despite his criticisms, ibn Munqidh did admire the Crusaders' martial prowess, stating: "They possess no virtue except courage, and among them, no rank or status is higher than that of a knight—they are the ones who make decisions, and they are the judges and rulers" (Ibn Mungidh, 2006 , p. 87) .

His relationship with one Frankish knight grew particularly strong, and he referred to him as "the honorable Frank." This knight even called Ibn Munqidh "my brother" and requested that he send his son, Murhaf, to Europe to learn chivalry and wisdom (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 151). However, ibn Munqidh declined, fearing for his son's religious and cultural identity, instead offering the excuse of the boy's deep attachment to his grandmother. Thus, despite the bond that developed between ibn Munqidh and the Frankish knight, underlying caution and mistrust remained, preventing him from entrusting his son to the Crusaders (Afaya, 2000, p. 226).

Usama ibn Munqidh differentiated between two types of Franks: those who were used to the Levant and, through prolonged contact with Muslims had adopted the customs and traditions of the Arab East, and those who had recently arrived from Europe, retaining their native habits and manners. He viewed the former as more refined and civilized, considering them superior to European newcomers (Afaya, 2000, p. 228). To illustrate this adaptation and refinement among the Crusaders who had spent significant time in the East, ibn Munqidh mentioned an incident in which a Frankish knight, who had been in the region for a long time, invited him to a well-prepared and exceptionally clean banquet. The knight encouraged ibn Munqidh to eat: "Eat with a good appetite, for I do not eat Frankish food. I have Egyptian cooks, I eat only what they prepare, and no pork enters my home." (Ibn Mungidh, 2009, p. 159–160). This account highlights how some Crusaders assimilated into the local culture, adopting the Levant culinary traditions and refined dining etiquette.

Finally, ibn Munqidh pointed out that he had known individuals from the "Bourgeois" class with qualities distinct from the rough or barbaric knights. He also mentioned that some Crusaders considered him "bourgeois" (from the noble or merchant class) (Ibn Mungidh, 2009 , p. 163), taking into consideration that all of his observations reflect his personal experiences and perspectives derived from his interactions with the Crusaders, his upbringing, and the influence of his father—the knight passionate about hunting.

As for ibn Jubayr, he witnessed some of the cities in the Levant while they were under Crusader control and focused on specific sites in addition to what was mentioned earlier. For example, he noted the inhumane way in which the Franks treated their prisoners and captive Muslim women (Ibn Jubayr, 2000, p. 252). He also commented on the appearance of Christian women, who were generally depicted in a bright and positive light and were full of respect. In Sicily, he admired the security enjoyed by the locals—even by strangers who did not speak the language of the land (p. 266). He further pointed out that many people and traders were carrying on with their work and daily lives away from wars: "Those who are at war are preoccupied with their war, while the people live in ease, and the world belongs to those who prevail" (p.235). However, it is noteworthy that after each scene—whether negative or positive—ibn Jubayr would seek refuge from sedition; a sense of fear seemed to dominate him, especially as the Andalusian, cities were falling one after another, as he called for these cities to be restored to Andalusia once again.

Conclusion

Arab travel literature has formed an important resource for understanding the European Frankish other. The travel books contained a wealth of information about the people they visited and the regions they reached, which led to a diverse range of information. Some information focused on geographical and demographic aspects, with religious differences taking up many travelers' observations. Additionally, the travelers devoted considerable attention to general customs and the relationship between men and women, noting the differences between Western and Arab women and their interactions with men. Arab travelers deliberately explained the extent of these differences by recording their impressions on the subject.

It becomes clear the frameworks from which Arab travelers assessed Western societies. Religion sometimes formed the benchmark for judging the other, while at other times, their personal experience, upbringing, and human relationships led to either negative or positive impressions. Therefore, the other appeared variously as an enemy and oppressor at one moment, as a gallant knight at another, and as a cunning adversary in warfare yet at another. Negative traits such as betrayal and treachery were also attributed. Ultimately, the other is human and cannot be confined to a single status.

Arab travelers' efforts did not begin from a specific institutional vision with predetermined objectives, as is the case with Western travel literature, which paved the way for the colonial project. Instead, Arab travels were divided between exploratory travel and political and scientific missions without an expansionist colonial project.

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