THE CRUSADERS' AXE AND ISLAMIC CRESCENT: A NEW THEORY ON THE CRUSADERS' HISTORY IN THE EAST (12TH -13TH CENTURIES A.D.)

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Abstract

This paper does Spot Lights on New theory of the Crusader's Axe and the Islamic Crescent during age of the crusades which considered very important epoch in history of relations between east and west in the middle ages. The Islamic crescent was strong response of the crusader's Axe so we can realize that great universal conflict in the Levant through the importance of the geographical side because geography guides history and history itself is nothing but conflict over geography.

Keywords:-Crusader's Axe- Islamic Crescent- crusades- middle ages

INTRODUCTION:

In this paper, we would discuss what could be called "the Crusaders'Axe which was faced by Islam's Crescent throughout the period " 12th -13th centuries A.D.".

As a matter of fact, the Crusades (¹) (Croisades in French , Kreuzzuges in German) was initiated upon the call of Urban II (1089 -1099 A.D.) in Clermont Council, held in France in 27th of November 1095 A.D. Thus, the Middle Ages' World War had begun.

The Crusaders could successfully use the political dispersal between the Muslims in Syria , as well as the Sect's conflict between the Sunni Abbasside Caliphate in Baghdad and the Shiite Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt , which led Syria to be amiddle -barrier between the two caliphates.

Actually , when we read the modern historians' reviews and studies aboutArab and Crusaders' chronicles, we would find out that they mainly focused the political and military history of that era . Therefore ,we should concentrate our views to the geography , as being the leader of history , as well as the history itself is defined as the struggle for the geography, without, of course, ignoring the other factors of struggle.

1- Crusader the Axe:-Ample information had been provided to the crusaders about the geography of Syria and Upper Mesopotamia. They got that information via the pilgrims, merchants and spies, throughout many centuries of the West's dealings with the Muslims. Thus, the crusaders established the principalities of Edessa (²), Antioch(³), Latin kingdom of Jerusalem(⁴), and principality of Tripoli(⁵).

The crusaders established successfully Principality of Edessa in Upper Mesopotamia, which located precisely between Mosul and Aleppo. The first was the metropolis of northern Iraq , while the second was the metropolis of Northern Syria . The crusaders' choice had definitely focused this region for primarily strategic considerations , for dividing the geographical and historical links between Syria and Iraq , a matter does confirm to us that the crusades' venture was initiated

basically to tear up the ties of that region , as its natural and national unity will lead to extirpate that imperial venture .

Also , we do not ignore the crusaders' wish to establish a pre-warning station via Edessa , to monitor any Muslim activities towards the crusaders' existence before they would arrive or act in Syria .

However , if we moved to west of Edessa , we would find that crusaders had established the principality of Antioch in Northern Syria at the west of Aleppo , by that ,they established a distinguished strategic defensive location if Aleppo would ever be threatened , as well as it located on the previously- mentioned Intercontinental Silk Road . In addition to that, Antioch was considered as the metropolis of Orontes River (6) , which is originated from Baalbek in Lebanon's al -Bikaa' Valley , on which the cities of Homs and Hamah were located , and eventually it is discharged into Bay of Alexandrina . Thus , the crusaders were devoted to control that river as it was central to their own watery security .

Add to that, our recognizing that Antioch had San Simon ,which is a very important Mediterranean port . That port, effectively, contributed to merchandise the goods and articles to the inland Syrian cities. If we added to the above mentioned, its inaccessibility, since it has lofty walls with 360 towers, we would naturally recognize its outstanding importance.

Regarding the military -strategically aspect, we see that the principality of Antioch had linked with Edessa by a defence - line, such line was put to encounter a Muslim defence line, i.e. Aleppo - al-Mosul line(⁷). In that way, we should not study the history of any Crusader principality separately from other ones; as all the principalities had cooperated with each other to achieve the supreme crusaders' aims to conquer the whole region. Hence, we stand by the prominent Professor, Joshua Prawer's (⁸) description of Kingdom of Jerusalem, as " icon of the European colonization movement in the Middle Ages ". All of the preceding points do confirm to us that the Crusaders established their entities, in a wiliness way, in the region to achieve many of Imperialistic aims.

Regarding Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, it was originally established within the natural Palestinian borders; it was located within al-Aula river in the north to bay of al-Aqaba in the south, and from Golan Heights toal-Hula, lake of Tabariya (Tiberias), River of Jordan, Depression of Jordan, and eventually to Aela (Aqaba). Thus, it got a strategic passage on the red sea and the Indian Ocean.

Naturally, Mediterranean sea occupies its western borders. The crusaders endeavoured hardly to occupy its eastern coast (i.e. Levant), as it was their link between them and their European Homeland (Patria), from which they revive the human, financial and political support, rather than its importance for trade (9). That coast was extending from San Semeon in Antioch at the north, to Gaza in the south. Acre was the cardinal core of that far important region, for its active year-long ship port, consequently it contacted with the main ports in the Mediterranean domain. IbnJubayr (d.1217 A.D.) likened it to Constantinople (10), the capital of Byzantine Empire.

The control and occupation of the Levant coast was a prime strategic aim for the Crusaders, and was developed to be a life-or- death case, as well as its constant position which was not changing by the succession of their Kings. The Crusaders completed the whole occupation and control of Levant in the era of Baldwin III (1145 - 1163 A.D.) (11) when he could occupy Ascalon in 1153 A.D.

There is no doubt as regards the importance of the Geographical position of the crusader's existence in Syria and Euphrates , such position enabled the Crusaders to control the intercontinental trade routes and their goods , especially spices ,silk , gold and slaves . That control had occurred during what is so-called "TheCommercial Revolution" (1100-1400 A.D.) , which initiated our Modern Age.

In addition to that, the Crusaders controlled over the Christians' Holy places in Palestine in a way that enabled hundred thousands of pilgrims to come from the whole Christendom, hence immense sums of money had been got to the crusaders' Kingdom in the Levant , and enhanced its International reputation for being the protector of Terrum Sacrum .

In another aspect, the Crusaders adhered to build tens of Crusader castles , for maintain their existence in the region and to face the problem of lacking of the human factor; a problem they suffered throughout their existing period in the region , plus they could easily control the trade routes penetrating their domain(s) and to secure their own watery security .

When we regard attentively the general figure of the Crusaders' existence, geopolitically, we would find out that it took a form of an axe, its arm is beginning in the Levant, plus Antioch's coastal plain in the north, till Tripoli in the middle, and eventually to the frontiers of Latin kingdom of Jerusalem; and principality of Edessa forms the tip of the axe.

Such geographical distribution was not random , rather , it indicates how precisely the Crusaders studied the region , and how far they well-evaluated the importance of establishing that axe , in the middle of a rival Islamic environment with population density that contributed to the region's strategic balances and formed a critical threat to the Crusaders .

As a matter of fact , the crusaders' invasion of Syria and Upper Mesopotamia was a great challenge to the Muslims , as it was the first time that their lands face a colonizing European occupation ; a situation enforced them to face .

2- The Islamic Crescent:-Here , we do not skip to note that there was a pre-phase of what could be called "The Islamic Crescent " that faced the Crusader Axe . That crescent had been figured by the roles of al-Mosul'SAtabeg , i.e. of Sharaf al-DeenMaudud (1108-1113 A.D.) (¹²) , $\bar{A}qSonqor$ al-Borsoqi (1114-1126 A.D.) (¹³) and Emad al-DeenZinki (1127-1146 A.D.)(¹⁴). The Muslims could successfully in the era of the late to capture Edessa in 1144 A.D.There is no doubt regarding the importance of that critical event in the history of conflict between Muslims and crusaders. The fall of Edessa caused by inner and outer factors. The first ones represented in the gap between the successive generations of crusaders, as the governor of Edessa , Joscelin II (1131 - 1146A.D.) (¹⁵) was a trifling and inattentive person . As regards the outer factors ; its most one is the successive hits of the Islamic Jihad against Edessa , which were so strong that weakened it , and in that point , we do not ignore the effect of the conflict of that Crusaders' Principality with Antioch , which was a conflict consumed its capacities and resources .

By the fall of Edessa, the head of the crusaders' axe had been cut, and that led the crusaders' existence to be confined in the Syrian coast and coastal plain , forming one geographic entity , which constituted a development in the events , as the Islamic hits would focus that entity , later, throughout the period (1144 - 1291 A.D.) .

After the assassination of his father in 1146 A.D. , Nur al-Deen Mahmoud (1146-1174 A.D.) (16) could successfully capture Aleppo, followed by his capture of Damascus in 1154 A.D. Hence, the two major Syrian cities had been joined for the first time under a Muslim government since many decades.

A ministerial conflict had occurred in the Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt , which was ,then , undergoing one of its most weak era in Medieval history , in the time of Caliph al- \bar{A} did(1160-1171 A.D.)(¹⁷) . That conflict had blurred between the ministers ,Shawer and Dirgham , and both sought an ally . Shawer won the alliance with Nur al-Deen Mahmoud , while Dirgham had the support of the king Amalric I (1163 -1174 A.D.)(¹⁸). Nur al-Deen intermeddle in that Egyptian question via his assistant ,the commander Asad al-DeenShairkoah , and his nephew , Saladin (¹⁹).

Here, we do not need to narrate the details of well-known historical events . Saladin, after $al-\bar{A}did$ appointed him as a minister, could successfully to downfall the Fatimid Caliphate in tenth of September 1171 . That was not considered as a coup , but rather a real revolution , kept from that time on the Sunni Sect in Egypt . The inner and outer factors had joined together in a way led to downfall the Fatimid Caliphate that lasted two centuries before, thus; Egypt returned to the Sunni Sect under the Abbasids, and from that time on, Egypt would cooperate in the Jihad against the Crusaders by its all rich faculties.

It is noteworthy that the fall of Fatimid Cairo set up the completion of Islamic Crescent via Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo, thus surrounding the Crusaders' entities from the south, east and north east $.^{20}$ Those cities have an undeniable civilized and cultural aspect , as well as big population densities. Also, of them are cities located on the shores of a river, like Cairo. It is important here to recognize the roles of the rivers controlled by the Muslims , which led to incline the balance of powers , in fighting the crusaders , to their own favour , as the Crusades in itself are confronts in the maritime environments ,i.e. seas (Mediterranean) and rivers (Nile , Orontes , Tigris and Euphrates).

It is important here to note the importance of al-Mosul's central role as a strategic dimension of the previously -mentioned Islamic Crescent, specially, al-Mosul was the first spot which started the Muslim acts against the crusaders' challenge.

We can consider the period (1146-1171 A.D.) as the first stage of formation of the Islamic crescent , but it was not a stable stage , because of the death of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud , the leader of the Islamic Jihad movement in the second half of the 12th century A.D. , in 1174 A.D. , succeeded by al-SalehIsma'el , who was a young man does not fit to the hard world politics and army . Hence, the Islamic Crescent had been jeopardized.

Saladin could be considered as a man of a prominent role in supporting that Islamic formation that surrounded the crusaders. He moved , at first, in 1174 A.D. to join Damascus with its southern arm , cairo , thus , confirming the geographic- historical concept (Syro-Egypt), that linked Syria with Egypt throughout the ages of history .

Saladin could, successfully, defeat his rivals, the Zangids, as we saw inBattle of Qoroon Hamah in 1174A.D.. He also sought to form an army which was described as "the strongest and biggest power in the East ", as well as establishing a professional intelligence organization, formed of a web of spies, who provided him by information on the crusaders' positions.

His policy distributed , cunningly , between the war and diplomacy ; he was signing an armistice with the crusaders to dedicate his power and time to fight the Zangids , and after passing a period of time , he was doing vice versa . Surely, he had done an Ayyubid plundering war, to waste the energy and capabilities of the western conquerors. Here, we take notice of the insight of the prominent William of Tyre , as he praised Saladin by phrases by which he did not praise the king Amalric I, although he is the one who ordered him to compose the notable Crusades' history work "Historia rerum" (²¹).

Saladin sought to join the capital of Northern Syria , Aleppo , in 1183 A.D. , which had a strategic location by opposing the crusader's' principality of Antioch . Aleppo was well-known for its plentiful trade activities , as well as it contained ,among its population, merchants' families known for money investments. There is no doubt regarding the importance of that strategic achievement, as it provided Saladin with the necessary financial support , which was critical to face the crusaders.

We can say that the achievement done in 1183 A.D. meant that the Islamic crescent had been formed by the effort of Saladin and his army (from Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo), that was the

second form of it , as the crescent was before formed of (Aleppo -Damascus-Cairo) . Thus, we see that the period 1171-1183 A.D. is an actual affirmation of the first period of that crescent's formation (through the years 1146-1171 A.D.). That does not mean to have a bias for one specific leader of the Muslims with neglecting the other; because they all have shared in making those events.

The Ayyubid State, by invading and capturing Aleppo, extended, in the time of its founder, from Aleppo in the north to Nubia in the south . The Egyptian Mediterranean coast also had been captured, as well as the Red sea coast, on which the pilgrims" road to the holy lands of Mecca and Medina, as well as the caravan routes, were located.

It was not odd that , after only 4 years of formation of the Islamic crescent , i.e. in its second phase , that the Muslims could successfully defeat the crusaders in the battle of Hattin (22) in the 4th of July 1187 A.D. that battle resulted in major results ,which are :

First : the destruction of the crusaders' army , whose soldiers demolished and scattered as killed , captivated and wounded .

Second: opening of the Syrian coastalcities ,Acre in particular.

Third : the downfall of the crusaders' castles and forts .

Fourth : re-capturing of Jerusalem in 2nd of October 1187 A.D. .

Thus , the Islamic crescent , composed of the cities of Cairo- Damascus - Aleppo , could face the Crusaders' Axe and brutally defeat it . That was the first time, since the invasion of the crusaders of Syria in 1097A.D. , that the Muslims could downfall the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem .

Following to that great event , the crusades succeeded , representing in the third Crusade (1189-1199 A.D.) led by, Richard the Lionhearted (23) , Philip II Augustus (24), (1180-1223 A.D.) , Frederick I Barbarossa (25) (1152-1190 A.D.) . The fifth Crusade (1218 - 1221 A.D.) led by the king Jean de Prienne (1210 -1225 A.D.) ,and Plagius (26) , the delegate of the Pope . The sixth Crusade (1227-1229 A.D.) led by the Emperor Frederick II (27) (1211-1250 A.D.) who could re-capture Jerusalem via the suspicious pact of Jaffa ,signed with al-Kamel al-Ayyubi (28) in 1229 A.D. Two other Crusades had followed that Crusade ; the Seventh Crusade(1250 A.D.) , led by the king Louis IX (1226-1270 A.D.) (29) that aimed at invading Egypt , and resulted in his defeat ; and the eighth Crusade which led by him too , but aimed at Tunis in 1270 A.D.

The Mamluks , who controlled Egypt after the Ayyubids , adhered to activate the Islamic Axe against the Crusaders ; the Muslims could , under the leadership of al-ZaherBaybers (1260-1377 A.D.) (30)invade and downfall Antioch in 1268 A.D., as well as Tripoli in 1289 A.D. under al-Mansur Qalawoon (1279-1290.A.D.) (31) . After that , his son ,al-Ashraf Khalil (1290-1293 A.D.) (32) could lead the Mamluks to downfall Acre, the Crusaders' last strongholds in Syria, in 1291 A.D. Hence, the Crusaders' existence in the region had finally been erased , after lasted throughout the years (1098 -1291 A.D.) .

As a matter of fact , when we evaluate the achievement of Islamic Crescent , we should recognize the importance of the strategic dimension for the Muslims ; a dimension extends from the Islamic Eastern territories until Morocco , along which the Muslims contributed in facing the Crusaders , who in turn ignored that dimension due to the geography had betrayed them , that's for they existed in a linear entity in Syria , after 1144 A.D.in particular , though their strategic dimension was extending far-long , beyond the Mediterranean sea , on Western Europe.

Also , we do not underestimate the importance of the Soft Power of the Muslims , which were represented in hundreds of schools and mosques as well as the plenty of Sheikhs and scholars who

called for unity of the Islamic Nation to commit the Jihad and to re-control Jerusalem , while the Crusader entity lacked its own soft power , and confined itself to the trilogy of (War-Pilgrimage - Trade).

THE CONCLUSION:-

The presented paper is concluded with the following results :

First : the crusader existence in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia did form in the shape of an axe , which was forming of Principality of Edessa , principalities of Antioch and Tripoli , and Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. That shape does indicate how far the crusaders had recognized that region and its geography , and their invasion was not by mere coincidence , it rather based upon an attentive study by a conqueror wished to reside and settle in the region upon suppressing its original natives.

Second : The Islamic reaction to the Crusader challenge appeared in a formation of an Islamic crescent that surrounded the Crusader entity. That formation took two stages ; the first extended from 1146 until 1171 A.D. The second phase extended from 1171 up to 1183 A.D. The last one distinguished the first by the existence of a powerful leader, i.e. Saladin , who assumed the power and took control of its aspects , while the first phase had included many different leaders.

Third : we cannot recognize the importance of the Islamic Crescent and its role in turning the strategic power-balances in favour of the Muslims , except by our understanding of the Syro- Egypt concept , which is the geographic-historical link between Syria and Egypt throughout the ancient , Medieval and modern ages , in addition to recognizing the importance of Iraq ,which is the north eastern strategic axis , and its Upper Mesopotamia in particular and al-Mosul, its prominent capital.

Fourth : The Islamic Crescent could clamp down on the Crusader existence so strongly that led to the fall of Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem for the first time in the Crusades' history in 1187A.D., followed by the fall of the remaining Crusader principalities, especially in the 2nd half of the 13th century A.D., definitely throughout the period (1268 -1291 A.D.). Thus, during 23 years the Muslims could capture the principalities of Antioch and Tripoli, and to downfall the Crusader kingdom of Acre, via the Islamic Crescent.

That paper has been a narration about the Crusader Axe and Islamic Crescent throughout the 12th and 13th centuries A.D.

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