

КУЛЬТУРА И СОЦИУМ

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THE MEMORY OF THE CRUSADES IN THE ARABIC FOLK EPICS:
IMAGES AND PATTERNS¹

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Abstract: *Considering the importance of the Crusades' topos for the Arab discourses of the 19th – 21st centuries and its influence on the collective memory in modern Arab countries, the challenge of finding the roots of this phenomenon is valid. This research problem can be solved through the analysis of the memory of the Crusades in Arab culture from the late 13th to the 19th centuries. Therefore, it is relevant to study the preservation of the Crusades' memory in one of the most important types of works of Arabic literature, Arabic Folk Epics. The analysis of the Franks' image in these sources shows that during the era of the Crusades itself and in the subsequent centuries, a huge number of the Arab tribal pre-Islamic narratives and notions about the struggle against Byzantium were transformed into the ones dedicated to Jihad against the Franks. The Crusades created a demand for a Mujahid character in Arab Folk culture in the 12th–13th centuries, and the images of the pre-Islamic heroes were thus reshaped and reimagined for the new realities. It can be assumed that at first the Crusades had reshaped this kind of narratives, and then the Arab tradition itself began to reproduce the image of the Christian-European Crusader in the collective memory of Egypt and Levant due to high popularity of the Folk Epics, which may have created a horizon of expectation for the perception of European colonial policy of the 19th–20th centuries as “the return of the Crusaders”.*

Keywords: Crusades, Arabic Folk Epic, Islam, Arab Identity, collective memory, image of the Other.

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Out of all the phenomena of the Middle Eastern history, the Crusades remain one of the most often mentioned eras addressed in media and one of the most popular fields of research. As Carole Hillenbrand notes, the likening of the modern Europeans to the Crusaders has been typical for Arab political and religious leaders as well as cultural figures since the mid-20th century [Hillenbrand, 1999, p. 590]. Moreover, recent studies show that Arab socio-political and cultural discourses of the second half of the 19th century also contained a significant number of references to the theme of the Crusades, and representatives of all major branches of the Arab social thought (Pan-Islamism, Pan-Ottomanism and Pan-Arabism) appealed to this era [Phillips, 2018; Phillips, 2020; Tikhonova, Sokolov, 2021; Sokolov, 2022].

Thus, given the importance of the topos of the Crusades for the Arab politics and culture of the 19th–21st centuries and its role in the formation of identities within the imagined communities

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(national and religious) existing in modern Arab countries, the problem of finding the roots of this phenomenon seems to be extremely relevant. The solving of this research question is related primarily to the study of the functioning of the Crusades' memory in Arab culture from the late 13th to the early 19th century.

In modern historiography, there are two points of view on how the memory of the Crusades was being preserved among the Arabs until the 19th century. According to the first viewpoint, the European invasion was almost forgotten. The main arguments in support of this are the absence of the word "Crusader" (ar. *ṣalībī*) in the Arabic language until the 19th century and the fact that Arab authors did not create specialized works on the history of the Crusades before that time. This point of view is shared, for example, by Hannes Mohring [Mohring, 2008, p. 101], Bernard Lewis [Lewis, 2003, p. 50–51] and Jonathan Riley-Smith [Riley-Smith, 2008, p. 64].

According to another point of view, it is impossible to make an unequivocal conclusion that the Arabs did not preserve the memory of the Crusades. Haim Gerber argues that "the Crusades left a deep and lasting trace of fear in the collective mind of the Arab population of Palestine, and will forever remain in their memory" [Gerber, 2008, p. 44]. According to Jonathan Phillips, "we should not underestimate the transmission of the memory of the Crusades through popular culture, which is a subject worthy of further research" [Phillips, 2008, p. 5].

Based on this, it seems relevant to study the preservation of the memory of the Crusades in the late Middle Ages and the Modern Age in the so-called Arabic Folk Epics.

The Arabic Folk Epic is a fusion of ancient Arabian tribal folklore, legends and fairy tales of ancient Semitic, Persian and Indian origin, historical chronicles and Muslim hagiographic literature. For the most part, the Folk Epics emerged during the era of the Crusades as well as the Mamluk period. During the reign of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and North Africa in the 16th – 19th centuries, works of this genre were extremely popular, as they were performed by professional storytellers in the streets, bazaars and coffee houses [Krymskiy, 1971, p. 48]. The wide popularity of Folk Epics in the Arab society of Ottoman times is reported by many travelers and researchers: Dominique-Vivant Denon (1747–1825), Antoine-Barthélemy Clot-Bey (1793–1868) and Edward Lane (1801–1876). It is important to note that the Epics were known and loved by both urban and rural population, along with the Bedouins [Krymskiy, 1971, p. 49–52].

The issue of preserving of the Crusades' memory in the Arabic Folk Epic, however, has not previously become the topic of complex research. In the only known article directly related to the topic under consideration, "The Crusading Stratum in the Arabic Hero Cycles", its author Malcolm Lyons lists examples of references to the Crusades in the Arabic Epics without considering the patterns of preserving the memory of this phenomenon, and also without examining such an important aspect as the influence of the Crusader topos in the Folk Epics on the image of the Europeans in the Arab culture. At the same time, Lyons notes that the study of the image of the Crusades in the Arabic Folk Epic is extremely important and ambitious [Lyons, 1993, p. 147–161].

Arabic Folk Epics are not considered as sources in the studies of the Arab memory of the Crusades: for instance, Carol Hillenbrand [Hillenbrand, 1999] and Jonathan Phillips [Phillips, 2008] mention merely the potential relevance of studying these works in this course. In his article on the image of Salah al-Din in popular Arab culture, Omar Sayfo starts his analysis only from the 19th century, ignoring similar episodes in the popular culture of the 14th – 18th centuries [Sayfo, 2017]. Paul Cobb, for his part, merely mentions the glorification of Baybars in the eponymous Epic in his study of Islamic perceptions of the Crusades [Cobb, 2016].

Researchers who studied the Arabic Folk Epic from the historical and ethnographic point of view also did not analyze the memory of the Crusades in this type of sources. Bridget Connelly's monograph *Arab Folk Epic and Identity* only examines the influence of the *Sīrat banī hilāl* Epic on the Egyptians' identity, and references to the Crusades in the Epic are only mentioned in passing

[Connelly, 1986]. The comprehensive selection of articles *Lectures du Roman de Baybars* also does not focus on the aspects of the historical memory of this era [*Lectures*, 2003]. Ana Vidal-Luengo's article merely mentions the symbolic importance of the alliance of Baybars with the Ismailis against the Crusaders in the Folk Epic [Luengo, 2003].

Literary studies of the Arabic Folk Epic, such as Peter Heath's *The Thirsty Sword: Sirat Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic*, briefly mention the references to the Crusades without comparing them to the broader context of the memory of this era. The studies by Agafangel Krimskiy [Krimskiy, 1971], Nimatullah Ibragimov [Ibragimov, 1984] and Isaac Filshtinskiy [Filshtinskiy, 2010] are also focused on the analysis of the language and composition of the Epics, and although they do mention episodes that are undoubtedly related to the Crusades, they do not analyze them from the point of view of the history of ideas and historical memory.

Works on the Europeans' image in the Arab culture of the late Middle Ages and the Modern Age also neglect Folk Epics. The same can be said about studies on the history of Jihad and works on the Christian-Muslim confrontation in the Mediterranean. Fundamental studies on Arab historical memory and identity, such as the works by Peter Webb [Webb, 2017] and Peter Wien [Wien, 2017], also bypass this type of sources.

Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that there is large room for the analysis of the Crusader topos in Arabic Folk Epic. On this basis, my article is aimed to analyze the patterns of depicting the Crusaders and the Crusades in the Arabic Folk Epic, as well as to identify the typological characteristics of their images. This will allow us to answer the question of how the Crusades were imprinted in one of the most important types of works of Arabic Folklore, which is crucial in the context of studying the formation of the image of Europeans in the Arab culture. This study is supposed to continue Carol Hillenbrand's work [Hillenbrand, 1999] dedicated to the analysis of the Muslim view of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. The methodology of the article is based on discourse analysis and analysis of the image of the *Other*.

It is important to note that within the framework of this article, I am considering the memory of the Crusades a phenomenon, i.e. the memory about the arrival of the Franks' armies from across the sea in order to conquer the territories of the Middle East and capture the Muslim sacred space. The search for references to specific historical characters, events and locations of the era of the Crusades in the Folk Epics is another big research quest, which should constitute a separate article.

The following popular Arabic Folk Epics became the sources for this article²:

Sīrat 'antara ibn shaddād (Life of 'Antara Ibn Shaddad) is an Epic about the pre-Islamic warrior-poet 'Antara Ibn Shaddad, a hero of the Arabian tribal wars and an author of famous qasida's. According to the plot of the Epic, the hero travels throughout the Mediterranean and visits European lands (*bilād al-ifranj*).

Kiṣṣat al-zīr sālim (Story of al-Zīr Salim) is an Epic about the pre-Islamic warrior poet al-Zīr Salim (real name 'Adi bin Rabi'a), nicknamed al-Muhalhil ("composer of the fine and elegant verses³"), who was the leader of the Banu Taghlib in the Basus War (494–534). The Epic is based on the biography of the poet, derived from *Ayām al-'arab*, and contains many qasida's attributed to him. Al-Muhalhil is also considered the legendary ancestor of Banu Hilal.

Sīrat banī hilāl (Life of the Banu Hilal tribe) is an Epic about the migration of the Arab tribe Banu Hilal from Najd to Tunisia and Algeria through Egypt.

² The term "Arabic Folk Epic" embraces three terms: *sīra*, *kiṣṣa* and *ḥikāya*, used in the Arabic tradition for the similar type of works (the latter two refer, ordinary, to less voluminous Epics).

³ According to another version, he received the nickname for the use of the verb *halhala* (meaning "nearly do something"; the translation in this case would be *halhala*-sayer).

Sīrat dhāt al-himma (Life of Dhat al-Himma) is an Epic centered around the Arab female warrior Fatima, nicknamed Dhat al-Himma (“one who possesses energy”). The Epic is dedicated to the military struggle on Byzantine/Arab frontier in the Abbasid period.

Sīrat sayf ibn dhī yazan (Life of Sayf Ibn Dhi Yazan) is an Epic, the main character of which is Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan (516–587), king of Himyar (modern Yemen). The plot of the Epic is built around the fight against the threat from Christian Ethiopia.

Sīrat al-zāhir baybars (Life of al-Zahir Baybars) is an Epic about the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt, al-Zahir Baybars (1223–1277). The work describes wars with the Crusaders and other enemies, as well as the Sultan’s struggle against unjust officials. From all the main characters of the Folk Epics, Baybars is the only contemporary figure, a real participant in the wars against the Crusaders.

As the researchers of the Arabic Folk Epics unanimously note, all six of the aforementioned works were extremely popular in the Middle East in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, and remain popular in the 21st century⁴.

While analyzing the Crusader topos in the Arabic Folk Epic, the following patterns of depicting the Crusades and the Crusaders were identified.

THE PATTERN OF THE ETERNAL WAR AGAINST THE EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS

The functioning of this pattern is crucial, first of all, in Epics, the main characters of which are ancient pre-Islamic heroes, who, according to the plot, selflessly fight against the Franks and embody the ideal of a fighter for the true religion (ar. mujāhid). The most illustrative examples of this are found in the adventures of ‘Antara ibn Shaddad (*Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*), al-Zir Salim (*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim*) and Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan (*Sīrat sayf ibn dhī yazan*).

Throughout the most complete set of ‘Antara adventures, the protagonist faces the Franks. He travels for 20 years in the lands of the Franks and in the Northern Seas. One of the children of ‘Antara turns out to be a Frankish commander Jawfaran (Godefroi⁵), who besieges Damascus. ‘Antara challenges Jawfaran to a duel, beats him and is about to kill him, but it turns out⁶ that Jawfaran is his son from the Frankish princess Mariam (Mary) [*Sīrat ‘antara*, s.d., vol. 2, p. 378–379]. ‘Antara fights the Franks at sea and on land, in Sham, Hijaz, Iraq and other regions of the Middle East. The Epic is replete with the descriptions of battles like the following: “A five-day battle began with fifty thousand Franks marching under countless banners and crosses in the lands of Sham” [*Sīrat ‘antara*, s.d., vol. 4, p. 209]. It is important to note that after the death of ‘Antara, his descendants convert to Islam and participate in Jihad against Christians [Filshtinskiy, 2010, p. 605].

The episodes of confrontations with the Crusaders in the Epic *Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim* are of great interest. In one of the Bedouin scimmages, the main character, al-Muhalhil, gets drunk and falls into the hands of enemies who kill him, chopping him into pieces. The hero’s sister puts his body into a magic chest, which she lowers into the sea⁷. The chest is fished out by Beirut fishermen, and doctor Hakmun, the ruler of Beirut, revives and heals the hero. However, then the ruler throws al-Muhalhil in prison for insolence in conversation [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim*, s.d., p. 71–77]. Right after that, the city is attacked: “In those days Jupiter the Crusader (ar. birgīs al-ṣalībī), one of the kings of the Byzantines⁸, arrived and with him his brother and a

⁴ Folk Epics still inspire many films, series and cartoons, made in the Arab countries.

⁵ The most well-known Crusader, bearing this name, is, undoubtedly, Godefroi de Bouillon (1060–1100), the first ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099–1100).

⁶ The narrative of a duel between a father and a son, who are unaware of their relationship, is very widespread in Arabic Folk Epics and is rooted in ancient Middle Eastern myths.

⁷ A variation on the myth of the goddess Isis prevalent in the Middle East.

⁸ Al-Rūm (Byzantines) are numerous mentioned in Arabic Folk Epics, though in many contexts the images of Byzantines and Crusaders are mixed and interchanged under this name.

hundred thousand army, they came from Kasarwan⁹ to fight the ruler Hakmun” [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālīm*, s.d., p. 78]. The siege of the city begins, during which al-Muhalhil escapes from prison twice to help the defenders. Seeing that, Hakmun frees him, and al-Muhalhil participates in a ten-day battle under the walls of the city. He kills Jupiter’s brother and many other Christian warriors, after which the Christian commander makes peace with Hakmun and retreats [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālīm*, s.d., p. 79–81].

In this episode, it is important that the campaign described is undoubtedly a projection of the events of the era of the Crusades, while it is worth mentioning that the inhabitants of the city in the Epic are Jews. This could be explained by the fact that the action of the Epic takes place in pre-Islamic times, and al-Muhalhil, being a monotheist, could not, according to the logic of medieval Muslims, help pagans against the “people of scripture” – Christians, respectively, the inhabitants of the city are declared representatives of another Abrahamic religion. When the ruler asks the hero what is his name, al-Muhalhil, as he does not want to reveal his real name, answers: “My name is Monotheist (ar. muwaḥḥid), servant of the Great God (ar. al-ilāh al-‘azīm), Lord of Musa and Ibrahim¹⁰” [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālīm*, s.d., p. 76]. In this case, it is important that the monotheist hero bravely confronts the Christian invaders.

This episode also demonstrates a synthesis of the Bedouin pre-Islamic narrative and the medieval realities of Jihad against the invading Crusaders: drunk al-Muhalhil is ambushed by enemies during an inter-tribal Arabian strife, and immediately after this he turns into a mujahid hero at the forefront of the fight against the advancing armies of the Crusaders.

The case of another pre-Islamic hero, Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan, in turn, is a typical example of a hero’s divine predestination to fight the infidel invaders: even before his birth he was called the “destroyer of the pagans” and “the conqueror of the infidels” [Fāris al-yaman, s.d., vol. 1]. This circumstance, along with other examples, clearly illustrates the fact that the fight against infidels is the main pivot of the Epic. Similar episodes with prophecies about the birth of the protagonists, who will subsequently fight the infidels, are inherent in many Arabic Folk Epics. For example, in *Sīrat al-zāhir baybars*, there is also a prophecy about the birth of the main hero, which reads as follows: “And an Arab ruler will appear who will build madrasahs and turn churches into mosques” [*Sīrat al-zāhir baybars*, s.d.]. In the Epics *Sīrat sayf ibn dhī yazan*, *Sīrat al-zāhir baybars* and *Sīrat al-amīr ḥamza al-bahlawān* the birth of future Mujahideen heroes is foretold by the prophet Khidr [Ibragimov, 1984, p. 162]. At the same time, there are also cases when Muslims unite under the leadership of an epic hero. Baybars, for example, unites the Bedouins and Ismailis against the Crusaders under his banner [Luengo, 2003].

It is important to emphasize that the Arabic Folk Epics create the image of the Western Christians attacking the Middle East even before Islam, and monotheistic heroes – “predecessors of Muslims” – fighting and repelling them.

In the author’s text of the Epics (in the narrator’s words¹¹) the statement that “the Franks are plotting an attack” is often repeated, and an Arab hero – an ideal Mujahid, whose main mission in his life is fighting against infidels – rises up to repulse it. Thus, it is safe to say that the Crusades created a demand for a Mujahid character in Arab Folk culture in 12th–13th centuries, and the images of the pre-Islamic heroes were thus reshaped and reimagined for the new realities.

⁹ Christian (Maronite) region of Lebanon. Maronite historiography mentions that the Crusaders took refuge there after the loss of all the Strongholds in Levant. The notions of this in Arabic Folk Culture deserve further investigation.

¹⁰ Moses and Abraham.

¹¹ Paragraphs begin with “the narrator said” (ar. kāla al-rāwī).

THE PATTERN OF A UNANIMOUS GATHERING OF EUROPEANS TO ATTACK THE MUSLIM WORLD

Christian aggressors arriving in the Middle East in the Epics, both Byzantines and Franks, bear European names: Bimūnd (Bohemund) – the Frankish commander in *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, Bardwīl (Baudouin, Baldwin) – the ruler of al-Arish in *Sīrat banī hilāl*, Jawfaran (Godefroi, Godfrey) – Frankish commander, son of ‘Antara in *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, Juwān (John) – the main antagonist of *Sīrat al-ẓāhir baybars*, Lawūn (Leon) – the Byzantine emperor in *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, etc., as well as symbolic names such as ‘Abd al-Ṣalīb (“slave of the cross”, grandfather of the main antagonist in *Sīrat al-ẓāhir baybars*), Bīrjis al-Ṣalībī (Jupiter the Crusader, one of the antagonists in *Ḳiṣṣat al-ẓīr sālim*). In some cases, the Crusader images can be seen even in the figures of Zoroastrians. An illustrative example of such transfer can be found in the third cycle of *Sīrat banī hilāl* – *Taghribat Banī Hilāl* (Way to the West of the Banu Hilal Tribe). On their way to Egypt, the tribesmen encounter Bardwīl, the ruler of al-Arish, a fire-worshiper. The main character of *Sīrat banī hilāl* Abū Zayd goes to a duel with Bardwīl and defeats him [*Taghribat banī hilāl*, s.d., p. 93–94]. It is assumed that Bardwīl’s character is based on the personality of the king of Jerusalem Baldwin I (1100–1118)¹².

In the Arabic Folk Epics, many Frankish lands such as Portugal, Barcelona, Rome, England, etc. are mentioned, while it is noted that all these are enemy lands [Lyons, 1993, p. 147–161]. In various Epics, the Franks also control and besiege many cities in the Middle East.

An important recurring image in the Arabic Folk Epics is the gathering of Frankish kings to seize the territories of the Middle East or to attack Muslims or Muslim sacred space.

In *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, the ambassadors of the Franks arrive in Constantinople with crosses on their chests, and then the Franks advance to fight for Jerusalem. Later, a large army of Franks spreads Christianity in the Middle East by the sword and threatens Damascus, Hijaz and Kufa [*Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, s.d., vol. 4, p. 212–215]. In the same Epic, the united fleet of Franks sails to the Middle East in order to restore the empire of Alexander the Great. The Muslim Middle East is also attacked by the Franks throughout the Epics *Sīrat dhāt al-himma* and *Sīrat al-ẓāhir baybars*. In *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, it is often emphasized that all Franks, without exception, are campaigning against Muslims: “And when the Giant [ar. ‘imlāk, nickname of the king of the Franks] received an answer, he left only women in the country of the Franks, and set forward with a hundred thousand horsemen by land, accompanied by six hundred ships full of warriors at sea, and he ordered the captains to attack all the Muslim ships” [*Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, s.d., vol. 1, p. 395]. The Franks in the Arabic Folk Epics are also presented as enemies who come from afar [Lyons, 1993, p. 147–161].

In *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, the Franks regularly appear as allies of the Byzantines. Addressing the Christians of the Middle East, the Byzantine emperor says the following: “I inform you that they [Franks] are going to advance to the lands of Hijaz. The ships have arrived, and there are more of them than the number of stars and planets in the sky, and they carry troops from different nations, all of them are from the Franks-conquerors (ar. ṭawā’if mukhtalifāt al-ajnās min ghuzāt al-ifranj), and they are more than two hundred thousand [...], and they set out for the victory of those who worship the cross” [*Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, s.d., vol. 4, p. 202]. In *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, the Byzantine emperor Armanus fights for the throne with his son Bimūnd, and the armies of Franks and Arab tribes also take part in this fight. In another episode of the same Epic, the “patriarchs and kings of the Franks” gather around the bed of the sick Byzantine emperor [*Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, s.d., vol. 1, p. 906].

¹² This assumption is supported by the fact that Baldwin I died near al-Arish, while he was returning from a campaign against Egypt. There is a lake not far from the city, which is called Bardwīl until today.

The united Franks are also going to forcibly convert the inhabitants of the Middle East to Christianity. ‘Uqba, the main antagonist of *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, calls for help from the Byzantine emperor, promising that “bells will ring in all lands of Islam” [Ibragimov, 1984, p. 108–109]. Subsequently, an army of Christians led by eighteen kings tries to save ‘Uqba. In *Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim*, the inhabitants of Beirut are afraid of the power of Christian kings and are happy about peace with the Crusaders. Jupiter the Crusader is called “one of the kings” of the Byzantines, which indicates the multiplicity of the Christian enemies [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim*, s.d., p. 78]. In the same Epic, inhabitants of the city are very happy about a peace agreement “fearing the might of the Christian kings” [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim*, s.d., p. 81].

The aforementioned episodes demonstrate the anticipation of the arrival of large united armies of Christians from the ‘Frankish lands’ by the inhabitants of the Medieval Middle East.

THE PATTERN OF THE RIGHTEOUS DEFENSIVE WAR AGAINST THE EUROPEANS

In *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, ‘Uqba says that “as many Muslims as possible must be converted to Christianity”, and “Christians must wage Holy War against Muslims” [*Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, s.d.]. Such passages are typical of the Arabic Folk Epics in general, and can be reduced to a single idea – the attribution of the doctrine of holy war to Christianity. Bohemond, leading an army of Franks in *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, proclaims that he wants to seize Muslim lands. In the same Epic, the Frankish ambassador introduces his King, the Giant, who is going on a campaign against Muslims, as the viceroy of Jesus Christ over all Christians [*Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, s.d., vol. 1, p. 396]. In *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, there is also a detailed description of the army of Crusaders arriving to the Middle East: “And the king of the Franks Khīljān came, and he is like Shaitan or a demon, ...he conquered the kings of different countries and conquered the islands in the seas, and made many worship the Gospel. And he set out to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (ar. bayt al-maḳḍis). ...And he sent a messenger to the Khosroi to announce: «Get out of these lands, and if you are afraid of our arrival, then worship Isa, the son of Mary, and destroy the temples of fire, and build churches in their places»” [*Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, s.d., vol. 4, p. 211]. The king of the Franks in *Sīrat dhāt al-himma* is also called “the enemy of Allah” [*Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, s.d., vol. 1, p. 855].

There are many references to the theme of Jihad in *Sīrat al-zāhir baybars*. The Epic actively creates a negative image of Christians and emphasizes the just nature of the holy war against them. This circumstance is vividly illustrated, for example, by the episode of the confrontation between Baybars and a Crusader pirate who threatens the trade on the coasts of Sham and Egypt [*Sīrat al-zāhir baybars*, s.d.]. The Epic also describes in detail the process of recapturing of the coastal line of Sham from the Crusaders: Baybars expels the Franks from al-Arish, Ascalon, Antioch, Tripoli and other cities and castles [*Sīrat al-zāhir baybars*, s.d.].

In most cases, the Epics present Christians as enemies, invaders and robbers, for example in *Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim* [*Ḳiṣṣat al-zīr sālim*, s.d., p. 78–81], they are focused on capturing territories and collecting tribute from the vanquished. In *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, there are many passages stating that “there was no peace for the Arabs, and the Byzantines again marched to war against them and the Franks set out on a campaign” [*Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, s.d., vol. 8, p. 2].

The Franks are always explicitly portrayed as villains, even when they are fighting not against Muslims, but against Jews, Persians or Byzantines. Al-Muhalhil helps the Jews against the Crusaders, and in *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, Arabs help Persian fire-worshippers to fight against the Franks. ‘Antara also personally fights on the side of the Byzantines against the Franks, including the naval battles [*Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*, s.d., vol. 7, p. 351]. Thus, the Franks are seen as an alien aggressive element in the Middle East.

The plot about the Frankish threat to the Muslim sacred space, primarily Mecca, is also very widespread. In *Sīrat dhāt al-himma*, the Frankish ruler Milas has a dream that he must recapture Jerusalem. At the beginning of the Hilali cycle, the Byzantines set out on a campaign to Mecca. It is also important that ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the protagonist of the Hilali cycle, is given a nickname “protector of the Prophet’s grave” [Lyons, 1993, p. 147–161]. Mecca is also attacked by Christians in *Sīrat ‘antara ibn shaddād*.

An important feature of the narratives of the Arabic Folk Epics in relation to this pattern is also that the Muslims always win in the end and the sacred space remains under their control, despite the large number and strength of the invading Franks.

CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the analysis of the Franks’ image in the Arabic Folk Epics, it is important to emphasize that although they are depicted stereotypically, the passages about the Franks are important not for their pictorial side, but because they are found in almost all Epics, dedicated both to pre-Islamic and Medieval heroes. Thus, the ways how the Franks are depicted are less significant than the very fact of their ubiquitous presence. The European Crusader became the main enemy in this kind of narratives, although initially they were devoted to inter-tribal wars of pre-Islamic Arabia, the struggle against the Ethiopians and Byzantines, and other episodes of pre-Islamic and early Islamic history. The pre-Islamic heroes were reimagined to become Mujahideen – fighters against the Crusaders. All of this made the struggle against the Franks in the Folk Epic look eternal and principal.

It is important to emphasize that as the texts of the Arabic Folk Epics were emerging during the Crusades, it was these events that made Epics a focal point for preserving the memory of Europeans as enemies. Therefore, first the events of the Crusades had been depicted in the Arab tradition, and then the tradition itself began to support and reproduce the image of the Christian-European-Enemy-Other due to the popularity and wide spread of the Folk Epics.

The analysis of the Crusaders’ image in the Arabic Folk Epics is, in fact, an analysis of the image of the European Christians in this key type of works of the Arab Folk culture of the Middle Ages and Modern Times, since the study of the above contexts allows us to use the term “Frank” as an umbrella for the concepts of European and Crusader (coming from the West, from far across the sea, a Christian invader, speaking “Frankish language”). The main conflict of the Folk Epics is Islam versus Christianity and Islam versus Polytheism, which makes the Jihad the main motivation of the protagonists (“defense of the faith of Muhammad and the lands of Islam”). At the same time, the Epics almost never mention Arab or Muslim conquests, concentrating on the defense against the Christians (Byzantines, Ethiopians and Franks).

Based on the foregoing, it can be confidently assumed that although it is believed that the Crusades were forgotten by the Arabs shortly after they had ended, and the inhabitants of Modern era Egypt and Levant hardly knew who the Europeans were, since they did not interact with them, the Folk Epics’ material shows that the image of the European Crusader in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern period was remembered and reproduced due to the enormous popularity of these works. Furthermore, after the end of the Crusades era, as the image of the Crusader-Frank-Christian was maintained in the Arab collective memory by Arabic Folk Epics, it created a horizon of expectation for the perception of the European colonial policy of the 19th – 20th centuries, i.e. “the return of the Crusaders”, which is important for the genesis of the Europeans’ image in the Arab collective memory and the formation of Arab identities.

It should also be noted that the Mongols, who destroyed the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 and threatened other regions of the Middle East, being a more formidable military threat, unlike the

Franks, are practically not mentioned in the Arabic Folk Epic (they appear basically only in *Sīrat al-ẓāhir baybars*). This circumstance again actualizes the question of the importance of the memory about the Crusades in the Arab culture.

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