A GLIMPSE ON THE USE OF THE ḤARRANTAQAS IN THE RED SEA AND ON THE NILE FROM THE FĀTIMĪD TILL THE END OF MAMLUK PERIODS

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Abstract

In the Medieval period, domination of the seas meant holding both the regional power and the power over trade, and that is the reason why the high seas witnessed numerous struggles throughout history. Over time, trade relations between states gained an international dimension due to advances in shipbuilding technology. Ships were the means of transport used for military and commercial purposes. One of the types utilized in Middle Ages was the ḤARRANTAQAS, which was designed to attack enemy ships by means of fire. The present study intends to determine the reasons for the use of the vessels called ḤARRANTAQAS, by whom they were utilized and their functions in the Red Sea and on the Nile River in the light of classical Arabic sources.

Keywords: ḤARRANTAQAS, ship, Red Sea, Nile, sultan, amirs, wars, ceremonies, transportation.

Öz


Anahtar Kelimeler: ḤARRANTAQAS, gemi, Kızıldenz, Nil Nehri, sultanlar, emirler, savaşlar, törenler, ulaşım (nakil).

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The ḥarrāqa was a type of ships, used for incinerating the enemy vessels with naphtha during the Medieval period, and the Crusades in particular. Accompanying great capital ships, it was one of the most important battleships that contributed to Islamic naval forces; and consisted of 100 oars according to Ayyūbid historian Ibn Mammātī (544-606/1149-1209).\(^1\) Indeed, in addition to Ibn Mammātī’s account, other sources shed further light upon the use of ḥarrāqas in the Mediterranean Sea. The following discussion aims to provide a detailed analysis regarding the military and civil functions the ḥarrāqa fulfilled in the Red Sea and on the Nile.

As regards the use of ḥarrāqas in the Red Sea, al-Maqrīzī (766-845/1364-1442), writes: “In 512 (1118-9), the ships dispatched from ‘Aydhāb by Qaṣīm b. Hāshim, the governor of Mecca, crossed the merchants’ path and ravaged every-thing they could find. Bursting with rage, the Fāṭimīd vizier al-ʿAfḍāl b. Badr al-Djamālī said: ‘The Governor of Mecca ravished the merchants in my country, and I, personally, will stand up against him with a navy with one end in ‘Aydhāb and the other in Jeddah.’ Subsequently, the notables of Mecca were informed of the situation and were warned to return these merchants and pilgrims reaching Mecca. A notice was sent to the governor of Qūṣ ordering that he himself or someone nominated by him ensure that no one should board on jallāb\(^2\), that he identify the number of ḥarrāqas and shawānī\(^3\) on the coast of ‘Aydhāb and pro-

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\(^2\) For further information about this type of vessel: Nukhaylī, Al-Sufun al-Islāmiyya, pp. 27-29.

\(^3\) For further information about this ship whose singular form is shīnī, see: Fahmy, Muslim Sea-
vide them with necessary equipment and armory. And finally, he was supposed to
go to ‘Aydhb and make sure that the citizens understand the imminence of war
around the coast of Hijâz. Afterwards the five harrâqas, newly constructed, were
dispatched to Hijâz...’

Clearly enough, the information presented by al-Maqrîzî indicates that the
harrâqas, along with the shawâni, were among the most important and indis-
penisible types of vessels in the Fâtimîd navy. The five above-mentioned new
harrâqas sent by the government to assist other ships around the coast of Hijâz
reveal that this vessel type was employed by the Fâtimîds not only for defending
the coastal frontier, but also for monitoring the sea against hostile activities.

The Fâtimîds maintained another flotilla consisting of five ships at port of
‘Aydhb for the purpose of protecting the merchantmen sailing between ‘Aydhb
and Sawâkin, and for safeguarding the Kārîmî merchant caravans against pirate
raids in the course of years. The flotilla was later reduced to three vessels, charging
the governor of Qûş to maintain and outfit this squadron. Although Qalqashandî
(756-821/1355-1418) does not specify the type of ships stationed in Qûş, it is
reasonable assume that harrâqas were among the escort vessels.

In 577 (1181-2) Śalâh al-Dîn al-Âyyûbî ordered the construction of five
harrâqas in the shipyard of Cairo to transport amîrs and soldiers to Yemen. On

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Vessels”, The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History II, 263-264; Vassilios Christides, “Shîrîn,
shâniyya, shânî”, EF (English), IX, 444-445.

4 Taqiyy al-Dîn Abû al-‘Abbâs Âhmâd ibn ‘Âli al-Maqrîzî, Itti ‘az al-Ḥumâfâ bi ‘Âkhbâr al-A’immah
Islâmîyya, p. 33; Yaacov Lev, State and Society in Fatimid Egypt, Leiden-New York-Köln
s. 88; Haldane, ibid, p. 139.

Yaacov Lev, Saladin in Egypt, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1999, p. 171; Dionisius Agius, “The Arab
Âlânîd”, Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras III, ed. U. Vermeulen-J. Van
Steenbergen, Leuven 2001, p. 53; Vassilios Christides, “Roman and Byzantine Naval Power in
Decline in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean” Ekklesiastikos Pharos 95, Alexandria-Johannesburg
2013, p. 85; 23.

6 Maqrîzî, Kitab al-Sulûk li-Ma‘rifat Duwal al-Mulûk, ed. Muḥammad M. Ziyâdah, Cairo 1956, I,
wa ’l-Shâm, Beirut 1981, p. 219; Lev, Saladin in Egypt, p. 171. Haldane (ibid, p. 139) reports that
although Fâtimîd navy was destroyed in Fustât in 1169, fire-ship technology as well as fire-ships
were found in surrounding ports, the Ayyûbîds used this technology for their own benefits and
16th Rabī' I 638 (5 October 1240) the Sultān al-Malik al-Sāliḥ Naṣṣīm al-Dīn Ayyūb (637-647/1240-1249) sent ḥarrāqas and shawānī, which he had prepared in advance, from the Red Sea to Yemen, headed by the assigned amīrs and troops.\(^7\)

Although the available primary sources do not provide much detail about the use of ḥarrāqa ships in the Red Sea, Yaacov Lev\(^8\) argues that the ḥarrāqas, together with other army vessels, were among the most important war ships that defended the coastal frontiers of the Islamic Red Sea against the Crusaders.\(^9\)

Records that mention the use of ḥarrāqas around the Nile are not only sufficiently revealing but also abundant compared to the records mentioning ḥarrāqas operating in the Red Sea. Classical Arabic sources suggest that these crafts were used not only for military, but also for formal ceremonies and civil purposes. Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī (d. 775/1374) reports that they “...were among the ships known in the Nile Delta and functioned as luxury vessels for rulers and amīrs.”\(^10\)

In his Mawā‘īz al-Maqrīzī adds: “Do not forget! ‘And to Him belong the

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\(^7\) Maqrīzī, Sulūk, I, Part 2, 306.
\(^8\) Saladīn in Egypt, p. 182.
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ships [with sails] elevated in the sea like mountains.”¹¹ Ghurābs¹², shawānī and ḥarrāqas were huge even faster than the wind and arrow; stones, irons, and people were often seen on these ships and they grant victory during wartime.”¹³ All these quotations leave no doubt that ḥarrāqa was used not only as a river craft, but also played an integral role as a military vessel throughout the period under discussion.

When the Crusaders, who conquered Damietta in the reign of the Ayyūbīd Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (615-635/1218-1238), marched towards the interior of Egypt, the Islamic navy landed troops with a huge ḥarrāqa and 100 shawānī to fight them at the bay known as Bahr al-Maḥalla (616/1219-20).¹⁴

Yet once again during the reign of al-Malik al-Kāmil one hādjib called -Ṣāliḥ al-Arbilī- got on a ḥarrāqa with the sultan while holding the sultan’s hem with one hand and with the Nile on his left, he recited this poem:

If one wants wealth, said in the proverb,
Should be around the sea or the king as both bring wealth!

How can poverty visit my house? Since I have two seas! One of them is at the peak and the other is flowing…

¹¹ Qur’ān 55:24


¹⁴ Maqrīzī, Sulūk, I, Part 1, 203; Maqrīzī, Mawā‘īz, I, 591. Cf. ‘Abbādy-Sālim, ibid, p. 234; Haldane, ibid, p. 142. ‘Izz al-Dīn Abī al-Hasan ‘Alī b. Abī al-Karam ibn al-Āthīr (al-Kāmil fi al-Ta’rikh, Turkish trs. Abdüllerim Özaydın-Ahmet Ağırakça [İslâm Tarihi Ibnü’l-Esir, el-Kāmil fi l-Tarih Tercîmesi], Istanbul [n.d.], XII, 281-282) reports that Muslim ships on the Nile headed to the battle field without specifying any vessel name. In addition, the same author states that al-Malik al-Kāmil built up many bridges on the Aṣhmūn branch of the Nile, helped Muslims to pass the river via these bridges and held the path which the Crusaders would pass; and that the well-known and large Crusader ship, known as the maramma, was full of all arms, food, and weapons needed by them and was coming closer to the Muslims; and that there were a lot of ḥarrāqas protecting this ship. He also states that the Muslims captured this large ship and the ḥarrāqas following a set of battles. After this victory the Crusaders evacuated Damietta (7 Radjab 618/27 August 1221). Cf. Maqrīzī, Mawā‘īz, I, 593. For further information about the maramma vessel, see: Nukhayli, Al-Sufun al-Islāmiyya, pp. 140-141.
Sea [the Nile] is on my left, the perfect king is on the right!\(^{15}\)

While mentioning the Crusader attack on Damietta in 647 (1249), Ibn Wāṣil (604-697/1207-1298) stated that ḥarrāqa and shawānī fully-equipped with warriors appeared before the walls of Manṣūra.\(^{16}\) In Muḥarram of 648 (April-May 1250) Louis IX of France (1214-1270), marched with his army towards the inner suburbs of Damietta. However, they were captured while trying to return to Damietta along with their ships in the area of Munyat Abī Ḏabdallāh, located in the east bank of the Nile within Damietta. After Louis IX’s request of safe-conduct [amān] was accepted and once the remaining forces fighting against the Muslims were killed, Louis IX was taken to Manṣūra on a ḥarrāqa accompanied by other ships.\(^{17}\)

Abū al-Fida’ (672-732/1273-1331) also mentions the escape attempt of Ayyūbīd sultan Tūrāniyāh by getting on a ḥarrāqa in 648 (1250).\(^{18}\) The main reason why the sultan chose a ḥarrāqa vessel was probably due to its higher cruising performance compared to other ships.

After the fall of the Ayyūbīds, al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars announced one of the ‘Abbāsids as the caliph in order to gain sacred legitimacy and consolidate his power. The sultan of the Mamluks got on a ḥarrāqa with Caliph al-Mustanshir to go to Egypt from the Qal’at al-Dībal and navigated through the Nile, arriving at

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Qal‘at al-Diţazzîrî in 19 Radjab 659 (19 June 1261).19

Al-Maqrîzî further adds: “When the Ayyûbîds declined and the Turkic Mamlûks came to power; they neglected the navy until the period of al-Malik al-Zâhir Baybars. He, [Baybars], then examined the shawâni used for the war and-called for the officers in the navy. Amîrs were using seamen on the harrâqas, and al-Malik Baybars ordered once again the construction of shawâni, the cutting of timber, and making these ships as strong as they were once during the reign of al-Malik al-Šâlih Nadîm al-Dîn Ayyûb. He himself supervised the progress of works by paying regular visits to the shipyards in Egypt; led the addition of 40 more ships to the fleet besides harrâqas and ṣarîd20 in Shâwâl 669 (May-June 1271).21 Evidently, the harrâqas were also one of the vessel types often used on the Nile during the Mamlûk period.

When the Nubian King Dâ‘ûd tyrannized his own country and spread fear in the Egyptian land, the sulţân of the Mamlûks al-Malik al-Zâhir Baybars, taking advantage of the Nubian King’s relatives coming to him for sanctuary, furnished the army with necessary equipment and reinforced it with harrâqa soldiers [crews] on Sha’un 674 (January-February 1276).22 This evidence corroborates that crew members of harrâqas’ were entrusted in the campaign against Nûba and given the number of the ships; there were -probably- more than enough seamen recruits.

Following his accession to the throne of the Golden Horde [Bâtû’îd] (1236/40-1502), Malik Ôzbek Khân (1313-1341), a descendant of the Mongol Čingiz-Khânid Dynasty, desired to establish a relationship with the Mamlûks by way of marriage. To this end, he sent one of his relatives as bride to Egypt to marry the Mamlûk Sulţân al-Malik al-Nâşir Muḥammad b. Qalâwûn (709-741/1310-1341), who was in his third reign. The prospective bride arrived at Alexandria in the month of Rabî‘ I in 720 (April-May 1320). Upon disembarking the ship, she

19 al-Muqaffâ, I, 697.
20 For further information about this vessel whose singular form is ṣarrîd, see: Fahmy, Muslim Sea-Power, pp. 136-137; Nukhaylî, Al-Sufun al-Islâmiyya, pp. 89-92; Christides, “Islamic World Vessels”, The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History II, 265.
was welcomed by 18 ḥarrāqas and ḥādjiibs, which were put under her authority once she landed, and subsequently boarded the biggest ḥarrāqa, which belonged to the sultan, while the rest embarked on other ḥarrāqas. When they arrived at the royal palace, the sultan’s prospective bride was again warmly welcomed by the regent [nā’ib] of the sultan Amīr Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn (25 Rabī’ I 720/5 May 1320).23

Likewise, another source also provides the information that: “Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn assigned himself a vessel called shabbāra24; shabbāras were medium length, elaborate ships, propelled by oars which were round-ended. Although they were well-built, the sultan later preferred the ḥarrāqa instead of the shabbāra.”25

Al-Maqrīzī talks about two hearsays, suggesting that land and engineering surveys on the Nile were done using ḥarrāqas. According to the first record al-Khaṣfīrī Mosque was demolished as the waters of the Nile flooded the shores of Būlāq in 738 (1337-1338). Upon this incident, Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn sailed from Qal’at al-Djabal to the Nile on a ḥarrāqa, along with the soldiers and engineers he recruited from Damascus, Aleppo, Egypt and Euphrates.26 Making mention of the bridge constructed between al-Djīza and Rawda in 749 (1348-1349), al-Maqrīzī also states that the regent [nā’ib] of the current Sultan al-Nāṣir Hasan -Baybūghā Arwas- and amīr, got on ḥarrāqas with engineers sailing through the Nile in order to conduct surveys.27

All captured rebels were transported by ḥarrāqas to the prisons in Alexandria and Qūş. The relevant sources provide sufficient evidence on this issue. During the reign of Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, Amīr Tankiz, who revolted against the sultan, was taken to Alexandria with on a ḥarrāqa and executed there (741/1340-1).28 In 742 (1341), Amīr Qawsūn sent certain amīrs to Alexandria for imprisonment, who, however, managed to return to Cairo

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24 For further information about this type of vessel, see: Nuḥhayli, Al-Sufun al-Islāmiyya, pp. 72-73.
26 Māqrīzī, Mawā‘īz, III, 555-556.
somehow. Later on, the very same ḥarrāqa ship carrying them as prisoners this time transported Amīr Qawsūn himself to Alexandria.29 Again in 742 (1341), when the amīrs convened to dethrone al-Malik al-Manṣūr Abū Bakr, son of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, they took him along with his five brothers, slaves, and wives to the banks of the Nile and transferred them altogether on a ḥarrāqa to Qūṣ.30 By the time the six children of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn returned from Qūṣ to Cairo on 7 Ramaḍān 742 (14 February 1342), the amīrs who were planning to welcome them were already boarded on ḥarrāqa.31

Upon the release of the Amīr Shaykhūn, who had been imprisoned in Alexandria due to the problems between amīrs in the reign of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ (752-755/1351-1354), on his way to Cairo on a ḥarrāqa, the ḥarrāqa of another amīr approached his ship to give him the good news that he had been appointed as the regent [nāʿīb] of Ḥamā province. Amīr Shaykhūn was so delighted to hear the news and when he arrived in Cairo there were more than 1,000 ships around his ḥarrāqa 752 (1351-2).32

Amīrs who were captured in the year 791 (1388-9), during the period of al-Malik al-Manṣūr Ḥājjījī, were also transported to the prison in Alexandria by ḥarrāqas.33

Sources inform us that the Mamlūk Sulṭān al-Malik al-Āshraf Barsbāy (825-841/1422-1438) ordered the arrest of his amīr Taghhrībirdī al-Maḥmūdī and had him sent to Alexandria by a ḥarrāqa on 13 Dījumādī II 830 (11 April 1427).34 However, the same authors -in other parts of their works- tell us that the Mamlūk sulṭān al-Malik al-Muʿayyad Shaykh (815-824/1412-1421) went on a trip on the Nile with a ḥarrāqa on 27 Dījumādī I 822 (21 June 1419).35

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32 Maqrīzī, Sulūk, II, Part 3, 848; Ibn Taghhrībirdī, Nudjīm, X, 201, 204.
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As mentioned earlier, the ḥarrāqas were also used during the formal ceremonies on the Nile. In this regard, Qalqashandi provides the following evidence: “The sulṭān could sail to the bay aboard these ships, but he customarily would neither use an umbrella nor would he mount his horse until the arrival of the ship. His ship-boarding was nothing like any ceremony held at the squares and festivals. When the miqyās [nileometer] officer started his duty, the sulṭān would get aboard leaving his castle and had his meal there with his amīrs. After the miqyās officer was given a bowl of heated saffron, he would swim to the pole in the Nile and apply the saffron to the pole. The ḥarrāqa carrying the sulṭān was very well decorated along with those of his amīrs’. After the curtains over the window facing miqyās were pulled open, the ḥarrāqa of the sulṭān would be berthed to the spot where he used to swim by jumping directly into the river through the window. In addition to the ḥarrāqas of the amīrs around the sulṭān, ships filled with people eager to watch the sulṭān swim would rush the area and they would go up to the entrance of the bay like this. The greatest ḥarrāqa of the sulṭān known as dhahabīya and the ḥarrāqas of the amīrs would cruise around with some flame shots being performed. Afterwards they would move on up to al-Sadd [dam], and with the routes blocked to make way for him, the sultan would return to the castle on horseback.”

This follows that the ḥarrāqas were alternatively known as dhahabīya in the Mamlūks period. In fact, the word dhahabīya was used to describe the color of ḥarrāqas during the late Middle Ages. Dhahabī [golden] was the color of the sulṭān’s ḥarrāqa. Indeed, according to Qalqashandi, ḥarrāqas were used for navigation as well as for naphtha attacks. However, it is quite obvious that the ships known as dhahabīya did not have the naphtha attack feature.

37 Qalqashandi, Subh al-a ṣāhī fi ṣinā`at al-ınshā`, IV, 47-48; Nukhaylī, Al-Sufūn al-İslāmiyya, p. 36; ’Abbādy-Śālim (ibid, pp. 227-228) combines two other resources with Qalqashandi’s records and describes the formal ceremony on the Nile in a similar way. Maqrīzī (Mawā’iz, III, 617) records that flame was sprayed to shawānī for show and training during official ceremonies. For similar statements, see also: Maqrīzī, Sūlūk, I, Part 3, 928. The belief that the flame was sprayed by ḥarrāqas seems to be reasonable.
38 Nukhaylī, Al-Sufūn al-İslāmiyya, p. 36. For further information about the dhahabīya, see: Nukhaylī, Al-Sufūn al-İslāmiyya, pp. 50-51. In fact there are different information and comments about the ḥarrāqas on the Nile. ’Abbādy-Śālim (ibid, p. 137) states that ships known as ḥarrāqas were also known as ʿuşhārī before Mamlūks (?!). Furthermore, Ṭabd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, who lived between 557-629/1162-1231, states in his work al-Īfāda wa l-i ṭābīr fi al-umār al-muḥāhadah wa-al-ḥawādith al-muṭanah bi-ārd Miṣr, ed. A. G. Sabānū, Damascus 1983, p. 71): “They (in
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To sum up; this essay suggests that the ḥarrāqas were used not only for the purpose of war in the Mediterranean Sea but also by the sultanāns and amīrs on the Nile and in the Red Sea region. They served for various purposes including carriage of goods, transport of passengers for short-distance trips on the Nile, official ceremonies, and warships as well. Contemporary historians refer to the ḥarrāqas as large ships, operated in the Red Sea and on the Nile. However, given the use and the number of these ships, we may justifiably infer from sources, which are analyzed in the previous pages, that the ḥarrāqas became smaller but swifter over time without losing their function. Undoubtedly, the sultanāns’ and amīrs’ preference of the ḥarrāqa over other crafts is certainly an indication of their strength and reliability. Last but not least, it is likewise clear that until the end of the fifteenth-century, this kind of ships was widely used by Muslim dynasties of central and peripheral Egypt.

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Egypt) have various ships. The weirdest one is ‘uṣhārī. Its shape looks like shabbārat al-Tigris. But they are wider, taller and smoother. They are made of strong wood. There is a wooden hut on the surface, on the top dome, windows are opened like a door. In the hut there is one toilet and a wardrobe. It is coated with best quality paints and golden gilt. These ships are used for the sultan and leaders (الرزق) of the states. Thus, the leader sits at the head, while the men around him and the crew always stand up. Seamen are under the surface of the ship and during their time on the ship they do not even notice who comes onboard, only doing their job.” For further information about the ‘uṣhārī: Nuḥaylī, Al-Sufun al-Islāmiyya, pp. 95-101. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Lawāṭī al-Ṭanḍījī ibn Baṭṭūta, who lived between 703-770/1304-1368, (Rihla, Turkish trs. A. S. Aykut [Ibn Battūta Seyahatnâmesi] İstanbul 2004, II, 908) states that he boarded ships that resembled ḥarrāqas in China. Translator of Abū l-ʿAbbās Shams al-Dīn ibn Khallikān (Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa-ʾAnbāʾ Abnāʾ al-Zamān, Eng. trs. Mac Guekin De Slane [Ibn Khallikan’s Biographical Dictionary], Beirut 1970, I, 174-175) states that a particular type of ship named shabbāra utilized in Iraq is used in Egypt as well with the name of ḥarrāqa.
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*Qurʾān 55:24.*


Ekler

Ek 1

Harriga used by the Muslims, plaque no: 50
(Su'ud Mîhit, al Balbînî, Miṣr al Balbînîyya, Cairo 1967)
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Ek 2

hawks used by the Mamluks, plaque no. 65
(Sa'd Mahr, al-Badā'yi fī Musār al-Islāmiyya, Cairo 1967)
Ek 3
Ek 5

While King of France, Louis IX and Crusaders were entering Damietta
(İbn Demirshat, Hâşî Şefâkârî Tarihi, İstanbul 1997, p. 215)
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Ek 6

Islamic army captures King of France, Louis IX
(Iṣra’ı̄l Dəmirkən, Hāçılı Şefəleri Tərəh, Istanbul 1997, p. 217)