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DEFENSIVE JIHAD: ISLAMIZATION OF THE TURKS AND TURKIFICATION OF ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

The defensive Jihad conducted by Turkic people against the Crusades in the twelfth and thirteen centuries had a crucial role in the process of the Islamization of the Turks and the Turkification of Islam. Based on a creative adaptation of James Russell's theory of Christianization of the Germanic people and the Germanization of Christianity, this article shows how that the Arabs were the 'sword of Islam' during its offensive phase, and when they became exhausted, the Turks emerged to be the 'shield of Islam'. The Frankish invasions gave the Turks a golden opportunity to deepen their presence in Islamic culture, and to legitimize their leadership of the Islamic World at a time where the military skillfulness and religious revival were much needed for the survival of the Islamic faith and heartland. The Turks gained the trust of the Abbasid caliphs, the Sunnī scholars and the Muslim populations at large, as defenders of the Islam. The Turkic 'moment' in Islamic history lasted eight and a half centuries, from the investiture of Tughril Beg, the first Seljuq sultan, in Baghdad in 1055, to the deposition of 'Abd Al-Ḥamīd II, the last Ottoman sultan, in 1909. The center of gravity of Muslim power moved with this Turkic movement westward from central Asia, to Persia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and then finally to Anatolia. The Article concludes with the lesson of this history of the Islamization of the Turks and Turkification of Islam today, at a time where Islamic civilization is in need for a leading "core state" to be a source of order and protection.

Key Words: Islam, Christianity, Jihad, Crusades, Caliph, political legitimacy, Turk, Turkey, Islamization, Turkification, core state, Huntington.

INTRODUCTION

In 921 the Abbasid ambassador Ibn Fāḍlān described the Turkish Bulgars and the Vikings in very pejorative terms: two 'barbarian' nations, one half-converted to Islam; the other completely pagan.¹ But Ibn Fāḍlān would not have imagined that, in less than 300 years, these two nations will be fighting one another on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, as fervent Christian and Muslims. The parallel fates of these two nations are worth exploring by the scholars of world history.

The aim of this article is more limited. It is the Turkish contribution to Islam during the crusades that is of interest here. This contribution was manifested in several dimensions: defending the borders of

¹ Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān* (Damascus: Al-Majma' Al-'Ilmī Al-'Arabī, 1959), 82, 89-90, 151; James E. Montgomery, "Ibn Faḍlān and the Rusiyyah," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 8.

Islam against external threats, suppressing the internal ‘heretics,’ especially the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘a, and sponsoring the revival of Sunnī jurisprudence and theology.

The Turkish contribution to medieval Islam was not dissimilar to the contribution of the Franks to medieval Christianity. Some scholars go as far as saying that “the new societies resulting from the Germanic and Islamic conquests may not be as different as they are usually portrayed.”² Throughout the following text, the active role of the Sunnī Turks and the Catholic Franks in the crusades is in contrast with the passive role of the Shī‘a Fatimids and the Orthodox Byzantines.

Modern Arabic literature on the crusades tends to deemphasize the Turkish role in the Islamic counter-crusade. This attitude is a part of the modern Arab nationalistic perspective through which the history of the crusades is often seen and presented. A serious study of the Muslim counter-crusade cannot agree with this perspective. On the contrary, the role of the Turks in repelling the Franks and reviving the Sunnī political order is one of the most significant phenomena in the history of the crusades.

Carole Hillenbrand rightly deplores this negligence in modern Arabic historiography, and puts this phenomenon in a broader historical perspective. “Whilst anachronistic nationalistic labels should be avoided in the study of medieval history,” writes Hillenbrand,

“there is no doubt that recent Muslim writings had underplayed the role of the Turks in the Crusading period. The study of the Muslim response to the coming of the Crusades needs to be undertaken within the wider context of the role played by the eastern Islamic world in general, and especially taking into account the military and ideological role played by the newly islamicised Turks and the continuing heritage of the Seljuq empire in Syria and Palestine. Although there is no doubt in the minds of Arab Muslims today that almost all the great fighters of Jihad (*mujahidun*) who finally defeated the Crusaders--Zengi, Nur Al-Din, Baybars--were Turks, this has been inadequately recognized, perhaps because of several centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule which followed the end of the Crusades. Traditionally, this period has been regarded by the Arabs of the Levant with loathing, and this is perhaps the reason for modern neglect of the Turkish achievement in the medieval context.”³

If one reads the Arabic medieval sources that were free of the nationalistic rhetoric of today, they clearly recognize the role of the Turks in medieval Islamic history, especially in the defense of the ‘House of Islam’ against the Franks and the Mongols. The Andalusian historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) perceived the Turkish incursion into the heart of Islam in the tenth century as a “divine providence.” He presents it thus:

“And when the Arabs became busy with their civilization and luxury, and wore the cloth of bane and powerlessness... and got absorbed in pleasures... and took off the garment of bravery and manhood, Allah out of his mercy saved the fading faith, by sending to Muslims these Turkish people with their proud and abundant tribes, which entered the faith with a faithful determination and nomad virtues that were not corrupted by the dirtiness of pleasures, nor blunted by abundant luxury”⁴

Ibn Khaldūn attaches to ‘barbarians’ a crucial and positive role in building and defending Islamic civilization. These dynamic social forces that he calls “the nomad Arabs and those who are like them”⁵ included, along with the Arab conquerors of early Islam, “the bedouin Berbers of North Africa, the

² Ann Christys, “The History of Ibn Habib and Ethnogenesis in Al-Andalus,” in *Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 323.

³ Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 5.

⁴ Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār Al-Qalam, 1984), 5:428.

⁵ Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima* (Beirut: Dār Al-Qalam, 1984), 1:129.

Kurds, the Turkmen and the Turks of the East.”⁶From the perspective of Ibn Khaldūn, these ‘noble savages’ had some virtues that civilized and urbanized people do not usually have. Among these virtues are (a) a strong social solidarity, ‘*aşabiyya*, based on real or imagined blood ties, (b) a high military ethos that expressed itself in bravery and worship of heroism, and (c) a sense of individual and collective pride that prevents them from accepting humiliation or submitting to aggressors.⁷

Like the Arabs before them, the Turks and the Franks were both ‘barbarian’ people (*mutawaḥḥishūn*) in the positive sense used by Ibn Khaldūn. The theory of Ibn Khaldūn is useful to understand the metamorphosis of the two people from their early scattered raids and conversions, to their complete domination of the Muslim and Christian societies, and finally their clash in the Holy Land.

Ibn Khaldūn expresses deep sorrow that the Arabs, after the Prophet Muhammad had transformed them from their self-destructive tribalism to a strong and unified nation, were unable to keep their strength. According to him, they neglected the two main sources of their common identity: religion and blood ties. But, as the quotation above shows, Ibn Khaldūn was happy that the Turks came to replace the Arabs in their leadership and defense of Islamic civilization.

For ‘barbarians’ to transform and to contribute to civilization, according to Ibn Khaldūn, they need to acquire a new identity that is higher and broader than their naïve sense of belonging to the same ancestor; they need a ‘religious call’ (*da’awa dīniyya*), to unite them and to give a universal mission to their life. The Arabs acquired this collective identity with the advance of Islam, and the Turks acquired it with their conversion to Islam. By extension, one can say that the Germanic tribes acquired this kind of identity with their conversion to Christianity.

This religious metamorphosis does not mean that blood ties become irrelevant under the pressure of religious universalism. Ibn Khaldūn actually gives a very important social function to blood ties, and he affirms that “the religious call without social solidarity (‘*aşabiyya*) behind it does not achieve its goal.”⁸ He seems to establish a dialectic relationship between religion and social solidarity as unifying factors, and he makes the two interdependent.

Ibn Khaldūn’s view of the contribution of the Turks, especially the Seljuqs, to Medieval Islam and their role in the counter-crusade was echoed by some modern scholars. Herbert Loewe, for example, believes that,

“The Muslim world was to encounter the might of Europe; the pomp and chivalry of Christendom were to be hurled against the Crescent with, one would imagine, every prospect of success. At this juncture Islam was re-animated by one of those periodical revivals that fill the historian with amazement... Islam was saved from destruction at the hands of the Crusaders by one of these timely ebullitions. The approach of the Seljūqs towards the West produced a new element in Islam which enabled the Muslims successfully to withstand the European invaders; their intervention changed the subsequent history of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt.”⁹

To put the Turkish moment of Islam in the right context, one can say that two nations dominated the political scene of classical Islamic civilization: the Arabs, and the Turks. Each one of these two nations

⁶ Ibid., 1:121.

⁷ Muhammad ‘Abid Al-Jābirī, *Fikr Ibn Khaldūn: Al-‘Aşabiyya wa Al-Dawla* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt Al-Wiḥda Al-‘Arabiyya, 1994), 253.

⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima* 1:159.

⁹ Herbert M. J. Loewe, “The Seljūqs,” in *The Eastern Roman Empire (717-1453)*, Vol. 4 of *The Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. J. R. Tanner, C. W. Previté-Orton and Z. N. Brooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 302.

made different contributions to Islam. From the military history standpoint, the Arabs were the sword of Islam during its offensive phase. The speed and efficiency of their conquests astonished historians throughout the ages.¹⁰

By the fifth century H. (the eleventh century AD), the Arabs proved to be exhausted, just like the “the tired empires”¹¹ they had conquered several centuries earlier. At that moment of their history, the urbanized Arab elites of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo might well have been criticized the same way the Bishop of Acre James of Vitry (d. 1240) criticized the ‘Orientalized’ Franks of his days for their effeminacy and their preference for baths over battles.¹² When the Arabs became exhausted, and Islam turned defensive, the Turks emerged to be the ‘shield of Islam’. As if the destiny of Islam moved to their hands, their dedication and persistence in defending the borders of Islam are incomparable with that of any other medieval people.

The Franks started their crusades against the Islamic Orient at the beginning of the Turkish moment in Islamic history—a ‘moment’ that lasted eight and a half centuries, from the investiture of Tuğhril Beg, the first Seljuq sultan, in Baghdad in 1055, to the deposition of ‘Abd Al-Ḥamīd II, the last Ottoman sultan, in 1909. The center of gravity of Muslim power moved with this Turkish movement westward from central Asia, to Persia, to Iraq, to Syria, and then finally to Egypt and Anatolia.

This Turkish movement westward can be compared with the Frankish movement eastward. The two people continued their irruptions into the old land of Christianity and Islam for centuries, until they clashed on the Anatolian plateau and the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. It was a great historical movement on both fronts that makes the Crusades mainly a clash between the Turks and the Franks. Therefore, the crusades can be situated within Turkish history, the same way they fit within the history of the Franks.

British scholar John Joseph Saunders believes that with the conversion of the Vikings and the Magyars to Christianity at the end of first Christian millennium “the immunity of Islam from external attack came to an end.”¹³ One can say the same thing about the vulnerability of Europe after the massive conversion of Seljuq Turks that started nearly in the same period. After centuries of relatively quiet frontiers between the two faiths, this Turkic conversion brought with it a similar threat to the eastern defenses of Christendom. The battle of Manzikert in 1071 was the most evident manifestation of this historical transformation.

Few medievalists grasped the parallelism of the Turkish and Frankish historical processes, including the contribution of these two peoples for medieval Christianity and Islam. Though incidental and sketchy, the remarks of these great medievalists are of a great value for this study.

Saunders notices that the Turks “infiltrated the world of Islam as the Germans did the Roman Empire.”¹⁴ He adds that The Seljuqs “abandoned their ancestral shamanism for Islam [around 950], a

¹⁰ For a brief and deep account of the early Arab conquests, see David Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, Essential Histories (Oxford: Osprey, 2009). A more detailed presentation is in Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (London: Orient Books Ltd, 2007).

¹¹ Nicolle, *Great Islamic Conquests*, 48.

¹² J. S. C. Riley-Smith, “Peace Never Established: The Case of the Kingdom of Jerusalem,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series 28, (1978): 97.

¹³ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 154.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

change of faith as momentous for the future of Asia as the conversion of Clovis and his Franks to Catholicism in 496 was to Christian Europe.”¹⁵

Claude Cahen highlights the way the Turks defended Islam “just as ‘barbarian’-born chieftains had defended the Roman empire against the ‘barbarians’”¹⁶ and he notices the similarity of the Islamization of the Turks with the Christianization of the German tribes: “Like that of the Germans in the Roman Empire, the conquest by the Turks, from then on, was accomplished from inside.”¹⁷ Cahen also presents the relations between the Arab caliphs of Baghdad with the early Turkic Sultans as “a true symbiosis which might suggest that which had existed in western Christendom between Charlemagne and the papacy.”¹⁸

One cannot separate the Turkic role in combating the Franks and the Mongols from the process of legitimizing the Turkic rule of the Islamic heartland—a rule that was monopolized by the Arab elites in the early centuries of Islam. Another way to look at the Crusades within the Islamic context is to relate them to this process of the Turkification of Islam. The crusades and the Mongol invasions gave the Turks a golden opportunity to legitimize their leadership of the Islamic World at a time where military skills and the will to sacrifice in defending the 'House of Islam' were much needed. The Turks gained the trust of the Arab caliphs and Sunnī scholars, as defenders of the Faith, the same way the Germanic Franks gained the trust of Pope Urban as defenders of Christianity.

The Turkic dominance of the scene of Islamic history during the eleventh century and the subsequent Turkic role in repelling the Frankish offense against the 'House of Islam' in the twelfth and thirteen centuries are of major significance for a better understanding of Islamic history. The Islamic counter-crusade can be seen as a part of the long process of this Turkification of Islam and Islamization of the Turks. Cahen rightly noticed that the ‘backbone of resistance’ against the Crusaders was actually Turkic at the heart. Turkic peoples of different manifestations played the most crucial role in the Islamic counter-crusade.

Walter Benjamin wrote that “there is no document of civilization that is not simultaneously a document of barbarism.”¹⁹ Indeed, the intermingling relations between barbarism and civilization make it difficult to draw a clear line between the two. It seems that barbarians are always carrying the seeds of civilization, and that civilization is prone to go back to barbarianism.

The Christianization of the Franks and the Islamization of the Turks show that 'barbarians' themselves change as much they change the life of those they subjugate. Thomas Craughwell affirms that barbarian nations such as the Goths, the Franks, the Angles, the Saxons, the Vikings and the Mongols shaped modern Western civilization.²⁰ The lamentation of St. Jerome (347-420) about the destruction of Rome, Craughwell argues, should not veil the fact that “over time, out of the ruins emerged modern Europe.”²¹ This is not of course how the contemporaries of the destructive invasions

¹⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹⁶ Claude Cahen, “The Turkish Invasion: The Selchukids,” in *The First Hundred Years, Vol. I of A History of the Crusades*, ed. M. W. Baldwin (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 136.

¹⁷ Ibid., 142.

¹⁸ Ibid., 146.

¹⁹ Quoted by Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism and Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), vii.

²⁰ Thomas J. Craughwell, *How the Barbarian Invasions Shaped the Modern World* (Beverly, Massachusetts: Fair Wind Press, 2008), 9.

²¹ Ibid., 10.

of the barbarians perceived the future, “but for the future of Europe and the larger world, the coming of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, and Frisians was providential.”²²

Craughwell’s thesis sounds like an extension of Ibn Khaldūn’s. The term ‘providence’ used by Craughwell here was also exactly the same word some Muslim historians, such as Ibn Khaldūn, have used to describe the Turkic incursion into the heart of the Islamic world, and the role the Turks played afterward in the protection of the Islamic world against the Frankish and the Mongol invasions.

What we have been calling here the Islamization of the Turks and the Turkification of Islam brings to mind James Russell’s theory of “the Christianization of the [Germanic] Franks and the Germanization of Christianity.”²³ The main premise of this article is indeed in line with some of Russell’s ideas. For example, his remarks on “the high level of internal group solidarity which existed among the Germanic people,”²⁴ and his interpretation of the decline of group solidarity by “urbanization, territorial expansion, prolonged internal conflicts, invasion and social heterogenization”²⁵ are similar to the idea of *‘aşabiyya* in Ibn Khaldūn’s sociopolitical theory that has been used as a theoretical basis for this article.

Russell, however, seems to have fallen into essentialism through his belief in the perpetual disparity between what he perceived as a world-rejecting Christianity and a world-accepting Germanic culture, and his overemphasis of “the vitality of Germanic folk-religiosity” that eventually “helped to make a Germanized form of Christianity normative throughout Western Europe.”²⁶ Unlike Russell’s exaggeration about the Germanization of Christianity, the Turkification of Islam described here is mainly a political and military Turkic leadership of the Islamic world.

We have two disagreements with Russell’s theory that need be emphasized here. First, the Turks did not change the essence of Islam the way Russell believes the Germanic peoples changed the essence of Christianity. Second, even in their militarism, the Turks were more a continuation of the early Arab conquerors rather than a fresh start in Islamic culture. After these necessary clarifications have been made, it is time then to look at the process of the Islamization of the Turks and the Turkification of Islam, and to put the counter-crusade within the context of this process.

One of the great cultural achievements of the Persian Samanids (r.819-999) was the conversion of many Turkish tribes of Eurasia to Islam, including the Seljuqs and Bulgars. Though the Samanids were proud of their Persian culture and language, they were also close allies to the Arab caliphs of Baghdad.²⁷ The Turkic Bulgars embraced Islam before 921, though superficially, as the Treatise of Ibn Faḍlān (to which we will come later) suggests; the Seljuqs who were “destined to so glorious a future,”²⁸ and who played a crucial role in the counter-crusade, converted to Islam in about 956. The sources mentioned other conversions of unidentified Turkic tribes and nations in the tenth century under the influence of the Samanids. These mass conversions, added to the early conversions of Turkic slave-soldiers who served

²² Ibid., 100.

²³ James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

²⁴ Ibid., 6.

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Ibid., 209, 211.

²⁷ On the Turkish conversions at the hand of the Samanids see Zubayda ‘Aḩā, *Bilād Al-Turk fī Al-‘Usūr Al-Wuṣṭā: Bīzanṯa wa Salājiqat Al-Rūm wa Al-‘Uthmāniyūn* (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 35-36.

²⁸ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 143.

the Abbasid caliphs, made Islam a crucial component of the Turkic identity and a major unifier of the different nations and tribes of Turkic origin.

The conversion of the Turkic people to Islam has many aspects of similarity and historical significance with the conversion of Germanic people to Christianity. In both cases the process was slow and disturbing to the traditional Christian and Islamic order. Some differences, however, are to be noticed. Issawi remarks two of them. The first is related to the conversion process; the other to the linguistic adaptation. On the conversion process, he remarks that,

“the Islamic Middle East (Arab-Persian) was able to assimilate its barbarian invaders (Turks and Mongols) more successfully than did Roman Christianity, by rapid conversion. The numerous Turkic slaves who formed much of the region's military aristocracy— for example, under the Abbasids in Iraq from about 850 on and as Mamluk rulers of Egypt from about 1250 to 1517 and later— were converted on arrival and given an Islamic education. The great Turkic dynasties— including the Ghaznavids (976-1186), who ruled eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and northern India; the Seljuks (1055-1117), whose empire stretched from Anatolia to Afghanistan; and the Ottomans (1290-1918)—had become Muslims before they took power.”²⁹

On the front of linguistic adaptation, Issawi notices that although the Turks "were Islamized... they were not Arabized... In this respect, they are like the Saxons, Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles, rather than the Franks or Lombards.”³⁰ The fact that the Seljuq Turks were relatively new converts who had a great zeal for their new acquired Islamic identity, and they were bedouins who had not lost their military ethos, endowed them with some qualities that made them more compatible with their Germanic Frankish counterparts during the Crusades.

The Turks found their way to the heart of the Abbasid establishment in the first half of the ninth century, when the Caliph Al-Mu'taşim (833-842) recruited many Turkic slave-soldiers and made them his personal guards. Other caliphs followed in his footsteps in their attempts to counter-balance the Persian quasi-dominance of the Abbasid bureaucracy, and to check the constant Arab revolts against the caliphate. The Turkic infiltration of the political and military elite gave quickly its political fruits: two Turkic families, the Tulunids and Ikhshidites, dominated Egypt in 868 and 933 respectfully. But these early Turks assimilated within the Arab society and culture.

It was only in the eleventh century that the Turkic factor became more significant, and the Turks became leaders and defenders of Islam. This transformation started with the conversion of the Seljuqs and their invasion of the Islamic heartland, which inaugurated the Turkic era of Islamic history. Three factors facilitate the Turks' dominance of the Islamic scene from the eleventh century downwards: their military skills, their loyalty to the Abbasid caliphs, and their demographics. One of the earliest works on the Turks within the Abbasid society is the treatise of Al-Jāhiz (776-869) on *Manāqib Al-Turk* (*Merits of the Turks*), in which the great Abbasid writer praises the Turks' pride, bravery, loyalty and military discipline.³¹ Al-Jāhiz notices and praises the Turkish mastership of archery, which would later have a great military importance during the Crusades.³² He writes that the Turk can hit his enemy with his

²⁹ Charles Issawi, *Cross-Cultural Encounters and Conflicts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 34-35.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹ ‘Amr Ibn Baḥr Al-Jāhiz, “*Manāqib Al-Turk*,” in *Rasā'il Al-Jāhiz* (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Khānjī, 1964), 1:44-45. See also Jamīl Jabr, *Al-Jāhiz wa Muḥtama' 'Asrih fī Baghdād* (Beirut: Dār Şādīr, n.d.), 66; Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment,” 179.

³² See for example, W. F. Paterson, “The Archers of Islam,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 9, no. 1/2 (Nov., 1966): 70, 84.

arrow from the back of his horse, and he can shoot in all directions, as if he has “four eyes; two in his face and two in his back.”³³

These Turkic military skills were also noticed by the Christian chroniclers of the Crusades such as Anna Comnena and Fulcher of Chartres. Anna writes that the Turks were “long practised in war,”³⁴ and Fulcher describes them as “a valiant race from the East *skilled in the bow*. They had crossed the Euphrates River from Persia fifty years before [the First Crusade] and had subjugated the whole Roman [Byzantine] land as far as the city of Nicomedia (emphasis added).”³⁵ The fact that the Turks came to the Byzantine lands through Persia and Iraq seems to have been the cause of confusing them with the Persians in Medieval European sources. Pope Urban II is said to have called the Turks in his famous sermon at Clermont “a Persian people” and Fulcher of Chartres himself called them “pagan Persians.”³⁶

Another early text in Arabic on the Turks during the process of their Islamization is the *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān (Treatise of Ibn Faḍlān)*. Ahmad Ibn Faḍlān is known to Western scholars through his description of the Vikings in one of the earliest written records on these North European people. As has been alluded to earlier, Ibn Faḍlān was sent in 921 by the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, Al-Muqtadir, as a religious teacher and an ambassador to the king of the Bulgars, “a Turkic race living in the region of the middle Volga.”³⁷ He met there some Viking trading groups whom he presented in very negative light.

More relevant to our topic here is what Ibn Faḍlān wrote about the Turks. He pictured the Turks as negatively as he did the Vikings, but he also revealed the early signs of the traditional loyalty and attachment to the Abbasid caliphs among the Muslim Turks—a loyalty that had much political and military relevance for the course of the historical events studied here.

Ibn Faḍlān relates that a new converted Turkic leader told him that he was not afraid of the armies of the caliph of Baghdad, because they cannot reach him in his remote land, but he expressed his fear that if he disobeys the orders of the caliph, the caliph might invoke God’s wrath on him, and that would destroy him.³⁸ This religious veneration for the Abbasid caliphs was frequently expressed later on in the correspondence between the Seljuq leaders and the caliphs of Baghdad. In those letters, the Seljuqs expressed their attachment and obedience to the Prophetical family to which the caliphs belong, and from which they drew their religious and political legitimacy.

The perception of the Abbasid caliphs as objects of religious reverence and a source of political legitimacy will continue on for centuries as a part of Turkic political culture, even when the caliphs became unable to exercise any real political power. It was only in the sixteen century that the Ottoman Sultans finally freed themselves completely from the symbolic authority of the Abbasids.

In addition to military skills and loyalty to the Abbasids, demographics was a third factor that gave birth to the Turkic era of Islamic history. The early Arab conquerors seem to have been very limited in numbers compared with the people of the conquered nations. The Turks, however, seem to have been an

³³ Al-Jāhīz, “*Manāqib Al-Turk*,” 45.

³⁴ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (Cambridge, Ontario: Parentheses Publications, 2000), 205.

³⁵ Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, 1095-1127*, trans. Frances Rita Ryan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 66, 84.

³⁷ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 143.

³⁸ Ibn Faḍlān, *Risālat*, 121-122.

undrainable source of manpower for many Muslim empires from the ninth century on. After all, it was from the northern Iraq with its Turkic “ample reserves of manpower”³⁹ that the genesis of the Muslim counter-crusade took place, and it was from there that Muslim armies continued to spring throughout the whole crusading era.

The Islamization and Sünnization of the Turks produced a military and political Turkification of Islam. One cannot overemphasize the significance of these two phenomena for both Islamic and world history. The historian of Aleppo, Ibn Al-‘Adīm, reported an interesting story that indicates the depth of this historical transformation. When the second Seljuq Sultan Alp Arslān (1063-72) crossed the Euphrates from Iraq to Syria for the first time, one of the Muslim scholars in his entourage, Abu Jaafar, urged him to express his gratitude for God, since “not a single Turk ever crossed this river except as a slave, and you have crossed it today as a king.” He Sultan gathered his military and political leaders and he asked Abu Jaafar to repeat what he had said in front of them. And all of them “praised God abundantly” for this great bounty.⁴⁰

Saunders summarizes the profound implications of the infiltration of the Seljuq Turks into the heart of Islam. “The entry of the Seljuq Turks into Western Asia in the second half of the eleventh century,” writes Saunders,

“forms one of the great epochs of world history. It added a third nation, after the Arabs and Persians, to the dominant races of Islam; it prolonged the life of the moribund Caliphate for another two hundred years; it tore Asia Minor away from Christendom and opened the path to the later Ottoman invasion of Europe; it allowed the orthodox Muslims to crush the Isma‘ilian heresy, and provoked in reprisal the murderous activities of the Assassins; it put an end to the political domination of the Arabs in the Near East, it spread the language and culture of Persia over a wide area from Anatolia to Northern India, and by posing a grave threat to the Christian Powers, it impelled the Latin West to undertake the remarkable counter-offensive of the Crusades.”⁴¹

Like Saunders, Cahen highlights also the importance of the Turkic, especially the Seljuq, conquest of the Islamic world, as one of the crucial events in human history.⁴² From the perspective of this study, the most important result of this Turkic dominance of medieval Islam since the eleventh century is the one highlighted by Issawi: Islam survived, and “successfully dealt with the only two serious threats it encountered in over a thousand years, the Crusades and the Mongol invasion, the first by expulsion, the second by repulsion and conversion.”⁴³

One can add by analogy that the conversion of the Germanic tribes helped Western Christianity, for four centuries, to delay the Muslim Turks from controlling the whole Byzantine realm and infiltrating deep into Western Europe. Although the Germanic Franks did not succeed in their immediate goals of keeping Jerusalem for Christendom and permanently annexing Byzantium to Rome, they seem to have had succeeded indirectly through their Crusades in preventing the ‘Turkish caravan’ from travelling West on a fast pace.

One of the results of the Turkic leading role in repelling the Crusades (and the Mongol invasion) was the Sünnī revival sponsored by the Turkic political and military leaders during the twelfth and

³⁹ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 162.

⁴⁰ Kamāl Al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat Al-Ṭalab fī Tārīkh Ḥalab* (Damascus: Dār Al-Fikr, n.d.), 4:1974.

⁴¹ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 141.

⁴² Claude Cahen, “Le Malik-nameh et l’histoire des origines seljukides,” *Oriens* 2, no. 1 (Oct. 31, 1949): 31.

⁴³ Issawi, *Cross-Cultural Encounters*, 13. See also Milton Viorst, *Storm from the East: The Struggle Between the Arab World and the Christian West* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 16-17.

thirteen centuries. A side effect of this revival was the shrinking of Shī'ism. The Turkic political and military domination was devastating for Shī'ism.

A reasonable relation with the Arabs facilitated the Turkic domination over the Islamic heartland. To understand the Arab-Turkic relation during the Abbasid era, the 'middle ground' theory elaborated by the American historian Richard White can be invoked here, with the necessary contextual modifications. One can say that the Sunnī Arab elite and the Turkic military elite came to a 'middle ground' –Claude Cahen calls it “a true symbiosis”⁴⁴ - based on the division of labor and status. The Sunnī Arab elite, represented by the Abbasid caliphs, continued to exercise religious authority and legitimacy, and the Turks took in hand political and military power. One of the Egyptian scholars of Persian and Turkish poetry of our time believes that the Turks -unlike the Persians- were not too haughty and proud of their race in their relations with the Arabs.⁴⁵

The Turks seem to have developed a deep admiration for Arab religiosity, as the story of Ibn Fadlān with the Turkic chieftain reveals. Likewise, the Arabs were deeply impressed by the Turkic military prowess, as Al-Jāhiz's treatise reveals. After describing the Turkic military skills, especially in horse archery, Al-Jāhiz' concludes that no other people fascinated the Arabs with their military competence more than the Turks.⁴⁶

This was probably similar to the way the Germanic Franks fascinated the Byzantines with their military prowess and bravery, as one can perceive clearly in the words of Anna Comnena: “the nation of the Franks in general” writes Anna,

“is self-willed and independent and never employs military discipline or science, but when it is a question of war and fighting, anger barks in their hearts and they are not to be restrained; and this applies not only to the soldiers but to the leaders themselves for they dash into the middle of the enemies' ranks with irresistible force.”⁴⁷

Anna's view is supported by the Arab knight and poet, Usāma Ibn Munqidh (1095-1188), who earned a firsthand knowledge of the Frankish way of life. Although Usāma disliked many Frankish customs that were incompatible with his Arab culture, he was deeply impressed by their bravery and military skills.⁴⁸

Early Turkic converts to Islam were seen by the Arab city-dwellers as brave people who deserve respect for their military merit; and the Arabs were seen by the Turks as the people of the Prophet and the bearers of Islam. These positive perceptions helped create a 'middle ground' between these two pillars of Islam during the crusades.

The Arab-Turkic middle ground is best exemplified by the certificates of investiture that the Turkic sultans and generals used to seek from the caliphs of Baghdad to legitimize their political and military control of some provinces of the disintegrating Abbasid Empire. Though there was no practical need for such certificates, their symbolic meaning remained very important for the political legitimacy of the Turkic rule.

⁴⁴ Cahen, “The Turkish Invasion,” 146.

⁴⁵ Ḥusayn Muḥib Al-Miṣri, *Şilat Bayn Al-'Arab wa Al-Furs wa Al-Turk* (Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyya, 2001), 219-220.

⁴⁶ See Al-Jāhiz, “*Manāqib Al-Turk*,” 44-56. See also Al-Miṣri, *Şilat*, 220.

⁴⁷ Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, 201.

⁴⁸ Usāma Ibn Munqidh, *Kitāb Al-I'tibār* (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Thaqāfa Al-Dīniyya, n.d.), 137.

The year 1055 was a turning point in the legitimization of the Turkish dominance of the Islamic scene. In that year the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, Al-Qāim, invested the first Seljuq leader, Ṭughril Beg (990-1063) as a sultan, and gave him the title of the Sultan of the East and the West. This was the result of a mission led by Al-Māwārdī (972-1058), a Sunnī scholar and judge, who convinced Ṭughril, upon a request from the caliph, to move to Baghdad and make it his military and political capital. As another indication of the Turkic reverence for the Abbasid caliphs, Ṭughril “traveled four leagues to meet him out of respect of the caliph’s message”.⁴⁹

The caliph’s offer came in a crucial moment of deep division between the Sunnī and Shī’a political elites of Baghdad, and at a time when Fatimid propaganda was spreading in Iraq. The political power in Iraq was divided between two strong men who hated one another intensely. The first was the Shī’a military leader, Abū Al-Ḥārith Al-Basāsīri (d.1059) who was protected by the Shī’a Buyid Sultan, Al-Malik Al-Rahīm (r.1048-1055); the second was the Sūnnī-Ḥanbalī Vizier ‘Alī Ibn Al-Muslima, who was an ally of the Abbasid caliph and “was doing whatever he could to hurt the Shī’a.”⁵⁰ Both men tried to find allies among their sects inside and outside the Iraqi realm. Al-Basāsīri rallied himself with the Shī’a tribal leader Dubays Ibn Mazīd; Ibn Muslima with the Sunnī governor of Mosul, Quraysh Ibn Badrān. The circles of alliance broadened more when Al-Basāsīri contacted the Fatimids of Egypt, and Ibn Muslima contacted the Seljuqs of Persia. Both powers, the Fatimids and the Seljuqs, were happy to offer support because they had long had their eyes on Baghdad.⁵¹

Al-Basāsīri was able to control Baghdad and to take a written oath from the Abbasid Caliph Al-Qā’im that the Abbasids had no right in the caliphate and that the Fatimids were the only legitimate caliphs.⁵² Ṭughril suppressed Al-Basāsīri’s revolt and put him to death, aborting what Farhad Daftary calls “the episode of Al-Basāsīri”—an episode that lasted only one year of ruling Baghdad in the name of the Fatimids, and was the last and most daring attempt of the Fatimids to control Iraq. The investiture of Ṭughril in Baghdad was a crucial gain of Sunnism against Shī’ism in Iraq that will be reinforced and expanded later in Syria and Egypt. Since then, a great bargain took place between the Turks and the Sunnī Arab caliphs. The caliphs, who had lost their political and military power for a long time and were subjugated by the Shī’a Buyids for more than a century, were happy to find the emerging Sunnī military power of the Seljuq Turks to protect their symbolic status and moral authority, and the “The Seljuks were even more anxious to have their rule legitimized.”⁵³

The manifestations of this Sunnī gain can be summarized in four Seljuq achievements: (a) putting an end to the political chaos in Baghdad by imposing relative order and stability; (b) putting an end to the Buyid Shī’a dynasty that had controlled Iraq for more than a century (950-1055); (c) aborting the Shī’a Fatimids’ ambition to expand their rule eastward towards Syria and Iraq; and (d) providing a fresh military power that proved capable of suppressing Shī’ism and defending the Islamic heartland.

⁴⁹ ‘Abd Al-Rahmān Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntazim fī Tārīkh Al-Mulūk wa Al-Umam* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1939), 15:289.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 16:6.

⁵¹ On Al-Basāsīri and his revolt, see ‘Izz Al-Dīn Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī Al-Tārīkh* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, 1993), 8:341-348. For more details on this sectarian map, see Muhammad ‘Abd Al-‘Azīm Abu Al-Naṣr, *Al-Salājiqa: Tārīkhuhum Al-Siyāsī wa Al-‘Askarī* (Cairo: ‘Ayn li Al-Dirāsāt wa Al-Buḥūth, 2001), 61-68.

⁵² Aḥmād Ibn ‘Alī Al-Maqrīzi, *Itti‘āz Al-Ḥunafā’ bi Akhbār Al-A‘imma Al-Fāṭimiyyīn Al-Khulafā’* (Cairo: Lajnat Iḥyā’ Al-Turāth, 1996), 2:253.

⁵³ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 147.

The Sunnī historian Ibn Kathīr expresses his joy at the downfall of the Shī'a Buyids and the emergence of “the Turkic Seljuqs who love and support the Sunnīs, and raise their status.”⁵⁴ Ṭughril did not wait to start a counter-offense against the Shī'a. His entry into Baghdad was accompanied by attacks against the Shī'a quarter of Karkh, where their businesses and libraries were set on fire.⁵⁵ The Shī'a developed a deep contempt towards the Turks, and they were aggressive against them. Ibn Al-Athīr reported that when the leader of Shī'a city of Ḥilla in Iraq, Ṣadaqa Ibn Mansūr (r.1086-1107), took over the city of Wāsiṭ in 1104, he announced that every Turk who lives in the city must leave.⁵⁶ The same scene took place one year earlier in Syria. The Damascene historian Ibn Al-Qalānisī reported that in 1103, when the Nizārīs assassinated the Turkic leader of Homs Janāḥ Al-Dawla, most of the Turkic population of the city fled to Damascus.⁵⁷

A part of the implicit deal between the caliphs of Baghdad and the Turkic military and political elite was the responsibility of the Turkic sultans to achieve two mission: (1) to defend the empire against the attackers from outside, especially from the Byzantines who were pressing hard on the western flank of the Abbasids in northern Syria, and (2) to protect the faith against the heretics from inside, which means in the Abbasid political terminology the Shī'a Fatimids of Egypt who were presenting themselves as a global alternative to the Abbasid caliphate. Both the missions against the outsider enemies (the Byzantines) and the insider enemies (the Fatimids) legitimized and accelerated the Turkic march westward that changed the face of the Islamic world. The Turks (Seljuqs and others) moved from Iraq southwest towards Syria and Egypt, and northwest towards Armenia and Byzantium. It was Sultan Alp Arslan (r.1063–1072), the nephew and successor of Ṭughril, who inaugurated this march.

Carter Findley notices a constant move westward as an essential characteristic of Turkic history. What he sometimes calls the “Turkish caravan,” and sometimes “the Turkish bus”⁵⁸ was perpetually moving from east to west. He uses the metaphor of a ‘bus’ to describe the historical movement of the Turks over the centuries from the heart of their ancestors’ homeland in western China to Persia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Anatolia:

“the whole phenomenon of Turkishness (Türklük) resembled a bus traveling across Asia from East to West. The trip took a long time, and there were many stops. At each stop, people got on and off. They loaded and unloaded bags and bundles as they did so. Many of the travelers cared little about the beginning and ending points of the bus route. Many intended to go only short distances. The idea that what they shared with all the other passengers on the bus was more significant than their differences probably never crossed their minds. Occasionally, the bus broke down and had to be repaired with parts found along the way. By the time the bus reached Turkey, it was hard to know which, if any, of the passengers or parcels had been on board for the whole trip. The bus, too, was no longer the same as when it set out. Yet this was still the ‘Trans-Asian Turkish Bus’.”⁵⁹

This metaphor of the bus is very telling indeed. It presents the Turkic historical movement from east to west in its whole complexity—a movement that started when Islamic eastern defenses broke down

⁵⁴ Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa Al-Nihāya*. Beirut: Maktabat Al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 12:69.

⁵⁵ Yaqūt Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam Al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār Al-Fikr, n.d.), 1:534.

⁵⁶ Ibn Al-'Athīr, *Al-Kamil*, 9:74.

⁵⁷ Ḥamza Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl Tarīkh Dimashq* (Damascus: Dār Ḥassān, 1983), 230.

⁵⁸ Carter V. Findley, *Turks in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

with destruction of the Samanid state at the hands of the Turkic Karakhanids in 999, and continued with the breaking down of the Christian defenses at Manzikert in 1071, and culminated in the capture of Constantinople in 1453. That is not even the end of the story. The 'Turkish bus' is still moving westward today, as the Republic of Turkey aspires to join the European Union.

After the Seljuqs controlled Baghdad and entered into the service of the Abbasid caliphs, the Turkish caravan started the double mission of cleansing the House of Islam from the heretics and protecting the borders of this House. Consequently, the caravan revived the old conflict between Islam and Byzantium that was dormant for centuries.

On the way, the Turks broke down the eastern defenses of Christendom at Manzikert in 1071, “involuntarily setting the Crusades in motion by their invasion [of Anatolia]”⁶⁰ and awakened a strong rival that was never expected—the Franks. Therefore, in a sense, the Turks were the ones who brought the Franks to the Islamic land, and they were the ones who repelled the Franks through two centuries of counter-crusade.

The Islamic counter-crusade was mainly a Turkish endeavor and achievement. This is almost an inevitable conclusion if one looks at the fragmented Muslim counter-crusade as one movement and sees the Turks with all their internal diversities as one phenomenon. One result of this historical phenomenon was the triumph of Sunnism over Shī‘ism during the crusades, and ultimately the Turkification of Islam for many centuries.

The Muslim counter-crusade was a slow and fragmented movement. The understanding of this movement requires some synthesizing categorization in order to put together, and to make sense of, two centuries of attrition wars, bloody victories and defeats, and countless heroes and traitors. Arab and Western scholars have used several analytical models to present the Muslim counter-crusade. Some adopt a political approach while others adopt a geographic categorization. In the former, scholars divide the counter-crusade movement through the lines of Muslims monarchies. Therefore, they write about the role of the Zengids (‘Imād Al-Dīn and his son Nūr Al-Dīn), of the Ayyūbids (Saladin and his successors) and of the Mamlūks (Baybars, Qalāwūn)...etc.

As for the categorization based on geography, Syrian historian Suhayl Zakkār divides Muslim resistance to the crusades into four phases, based on the four cities that were the center of gravity of this movement. The first phase was the one of Mosul, the second of Aleppo, the third of Damascus and the fourth of Cairo.⁶¹

The genesis of the Muslim counter-crusade started in Mosul, and then it grew stronger when Aleppo and Damascus were unified with Mosul under the rule of Nūr Al-Dīn. Aleppo was squeezed between the two Frankish states of Antioch and Edessa, but it was the closest Syrian city to Mesopotamia, where the first seeds of the counter-crusade were planted. Damascus was the closest important city to the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish County of Tripoli.

When Saladin added Egypt to this axis, the Muslim power grew significantly and was able to launch the decisive campaign that led to the victory at Hattin in 1187. The final phase came about a century later when the Mamluks of Cairo eradicated Acre, the last Frankish stronghold in the Levant, in 1291.

⁶⁰ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition.s.v. “Crusades.”

⁶¹ Suhayl Zakkār, *Al-Mawsū‘a Al-Shāmiyya fī Tārīkh Al-Ḥurūb Al-Şalābiyya* (Damascus: Dār Al-Fikr, 1995), 3:276-446.

The categorization suggested in this study is very simple. It is based on the distinction between three fronts: the northern front of Anatolia, the eastern front of Syria and Iraq, and the southern front of Egypt. Regardless of the categorization one adopts, however, a broader look at the Muslim counter-crusade in these two centuries shows that the Turkic factor was its most consistent element. With the exception of Saladin, whom we consider a part of the Turkic military elite (see below), all the prominent military leaders of the counter-crusade, and the majority of its fighting force, were Turks. This is enough to legitimize an assumption on which this study is based, namely that the crusades were in essence a Turkic-Frankish conflict.

This does not, however, minimize the importance of the roles played by other Muslim ethnicities in the counter-crusade. Arab scholars provided the ideological drive behind this movement, and Arab urban populations in the Syrian and Egyptian cities actively defended their cities under siege. But this role remained a role of support, more than a role of leadership and initiative, not unlike the role of the Byzantines, or perhaps the role of the Italian cities in the crusades, where trading and crusading were intermingled.

In their purely military and political manifestations, however, the crusades were mainly a conflict between the Franks and the Turks. The Arabs who had been the sword of Islam for centuries in its offensive phase against Christendom, and the Greeks who had been the shield of Christianity against Islam for centuries, did not play such major roles during the military activities of the crusades. Both nations were part of the overall scene, but not effective participants in the real battles.

Stevenson might be right to affirm that “not only are the crusades an essential part of the history of the Turkish empire, they are best treated in the main as such.”⁶² Almost all the leaders of the Muslim counter-crusade movement were Turks. Among the Turkish leaders on the northern front were two families, the Sultans of Rum (Anatolia) and the Danishmend emirs of northeastern Anatolia who played a crucial role in exhausting several waves of the Franks. The Anatolian Turks contributed in the counter-crusade with these disruptive confrontations which are usually overshadowed by later high profile battles, but they were very significant to the overall process of counter-crusade because they deprived the crusading movement of an easy land passage to Syria and Palestine.

Kilij Arslan I, Sultan of Rum (r.1092-1107) crushed the People’s Crusade led by Peter the Hermit in 1096.⁶³ He also shattered three Frankish reinforcement armies in 1101, with the support of Malik Ghāzī (r.1097-1104), the founder of the Danishmend Emirate of northeastern Anatolia. Malik Ghāzī himself destroyed the army of Bohemond I of Antioch and captured him in 1100. His son Gumushtekīn Ghāzī (r.1104-1134) defeated and killed Bohemond II of Antioch in the Battle of Jihān in 1130.

Kilij Arslan II, Sultan of Rum (r. 1156-1192) crushed the Byzantines in 1176 in the battle of Myrioccephalum, which was seen by some historians as a second Manzikert. It is worth mentioning, however, that Kilij Arslan II’s priority was his wars with the Byzantines. He was less consistent regarding the war against the Franks. After he sent his son Qūb Al-Dīn to fight the army of Frederick Barbarossa, he stopped this attempt and allowed the German emperor to cross his realm with his huge army. Saladin was furious at this complicity and denounced it as a treacherous act.⁶⁴ Though this battle

⁶² W. B. Stevenson, *The Crusaders in the East: A Brief History of the Wars of Islam with the Latins in Syria during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 4.

⁶³ Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, 179.

⁶⁴ ‘Imād Al-Dīn Al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Barq Al-Shāmī* (Amman: Mu’assasat ‘Abd Al-Ḥamīd Shūmān, 1987), 3:174.

was not directly against the Franks, it weakened and exposed the Franks of Antioch by making it impossible for the Byzantines to intervene for their rescue. It also made the Turkish presence in Anatolia permanent. As Runciman put it, “the disaster of Manzikert in 1071 allowed the Turks into Anatolia. The disaster of Myrioccephalum in 1176 ensured that they would remain there.”⁶⁵

The eastern front was the most active one, and here one finds the most intensive Turkic role in the counter-crusade. Two Turkic families, the Artuqids and the Zengids, led the counter-crusade on this front. The Artuqid family gave three leaders to the counter-crusade: the two brothers Suqmān and Īlghāzī and their nephew Balak. The Zengid family gave two others: ‘Imād Al-Dīn Zengi and his son Nūr Al-Dīn Maḥmūd.

In a very early success against the Franks before the crystallization of the counter-crusade as a religious and political movement, Suqmān Ibn Urtuq of Mārdīn was able, along with another Turkic emir, Jekermish of Mosul (r. 1101-1106), to defeat the Franks of Antioch and Edessa in the Battle of Ḥarran and to capture their leaders.⁶⁶ The Frankish defeats at Ḥarran “meant in the long run that the county of Edessa was doomed and that Aleppo would never pass into Frankish hands.”⁶⁷ Ḥarran opened the door for a more systematic counteroffensive on the eastern front.

For a few years, the championship of the counter-crusade moved from Mārdīn to Mosul with the Emir Mawdūd (r.1109-1113). Upon the frequent requests from the Muslims of Syria, the Seljuq sultan of Baghdad ordered Mawdūd to lead expeditions against the Franks. For four years, Mawdūd entered into indecisive skirmishes and battles against the Franks of Edessa, Antioch, and Jerusalem. He also led armies of rescue to both Aleppo and Damascus. In one occasion, Mawdūd and the Emir of Damascus, Ṭuḡtukān, infiltrated the territories of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. They besieged Tiberias, pillaged Galilee and defeated King Baldwin I at the Battle of Al-Şanbara.⁶⁸ A few days later, the Shi’a Nizārī Assassins murdered Mawdūd in the great Mosque of Damascus. The counter-crusade was back in the hands of the Artuqids.

The leader of the Battle of Ḥarran, Suqmān, was succeeded by his brother Īlghāzī who expanded his rule over Aleppo upon a request from the judge of the city Abū Al-Faḍl Ibn Al-Khashshāb. In 1119, Īlghāzī defeated the Franks in the Battle of *Ager Sanguinis* (the Field of Blood) in which the Frankish army of Antioch was almost annihilated as was their leader, the regent of Antioch Roger of Salerno. Balak was even more enthusiastic about fighting the Franks than his uncles. He inflicted a serious blow on the Franks when he ambushed and captured Count Joscelin I of Edessa in 1122.⁶⁹ He also captured King Baldwin II of Jerusalem who had tried to free Joscelin. In 1124 Balak strengthened the Islamic eastern front by making Aleppo his capital. But he was killed soon after by a stray arrow while besieging Manbij.⁷⁰ The last words he uttered were: “this arrow has killed all Muslims.”⁷¹ Maalouf believes that

⁶⁵ Steven Runciman, *History of the Crusades* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 3:450.

⁶⁶ Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 8:496; Al-Dhahabī, Shams Al-Dīn. *Tārīkh Al-Islām*. (Beirut: Dār Al-Kitāb Al-‘Arabī, 1987), 34:59.

⁶⁷ Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 2:44.

⁶⁸ Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 295.

⁶⁹ Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 8:672; Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh*, 5:227.

⁷⁰ Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat Al-Ṭalab*, 5:2234.

⁷¹ Kamāl Al-Dīn Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat Al-Ḥalab fī Tārīkh Ḥalab* (Damascus: Dār Al-Kitāb Al-‘Arabī, 1997), 1:289.

“Balak was right” in his statement.⁷² Upon his death, the people of Tyre, who were waiting for him to save their city from a Frankish siege, capitulated, and Aleppo fell into very ineffective hands. The death of Balak marked the end of the Artuqid leadership of the counter-crusade, and the emergence of a new Turkic family on the eastern front, the Zengids.

The Founder of the Zengid dynasty was ‘Imād Al-Dīn Zengi (1085-1146), Emir of Mosul, Aleppo, Hama and Edessa. Zengi’s most remarkable contribution to the counter-crusade was his capture in 1137 of Fulk of Anju the King of Jerusalem, and his Conquest of Edessa, the first Frankish state to fall.⁷³ The fall of Edessa in the Muslim hands had important consequences. It opened the road between Mosul and Aleppo through which fighters would pour for decades from northern Iraq into Syria and Egypt. When Zengi was murdered by the Shī‘a Nizārī Assassins in 1146, his son Nūr Al-Dīn took the banner. With Nūr Al-Dīn, the counter-crusade took a new ideological and military shape. Nūr Al-Dīn had a broad perspective on the war with the Franks. He worked hard and to build a united Muslim front that comprised Mosul, Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo. Nūr Al-Dīn’s contributions to the counter-crusade were many. He saved Damascus from the armies of the Second Crusades, and defeated the Franks in the Battle of Ināb 1149 in which the Prince of Antioch, Raymond of Poitiers (1136–1149), was killed. He also captured Joscelin II of Antioch in 1150, who died in his prison in 1159, and he imprisoned another Prince of Antioch, Raynald of Châtillon, for sixteen years.

Finally it was the Turkic sultans of Egypt, the Mamlūks, who conquered the last Frankish territories on the Syrian coast. Among these Mamlūk leaders was Rukn Al-Dīn Baybars (1223-1277), the Sultan of Egypt and Syria who, defeated the army of Lewis IX of France in Al-Manşūra in 1250, captured several Frankish holdings in Syria (Caesarea, Arsuf, Şafad, Jaffa, Krak des Chevaliers ...etc), and stripped Antioch from the Franks in 1268.⁷⁴ Baybars’ war on the Franks was a small portion of his amazing military career. His biographer ‘Izz Al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād counts seventeen cities and castles he took from the Franks, sixteen from his Sunnī rivals, eight from the Shī‘a Nizārīs, and three from the Mongols.⁷⁵ His most remarkable achievement was his crushing defeat of the Mongols at ‘Ayn Jālūt in 1260, a “victory [that] saved Islam from the most dangerous threat that it has ever had to face.”⁷⁶ No wonder Baybars was nicknamed by Muslim chroniclers “Father of Conquests” (Abū Al-Futūḥ)⁷⁷-- a nickname that was given previously only to the second rightly-guided Caliph of Islam and the prophet's companion, ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khṭṭāb (580-644).

After Baybars came two other Mamlūk Sultans who concluded the Muslim counter-crusade. The first was Sayf Al-Dīn Qalāwūn (r. 1279-1290) whose main contribution to the counter-crusade was his

⁷² Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 97.

⁷³ Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:131; Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat Al-Ḥalab*, 1:325; Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓim*, 18:39.

⁷⁴ Ismā‘īl Abū Al-Fidā’, *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār Al-Bashar* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba‘a Al-Ḥusayniyya Al-Miṣriyya, 1907), 3:181.

⁷⁵ Ibn Shaddād, ‘Izz Al-Dīn. *Tārīkh Al-Malik Al-Zāhir*(Beirut: Markaz Al-Ṭibā‘a Al-Ḥadītha, 1983), 321-324.

⁷⁶ Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 3:313.

⁷⁷ For example, Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Ibarfī Khabār man Ghabar*(Beirut: Dār al Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 3:331; Yūsuf Ibn Taghrī Bardā, *Al-Nujūm Al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa Al-Qāhira*(Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Culture, n.d.), 7:94; ‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Na‘īmī, *Al-Dāris fī Tārīkh Al-Madāris* (Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), 1:264; ‘Abd Al-Ḥay Ibn Al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt Al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab*.(Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1986), 7:610.

capture of Tripoli in 1289,⁷⁸ and Al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290-1293) who captured the last Frankish outposts, Beirut and Acre in 1291, marking the end of the crusades in the Levant.⁷⁹

Even the Khawarizmian Turkmen, who came to the Levant very late, had their important role in the counter-crusade. After being devastated by the Mongols, the remnants of their armies fled to Syria and recaptured Jerusalem in 1244 from the Franks. In the same year, they participated with Baybars in a crushing defeat of the Franks and their Muslim allies of Homs and Damascus in the Battle of La Forbie (Gaza) in which the Grand Master of the Templars and their Marshal were killed.⁸⁰ This long list of Turkic leaders and their contributions throughout two centuries justifies the premise of this study that the Muslim counter-crusade was in essence a Turkic phenomenon.

One legitimate objection that might be raised against the emphasis on the counter-crusade as a Turkic phenomenon is the role of Saladin, the most celebrated Muslim leader in the crusading era, who captured Jerusalem and most of the Syrian coast from the Franks. Since Saladin was ethnically Kurd, he evidently did not belong to the Arabs, the traditional elite of the Muslim society, or to the Turks, the emerging elite of his time. Saladin had probably faced a demographic challenge: the Kurds were good mountainous fighters, but their short numbers would not have allowed him and his family to build a strong empire on their own social solidarity, or ‘aşabiyya, to use Ibn Khaldūn’s terminology.

Geoffrey Regan rightly notices that Saladin was “a Kurd in an empire dominated by the Turks,”⁸¹ and the same thing can be said about Saladin’s father and uncle. But Saunders gives the credit for the rise of the two men to Nūr Al-Dīn “who made the brotherhood of Islam a reality and political benefit.”⁸² Not only had Saladin to face the Turkic military and political dominance, but he also had to deal with the Arab cultural dominance in Syria and Egypt. He needed to infiltrate the Turkic military elite, as well as the Arab (and Arabized) intellectual elite, and he succeeded in that beyond the conventional limitations, partly because of his ability to integrate himself within the Arab-Turkic middle ground, but more importantly because of his deep attachment to the Islamic identity and solidarity.

As for the Turkic factor, Saladin, like his father and uncle, started his military and political career under the tutorship of the Turk Nūr Al-Dīn; then he succeeded Nūr Al-Dīn in the rule of Syria and Egypt. Some of Saladin’s own military commanders were Turks, such as Muẓaffar Al-Dīn Kūjk, Saladin’s brother-in-law and one of his leaders at Hattin. Saladin always had a substantial Turkish element within his soldiery. Saunders describes it as “a Kurdo-Turkish army,”⁸³ and it seems that the Turkic element was demographically dominant. Ibn Shaddād highlights Saladin’s dependence on the Turkmen fighters, and “the huge number of Turkmen” joining him and fighting with him.⁸⁴

Saladin's self-identification with both the Turks and the Arabs proves his broadmindedness and political wisdom. An anecdote of Arabic literature illustrates Saladin's self-identification with the Turks: an Arab poet from Mosul named Ibn al-Dahhan came to the camp of Saladin seeking his generosity, but Saladin's secretary reminded the Sultan that this poet had composed previously a satirical poem in which he accused the Turks of the lack of appreciation for poetry, saying:

⁷⁸ Abū Al-Fidā’, *Al-Mukhtaṣar*, 4:23.

⁷⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya*, 13:321, 377.

⁸⁰ On the Battle of La Forbie, see Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 3:226-227.

⁸¹ Geoffrey Reagan, *Saladin and the Fall of Jerusalem* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Greenhill Books, 2002), 15.

⁸² Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 163.

⁸³ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 166.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Ibn Shaddād, *Al-Nawādir*, 273, 314.

"Do you really praise the Turks seeking their generosity?"

The Turks are still negligent regarding poetry."

Saladin felt gave the poet a hundred dirhams and say: "this is a gift for you, so you do not say in the future that the Turks don't appreciate poetry."⁸⁵

The Arabs' cultural domination was an easier challenge to Saladin's legitimacy, because he himself was deeply rooted in the chivalric culture of the ancient Arabs. Ibn Shaddād notices that Saladin "knew by heart the Arab genealogies and their major battles and he knew their history and their way of life. He even knew by heart the genealogies of the Arabian horses."⁸⁶

The most important factor in Saladin's emergence and leadership is his emphasis on Islam as a unifying factor between this human mosaic of races and ethnicities. Saladin was skillful in his use of moral power, and he proved successful in that. Still, even with this moral authority, Saladin cannot be disconnected from his Turkish environment, since according to some scholars, he was emulating the example of his Turkish tutor Nūr Al-Dīn.⁸⁷

Therefore, the triumph of Saladin and the Ayyūbid phenomena do not invalidate this main premise that the counter-crusade was a Turkic enterprise. Saladin should be treated as a part of the Turkish military elite that occupied the center-stage of medieval Islam for more than eight centuries; not only because he himself was "the product of the Seljūq renaissance"⁸⁸ as Loewe rightly notices, or because he had many Turkic leaders and fighters in his armies, but also because the Ayyubid Empire he founded was no more than a short transition between the Turkic Seljuqs and the Turkic Mamlūks and Ottomans.

One reason for this crucial Turkish role in the counter-crusade was the fact that the Turks provided Muslim societies with the three main elements they needed to fight the Franks: religious enthusiasm, military ethos and skills, and a sense of unity and order. An intellectual and religious revival started before the crusades, with the great Seljuq vizier Ḥusayn Al-Ṭūsī, better known as Niẓām Al-Mulk (1018-1092), who founded several theological universities to combat the Shī'a Ismā'īlī ideology. He was competing with the Fatimid schools and seminaries, especially the most celebrated university in Islamic history, Al-Azhar of Fatimid Cairo. Among the universities built by Niẓām Al-Mulk was Al-Niẓāmiyya college of Baghdad in which the great anti-Isma'ili philosopher and mystic, Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), was a professor.

Niẓām Al-Mulk himself attacked the Shī'a Ismā'īlīs fiercely in his book, *Siyāsat-Nāmah*, and warns the Seljuq Sultan of their infiltration of the state bureaucracy.⁸⁹ The Ismā'īlīs were not forgiving, and Niẓām Al-Mulk was one of the first victims of their political assassinations.

Al-Ghazālī was rightly described as "the ablest defender" of Sunnism against heresy.⁹⁰ He dedicated his *Faḍā'ih Al-Bāṭiniyya (Scandals of the Esotericists)* to discredit the Shī'a Ismā'īlīs, whom he calls with the pejorative name *Al-Bāṭiniyya*. The book was written upon a request from the Abbasid

⁸⁵ Ibn Al-'Imād, *Shadharāt Al-Dhahab*, 6:443.

⁸⁶ Bahā' Al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, *Al-Nawādir Al-Sultāniyya wa Al-Maḥāsīn Al-Yusufiyya, aw Sirat Ṣalāh Al-Dīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Khanjī, 1994), 70.

⁸⁷ For example, Shākir Muṣṭafā, *Ṣalāh Al-Dīn Al-Ayyūbi: Al-Fāris Al-Mudjāhid wa Al-Malik Al-Zāhid Al-Muftarā 'Alayh* (Damascus: Dār Al-Qalam, 1998), 47.

⁸⁸ Loewe, "The Seljūqs," 4:299.

⁸⁹ Ḥusayn Al-Ṭūsī Niẓām Al-Mulk, *Siyāsat-Nāmah aw Siyar Al-Mulūk* (Doha: Dār Al-Thaqāfa, 1986), 235.

⁹⁰ Saunders, *History of Medieval Islam*, 152.

Caliph, Al-Mustazhir (r. 1094-1118) and its ninth chapter was dedicated to prove the political legitimacy of that caliph.⁹¹ It was one of the most systematic Sunnī attacks on Ismāʿīlism, though Al-Ghazālī himself could not escape the influence of Ismāʿīlī philosophy.⁹²

The Turkish leaders of the counter-crusade continued this legacy of Nizām Al-Mulk, by subsidizing the religious and scientific learning. The famous Moorish traveler Ibn Jubayr was deeply impressed with the schools and hospitals that Nūr Al-Dīn established in Damascus, and he even calls these institutions “a source of pride for Islam.”⁹³ Two of these institutions are still among the historical landmarks of Damascus today, the Nūriyya Ḥadīth College and *Al-Bimarstan* hospital that serves now as the Museum of Arab Medicine and Science in the Syrian capital. It was Nūr Al-Dīn who also established the first religious schools in Aleppo with the unequivocal purpose of restoring Sunnism.⁹⁴

The sponsorship to religious learning seems to have had created what Cahen calls “a partial moral rearmament,”⁹⁵ and Reagan calls “a moral rebirth of a united Islam.”⁹⁶ This phenomenon was called by other scholars a ‘Sunnī revival’⁹⁷, because its manifestations were mainly Sūnnī, and its main objective was the consolidation of Sunnī tradition and the intellectual defeat of Shīʿism. This was true especially in the Arab lands, where the followers of Sunnism had been challenged for long period of time by the reign of the Buyids in Baghdad and the Fatimids in Egypt.

In summary, one can say that the Muslim defensive Jihad against the Crusade was mainly a Turkic endeavor. This Jihad for the protection of the House of Islam was one of the major factors that led to the Turkification of Islam, i.e. the dominance of the Turks in the Islamic heartland for centuries. The Turk's leading role in repelling the Crusaders in the twelfth and thirteen centuries legitimized their dominance in the eyes of the Muslim scholars and general public, and paved the way ultimately to the birth of the Turkish Ottoman empire—the most powerful empire in Islamic history. Today, the Islamic heartland is bleeding and disintegrating, and it is infiltrated by all sorts of outsider enemies, because it lacks a political and military center of gravity that is able to impose a sense of order inside, and provide protection against the enemies outside. The American political scientist Samuel Huntington's theory of post-cold war international relations is useful to understand the place of Turkey within this context. Huntington's theory is based on the necessity of “the core states of civilizations” or the stability of the international order: “In this world, the core states of civilizations are sources of order within civilizations and, through negotiations with other core states, between civilizations.”⁹⁸

Huntington notices that “lacking a recognized core state, Islam is intensifying its common consciousness but so far has developed only a rudimentary common political structure,”⁹⁹ and that “the

⁹¹ Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾih Al-Bāṭiniyya* (Kuwait: Dār Al-Kutub Al-Thaqāfiyya, n.d.), 169-194.

⁹² For the Ismāʿīlī influence on Al-Ghazālī's thought, see Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 100.

⁹³ Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dār Dār Al-Hilāl, n.d.), 198.

⁹⁴ More on Nūr Al-Dīn's policy of Sūnnī revival see Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dār Al-Fikr, 1995), 57:118-124; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ḥalab”.

⁹⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Crusades.”

⁹⁶ Reagan, *Saladin and the Fall of Jerusalem*, 114.

⁹⁷ For example, Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 11-25; Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis*, 7.

⁹⁸ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 156.

⁹⁹ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*, 155.

absence of an Islamic core state poses major problems for both Muslim and non-Muslim societies."¹⁰⁰ Among all contemporary Muslim-majority countries, Huntington rightly found that "Turkey has the history, population, middle level of economic development, national coherence, and military tradition and competence to be the core state of Islam."¹⁰¹

Taking into account the historical background we presented in this study, and the six factors that qualify the Republic of Turkey to be the future "core state" of Islamic civilization according to Huntington, and combining them with the Islamic revival in Turkey throughout the last few decades, and the recent effort build a new strategic partnership and to create a new 'middle ground' between the Turks and the Arabs, it might be legitimate to expect a new phase of the Islamization of the Turks and Turkification of Islam in the twenty first century.

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¹⁰⁰ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*, 135.

¹⁰¹ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*, 178.

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