

# Unsheathing Poet's Sword Again: The Crusades in Arabic Anticolonial Poetry before 1948

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Both Arab and Western scholars agree that, starting in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the correlation of Western Europeans with the Crusaders and the extrapolation of the term “Crusade” to modern military conflicts have become an integral part of modern Arab political discourse, and are also widely reflected in Arab culture. The existence of works examining references to the theme of the Crusades in Arab social thought, politics, and culture of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contrasts with the almost complete absence of specialized studies devoted to the analysis of references to this historical era in Arab culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. An analysis of references to the era of the Crusades in the work of Arab poets before 1948 shows that, already in the period of the Arab Revival, this topic occupied an important place in the imagery of anti-colonial poetry, and not only in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, historically attacked by the Crusaders, but also in other regions of the Arab world. If, before World War I, Arab poets only praised the commanders of the past who defeated the Crusaders, then afterwards the theme of the Crusades was also used to liken the European colonialists to the “medieval Franks”. The authors of the poems containing images from the era of the Crusades were, among others, the participants of the Arab Uprising of 1936–1939 and the Arab-Israeli War of 1947–1949, who set their goal with the help of poetry to mobilize the masses for the struggle.

*Keywords:* Crusades, Arabic poetry, nationalism, Arab Revival, anticolonial struggle.

The role of the past in the life of Arab societies has always been extremely important: stories from various historical periods have been widely used to explain causal relationships between modern events. Starting with the classical period of Arab history, this phenomenon can be observed in all main areas of intellectual life of Arab civilization: science, politics, religion, and culture [1, pp. 232–234]. Therefore, it is important to find out how history helps the Arabs to shape their subjectivity and how they identify their enemies and allies based on historical examples. Studying such issues is actual, first of all, in connection with the quest for a new Arab identity that is one of the most important challenges faced by modern Arab societies.

In dealing with these subjects, Arab intellectuals regularly cite examples from the era of the Crusades in their statements and publications, generally because this period of Middle Eastern and North African history was for the first time marked by a direct European invasion. If in previous centuries Europeans only counterattacked Muslims in Andalusia and Sicily, then during the Crusades they took possession of the third holy city

of Islam, Jerusalem, for more than a hundred years (1099–1187, 1229–1244). In 1182–1183, even Mecca and Medina were under the threat of invasion. On the other hand, this historical era is a unique example of the long military confrontation between Europe and the Muslim East in the past, during which Muslims initially lost some lands to the European conquerors, but in the end were able to completely rout and expel them. This narrative of a dramatic confrontation, in which Western Europe in the end suffered a military defeat, makes the period of the Crusades extremely advantageous for drawing analogies with modern times<sup>1</sup>.

Modern scholars point out that after 1948, the association of the modern West with the Medieval Crusades became a distinguishing point of Arabic social and political discourses [3, pp.175–186]. Many famous Arab politicians and religious leaders appealed to the Crusades: Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn and Mu‘ammar Qadhdfāfi, who used anti-crusader rhetoric in nationalist and socialist narratives, and the renowned Islamists, such as ‘Abdullāh ‘Azzām and Usāma bin Lādin, who called their followers to wage jihad against modern Europeans, considering them New Crusaders. Many references to the Crusades can also be found in the Arab culture of the 1950<sup>s</sup>–2000<sup>s</sup>: one should note poems by Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Nizār Qabbānī, Adūnīs, Aḥmad Maṭar and other well-known poets, novels, films and series, plays and comics.

A significant number of separate studies have been devoted to the Arab anti-crusading discourse of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> — early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. However, the roots of this phenomenon have not yet been thoroughly analyzed and most examples of the use of the theme of the Crusades in Arab socio-political discourse and culture are cited from sources after 1948<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it seems important to study the functioning of the theme of the Crusades in the Arab culture of the previous period — in the 19<sup>th</sup> — first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The object of research is the Arabic anti-colonial poetry of the period under consideration. The choice of this subject is defined by the significance of the poetry in the Arab culture, because ever since pre-Islamic times, this kind of art has played a large role in the life of Arab society, serving the purposes of self-identification and as a weapon against enemies [4, p. 130]. Thus, it would be no exaggeration to say that the Arabic poetry, both in literary language and dialects, should be considered as the most important source for studying the views and moods that existed in a certain region of the Arab world in a particular period.

The historiography of the issue has a limited number of works. Carol Hillenbrand mostly addresses the perception of the Crusades and Crusaders by medieval Muslims and briefly mentions the perception of the era of the Crusades in the Muslim world in the 19<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It is also important to note that the vast majority of Hillenbrand’s examples date back to the period starting from 1950<sup>s</sup> [5]. Umej Bhatia presents only a general survey of the use of the Crusades image by the representatives of various Islamic ideological movements since the 1950<sup>s</sup>. The author briefly mentions several examples of the theme of the Crusades in discourses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while also completely disregarding the period between the two World Wars [6]. Omar Sayfo does not address

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<sup>1</sup> Although the final military defeat of the Crusades is a key point of reference to this topic among Arab politicians and public figures of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries, some Arab authors of this period emphasize that, in the long run Europe, has benefited from the Crusades. See for example [2].

<sup>2</sup> 1948 as the year of the formation of the state of Israel is often considered as the turning point, marking the extensive growth of the Anti-western rhetoric in Arabic social thought, politics and culture.

the issue of preserving and reproducing the memory of the Crusades as a whole, focusing only on the figure of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (1138–1193) [7, pp. 65–85].

In an article devoted to heroic personalities in the literature of Muslim countries, Werner Ende mentions the *qasida* *‘Azīm al-nās man yabkī al-‘izām* (Great is the one who mourns the great) by Egyptian poet Aḥmad Shawqī (1868–1932), dedicated to the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941) in the mausoleum of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in 1899 [8, pp. 70–94]. Mattityahu Peled notes references to the theme of the Crusades in Palestinian poetry during the period of the Arab-Israeli war of 1947–1949 in his article *Annals of Doom: Palestinian Literature — 1917–1948* [9, pp. 143–183]. Boris Chukov, in his study *Stat’ s vekom naravne* [10] (Stand Equal to the Century), which discusses the heritage of Iraqi poets, points out the mentions of the Crusades in the poetry of the Mosul author Muḥammad al-‘Ubaydī (1882–1963).

I should also note the studies of Jonathan Phillips: in the last chapter of his fundamental monograph devoted to the biography of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, he analyzes preserving the memory of this historical figure in the Middle East. From the period of the 19<sup>th</sup> — first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Phillips cites parts of two poems of the Palestinian poet Burhān al-Dīn al-‘Abūshī (1911–1995) [11, pp. 364–365].

Although some examples of references to the Crusades in the period under review were mentioned by scholars, this topic needs a more thorough and comprehensive study. The purpose of the article is to consider in what contexts and in connection with what events Arab poets turned to the theme of the Crusades in the 19<sup>th</sup> — first half of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sources of the study are the poetry in literary Arabic and the authors of the poems chosen for analysis are among the most (or simply the most) popular Arab poets of their time. Methodologically, I rely on the analysis of the image of *the Other*, since the study of the image of the crusader-enemy is an important part of the examination of the formation of imagined communities in the Arab world, since by defining its enemy the community thus identifies itself.

Already in the era of the Crusades, Arab poets repeatedly addressed the theme of the Crusader invasion, mourning the lost territories, calling for jihad, or praising Muslim commanders. The poetry of this period and its role in the struggle against the Franks were discussed in detail in the works *The Cutting Edge of the Poet’s Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades* [12] by Osman Latif (my article’ title refers to this work) and *Jihad Poetry in the Age of the Crusades* [13, pp. 9–25] by Carol Hillenbrand.

It should be noted that, although after the Crusaders were expelled from the Middle East, the memory of the Crusades and Muslim commanders such as Nūr al-Dīn Zankī, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Baybars was preserved in Arab cultural memory (primarily in Arabic folk Epic), in the Ottoman period until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Crusades very rarely appeared in Arabic poetry in literary language. The reason for this was the regression of the Arabic poetic genre of epic poems, *qasida*, which, as modern literary scholars note, degraded during the Ottoman period. As indicated by Muhammad Badawi, this phenomenon had several reasons: the inefficiency of the “educational system, which was mainly theocentric in nature, and therefore did not encourage personal initiative and originality”, the “lack of patronage” by “Turks who did not speak Arabic”, as well as substitution of Arabic by Turkish as the official language [14, pp. 6–7].

This point of view is disputed by Hussein Kadhim. He notes that even in the period of the Umayyad Caliphate, the *qasidas* were written more and more often in connection with

certain “heroic” events. The epochs of Umayyads (661–750) and Abbasids (750–1258) were “heroic” periods, rich for the occasions that inspired famous authors of *qasidas*, such as Abū Tammām (788–845) and al-Mutanabbī (915–965). Such reasons could have been both joyful and sad, but their main feature was that they brought the hero in a fierce confrontation with the enemy, i.e. the Byzantines, fate, etc. Thus, we can detect a connection between the decline of the *qasida* genre and the lack of “special cases”, which provided poets with suitable themes for writing such works. The reason for this was a sharp turn in the political fate of the Arabs, when most of the Arab world by the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century fell under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. During Ottoman period, Arab lands and their populations were left out of active political life, and this state of affairs did not change for centuries [15, p. 36].

The form of *qasida* received a new life in the work of Arab poets-neoclassicists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The reason for this most likely was the activation of political life in the Arab countries of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the “Arab Revival”. At this time, Egypt and Syria became the two main centers of renovation movements in the Arab world. People of art in these regions had different approaches to the search for the source of inspiration for the revival of Arab culture: Egyptians focused primarily on the revival of the Arab-Muslim heritage, while Syrians and Lebanese felt it necessary to turn to European culture as a source of possible borrowings [16, pp. 6–8]. Such a division is, however, rather theoretical because of the fact that many Syrian and Lebanese people of art worked in Egypt for most of their lives. At the same time, representatives of both movements, following the social, political and religious figures of their time, recognized the importance of the Crusades as a source of examples of Arab-European interactions in the Middle East, and actively turned to this historical period in their works of art.

Numerous examples of appeals to the Crusader theme are presented in the works of the famous Egyptian poet Aḥmad Shawqī (1868–1932). The future poet, playwright and translator graduated from the Higher School of Law in Cairo in 1884, and from 1887 to 1891 studied law in France. After returning to Egypt, Aḥmad Shawqī until 1914 remained a court poet of the Egyptian Khedives. According to most Arab scholars, Aḥmad Shawqī can rightly be considered the most popular and influential Arab poet of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [17, p. 38].

The first poem by Aḥmad Shawqī, related to the events of the Crusades, was *Kibār al-hawādith fi wādī al-nīl* (The Greatest Events in the Nile Valley) [18, pp. 25–35], written in 1894<sup>3</sup> and first read in Geneva the same year at the International Congress of Orientalists. The poem referred to the Ayyubids and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn personally, as well as to the French king Louis IX of France, the organizer and participant of the Crusades to Egypt (1248–1254) and Tunisia (1270).

1. Once the cross came out and those who bore it,  
The West stepped forward: its people, and women,
2. In the souls of whom dreams pranced  
And blood was boiling in their hearts
3. They intended to destroy justice,  
And the people, and the faith of those who brought the truth,

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<sup>3</sup> Werner Ende notes only the very fact of the presence of the name Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in this poem and does not mention other references to the era of the Crusades in this *qasida* (See [8, pp. 70–94]).

4. And with singing and crosses they destroyed,  
What was erected,
5. But resolute people stood against them,  
And they erected a tent protecting the faith,
6. And scattered [the Crusader] army throughout the country,  
As the light scatters darkness,
7. And the beardless king was captured<sup>4</sup> ...<sup>5</sup>

In this poem, the poet glorified the victory of the Mamluks over the Crusaders of the Seventh Crusade and spoke of their unfulfilled dreams of conquering the lands of the “true faith” i.e. Islam.

Another poem by Aḥmad Shawqī related to the Crusades was the previously mentioned *qasida* *‘Azīm al-nās man yabkī al-‘izām* (Great is the one who mourns the great)<sup>6</sup> [18, p.832], written in 1899. The reason for its writing was the visit of Kaiser William II to Jerusalem in 1898. The route chosen by the Kaiser to travel to Jerusalem was deeply symbolic, as it repeated the route of the Crusader armies of the First Crusade. William II rode into the city on a white horse, he was dressed in a white robe, wearing a steel helmet, thus representing himself as a modern Crusader knight. On his return trip, he visited Damascus, where he declared himself the defender of Islam and visited the grave of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, calling him “a knight without fear and reproach, often forced to teach his opponents what chivalry is” [8, pp.70–94].

1. Great is the one who mourns the great,  
And cries for them, although he himself is great,
2. And better than if the clouds appear in a drought,  
When a young man enlivens with praise of the noble,
3. And there is no reason not to repay them,  
But how to reward them besides words?
4. And does someone tell Wilhelm,  
About how I praise his act?
5. Allah brought you to a noble ruler,  
You visited a valiant king in his wealth,
6. I see oblivion became his thirst,  
And when you stood at his grave, you became rain clouds.

In the same 1899, Aḥmad Shawqī published an article on the Kaiser’s visit in the pan-Islamic anti-British newspaper *al-Mu‘ayyad* (Support), funded by Sultan Abdulhamid II. In the article, the poet argued that of all the great Muslims of the past, no one after the first four righteous caliphs was as worthy of praise as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Mehmet Fatih (1432–1481). At the same time, Shawqī asked a rhetorical question, why Muslim writers were slow in awakening the memory of these historical figures, and the Kaiser had to

<sup>4</sup> This epithet *Amrad al-mulūk* (Beardless King) denotes Louis IX.

<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter, besides the specially mentioned cases, the translation of poems is made by the author of the article.

<sup>6</sup> This *qasida* also has a second name: *Taḥiyyat ghalyūm al-thānī li ṣalāḥ al-dīn fi al-qabr* (Greetings of William II to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn at his grave).

remind the Arabs about the role of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in their history [8, pp.70–94]. Though, it would be wrong to conclude from this statement that the Arabs forgot the era of the Crusades and the figure of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, since Aḥmad Shawqī most likely deliberately presented the situation in a tragic light in order to shame Arab writers who did not pay enough attention to glorious pages of Arab history in their works.

We find another appeal to the theme of the Crusades in the poem *al-Uṣṭūl al-‘uthmānī* (The Ottoman fleet) [18, pp.309–311]. This *qasida* was written by Aḥmad Shawqī, impressed by the military power of two Ottoman warships acquired from Germany, which he saw while he was in Istanbul.

1. Your strength will be strengthened, and misfortunes [of the enemy] will increase, Empower your victory, and the troubles of [the enemy] will multiply,
2. What is the use of many ships, If their banners are not fluttering proudly.
3. When I saw you, I cried for joy, I stood watching and asking:
4. Are there Lūlū or Tāriq at the sea, So that the flags may fly over them?

The author cited Ḥusām al-Dīn Lūlū, the commander of the Egyptian fleet, who fought against the Crusaders during the reign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, as an example of the brilliant Muslim naval commander, which should serve as an example for contemporaries. Lūlū gained the greatest fame thanks to his successful operations against the Renault de Chatillon’s fleet in the Red Sea, when in 1182–1183 the Crusaders launched an expedition to attack Mecca and Medina. Lūlū defeated Renault’s fleet and brought to Cairo many Frankish captives who were executed by the order of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn [19, pp.436–437]. It should be noted that Lūlū cannot be attributed to the most famous characters of the era of the Crusades, but he was known to Aḥmad Shawqī. The poet mentions this naval commander without any explanation regarding his identity, putting him on a par with Tāriq ibn Ziyād (670–720), the commander who launched the Muslim conquest of Spain.

The poet also touched on the Crusades in the poem *al-Andalus al-jadīda* (New Andalusia) [18, pp.315–319], written in 1913. This *qasida* was composed after the fall of Edirne (Adrianople) during the First Balkan War (1912–1913) [20, p.52].

It is important to emphasize that the studies concerning the preservation of the memory of the Crusades and their personalities by the Arabs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mainly mention<sup>7</sup> only one *qasida* of Aḥmad Shawqī — *‘Aẓīm al-nās man yabkī al-‘izām*, although references to the history of the Crusades are contained in many of his works.

I should also note that Aḥmad Shawqī mentioned in verses not only famous rulers, but also less-known historical figures of the Crusades. At the same time, the heroes names were given without any explanation and in short form or the character was indicated only by an epithet: for example, Louis IX in *qasida Kibār al-ḥawādith fī wādī al-nīl* was called just “the beardless King”, the Egyptian naval commander Ḥusām al-Dīn Lūlū was referred to in the *qasida al-Uṣṭūl al-‘uthmānī* simply as “Lūlū”, Yūsuf Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī in *qasida al-Andalus al-jadīda* was shortly called Yūsuf. These facts allow us to conclude that

<sup>7</sup> Besides the W. Ende’s mentioning of the presence of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s name in the *qasida Kibār al-ḥawādith fī wādī al-nīl* (Greatest events in the Nile Valley).

the poet expected these characters to have been well-known for the readers. In the case of Louis IX and the events of the Seventh Crusade, it is not possible to establish whether Aḥmad Shawqī received information about them from Arab or European sources, however, in the case of Ḥusām al-Dīn Lūlū, it can be said with great certainty that the poet learned about the most glorious episode in the biography of this naval commander precisely from the Arab-Muslim tradition.

Such an assumption is based primarily on the fact that the story about the defeat of the Crusader fleet in the Red Sea by Lūlū and the rescue of Mecca and Medina from the Crusader attack is known only from Arab medieval sources, and European chronicles of the Crusades era do not mention these events<sup>8</sup>. Although the figure of Ḥusām al-Dīn Lūlū was undoubtedly known to the European mediaevalists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>, the course and the dramatic consequences of Renault's expedition were first reconstructed in detail in European historiography based on the chronicles of Ibn al-Athīr, al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Jubayr, only in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century in the fundamental work *A History of the Crusades* (1952) by Sir Steven Runciman [19, pp. 436–437].

Another author who addressed the topic of the Crusades was the Iraqi poet Muḥammad Habib al-'Ubaydī (1882–1963). A native of Mosul, al-'Ubaydī came from a noble and ancient family. His teacher was the famous Mosul poet Aḥmad Fakhri (d. 1927), who taught al-'Ubaydī theological and philological disciplines.

Al-'Ubaydī became interested in politics in his youth. At the age of seventeen, he composed *qasida Alwāḥ al-ḥaqā'iq* (Tablets of Truths, 1899), which, however, became widely known only after it was presented to the public in 1912 at a literary club in Istanbul [10, p. 259]. This *qasida* is a *hamziya*<sup>10</sup>, consisting of 500 baits. Its text is divided into 36 parts.

The main idea of the work is a warning to Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire against ethnic hatred in the difficult historical period that the Ottoman state was going through. Al-'Ubaydī called on Muslims to unity and preservation of the Ottoman caliphate, which was being attacked by “godless” Western states. At the beginning of the poem, the author glorified the heroes who sacrificed their lives for the integrity and prosperity of the Ottoman Empire, and then went on to describe the glorious episodes from the history of Islam, starting with the prophetic mission of Muḥammad.

1. Fate was cruel to us, and we fought  
With fate, answering her the same
2. In an environment where people freeze with fear,  
Hearts break and entrails decompose
3. We haven't received anything from fate from the share of happiness owed to us,  
It had already lost its taste for everything except its glass of golden wine.
4. Where is among the people the one who perpetuates memory  
And fill the pages of periodicals with brilliance and splendor?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The only Latin source mentioning the Renault expedition to the Red Sea is the Chronicle of Ernole, and it does not mention the fighting with the Egyptian fleet, and the expedition itself is described as a research one. See [19, p. 437].

<sup>9</sup> Ḥusām al-Dīn Lūlū is repeatedly mentioned by Ibn Shaddad (1145–1234) in his work on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, well known to European scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>10</sup> *Qasida*, in which the lines end by *hamza*.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by B. V. Chukov, see [10, p. 260].

The plot of *qasida* is built according to the following scheme: modern events — medieval history — modern events. One of these episodes is dedicated to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī and the Crusades. Citing examples from the glorious history of Islam, the poet was insisting on that Muslims need a new leader, similar to the heroes of the past, one of which was Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who liberated Jerusalem from the Crusaders.

The theme of the resistance against the invasion of Franks also appears in the *qasidas* of the other artists of the Arab Revival such as Egyptian poet Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1871–1932) and Lebanese author Abū al-Faḍl al-Walīd (1886–1941)<sup>12</sup>.

Summarizing the analysis of the image of the Crusades in the Arabic poetry culture of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> — early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is important to note that in the period under review, the theme of the Crusades was reflected in the revived classical genres, *qasida*. Poets Aḥmad Shawqī and Muḥammad al-‘Ubaydī in their poems presented the Crusades as a time of glorious victories of Muslims, which should inspire contemporaries to confront Europeans. At the same time, both Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who was well-known to Europeans, and the Egyptian naval commander Ḥusām al-Dīn Lūlū, the savior of Mecca and Medina from the Crusaders, appeared as examples of ideal military leaders.

A romantic view of the Crusades as a time of glorious victories, presented by Shawqī and al-‘Ubaydī, goes along with image of the Crusades in the works of playwrights and novelists Najīb al-Ḥaddād (1867–1899), Jirjī Zaydān (1861–1914) and Farāḥ Anṭūn (1874–1922). The romantic image of this era as the time of noble rulers, such as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who can decide the fate of the Middle East, was based on the one hand on the European romantic perception of this period of history, on the other, on the historical optimism of the leaders of the “Arab Revival”, who projected the events of medieval history onto the present. They probably hoped that in their time there would be a leader, capable of resisting European expansion, as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Nūr al-Dīn or Baybars.

The nature of the Arab anti-colonial poetry changed during the World War I. Describing this kind of poetry, Hussein Kadim divides the neoclassical anti-colonial *qasidas* into two types: polemical and representative. Polemical *qasidas* criticize the actions of the colonialists or the passivity of compatriots in the fight against them, while *qasidas* of a representative type are designed to show the brutal realities of colonial rule and its consequences for the population of the colonies [15, p. 10]. It should be added that both types of *qasidas* often contain historical references: in the first case, the poet argues with the colonialists, referring to past events, while in the poems of the second type, the author reminds his compatriots of the glorious deeds of their ancestors, setting them an example for contemporaries through the references to Arab history.

It is crucial to mention that if Arab poets tried only to praise the glorious commanders who fought crusaders in the past before World War I, then after and during the Great War the image of the Crusades became widespread in *qasidas* of both types: vividly responding to political transformations and military clashes, Arab poets even regularly turned to anti-Crusader rhetoric.

One of the reasons for that was the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration. In 1917, during the World War I, the British government issued a public statement supporting the creation of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, which remained the province of the Ottoman Empire during that time. The declaration was contained in a

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<sup>12</sup> Although these poets on par with Shawqī and al-‘Ubaydī kept composing new poems after the World War I, most of their most well-known and influential *qasidas* were written before it.



letter dated November 2, 1917, sent by British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour (1848–1930) to the leader of the British Jewish community Lionel Rothschild (1868–1937) and transferred later to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. The text of the declaration was published in print on November 9, 1917 [21, p. 50].

A vivid example of the use of Crusader images in connection with this event we find in the work of the Lebanese poet Rashīd Salīm al-Khūrī (1887–1984), who was nicknamed *al-Shā'ir al-qarawī* (Village poet) and *Shā'ir al-'urūba* (Poet of the Arab world). Al-Khūrī was born in the village of Barbara near Byblos. At the age of 13, he moved to Sidon and entered the American School of Art, and then the American University of Beirut. After graduation, he started teaching in secondary schools in Beirut and Tripoli.

Al-Khūrī adhered to the ideas of Arab nationalism and devoted several *qasidas* to the struggle against imperialism and inter-religious contradictions in the Arab world [22, p. 11]. In 1917, he published his famous *qasida Wa'd balfūr* (Balfour Declaration) [23, pp. 71–84]:

1. The truth is more than you and your declarations,  
Take it good, arrogant man,
2. You prepare declarations and demand their implementation,  
Relocating worshipers, you will be banished, colonialist!..
18. Arabs, the time has come for retribution,  
Today you will take revenge with pride
19. Thy people are calling for you, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, arise,  
May the valor from sleep be awakened and guard us,
20. The Crusaders forgot how you taught them before death,  
Go back to them and remind Richard,
21. The best to remember your sword,  
Let them ask him, he will not argue...

In this *qasida*, the poet directly compared modern Europeans to the Crusaders. The poet resurrected the memory of the Crusades as a glorious period in Arab history, when “Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn taught Richard the Lionheart a lesson”. Although it is not clear whether the author meant by “Crusaders” only European colonialists or also Zionist activists, this poem is the first example of the use of the anti-Crusader rhetoric in connection with the theme of Zionism and Jewish migration to Palestine in Arabic poetry.

Another *qasida*, referring to the era of the Crusades, was written by the famous Iraqi poet and researcher Ma'rūf al-Ruṣāfī (1875–1945). The future writer was born in Baghdad, studied at the *al-Rushdiyya* military school, but failed his final exams. Later he studied linguistics and Islamic disciplines, taught Arabic in high school [24, pp. 22–26]. In 1908 he left for Istanbul, where until 1918 he taught Arabic and actively participated in public life. In 1918–1921 he was a political activist in Syria and Palestine. Since 1921 he lived in Iraq, taught Arabic and literature, worked at the Ministry of Education, and in 1930 was elected to parliament.

Al-Ruṣāfī is considered one of the founders of Iraqi social poetry. Among the main themes of his poems was the British occupation of Iraq [24, pp. 22–26]. Impressed by the speech delivered by General Gouraud in Beirut, al-Ruṣāfī composed *qasida* called *Maḏāhir al-ta'aṣṣub fī 'aṣr al-madaniyya* (Manifestations of the fanaticism in the civilized era) [25, pp. 625–626].

1. Easy, General Gouraud,  
Your words upset us!
2. You came to the East after the peace agreement,  
Upsetting Muslim affairs,
3. And a humble man approached you, and he was Muslim,  
He appealed to you with open sympathy, and you accepted it,
4. And he expressed feelings  
Of respect and obeisance for your people,
5. And you turned to him at a meeting of people with a speech,  
Praising yourself and assuming airs,
6. Recalled the people of the cross and the war against them,  
And how your heroes went to the East,
7. And you spoke about Franks, your people,  
That they are the descendants of the heroes of those battles,
8. You aroused the sorrow that lives in the East,  
You revived the era of the campaigns to the East,
9. You have done us evil by recalling that epoch,  
And the ages and generations have been enraged,
10. And you reminded us of the Crusade,  
Which your people hope for now...

In this poem, al-Ruṣāfi accused Gouraud of the fact that to the respectful treatment from Muslims of the Middle East, he responded with a reminder of the era of the Crusades and the heroism of the Crusaders who fought in the Holy Land, and recalled that modern Europeans were proud of them. At the same time, al-Ruṣāfi stated that the memories of the Crusades era made the people of the East grieve.

The theme of the Crusades was also reflected in the later works of Aḥmad Shawqī. In 1925, Aḥmad Shawqī published *qasida Nakbat dimashq* (Catastrophe in Damascus), which was triggered by the massive shelling and bombing of Damascus by French troops on October 18–20, 1925. Estimates of casualties and material damage vary, but most point to heavy losses and extensive material damage. The bombardment of civilians by French forces provoked international protests, in the face of which the French government of Prime Minister Paul Painlevé (1863–1933) was forced to withdraw General Maurice Sarrail (1856–1929), the main commissar in Syria, to the metropolis [26, p. 181].

The shelling of Damascus caused a wave of protest throughout the Arab world. A large number of rallies were held demonstrating solidarity with the people of Syria in the face of the colonialist attack. At these rallies, many *qasidas* were read. Most of these verses have sunk into oblivion, but Shawqī's poem is an exception. Undoubtedly, the prominent place that Shawqī occupies in modern Arabic poetry, partly contributed to the popularity of this *qasida*, however, this does not fully explain its unfading glory. Many Arab literary critics have noted the exceptional virtues of this *qasida* [15, p. 43]. For example, the famous Egyptian critic Dhakī Mubārak describes the “Catastrophe in Damascus” as “a *qasida* that cannot be surpassed”. In his opinion, “not a single poet has composed a more refined verse than that which Aḥmad Shawqī devoted to the tragic events in Damascus” [20, p. 57].

11. Shouted with all his might every proud and free man,  
Who derives his family from the Umayyads.
12. Damn the news coming one after another,  
Hard of hearing for the mourner.
13. The mail tells the world about it,  
The telegraph sums up the horizon.
14. So terrible are these things,  
That they can be considered a myth, but they are true.
15. They say: historical monuments collapsed,  
They say: destruction and fire struck them.
16. Oh Damascus, are you not the nurse of Islam,  
The nanny of [our] fathers, which cannot be disobeyed?
17. Oh, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, crown of unsurpassed beauty  
And graces adorned your head.

In this *qasida*, Aḥmad Shawqī mentioned Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as a model of justice and mercy, which he showed in relation to his opponents, Crusaders in the Middle Ages. Thus, the poet contrasted Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn with the French — the “modern Franks” — who disturbed the peace of the Sultan in our time during the shelling of the city, recalling the events of the Second Crusade.

The theme of the Crusades was often the subject of appeals by Arab poets participating in the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939 and the Arab-Israeli War of 1947–1949.

The famous Syrian poet and diplomat ‘Umar Abū Rīshā (1910–1990) addressed the images from the era of the Crusades in connection with the theme of the Arab revolt. Abū Rīshā was born in Manbij (Syria), studied in school in Aleppo, then entered the American University of Beirut, and later studied industrial chemistry at the University of Manchester. After returning to Syria in 1932, Abū Rīshā joined the resistance movement of the French occupation. After Syria gained independence in 1946, he entered the diplomatic service, held the position of cultural attaché in the League of Arab States, and then was the ambassador of Syria in various countries [14, p. 172].

Abū Rīshā was inspired by the poetry of the Abbasid period and modern neoclassical poets. As the poet himself noted, he was also influenced by the work of *al-Rābiṭa al-qalamiyya* (League of Pen), the Arab-American literary society, founded in 1915 [14, p. 173].

In 1937, Abū Rīshā wrote the poem *al-Quyūd* (Ties) [27, pp. 556–561], which tells about pride of the heroic past and its connection with the present. The poet turned to the fate of Jerusalem, condemning the British colonialists and associating their actions with the invasion of the Crusaders, pointing to the harm that both of them did to Palestine and its inhabitants.

1. How can blood be shed in Jerusalem,
2. What times have come, even if
3. In the era of the Crusaders, this did not happen.
4. The sail of this era is sins,
5. Blood flows from all sides,
6. And an echo is heard all over the world.

7. The kings stood in formation, but arrogance did not allow them to succeed,
8. They relied on an arrogant dream, and it instilled hatred...

In this case, the poet compared the violent clashes during the Arab Uprising of 1936–1939 with the battles of the Crusades. Mentioning the bloodshed in Jerusalem, the author probably meant the killing of thousands of inhabitants of the city by the Crusaders after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. By “kings standing in formation” he probably meant, in a narrow sense, the leaders of the Third Crusade (1189–1192) Richard I the Lionheart and Philip II, and broadly, all European monarchs who led Crusader expeditions to the East.

One of the authors who, during the Arab-Israeli war of 1947–1949, appealed to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn with a call to “rise and fight the new Crusaders” was a Palestinian poet and military commander ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Mahmūd (1913–1948). A native of the city of Anabta in Palestine, he studied there at an elementary school, and then at *al-Najah* National College in Nablus.

After completing his studies, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Mahmūd worked as a teacher of Arabic literature in Nablus. When the Arab uprising began in Palestine in 1936, he resigned and joined the rebels in Jabal al-Nar. For participation in hostilities he was deported to Iraq. There he enrolled in a military school, and after three years of training he was awarded the rank of lieutenant. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Mahmūd also participated with other Palestinian volunteers in the anti-British military coup on April 1, 1941 in Iraq under the leadership of Rashīd ‘Alī al-Kilānī (1892–1965) [28, pp. 68–69].

After these events, he returned to Palestine and continued to work at the *al-Najah* National School. In 1947, after the outbreak of military clashes in Palestine, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Mahmūd joined the Salvation Army (*ar. jaysh al-inqādh*)<sup>13</sup>. The poet took part in the battle of Bayar ‘Adas in a company from the Hittin battalion, named after the victory of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn over the Crusaders. He died in battle near the village *al-Shajar* in July 1948 [29, pp. 23–24].

‘Abd al-Rahim Mahmud addressed the theme of the Crusades in the poem *Qum ya ṣalāḥ al-dīn* (Rise, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn) [30, p. 54].

1. Tomorrow we will raise the bravery banners  
With the proud for Hittin,
2. In the name of our destiny, rise up, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn,  
Rise, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, and we will reject our shame
3. Rise, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, tomorrow the Prophet’s night journey,  
The lair of the wolves and the place of transition of each believer,
4. The enemy collected money and weapons,  
And recruited youth at the squares,
5. And we, [like] a hungry forest lion,  
Our hearts gathered and we fell into dust
6. Oh, woe, Arab youth,  
You were carried away by the nightingale singing in the gardens...

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<sup>13</sup> In the scientific literature, the translation “Arab Liberation Army” is also used.

In this poem, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Mahmūd lamented that Arab youth did not stand to defend Palestine. The call “Rise, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn!” can be interpreted as an indication that the Arabs needed a leader who could rally them and repulse the invaders, as the Ayyubid Sultan did in his time.

Another poet, who addressed the theme of the Crusades in connection with the Palestinian problem, was Burhān al-Dīn al-‘Abūshī, born of the Palestinian city of Janine. The poet studied at Al-Najah National College in Nablus, and in 1931 he moved to Lebanon to continue his studies at *al-Shuwaiḥat* National College. In 1933, he entered the American University of Beirut, but because of his nationalist views and participation in that kind of organizations, he was unable to complete his studies at the university, as he was expelled by decision of the university administration at the beginning of the second year of study [31, pp. 13–18]. Shams al-Dīn ‘Aṣīda, a researcher of the poems of al-‘Abūshī, notes that the poet read a lot of historical literature in his youth, and got a familiar with the biography of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn [31, p. 129].

As the literary critic ‘Abd al-Sattār Ibrāhīm noted in 1947, “al-‘Abūshī wholeheartedly supports the Arab nation. He believes that colonial policy in Palestine is nothing but a new Crusade. He does not believe in politics and diplomacy; he does not believe in treaties and negotiations. He is a man of war and a soldier of his homeland. He firmly believes that it is possible to solve the country’s problems only through an uprising, and nothing else” [32, p. 57].

In 1947–48, the poet took part in the war in Palestine. In 1948, Iraqi army units arrived to his hometown of Janin, and al-‘Abūshī, who met the Iraqi soldiers, was full of hope for the victory of the Arabs in the war. This manifestation of Arab support led him to believe that the honor of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the conqueror of Palestine, Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (595–674), who won the battle of Qadisyya<sup>14</sup>, and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who freed Palestine from Crusaders, will be restored [9, pp. 143–183]. The arrival of Iraqi troops to help the Palestinians inspired the poet to write a *qasida* [33, p. 156].

1. Oh, the heroism of our Arab people,  
Ask fate about it,
2. Once upon a time we were drowned in blood,  
We imagine it as a sea raging,
3. In the days when the Persians were defeated  
As well as the Byzantines by our lord ‘Umar
4. Near Qadisyya and Sharish<sup>15</sup>,  
And the young Arabs prevailed
5. Under Hittin, ask about Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn,  
And you will hear a story about him,
6. If fate is favorable to us,  
We will return what has passed.

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<sup>14</sup> The battle of Qadisyya (December 2, 636) was a decisive battle between the Sassanid army and the Arab conquerors. The crushing defeat of the Persian army in this battle marked the beginning of the fall of the Sasanian Empire.

<sup>15</sup> The Battle of Guadalet (July 19, 711) — the battle between the Visigoths and the Arab-Berber army of the Umayyads under the command of Tāriq ibn Ziyād. The battle ended in the complete defeat of the Visigoth army and became the starting point for the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula.

In another poem, the poet also expressed hope for the liberation of Palestine [33, p. 167]:

1. I see fire over Hittin, coals ignited,  
A confident warrior kindles them,
2. Do not lose hope, Jerusalem. Power is coming,  
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn hides in the lands of Sham,
3. He will triumphantly come to the south of Sham,  
Scattering the dreams of the Franks and crushing them,
4. I appealed to the fallen warriors, because  
I saw Arab men die and say goodbye.

Jonathan Phillips also cites other al-‘Abūshī’s poems in which he calls to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to “come and teach Crusaders the lesson they have forgotten” and shames his fellow citizens, who don’t fight for their country in the name of their glorious ancestors [11, pp. 364–365]<sup>16</sup>.

Besides the poems analyzed above, many other Arab poets also addressed the theme of the Crusades in the period between the World Wars, among the most famous ones dealing with this theme was Abū al-Faḍl al-Walīd<sup>17</sup>, who started appealing to it even before World War I, and the Palestinian poet Ibrāhīm Tūqān (1905–1941)<sup>18</sup>.

It is also important that throughout the analyzed period, references to the theme of the Crusades in Arabic poetry were directly correlated with references to this topic in social thought and political discourse. Ma’rūf al-Ruṣāfi’s critics of General Gouraud, trying to legitimize French presence in Syria by the appeals to the time of the Crusades, resonate with Faisal’s I criticism of the same kind of speeches by French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon (1857–1933) [35, p. 52] or Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb’s (1886–1969) critics of the British trying to claim their right on Palestine in the same manner [36]. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Mahmūd and Burhān al-Dīn al-‘Abūshī on par with social thinkers Is‘af al-Nashāshībī (1885–1946) [37, pp. 90–91], Rashīd Ridā (1865–1935) [38, pp. 593–606] and the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906–1949) [11, p. 362] called for a new Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to come and save Arab Lands. ‘Umar Abū Rishā’s compared the bloodshed during the Arab revolt (1936–1939) with time of the Crusades in the same manner as Farhat ‘Abbas (1899–1985), who recalled the medieval Frankish invasion in connection with Setif tragedy (1945) in Algeria [39, p. 40].

Drawing the conclusions, I should first of all point out, that in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century — first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the theme of the Crusades was of high importance for the Arab poets, which is contrary to the views of some contemporary scholars who argue that its extensive use began only in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, the key ideas related to the Crusades, which played a critical role in the formation of “anti-Crusader rhetoric” in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries, had already been articulated before 1948.

<sup>16</sup> Original citation from the translation by Khalid Sulaiman, [34, p. 38–39, 59].

<sup>17</sup> See the poems, *Ra’aytu al-sharq mulkan li-l-nabi* (I saw the East as Prophet’s dominion) and *Hiya al-rīḥ qad habbat min al-gharb shararan* (This is the wind which brought the storm from the West).

<sup>18</sup> See the poem, *Ahlan bi rabb al-mahrajān* (Welcome to the Master of the Carnival).

It is also important to note that the Crusades were widely reflected in Arab poetry as a whole, and not only in Sham and Egypt, which were attacked by medieval franks; suffice to mention the repeated appeal to this topic by the poets of Iraq, historically not marked by the Crusader invasion.

The Crusades became an important topic and formed a whole system of images in Arabic poetry during the anti-colonial struggle in the Middle East. If, in poetry, before World War I, Arab authors praised the commanders of the past who defeated the Crusaders, then starting from World War I, the theme of the Crusades began to be used to liken European colonialists and Zionists to “medieval Franks”. After the outbreak of the Great War and later, the uses of the theme of the Crusades by Arab poets became an integral part of anti-colonial rhetoric and, for the most part, such uses came in response to actions or statements of Europeans. It is important to note that the authors of poems containing images from the era of the Crusades were, among others, participants of the Arab Uprising of 1936–1939 and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948–1949, who aimed to mobilize the masses to fight the enemy with the help of poetry.

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## Обнажая меч поэта вновь: Крестовые походы в арабской антиколониальной поэзии до 1948 г.

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Как арабские, так и западные исследователи сходятся в том, что начиная с середины XX в. соотнесение западноевропейцев с крестоносцами и экстраполяция термина «Крестовый поход» на современные военные конфликты стали неотъемлемой частью современного арабского политического дискурса, а также нашли широкое отражение в арабской культуре. Наличие работ, рассматривающих обращения к теме Крестовых походов в арабской общественной мысли, политике и культуре второй половины XX в., контрастирует с практически полным отсутствием специализированных исследований, посвященных анализу отсылок к этой исторической эпохе в арабской культуре XIX — первой половины XX в. Анализ обращений к эпохе Крестовых походов в творчестве арабских поэтов до 1948 г. показывает, что уже в период Арабского возрождения эта тема занимала важное место в образной системе антиколониальной поэзии, причем не только в Египте, Сирии и Палестине, исторически подвергшихся нападению крестоносцев, но и в других регионах Арабского мира. Если до Первой мировой войны арабские поэты лишь восхваляли полководцев прошлого, победивших крестоносцев, то после ее начала тема Крестовых походов стала использоваться еще и для того, чтобы уподобить европейских колониалистов «средневековым франкам». Авторами стихотворений, содержащих образы из эпохи Крестовых походов, были в том числе участники Арабского восстания 1936–1939 гг. и Палестинской войны 1947–1949 гг., ставившие своей целью при помощи поэзии мобилизовать народные массы на борьбу.

*Ключевые слова:* Крестовые походы, арабская поэзия, национализм, арабское Возрождение, антиколониальная борьба.

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