

Rapprochement between Sunnīs and Imāmīs during the Crusades

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Abstract: The Imāmī Shī'a of Syria stood along with the Sunnīs as one group against the Franks, rather than as followers of different religious traditions. This article traces the rapprochement between the Sunnī and the Imāmī Shī'a in the face of the Franks. Examples that were invoked to make the point here include the Imāmīs of Tripoli and Aleppo and the Imāmī vizier of the Fatimids, Ṭalā'i' Ibn Ruzzayk. Three factors seem to have underlined this sense of unity: doctrinal nearness, geographic proximity, and the political quietism of medieval Imāmism. Saladin's relations with the Imāmīs are also invoked here. Being more pragmatic than his predecessor Nūr Al-Dīn, Saladin valued winning hearts and minds as much as winning battles. He successfully adopted a containment policy that was based on winning the Syrian Imāmīs and building a broad alliance with them against the Franks.

Keywords: Islam, Syria, Crusades, Sunnism, Shī'a, Imāmism

التقارب بين أهل السنة والشيعة الإمامية أثناء الحروب الصليبية

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ملخص البحث: يتتبع هذا البحث مظاهر التقارب والتحالف بين أهل السنة والشيعة الإمامية أيام الحروب الصليبية. ومن الأمثلة التاريخية التي وردت في البحث علاقة أهل السنة بالشيعة الإمامية في كل من طرابلس الشام وحلب آنذاك، وكذلك مساعي الوزير الإمامي بالدولة الفاطمية طلائع بن رزيك إلى بناء حلف مع القائد السنّي نور الدين زنكي. ويبيّن البحث أن عوامل ثلاثة سهّلت هذا التقارب السنّي الإمامي في وجه الصليبيين، وهي: التداخل الاعتقادي، والقرب الجغرافي، والسلبية السياسية التي كان يتسم بها الإمامية بتأثير فكرة الانتظار آنذاك. وقد تناول البحث علاقة صلاح الدين الأيوبي بالشيعة الإمامية، وأوضح أنه كان أكثر براغماتية من سلفه نور الدين، وأنه كان حريصاً على كسب القلوب بقدر ما كان حريصاً على كسب المعارك. وقد انتهج صلاح الدين سياسة احتواء تجاه الإمامية، واستطاع أن يكسبهم ضمن الحلف العريض الذي بناه تمهيداً لمعركة التحرير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلام، الشام، الحروب الصليبية، السنة، الشيعة، الإمامية.

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It is very common today to see the Muslim counter-crusade as a pure Sunnī movement, devoid of Shī'a contribution. This view, however, is partial at best and selective at worst. It is based on a reading of the Muslim counter-crusade as a movement that started only a half century after the Council of Clermont, specifically with Zengi and his capture of Edessa in 1144. This interpretation of the counter-crusade movement does not stand firm in front of a more detailed and nuanced scrutiny of the primary sources, which takes the early jihad against the Franks into account, nor does it make the necessary distinction between the different brands of Shī'ism and their different roles throughout two centuries of crusading and jihad.

This article explains how, after the initial stage of mistrust and division in the face of the Franks, the Sunnīs and the Imāmī Shī'a of Syria developed a sense of unity and acted politically and militarily as one religious body, not as followers of different religious traditions. The Frankish factor had a double effect in this process, both dividing and unifying the two Muslim groups.

The defensive and offensive contribution of the Imāmī Shī'a of Tripoli and Aleppo in the counter-crusade, along with the Sunnīs, illustrates a sense of unity between the two groups during the Crusades that is overlooked by polemicists from both sides today. The three foundations for this sense of unity were doctrinal, political, and practical.

On the doctrinal front, Sunnī revivalists, such as the vizier Nizām Al-Mulk and his sponsored scholar Al-Ghazālī, perceived the Imāmīs as moderate Shī'a, both politically and doctrinally.⁽¹⁾ Despite the constant turmoil between the Imāmīs and the Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad, mainstream Sunnism kept a relatively positive view of Imāmism compared with its very negative view of Ismā'ilism. This was especially true in Syria, more than in Iraq, because in Syria, the syncretistic Ash'arī Sunnism was dominant during the early Crusades, while in Iraq, the puritanical and anti-Shī'a Ḥanbalism was dominant. This doctrinal setting seems to have created a common ground between Sunnism and Imāmism in the face of the Franks' invasion, especially in the case of Tripoli and Aleppo.

On the political level, Imāmī Shī'ism was characterized by chronic passivity. After the demise of the Buyid monarchy in Baghdad in 1055, the Imāmīs never again formed a serious political challenge to Sunnism. In Syria, such a challenge never existed. The small Imāmī states in Aleppo were syncretistic in doctrine and weak in structure. The political weakness of the Imāmīs was partially the result of a theology of quietism and of waiting for the Hidden Imām that dominated medieval Imāmī thought.

Since its inception, Shī'ism expressed itself politically in two different schools of thought: activism and quietism. The quietist school of thought is symbolized by Imām Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī (625-669), the elder grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad who compromised with his enemies and gave up his political aspiration for the caliphate to Mu'awiyya (reg. 661-680), the founder of Omayyad monarchy. The activist school of thought is symbolized by Imām Ḥusayn (626-680), the twin brother of Ḥasan who revolted against Yazīd (reg. 680-683), the son and successor of Mu'awiyya. Ḥusayn, killed with his family members and supporters at Karbala, became the ultimate martyr and revolutionary icon of Shī'ism, even to the present day.

As Denis McEoin notices, 'activism and quietism have, in a sense, co-existed in a state of tension within Shī'ism.' However, 'what eventually emerged as [Imāmī] Twelver... represents rather more the line of quietist acceptance of Umayyad and Abbasid rule than that of Husaynid descent pure and simple.'⁽²⁾ Quietism does not mean legitimization of the state; it only means a modus vivendi situation based on self-

(1) See for example: Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'ih Al-Bāṭiniyya* (Kuwait: Dār Al-Kutub Al-Thaqāfiyya, n.d.), 37; Nizām Al-Mulk, *Siyāsat Nāmeḥ* (Doha: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1986), 235.

(2) Denis McEoin, "Aspects of Militancy and Quietism in Imāmī Shī'ism," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (1984): 18.

preservation and on waiting for the Hidden Imām, who is expected to fill the earth with justice after it has long been filled with injustice.

In medieval Shī‘a history, activism was, in general, characteristic of the Ismā‘īlīs, while quietism was characteristic of the Imāmīs. This did not change until the twentieth century, when Iranian clerics played an important role in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1907, and then seven decades later, in the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. The leader of this revolution, Ayatullah Khomeini, gave Imāmī activism its theoretical justification through his theory of the sovereignty of the jurist (*vilāyat-i-faqīh*).⁽¹⁾

The duality of quietism and activism is important to keep in mind in order to understand Sunnī relations with these two branches of Shī‘ism during the Crusades. Medieval Imāmism in Syria had never been a serious political challenger to the Sunnī Abbasid caliphate, and the small Imāmī states there, such as the Ḥamdānids and Banū ‘Ammār, were very tolerant of Sunnism. Medieval Ismā‘īlism, however, was a strong challenger of Sunnism and a potent alternative to the Abbasid caliphate.

Finally, some practical considerations also played a role in the creation of Sunnī-Imāmī unity during the Crusades, such as geographic proximity and trust in the emerging Turkish military power, especially compared with the vanishing Fatimid power and its influence in Syria. Shī‘a Tripoli was geographically closer to Damascus than to Cairo, and Shī‘a Aleppo was closer to the Sunnī center of gravity in Mosul, where the Sunnī Turkish militaries were available to help.

Being the homeland of the anti-Shī‘a Omayyad monarchy, Syria had originally been a Sunnī stronghold. The Omayyads, the antithesis of Shī‘ism, had made Syria impenetrable for the Shī‘a. Things started to change with the advent of the Abbasids, who used their syncretistic tendencies to help make Syria more accessible for Shī‘ism. At the beginning of the tenth century, a wave of Arab Shī‘a tribes entered the northern part of the country from Iraq. In 944, the Shī‘a Imāmī Ḥamdānid leader, Sayf Al-Dawla (916-967), captured Aleppo from the Ikhshīdids, who ruled it in the name of the Abbasids. Sunnī historians attacked Sayf Al-Dawla for his leaning towards Shī‘ism.⁽²⁾ In 977, Sayf Al-Dawla’s son and successor, Sa‘d Al-Dawla (reg. 967-991), changed the *adhān* from the Sunnī to the Shī‘a formula for the first time in the history of Aleppo and Syria—an indication of Shī‘a doctrinal and political self-affirmation.⁽³⁾

The Fatimids captured Aleppo in 1015 and used it to press on the Abbasid western flank, but when the Sunnī and Shī‘a Imāmī population resisted, the Fatimids retreated and accepted the nominal control of the city by the Imāmī Mirdāsids. During the Mirdāsīd rule (1024-1080), Aleppo kept its Shī‘a Imāmī majority. The geographer Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī cited a letter written by a physician named Ibn Baṭlān in 1048, saying that the jurists of Aleppo were following the Shī‘a Imāmī school of jurisprudence in his days.⁽⁴⁾

As for Tripoli, the sectarian map on the eve of the Crusades was clearer. The Persian Ismā‘īlī traveler Nāṣir Khusrū (1104-1077), who visited Syria in 1046, wrote that ‘all the inhabitants of Tripoli are Shī‘a, and the Shī‘a have built beautiful mosques everywhere.’⁽⁵⁾ Khusrū’s Shī‘ism might have had an effect on his sweeping generalizations here, but the presence of a Shī‘a majority in Tripoli when he visited the city seems to have been incontestable. This was also true for Tyre. Khusrū affirms that the majority of the Tyre’s population was Shī‘a, but the judge of the city was Sunnī, and he praises this judge for his kindness and

(1) See a good survey of Khomeini’s theory in Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of New Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 105-124.

(2) See for example Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya*, 11:241.

(3) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat*, 1:159-160.

(4) Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam Al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 1995), 2:283.

(5) Nāṣir Khusrū, *Safar-Nāmāh*, trans. Yahya Al-Khashshāb (Beirut: Dār Al-Kitāb Al-Jadīd, 1983), 48.

generosity.⁽¹⁾ He also suggests that the population of Tiberias was Shī‘a and that that was the reason he could not visit the tomb of Abū Hurayra (603–681), one of the Prophet’s companions that the Shī‘a dislike: “the population are Shī‘a, and anyone who goes to visit the tomb, children gather around him, abuse him and throw stones on him. That is why I could not visit it.”⁽²⁾

This was then the situation in Aleppo and Tripoli. But does that indicate the existence of a Shī‘a majority in Syria as a whole on the eve of the Crusades? In northern Syria, the answer is the affirmative; in the southern part of Syria, however, it is hard to determine, but some historical evidence supports that conclusion.

More than a century before the Crusades, Al-Maqdisī (947-990) reported that the majority of the population of Tiberias was Shī‘a, as well as was half of the population of Nablus, Jerusalem and ‘Ammān.⁽³⁾ The Moorish traveler Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217) provided more explicit testimony. Unlike the Shī‘a Khusrū, Ibn Jubayr was a Sunnī scholar and an admirer of Saladin. He despised the Shī‘a and ridiculed their beliefs and rituals in his travelogue, as well as in his poetry.⁽⁴⁾ However, he confirms Khusrū’s assessment of the Shī‘a majority in Syria.

He wrote in his remarks while in Damascus: ‘the Shī‘a in this land have strange behaviors, and they are more numerous here than the Sunnīs. They covered the land with their different ideologies, and they are divided into many sects.’⁽⁵⁾ It is not clear if by “this land” Ibn Jubayr meant Damascus only or the whole Syrian territory. However, the last part of his statement suggests that he meant the whole region, not just the city of Damascus.

The first contact between the Franks and the leaders of Tripoli was during the Franks’ march to Jerusalem after they had captured Antioch and devastated Ma‘arat Al-Nu‘mān. What happened during this first contact sheds some light on the deep division between the Muslims of Syria, as well as on the shock that the Frankish victory at Antioch left on the Islamic mood.

The Imāmī rulers of Tripoli, the Banū ‘Ammār, tried to strike a balance between the Fatimids of Egypt and the Seljuks of Syria and Iraq. This effort to preserve their independence vis-a-vis the two Muslim empires became the guiding principle of the Banū ‘Ammār’s foreign policy. In times of hardship, however, the leaders of Tripoli proved closer to the Sunnīs of Damascus and Baghdad than to their former patrons, the Shī‘a Fatimids of Cairo.

The trial of Tripoli started very early, even before the conquest of Jerusalem. When the Franks reached his territory on their way to Jerusalem, Fakhr Al-Mulk Ibn ‘Ammār followed in the footsteps of the other Arab emirs of the Syrian coast. He sent ambassadors to the Franks, offering them provisions and guides to Jerusalem in exchange for the safety of his principality. William of Tyre reports that, among the guides that led the Frankish army towards Jerusalem, there were ‘persons from the household of the governor of Tripoli.’⁽⁶⁾

(1) *Ibid.*, 50.

(2) *Ibid.*, 53.

(3) Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan Al-Taḳāsim fī Ma‘rifat Al-Aḳālīm* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 1991), 1:179.

(4) During his pilgrimage to Mecca, Ibn Jubayr composed a long poem attacking the Shī‘a of Medina for what he perceived as deviations in their popular piety, and he sent the poem to Saladin urging him to stop these practices in the City of the Prophet. See the full text of this poem in Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd Al-Malik Al-Murrakshī, *Al-Sifr Al-Khāmis min Kitāb Al-Dhayl wa Al-Takmila li Kitāb Al-Tawṣil wa Al-Ṣila* (Beirut: Dār Al-Thaqāfa, 1965), 2:617-620.

(5) Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat*, 195.

(6) William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, Translated by Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 330.

Some divisions arose between the Frankish leaders who wanted to proceed to Jerusalem without delay and those who wanted to capture the coastal towns before that. Among the latter was Raymond of Saint-Gilles (1042–1105), who besieged Arqa, one of the towns that composed the principality of Banū ‘Āmmār.

Ibn ‘Ammār was ready to buy the survival of his realm at any price. He ‘offered an immense sum of money to induce the Christians to lift the siege [of Arqa] and remove the troops from his land.’⁽¹⁾ When he noticed the divisions between the Frankish leaders on their strategy of war, he withdrew his offer.

William reports that ‘for more than two months, the Count of Toulouse [Raymond] had been trying in vain to take Arqa but had accomplished nothing.’⁽²⁾ Upon the insistence of his soldiers and other crusade leaders, and in the face of the strong resistance of Arqa, Raymond lifted the siege of the city and resumed his journey to Jerusalem. On his way, he tried to capture Tripoli itself, but Ibn ‘Ammār convinced him to accept a huge ransom, plenty of provisions, and guides, in exchange for lifting his siege. William’s account of Tripoli’s cooperation with the Franks clearly indicates that this cooperation was mainly motivated by fear. According to William, the leader of Tripoli showed some arrogance and resistance in his first contact with the Franks and tried to deal with their leaders ‘on equal terms,’ but he realized that the balance of power was not helping him succeed that way. He finally decided to buy peace through expensive tribute, gifts and guides.⁽³⁾

Raymond did not achieve any political gain from the crusading enterprise in Antioch; rather, his main competitor, Bohemond, took over the city. When the Franks captured Jerusalem, Godfrey of Bouillon, rather than Raymond, became the leader of the Holy City. Looking for a new role, Raymond decided to capture Tripoli and to make it his own realm. He restarted his effort to control Tripoli; however, before going back to the longest siege in the history of the Crusades, there is a need to mention another important instance of Ibn ‘Ammār giving help to the Franks that took place one year later.

When Godfrey of Bouillon, the first Frankish leader of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, died in July 1100, his brother Baldwin of Edessa (later King Baldwin I of Jerusalem) moved from Edessa to Jerusalem to replace him. It was a very risky journey that reflects Baldwin’s adventurous character. William of Tyre writes that Baldwin ‘gathered an escort of two hundred knights and eight hundred foot soldiers,’ and ‘it was a matter of surprise to many that he proposed to make so long a journey through enemy country with so small a following.’⁽⁴⁾

At that moment, the relations between Jerusalem and Damascus were strained by the Franks’ constant attacks on the Golden Heights and occasional attacks on the Damascene suburbs. The emir, Duqāq of Damascus (reg. 1095-1104), decided to seize the moment of power transition in the Frankish realm to take revenge by capturing or killing the adventurous Baldwin during his passage through the Syrian mainland from Edessa to Jerusalem.

The plan was very ambitious, and, had it been successful, it would have deprived the nascent Frankish kingdom of a very competent leader. Through his long and successful reign, Baldwin I proved to be the real founder of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and one of the greatest warriors of the crusading era. As Stevenson notices, ‘the Latins could have had no more competent leader in their early Moslem wars than Baldwin I.’⁽⁵⁾

(1) *Ibid.*, 328.

(2) *Ibid.*, 328.

(3) *Ibid.*, 329-330.

(4) *Ibid.*, 421.

(5) B. W. 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), 43.

The emir of Tripoli not only provided Baldwin and his Frankish army with generous hospitality, but he also, more importantly, volunteered to give them an extraordinary military secret. Fulcher of Chartres reports the event as follows:

‘At this time the king of Tripoli sent to Lord Baldwin’s tent bread, wine, wild honey i.e. sugar, and wethers for eating. He informed Baldwin that Ducath [Duqāq], King of the [sic] Damascus, and Ginahodoles [Janāh Al-Dawla], King of Aleppo were waiting with many Turks, Saracens, and Arabs massed along the route through which they knew we would come. Although we did not believe this to be entirely true, we realized later that it was.’⁽¹⁾

There is probably a mistake in Fulcher’s account: Janāh Al-Dawla was the emir of Homs not Aleppo. As for Ridwān of Aleppo, he was in such constant discord with his brother in Damascus that it is unconceivable that he joined him in this ambush. The bulk of the story, however, seems trustworthy, though no Arabic source from that era mentions the revealing of the secret ambush by Ibn Ammār.

The importance of this military secret can only be appreciated when one reads how Fulcher of Chartres and William of Tyre describe the place in which the small Frankish army was about to be ambushed: ‘Not far from the city of Beirut,’ writes Fulcher,

‘about five miles, is an extremely narrow place in the public road next to the sea. It could not be possibly avoided by us or anyone else wishing to go through if an enemy were provided with food and wanted to block the way. A hundred thousand soldiers could not cross through if a hundred or even sixty armed men resolutely held it against them. Therefore our enemies planned to cut us there on all side and slay us.’⁽²⁾

William of Tyre describes the location as ‘a very dangerous passage’ and a ‘perilous way.’⁽³⁾ He adds some dramatization by saying that Baldwin himself ‘dreaded the narrow and the confined defiles.’ However, thanks to Ibn Ammār’s information, Baldwin was able to plan a successful counter-attack and to make his army cross ‘the place which had rightly caused them so much apprehension and dread.’⁽⁴⁾

Ibn ‘Ammār seem to have been motivated by internal strife with his Damascene neighbor. He was ‘on the worst possible term with Duqaq of Damascus.’⁽⁵⁾ The relationship between the two improved shortly after this event, and they even fought the Franks together. Another motivation was the fear of Frankish power. The fresh memory of the Frankish massacre of the inhabitants of Antioch, Ma’arrat, and Jerusalem left a great deal of fear in the hearts of several emirs of the Syrian coast and spurred more divisions within their ranks. Ibn ‘Ammār was not the only emir along Baldwin’s way who tried to buy the Franks’ friendship and avoid their wrath. All emirs of the area did the same, out of fear and not out of conviction, as Fulcher rightly noticed.⁽⁶⁾

These conciliatory moves towards the Franks did not buy peace for Tripoli. As mentioned earlier, Raymond returned in 1102 to resume his siege. Ibn ‘Ammār proved to be a great survivalist and a strong defendant of his city. Indeed, Tripoli resisted a Frankish siege longer than any other city did during the Crusades; the siege lasted ‘for almost seven successive years.’⁽⁷⁾ Maalouf dedicated a chapter of his book to

(1) Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem 1095-1127*. Translated by Frances Rita Ryan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 138.

(2) Ibid.

(3) William of Tyre, *History of Deeds* 422.

(4) Ibid. 424.

(5) Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 1:323.

(6) Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition*, 138.

(7) William of Tyre, *History of Deeds*, 478.

‘the two thousand days of Tripoli’⁽¹⁾—days of siege, agony and resistance.

The long siege of Tripoli seemed to have changed the political mood in southern Syria. Ibn ‘Ammār clearly realized that his policy of buying the Franks’ friendship was absurd. The other emirs seemed to have also learned from the long siege of Tripoli that the Franks were not invincible. From this point on, the Franks became more of a unifying factor among the Sunnīs and the Imāmīs of Syria than a dividing force between them.

When Ibn ‘Ammār had to seek relief from his Muslim neighbors, he did not seek it with the former Fatimid patrons of his family, with whom he shared the Shī‘a doctrine; rather, he turned his face first towards Damascus and later towards Baghdad. He sent letters to Emir Duqāq of Damascus and Emir Yākhiz of Homs asking their support and advising them to move quickly against Raymond before his military power grew stronger.⁽²⁾

Ibn Al-Athīr reports that the emir of Homs came in person, and the emir of Damascus sent two thousands fighters to save Tripoli. However, the two armies, combined with the army of Tripoli, were disastrously defeated at the hands of Raymond, who moved afterward to besiege Tripoli with the help of local mountain people and farmers ‘who were mostly Christians.’⁽³⁾ The siege did not succeed, and Raymond agreed to withdraw in exchange for a tribute of money and horses. He shifted his forces to capture the port of Tarsus, north of Tripoli. Two years later, Raymond tried to capture Tripoli again, this time with the help of a large Genoese fleet, and, for the second time, the siege failed. Raymond then moved south to conquer Jubayl, a neighboring town south of Tripoli. With the fall of Jubayl in the south and Tarsus in the north, Tripoli must have appeared to Raymond a ripe fruit.

To guarantee the success of his siege, Raymond built a strong citadel that oversaw every person who was entering or leaving Tripoli. The Byzantine emperor, with whom Raymond was on good terms, provided money and architectural expertise for the project.⁽⁴⁾ Raymond named his citadel Mons Peregrinus, but Arab historians simply called it Qal’at Şanjīl (Citadel Saint Gilles). It is still one of the historical monuments of Tripoli today. The citadel gave Raymond an extraordinary advantage over his besieged enemies,

‘from it as a base, almost daily Raymond caused new trouble for the people of Tripoli. As a result of this constant harrying, the natives of the entire district and even those who dwelt in the city itself were forced to pay him an annual tribute and in all matters obeyed him as if he owned the city without dispute.’⁽⁵⁾

When he felt overwhelmed, Ibn ‘Ammār invited another Sunnī leader, the Turkish emir of Kifa fortress, Suqmān Al-Quṭbī, to help. Since Al-Quṭbī was a former ruler of Jerusalem who had been dispossessed by the Fatimids, this was another indication of the bad relations between Ibn ‘Ammār and the Fatimids. On his way to Tripoli, however, Suqmān died, and his army carried his body back to his castle.⁽⁶⁾

The determined Ibn ‘Ammār did not show any weakness. To the surprise of Raymond, who used

(1) Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, Chapter IV: “Tripoli’s two Thousand Days,” 77-103.

(2) ‘Izz Al-Dīn Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fi Al-Tārīkh*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, 1993), 9:55.

(3) Ibid9:55 . .

(4) Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, Translated by Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (Cambridge, Ontario: Parentheses Publications, 2000), 204.

(5) William of Tyre, *History of Deeds*.454 .

(6) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil* 8:509, 527.

to oversee Tripoli from high ground, Ibn ‘Ammār took the initiative in 1104 and led a detachment of his fighters to storm the citadel. He ‘killed those inside, and looted the place. He burned and ruined [everything] and took a lot of arms, money, silk and silver.’⁽¹⁾ Raymond was severely burned by the fire set by Ibn ‘Ammār and died a few months later.⁽²⁾

The bitter siege and the killing of Raymond seem to have inspired many leaders to help Tripoli. Even Riḍwān of Aleppo, who had never been enthusiastic to fight the Franks, tried to help at least once. He gathered ‘a large army of regular and voluntary forces with the intention to help Fakhr Al-Mulk Ibn ‘Ammār against the Franks who were besieging him.’⁽³⁾ However, the expedition ended disastrously when Tancred of Antioch shattered Riḍwān’s army, putting Aleppo itself at a great risk.

When the long and bitter siege of Tripoli became unbearable, Ibn ‘Ammār decided to go to Baghdad and seek military support from the Sunnī leadership in Iraq: the Seljuk sultan and the Abbasid caliph. A good strategist and politician, Ibn ‘Ammār planned his departure very well. He delegated his authority to his cousin Dhū Al-Manāqib, paid the salaries of his army for six months in advance, and assigned everyone a specific mission within the defense strategy.⁽⁴⁾

On his way to Baghdad, Ibn ‘Ammār passed by Damascus, where he was welcomed with honour by the Sunni Turkish emir of the city, Ṭughtukīn.⁽⁵⁾ When he reached Baghdad, he received extraordinarily generous hospitality from both the Sunnī sultan and the caliph. The two men seem to have understood the high position that ‘the Syrian hero’⁽⁶⁾ had earned in Muslim public opinion because of his steadfast resistance to the Franks. Ibn Al-Athīr describes the unusual welcome as a fruit of Ibn Ammār’s labor in jihad.⁽⁷⁾

Apart from courteous welcomes and generous promises, however, no concrete support was gained from this trip. To his distress, Ibn ‘Ammār realized that the sultan of Baghdad was more interested in subjugating a rebellious vassal in Mosul than in saving the population of Tripoli.⁽⁸⁾

In the end, Raymond’s successors were able to capture Tripoli in 1109. The Frankish victory was a great achievement. As Gibb notices, “with the establishment of the county of Tripoli, a rough balance of power was struck in Syria between crusaders and Moslems. Jerusalem faced Damascus, Antioch faced Aleppo, and Tripoli faced the group of lesser cities in the upper Orontes valley.”⁽⁹⁾

Tripoli was lost, but Ibn ‘Ammār became a hero in the whole region because of his perseverance in the longest siege during the Crusades. Sunnī historians praised this Shī‘a leader highly for his contribution to the counter-crusade. Ibn Al-Athīr praises his ‘great patience, bravery and clairvoyance.’⁽¹⁰⁾ Even Al-Dhahabī, with all usual his anti-Shī‘a rhetoric, could not but praise Ibn ‘Ammār as ‘a unique man’ in his

(1) Ḥamza Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl Tarīkh Dimashq* (Damascus: Dār Ḥassān, 1983) 236.

(2) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:95.

(3) Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 239.

(4) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:120; Zayn Al-Dīn Ibn Al-Wardī, *Tarīkh Ibn Al-Wardī* (Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, 1996), 2:19; Ibn Al-Adīm, Kamāl Al-Dīn. *Bughyat Al-Ṭalab fī Tarīkh Ḥalab* (Damascus: Dār Al-Fikr, n.d.), 10:4532.

(5) Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa Al-Nihāya* (Beirut: Maktabat Al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.), 16:207; Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz Al-Ḥunafā’ bi Akhbār Al-‘Imma Al-Fāṭimiyyīn Al-Khulafā’* (Cairo: Lajnat Ihya’ Al-Turāth, 1996), 3:38.

(6) René Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du Royaume Franc de Jérusalem* (Paris: Perrin, 1991), 1:349.

(7) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:120.

(8) Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 266; Grousset, *Histoire des croisades*, 1:349; Maalouf, *Crusades through Arab Eyes*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1985)79.

(9) Hamilton A. R. Gibb, “Zengi and the Fall of Edessa,” 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), 449.

(10) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:96.

military prowess and political wisdom.⁽¹⁾

The Fatimid rulers of Cairo did not do much to save Tripoli. The Egyptian historian Ibn Taghrī Bardī condemned the Fatimids for ‘negligence’, of which he perceived three manifestations: (1) the late response to the plight of Tripoli, (2) the ineffectiveness of the fleet they sent, and (3) the absence of the Fatimid vizier Al-Afdal from leading this military effort in person.⁽²⁾

The tendency of Shī‘a leaders of Tripoli to ally themselves with the Sunnīs of Iraq, instead of their Shī‘a brethren of Egypt seems an interesting case of the triumph of pragmatism over doctrine. However, this tendency can be fully explained only if it is put into the broader context of the doctrinal, political and practical factors discussed above in this article.

Banū ‘Ammār were followers of Imāmism, which was seen by Sunnīs as a moderate form of Shī‘ism. The Sunnī political leaders also did not see in Imāmism a political risk. Moreover, Tripoli is much closer to Damascus than Cairo, and from a purely logistical viewpoint, this geographic proximity is very relevant. One needs to remember here that Tripoli was a part of the Damascus province and had been the port-city of that province since the first Islamic conquest of the city in 645. It was only in 942 that the Fatimids captured Tripoli and separated it from Damascus. When the leader of Tripoli turned repeatedly to Damascus for help, he seems to have had this practical imperative of geography in mind.

Geography alone does not, however, explain why the Shī‘a leader of Tripoli went in person to the very distant Baghdad, seeking the salvation of his city at the hands of the Sunnī caliph and sultan. Here, political and military considerations seem to have been more relevant than geography. Not only did the Banū ‘Ammār want to preserve the independence of their state from its old Fatimid masters, but they also seem to have accurately judged the military balance in the region. The Fatimids had lost their military might a long time before the Crusades, while the Seljuks, with all their divisions, were still a promising military power.

The emir of Tripoli seems to have understood the spirit of the age—a new Islamic era dominated by the Turks. Ibn Al-Athīr explained why the ruler of Tripoli asked for military aid from the Sunnī Turks, rather than from his own Fatimid coreligionists, by citing Ibn ‘Ammār’s understanding of the shift in the balance of power in favor of the Seljuk sultan, Muḥammad Ibn Malik Shāh.⁽³⁾ It was the dominant Turkish factor in the Islamic counter-crusade that made the Shī‘a leader of Tripoli bet on the Turkish horse. These were probably the reasons for Ibn ‘Ammār’s trip to Baghdad. However, this Sunnī-Imāmī rapprochement was even more significant and fruitful in northern Syria, far from the Fatimid influence.

In Aleppo, there was also a tacit Sunnī-Imāmī alliance against the Franks. The sense of unity is clearer in this case. Though the Imāmī Shī‘a had lost the political leadership in Aleppo after that dramatic shift of political power in favor of the Sunnī Seljuks in 1070, they continued to dominate the city socially and culturally during the twelfth century. They persistently resisted any Sunnī revival in the city. For example, when the Sunnī emir of Aleppo, Sulaymān Ibn Urtuq, started building the first Sunnī school in Aleppo, the Shī‘a population challenged him. Whatever he built in the daytime they destroyed at night, until finally he had to delegate the project to one of the leading Shī‘a figures, Ibrāhīm Al-Ḥusaynī—a member of the well-respected Zahra family.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Shams Al-Dīn Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām Al-Nubalā’* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat Al-Risāla, 1993), 19:311.

(2) Yūsuf Ibn Taghrī Bardā, *Al-Nujūm Al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa Al-Qāhira* (Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Culture, n.d.), 5:179.

(3) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:120.

(4) ‘Izz Al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, *Al-A‘lāq Al-Khaṣira fī Dhikr Umarā’ Al-Shām wa Al-Jazīra* (Damascus: Syrian Ministry of Culture, 1991), 1:241; Kāmil Ibn Ḥusayn Al-Ghazzi, *Nahr Al-Dhahab fī Tārīkh Ḥalab* (Aleppo: Dār Al-Qalam, 1998), 2:67.

The Imāmī Shī‘a judge of Aleppo, Abū Al-Faḍl Ibn Al-Khashshāb (d. 1125), is seen by some scholars as the man who saved his city from the Franks during the turbulent early decades of the twelfth century. Maalouf dedicates a whole chapter entitled ‘Turban-Clad Resistance’ to Ibn Al-Khashshāb’s contribution to the counter-crusade,⁽¹⁾ and Hillenbrand calls his effort ‘an early model for the active participation of the religious class in the fight against the Franks.’⁽²⁾ The career of Ibn Al-Khashshāb illustrates the Sunnī-Imāmī unity during the Crusades.

Ibn Al-Khashshāb witnessed a period of political chaos, military weakness, and sectarian division in Aleppo, along with a constant threat against his city, which was squeezed between two Frankish states, Antioch and Edessa. The historian of Aleppo, Ibn Al-‘Adīm, suggests that Muslim emirs and kings did not even want to have Aleppo annexed by their realms because the city was suffering a severe economic decline and any leader who decided to defend it would have had to spend a great deal of money on his military operations.⁽³⁾

The emerging sense of unity between the Sunnīs and the Shī‘a Imāmīs of Aleppo against the Franks seems to have started in 1110 when the Franks of Antioch captured Al-Athārib castle near Aleppo and forced the Seljuk ruler of the city, Riḍwān, to pay an expensive tribute.⁽⁴⁾ Facing this imminent threat, a group of Muslim jurists, traders and Ṣūfī leaders from Aleppo hurried to Baghdad, seeking help from the Seljuk sultan, Muḥammad Ibn Malik Shāh (reg. 1105–1118), and the Abbasid caliph, Al-Mustazhir (reg. 1094–1118).⁽⁵⁾

Many scholars from Baghdad joined the cause and organized with the delegation of Aleppo what appears to be a political strike first at the mosque of the sultan, then at the mosque of the caliph the following Friday. In order to press the caliph and the sultan to take more seriously the misery of Aleppo, the scholars broke into the room of the caliph inside the mosque, destroyed the pulpit and made a great disturbance.⁽⁶⁾

Arab historians did not clearly identify the members of the Aleppo delegation, but Ibn Al-Qalānisī mentions ‘a man from Al-ashrāf’ (the descendants of the Prophet) as the leader.⁽⁷⁾ This is a strong indication that this man was a member of the Banū Zahra family, a Shī‘a noble family from Aleppo who monopolized the political representation of the descendants of the Prophet in the city for centuries.

Both the caliph and the sultan were busy with what the delegation of Aleppo and its Iraqi supporters must have seen as a trivial matter: the celebration of the arrival of the sultan’s sister, who had just married the caliph, in Baghdad from Esfahan.⁽⁸⁾ The caliph was frustrated by the disturbance of his wedding celebration, he even considered punishing the members of the Syrian delegation, but the sultan was wise enough to prevent him from doing so, and he ordered the military leaders to get ready for jihad against the Franks in Syria.⁽⁹⁾

On the sultan’s orders, a group of armies from Mosul, Mārdīn, and Khilāṭ marched to Syria under

(1) Maalouf, *Crusades through Arab Eyes*, 82-105.

(2) Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 108.

(3) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat Al-Ṭalab*, 4:1964.

(4) On this tribute, see Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:141.

(5) Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*; 173 Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:141.

(6) On these details see Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:141; ‘Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār Al-Qalam, 1984), 5:222.

(7) Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 276.

(8) *Ibid.*, 277.

(9) *Ibid.*

the leadership of Mawdūd in 1111, but they failed to take Aleppo or to deter the Franks.⁽¹⁾ Emir Riḍwān of Aleppo was very skeptical about any intervention from Baghdad that might make him lose his city. He did not allow the Iraqi armies any access to Aleppo.⁽²⁾

After the death of Riḍwān in 1113, the city fell deeper into chaos and became more vulnerable. The Franks of Antioch did not waste time, and they moved to besiege the city. It is in this crucial moment that the Imāmī judge of Aleppo, Ibn Al-Khashshāb, led a successful effort to save the city. Ibn Al-Athīr calls Ibn Al-Khashshāb the ‘headman (raʿīs) of Aleppo’⁽³⁾ and Ibn Al-ʿAdīm affirms that Ibn Al-Khashshāb was the de facto leader on whom people depended to protect Aleppo and preserve the public interest.⁽⁴⁾

Ibn Al-Khashshāb sent a delegation seeking help from the Turkish Sunnī emir of Mārdīn, Najm Al-Dīn Ilghāzī, (d. 1122). Upon his arrival, Ilghāzī was initially hesitant, found the situation of Aleppo a lost case, and decided to leave, but Ibn Al-Khashshāb and other leaders of the city convinced him to return and to defend the desperate population.⁽⁵⁾ Among these ‘other leaders’ was Ibn Badīʿ, a leader of a local Sunnī militia in Aleppo who, while he was on his way to convince Ilghāzī to return to Aleppo, was murdered along with his two sons by two Nizārī assassins. This is another indication of the strong Sunnī-Imāmī unity in Aleppo against both the Franks and the Nizārīs.⁽⁶⁾

Ilghāzī reorganized the Muslim fighting power, brought a fighting force from his eastern provinces, and then led the army to meet the Franks. The historian of Aleppo Ibn Al-ʿAdīm narrated that,

‘Ibn Al-Khashshāb came riding a donkey, with a lance in his hand. He urged people to fight. But when some of the [Turkish] soldiers saw him, they ridiculed him, and they said: ‘did we come from our land to be led by this turbaned man?’ Then he moved forward toward the people, and gave an eloquent speech that moved them and strengthened their determination while he was standing between the two armies. People started weeping and they developed a great respect for him.’⁽⁷⁾

This image of an Arab Shīʿa cleric boosting the morale of a Sunnī Turkish army and leading them to the battlefield was never common in Islamic history. However, it seems that the Imāmīs and the Sunnīs of the day found that any doctrinal difference among themselves was irrelevant in the face of the Franks.

Ilghāzī defeated the Franks on June 28, 1119, in a decisive battle known in Arabic sources as the Battle of Sarmadā, and in Frankish sources as Ager Sanguinis (the Field of Blood). Ibn Al-Qalānīsī calls it a great victory, like none that the Muslims had seen for a long time.⁽⁸⁾ It was one of the earliest successes of the counter-crusade, and it witnessed Sunnī-Imāmī unity.

A similar scenario took place in 1125, when King Baldwin II, supported by a large alliance of Muslim and Frankish adventurers, besieged Aleppo in one of the worst sieges that the city ever saw. Ibn Al-ʿAdīm reports that the besieged people of Aleppo were almost starving to death. They ate dogs and cats, and diseases spread among them. Nevertheless, whenever they heard the trumpets indicating a Frankish attack,

(1) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:185.

(2) Kamāl Al-Dīn Ibn Al-ʿAdīm, *Zubdat Al-Ḥalab fi Tarīkh Ḥalab* Damascus :Dār Al-Kitāb Al-ʿArabī;1:369-370 ,(1997 ,
Ibid ,*Bughyat Al-Ṭalab*.1:61 .

(3) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:141.

(4) Ibn Al-ʿAdīm, *Zubadat Al-Ḥalab*, 1:387.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Ibn Al-ʿAdīm, *Zubadat Al-Ḥalab*, 1:270.

(7) Ibid.1:390 ,.

(8) Ibn Al-Qalānīsī, *Dhayl*.320 .

they jumped from their beds and started fighting until they repelled them back from the city walls.⁽¹⁾

Ibn Al-Khashshāb sent a delegation (among which was the grandfather of historian Ibn Al-‘Adīm) seeking relief from the emir of Mosul, Aq-Sunqur Al-Bursuqī. When the delegation reached Mosul, they found that Al-Bursuqī was very sick, but he gathered a large army and hurried to Aleppo. When he approached the city, the besieging allies withdrew and their alliance broke up.⁽²⁾

The arrival of Al-Bursuqī at Aleppo opened the door for the future unification of Aleppo and Mosul under the rule of the Zengids: Al-Bursuqī’s son ‘Imād Al-Dīn Zengī and his grandson Nūr Al-Dīn. It also guaranteed, for the moment, the safety of Aleppo from the Franks. Not everyone was pleased with these developments, which opened the Syria’s doors to the Seljuks and their allies. Both Ibn Al-Khashshāb and Al-Bursuqī did not live long after this intervention in Aleppo in 1125. The Nizārīs assassinated Ibn Al-Khashshāb in the same year and Al-Bursuqī the next year.⁽³⁾

When Nūr Al-Dīn conquered Aleppo in 1146, he started an aggressive policy against the Shī‘a, the Imāmīs and the Nizārīs alike. Supported by some Sunnī scholars in Aleppo, he ordered the Shī‘a to stop slandering the reputation of the Prophet’s companions and to change the formulas of some of their rituals to be compatible with Sunnism. He also sent a few Shī‘a scholars into exile, including the father of the historian Ibn Abī Ṭay.⁽⁴⁾

Some of the aides of Nūr-Al-Dīn among the Sunnī scholars went as far as going to mosques and threatening to throw anyone who called ‘adhān according to the Shī‘a formula from the top of the minaret. (5) The Shī‘a of Aleppo were very frustrated with this policy, and they tried to resist it, but they could not do anything about it ‘out of fear of Nūr Al-Dīn’s iron fist.⁽⁶⁾

The Imāmīs continued to hope that they could end this persecution. Historians reported an aborted attempt in 1157 by the Imāmī Shī‘a to forge an alliance with Nūr Al-Dīn’s brother Muḥammad, who allowed them to revive their suppressed rituals in exchange for their political support against his ailing brother Nūr Al-Dīn. This plot suggests that the Shī‘a were probably still a majority in the city.⁽⁷⁾

The Imāmī Shī‘a seem to have preserved a majority in Aleppo during the time of Saladin and even afterwards during the rest of the Ayyūbid era. In their narration of the conflict between Saladin and his political rivals in Aleppo, Arab historians report that the young king of Aleppo, Al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā‘īl (son of Nūr Al-Dīn), asked the population of his city to support him against Saladin, but they brought forward a few conditions in exchange for their support. Among these conditions were the adoption of the Shī‘a formulas of ‘adhān and funeral prayers, and the acceptance by the public authority for the responsibility of suppressing any kind of sectarian discords.⁽⁸⁾ Ismā‘īl accepted their conditions, despite the fact that he himself was Sunnī and the son of Nūr Al-Dīn, who had persecuted the Shī‘a of Aleppo.⁽⁹⁾

Saladin was more pragmatic than his predecessor, Nūr Al-Dīn, and he valued winning hearts and minds as much as winning battles. There is even a debate between Western scholars on a supposed alliance between

(1) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat Al-Halab*, 1:293.

(2) More on this siege is below within the section on Dubays Ibn Ṣadaqa.

(3) Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 314.

(4) Abū Shāma Al-Maqdisī, *‘Uyūn Al-Rawḍatayn fī Akhbār Al-Dawlatayn*, (Beirut: Mu’assasat Al-Risāla, 1997), 1:118.

(5) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat Al-Halab*, 2:475-476.

(6) Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 301; Abū Shāma, *‘Uyūn Al-Rawḍatayn*, 1:202.

(7) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat Al-Halab*, 2:486; Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 349.

(8) Al-Ghazzī, *Nahr Al-Dhahab*, 3:88.

(9) On this political deal between Al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā‘īl and the Shī‘a of Aleppo, see Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya*, 12:289.

Saladin and the Byzantines against the German army of the Third Crusade.⁽¹⁾ When he appointed his son Al-Zāhir as a governor of Aleppo, Saladin gave him three pieces of advice:

‘(1) Be conscious of Allah—that is the source of all good; (2) avoid shedding blood, because blood revenge never fades away...; (3) preserve loyalty in the hearts of your people... and the hearts of the statesmen, leaders and nobles. I was able to achieve what I achieved only through winning people’s hearts.’⁽²⁾

These three principles seem to have guided Saladin’s internal policy, including the way he dealt with the Imāmī Shī‘a. The young Saladin served as shaḥna (head of the police) of Damascus under the rule of Nūr Al-Dīn in 1155, and he used to accompany Nūr Al-Dīn whenever he was in that city.⁽³⁾ He was certainly aware of Nūr Al-Dīn’s anti-Shī‘a policies. Judged by his later policies, however, Saladin does not seem to have been convinced by Nūr Al-Dīn’s behavior towards the Imāmī Shī‘a. Rather than following his predecessor’s aggressive persecution, he followed a containment policy based on winning the Shī‘a to Sunnism peacefully and building a broad alliance with them against the Franks.

When he became ruler of both Syria and Egypt after the death of Nūr Al-Dīn in 1174, Saladin tried to win the hearts of the Imāmīs, and he succeeded. He seems to have understood their social power in Aleppo—a power that had made several Sunnī leaders before him eager to buy their loyalty. Immediately after the death of Nūr Al-Dīn, Saladin moved from Cairo to capture Damascus and make it his capital. He followed a containment policy towards the Imāmī majority of Damascus, without compromising his Sunnī revival policy. Ibn Jubayr, who visited the city during Saladin’s reign, described some of the magnificent Shī‘a shrines in Damascus, and the rich endowments these institutions had.⁽⁴⁾

The biggest challenge for Saladin was Aleppo, which had another Imāmī majority and staunch Sunnī rivals who perceived Saladin as no more than an intruding usurper. These Sunnī opponents of Saladin gathered around the young boy Al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā‘īl, a son of Nūr Al-Dīn who was fighting for his father’s political legacy. It took Saladin nine years of political intrigues, military skirmishes and shifting alliances to capture Aleppo.

An early indication of the rapprochement between Saladin and the Imāmī of Aleppo can be deduced from his reaction to the murder of Ibn Al-Khashshāb, a relative of the abovementioned judge, and the leader of the Imāmīs of Aleppo. Ibn Al-Khashshāb was not on good terms with Saladin’s rivals in Aleppo, and he seems to have been supporting Saladin’s capture of the city. He was leading his supporters in a public protest in front of the Aleppo citadel when Saladin’s opponents killed him. Al-Asfahānī writes that ‘the leader of the [Imāmī] Shī‘a Ibn Al-Khashshāb came [to the citadel]. They murdered him in a terrible manner, and the Sultan [Saladin] became furiously angry when he received this news.’⁽⁵⁾

When Saladin finally controlled Aleppo in 1183, he allowed the Imāmī leaders who were expelled by Nūr Al-Dīn to return to their hometown. This decision partially explained why the Imāmī historian Ibn Abī Ṭay, whose father was among the expelled leaders, wrote the first eulogising biography of Saladin. The Shī‘a of Aleppo seem to have been enjoying freedom of worship under Saladin’s rule without any hindrance similar to that they had felt under the rule of Nūr Al-Dīn.

The Imāmī Shī‘a of Syria seem to have found in Saladin a reasonable ally. If one takes Ibn Abī Ṭay’s

(1) On this debate see :*Savvas Neocleous*, “The Byzantines and Saladin: Opponents of the Third Crusade?” *Crusades*, Vol. 1, (2010): 90-92.

(2) Ibn Shaddād, *Al-Nawādir*, 353.

(3) Abū Shāma’, *Uyūn Al-Rawḍatayn*, 1:320.

(4) Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat*, 226-227.

(5) Al-Faṭḥ Ibn’ Alī Al-Bandārī, *Sanā Al-Barq Al-Shāmī* (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Khanjī, 1979), 74.

writings as a mirror of the Sunnī-Imāmī relations during Saladin's rule, Imāmīs were more than happy under Saladin's authority. The surviving extracts of Ibn Abī Tay's biography of Saladin indicate that the Imāmīs' relations with Saladin were genuine and deep, not just a product of political convenience. Unlike their status under Nūr Al-Dīn, the Imāmī Shī'a under Saladin and his Ayyubid successors were not forced to convert to Sunnism or to hide their beliefs according to their principle of dissimulation, or *taqiyya*.

It is interesting, however, to notice that the active role of the Imāmīs of Aleppo in the counter-crusade ended with the advent of Nūr-Al-Dīn and Saladin's growing power. There are no historical reports of Imāmī public figures actively participating in Nūr Al-Dīn's or Saladin's war against the Franks or taking the initiative in this regard, the way Ibn Al-Khashshāb had earlier during the reign of Īghāzī. Two factors seem to have minimised the Imāmī role; the first was the religious persecution they had experienced under Nūr Al-Dīn, which probably led them to an attitude of indifference; the second was the fact that Nūr Al-Dīn and Saladin had filled the political void, and there was therefore no need for popular clerics, such as Ibn Al-Khashshāb, to lead the military initiatives.

Some of Saladin's successors had to adapt their religious policies to accommodate Shī'a social power. For example, Al-Zāhir Ghāzī, a son of Saladin and a ruler of Aleppo, built the famous Al-Nuqta (the drop) Shrine, where the Shī'a believe a drop of Imām Ḥusayn's blood fell when his severed head was carried from Karbala in Iraq to the Omayyad king Yazīd in Damascus in 680. Al-Ghazzī, a Sunnī historian from Aleppo, explained the political motivations behind this project:

'The writings on the shrine indicate that those who initiated the project were Imāmī Shī'a, despite the fact that the person who ordered the building of the shrine, King Al-Zāhir Ghāzī, was a Sunnī man and a son of a Sunnī man [Saladin]. Probably, the reason behind his decision was merely trying to please the Shī'a to win them as supporters, or to protect himself from their evil, because the Shī'a of Aleppo at that time were very powerful.'⁽¹⁾

The policies of Saladin and his sons towards the Imāmī Shī'a might have been affected by the ideological inclinations of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Nāṣir (1180–1225), who was, paradoxically, the symbol of the Abbasid Sunnism but who also displayed some sympathies with Imāmī Shī'ism in his policies and even in his poetry⁽²⁾ The alliance with the Imāmī Shī'a, however, was a consistent policy throughout the Ayyūbid era.

Another manifestation of this Imāmī-Sunnī unity during the Crusades came at the hand of Ṭalāī' Ibn Ruzzayk, who became vizier for the Fatimids in 1154, the very year in which Nūr Al-Dīn captured Damascus and unified Syria under his rule. Ibn Ruzzayk was ethnically Armenian, but he was, along with Al-Baṭāḥī, the only Fatimid vizier of Imāmī doctrine. Ibn Al-Athīr emphasizes that Ibn Ruzzayk 'was Imāmī. He was not following the Egyptian Alawid (Fatimid) doctrine.'⁽³⁾

The fact that this Imāmī vizier was enthusiastic about the alliance with Nūr Al-Dīn is an additional indication that the Sunnī-Imāmī rapprochement during the Crusades extended from Syria to Egypt. It also shows how Ibn Ruzzayk understood the new strategic shift that resulted from the Franks' control of Ascalon and Nūr Al-Dīn's control of Damascus.

A poet and statesman, Ibn Ruzzayk was the last strong vizier of the Fatimids. He impressed Sunnī

(1) Al-Ghazzī, *Nahr Al-Dhahab*, 2:214.

(2) For examples of these sympathies in Al-Nāṣir's policies, see Shams Al-Dīn Al-Dhahabī, *Al-'Ibar fī Khabār man Ghabar* (Beirut: Dār al Kutub Al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 3:87; in his poetry, see Gregorius Ibn Al-'Ibrī, *Tārīkh Mukhtaṣar Al-Duwal* (Beirut: Dār Al-Sharq, 1992), 237; Ibn Al-Wardī, *Tārīkh*, 1:109-110.

(3) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:286. On Ibn Ruzzayk's Imāmism, see also Shams Al-Dīn Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh Al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār Al-Kitāb Al-'Arabī, 1987), 38:196; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Al-Nujūm Al-Zāhira*, 5:311.

historians with his high intellect and prowess. Ibn Al-Qalānisī calls him ‘the knight of Muslims,’⁽¹⁾ Ibn Al-Athīr presents him as ‘a man of nobility,’⁽²⁾ and Abū Shāma describes him as ‘one of the great emirs and brave men.’⁽³⁾

Ibn Ruzzayk tried hard to keep the Syrian coast in Fatimid hands and, in at least one case, he inflicted on the Franks ‘a very painful defeat’ at Ascalon.⁽⁴⁾ From the perspective of the Sunnī-Shī‘a relations, however, what is interesting about Ibn Ruzzayk was his effort to forge an alliance with the anti-Shī‘a Nūr Al-Dīn against the Franks. Abū Shāma reported on several poems Ibn Ruzzayk wrote and sent to Nūr Al-Dīn through their common friend, the well-known poet and knight, Usāma Ibn Munqidh (1095–1188). In these poems, Ibn Ruzzayk urged Nūr Al-Dīn to stand against the Franks and to send his forces to liberate Jerusalem from the Frankish hands. He also expressed his will to lead the Egyptian armies and to join Nūr Al-Dīn in a common attack against the Franks.⁽⁵⁾

In his poetry, Ibn Ruzzayk appeared to have been more enthusiastic about fighting the Franks than was Nūr Al-Dīn himself. He kept urging Nūr Al-Dīn to avoid any kind of leaning towards the Franks or any reconciliation with them. He also claimed that he had already provided Nūr Al-Dīn with every support he asked for, and that his armies were ready to join Nūr Al-Dīn on the battlefield.⁽⁶⁾

Ibn Ruzzayk’s poetry reveals a deep emotional attachment to Jerusalem.⁽⁷⁾ Some historical reports even suggest that his final words expressed his deep regret that he did not do enough to recapture Jerusalem from the Franks.⁽⁸⁾ The political significance of this poetry deserves more attention. It shows a growing belief among the political elites of Egypt that Nūr Al-Dīn was the right man for the task that their own state could not accomplish. It also reflects a general willingness of the Imāmī Shī‘a to join the Sunnī leaders in their counter-crusade without reservation.

Nūr Al-Dīn did not show interest in any common military effort with this enthusiastic Imāmī vizier Ibn Ruzzayk, who was not urging him to come to conquer Egypt the way later Fatimid leaders did; rather, he wanted him to join with the Fatimid forces in fighting the Franks in and around Jerusalem. Taking into account his later interventions in Egypt, Nūr Al-Dīn apparently did not find in Ibn Ruzzayk what he sought—absolute control of Egypt—or, being an adjacent neighbor of the Franks, Nūr Al-Dīn simply did not see victory on the Frankish front as easily achieved as a poet in Cairo might have.

To complete the picture, one exception of this Sunnī-Imāmī unity during the Crusades is worth mentioning here. That was the case of Dubays Ibn Ṣadaqa, an adventurous Imāmī tribal leader from Iraq who once entered into alliance with the Franks against Aleppo. Ibn Ṣadaqa was originally from the city of Ḥilla, a historical center for Iraqi Imāmism near Baghdad that was founded by Dubays’s grandfather, Sayf Al-Dawla Ṣadaqa, in 1001. Al-Dhahabī describes Ṣadaqa as ‘Imāmī in doctrine, but a man of virtue and generosity.’⁽⁹⁾ He also reports that Ṣadaqa founded his city to serve Shī‘ism from the beginning.⁽¹⁰⁾ When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the city in 1326, he affirmed that ‘all the population are Imāmī Twelvers’⁽¹¹⁾—a fact that has

(1) Ibn Al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl*, 507.

(2) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 9:213.

(3) Abū Shāma, *Uyūn Al-Rawḍatayn*, 1:309.

(4) Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya*, 2:238.

(5) See the full texts of these poems in Abū Shāma, *Uyūn Al-Rawḍatayn*, 1:363-375.

(6) *Ibid.*, 1:374.

(7) For example, in a poem quoted by Abū Shāma, *Uyūn Al-Rawḍatayn*, 1:338.

(8) Aḥmad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt Al-A‘yān wa Anbā’ Abnā’ Al-Zamān* (Beirut: Dār Al-Thaqāfa, n.d.), 2:440.

(9) Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Ibar*, 2:382.

(10) Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 19:407.

(11) Muḥammad Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa* (Rabat: Akādimiyyat Al-Mamlaka Al-Maghribiyya, 1996), 2:56.

not significantly changed to the present day.

After the killing of his father by the hand of the Abbasid caliph, Dubays started a long life of troublemaking and pillaging in Iraq, Syria and Persia. Among his adventures was an attempt to capture Aleppo with the help of two Sunnī adventurers. He wrote to some people (presumably Shī‘a) in Aleppo to join him, but his letters were discovered by the Sunnī leader of the local police, Ibn Badī‘. Some of those who received his letters were killed; others were sent into exile.⁽¹⁾

Dubays did not give up; he asked for the support of the Frankish king of Jerusalem, King Baldwin II, in the capture of Aleppo. To convince his Frankish allies, he tried to invoke the Shī‘ism of the people of Aleppo, in a rare explicit invocation of Shī‘ism in such a context. Ibn Al-Athīr reports that Dubays told the Franks: ‘the people [of Aleppo] are Shī‘a, and they are inclined towards me because of the [Shī‘a] doctrine. Whenever they see me, they will submit the city to me.’ He gave the Franks generous promises, saying that he would become their obedient vassal in Aleppo.⁽²⁾

An alliance was forged between Muslims and Franks against Aleppo. On the Muslim side, there was Dubays, supported by two Sunnī leaders: Sulṭān Shāh, the son of Riḍwān who dreamed of regaining the throne of his father, and Ṭughril Arslan, a brother of the Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia who was looking for political fortune anywhere. On the Frankish side, there was King Baldwin II, supported by the Frankish armies of Edessa and Antioch.⁽³⁾

As demonstrated earlier, when the people of Aleppo realized the imminent threat, their Imāmī judge and de facto ruler, Ibn Al-Khashshāb, took the initiative. He sent a delegation seeking military support from Aqsuqur Al-Bursuqī, the Sunnī ruler of Mosul. When Al-Bursuqī’s forces reached Aleppo ‘the Franco-Bedouin alliance,⁽⁴⁾ as Runciman calls it, came to an end.⁽⁵⁾ Dubays led his tribesmen eastward to Iraq, and that was the end of his adventure to capture Aleppo.

Despite the fact that Dubays tried to use the Shī‘a doctrine to advance his political ambition in Aleppo, he did not have the credibility to do so. He was evidently not motivated by any religious ideal, and it was in the siege that he initiated that religious provocation against both the Sunnīs and Shī‘a was used in a way that had no parallel in Muslim infighting during the Crusades. The besieging armies used to drag out the bodies of dead Muslims and shout at the people of Aleppo: ‘This is your Muḥammad’ and ‘this is your ‘Alī.’⁽⁶⁾ Moreover, the people of Aleppo reacted to this siege initiated by Dubays with more contempt than ever before. Ibn Al-‘Adīm reports on the authority of his father that the people of Aleppo used to climb on the wall of their besieged city, beating their small drums and shouting: ‘Dubays, the evil one’ (Dubays yā naḥīs)⁽⁷⁾!

The Imāmī judge of Aleppo, Ibn Al-Khashshāb, clearly had much more doctrinal credibility and political influence. Moreover, Dubays had Sunnī and Frankish partners, which makes his endeavor hard to justify in doctrinal terms. Therefore, it is still safe to say that, in general, the Sunnīs and the Imāmī Shī‘a of Syria developed a sense of unity in the face of the Frankish threat.

As a conclusion, one might argue that the Crusades’ impact on the Sunnī-Shī‘a relationship was complex

(1) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat Al-Ṭalab*, 7:3483.

(2) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 8:695.

(3) See more details of the circumstances in which this alliance was built in Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 2:171-173.

(4) *Ibid.* 2:173.

(5) Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, 8:695.

(6) Ibn Al-‘Adīm, *Zubadat Al-Ḥalab*. 1:420.

(7) *Ibid.* 1:293.

and sometimes self-contradictory. The Frankish presence divided the Sunnī and Shī'a tactically in the short term, but it unified them strategically in the long term. The Crusades created more disunity and disarray among the Muslim political elites, but they provided an opportunity for political unity and a pretext for doctrinal uniformity. Overall, the Frankish presence created a unification status, and the impact of the Crusades as a unifying factor was much stronger than their impact as a dividing factor. Muslim sectarian divisions slowly dissipated in the face of the common enemy.

There is, however, a need to distinguish between the two Shī'a branches in their relations with the triumphant Sunnism. Under the pressure of the Crusades, the Imāmī Shī'a developed a sense of unity with the emerging Sunnī/Turkish power, while the Ismā'īlī Shī'a (Fatimids and Nizārīs alike) were more resistant to Sunnī hegemony. Unfortunately, this rapprochement between Sunnism and Imāmī during the Crusades has been clouded today by the current polemics between the two major traditions of Islam and the lack of non-apologetic studies of the Sunnī-Shī'a relations.

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