NEW SPOTLIGHTS ON THE PROBLEMATIC STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF NUR AL-DEEN MAHMOUD (1146 -1174 A.D)

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ABSTRACT

This paper does spotlights on problematic study of the history of Nur al – Deen Mahmoud (1146–1174 A.D.), the Leader of Islamic Jihad movement against the crusaders. We can summarize main points of this paper as follows: Firstly: we do not have biography of that leader by a contemporary historian, secondly: Nur al – Deen could not seize any crusader state in the opposite, thirdly: several historians criticized him because he could not attack Antioch although he defeated the crusaders in several battles, fourthly: overlapping of his history with Saladin's history, fifthly: Many of the modern historian neglected his active role in the era of balance of powers between Muslims and crusaders, sixth: several Orientalists could not recognize his important role in the Jihad movement, seventh: there are several motives of his foreign policy, eight: study of that leader as sole leader without popular support.

Keywords: Nur ad-Din Mahmoud, Crusades, Problematic Study, Middle Ages

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we will deal with what can be described as the problematic study of the history of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud (1146 -1174 A.D) that prominent leader in the era of the Crusades, for the object of estimating, *via* scholar objectivity, his own historical role.

We can discuss this problem *via* the following scopes:

First: we do not have a biography of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud written by a contemporary historian of his age, contrary to Saladin (1174-1193) since he was contemporary of the judge and historian Bahhaa al-Deen Ibn Shaddad (1226), who wrote the great and enjoyable Saladin's biography "al-nawader al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Mahasenal-yousoufiyyah".

On the other hand, a late historian of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud, Ibn Qadi Shahbah (1470), wrote Nur al-Deen's biography, entitled "al-Kawakeb al-Dorriyyah fi al –Seerah al –Nuriyyah", in which he counted on contemporary authorities, such as Ibn al-Qalanisi's (1160) work "Thail Tareekh Dimashq", and Ibn al-Atheer's(1232) two books: "al-Tarikh al –Baher" and "al-kamil fi al-Tarikh ". Those authorities cannot be compared with "al-nawaderal–Sultaniyyah" et al.,

Here, we cannot ignore, in the case of existing of a contemporary historian and biographer of Nur al –Deen, he should have provided us with a valuable historical subject on that prominent leader who lived in the Era of Crusades, *via* his own association, then, to the center of the political decision.

Second: Nur al-Deen Mahmoud had acceded to the throne shortly after the assassination of his father, Emad al-Deen Zengy (1146), who led the military operations resulted in the fall of the Crusader principality of Edessa (1144), and preceded Saladin (1171 -1193), who led the Muslims' armies, also, to the fall of Crusade kingdom of Jerusalem (1187), after the decisive battle of Hattin, in 4th of July of the same year.

Nur al-Deen Mahmoud could neither capture nor fall of any crusades' kingdom or principality. Therefore, the historians considered him as a normal ruler who could not achieve a decisive victory over the invaders. Hence, they underestimated him, in contrary to other Muslim leaders in the history of Islamic Jihad.

Third: There is a wide sector of historians who are obsessed with the study and analysis of the military operations and victories of the leaders, they considered Nur al-Deen Mahmoud as merely a governor who did not achieve remarkable military achievements against the Crusades, though he already achieved victory over them in military battles, such as Yaghri (1148); Anb (1149); Harim (1163). The most critical of them is the late battle, which the Arab and crusades' authorities discussed in deep details, in comparison with the other battles, which is a notable remark for its importance. We also do not ignore that Nur al-Deen had faced an Armenian–Byzantine alliance in that battle.

That prominent leader more preferred the political solutions, sometimes, than the military clashes, especially if the rival was a super power that may lead to brutal deaths for his troops. That's why he did not break through the crusade principality of Antioch () after the three victories accomplished by his army. Nur al-Deen was wise in such act, as he had wished not to flame up the Byzantine Empire with rage, which was supporting, then, the Crusades, in spite of the hard relations between those two western parties. In the same time the Byzantine Empire adhered to the existence of the Nuri State to consume the power and energy of the Crusaders, in particular those who dominated the principality of Antioch, so that Byzantine gain the eventual victory, based upon weakening the other powers in Syria. That was a general politics followed throughout its bitter history. However, it paid the ultimate expensive price later on, in 1204 A.D., when Constantinople downfallen, for the first time in history, by the fourth Crusade.

Fourth: one of the aspects of the problems concerning the study of history of Nur el-Deen Mahmoud, is the overlapping of his own history with Saladin's, so that the history of first is not written without mentioning the second's. Therefore, we find that historians dealing with Nur al-Deen history take side with him against Saladin, and vice versa. Both parties do not recognize that Saladin and Nur al-Deen were prominent leaders, led the jihad movement against the crusaders, and both complemented each other's rule.

The same thing appears with the succeeded leaders in history of Islam, such as Al-Zaher Baybers (1260-1277) who commanded the Muslims to downfall the Principality of Antioch in 1268 A.D., and al –Mansour Qalawoon (1279-1290) the commander of falling of County of Tripoli in 1289 A.D., as well as al-Ashraf Khalil Ibn Qalawoon (1290-1293) who commanded the Muslim army to downfall the Principality of Acre in 1291 A.D.

Fifth: Many of the modern historians neglected the importance of the era of " balance of powers" between Muslims and Crusaders, which professionally administered by Nur al – Deen, in spite of its central role in the history of Crusades, as without which the decisive victory over the Crusades in 1187 A.D. had never been accomplished, after the death of that prominent leader.

Without doubt, the summit of the success of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud was represented by the success of the Nuri –Abbasside Alliance in the downfall of the Fatimid Caliphate in 1171 A.D., which led consequently to change the history of the whole region, since Egypt had returned to the Sunni Domain by its whole natural, material and humanitarian resources. The most certain fact here is that the capturing of the Fatimid Capital of Cairo in 1171 A.D. was the real introduction of the capturing and opening of Jerusalem by Muslims in 1187 A.D. and of the falling of Kingdom of Jerusalem after its long lasting era (1099 – 1187).

Thus, we have to recognize the importance of the era (1146 -1174), in which many achievements had accomplished, such as capturing and annexing of Damascus in 1154 and the downfall of Fatimid Cairo in 1171 A.D. By that victory, both important cities had been joined under the dominance of one political power for the first time in epochs. Consequently, the cities of Cairo,

Damascus, Aleppo & Musil had been governed by one unified Islamic government, and surrounded the crusaders from the south, east and north eastern borders. Those cities are much important commercially, economically and demographically, as well as they have a great important political role in terms of the balances of International powers, particularly in the Levant.

Sixth: Nur al-Deen Mahmoud has been attacked by a group of orientalists who did not recognize his real and critical role in the Jihad Movement in the era of Crusades. The clearest proof on that, is what narrated by the prominent American historian John La Monte, as he thought that Nur al-Deen's main object was a political - based, not a religious- based.

We do refute that by quoting what William of Tyre, the most notable Crusade historian, mentioned in his HISTORIA RERUM, regarding Nur al-Deen as follows:

"He was a just prince, courage and wise. And regarding his traditions and people, he was a religious man". Also, we do not ignore that Nur al-Deen Mahmoud had asked the prominent contemporary historian, Ibn Asaker (1176), to write a book on Jihad, and he obeyed and composed a book entitled as "Arba'oon Hadithan fi al-hath ala al-Jihad", or, " forty traditions on fulfilling the Jihad". This clear evidence indicates his interest in the holy war against the crusaders, and that his own focus was the Jihad against the invaders, as well as his recognizing of the importance of Jihad that he imposed that great scholar of Damascus to compose such a book, which we consider it was distributed and read in a way enlightened the concept of Jihad in the souls of the contemporary Muslims.

Add to that, the age of Crusades was an age full of Jihad against the invaders, in particular it was the first time the Islamic world faces an imperial (ruining) western settling venture, not only a war for spoiling the resources of the lands. Whoever reads the written tradition on Jihad in that age, would recognize the huge amount of books and epistles written on Jihad, in the 12th and 13th centuries A.D.

Seventh: one of the problems regarding the history of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud, which stirs a big debate, and many would object to it, is the motives and objectives of his foreign relations, which are:

- 1: The religious motive, as Nur al-Deen was one of the leaders of Islamic Jihad movement in the age of Crusades. We even consider him the prime engineer of that movement in the second half of the 12th century A.D.
- 2: The political motive, which appeared in Nur al-Deen's wish to establish a vast state of its own major weight and importance among the other powers in the region. He already accomplished that wish *via* his relations with the Abbasid Caliphate, Byzantine Empire and other contemporary powers.
- 3: The economic motive, which is the major base on which the states do stand throughout the human ancient, medieval and modern history. Nur al Deen Mahmoud wished to open the Syrian coast, the far- important place in the economy of the Middle Ages, in particular since the crusaders, after a long period of conflict with Muslims, which lasted to more than half a century, had the power to fully close that coast, from San Simeon, port of Antioch in the north, to Gaza in the south, in 1153 A.D, when the invaders captured Ascalon in the reign of Baldwin III (1145 1163). Consequently, the Nuri State became a mere in-land state, has no maritime access on the Mediterranean. And as a result of that, it needed to negotiate with the Crusade party to export its products. That led to making peace deals and treaties, to ensure the safety of the trade caravans on the routes lead to the Syrian coast, particularly to Acre, which was the Trade gem of that coast, for being a professional port working successfully the year long.

And from Acre, the settled Italian merchants, from Genoa, Pisa and Venice, were bringing *via* the Mediterranean Sea the oriental products and goods, specially spices and silk, to the eager European markets and consumers.

Here we do confirm the desire of Nur al-Deen to subjugate the Middle-Eastern extension of the strategic intercontinental Silk Road, which ended on the Syrian coast. when Nur al-Deen intervened in the issues of Fatimid Egypt, *via* the ministers' conflict in the reign of the Caliph al-Ādid (1160 -1171), his action was not limited to a political aim or a religious sect only, but for his own desire to subjugate the Egyptian coast too, from al-Areesh in the east to Alexandria in the west, which was a critical section of the Mediterranean, the core of the international conflict then, for being the Crusades itself a Mediterranean war. Hence, the aim of that action was to compensate Nur al-Deen for the lack of the Syrian coast, as well as to use the Egyptian resources to seize that coast. That had already achieved later by Saladin, after his victory in the battle of Hattin in 4th of July 1187 A.D., since the seizing of the Syrian coastal cities, for their own importance, was done in a quick way, even before capturing Jerusalem itself.

4: The popular motive: it is a strong one that cannot be underestimated. The Muslim peoples in Syria, Egypt and Iraq considered a pressure power over the Muslim governors at that time, include Nur al-Deen of course, to face the Crusades' invasion that conquered their lands and killed their sons. That popular motive was a factor of pressure with its major political weight, and it emerged since the very early jihad against the invaders. Therefore, the role done by Nur al-Deen Mahmoud was a response to a wide and strong public will. That's why he is described in the public traditions as "The Martyr", although he did not die in a battle. The people do visit his grave to get his blessing as a martyr.

Thus, we can, objectively, declare that there are four motives of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud's politics with the Crusaders, *i.e.*, the religious motive, which is undeniable and should be put forward, and the political, economic and popular ones. The secular motives do not represent any offense to the history of a man considered as a leader of the Islamic Jihad movement. We do not ignore here that we are discussing a career of a man; his acts are not surrounded with a sacred halo made by his contemporary historians as well as the traditional public fantasy. we do not confuse between his personal religious behaviour, as he had a small wooden house in which he was worshipping, as well as his respect and love to the Muslim Sufis, and between his politics, which reasonably cannot be described as fully religious without the existence of other motives, since the foreign politics do not run in a mere one way.

As a matter of fact, in his book " al-Kamil ", the chief Iraqi historian, Ibn al-Atheer, adhered to show Nur al-Deen as a pious man. That is shown clearly in his following expressions:

"I have studied the careers of the precedent kings and Caliphs, and I did not see, after the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs and Umar Ibn Abdul-Aziz, better than Nur al-Deen's career, and his way in committing justice to his people".

"He was praying in the mid-nights, and had graceful prayers and Zikr".

"Of the signs of his piety and worshipping, he led an ascetic life, as he was neither eat nor wear clothes nor act personally except by his own personal money; which was a property he gained by his justly share of his war booty as a king, and by his personal lawful share in the Muslim Treasury".

"One day, his wife complained at him from the financial straits they had. Then he said to her: "I do not have any liquidity except this share. The whole money of the Treasury is not a personal property of me, and I can neither betray the Muslims nor go to the Hell in the After Life for fulfilling your personal needs in a wrongful way". The loyalty of Ibn al-Atheer to the House of Zengy led him to completely take Nur al-Deen' side, which we see clearly in his two works "al-Kamil fi al –Tarikh "and "al-Baher". Many of the modern historians follow Ibn al-Atheer in this way. We even find a prominent Arab historian had published a book in 1980s, in the era of, as it was called then, the Islamic waking, entitled: "Nur al-Deen Mahmoud wa tagribatoh al-Islamiyya", or "Nur al-Deen Mahmoud and his Islamic experience".

Such is considered as a wrong-based fashion that we cannot accept, because Nur al-Deen Mahmoud had no an original Islamic Experience that can be ascribed to him, rather he represented a part of a Jihad movement extended throughout the 12th and 13th centuries A.D.

Many of researchers, who have surging religious sentiment, had followed the same path of wrong assessment.

In his analytic study published in 1948, entitled "Nur al-Deen Mahmoud wa al-Salibiyyoun. Haraket al-Ifakah wa al-Mogtoma' al-Islami fial-Qarn al-Sadis al-Hijri" or "Nur al-Deen Mahmoud and the Crusaders. The movement of alert and the Islamic society in the 6th Hijri century", the pioneer historian Hassan Habashi (2005) earlier recognized the necessity of the researchers to non-binding their selves over the pure religious explanation of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud's career. That opinion was under the direction and advices of his professor, Muhammed Mustafa Ziyadah (1961), and he was fully right in that opinion.

However, we should take care of the exaggeration of the economic motive alone, or, then, we will follow the Marxists historians in their wrong explanations of history, based upon "Historical Materialism", which is a wrong theory, its failure proved by history and the world itself. Instead, we should focus the multi-motives of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud's foreign policy.

Eighth: Many of Eastern and western historians studied the history of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud, upon the base of "the leader/ hero", hence, they concentrated on the role of the individual in making history, although the individual is a pure product of his age, politically, intellectually, socially and economically. Neglecting such aspects will lead, naturally, to omission the role and importance of the society that created, originally, that historical hero.

Actually, the books of the careers of historical figures have its own scholar roles, focusing on the Muslim eminent men in the medieval ages, as individuals. But, when we write and discuss their careers and history, in our current century, we would be able to surround and deep-analyse the historical scene in a much clearer way. So, we can say that what Nur al-Deen Mahmoud, as well as the other Muslim leaders, had done, is a result and a product of a whole nation, not of one single leader.

Here, we do not ignore that focusing on the individual leader will lead to omit the ideological depth of the Islamic Jihad movement, which appeared as a public reaction, and was adopted and fulfilled by the contemporary leaders.

CONCLUSION

First: There is a real critical problem regarding the study of the history of Nur al-Deen Mahmoud and his own role in the age of Crusades. That appears *via* the view and narration of the Muslim historians lived in his era, as well as the modern historians, who add a pure religious mark to his role, for so clear political reasons that cannot be veiled to the minds of any one.

Second: The view of history of that leader swayed between an Arab view which imposes a pure Islamic mark on his career, and an orientalist view which severely underestimates him, except in rare cases.

Third: we are not able to objectively study Nur al-Deen's history, except if we recognize the multi-motives of his foreign policy, such as the religious, political, economic and popular motives. Also, the researchers should know the scopes of the axis and bases of the era of power-balancing between the Muslims and the Crusaders. That era was a real introduction to achieve the decisive victory of the Muslims over the Crusaders in the Battle of Hattin, under the command of Saladin in 4th of July 1187 A.D.

Finally, we should note that Saladin was, originally, introduced to the field of politics by Nur al-Deen Mahmoud, and his age does complete the age of his precedent, *i.e.*, Nur al-Deen, and we do not underestimate the glorious historical roles of both figures.

The aforementioned is a brief of the important results of this paper.

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