Dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb

Territories, People, Identities

Edited by

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Roberta Denaro

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CHAPTER 18

Better barr al-ʿaduww Than dār al-ḥarb
Some Considerations about Eighteenth-Century Maghribi Chronicles

Antonino Pellitteri

1 Introduction

The topic of the dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb dichotomy which is at the center of this volume can be dealt with from several points of view. I shall limit myself mainly to analyzing the matter starting with the reading of a number of essays by two Maghribi historians from the Ottoman period, the Libyan Ibn Ġalbūn (Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Ḫalīl Ġalbūn al-Ṭarābulusī al-Miṣrātī, twelfth/eighteenth century) and the Tunisian Maḥmūd al-Maqdīš al-Safāqusī (d. 1226/1811), with some reference to other authors from different historical periods and geographical contexts.

Ibn Ġalbūn and al-Maqdīš are representatives of an as yet little studied local historiography. They both studied fiqh, tafsīr and Hadith according to the tradition of that period. In the chronicles that we take into account, the two historians and fiqḥāʾ seem to be more interested in describing the Other as representing similarity and diversity at the same time. This orientation should be approached, in my view, taking into account what my colleague and friend Gianroberto Scarcia wrote about the dichotomies islām/ḥarb and ʿarab/ʿajam:

What is not Islam, then, is not what is located beyond clear—although controversial and variable—territorial boundaries but a merely historical “flaw” of the human soul. A flaw which is behavioral, superficial, political and not a way of being (a “diversity”) of an anthropological order: a moral flaw indeed, which is, in Islam, juridical.  

It is sufficient to consider the use of the term ṣağr (pl. tuğūr) in Arabic sources to realize that Scarcia’s observations are very insightful. According to the Lisān

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al-ʿarab by Ibn Manẓūr, the meaning of ṭaġr is “breach,” an open and fluctuating passage. The territory beyond the breach is not necessarily a grey zone between white and black; it represents what is contiguous to the world of Islam, a place of apprehension. In this regard, it can be useful to look at the Fatimid period and the role of Sicily in that historical and ideological context, even though at first sight this reference may appear inappropriate.

Indeed, if we examine the case of Calabria in particular—although this region wasn’t actually part of the Islamic territories, in the tenth century its population used to pay the jizya to the Fatimid ʿāmil of Sicily—or more generally the case of Southern Italy at the time of the first Banū Abī ʿl-Ḥusayn, or Kalbids—governors of Muslim Sicily on behalf of the Fatimids—we can better understand the complexity of the matter. In this context, an important document concerning Sicily at the time of the victory of the daʿwa fāṭimiyya in North Africa is very revealing. The document expresses a coherent—if we consider the time and place in which it was drafted—definition of the Other as a reflection of the Self. It is a message dated 296/909 and addressed to the Muslim Sicilians by the dāʿī Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣanʿānī after the Fatimid victory over the Aghlabids in the same year. According to qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, the message was part of a more comprehensive document sent to all the territories administered by the Aghlabids, promising amān to everyone who had shown obedience and loyalty towards the daʿwa fāṭimiyya. There is no explicit mention of the dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb dichotomy in the document, but only a reference—appropriate to the history of that time—to dārikum and dār al-mušrikīn, a sort of problematic invitation to the ḥaqq al-jihād and an even more problematic appeal “li-jihādikum al-kafara al-ẓālimīn.” The latter should be intended—in my opinion—as a fight against the usurpers, the Bānū al-Aġlāb, who persist in error, as clarified by the above-mentioned qāḍī al-Nuʿmān in his Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa which contains the aforesaid document.4

أَتَتْ مَعَشَر أَهْل جَزِيرَة صِقْطَلِية أُحْق بِمَا أُولِيَّهُ مِنَ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَاسْدِيْتُهُ، وَأَوْلِيَّهُ بِأَقْرَبِ إِلَيْهِ لَقَرْبِ دَارُكِم مِن دَارِ الْمَشْرِكِينِ وَلَجِهَادِكِ

2 See Antonino Pellitteri, I Fatimiti e la Sicilia (sec. X): materiali per uno studio sulla Sicilia thaghr e terra di gihâd con particolare riferimento a fonti ismailite dell’epoca (Palermo: Centro Culturale al-Farabi, 1997), 15.
4 Pellitteri, I Fatimiti e la Sicilia, 45–49.
A) And you, the people of the island of Sicily have a greater right and are (even) more deserving of the benevolence that I have awarded to you; all the more so, since your land is closer to that of the godless (al-mušrikīn), and because of your jihad against the unbelieving sinners. I will fill your island, if God be willing, with horsemen and foot soldiers, who are believers and will have the task of fighting the just cause of the jihad in the name of God. And God will consolidate, through these, the hold of religion and the strength of the Muslims, and through these, will humiliate the idolatry of the godless. The power and strength are with God Almighty and Omnipotent; He suffices, for our needs, and is our most excellent Defender.

B) And when what was written was read out in the country, its people felt safe and confident, calm and grateful. Their fears were appeased, and delegations reached him from every corner of the land to thank him, to rejoice with him and to acknowledge his justice, goodness and successful running of public affairs. This increased their exultation and joy for him.5

There is no doubt that this letter to the Sicilians should be analyzed also by taking into account the specific terminology and framework of the fourth/tenth–century daʿwa fāṭimiyya both from a historical-political and a juridical–theoretical point of view, but that is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, we can affirm that in qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s text one can find references to the fact that Islam urges all humankind to know one another, according to the Qur’an: “And (We) have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another (sūrat al-ḥujurāt, Q 49:13).” On the other hand, the idea of geographical divisions along religious lines is mentioned neither in the Qur’an nor in the sayings of the Prophet. The notion of “houses” or “divisions” of the

world such as dār al-islām and dār al-ḥarb does not appear in the Qur’an or in the Hadith. Early Islamic jurists devised these terms to denote the legal rulings in connection with the Islamic expansion. Since Islam is not necessarily intended as “a physical space,” the dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb dichotomy is not applicable to real history. The Arab historians themselves, although they were often fuqahā’, coined different terms for different regions according to the actual situations prevailing therein, like dār al-amān (territory of security), dār al-silm (territory of peace) and dār al-muwāda’a (territory of mutual peace). As an example that is closer to the historical period which is the main focus of this article, I would like to mention the case of the Yemeni historian and Shafi‘i faqīh Zayn al-dīn b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ma‘barī, who noted in his Tuhfat al-mujāhidīn fī ba’d aḥbār al-burtuqāliyyīn (ca. 985/1577):

In Mulaybar, Muslims had no authoritative chief. Their unfaithful lord used to govern them according to the regional laws ... Nevertheless, Muslims used to enjoy respect and consideration. They were allowed to pray, to celebrate their festivities; judges and muezzins regulated their duties and cared about the application of the laws among Muslims. People were not allowed to interrupt their activities on Friday, and whoever did not respect the rules was fined. If a Muslim committed a crime punishable by death, the penalty was applied only by the consent of the notables of the Muslim community. In the same way, when a Muslim transgressed the Law, he was not arrested without the notables’ authorization. And when a member belonging to a lower social class converted to Islam, he was respected as a Muslim even if he came from the lowest caste.”

What ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ma‘barī adds is therefore important:


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7 “Muslims entered the ports of Mulaybar, settled there and local people entered Islam day after day, so that Islam appeared more and more prominent until Muslim multiplied there and the country was inhabited by them, since the infidel subjects showed little enmity”: ibid., 46.
Conversely, with regard to the coming of the Portuguese (ahl Burtuqāl min al-ifranj), Maʿbarī underlined: “fa-ẓalamūhum wa-afsadū wa-ʿtadū ‘alayhim min aṣnāf al-ʿuzūl wa’l-fasād al-ẓāhira bayna ahl al-bilād.”

It is useful to point out that the Yemeni author describes elsewhere the modalities of the Islamization of the Mulaybar local population by using the expression: “daḥala ahluhā fi ‘l-dīn qalīlan qalīlan,” (their people entered into the religion little by little) as if he intended to denote a condition that was continuously redefining itself: that of dār al-ʿahd, or the “land of the pact,” which, according to Šāfiʿī, whose school the Yemeni historian belonged to, would be a temporary juridical status of a territory, between dār al-islām and dār al-ḥarb.

Having considered these precedents, what is more interesting to us is the representation of the barr al-ʿaduww in the works of Ibn Ġalbūn and Maqdiš al-Safāqusī.

Little is known about the life of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Ḫalīl Ġalbūn al-Ṭarābulusī al-Miṣrātī, who is better known as al-ustād al-fāḍil al-muʾarriḥ al-ʿallāma, apart from the fact that he belonged to a family of well-known ulema who were active in the Miṣrāta and Misillāta areas, then in Tripoli, and that he lived at the time of the governor Ahmad Pasha Qaramanli.

In 1133/1721 he must have come back to Miṣrāta, in Libya, his hometown, from Cairo, where he had studied at al-Azhar under the sheikh Raʿūf al-Bišbīšī and al-ustād Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Yaḥyā al-Sūsī.

In Miṣrāta, he used to teach tafsīr, fiqh—he belonged to the Maliki maḏhab—and Hadith. In the course of his teachings, he seems to have asked the governor for the suspension of the fees which were due from the students, and the request was accepted by Aḥmad Pasha. According to another anecdote which refers to him, he acted as a governor’s spokesman in order to inhibit the spread of the alcoholic beverages deriving from the fermentation of dates.
The only extant work of the historian of Miṣrāta is the History of Tripoli in Libya, or al-Tīḍkār fī man malaka Ṭarābulus wa-mā kāna bihā min al-aḥbār.

Better known are the biography and work of the Tunisian Maḥmūd Maqdīš al-Safāqusī, who was a man of wide culture, an expert in law, science and specifically the science of tawḥīd.

His work Nushat al-anẓār fī ‘ajāʿib al-tawārīḫ waʾl-aḥbār, written in the second half of the twelfth/eighteenth century, is typologically meaningful with regard to the succession of its chapters: the geographical introduction—largely dedicated to Sicily—in which the historian borrows from his predecessors such as Idrīsī and Ibn Jubayr; some notes on medieval history; the closing chapter concerning the city of Sfax, its territory and the history of the events at the end of the eighteenth century, with regard to relations in the Mediterranean and the policy of Venice.

Carlo Alfonso Nallino provided a partial translation into Italian of al-Maqdīš’s work, and in particular the appendix—or final chapter—published under the title “Della guerra santa che gli abitanti di Sfax ebbero a sostenere in questi ultimi tempi.”

This translation prompts us to return to the original text in Arabic in order to consider the point of view of “mirroring.” From this perspective, we can affirm that his re-reading of the traditional topics of the great Muslim geographers, travelers and historians of the past should not be considered as a sterile imitation, but as the establishing of the representation of the ‘aduww as a reflection of the Self.

Nallino’s translation, although valuable, has a limit (but the same could apply to other great orientalists): it does not take into due account, even in the title, the connection between representation, perception and memory, image and its meaning. In fact, when al-Maqdīš wrote that there were many islands “between al-Andalus and the land of the enemies,” he intended representation as an active process inscribed in a complex cognitive apparatus, as congruently expressed by the Arabic: “bayna al-Andalus wa-barr al-ʿudwa.”

Both in this and in Ibn Ġalbūn’s work, we do not come across the dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb dichotomy. Moreover, in accordance with the Muslim historiographical tradition Ibn Ġalbūn never uses the term ṣalībiyyūn, or Crusaders, to indicate the non-Muslim Other, either when he refers to the past or when he narrates contemporary events. In this respect, the aforemen-

tioned Maʿbarī, in the course of the first chapter of his work dedicated to jihad, refers to non-Muslims, especially the Portuguese, by calling them generically *kuffār*. He also distinguishes them into two kinds: those who are *mustaqirrīn fī bilādihim* (i.e. those who permanently live in their countries)—in this case the jihad is *fard kifāya*—and those who are aggressive towards the Muslim countries, in which case the jihad is *fard ʿayn ʿalā kull muslim mukallaf*.14

The terminology used by the two Maghribi authors has ethnic and geographical connotations (*ifranj, rūm* and *bilād al-rūm*); political connotations (*al-ʿaduww*); and juridical-ideological connotations (*ahl al-kufr, naṣāra* and *naṣrānī*) as it appears in Ibn Ġalbūn. As far as this aspect is concerned, the eleventh/seventeenth-century Maghribi historian Ibn Abī Dinār might have had some influence. In fact, with regard to the Sicilians and Roger II, he wrote that the Norman king, in order to conquer the isle of Djerba, sent a fleet including “*muslimīn min ahl Ṣiqilliyya wa-naṣāra min al-Ifranjiyyīn*” (Muslims from the people of Sicily and Christian Franks), making almost no distinction within the enemy group, which is remarkable if we consider that the author was a highly regarded *qāḍī*.15

In turn, to designate Roger, Ibn Ġalbūn used the expressions *malik al-Ifranj šāhib Šiqilliyya* (king of the Franks, master of Sicily).16 Both authors considered that the policy of Roger II towards Muslim north Africa represented a historical watershed and a crucial moment of trespassing from a political point of view, not only for the loss of Sicily but also for the changes it produced in the whole system of relationships in the Mediterranean area. Ibn Ġalbūn recalled that *Rūjār al-rūmī šāhib Šiqilliyya malik al-Ifranj* persisted in *ṭuġyān*, and it is known that according to the Qur’an the term *ṭuġyān* means “rebellious trespassing” as it occurs in Sura of the Cow (Q 2:15). In this regard, the historian of Tripoli added:

لماكان بينه وبين والده من المودة لما وقعت الوحشة بينه وبين رجار
صاحب صقلية بسبب الأسطول الذي كان قد صنعه عامله مكنى بن كامل
الهجمائي ويلي قابس من قبله لحمل التجارة، واستعانة مكنى بن كامل برجار
وتفق أن وصل بأثر توليه أسطول أمير المؤمنين على بن يوسف مع قائدته
علي بن ميمون إلى بلاد رجار فافتتح منها حصولاً وسيم منها سبايا كثيرة
فلم يشك النصراني أن الباعث لعلي بن يوسف على ذلك إنما هو الحسن
فاستجاس وحشد أجانبه ومقاتله ونال في كثير أمره بمنع السفن من
سواحل المسلمين فلم يخف على الحسن مقتضيه وخشى أن يطرق بقائه
دون أهمته له فأمر بإتخاذ الأسلحة وتشييد الأسوار واستقدام القبائل
من الأعراب وغيرهم للجهاد فوصلت الحشود إليه من كل جهة، ونزلت
الأعراب بظاهرة الهجرة، لما كان يوم السبت لخمس بقين من جمادي
الأولى سنة سبع عشرة وخمسين، وصل أسطول رجار إلى المهدية فهى
الجزيرة المعروفة بجزيرة الاحامي وهي على عشرة أميال من المهدية.
ونزل قائداه عبد الرحمن وجورجي إلى الجزيرة وضربت لهم ولمقدمي
الإفرنج مضار هناك وكان وصولهم آخر النهار خرج منهم إلى البر
تلك الليلة خلق كثير وانبسط احتي تعودوا عن البحر آمالاً ثم عادوا إلى
الجزيرة، ووصل القائدان في اليوم في البحر إلى المهدية في بعض قطع
 فأطافا بها وانتهىما إلى ساحل توبلة فهلكهما ما رأيا بالأوار والسواحل
من الناس والنصرا عائدين إلى الجزيرة فوجدوا طائفة من العرب والأجاند
قد حطوا حالياً وكتبوا من كان بها من الروم عن مواضيعهم، وقاتلاً
Zīrids. The island was inhabited by Arabs, while most of the army that rushed
on the island were Berbers. Roger’s assault was doomed to fail.

The author here refers to the battle of Cape Dimās which is considered a
crucial moment in the first Norman aggressive attempt against Ifriqiya (July
1123). The fleet, coming from Sicily, arrived on July 21 at the island of Aḥāṣi, off
Cape Dimās, about 10 kilometers from al-Mahdiyya, the political center of the
Zirids. The island was inhabited by Arabs, while most of the army that rushed
to defend al-Mahdiyya was formed by Berbers. Roger’s assault was doomed
to fail.
Ibn Ġalbūn employs an interesting terminology:

1. Roger is ṣāḥib Ṣiqilliyya, which is also called bilād Rūjār. Roger is al-naṣrānī, while his men are called al-ifranj and al-rūm. This last definition probably refers to a specific Greek Byzantine unit bound to Roger’s admiral Jīrjī al-Anṭākī and headed by the very chief of the Norman expedition, Christodoulos, who was a Muslim converted to oriental Christianity.

2. Even with regard to the defense of al-Mahdiyya, Ibn Ġalbūn specifies that the battlefields are sawāḥil al-muslimīn; the inhabitants of the island of Aḥāsī are ṭāʾifa min al-ʿarab; the Zīrids’ troops, whose main part is formed by Berbers as we have already remarked, are called ‘asākir al-muslimīn. They had gathered for jihad and a part of them was made up by qabāʾil min al-aʿrāb.

As for Ibn Abī Dīnār, he says that, during the battle of Djerba, al-fransīs killed several men, raped the women of the island and captured children and young men who were later sold in Sicily.17

We can therefore affirm that both Ibn Abī Dīnār first, and later Ibn Ġalbūn, dealing with the historical facts related to the ifranj expansion in North Africa, aimed to appeal to the Muslim governors to restore justice as an antidote to the system of ẓulm. This can easily be noted in the context of the narrative of the rise of the Almohads, some of whom were depicted as courageous and able to restore justice, ‘ādil biʾl-kitāb waʾl-sunna: the emir Abū Fāris ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz—as recorded by Ibn Abī Dīnār—was a pious man who did justice to the oppressed (al-maẓlūm) against his oppressor (al-ẓālim). More importantly, the Tunisian historian put the governor’s doings in an international context, underlining that the Almohad emir had shown an ability to react to the European expansionism.

In this regard, the way Ibn Abī Dīnār explains the term imbirāṭūr in the context of sixteenth-century Mediterranean history, is revealing: “al-imbirāṭūr fi ḍālika al-zaman huwa šāhib Isbāniya (...) waʾl-imbirāṭūr min asmāʾ mulūk al-Almān li-anna mulkahum qadīm waʾl-imbirāṭūr ʿindahum kaʾl-ḥalīfa ʿinda ʿl-muslimīn.”18 With regard to the policy of Charles v, the author defined precisely the idea and the practice of mujāhadat al-kafara, which he used as a device to oppose the alliance between the Sicilian Christians and the Hafsid

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17 Ibn Abī Dīnār al-Qayrawānī, Muʾnis, 114.
18 “At that time, the emperor was the master of Spain ... ‘emperor’ was among the names of the kings of Germany, because their regality was ancient and the emperor among them was like the caliph among the Muslims”: ibid., 185.
power of Tunis, stressing his sympathy for the Ottoman conquest defined as *al-fath al-mubārak*, despite the reticence expressed elsewhere in his work.¹⁹

### 3 Conclusions

The Arabic terminology which we here refer to, and which has been employed by Ottoman North African historians as well as *fuqahāʾ*—even if this could well concern in general the Arabic historiography of the same period—is meaningful with regard to the representation of a *dār al-ḥarb* which is not “territory of war or chaos,” and to the fact that the *dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb* dichotomy is not relevant to the reality of *barr al-ʿaduw*.

The Arabic historians whom we have taken into account—as one can see—propose an analysis of *barr al-ʿaduw*, in which the system of ḥālim, ṣālim and maẓlūm is much more significant, as unquestionably attested to by the historian and *faqīh* Ibn Abī Dīnār al-Qayrawānī. Even Ibn Ġalbūn and al-Maqdīš al-Safāqusī use the above-mentioned terminology to represent the Other according to a concept connected to an idea of “mirroring.” This kind of Alterity, even though at an unconscious level, proves to be similarity or, in other words, resemblance of “he who represents” to “whom is represented,” so that *barr al-ʿaduw* is to be preferred to *dār al-ḥarb*.

### References


¹⁹ Ibid., 220.


