

Project: "Crossing Borders of the Dar al-Islam in the Medieval Mediterranean"

[Abstract: The study addresses a small group of Arabic travel records in light of the Islamic criteria of the Abode of War vs. Abode of Islam, formal conceptualization of borders and frontiers in Islamic law and geography, and personal experience of Muslims finding themselves in areas dominated by Christian states. The period chosen falls between the Second and Third Crusades and follows the completion of the greatest work of Islamic geography by Sharif al-Idrisi at the court of the Norman ruler of Sicily Roger II. The works included are those by Abu Hamid al-Andalusi al-Gharnati (1090-1169) and Abu 'l-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217).]

This project, initiated in the framework of the NEH 2012 Summer Institute on Networks and Knowledge, aims to explore the experience of medieval Muslim travelers in the Mediterranean region who went beyond the territory controlled by the Islamic state. In general, few travel records by Muslims survive from the earlier Islamic Middle Ages; even fewer were those who were interested in the world outside the Abode of Islam. And out of those who did travel to the Abode of War, some wrote academic studies rather than memoirs of their travels. Unquestionably, many travelers from the western Muslim world observed and even experienced the coexistence of European and Near Eastern societies governed by Christian and Muslim rulers after the first wave of the Muslim expansion (632-732 C.E.) in the Near East, in al-Andalus or during the Crusades. Out of those, I chose to focus on the works by few recorded their observations and thoughts about what was entailed in moving between the worlds dominated by Christian or Islamic values and/or legal norms.

The subject of the Islamic frontier has been mostly addressed as a historical and legal phenomenon and viewed in conjunction with the expansion of Islam in the early Middle Ages. The theoretical discussion in these cases has been dominated by the issues of conquest, conversion, and taxation. The modern experience of European confrontation with Islamic societies has only recently begun to be evaluated in light of the frontier theory; the concept of internal frontier has been offered which may be useful in analyzing the borders within the Abode of Islam. The distinction between internal and external Muslim borders or boundaries places greater emphasis on ethnicity, kinship, and religion and allows for a somewhat smaller role for political and geographical factors. In this study, the emphasis will be on the external boundaries of the Islamic realm and specifically on the personal experience of Muslim travelers engaged in the Islamic/non-Islamic dichotomy, convivencia, or confrontation.

Frontier implies expansion, immigration, and settlement. As borderland or periphery it also implies a territory where societal encounter takes place and cultures meet. Empirical studies of frontier in non-western societies have recently turned their attention to Islamic areas. The Medieval Mediterranean world presented a fluid picture of changing borders and warring states generally, though not consistently, aligned with the forces of either Christendom or Islam. The term Dar al-Islam refers to the territory controlled by Islamic state and law. Under Islamic authority, non-Muslim communities were allowed to live within the Dar al-Islam, under certain conditions designed to keep them under Muslim control. In the Mediterranean environment where Muslims had dominated the Levant, North Africa and much of the Iberian peninsula for several centuries, there was widespread Muslim awareness of the limitations on the ability of Muslim authorities to control or dominate the Christian world beyond certain geographical boundaries. (This study does not disregard the presence of Jewish communities in the Mediterranean during the medieval period, but given the lack of a Jewish polity and Jewish armed forces, frontier issues and border lines were determined and regulated through the interaction between Muslim and Christian states).

In the ideal, Islamic law recommends that Muslims stay within the Dar al-Islam. Recognizing the pressures of politics and the need to earn a living, Muslims are advised to return to the Dar al-Islam as soon as possible after conducting their business in the Dar al-Harb, the legally unyielding characterization of non-Muslim territories. The Crusades, the Reconquista, and continuing contest for the major islands in the Mediterranean Sea brought to issue the ability of the Muslim state to expand or even hold on to what was already regarded as the Dar al-Islam. While coexistence of Christian and Muslim polities in the region was a reality, and the Dar al-Islam included significant numbers of in the region, and the borders between the Byzantine Empire, Latin Christendom and the Dar al-Islam were continuously changing, mostly through war. Yet peaceful, civilian Muslims found compelling reasons to travel through and even settle, if temporarily, in territories dominated by non-Muslims – in the Mediterranean region, the non-Muslim rulers of the period for which travel sources exist, were inevitably Christians.

The most compelling reason for any Muslim to leave home and travel long distances through strange land was the religious requirement of performing pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj. Other travel often was added to the pilgrim route or followed the completed hajj, and eventually travel literature grew around this requirement that developed into a special genre of rihla and even produced guidebooks and praise literature for Mecca. I have identified two Arabic

sources from the second half of the 12th century produced by Muslim travelers in the period between the Second and Third Crusades. The declared motivation for their initial journeys was the hajj, but the geography and logistics of the times had led the authors to reside in Christian territories for months or even years. Their first concern was their fellow-Muslims in hostile lands, but the specific encounters with both Muslims and Christians, and information they record in their books take the reader beyond the clear-cut categories of friend, enemy, or dhimmi.

The ideal Islamic state was the unique caliphate, the political expression of authority of the united Muslim community, the umma. The reality was different, and by the late 14th century, wars and political and sectarian divisions within the world of Islam led to the formation of over a dozen separate political entities and the elimination (in 1258) of the caliphate. This meant that, even without crossing the external borders of the Dar al-Islam, many Muslim travelers – even pilgrims – had to cross internal borders from one Muslim country to another. Approaches to the Hijaz from the Mediterranean usually involved joining one of the main pilgrim caravans that would then take weeks or months to reach Mecca: Cairo or Damascus hajj caravans were the most significant of those. It was possible for Muslims to bypass Christian territory in reaching their pious destination, but those coming from the Mediterranean region, even if their home was in North Africa, often ended up encountering Christians under what, for them, was less than desirable circumstances: using Christian (often Genoese) boats for transportation, spending time in Christian-controlled ports in the Levant, Byzantium or the islands (Norman Sicily, Sardinia, etc.), crossing the Crusader-held lands on the way to or from Damascus, and so on. For those Muslims coming from al-Andalus, the sense of living on the frontiers of Islamdom, already honed by the pressures and vicissitudes of the Reconquista, would have been made particularly acute by not only having to deal with Christian sailors or merchants, but encountering armed Crusaders and seeing slave markets replenished with Muslim prisoners.

Selection criteria employed for the chosen records ensured that the two selected sources are comparable in many respects – first, for the geographical span of their authors' travel: from Granada in southern al-Andalus to Mecca and beyond, following different routes to their destinations, but visiting some of the same locations and returning home at some point. Secondly, for the chronological proximity of these journeys: Abu Hamid al-Andalusi al-Gharnati (1080-1169) left home about 1117 to travel first in Muslim countries, but then lived in Christian Hungary in the 1150s. Half a century separates him from the

most accomplished writer of the Arabic rihla (travel) genre, Abu `l-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr al-Kinani al-Andalusi al-Balansi. Although lacking motivation to explore, his 1183-1185 pilgrimage to Mecca put the traveler in repeated contact with Latin Christians, during the sailing passages on the Mediterranean as well as in the Crusader-held parts of the Levant. And thirdly, because both the authors recorded crossing from the Muslim to Christian domain and/or vice versa: Abu Hamid in his *Tuhfat al-albab* ("Gift to the Intellectuals") and Ibn Jubayr in his *Risalat al-Kinani* ("Relation of the Kinanite"), or the *Rihla*. The approach is to examine their writings for the range and comparison of degree of the itinerary overlap that allows for comparison of the authors' impressions, attitudes, and reactions involved in first, crossing from Muslim into Christian territory and then, their observing, interacting with, and reacting to the Christians of the Dar al-Harb.

The "Father of Arab Geography" Ibn Khordadbeh (820-912/3) says in the "Book of Roads and Realms" (*Kitab al-masalik wa-`l-mamalik*):

The merchants that start from Spain or France travel to Sus al-Aksa (Morocco), then to Tangier, then to Ifriqiya (Tunisia), from where they walk to the capital of Egypt. Thence they go to Ramla, visit Damascus, Kufa, Baghdad and Basra, cross Ahwaz, Fars, Kirman, Sind, Hind, and arrive in China [Adler, p.3, edited MT].

The earliest, Iraqi school of Arabic geographers, emphasized administrative geography. Clearly, the science of "Roads and Realms" included geographical familiarity with the borders of Islam. However, the academic texts rarely do more than mention the "first" or "last" city of a country, and the maps show no line borders at all. What distinguishes the travelers' records sources is their authors' first-hand experience of societies and cultures neighboring on the Islamic empire. Looking for evidence of judging the cultural attitudes and perceptions of the metropole toward frontierlands means leaving out the works of some prominent geographers who also traveled: for instance, al-Muqaddasi (who was not interested in non-Muslim areas) or al-Mas`udi (whose systematic descriptions do not qualify as travel narratives). The chronological threshold for sources to be addressed was chosen to be the year 1154. This was the year when the famous Arab geographer al-Idrisi completed his world geography for the Norman ruler of Sicily Roger II. Unquestionably the greatest Islamic geographer, and arguably the best geographer of the Middle Ages, this descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (therefore, al-Sharif al-Idrisi, 1100-1165) combined the ancient and contemporary geographical information of the West with Arabic geography to create an atlas of 71 maps of the world and the

accompanying narrative, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi 'khtiraq al-afaq* (“Entertainment for those desirous of distant horizons”).

The questions to be pursued include: How do the travelers “register” the leading of the Abode of Islam and entering the Abode of War? What attracts their attention in foreign Christian lands? How does that compare to what attracts their attention in Muslim countries other than their own? What religion-informed comments do they make about local communities? How positive or negative is their perception of the local rulers, social hierarchy, integrity of the state, social mores, etc.? What is their view of fellow-Muslims encountered in Christian lands, be they travelers, immigrants, or native-born locals? What do answers to these, and other yet to be articulated questions, tell us about Islam, the Mediterranean, tolerance, “convivencia” and “conveniencia,” and the other issues raised during the Institute. And finally, because the sources chosen are part of the academic heritage of Arabo-Islamic civilization, the books and their authors will be looked at from the perspective of the “Networks and Knowledge” that developed in the “Muslim-Christian-Jewish Mediterranean” in the period of contradictory, yet not unconnected major shifts in political fortunes of the region: the waning of the Crusades, dynamic changes in the Near East, decline of the Byzantine Empire, and the growing momentum of the Iberian Reconquista.