

Sentiment Analysis of the Image of the Franks (ifranj) in the Arabic Folk Epic *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma**

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The method of sentiment analysis opens up great prospects for historical and anthropological research, primarily for studying the problems of the construct of the image of the *Other*. To test this method on the material of the Arabic language, I chose the Arabic folk epics as they are a conflux of the cultural memory of Arab population of Levant and Egypt, insufficiently investigated from the point of view of historical anthropology. The narratives of the Arabic folk epics combine an ancient Arabian tribal folklore, as well as fabulous and legendary stories of ancient Semitic and Persian origin, in addition to the chronicles from different periods of the history of Islam. The epic *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma* (“The Life of Dāt al-Himma”) was taken as an example to analyze the contexts about the Franks in this type of sources, and to conceptualize the patterns of creating the emotive image of the Frank-Crusader. The main patterns of creating the image of the *Other* in the epic are the opposition of the followers of the true and heretical faiths, the attribution of deviant and bestial behavior to the Franks, and the depiction of them as carriers of demonic superpowers. The tropes and stylistic devices of metaphor, epithet and hyperbole, used in these cases, are joined to evoke laughter, fear and hatred of the Franks at the same time in the listener of the folk epics, making comic relief one of the most recurrently used techniques as it usually involves all abovementioned emotions.

Keywords: sentiment analysis, Arabic folk epic, image of the Other, Arab history, Crusades.

Introduction

The ambitious method of sentiment analysis, which have been used primarily for the investigation of media texts since the initial period of its development, is reckoned as one of the most promising approaches for modern humanities and social sciences [1, pp. 762–772]. Although the formation of the sentiment analysis method was initially based on the material of the English language, currently one can witness an active development of its tools for other languages, including Arabic [2, pp. 2479–2490]. Approbation of this approach on the various types of texts draws many interdisciplinary researchers. The main challenges that they face when dealing with the arabic sentiment analysis are the complexity of the Arabic word structure, based on the morphological richness of the Semitic languages, and the variety of dialects and forms of literary language [3, pp. 408–430].

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The practical application of the method of sentiment analysis opens up great prospects for anthropologists and historians. One of the main areas of research in this case is the study of the emotional contours of historical texts in order to deconstruct the methods of creating a reader's view of certain communities, i. e. the study of the image of the *Other* [4, pp. 10–11]. In this article by the term “sentiment analysis” I designate a type of content analysis method designed to identify emotionally colored vocabulary and syntactic constructions in texts as well as the emotional evaluation of authors (opinions) in relation to the objects referred to in the text.

Since the last third of the 19th century, one of the most important discourses about the *Other* in Arab public thought, politics and culture has become anti-crusading rhetoric, in which the image of the Crusader embodied different *Others*: “European”, “Christian”, “Zionist”, “colonialist”, etc. [5, pp. 335–351]. As the crusading and anti-crusading narratives remain relevant in 21st century [6], it seems essential to trace the very roots of this imagological pattern in Arabic sources.

This article is dedicated to an attempt to solve this scientific problem by applying the method of sentiment analysis onto the Arabic folk epics as they feature the large Arabic narratives created after the Crusades and before the beginning of the Arab Revival in the second third of the 19th century, where the episodes about Europeans occupy a significant part of the story. The narratives of the Arabic folk epics combine an ancient Arabian tribal folklore, as well as fabulous and legendary stories of ancient Semitic and Persian origin, in addition to the chronicles from different periods of the history of Islam. For the most part, the so-called folk epics developed during the era of the Crusades, as well as during the Mamluk period in Egypt and the Levant [7, pp. 125–150].

A high research potential of the study of the Crusades' memory in the Arabic folk epics was marked by Malcolm Lyons in his article on the Crusader stratum in this type of sources [8, pp. 147–161]. Arabic folk epics are not considered as sources in studies by Carol Hillenbrand [9] and Jonathan Phillips [10], who only mention a substantial relevance and importance of the search for the memory of the Crusades in the Arab folk culture.

Researchers studying the Arabic folk epics from the point of view of history and ethnography also do not analyze in detail the memory of the Crusades in this type of sources. In Bridget Connolly's monograph *Arab Folk Epic and Identity*, only the question of the influence of the epic *Sīrat Bani Hilāl* on the identity of the Egyptians is considered, and the references to the Crusades in the Epic are mentioned only in passing [11]. A. R. Vidal-Luengo in her article mentions only the symbolic importance of Baybars' alliance with the Ismailis against the Crusaders in *Sīrat al-Zāhir Baybars* [12, pp. 465–484]. Literary studies of the Arabic folk epics, such as Peter Heath's *The Thirsty Sword: Sirat Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic* on the epic *Sīrat 'Antara Ibn Šaddād*, also make short references to the Crusades, without relating them to the broader context of this era's memory [13]. This characteristic is also true for the works of Shawqi 'Abd al-Hakim, dedicated to the epics *Qiṣṣat al-Zir Sālim* [14], *Sīrat Banī Hilal* [15] and *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma* [16].

Thus, the purpose of this article is to identify emotive means of creating the image of a European (frank — ar. *ijranjī*¹) in the Arabic folk epics. To do this, I will try to deconstruct the emotional contour of the passages about the Franks.

¹ The modern Arabic word *urūbī*, denoting Europeans, came into wide use only in 20th century.

Methodologically, I relied on contextual analysis to find out by what lexical and grammatical means and techniques the emotional image is created in the narrative. The contexts were also considered from the point of view of the theory of dehumanization in order to identify techniques that evoke emotions in the recipient of the narrative.

Solving this research problem will help answering the question of how the Franks are depicted in one of the most important types of works of Arabic folk literature. The outcome of this work might later serve for the study of the evolvement of the Europeans' image in Arab culture in a historical perspective.

Sirat *Dāt al-Himma*

As an object of study, I chose one of the most popular Arabic folk epics² *Sirat Dāt al-Himma* (“The Life of *Dāt al-Himma*”), which is named after its main character, the Arab woman-warrior *Fāṭima*, nicknamed *Dāt al-Himma* (“the one who possesses energy”). The plot of the work is based on a long history of the Arab-Byzantine wars in the time of the Umayyad and early Abbasid caliphs before the reign of the Caliph *al-Wāṭiq billāh* (812–847), however, due to the fact that, as in the case of most other folk epics, the text of *Sirat Dāt al-Himma* was emerging in the period from the 12th to the 14th century, it reflects a much greater extent of the historical realities of this period, primarily the Crusades. An important structural element of the narrative is also the rivalry between the Arab tribes *Banū Kilab*, to which the main characters belong, and *Banū Sulaym*.

It is important to emphasize that although in *Sirat Dāt al-Himma*, same as in the other Arabic folk epics, the images of the Crusaders could be clearly seen not only in the Frank characters, but also in other Christians (Byzantines and Ethiopians), in this article we will limit ourselves to considering the contexts in which the characters are denoted by lexemes with the root *f-r-n-j*. In this case study, I consider only the first volume of 1980–1981 Beirut edition of this vast folk epic [17].

To deconstruct the emotive factors in the formation of the image of the frank, an analysis of the emotive score of the contexts with the root *f-r-n-j* was carried out. The examples were processed using the Arabic natural language processing suit *CAMEL Tools* (Python) [18, pp. 7022–7032]. It should also be noted that the *ifranj* lexical unit itself has a negative connotation with an emotive score of 0.7. The table below (Table 1) shows statistics on the verb sentences, where the subjects are individual Frank characters or groups of Franks.

Table 1. Emotive score of verbal sentences with *ifranj* as subjects

Type of score	Score range	Percentage
Negative	0.513–0.988	35 %
Neutral	0.667–0.969	65 %

² Arabic folk epics still enjoy popularity in the Arab countries. These works are still being published and filmed. *al-Jazeera* channel in 2020 devoted to a series of documentaries to the Arabic folk epics, in which the emphasis was placed on Jihad and the participation of Arab epic heroes in it.

Although the algorithm evaluates only the sums of valences of lexemes, which may eventually give inaccurate estimates of contexts, and the real number of negative contexts is the prevailing majority, it is important to emphasize that the algorithm evaluated the fragments about Franks exclusively as negative and neutral.

Next, we will conduct a semantic and grammatical analysis of contexts in order to identify the emotive factors in creating the image of the Franks.

Creating the emotive image of the Franks

The first emotive factor in creating the image of Franks as enemies is the depiction of them in the epic as infidels seeking to destroy Islam and convert Muslims to Christianity. This image is formed primarily through the use of particular lexical units indicating the opposition of the Franks to the will of Allah and their hope in the will of Jesus Christ³. King of the Franks in *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma* is called *ʿaduww allāh* (Enemy of Allah). In one of the episodes, the hero of the epic ʿĀmir strikes the king of the Franks with a spear: *Wa armāhu bihā wa qāla huḍhā yā ʿaduww allāh wa ʿaduww al-rasūl fa lam yašʿur ʿaduww allāh malik al-ifranj illā wa qad waqaʿat fī labbatihī aḥraqat qafāhu wa ḥarajat min nuqratihi* (‘He threw it [spear] at him, shouting, “Take this, enemy of Allah and enemy of His Messenger!” And the king of the Franks, the enemy of Allah, felt only how it [the spear] hit his upper chest, pierced his nape and came out of its rear⁴) [17, p. 855]. The epic’s main antagonist ʿUqba is also in some cases referred to as an “Enemy of Allah”.

The text of the narrative also contains numerous contrasting descriptions of the opposing sides, as, for example, in the episode of the siege of the city held by the Franks: *Wa irtafaʿat al-aṣwāt wa zādāt al-ḍajjāt wa kafarat al-ifranj bi rabb al-arḍ wa al-samawāt wa ṣāḥat al-kuffār min fawq al-aswār wa rāmū bi al-aḥjār wa al-muʿminūn yaqūlūna yā ummat muḥammad al-muḥtār jāhidū fī al-kuffār al-fujjār* (‘The voices grew louder and the noise increased, and the Franks blasphemed the Lord of Earth and Heaven. The infidels shouted from behind the walls, and they threw stones at the righteous, and the believers exclaimed: “O people of Muhammad the Chosen, fight against the impious infidels”’) [17, p. 395]. The narrative also emphasizes the contradiction between the Christian concept of the divine and the basic tenets of Islam: *Wa qad ḥalaqū al-liḥāʾ wa naṣarū al-nuṣūr wa kafarū bi al-malik al-ḡafūr* (‘[The Franks] shaved off their beards and spread faith in the Resurrection [of Jesus Christ], and they did not trust in the Forgiving King⁵) [17, p. 803]. Thus, the epic emphasizes the deep sacred importance of the fighting against the Franks.

The motive that the Franks are forcibly converting the inhabitants of the Middle East to Christianity is also of significant importance. ʿUqba, for example, promises that “bells will ring in all the lands of Islam” [19, pp. 108–109], while the Frankish ambassador introduces his King the Giant (ar. *ʿimlāq*, the nickname of the king of the Franks), who went on a campaign against the Muslims, as the vicar of Jesus Christ over all Christians [17, pp. 396]. ʿUqba says that “it is necessary to convert as many Muslims as possible to Christianity”, and “Christians are obliged to wage a holy war against Muslims” [19, p. 112].

³ In Islam, Jesus (ʿĪsā) is one of the most respected prophets, but the assertion by Christians of his divine nature is interpreted by Muslims as *širk* (a violation of the principle of monotheism).

⁴ *Nuqrat al-qafā* denotes a small pit in the nape.

⁵ *Al-malik al-ḡāfūr* — one of the epithets of Allah.

Such passages are essential for Arabic folk epics in general, and can be reduced to one idea — attributing the doctrine of holy war to Christianity. At the same time, symbols and stereotypical images of Christianity and Christians that existed in medieval Arab-Muslim culture were used to create an emotional image of the enemy. Among the most widely used myths one can find an exaggerated number of representatives of the higher Christian clergy in the ranks of the Franks, extensive cross symbolism, as well as the vast introduction of pigs into the profane and sacred practices of Christians.

The second emotive factor consists in creating the image of Franks as enemies through their humiliation.

One of the most effective ways to dehumanize an enemy in many cultures has been to attribute cannibalistic practices to them. The implementations of this approach in the Epic under consideration are in abundance, as, for example, in the following episode: *Wa ḥaraja nāšir malik al-ifranj wa qāla anā aḥud bi ʾaʾr waladī wa ḥašāsat kabdī wa lā budda an akul min kabd haḍā al-muslim qiṭʾa* (“The herald of the king of the Franks stepped forward and said: “I will avenge my son, who was dearest to me. I must eat a piece of this Muslim’s liver”) [17, pp. 854–855]. The plot about eating the liver of a defeated enemy reproduces the archetypal idea, dating back to the ancient myths of the Middle East, that this organ holds the concentration of human strength and wisdom.

Another common type of dehumanization is the motive of the ritual use of excrements. This plot vividly illustrated by the episode of the meeting between the king of the Franks, the Giant, and the highest Christian patrician, cited in the epic: *Tarajjala lahum wa sajada li al-baṭrak wa aḥada min al-buḥūr al-maḥlūṭ bi rajīʾihi wa tasawwaka ḥattā sālāt al-dimāʾ min famihi wa laṭaḥa bi ḍalika al-rajiʾ šawāribhu wa liḥyathu fa qāla lahu al-baṭrak iʾlam anna al-sayyid al-masīḥ qaddamaka ʾalā jamīʾ al-našrāniyya* (“And when [the Giant] dismounted in front of them, he bowed to the patrician, took some incense mixed with his excrements, and brushed his teeth with it until blood flowed from his mouth. And he smeared his mustache and beard with these excrements, and after that the patrician said to him: “Know that the Lord Jesus Christ has assigned you over all Christians”) [17, p. 396]. The contrasting description of the pretentious ceremony with the participation of the patrician, in which excrements are used, is also intended to create a comic effect.

Finally, another way of dehumanizing the Franks in the epic involves likening them to animals. This aspect works in two scenarios. The Franks in the narrative are correlated with animals with epithets, as, for example, in the episode: *Wa lam yazālū bi al-mawkib ilā an waṣalū ilā al-kalb ʾimlāq* (“And [the Franks] continued to walk until they came to [their king] dog Giant”) [17, p. 396], while in the other episodes, it is argued that they literally reproduce the behavior of the beasts: *Wa inna al-malik manuwil jalasa min laylatihi wa aʾṭā mamlakat al-ifranj li rajul kāna min akābirihim yuqālu lahu al-qimṣ al-kabīr wa kāna kāfir šarīr wa lahu zamjara wa ḥadīr wa huwa ka annahu al-ḥinzīr wa huwa kāfir bi al-laṭīf al-ḥabīr* (“And King Manuel awoke from the sleep and gave power over the kingdom of the Franks to a man who was one of their great men. His name was the Great Hegumen⁶ and he was an evil infidel who growled and roared. He was like a pig and did not believe in the Gentle [and] the Well-Acquainted [Lord]”) [17, p. 855]. I. Filshtinsky also notes the use of the symbolic image of the ritual impurity of a pig in the epic in order to dehuman-

⁶ The term *qimṣ* is translated as “hegumen”, because it is usually used to denote representatives of the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches, though it equals to abbot (ar. *ab* or *raʾīs al-dayr*).

ize Christians. He cites as an example from the episode where the main antagonist of the story — ‘Uqba — pours pig fat on the wounds of Dāt al-Himma [20, p. 641].

The studies of the offensiveness of the animal metaphors show that there are two main routes through which offensiveness is generated. Some metaphors are adjudged to be highly offensive because they liken persons to disgusting or taboo animals, whereas others acquire their offensiveness because the comparison itself is seen as dehumanizing, even if the animal itself was not detested [21, pp. 311–325]. In the case of the image of the Franks, we see the implementation of both of these approaches.

The third factor is the creation of the image of the Franks as numerous, strong and dangerous opponents. For this purpose, various tropes and figures of speech are used. The most frequent means of this are derogatory epithets, as in the following example: *Fa waṭaba min bayna al-jamī‘ baṭrīq jabbār yuqālu lahu qiriyāqīs bin iflātūn bin midās al-ifranjī wa kāna yu‘addu bi alf fāris fi al-maydān wa kāna taḥta yadihi ṭalātūmi‘at alf fāris wa kāna waladuhu qiriyāqīs aḵtar minhu šarr wa la’na* (‘And the mighty patrician Frank Qiriyāqīs stepped forward from their ranks. He was the son of Iflātūn bin Midās, who was worth a thousand knights in the battlefield, and he had under his command three hundred thousand knights, and his son Qiriyāqīs was even more evil and cursed than him’) [17, p. 901].

The example presented above also demonstrates the implementation of hyperbole, the second most common trope in the epic. This practice in the narrative is used primarily in relation to the number of the Frankish invaders. In *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma* it is often emphasized that all the Franks, without exception, set off on campaigns against the Muslims: *Wa lammā ‘alima ‘imlāq al-ijāba fa mā taraka fi bilād ifranja ġayr al-niswān wa sāra fi al-barr bi mi‘at alf fāris ḥalf sittūmi‘at qiṭ‘a fi al-baḥr mal‘āna bi al-rijāl wa amara qubṭān al-marākib an yahjum ‘alā marākib al-islām* (‘And when the Giant received the answer, he left only women in the country of the Franks, and set out by land with a hundred thousand horsemen, accompanied by six hundred ships at sea full of soldiers, and he ordered the captains to attack the ships of Muslims’) [17, p. 395]. In another episode, numerous “patricians and kings of the Franks” gather around the bedside of the sick Byzantine emperor [17, p. 906].

To create an image of the strength and multiplicity of the Franks, a metaphor is also often used in the narrative, as in the following examples: *Fa šārū ka annahum sadd min ḥadīd* (‘And [the Franks] stood up like an iron wall’) [17, p. 855] or *Wa dārū bihim al-ifranj wa inḥaṭṭū ‘alayhim ka annahum al-ġamām* (‘The Franks surrounded them and descended on them like storm clouds’) [17, p. 894]. The narrative also uses the metaphor of nature, which is “frightened” at the approach of a huge Frankish army: *Wa idā al-dunyā iġtammāt wa aḏlamāt janbāt wa nafarat al-tuyūr min awkārḥā wa al-wuḥūš min falawāt wa aḏlama al-jaww min ġubārḥā wa aḏlamāt al-arḍ min aqṭārḥā wa aqbala al-jayš miṭla al-sayl al-mutaḥādīr wa al-maṭar al-mutawātir* (‘And when the world became gloomy and the sides darkened, and fled the birds from their nests and the beasts from their wilds, and the atmosphere became darker with its dust, and the earth became darker in its regions, and the army came like a rolling torrent and a frequent rain’) [17, p. 803]. The depiction of the Franks as very strong and numerous enemies should also be considered a form of demonization. According to T. Brudholm, superhumanization often occurs if the respective *Other* is perceived as dangerous, and it can be theorized as perceiving the *Other* as a monster [22, pp. 94–96].

Malcolm Lyons also notes that the Franks in the Arabic folk epics are described as strong and dangerous warriors [8, pp. 147–161]. In *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma* their large physique is specifically emphasized: *Wa kāna muqaddamat al-jayš miat alf min al-ifranj kibār al-ajsād ka annahum min baqāyā qawm ‘ād bi al-qinṭāriyāt al-midād wa al-suyūf al-ḥidād* (‘And hundred thousand Franks were in the vanguard, and their bodies were so massive, as if they were the remnants of the people of ‘ād, with long spears and sharp swords’) [17, p. 767]. ‘Adites are mentioned in the Qur’an as a people who disobeyed the prophet Hūd and were destroyed by Allah for this. “Have you not seen what your Lord did with the ‘Adites, the people of Iram of the Columns the likes of which had never been created in the land?” (89: 6–8). According to the Islamic tradition, the ‘Adites were distinguished by their tall stature and great physical strength. Thus, the correlation with the people who disobeyed the will of Allah gives the image of the Franks an additional negative emotional characteristic.

It is also important to note that although Christians — Byzantines, Ethiopians and Franks — are generally the enemies of the Arabs/Muslims in the Arabic folk epic, the Franks are always depicted as the most feared and powerful of them, and they are also feared by their allies in the Christian camp. *Fa baraza ilayhi min al-ifranj fāris yuqālu lahu qūqyās ibn malik ifranja wa kāna min al-abṭāl al-ma‘rūfīn wa al-aqyāl al-mawṣūfīn tahābuhu mulūk al-rūm jamī’an li annahu kāna yaqtaniṣu al-asad min al-ḡābāt wa ya’ḥud al-qawāfil min al-falawāt* (‘And a Frankish knight named Qūqyās, the son of the king of the Franks, rushed to him. He was a renowned daredevil and a famous leader. All the kings of the Romans feared him, because he hunted lions in the forests and robbed caravans in the wilds’) [17, p. 853].

Conclusion

In summary, it should be noted that according to the conducted analysis, the passages about the Franks have mostly a negative emotional connotation. There are three main emotional patterns to create the image of the Franks-*Others*. The first way consists in emphasizing the threat that they carry out to Islam and the Muslim lands, for which the descriptions of the righteousness of Muslims and the heretical beliefs of the Franks are actively used. This technique is amplified by the two types of dehumanization: humiliation, exhibited in correlation with animals and attribution of deviant behavior such as cannibalism, as well as depiction of the enormous strength and demonic power of the Franks. It is important to emphasize the mutually exclusive nature of the last two factors: the attribution of the low instincts and animal habits to the Franks is adjacent to the passages that create the image of them as superhumans. The tropes and stylistic devices of metaphor, epithet and hyperbole, used in these cases, are combined to evoke in the reader, or rather the listener of the folk epics, laughter, fear and hatred of the Franks at the same time, making comic relief one of the most actively used techniques as it often involves all these emotions. Thus, the method of sentiment analysis makes it possible to identify key features of the image of the *Other* and patterns of dehumanization in historical narrative.

The way in which, thanks to the Crusades, *ifranj* were imprinted for many centuries in the most popular works of the Arab folk culture, is important for the formation of the image of the Europeans in the Arab imagery of the Middle Ages and for the evolution of the concept of the *Other* in the formation of the identities of the Arabic-speaking communities of the Middle East.

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Сентимент-анализ образа франков (ifranj) в арабском народном романе *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma**

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Метод сентимент-анализа открывает большие перспективы для исторических и антропологических исследований, в первую очередь для изучения проблематики конструкта образа *другого*. Для апробации этого метода на материале арабского языка я выбрал арабские народные романы, поскольку они представляют собой сосредоточение культурной памяти арабского населения Леванта и Египта, недостаточно исследованное с точки зрения исторической антропологии. Нарративы арабских народных романов сочетают в себе древний арабский племенной фольклор, сказочные и легендарные сюжеты древнесемитского и персидского происхождения, а также сведения из исторических хроник, относящихся к разным периодам истории ислама. На примере романа *Sīrat Dāt al-Himma* («Жизнь Зат ал-Химмы») были проанализированы контексты о франках в этом типе источников, при этом были выявлены паттерны создания эмотивного образа франка-крестоносца. Основными паттернами создания образа *другого* в романе являются противопоставление праведных и неверных, для чего активно используются описания праведности мусульман и еретических верований франков, атрибуция франкам девиантного и звероподобного поведения, в первую очередь каннибализма, а также представление франков как носителей демонической сверхсилы. Используемые в этих случаях тропы и стилистические приемы метафоры, эпитета и гиперболы вызывают одновременно смех, страх и ненависть к франкам у слушателя народных романов, что делает разрядку смехом одним из наиболее часто используемых приемов в произведении. Таким образом, изучение эмотивности текста источника позволяет выявить ключевые особенности образа *другого* и закономерности дегуманизации в историческом нарративе.

Ключевые слова: сентимент-анализ, арабский народный роман, образ другого, арабская история, Крестовые походы.

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