

Role played by the Egyptians, in the
Islamic navy, in the 1st century H./the 7th A.D;
according to the Arab Papyrus Documents.

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Undoubtedly, the Arab papyrus heritage associated with the Middle Ages, when Islam first appeared. Since it existed solely; while the other types of papyrus became extinct. Whenever papyrus is mentioned, Egypt comes to mind instantly; since it is the place where it was first manufactured and developed into a means of knowledge and culture. Thus the Arab papyrus heritage is the beginning of Egypt's Arab identity. An identity that influenced the country's past, present and future.

To the Islamic historian, the Arab papyrus is not just a relic, but also valued for its humanistic content from cultural, economic, social and historical perspectives. The nature of the information from the Arab papyrus is not in itself an integrated historical narration. However, it is considered fresh and, sometimes rare information. Moreover the majority of such papyrus was found scattered over a variety of places, which makes them hard to list and analyse. Two of the scientists who produced valuable materials are Adolf Grohmann(1), and Cheïra(2)

(1) Cf. Arabic papyri in the Egyptian library. Cairo, 1934 sqq.

(2) Cf. la Documentation Papyrologique Arabe. Alexandrie, 1946.

According to the Arab Papyrus, the role of the Egyptians in the Arab navy during the first century of Hira 17th century A.D., was depicted as follows:

First: Ship - builders; there is evidence in numerous contexts that the governor " Wali(1) " sent orders to his sub - governors in Egypt to find him experts in naval- building from different Egyptian regions. He also ordered that these experts " Ustawat " (2) ; whether carpenters and blacksmiths (3) ; should be generously paid (4), from the state's treasury. It is also evident that Egypt's marine wealth was put under the disposal of the arab rulers. There is a papyrus document where the necessary equipment for ship- building had been listed; including the iron (5) and logs . There is also a papyrus document dated Diu al-Hidja 60H./709 Ad (6), proving that the Egyptian Artizans work was not confined to Egypt alone, but was sent all over the Arab Empire. These artizans, practically built the Arab navy.

(1) Cf. *ibid*, p.61. (Bell: Catalogue of papyri in the Brit-Mus, IV, 1379; 1410.

(2) Cf. Cheïra, p.45 (B.M.1391)

(3) Cf. Bell: Aphrodito papyri. *Der Islam*, 11, 1957.

(4) Cf. Cheïra, P. 62.

(5) Cf . *ibid*, p 52 (Bell: B.M IV , 1369) .

(6) Cf. *ibid*, p.35 (B.M.1410) .

On the other hand, another Arab papyrus dated 28 Tuba/81 H, (1), that the majority of these artizans were Copts. Since the Arabs were, at the dawn of their civilization, a beduin community, with no experience what-so-ever with seafare. Amr b. al-Aaṣ, the conqueror of Egypt, went as far as to describe them as: "Worms on a log"(2) Undoubtedly, the Copts who lent a hand to the Arabs during the Arab conquest of Egypt gravely outnumber thos who opposed them and supported Byzance.

Second: Ship- bulding; whose sites are called "Sinā'a" , "Dar Sinā'a" or "Sinā'a al-Bahr". According to the Arab papyrus; these places were also considered marine bases where war-ships were manned and armed(3). Such places were found along the coasts and ports of Egypt in Alex, Damiette, and Kulzum (Kylsma) (4). However, the most famous was found in "Bābalyûn", on the Nile We know that from the early days of the conquest a clear distinction was established between "Bābalyûn" and "Fuṣṭāṭ(Misr.)"(5) The first was the house of the governmental bodies , the latter became the camp - site of Arab tribes. Such distinction soon

(1) Cf. *Ibid*, p.45(B.M.1991).

(2) Maqrîzî, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3, p.341.

(3) Cf. Cheira, p.46.

(4) Ch. *Ibid*, p.39; 46.

(5) Cf. *Ency of Islam* (art Bābalyûn) 2ed, tI, p. 844-5.

aded- out when "Bâbalyûn " and the area sorrounding it; melted into "Fustât " (Misr). The name of "Bâbalyûn"; was remained as long time , even in latter documents Saladin was mentioned with the name: Soldano li Babiloni "

Third: Egyptian sailors; worked in the Islamic navy from its earliest time, in its voyages from the East to the West, also to protect Arab coasts and the Nile shores. The Egyptian Fleet(1), was famous in the days of the Caliph al-Mutawakel al-Abassi. According to the arab papyrus documents (2), the Egyptian sailors were considered the backbone of all Arab Fleets, in their conquests and wars against the Byzantines. A papyrus(3), dated january /February 7 10 A.D. (4 Amshir), states that the " Wâli " asked the "pagarque", to mention to him the names of the sailors, who returned from the African Conquest, under the leadership of Mûsa b. Nuşîr .

Finally; it must be said that any scientific research regarding the Arab Papyrus revives the historic relics of the time and make them pulse with life and meaning .

(1) Cf. Cheira , p.60.

(2) Cf . 1bid, p44-45 (Bell: B.M.IV, 1349).

(3) Cf (B.M. 135 (94); IV, 13050) .