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The Barbarossa brothers and the prevalence of interests

It can be said that from the beginning, the Ottoman Empire directed the sea pirates and cooperated with them. The evidence for this is the two pirates Aruj and Khair Al-Din Barbarossa.

Aruj Barbarossa moved his activity to the west, away from the Ottomans, in order not to clash with them and to appease them on the one hand. On the other hand, he wanted to track and hunt the European ships in the West. He established an independent Emirate for him on the island of Djerba in Tunisia. In order to legitimize his actions, he served the ruler of Tunisia (Bey de Tunis) and showed courage and skill in confronting the European aggression against North Africa, until the Algerians asked him to save the port of Bejaia. That is what many historians of the Maghreb mentioned.

After the death of Aruj near the city of Tlemcen, Khair Al-Din found himself the leader of a weakened force. He took measures through which he took advantage of the state of the country. He decided to be under the rule of the Ottomans as “the new masters”. He wrote to Selim I in 1519 AD, and his letter contained pleas to link the issue of Algeria to the Ottomans, and petitions from judges, jurists and notables of the country to the Sultan to put Algeria at his disposal.

They even described themselves that they would be “slaves of the Ottoman Empire”, if it accepted to protect them. This was a letter they wrote by order of Khair Al-Din and not on their own. He concluded his letter by saying that he would have personally gone to Istanbul to be at the Sultan's disposal, had the Algerians not begged him to stay among them to protect their country.

Selim I did not hesitate to accept such an opportunity, as he found himself in front of a large area of the western Mediterranean ports that would be under his control without cost. He sent to Khair Al-Din assigning him to rule Algeria and a firman included the order of calling him “kurcu başı or beylerbeyi”, meaning a general prince. It was the highest title for an Ottoman governor. He also sent two thousand Janissary soldiers to help him.

All of this caused instability and insecurity in the Arab countries in North Africa in general. All of this was for the sake of continuing the common interests of controlling the seas and gaining international relations with Europe.

It was a win-win deal for both the pirate and the sultan, as Khair Al-Din was no longer a wandering pirate, but rather became an Ottoman governor and leader, and the Ottomans gained land at an insignificant price. Rather, they appointed him commander of their fleet to exploit his talents and skills. Although the people were at ease with Barbarossa at first and demanded the Ottomans to leave him in North Africa because they desperately needed his presence and leadership, the Ottoman Sultan, as usual, preferred his interest over the state's.

The Ottoman Empire gained sovereignty over the seas and over Algeria in a nominal capacity, so the western Mediterranean became an arena for fighting between the Ottomans and those whom it considered an enemy from the Arabs to protect interests with the conflicting countries in Europe.