

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

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Many politicians throughout history have claimed that God is on their side. But few leaders can have had more evidence to support this claim than Yusuf Salah al-Din Ibn Ayyub, known to the West as Saladin. Throughout his life a series of fortunate circumstances enabled this relatively junior officer in the Syrian army to become ruler of Egypt, then the ruler of Syria as well, after that to inflict a heavy defeat on the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem at the battle of Hittin, and follow this up with the supreme triumph of his life: the liberation of Jerusalem from the Crusaders. Please allow me briefly to describe the conditions prevailing in the region where he lived, as this background knowledge is essential to understand his career and assess his achievements objectively.

For several decades before Saladin was born, the geographical region known as *Al-Mashriq al-Arabi*, the eastern part of the Arab world, had been in a state of weakness because of the inadequacy of its rulers. The two greatest powers of the time in theory, the Abbasid Khilafa in Baghdad and the Fatimid Khilafa in Cairo, were bitter enemies of each other. In both, the nominal ruler, the Khalifa, was a figurehead and the government was in fact run by a military dictator with the title of sultan or *wazir*.

Syria was fragmented into several city-states whose rulers were more jealous of each other than interested in resisting the Crusader invasion. For example, the hatred between two brothers, Ridwan who ruled Aleppo and Duqaq who ruled Damascus, prevented either of them from helping to defend Antioch from capture by the Crusaders in 1098. The ruler of

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

Tripoli, Fakhr al-Mulk, collaborated with the First Crusade in 1099, because of his enmity with the ruler of Damascus¹. The following year, when Duqaq sent a force to fight the Crusaders in Lebanon, Fakhr al-Mulk supplied the Crusaders with intelligence information which undermined Duqaq's campaign against them².

Fakhr al-Mulk's collaboration did not prevent the Crusaders from seizing Tripoli from him³. A similar fate awaits modern Arab leaders who collaborate with Israel, although they do not seem to be aware of this. Politicians hardly ever bother to study history, let alone to draw lessons from it.

The greatest military triumph of the First Crusade, in 1099, was the seizure of Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were massacred in one of the worst atrocities of genocide in history. Not only Muslims were victims: the Jewish community were assembled and burnt to death in their synagogue. Even local Christian inhabitants of the city suffered from the Crusaders' cruelty⁴. (This behaviour is in striking contrast to that of the Muslims under 'Umar Ibn al Khattab, who took possession of Jerusalem peacefully in 638, and guaranteed freedom of religion to all its inhabitants) Jerusalem became the capital of the main crusader state, which came to be known as the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

After Duqaq died in 1104, control of Damascus passed to Tughtegin, who reached agreements with the Crusader states, including alliances against other Muslim rulers⁵. One of his officers, Mu'in al-Din Onor, later became ruler of Damascus, and signed a treaty of alliance with the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem against the ruler of Mosul and Aleppo Imad al-Din Zangi, the most effective Muslim military leader in the first half of the 12th century. In 1144, Zangi made the first major territorial recovery from the Crusaders: the city of Al-Raha, capital of the Principality of Edessa east of the Euphrates, the first state established by the First Crusade in 1098. This was a severe blow for the Crusader presence, and led Western Europe to send the Second Crusade under the command of Kings Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany.

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

The Second Crusade proved a disaster, because its leaders made the incredibly foolish mistake of attacking Damascus - with whose ruler the Kingdom of Jerusalem had a treaty of alliance. This forced Mu'in al-Din Onor to turn for help to Nur al-Din Mahmud, the son of Imad al-Din Zengi, who was proving himself to be as good a military commander as his father. When Onor died the following year, the people of Damascus welcomed Nur al-Din as their ruler. To seal his peaceful take-over of Damascus, he married Mu'in al-Din Onor's daughter⁶.

The tide turned against the Crusaders not only because of the military genius of Nur al-Din Mahmud and his father before him, nor only the stupidity of the Second Crusade. It was even more the result of processes which had been developing the understanding of ordinary people in the Muslim world, and changing their mentalities and emotions in ways that would enable them to fulfil their duty of a liberation struggle.

When the First Crusade invaded, Ali Ibn Tahir al-Sulami, a religious thinker in Damascus, began efforts to educate the public on how to resist the invasion. He preached in mosques that Muslims must unite their efforts. Every Muslim, he said, had a duty to the jihad - a word which is often mistranslated as "holy war" by the Western news media, and others who should know better. In fact, jihad is very different from the European Christian concept of holy war. Jihad is a struggle against invasion, to defend Muslims and their territory from outside aggression. It can also be a struggle against occupation, tyrannical government or persecution, to defend freedom of belief. It is closer to the Christian concept of just war than of holy war, although it is a broader, more developed concept.

Sulami's disciples collected many of his sermons in a book called Kitab al-Jihad, to spread the idea of resistance among the public⁷. At the same time, the spirit of Sufism was spreading religious consciousness among the Muslim public. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, is a way of life which brings individual people as close as possible to their Creator. The Holy Qur'an says that God is closer to a human being than his jugular

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

vein⁸, but we must develop our awareness of this closeness, to be constantly aware of what God wants us to do. This is the essence of Sufism. The first step is that an individual human being must have the right relationship with his Creator, of complete submission to His will, which is what Islam means. Only if this relationship is correct, can we develop correct relationships with other human beings and society, and do our duty to correct what is wrong in society.

Both Nur al-Din Mahmud and Saladin made great efforts to strengthen Sufi movements. Indeed, Nur al-Din can be described as the first evidence that the spirit of Sufism had reached the ruling class. His father, Imad al-Din Zengi, was a great soldier, but not exactly a man of God. Indeed, he had a reputation for being harsh, although he was respected for his military successes in defending Islam. But Nur al-Din was widely respected for his deep devotion to God. He was known as Al-Malik al-Adil, the Just King, because of his strict adherence to God's command that "if you judge between people, judge with justice"⁹.

Saladin was born in 1138 AD in the town of Takrit, in what is now Iraq. His birth seemed inauspicious: on the day he was born, his father was dismissed from his position as commander of Takrit castle, and the family on a cold night in winter had to flee with the baby¹⁰. However, the divine hand was at work, and bad luck soon changed to good. Saladin's father Najm al-Din Ayyub went to Imad al-Din Zengi, whom he had once done a favour. Zengi remembered Ayyub with gratitude and appointed him governor of Baalbek. After Zengi was killed, Ayyub entered the service of Damascus, where he eventually became commander of the army. Meanwhile, Ayyub's brother Asad al-Din Shirkuh became an officer in the army of Nur al-Din Mahmud. This enabled the two brothers to play an important role in arranging for Nur al-Din to be welcomed by the people of Damascus and become ruler of that city in 1149, after the failure of the Second Crusade. Nur al-Din thus controlled

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

virtually all Syria and became the most powerful ruler the Muslim world. Ayyub then entered his service.¹¹

With both his father and uncle senior officers in Nur al-Din's army, it was natural for Saladin to follow a military career. As a junior officer in his mid-twenties, his opportunity came for active service. In Fatimid Egypt, the *wazir* Shawar was overthrown, and asked Nur al-Din's help to restore him to power. Nur al-Din sent an army to Egypt under Shirkuh's command, and Saladin went as his uncle's assistant. Ironically, Saladin was reluctant, and only grudgingly went on that mission that set him eventually on the path to success¹². His biographer Baha al-Din Ibn Shaddad aptly quoted the Qur'anic verse, "You might hate something that is good for you"¹³.

The Syrian ruler responded to Shawar's appeal because he wanted to forestall any move by the Kingdom of Jerusalem to extend its influence in Egypt. King Amaury, who became King of Jerusalem in 1162, sought actively to control Egypt. In September 1163 he marched into Egypt with an army to exact tribute from Dirgham, the *wazir* who had ousted Shawar¹⁴. Amaury's campaign was a failure, but it warned Nur al-Din of his intentions.

By accompanying his uncle to Egypt, Saladin joined a campaign which had a decisive effect on the conflict between Muslims and Crusaders. It was a campaign in which Shawar tried to further his interests by playing both sides off against each other, but destroyed himself by his unscrupulousness. Having taken advantage of Nur al-Din's army to regain power, Shawar had no intention of fulfilling his side of his agreement with the Syrian ruler, which included a promise to acknowledge his suzerainty and pay him one third of the revenues of Egypt¹⁵. When Shirkuh insisted he fulfil his obligations, Shawar wrote to the Crusaders for help, warning them that Nur al-Din might otherwise become master of Egypt¹⁶. The Crusader army entered Egypt and besieged Shirkuh's force at Bilbays for three months¹⁷. Shirkuh put up a firm resistance, and Nur al-Din continued to attack the Crusaders from the north, forcing them

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

to seek a truce.¹⁸ A compromise was reached whereby both armies withdrew from Egypt.

Egypt was a prize whose economic wealth could tip the balance in the conflict. The power struggles over the position of *wazir* had opened the door wide to outside intervention. Shirkuh returned to Damascus aware of the dangers and opportunities in Egypt, and resolved to return and seize control of it before the Crusaders did¹⁹.

Shirkuh had to lead two more campaigns in Egypt, on both of which Saladin accompanied him: the first in 1167 AD, and the second the following year. In the latter campaign, the Crusaders besieged Cairo, but withdrew when Shirkuh's army approached²⁰. Shirkuh reached Cairo, and shortly afterwards Saladin arrested Shawar, who was executed with the approval of Egypt's nominal head of state, the Fatimid Khalifa Al-Adid²¹.

In accordance with custom in Fatimid Egypt, Shirkuh succeeded to the post of the *wazir* he had ousted, but died soon afterwards. Saladin, still under 30 years old, was appointed his successor. Being suddenly thrust into a position of great responsibility had a profound effect on Saladin, and gave him a sense of mission for the future. According to his biographer Ibn Shaddad, it led him to give up wine and frivolous activities for the rest of his life, and devote himself to theological learning, Sufism and religion. Ibn Shaddad quoted Saladin as saying: "When God enabled me to have the land of Egypt, I knew that He wanted me to conquer the (Palestinian) coast."²²

Saladin did not become *wazir* easily. Many traditional Fatimid courtiers wanted the position, and allied themselves with the Crusaders in their intrigues to get it. Even in the Syrian army, many senior officers felt they would make better *wazirs* than Saladin, and refused to take orders from such a young man. The balance between the conflicting forces, ironically, was tilted by one person who was usually powerless. The Khalifa Al-Adid in fact still had one important function: he conferred legitimacy on the *wazir* by appointing him²³. Saladin's opponents were

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

presented with a fait accompli, and he had the armed force to hold the position which was declared legally his.

One explanation for Al-Adid's choice is that some courtiers told him that Saladin was the weakest and youngest of the Syrian army leaders, and would therefore be the easiest for the Fatimid court to manipulate: a serious miscalculation²⁴. There is also evidence that Shirkuh left a will designating Saladin his successor.²⁵

Some Egyptian civil servants supported Saladin because they considered him the leader most able to defend Egypt from the Crusaders. Foremost among these was Abd al-Rahim al-Bisani al-Asqalani, known as Al-Qadi al-Fadil, a Palestinian whom the Crusaders had driven out of his country. Being well-educated, he had joined the Fatimid civil service, and risen to a senior position. He attached himself to Saladin and became one of his closest confidants and a leading member of his administration²⁶.

Al-Qadi al-Fadil's biographer believes that, since he was a valued official adviser to Al-Adid, his advice played an important part in persuading the Fatimid Khalifa to appoint Saladin²⁷.

The *Diwan al-Insha'*, the government department which Al-Qadi al-Fadil headed, had functions similar to a modern foreign ministry. It also supervised the intelligence service that was constantly on the alert for outside attack or internal subversion, both of which posed repeated threats to Saladin's government²⁸.

Al-Qadi al-Fadil was also of great assistance to Saladin in the task of transforming Egypt's political system and society. The Fatimids belonged to the Isma'ili sect, whose attitude to the Crusaders was ambivalent, and even collaborationist. Saladin was determined to bring Egyptian society back to the majority Sunni sect, and also strengthen Sufi ideas to bring individual Muslims closer to God. Fatimid sympathisers were purged from the civil service, in a campaign directed by Al-Qadi al-Fadil, who had a thorough knowledge of the political and religious views of at least its senior officials, and could determine who was loyal to

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

Saladin and who was not. The purge included not only Isma'ilis, but also Christians and Jews who might sympathise with the Fatimids or contact the Crusaders. The Egyptian civil service was transformed into a Sunni-dominated institution²⁹. A cultural, educational and social revolution took place in Egyptian society. Ismaili judges were replaced by Sunni ones. Teachers, imams for mosques, and Qur'an readers were carefully appointed, new colleges were established³⁰. The effect of these measures on public opinion enabled Saladin to undermine the legitimacy of the Fatimid dynasty, although Al-Adid remained nominal head of state until he died of an illness in September 1171. The Fatimid dynasty died with him, leaving Saladin the sole ruler of Egypt.

After Al-Adid's death, Fatimid courtiers contacted the Crusaders, hoping to restore Fatimid rule. But the *Diwan al-Insha'* infiltrated their ranks, notably with a Christian informer who provided detailed information, and foiled their conspiracy. Seeing their allies in Egypt had been crushed, the Crusaders gave up any idea of intervening in Egypt to help them. However, the kingdom of Sicily sent a fleet which attacked Alexandria in 1173. The inhabitants of Alexandria, reinforced by troops, defeated the Sicilians after a few days.³¹

After he became *wazir* of Egypt, Saladin's relations with Nur al-Din deteriorated. Disagreements between them were perhaps inevitable due to Saladin's circumstances. He had gone to Egypt as an officer in an army commanded by a subordinate of Nur al-Din, and events had led to him being appointed to the most powerful office in that country by the Khalifa. In theory, he then became the servant of two masters. But because of the Fatimid Khalifa's weakness, Saladin even as *wazir* was the de facto ruler of an independent state. After Al-Adid died, he became formally ruler of Egypt. As such, he became primarily responder the defence of that country and its interests, and this, rather than Nur al-Din's orders, became the main factor determining his military actions against the Crusaders.

Ruling Egypt involved Saladin in policies and obligations that made it impossible for him to remain a vassal of Nur al-Din.

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

At best the two could remain allies, which in some respects they did since the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem was their common enemy. But their alliance suffered some serious strains. The historian Abu Shama felt that human nature made it inevitable the two leaders should reach this parting of the ways³².

Thank God this tension never developed into armed clashes, or the results would have been tragic for the whole Muslim world. In fact Al-Qadi al-Fadil played a positive role trying to calm this tension and resolve these disagreements. He was fortunately in touch with his counterpart Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, the head of Nur al-Din's civil service. Fortunately these two senior civil servants had identical views: both were sincere Muslims determined to preserve Muslim unity and prevent any tension between the two greatest Muslim leaders of that time from undermining that unity or weakening resistance to the Crusader invasion³³.

In May 1174, Nur al-Din died suddenly from an illness, leaving a 12-year old son, Al-Salih Isma'il, and no institutional procedure for succession. The situation was very dangerous, since a child of that age could not govern a state such as Nur al-Din had ruled. A struggle for succession between its most powerful military commanders threatened to plunge Syria into a civil war and destroy everything Nur al-Din had achieved. In a letter to one Syrian commander, Saladin wrote that Nur al-Din had indicated to him that Isma'il was to be his successor, and pledged to act for him "as a sword against his enemies". He also had Isma'il's name mentioned as ruler in Friday sermon in mosques in Egypt³⁴. However, each contender for power used Isma'il's name to advance his own cause.

While competing with each other for power, the military commanders in Damascus agreed to keep Saladin out of any decisions they made. They rejected appeals by Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, and Nur al-Din's *wazir* Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri, to consult Saladin and keep him informed of their actions. They also contacted the Crusaders in the hope of doing a deal with them that would strengthen their position in any power struggle

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

against Saladin. The Crusaders had taken advantage of Nur al-Din's death to lay siege to Banias, but agreed to withdraw in return for a large sum from the Damascus commanders and the release of some Crusaders whom the Muslims held prisoner.

Two months after the death of Nur al-Din, King Amaury died. He also was succeeded by a child, 13-year old Baldwin IV, who suffered from leprosy. Count Raymond of Tripoli was appointed Regent of the Kingdom of Jerusalem³⁵.

Saladin, through Al-Qadi al-Fadil, remained in correspondence with Al-Isfahani and Al-Shahrazuri, and Qadi Sharaf al-Din Ibn Abi Asrun of Aleppo, who were leading Islamic thinkers of that time in Syria. Al-Isfahani wrote letters to Saladin to inform him of the situation in Syria, the danger to the Muslim world that this posed and the need for him to intervene to prevent the country being fragmented by the power struggles³⁶. However, Saladin could not leave Egypt immediately, because of the internal dissension and the Sicilian attack against Alexandria. Saladin entrusted the handling of the situation in Syria to Al-Qadi al-Fadil, who wrote to Muslim leaders there assuring them that Saladin was watching the situation closely, and would not allow collaboration with the enemy or the disintegration of the country³⁷.

One of those competing for the control of Syria, Gumushtegin, gained control of Nur al-Din's son Isma'il and installed him in Aleppo. His rivals in Damascus, seeing themselves weakened, appealed to Saladin to join them³⁸.

After the Sicilian fleet and internal revolt in Egypt had been defeated, Saladin marched to Syria in October 1174, five months after Nur al-Din's death, and entered Damascus without any bloodshed³⁹. He emphasised that he regarded this as a step on the road towards the recovery of Jerusalem⁴⁰.

A struggle then ensued between Saladin in Damascus, who maintained that he was striving to preserve the unity of Nur al-Din's kingdom in order to defend Islam against the Crusaders, and his rivals in Aleppo, who accused him of betraying his late commander and seizing the kingdom for himself. His critics,

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

both during his lifetime and among modern historians, accused him of pursuing personal and dynastic ambitions, and spending more time and energy fighting fellow-Muslims than the Crusaders. But let us consider what would have happened had he acted other than he did. Suppose he had concentrated purely on fighting the Crusaders, and left his rivals in Syria alone, what would have happened?

Undoubtedly Syria would have remained fragmented, with two larger kingdoms of Damascus and Aleppo, and several smaller states, each ruled by an ambitious general and striving to conquer its neighbours. The Crusaders would have encouraged these states to fight each other more fiercely by forming alliances with some against others, and generally exploited the weaknesses of the Muslim side. They would particularly have formed alliances with Saladin's rivals against him, so he would have to fight on several fronts simultaneously. He realised that in this situation he had only one choice: to fight the Crusaders effectively he had to restore the unity of Muslim ranks and Nur al-Din's kingdom, and ensure that he would not be attacked from the rear or the flanks.

Saladin eventually gained control of Nur al-Din's kingdom. After that, he carried out his stated purpose, used his position to conduct a successful campaign against the Crusaders and recovered Jerusalem. The course that history followed vindicates his actions, because they led to the results which he said he was aiming to achieve.

It took Saladin nine years to eliminate the threat from his rivals in Aleppo. In 1181 Isma'il died. His cousin Izz al-Din Mas'ud, the ruler of Mosul, seized Aleppo, which he placed in the care of his brother Imad al-Din. The latter formed an alliance with the Crusaders. Saladin marched on Aleppo, and Imad al-Din wisely decided not to resist. He handed over Aleppo in 1183, was allowed to keep some other territory as a vassal of Saladin, and pledged to contribute militarily to the fight against the Crusaders. It is noteworthy that Saladin was welcomed by the people in Aleppo, as almost everywhere he established his

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

rule⁴¹. This was because he was widely recognised as a good Muslim and the man most capable of leading people to victory over the Crusaders. He would not have been welcomed if he had merely been an ambitious conqueror as his enemies claimed.

Saladin fought several battles against the Crusaders during this period. He raided Palestine in 1177, and was defeated in a battle near Ramleh. He defeated the Crusaders in a battle in the Jawlan Heights in April 1179, and at Marj Uyun in June that year. Two months later he destroyed a Crusader strong point on the Jordan River called Bait al-Ahzan. These losses led Baldwin IV to ask for a two-year truce to which Saladin agreed: this suited him, as it left his hands free to get his Syrian house in order. Count Raymond of Tripoli denounced the truce, but a show of force by Saladin silenced him⁴². However, this was a manifestation of tension that existed between the Count and the King of Jerusalem, which Saladin exploited later.

Useful though the truce was as a breathing-space, Saladin's victories which led to it were only minor skirmishes. Only in 1183 after the capture of Aleppo could he concentrate on a major campaign against the Crusader states. While he consolidated his position in Syria, events within the Crusader Kingdom moved in a direction that helped him.

When Baldwin IV came to the throne in 1174 at the age of 13, Count Raymond of Tripoli was appointed regent. Baldwin showed qualities of leadership and assumed full control when he came of age, but his leprosy became worse and it was clear he would not live long. His sister Sibylla's husband, William of Montferrat, had died leaving her with a small son who was heir to the throne of Jerusalem. In 1180 a French nobleman named Guy de Lusignan came to Jerusalem, and Sibylla married him⁴³.

The leadership of the Kingdom of Jerusalem divided into two factions. The extremists were led by Sibylla, her mother Queen Agnes, Guy de Lusignan, the Templars and knights newly arrived from France. The more moderate faction was led by Count Raymond of Tripoli, and included nobles born in the region, many of them third or fourth generation descendants of

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

the first Crusaders. These had grown up familiar with Muslim states as neighbours and prepared to coexist with them. The Crusader states suffered a chronic shortage of manpower, and had to encourage immigrants from Europe who were usually fanatical and provoked wars with the Muslims.

The most notorious of these was Renaud de Chatillon, who had married the heiress to the castle of Karak. From his impregnable castle on top of a mountain, on the main caravan routes between Syria and Egypt and Arabia, he ambushed caravans, massacred the travellers and seized their property. He ambushed and massacred a caravan of pilgrims going from Damascus to Makkah in 1181, in violation of a truce then in force⁴⁴.

King Baldwin's health deteriorated so badly that his mother and sister persuaded him to appoint his sister's husband, Guy de Lusignan, as regent. This gave the extremists the upper hand in Jerusalem. Renaud de Chatillon became increasingly aggressive. He organised a fleet of sixteen warships in the Red Sea which engaged in piracy, attacked coastal towns and intended to attack and destroy the Muslim holy places at Makkah and Madina. But they were defeated and eliminated by an Egyptian naval commander in February 1183⁴⁵. Renaud de Chatillon's actions persuaded increasing numbers of people that their lives, property and religion were under constant threat, and that coexistence with the Crusaders was impossible, thus strengthening the spirit of resistance for which Saladin stood.

In September and October 1183 Saladin conducted an inconclusive campaign in Galilee, in which the army of the Kingdom of Jerusalem evaded being drawn into a pitched battle. In November 1183 and July 1184 he unsuccessfully besieged Renaud de Chatillon's stronghold at Karak.

King Baldwin IV revoked the regency of Guy de Lusignan after a year. In early 1185, the dying king had his sister's small son proclaimed king as Baldwin V, with Raymond of Tripoli as regent. It was agreed that, if Baldwin V died before the age of ten, Raymond would remain regent until the Kings of

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

France and England and the Emperor of Germany chose a successor. Guy was excluded from the regency⁴⁶.

In March 1185 Baldwin IV died, and Raymond assumed power as regent. He declared that peace was the only chance for the kingdom's survival, and concluded a four-year truce with Saladin. However, Baldwin V died in September 1186, at the age of nine. The extremists acted swiftly, and crowned Guy king. This annoyed Raymond of Tripoli so much that he informed Saladin's nephew of his intention to come to terms with the Muslims⁴⁷. Early in 1187, Renaud de Chatillon again violated the truce by seizing a caravan travelling from Cairo to Damascus and taking the travellers prisoner. He even refused the orders of King Guy to release the prisoners and return the loot⁴⁸.

Saladin clearly had no alternative but to fight, and had wide support for this throughout the Muslim world. The Crusader side was deeply divided, and Saladin used his diplomacy to good effect. He signed a separate truce with Prince Bohemond of Antioch, to ensure that he remained out of the battle.

King Guy mobilised his forces, but not in order to fight the Muslims who were preparing to attack his kingdom. Instead Guy intended to fight Raymond, who appealed to Saladin for help⁴⁹. Despite a last-minute reconciliation between Guy and Raymond, the Crusader side was clearly in disarray. Guy's army was concentrated at Saffuriya in northern Palestine, while Saladin's army laid siege to Tiberias a short distance to the west, on 30 June 1187.

The Crusader leadership held a council of war in Saffuriya. Raymond's advice was to avoid battle, because Saladin was camped beside Lake Tiberias. To reach him, the Crusaders would have to march across fifteen miles of hilly country, under a blazing hot sun, and would certainly be defeated. Even if the Muslims captured Tiberias, Raymond argued, their army would go home in winter as it always did, and the Crusaders could retake the town. Renaud de Chatillon and

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

the Templars' commander Gerard de Ridefort accused Raymond of being a traitor and "trying to help his Muslim friends" with this advice. Nevertheless, the council decided to remain at Saffuriya.

However, De Ridefort persuaded King Guy to reverse this decision and march against Saladin. At the end of a day's march across barren hills under blazing sun, the Crusaders reached the Hittin area near Tiberias and camped for the night without water. The next morning they found themselves surrounded by the Muslims, who set fire to the dry grass. The infantry were overcome by the combination of the smoke and thirst, and their resistance collapsed. The knights continued to fight for some hours, but were eventually overpowered. King Guy, De Chatillon and De Ridefort were taken prisoner and brought to Saladin's tent.

Saladin received Guy politely, and handed him a bowl of iced rose-water to drink. The king drank, and then passed the bowl to Reynaud de Chatillon. Saladin intervened to say that he had not offered water to the lord of Karak. Under Arab custom, a prisoner's life would be safe if his captor gave him something to eat or drink. Reynaud de Chatillon was what in modern terminology we would call a war criminal, and Saladin had pledged to execute him. Saladin then enumerated the many crimes De Chatillon had committed, and ended by striking him with his sword where his head joined his body. Guards came forward and completed the decapitation⁵⁰.

The Kingdom of Jerusalem, with its already serious manpower problem, suffered very heavy losses in the battle of Hittin. Hardly any military forces remained to defend it. Saladin realised that his victory was likely to provoke the European powers into launching another crusade. It was essential to deny forces from Europe easy bridgeheads, so Saladin spent the ensuing weeks capturing as many coastal towns from the Crusaders as possible.

On 20 September 1187 he laid siege to Jerusalem. After some days the garrison surrendered. Saladin spared the lives of all in the city, after terms for ransom had been agreed⁵¹. Unlike

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

the Crusader capture of Jerusalem in 1099, there were no atrocities. The holy city returned peacefully to tolerant Muslim rule, and the so-called Kingdom of Jerusalem was now without its capital.

The great importance which Saladin attached to Jerusalem is indicated by the care he took regarding the sermon preached in the first Friday prayers in Al-Aqsa Mosque after the liberation. Saladin invited the greatest Muslim preachers of his time to prepare draft sermons and submit them to him. The one he chose which most clearly reflected the ideas he wanted to instil in people's minds after the liberation of Jerusalem was that of a judge from Damascus, Abu'l-Ma'ali Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Zaki al-Din.

The sermon began with many expressions praising God, such as: "Praise to God who strengthens Islam with His victory, humiliates polytheism with His conquest... and lures the unbelievers to their destruction by His plotting." It is God who is praised for giving victory to those who fight for Him, it is He who has purified Jerusalem from pollution. The preacher added that pleasing God is "the ultimate aim and the highest degree, and God is pleased that Jerusalem has been regained and restored to its rightful place in Islam.

The preacher spoke of Jerusalem's history, as the place from which the Prophet Mhad ascended to Heaven, may God bless him and give him peace. He spoke of Jesus the Messiah, who had taught his followers to worship only the one true God. The sermon quoted from the Holy Qur'an: "The Messiah will not be too proud to be a slave of God, nor will the angels who are close to Him"⁵²; "Those who say that God is the Messiah, the son of Mary, have blasphemed"⁵³; and "they have blasphemed who said that God is the third one of three. There is only one God"⁵⁴. Jesus never mentioned anything about a trinity; this was a pagan concept that was grafted onto Christianity by Constantine, more than 300 years after the birth of Christ.

A very important theme of this sermon was the need for humility. It stressed that the great victory came from God, and

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

must be recognised as a divine gift rather than a human achievement. Saladin and his army had been given a great honour by God when He had chosen to use them in order to bring this victory about. "Preserve this gift among you," the preacher said. "look after this grace, doing your duty to God. Beware that the Devil does not mislead you, that tyranny does not infiltrate you and make you imagine that this victory was due to your sharp swords, your fine horses and your endurance in the land of slaughter. No, this victory came only from God, the Almighty and Wise"⁵⁵. This preacher was aware that, if the Muslims ever forgot God's grace to them, or neglected their duty to God, they would be in danger of losing Jerusalem again. These are the reasons why Saladin chose him to preach the sermon.

The Third Crusade came, as Saladin had expected, a mighty expeditionary force from Western Europe, sent to capture Jerusalem again. Its greatest leader was Richard the Lionheart, King of England and lord of many territories in France like Anjou and Normandy. Richard and Saladin were the two greatest military leaders in the world at that time. They fought a number of battles, and Richard marched to the village of Bait Nuba, west of Jerusalem, hoping to go on to conquer the holy city.

From Bait Nuba, Richard saw Jerusalem on a mountain top in front of his eyes. He stopped and studied the surrounding countryside, and analysed the military situation, the forces available to both sides, all the factors that would affect the outcome of such a military campaign. And he realised he could not do it. He did not have at his disposal forces of the strength required to seize Jerusalem from the Muslims again. And even if he had such forces, there was no way he could keep them supplied with food and water through the long siege that would be required. In a meeting with other leaders of the Crusader army, Richard told them, "If it please you to proceed to Jerusalem, I will not desert you; I will be your comrade, but not your commander; I will follow, not lead you"⁵⁶.

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

Nobody volunteered to command such an enterprise. All the other Crusader commanders realised that if Richard could not do it, then no one could. The idea of trying to capture Jerusalem again was abandoned. By God's grace, Jerusalem in Saladin's time became secure in the Muslims' hands.

Let us conclude by considering the reasons for Saladin's success. His personal qualities, his skill at military leadership, his political intelligence, and his genuine devotion to religious principles, all played a part. Dedication to Islam made him a virtuous man in his personal life, and also a just ruler, which is vitally important. Numerous verses in the Holy Qur'an stress that justice is an indispensable quality of Muslim leadership. It is a quality that is sadly lacking in most governments in the Muslim world today. Unless ordinary citizens are convinced that their society is a just one, they will not feel devoted to that society and willing to make sacrifices for it.

This was the great contribution of the Just King Nur al-Din Mahmud, even before Saladin. He restored justice to the Muslim world after it had been trampled on by petty tyrants. The Muslim world is today in great need of leaders like Nur al-Din Mahmud and Saladin, who will govern with justice and according to God's law and Islamic ethics. Although they had some differences as I mentioned earlier, Saladin was the natural successor to Nur al-Din, as a leader embodying Islamic justice and ethics.

Islamic ethics was the determining factor in all Saladin's conduct of warfare. His honourable and humane actions astonished the Crusaders, who were not used to concepts like sparing innocent civilians in time of war. The code of European chivalry was profoundly affected by Saladin's example from which the Crusaders learnt. In fact, Islam had invented the concept of humanitarian international law in the seventh century AD. When Abu Bakr, the Prophet Muhammad's first successor to lead the Muslim community, sent armies to fight the empires of Byzantium and Persia, he strictly ordered them not to harm

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

women, children or old people, and not to destroy trees that bore fruit.

Another quality Saladin had was the ability to take advantage of opportunities, of which he certainly did have some remarkable ones: some people say he had astonishingly good luck. These opportunities often came to him without him planning them, or even contrary to his plans, as when he unwillingly had to accompany his uncle Shirkuh to Egypt.

It was more than just luck: in Islam we have our concept of historical inevitability, which the Holy Qur'an sums up in the words: "They plot, and God plots, and God is the best of plotters"⁵⁷. While Marxists claim that historical processes come about by purely material means, through forces of economics and struggle of social classes, Muslims believe that all these forces are activated and directed by the Creator Who is the prime cause of all being, and Who is guiding historical processes in the direction He has planned, for the accomplishment of His will. Islam means submission to God's will, and a Muslim must allow his Creator to direct him through historical processes, so that he becomes God's instrument, and his life can be a small contribution to the achievement of the great purpose.

Divine planning and guidance are evident if one studies closely the remarkable way in which Saladin was made to accomplish this purpose at a critical phase of history. But he could only succeed because he was operating from a sound foundation that had been laid in the decades before him. It was laid partly by Ali al-Sulami and his followers, who had taught the people the principles of jihad, the just war of liberation to recover Jerusalem, their holy places and their lands. And parallel to and complementing this educational programme of jihad had been the wider spread of Sufism, which operated at the level of the great masses of the people, encouraging ordinary individuals to develop their close personal relationship with God. All the while that the petty rulers of the little states were plotting against each other, betraying Islam and collaborating with the Crusaders, ordinary people were transforming themselves and their society,

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

preparing to regain Jerusalem and repel the invaders. And when they came to power, both Nur al-Din Mahmud and Saladin made an enormous contribution to the spread of Sufism, giving generously to the strengthening of Sufi orders and the establishment of Sufi centres.

I mentioned earlier that if a human being has a sound relationship with his Creator, all his other relationships, towards other human beings and society, can become correct. He also sees this life in its true perspective and realises its limits. He understands that true value lies in eternity. "We belong to God, and to Him do we return"⁵⁸. A Muslim is not afraid of death, because he knows it is only a door through which he must pass on his way to a better life.

Those who love this earthly life and are frightened of death can never achieve anything worthwhile. The relationship that Sufism develops between individual human beings and their Creator gives them the courage required to do whatever is needed to fight evil and liberate their society, without being terrified that they will be killed for doing so.

Many people these days do not understand what Sufism really is because, like many good things, charlatans have tried to use it to further their own ambitions. Because forgers try to reproduce great works of art, this does not mean that art itself is a bad thing. We must be discriminating and know the true from the false. Genuine Sufism is a powerful spiritual force that transforms individuals' lives by bringing them to a close personal relationship with God, and this in turn enables them to transform society. "God does not change what is in a people until they change what is in themselves"⁵⁹. It was because the people changed themselves that God brought about this change in them and enabled them to liberate Jerusalem under Saladin's leadership.

Consider a recent example of the relevance of Sufism. There are many reports in recent years of a revival of Sufism in Chechnya. In the battle of Grozny, a small number of determined people, with faith in God which had destroyed their fear of death,

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

held the army of the world's second greatest power at bay, and inflicted defeat on it. The bravest fighters in Grozny were members of the Sufi orders. This is a point on which we must meditate, as we face the need to repeat history and liberate Jerusalem again.

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¹ P.M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (Longman, London & New York, 1996), p. 22.

² Amin Maalouf, *Les Croisades vues par les Arabes* (J-C Lattes, Paris, 1986), pp. 77-79.

³ Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 24-25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22; Maalouf, *Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*, p. 67.

⁵ Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 27-28.

⁶ Maalouf, *Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*, pp. 139, 144, 163-166; Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 41-45, 55.

⁷ Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani (1131-1199)*, (Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1993), pp. 212-216.

⁸ Qur'an 55:16.

⁹ Qur'an 4:58.

¹⁰ Qadri Qalaji, *Salah al-Din al-Ayyoubi*, (Beirut, 1992), pp. 151-153.; Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin* (G.P. Putnam's Sons Ltd., London & New York, 1926), pp. 5-6, 65.

¹¹ Maalouf, *Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*, pp. 166-170.

- 12 Baha' al-Din Ibn Shadad, *al-Nawadir al-Sultania wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufia*, (Cairo, 1903), p.23.
- 13 Qur'an 2: 216.
- 14 Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*; see also Shams al-Din Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khalikan, *Wafaiat al-Ayan wa Anba' al-Zaman*, vol. 1, p. 145; Abu Shama al-Maqqisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 130.
- 15 Ibn al-Athir, *al-Khamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 9, p. 465; Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*, vol. 3, p. 204.
- 16 Abu Shama al-Maqqisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 131.
- 17 Jamal al-Din Muhammad Ibn Salim Ibn Wasil, *Mufarij al-Kurub fi Akhbar Bani Ayub*, vol. 1, p. 140.
- 18 Abu Shama al-Maqqisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 131-132.
- 19 Baha' al-Din Ibn Shadad, *al-Nawadir al-Sultania wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufia*, pp. 23-24; Abu Shama al-Maqqisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 142.
- 20 Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*, vol. 3, p. 299; Jamal al-Din Muhammad Ibn Salim Ibn Wasil, *Mufarij al-Kurub fi Akhbar Bani Ayub*, vol. 1, p. 158; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Khamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 10, p. 13;
- 21 Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*, vol. 3, pp. 300-301; Abu Shama al-Maqqisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 157.
- 22 Baha' al-Din Ibn Shadad, *al-Nawadir al-Sultania wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufia*, p. 26-27.
- 23 Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*, vol. 3, p. 307-308.

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

- 24 Ibn al-Athir, *al-Khamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 10, p. 17; Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*, vol. 3, p. 308; and see also note 4.
- 25 Jamal al-Din Muhammad Ibn Salim Ibn Wasil, *Mufarij al-Kurub fi Akhbar Bani Ayub*, vol. 1, p. 168.
- 26 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, pp. 103-106.
- 27 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, pp. 117-119.
- 28 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, p. 55-56 quoted from Ahmed Ibn Ali al-Qalqashandi, *Subuh al-A'sha fi Sina'it al-Insha'*, (Cairo, 1916), vol. 1, pp. 118-119, 114; see also Jamal al-Din Muhammad Ibn Salim Ibn Wasil, *Mufarij al-Kurub fi Akhbar Bani Ayub*, vol. 1, p. 178; Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Iti'az al-Khunafa'*, vol. 3, p. 311.
- 29 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, p. 134.
- 30 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, p. 136.
- 31 Ibn al-Athir, *al-Khamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 10, p. 64.
- 32 Abu Shama al-Maqqdisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 173.
- 33 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, pp. 180-181; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Khamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 10, p. 64.
- 34 Malcolm Cameron Lyons & D.E.P. Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982), pp. 73-74.
- 35 Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, p. 53.
- 36 Hadia Dajani-Shikil, *al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahman al-Bisani al-Asqalani*, pp. 180-183.

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

- 37 Abu Shama al-Maqqdisi, *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain al-Nuraiah wa al-Salahiah*, vol. 1, p. 598-602.
- 38 Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 53-54.
- 39 Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, p. 81-83.
- 40 *Murasalat Fadili*, MS No. ADD 7465, British Museum, p. 222.
- 41 Lane-Poole, *Saladin*, pp. 172-173; Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 55-56.
- 42 Lane-Poole, *Saladin*, pp. 154-161.
- 43 Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, p. 146.
- 44 Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 56-57.
- 45 Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, p. 185; Lieutenant-General Sir John Glubb, *The lost Centuries: from the Muslim Empires to the Renaissance of Europe: 1145 - 1453* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1967), p. 93; Said Ashur, *al-Harakh al-Salibiah*, (Cairo, 1986), vol. 2, pp. 617-620.
- 46 Lieutenant-General Sir John Glubb, *The lost Centuries: from the Muslim Empires to the Renaissance of Europe: 1145 - 1453*, pp. 96-97.
- 47 Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, p. 247.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 248; Glubb, *The lost Centuries*, p. 98.
- 49 Glubb, *The lost Centuries*, p. 98.
- 50 For comprehensive accounts of this battle, see Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, pp. 255-266; Lane-Poole, *Saladin*, pp. 205-215; Qadri Qalaji, *Salah al-Din al-Ayyoubi*, pp. 313-327; Baha' al-Din Ibn Shadad, *al-Nawadir al-Sultania wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufia*, p. 49-53; Said Ashur, *al-Harakh al-Salibiah*, pp. 525-636.
- 51 Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, pp. 267-277; Baha' al-Din Ibn Shadad, *al-Nawadir al-Sultania wa al-Mahasin al-*

Jerusalem: the Central Point in Saladin's Life

Yusufia, p. 35-55; Qadri Qalaji, *Salah al-Din al-Ayyoubi*, pp. 327-347; Said Ashur, *al-Harakh al-Salibiah*, pp. 537-650.

52 Qur'an 4: 172.

53 Qur'an 5:17.

54 Qur'an 5: 73.

55 The text is in Shamsh al-Din Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khalikan, *Wafaiat al-Ayan wa Anba' al-Zaman*, vol. 3, p. 365.

56 Geoffrey de Vinsauf, *Itinerary of Richard I and Others to the Holy Land* "translated as a "conjoint labour of a classical scholar and a gentleman well read in medieval history" (Henry G. Bohm, London, 1948), p. 301.

57 Qur'an 8:30.

58 Qur'an 2:156.

59 Qur'an 13:11.