

The
Crusades

6

What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?

J Byron
& M Riley

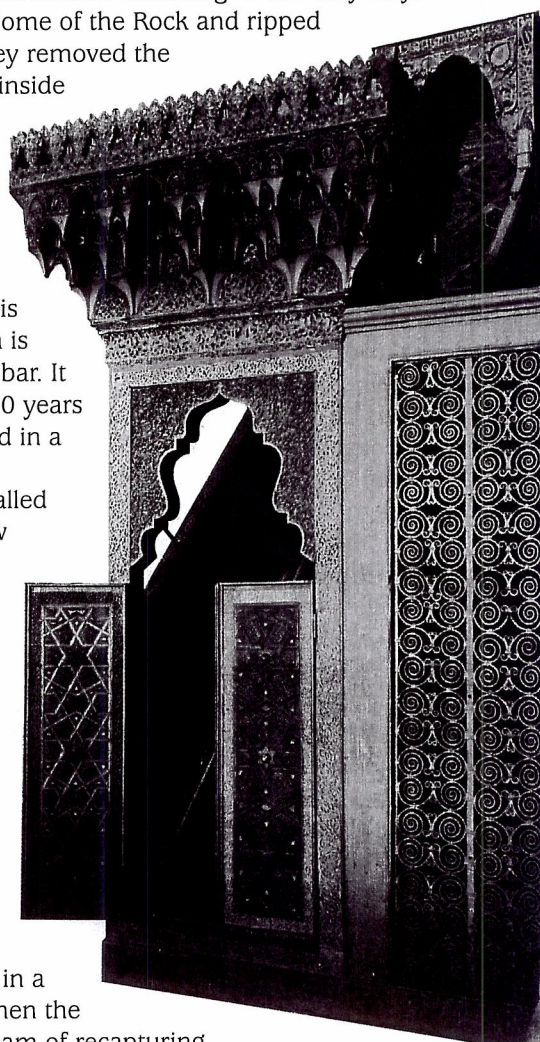
2013

Jerusalem, 2 October 1187. For the first time in almost 90 years the banners of Islam fluttered in the breeze above the city's battlements. Saladin, the Muslim leader, made his triumphant entrance into the city. This was a profoundly proud moment for Saladin. For the last thirteen years he had encouraged his fellow Muslims to follow the jihad and to recapture Jerusalem for Islam. Now, that goal had been achieved.

Saladin and his followers began a ritual cleansing of the Holy City. They climbed to the top of the Dome of the Rock and ripped down the large golden cross. They removed the Christian altar and statues from inside the building. They purified the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque with rose water and incense. As part of the Muslim takeover of Jerusalem Saladin had a new minbar (pulpit) installed in the Aqsa Mosque. This rare black and white photograph is all that remains of Saladin's minbar. It stood in the Aqsa Mosque for 800 years until 1969 when it was destroyed in a fire.

The minbar that Saladin installed in the Aqsa Mosque was not new in 1187. It was in 1168 that the Muslim leader Nur ad-Din had commissioned the master carpenter al-Akharini to carve the finest minbar in the Muslim world. Nur ad-Din hoped that one day he would be able to install the wonderful minbar in the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. For nearly twenty years the minbar had stood in the Great Mosque of Aleppo where it lay, according to one Muslim chronicler, 'like a sword in a scabbard' waiting for the day when the Muslims might achieve their dream of recapturing Jerusalem. In October 1187 that day had arrived.

△ The minbar of Nur ad-Din.



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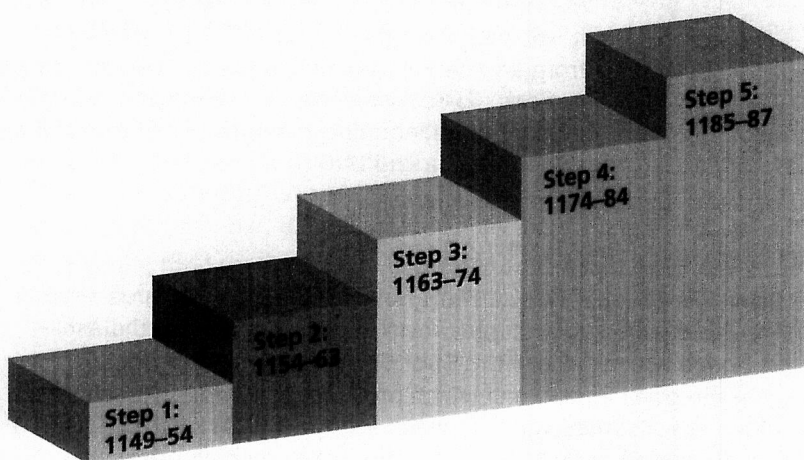
■ **Enquiry Focus:** What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?

One thing that the story of Nur ad-Din's minbar reveals is that the recapture of Jerusalem began a long time before 1187. Your challenge in this enquiry is to explain exactly what led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187. We have divided the period between the Second Crusade and the fall of Jerusalem into five different time-frames. Each of these can be seen as a 'step' towards the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem. We suggest that you start a separate page of notes for each of these steps.

In the middle of each page draw a 'step' to show which years it covers.

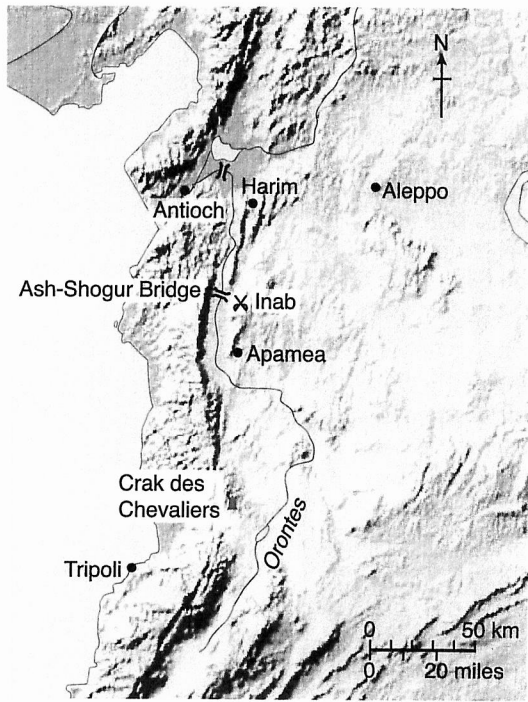
In the space above the 'step', make bullet point notes to summarise the achievements of Nur ad-Din or Saladin in these years.

In the space below the step, make bullet point notes to summarise changes in the crusader states in these years.



At the end of the enquiry you can use your 'flight of steps' to consider a range of issues that shed light on the Enquiry Focus: *What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?*

- In what ways did Nur ad-Din lay the foundations for the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem?
- What particular strengths did Saladin display in the years leading up to the capture of Jerusalem?
- When and how did political weakness in the crusader states contribute to the fall of Jerusalem?
- Which turning points were particularly important in leading to the fall of Jerusalem?
- At what point do you think the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem became inevitable?
- Overall, what factors were most important in explaining what happened in 1187?



△ Northern Syria in 1150.

You have already encountered Nur ad-Din during the Second Crusade. See pages 85–86.

The Caliph was Nur ad-Din's spiritual leader.

1149–54: Nur ad-Din and the crusader states

On the night of 14 September 1146, Zengi, lord of Mosul and Aleppo was knifed to death in his bed by one of his own servants. Zengi's heirs acted quickly. Saif ad-Din, his eldest son, took control of Mosul, the main centre of Sunni Islam. Nur ad-Din, Zengi's 28-year-old younger son, became the new emir of Aleppo. In the years that followed, Nur ad-Din would unite Syria, extend his power into Egypt and achieve a number of victories against the crusader states. However, at the beginning of his rule, Nur ad-Din's position was precarious. After the Second Crusade, he emerged as the most important Muslim leader in the Near East, but Nur ad-Din still needed to establish his power in northern Syria. In particular, it was important for Nur ad-Din to secure Aleppo from an attack by the neighbouring crusader state of Antioch. To do this, it was crucial to gain control of the two crusader outposts to the east of the Orontes river: Apamea and Harim.

The Battle of Inab, 1149

In the summer of 1149, Nur ad-Din's troops moved into the area around Apamea. He planned to isolate the town by taking control of the Ash-Shogur Bridge which crossed the River Orontes. Nur ad-Din began by besieging the small fort of Inab which protected the bridge. At daybreak on 29 June, his mounted warriors made a surprise attack on the forces of Prince Raymond, ruler of Antioch, who had formed an overnight encampment on the plain outside Inab. After hours of fighting in the heat and dust, Nur ad-Din's men emerged victorious. When the dust settled, they found the body of Raymond of Antioch among the dead. They decapitated Raymond and presented his head to Nur ad-Din who sent it as a trophy to the Caliph in Baghdad.

Nur ad-Din's victory at the Battle of Inab allowed him to launch further attacks on crusader territory. In mid-July, his forces captured the town of Harim. By the end of July he had also taken Apamea. Nur ad-Din now controlled all the land to the east of the Orontes. However, he decided not to press home his victory by besieging the city of Antioch itself, perhaps realising that the city's huge fortifications, and the possibility of reinforcements from Jerusalem, made an attack too risky. Nur ad-Din's victory at Inab and his conquests of Harim and Apamea were enough to ensure that the crusader state of Antioch now posed a more limited threat to the security of Aleppo. In order to advertise the significance of his victory at Inab, Nur ad-Din bathed in the Mediterranean.

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Weaknesses in the crusader states

In the years between 1149 and 1154 there were several reasons why the crusader states could offer only limited resistance to Nur ad-Din. The most important Latin ruler was Baldwin III, King of Jerusalem, but Baldwin faced some serious challenges.

- 1 In 1149 Baldwin was only nineteen years old. Since 1143 he had ruled jointly with his mother, Melisende, but, from 1149, relations with his mother soured because she refused to allow him to rule alone. Between 1150 and 1152 their relationship grew even worse as Baldwin tried to force Melisende's abdication and establish himself as an independent ruler.
- 2 From 1149 Baldwin III also faced the additional challenge of ruling Antioch. Prince Raymond's death at the Battle of Inab created a succession crisis in Antioch because his son and heir was only five years old. Constance, Raymond's young widow, refused to marry a man of Baldwin's choosing so this left Antioch without a male military commander. Baldwin III had no choice but to rule Antioch as well as Jerusalem.
- 3 Three years later, in 1152, Baldwin took over control of the County of Tripoli when Raymond II, ruler of Tripoli, was murdered by a band of assassins. This meant that Baldwin III was now charged with the rule of all three surviving crusader kingdoms. Baldwin III was a brave and competent ruler, but, in his early twenties, he was clearly stretched!
- 4 The young King received no help from Europe. Following the failure of the Second Crusade the Franks made urgent requests to European rulers for a new crusade, but there was no response. Baldwin III was left to defend the crusader states on his own.

Damascus, 1154

Despite these weaknesses, Nur ad-Din chose not to attempt a direct assault on the crusader states in the early 1150s. Instead, he focused his resources and energy on consolidating his power in Syria. Nur ad-Din's priority was to take control of the city of Damascus. In the four years between 1150 and 1154 he used a mixture of military threats and propaganda to subdue the city. His strategy worked: in April 1154, the people of Damascus surrendered. For the first time since the Crusades began, Aleppo and Damascus were now under the rule of one man. Nur ad-Din had created a united Muslim Syria. This would give him a formidable power base in his fight against the Franks.

Some medieval Muslim chroniclers suggested that from this point onwards, Nur ad-Din dedicated himself to jihad against the Franks, but the evidence does not support this view. Following his seizure of Damascus, Nur ad-Din agreed a truce with the crusaders that allowed him to continue securing his Syrian territory. Fighting a Holy War against the Christians of the Near East does not seem to have been at the top of Nur ad-Din's agenda in 1154.

■ Make your notes for the first step, 1149–54. Remember – the bullet points above the step should summarise Nur ad-Din's achievements and the bullet points below the step should summarise the changes in the crusader states.

Start with the main points. For Nur ad-Din's achievements these could be his securing of Aleppo and his victory over Raymond of Antioch. For the crusader states, the main points might be the problems of leadership and the lack of support from overseas. When you have decided on the main points you can then add the details.

1154–63: Nur ad-Din and the building of jihad

Nur ad-Din may not have been ready to fight a Holy War in 1154, but he was keen to portray himself as a devout Muslim and a warrior for jihad. The Muslim leader brought together the religious and military classes in Syria by ensuring that his army included religious men: prayer leaders, preachers, judges and **Sufi** mystics. He also saw it as his religious duty to construct buildings in the name of Islam. In the years between 1154 and 1163, Nur ad-Din paid for a range of new religious buildings in Damascus and other Syrian towns. Many of his new mosques, minarets, madrasas (religious schools), hospitals, orphanages and Sufi cloisters had his name inscribed on their walls. In 1163 Nur ad-Din completed the greatest of his buildings in Damascus – the House of Justice. It was here that his subjects could bring their grievances and where Nur ad-Din himself sometimes acted as judge. Nur ad-Din was keen to project an image of being a 'just ruler'. His House of Justice, and the other buildings that he sponsored, helped to portray him as a model Sunni Muslim ruler who was deeply religious and seriously committed to jihad.

In 1157–58, Nur ad-Din became seriously ill and almost died.

This seems to have deepened his religious commitment. The Muslim chroniclers tell us that Nur ad-Din experienced a spiritual awakening in these years. After his illness he focused on his own greater jihad in preparation for Holy War (lesser jihad) against the Christians. Nur ad-Din discarded his luxurious clothes and began to wear the simple garments of a Sufi mystic. In 1161 he performed the **Hajj**, the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest city – Makkah. Following his pilgrimage he rebuilt the walls of Medina – Islam's second holiest city. At the same time as Nur ad-Din was becoming more deeply spiritual, religious leaders in Syria were stressing the importance of religious martyrdom. They wrote and preached that Muslims who died fighting the infidel would be rewarded with a place in Paradise. In particular, the religious leaders emphasised that it was the duty of good Muslims to recapture Islam's third holiest city – Jerusalem.

The crusader states fight back

After 1154, Nur ad-Din established himself as a devout Sunni ruler, but he made little real advance in jihad against the Franks. During the period 1154–63, the crusader states were beginning to regain some of their strength:

- King Baldwin III proved to be more than a match for Nur ad-Din. In 1153 Baldwin had achieved an important victory when, after an eight-month siege, his armies had taken the southern port of Ascalon. This helped to secure the southern frontier of the crusader states and provided the crusaders with a potential stepping-stone into Egypt. The crusaders now held all the ports on the coast of Palestine, providing greater security for trade and pilgrimage.
- In the north, the crusader state of Antioch began to revive. In 1153, after four years of ruling alone, Constance finally married a young and handsome French knight, Reynald of Châtillon. Reynald had fought alongside Baldwin in the Siege of Ascalon and had gained the King's

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permission to marry Constance. He was a particularly brutal man who proved to be a formidable defender of crusader territory until he was captured by Nur ad-Din in 1161.

- In 1158 the crusaders recaptured the town of Harim from Nur ad-Din. Antioch was on the offensive again.
- The crusader states were further strengthened when relations with the Byzantines were restored. By the late 1150s, the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel I, was keen to forget the bad feeling caused by the Second Crusade. In September 1158, Baldwin III married Manuel's niece, Theodora. Three years later, Manuel married Maria of Antioch, the daughter of Constance and her first husband, Prince Raymond. These marriage alliances brought the Byzantines and the Franks closer together.

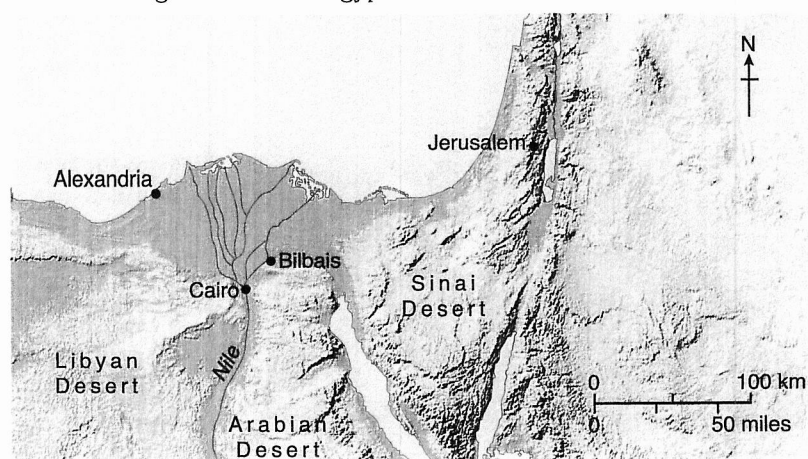
Nur ad-Din's pragmatism

In the light of these changes, Nur ad-Din proved himself to be a pragmatic ruler. In 1159, when Manuel I assembled Christian armies in Antioch for an assault on Aleppo, Nur ad-Din knew that the Muslims were outnumbered, so he negotiated a truce. In 1161, the capture of Reynald of Châtillon weakened the principality of Antioch, but Nur ad-Din chose not to exploit this. Instead, he agreed a truce with Baldwin III. In 1163, Baldwin III died suddenly of consumption at the age of 33. With the death of their most powerful ruler the crusader states were vulnerable, but, once again, Nur ad-Din did not react. In the years 1154–63, Nur ad-Din might have experienced a spiritual awakening and laid the foundations for jihad, but he chose not to commit his forces to a Holy War against the crusader states. In 1163, all that was about to change.

1163–74: Conflict and control in Egypt

After 1163, Nur ad-Din began to confront the Franks on the borders between his territory in Syria and the crusader states of Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem. However, the main focus of conflict in these years was in Egypt. Nur ad-Din knew that division between his Sunni Syria and Shi'ah Egypt was undermining any hope of recapturing Jerusalem and of forcing the Franks out of the Near East. If he could gain control of Egypt and unite Damascus with Cairo, the crusader states would be encircled. Control of Egypt would also give Nur ad-Din access to the country's fantastic wealth. Egypt's Fatimid regime had been weak for many years and, in 1163, it was in chaos. The summary of events on pages 96 and 97 shows how Nur ad-Din and his generals gained control of Egypt in the years between 1163 and 1174.

■ Make your notes for the second step, 1154–63. Above the step, summarise the main achievements of Nur ad-Din during these years. Below the step, explain how the Franks regained some of their strength. To what extent do you think the recapture of Jerusalem had become more likely by 1163?



△ Egypt and Palestine in the twelfth century.