

## Gaining control of Egypt, 1163–74

September 1163, Amalric, King of Jerusalem, invaded Egypt, but retreated. Baldwin III had no children and was therefore succeeded by his 27-year-old brother Amalric. William of Tyre, the new King's chancellor, wrote that Amalric was quite tall and good-looking with blond hair and a full beard. He was confident but quieter than his brother, perhaps because of a slight stammer. Amalric did not eat or drink too much, but was very fat 'with breasts like those of a woman hanging down to his waist'. Like Baldwin, Amalric would prove to be a strong crusader king who was prepared to confront his enemies. From the beginning of his reign, the new King of Jerusalem made the conquest of Egypt a priority. He invaded Egypt for the first time in September 1163 and began to besiege the town of Bilbais which lay on a tributary of the Nile. His troops were forced to retreat when the Egyptians opened the dykes and flooded the land around the town. However, before his death in 1169, Amalric would attempt four more invasions of Egypt.

### April 1164, Nur ad-Din's forces invaded Egypt

During 1164, Nur ad-Din's energy was directed at fighting the Franks in the north, but he knew that he could not risk the possibility of



a Frankish victory in Egypt. Reluctantly, his attention was drawn to the south. In April 1164, he ordered his Kurdish general, Shirkuh, to lead a campaign into Egypt. Shirkuh, blind in one eye and immensely fat, was feared and respected as a veteran soldier. Shirkuh was a trusted member of Nur ad-Din's inner circle, but he saw an Egyptian invasion as an opportunity to establish independent power for his own clan, the Ayyubids. Shirkuh's second-in-command was his young nephew, Yusuf Ibn Ayyub, better known as Salah ad-Din or Saladin. Between 1164 and 1169 Shirkuh and Saladin fought a number of bitter campaigns against the crusaders in the Nile region. Increasingly, they saw the potential of establishing an Ayyubid kingdom in Egypt.

### January 1169, Shirkuh gained control of Egypt

The Egyptian wars came to a head in the winter of 1168–69. The Franks' fourth invasion of Egypt, which began in October 1168, was a disaster. Amalric managed to capture the town of Bilbais, but failed to besiege Cairo and was forced to retreat from Egypt. The stage was now clear for Shirkuh. In January 1169, he ordered the assassination of the Egyptian vizier and made himself the new ruler of Egypt. With Syria and Egypt now united under the banner of Sunni Islam, the threat to Jerusalem, and to the overall security of the crusader states, suddenly intensified.

◁ A late medieval depiction of al-Malik al-Nasir Salah al-Dunya wa'l-Did Abu'l Muzzafar Yusuf Ibn Ayyub Ibn Shadi al-Kurdy – known (thankfully) to westerners as Saladin. In his twenties, Saladin had been Nur ad-Din's favourite polo partner. In 1169, when he took over from his uncle in Egypt, he was 31 years old. According to one Muslim chronicler, Saladin's religious conviction deepened after his rise to power. He was said to have given up wine-drinking and other frivolities.

## What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?

### March 1169, Saladin established his power in Egypt

Within weeks of taking control of Egypt, Shirkuh, by then in his sixties and vastly overweight, died of a heart attack. He was succeeded as vizier by his nephew, Saladin. At first, Saladin's position seemed insecure, but he soon began to impose his authority. He appointed members of his own family to senior positions in the government. His father, for example, became treasurer of Cairo. Saladin also began to impose Sunni Islam on Egypt. He built Sunni madrasas, dismissed Shi'ah judges and began to destabilise the teenage Fatimid Caliph, al-Adid. Saladin defeated the Fatimids' powerful Sudanese infantry regiment and created his own military corps – the Salahiyya. In the autumn of 1169, at the coastal city of Damietta, Saladin defeated Amalric's fifth and final invasion of Egypt.

### September 1170–March 1171, Amalric sought help from Europe and the Byzantines

The Syrian Muslims' acquisition of Egypt caused panic in the crusader states. In the autumn of 1170 Amalric sent diplomats to Europe to ask for help. Meetings with the Pope came to nothing. Political differences between King Louis VII of France and King Henry II of England (Amalric's nephew) meant that the two rulers could not agree on support for the crusader states. It was clear that there would be no new crusade to the Holy Land. With no prospect of help from European monarchs, Amalric travelled to Constantinople and paid homage to the Byzantine Emperor in the hope that Manuel I would help to defend the crusader states. Amalric's submission to the Byzantine Emperor showed how dangerous the threat from the Muslims had become by 1171.

### September 1171 Saladin took control

By 1171 Saladin had tightened his grip on Egypt; but, as vizier, he was still second in command to the twenty-year-old Shi'ah Caliph, al-Adid. He was also bound by ties of loyalty to Nur ad-Din. At the end of August

1171 al-Adid became ill. A Muslim chronicler later claimed that he was poisoned. On Friday 10 September, Saladin took the next step in establishing his power and authority. On that day, for the first time in over 200 years, Friday prayers in Egypt's mosques omitted the Shi'ah Caliph's name, replacing it with that of the Sunni Caliph of Baghdad. The next day, Saladin presided over a huge military parade in Cairo. The message was clear: Saladin was now in control. With the death of the Caliph on 13 September, Shi'ah Egypt came to an end. In late September 1171, Saladin took his forces into Transjordan (see the map on page 100) intending to join Nur ad-Din in attacking the crusader castles of Montreal and Kerak. However, Saladin soon retreated to Egypt and the two armies never combined. Nur ad-Din became increasingly aware that he was losing control of Saladin. Tensions between the two Muslim leaders deepened. Nur ad-Din now threatened to invade Egypt.

### May–July 1174, the deaths of Nur ad-Din and Amalric

By the spring of 1174 open warfare between Nur ad-Din and Saladin seemed imminent. Then, suddenly, on 15 May 1174, Nur ad-Din died of a heart attack. His body was later interred in one of the madrasas he had built in Damascus. During the 28 years of Nur ad-Din's rule, Aleppo and Damascus had been united, and the idea of jihad against Islam's enemies in the Near East had been revived. However, in 1174, the crusader states remained unconquered and Jerusalem was still under crusader control. Less than two months after Nur ad-Din's death, the crusaders' grip on Jerusalem began to look much less secure. On 11 July 1174, Amalric died following an attack of dysentery. He was succeeded by his son, Baldwin IV. Not only was Baldwin IV only thirteen years old, but he was also suffering from leprosy.

■ Make your notes for the third step, 1163–74. In what ways did the conflict in Egypt make the recapture of Jerusalem more likely?

## 1174–84: Crisis and conflict in the crusader states

In the summer of 1174, the contrast between the leaders of the Muslim and Frankish worlds in the Near East could not have been greater. Saladin was an experienced and ambitious warrior who was determined to impose his authority on the Muslim Near East. Baldwin IV was a thirteen-year-old boy with an incurable disease who could only rule through a regent. In the years between 1174 and 1184, Saladin secured his hold over Egypt and Syria and began to create a greater degree of unity among the Muslims of the Near East. Meanwhile, the crusader states became weaker and more divided. But how much closer did the Muslims come to recapturing Jerusalem over these years?

### Saladin and the Muslim Near East

Saladin faced a tricky situation in 1174. With the death of Nur ad-Din the Zengid regime fractured, but members of the Zengid dynasty still held positions of power in Syria and **Mesopotamia**. In particular, Saladin knew that he would have to display loyalty to Nur ad-Din's young son, al-Salih. Saladin established his control over Syria through patient diplomacy and propaganda rather than through force. One of the first things Saladin did following Nur ad-Din's death was to write to al-Salih, expressing his loyalty and reassuring the young ruler that he would protect al-Salih from his enemies. Saladin gained further authority and legitimacy by marrying Nur ad-Din's widow. Saladin was absolutely determined to pursue his own power in Syria and used the threat of force when necessary. But during the first years of Saladin's rule he was careful to establish his authority over other Muslims in the name of al-Salih, and in the wider interest of jihad against the Franks.

Saladin began his bid to rule the Muslim Near East by targeting Damascus. He accused the Damascene rulers of weakness because they had agreed a truce with the crusader state of Jerusalem. On 28 October 1174, Saladin marched peacefully into Damascus. According to Muslim chroniclers, many people in the city rejoiced at Saladin's takeover. The large sums of money that Saladin distributed to the people of Damascus must have helped to win their support. He later justified his occupation of Damascus as a step on the road to retaking Jerusalem. Not everyone at the time was convinced by this explanation. Some people thought that Saladin's desire for Muslim unification was more to do with his personal ambition than his commitment to jihad.

By the end of 1174, several of Syria's warlords had decided to support Saladin. The Sultan was able to seize control of Homs, Hama and Baalbek with little bloodshed. The conquest of Aleppo proved more difficult – it was not until 1183 that Saladin finally brought Aleppo under his control. Like Nur ad-Din, Saladin had spent the first ten years of his rule mostly fighting other Muslims. Perhaps this was a necessary precondition to waging Holy War on the Franks and prizing Jerusalem from their grasp.

What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?

## The vulnerability of the crusader states

During the reign of Baldwin IV (1174–85) the crusader states became less capable of countering Muslim attacks. The position of the Franks was not entirely hopeless. In 1177, for example, they defeated the Muslims and almost killed Saladin himself at Montgisard. But overall, the crusader states became more vulnerable between 1174 and 1185. The weakness of the crusader states was caused by three main factors.

- 1 Baldwin IV's leprosy.** Baldwin proved to be a courageous and determined ruler, but, as he grew up, the King became more and more disabled. The fevers caused by Baldwin's leprosy sometimes made him incapable of ruling. By his early twenties Baldwin was partly paralysed and nearly blind. When on campaign, the King had to be strapped to a horse or carried in a litter. The longer Baldwin lived the weaker the crusader states became.
- 2 Divisions within the ruling elite of the crusader states.** It was clear that Baldwin's reign would be short and that he would not produce an heir. Different factions within the crusader states therefore began to compete for power. Raymond III, Count of Tripoli (Baldwin's cousin), came to head one of the two main factions, while the other was led by Baldwin's mother, Agnes. In 1180, tensions between the two groups increased when Baldwin's sister, Sibylla, married Guy of Lusignan, a young French knight. Guy became a potential regent and successor to Baldwin, much to the disgust of Raymond's faction. This became a central issue in the politics of the crusader states and distracted the Franks from focusing on the threat from Saladin. When the Franks *did* turn their attention to Saladin, different approaches emerged. Raymond of Tripoli advocated truces with the Muslims but Reynald of Châtillon (after his release from prison in 1176) provoked Saladin with his aggressive campaigns.
- 3 Lack of support from the Byzantine Empire and Europe.** We have seen how the crusader states were strengthened by a closer relationship with the Byzantine Empire during the reign of Manuel I. In 1180, the Byzantine Emperor died and the new Emperor, Andronicus I, showed little interest in supporting the Latin rulers of the Near East. Neither did European monarchs. In autumn 1184 three of the most important men in the crusader states – the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the masters of the Hospitallers and Templars – were sent to Europe seeking support, but neither Philip II of France nor Henry II of England felt able to lead a new crusade to the Holy Land. The three diplomats returned to Jerusalem empty-handed.

## Confrontations and conflicts

■ The map below shows the main conflicts between the crusaders and the Muslims in the years between 1174 and 1184.

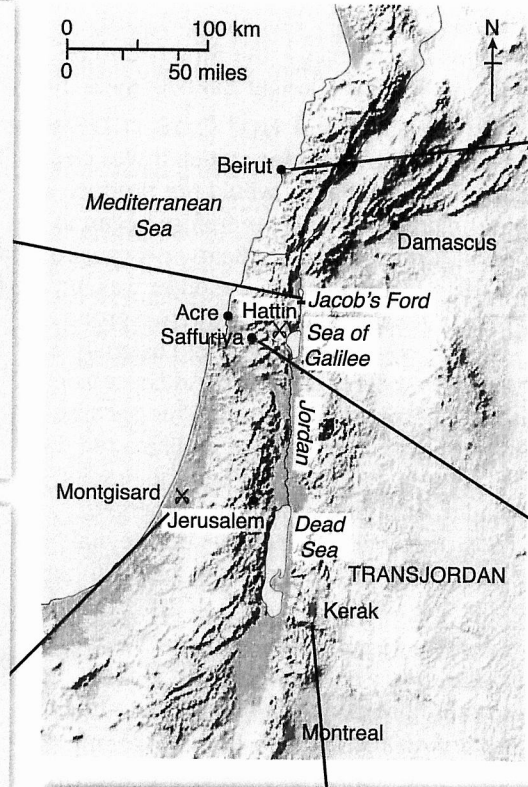
- Use the map and the previous two pages to make notes for the fourth step, 1174–84.
- Do you think that the weakness of the Franks was the most important change between 1174 and 1184?
- How much closer do you think the Muslims came to recapturing Jerusalem in these years?

### 2 Summer 1179:

Baldwin IV had begun to build a castle at Jacob's Ford – an important crossing point on the River Jordan which separated Christian Palestine and Muslim Syria. Saladin could not ignore this as the castle was a threat to Damascus itself. In August 1179 the Muslims attacked Jacob's Ford and razed the castle to the ground.

### 1 Autumn 1177:

Saladin launched his first military campaign on the crusader states. This was a limited raid rather than a full-scale invasion aimed at recapturing Jerusalem. Saladin's forces were defeated by Baldwin IV and Reynald of Châtillon at the Battle of Montgisard. Saladin was forced to flee for his life and was deeply humiliated.



### 3 Summer 1182:

Saladin launched a sea-borne attack on the crusader port of Beirut using the Egyptian navy that he had rebuilt. The Franks resisted and Saladin was forced to withdraw.

### 4 October 1183:

Provoked by Reynald of Châtillon's attacks on Muslim pilgrims as they travelled across the Red Sea on their way to Makkah, Saladin launched a major offensive on the Kingdom of Jerusalem. He encountered crusader armies at Saffuriya, but failed to engage Guy of Lusignan's forces in battle and withdrew after a couple of weeks.

### 5 November 1183:

Saladin besieged the crusader castle of Kerak in Transjordan. The attack coincided with the wedding celebration of Sibylla's younger sister, Princess Isabella. Saladin ordered his men to avoid bombarding the bridal suite for one night! More importantly, the castle resisted and Saladin's attack failed.

What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?

## **1185–87: The final step to Jerusalem**

### **A turning point for Saladin**

At the beginning of December 1185, Saladin, by now aged 48, became ill with a fever. As the weeks passed, Saladin failed to recover and his family became increasingly concerned. His Syrian doctors tried a range of treatments, but nothing worked. As the weeks turned into months, Saladin became weaker and weaker. In January, Saladin made his will. People began to think about the consequences of his death. Then, towards the end of February, Saladin began to regain his strength and to make a slow but lasting recovery. He spent most of the year of 1186 convalescing in Damascus – thinking, debating, hunting and hawking.

Many people came to see Saladin's illness during the winter of 1185–86 as a turning point in his life that had profound consequences on the future of the crusader states. Chroniclers suggested that Saladin's illness had forced him to confront his own mortality. From 1186, his spirituality deepened and he dedicated himself to the cause of jihad and to the recovery of Jerusalem. Since 1169, Saladin had been devoted to extending his authority over Egypt, Syria and parts of Mesopotamia. He had forged his Ayyubid Empire in the name of jihad in order to liberate the Holy City. Now it was time to focus on the end rather than the means. From 1186, Saladin became more determined to recapture Jerusalem and to expel the Franks from Palestine.

### **A succession crisis in the crusader states**

Baldwin IV finally died in May 1185 at the age of just 23. He had shown great courage in enduring his leprosy, but his reign had created great instability in the crusader states. The turmoil only deepened after his death. The new King of Jerusalem was Baldwin V, the seven-year-old sickly child of Baldwin IV's sister, Sibylla. By September 1186, the young King was dead. A bitter dispute over the succession erupted in the crusader states. Raymond III, Count of Tripoli, who had been acting as regent, plotted to seize the throne. But Sibylla and Guy of Lusignan outmanoeuvred him and were crowned Queen and King of Jerusalem.

Many people considered Guy to be too weak and inexperienced to be King of Jerusalem. Raymond of Tripoli, in particular, was infuriated by Guy's elevation to the position of king. When Raymond discovered that Guy was planning to seize his lands in Galilee, Raymond made a truce with Saladin, allowing the Muslims to move across his lands if they would support him in his bid to be king. That Raymond, Count of Tripoli, one of the most important Frankish nobles, made such a pact with Saladin demonstrated the degree of disunity in the crusader states in 1186. One Muslim chronicler later noted:

Their unity was disrupted and their cohesion broken. This was one of the most important factors that brought about the conquest of their territories and the liberation of Jerusalem.