

# How did the Muslim world change in response to the crusader kingdom?

## Key Questions:

In this chapter you will learn:

- How the Muslim world began to unite
- Why Nur ad-Din was important
- How Saladin grew powerful enough to seriously threaten the crusader kingdom
- Why relations between Christians and Muslims changed

You will also develop the following skills:

- Assessing the language and tone of documents
- Comparing sources and their limitations
- Analysing the impact of individuals
- Making a judgement on the long-term development of Muslim unity

*T Purser*  
*The Crusaders*  
*& Crusader*  
*States*  
*1073-1192*  
*2010*

## Introduction

The population of the Near East was extremely diverse and the Muslim world in the early twelfth century was divided into tribes and kingdoms that were split between the Sunni and Shia orthodoxies (see page 41). The First Crusade had succeeded in achieving its objectives, and it had been possible to found Latin states in the East largely because the Muslims had been divided against one another and had thus been unable to cooperate effectively to stave off their western foes. The end of the Second Crusade saw the Muslims preparing to unite, for the first time, against the Latin intruders in their midst, while the Latins, for their part, were sharply divided against one another. It was chiefly Zengi and Nur ad-Din, atabegs of Mosul, who spearheaded the Arab counter-attack against the West in the period 1130–75. The greatest Muslim leader of them all was Saladin. A profoundly orthodox Kurd, he brought Egypt back and gave the Muslim world a new prestige in the 1180s which was to challenge and then virtually destroy the crusader kingdom in 1187.

The growing unity of the Muslim world during the twelfth century was a factor which brought about the downfall of the crusader kingdom in 1187. In 1095 the Arab world was not a combined community. It was a myriad of tribal and racial components, from the Seljuks in Asia Minor to the Fatimids in Egypt and the Sultan in Baghdad, based in the regional centres of Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo. Whenever the Muslims brought a sizeable army to the battlefield, they could and did gain the victory, as at the Field of Blood in 1119 and the Battle of Inab in 1149. However, until the Muslim world was united under one leader with a coherent strategy commanding respect, any victory would be unsustainable. That leader was Saladin, but he himself built on the considerable achievements of Nur ad-Din, Zengi's son.

**Source**

**A** William of Tyre, writing in the 1170s, on the rising Muslim unity:

*Within quite recent times, Zengi ... first conquered many other kingdoms by force and then laid violent hands on Edessa ... then his son, Nur ad-Din, drove the king of Damascus from his own land and seized the ancient and wealthy kingdom of Egypt as his own. ... this Saladin, a man of humble antecedents and lowly station, now holds under his control all these kingdoms. From Egypt and the countries adjacent to it, he draws an inestimable supply of the purest gold ... other provinces furnish him numberless companies of horsemen and fighters ...*

**Arab writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries**

**Kamal ad-Din** was based in Aleppo. Writing in the thirteenth century, he provided important material on events in northern Syria.

**Ibn al-Athir** wrote a history of the Muslim world and was an eyewitness of Saladin's career, writing with a personal but well resourced view.

**Baha ad-Din** wrote a biography of Saladin, having served with him and admired him greatly.

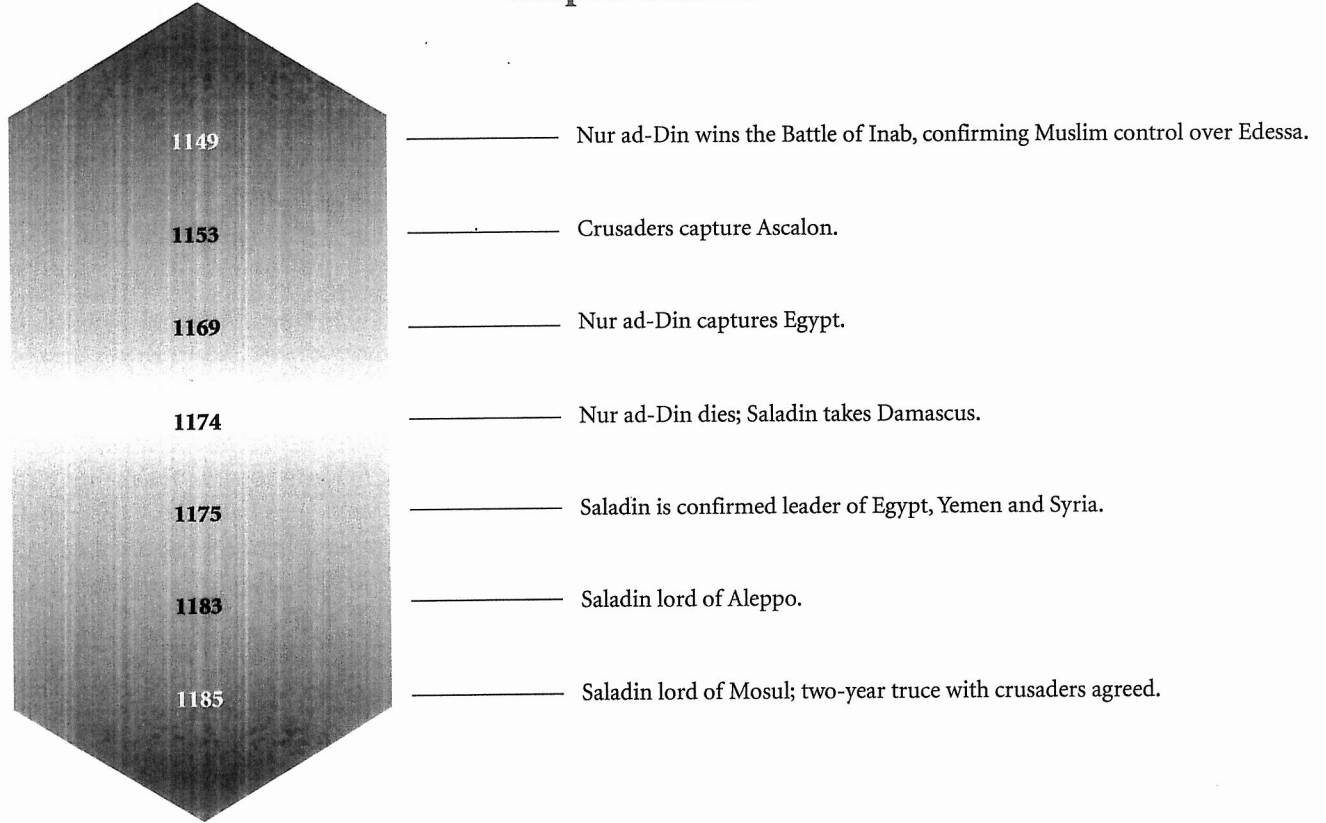
**Imad ad-Din** was secretary first to Nur ad-Din and then to Saladin. Chancellor and a scholar, he wrote a history of the fall of Jerusalem.

**Usama ibn Munqidh** was the emir of Shaizir. His life spanned most of the twelfth century, and his autobiography is full of anecdotes and references which provide a fascinating insight to the Holy Land in peace and in war.

**KEY ISSUES**

- What were the achievements of Nur ad-Din?
- How far was Saladin able to unite the Muslim world from 1174 to 1187?
- How did attitudes between East and West change in the period 1146–92?

## Chapter timeline



### What were the achievements of Nur ad-Din?

#### How did Nur ad-Din develop the notion of the *jihād*?

Zengi's son, Nur ad-Din, was a different character altogether from his father. His pious reputation as the just, puritanical *mujahid* (religious warrior) was displayed in inscriptions on coins, in his patronage of religious learning, schools, scholars and mosques. New religious schools (madrasas) grew throughout Syria; Nur ad-Din founded twenty or so of the forty that were built during his reign. He cultivated the image of the just ruler: judge, jurist and theologian, educated, literate and orthodox, but he was not a fanatic. His piety increased after illnesses in 1157 and 1159 and defeats in 1163.

In 1161 he took the **hajj** and rebuilt the walls of the city of Medina, a political as well as holy act, declaring his new power in Islam. The inscription on the *minbar* (pulpit) of the mosque in Aleppo declared his intention to relocate it to the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem when the Holy City (*al Quds* to the Arabs) had been recaptured. This was a statement of political and spiritual ambition.

Nur ad-Din was forced to concentrate on resources in Syria so that he could consolidate his power before extending it. The *jihād* was integrated into Nur ad-Din's policies, as he regularly demanded support for renewals of the holy war. Religious propagandists travelled in his armies. Nur ad-Din was careful to offer unity under the nominal authority of the Sunni caliph of Baghdad, whose permission was sought for each conquest and annexation.

#### **hajj**

The pilgrimage to Mecca, in Arabia. Mecca is important to Muslims as the town where Muhammad proclaimed the new Islamic religion. Every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it must complete this journey at least once in their lifetime.

**Source**

**B** Ibn al-Athir, writing in the early thirteenth century, describes the character of Nur ad-Din:

*Among his virtues were austerity, piety and a knowledge of theology. His food and clothing and all his personal expenditure came out of income from properties bought with his legal share of booty and money allocated for communal Muslims' interests. He often got up to pray at night, and his vigils and meditations inspired praise.*

By the time of his death in 1174, Nur ad-Din had confirmed and further raised the profile of the jihad as a real concept of political and military power against the Christian West. His death came at a crucial time for both religions, for King Baldwin, a powerful enemy, also died that year. But whereas Baldwin was succeeded by the leprous Baldwin IV, Nur ad-Din was succeeded by the one man who launched the Muslim world decisively onto the increasingly fragile and enfeebled Christian kingdom: Saladin.

**What were the military achievements of Nur ad-Din?**

Nur ad-Din's victory against Prince Raymond of Antioch at the Battle of Inab in 1149 confirmed the Muslim hold over Edessa and the surrounding region, but it was not until the 1160s that Nur ad-Din began to threaten the crusader kingdom with any seriousness. His main rival was King Amalric and the theatre of conflict was Egypt. Until Nur ad-Din's death in 1174, battles and campaigns raged continually, prompting Amalric's appeals to the West. For the first time since 1100, Outremer faced real opposition on all fronts.

**The struggle for Egypt**

Egypt was attractive for the following reasons:

- The Shia Fatimid dynasty was in decline, and had lost Jerusalem in 1099 and Ascalon in 1153 to the crusaders.
- Egypt was wealthy and would pay for troops and provide food for whoever governed it; Alexandria, on Egypt's north coast, was the prime port of the eastern Mediterranean.
- If the crusaders did not conquer Egypt then Nur ad-Din would, uniting for the first time Shia Muslims with the Sunni in Syria and therefore encircling the Christian kingdom.

King Amalric was Nur ad-Din's main rival. From 1163 to 1169, he led five campaigns into Egypt, or Babylon, as the crusaders called it, but without success. The problem was that when he was invading Egypt, Nur ad-Din could attack Outremer in the north, which happened in 1164 when Amalric attacked Bilbais, north-east of Cairo; Nur ad-Din took the towns of Harim and Banyas from Antioch and took the kingdom itself in 1164.

In 1167 Nur-ad-Din's general, **Shirkuh**, led an assault on Egypt. This prompted an Egyptian-Christian alliance. The Shia caliphate in Cairo was so desperate to fend off Shirkuh's Sunni invasion that it paid the Christians 400,000 dinars to remain in Egypt until the threat from Nur ad-Din's army had subsided.

**BIOGRAPHY****Shirkuh (died 1169)**

A Kurdish nobleman and warrior from Baghdad and Tikrit. He served under Zengi and then under Nur ad-Din, with great effect. He became chief general in Egypt and eventually vizier.

**The conquest of Egypt**

The two armies clashed in battle at Beben, south of Cairo. Neither had the decisive victory, but Shirkuh managed to capture Alexandria. Amalric laid siege to the city and it fell to the crusaders later in 1167; a truce was arranged and both armies left Egypt.

The prestige of the crusader army had been restored after the disastrous Second Crusade. A Christian army had captured a major Islamic city, the appeals to the West were bringing in recruits – though not many – and relations with Byzantium were stronger than ever when Amalric married the niece of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel that year.

In 1168 Amalric invaded Egypt again, but this time he was outmanoeuvred by Shirkuh. When the caliph was assassinated in January 1169, Egypt fell to Nur ad-Din's army. This was a major blow to the crusader kingdom. Its true consequences were to be realised in 1187 when Shirkuh's nephew, Saladin, had all the resources of Egypt at his disposal to enable him to invade Outremer when it was at its weakest. It also meant that future crusades from the West would have to invade or at least confront the problem of the Egyptian resources, which were now in the hands of the Sunni Muslims. From 1169 onwards, appeals to the West – and to Byzantium – for men and money grew increasingly urgent, for good reason.

**Source**

From William of Tyre, writing in the 1170s:

*[Nur ad-Din] could effectively shut in the realm and blockade all coastal cities by land and sea ... still more to be dreaded was the fact that he could hinder the passage of pilgrims on their way to us ...*

**The deaths of Nur ad-Din and King Amalric**

Undeterred, Amalric set about planning another invasion of Egypt. He was encouraged by the dissent within Egypt brought about by Saladin, who had deposed the Shia caliph in 1171 and refused to join Nur ad-Din to fight the crusaders in 1173. In May 1174 Nur ad-Din died from a heart attack, leaving Syria leaderless and Egypt unstable. Amalric had secured naval support from the Sicilians, who put a fleet to sea. Everything looked good for a successful invasion of Egypt, but in July 1174 Amalric himself died from dysentery, aged only 38. His successor was Baldwin IV, a thirteen-year-old boy with leprosy.

**ACTIVITY**

Why was Egypt so important to the Christians and the Muslims?

## How far was Saladin able to unite the Muslim world from 1174 to 1187?

In 1174, both Christian and Muslim worlds were in a state of flux and potential disarray. It was Saladin who regrouped and energised Islam faster and more effectively than the Christians, with their divided nobility and enfeebled resources, could mobilise. But Saladin was not the son of Nur ad-Din. His father was Shirkuh, who had consolidated his grip on Egypt in the years 1169–74 and in 1174 took control of Damascus. Saladin's policy of championing the Sunni orthodoxy gave him the respectability he needed, and in 1175 the Caliph of Baghdad invested him with the government of Egypt, Yemen and Syria. In 1176 he married Nur ad-Din's widow, thereby enforcing his image as the spiritual successor to Nur ad-Din.

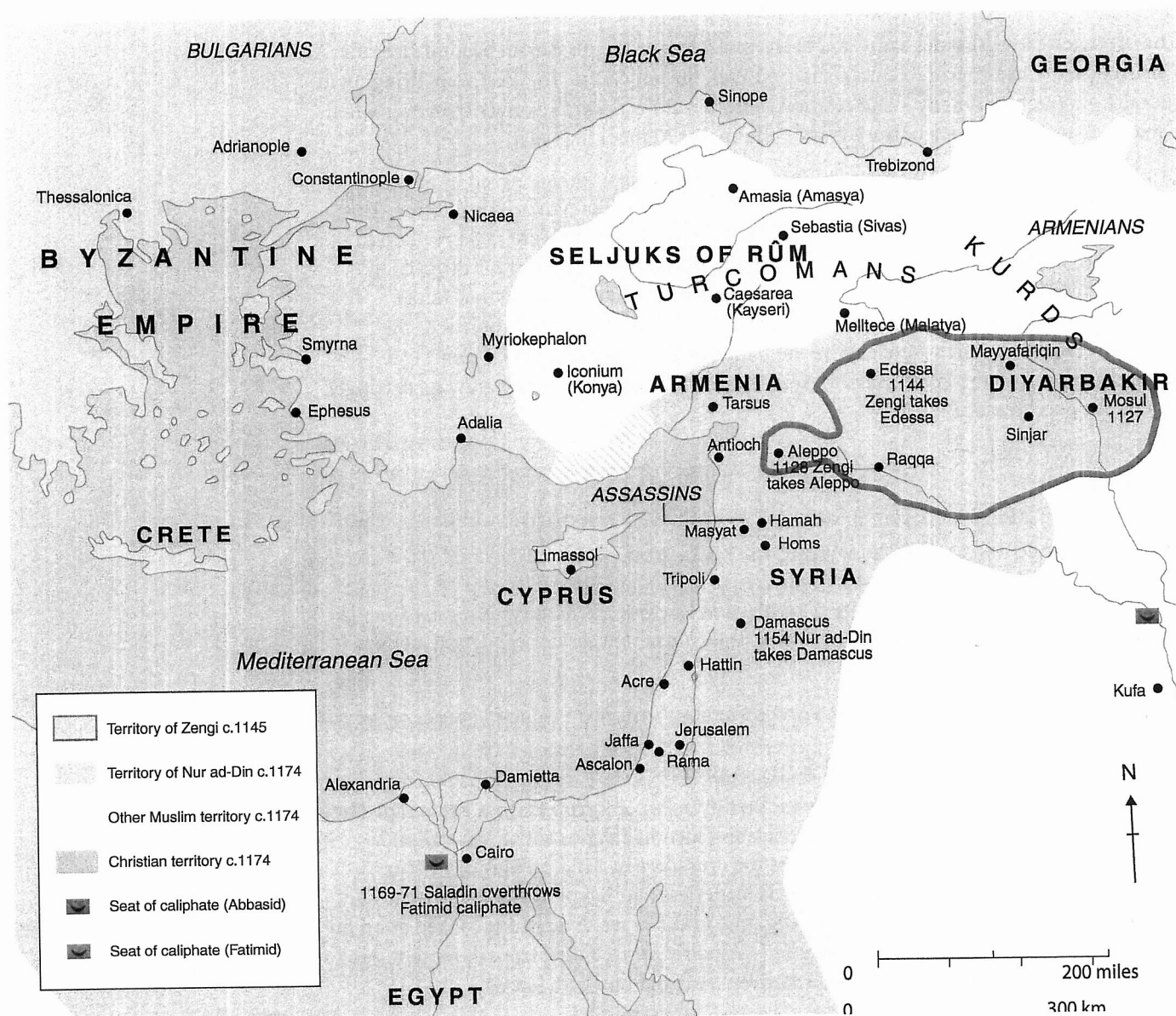


Figure 8.1 The expansion of Muslim territories under Zengi, Nur-ad-Din and Saladin, 1144–74.