



### How did Saladin restore Muslim unity?

Saladin rose to power first by defying Nur ad-Din and then by assuming Nur ad-Din's status as leader of the jihad. As the son of a Kurdish mercenary in the service of Zengi of Mosul, Saladin was an upstart who needed the legitimacy that the jihad could bestow. He was ruling a Turkish military elite and he had to be the orthodox leader, whether out of private conviction or public convenience. Public displays of religious devotion and personal piety were prominent features in his style as ruler, the ritual cleansing of the Dome of the Rock performed in person, the moving of the *minbar* from Aleppo, gaining formal recognition from the caliphs of Baghdad.

Saladin was not without Muslim enemies, however. As guardian of the Sunni orthodoxy, he was the target of two assassination attempts by the Shia **Assassins** in 1175. In response, he sent troops to the Assassins' castle at Masyaf and ravaged the area, but from then on he only ever slept in a wooden tower for protection.



Figure 8.2 Saladin.

### **Assassins**

The Assassins, as they were known at the time, were a Shia sect of Muslims. They were based in castles in the mountains of northern Syria, where most Muslims were Sunni. Their name derived from their use of hashish, which gave their killers a trance-like fanaticism under the leadership of the 'Old Man of the Mountains'. Even within the Shia Muslims, they were a feared splinter group who murdered Christians and Muslims alike. King Amalric approached them for an alliance in 1171. In 1175 they attempted to assassinate Saladin, who was the Sunni champion. Saladin's cheek was slashed and his chest armour pierced, but he survived, though for the rest of his life he only ever slept in a wooden tower, such was his fear of future assassination.

Saladin's role sat uneasily with the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia and with the Seljuks of Iran, and he was never warmly received by the caliphs of Baghdad. He was seen as a threat by many as he expanded outwards from his base in Egypt into Syria; his use of the jihad was viewed by some as a tool to further his political and military ends, and his truces with the crusaders were opportunities for him to deal with his co-religionist rivalries. Certainly the western Christians in Outremer and the eastern Christians in Byzantium were in doubt as to Saladin's territorial ambitions, hence their repeated appeals to the West.

#### **Source**

**D** Baha ad-Din, writing in the early thirteenth century, describes the character of Saladin:

*The Holy War and the suffering involved in it weighed heavily on his heart and his whole being in every limb; he spoke of nothing else, thought about equipment for the fight, was interested only in those who had taken up arms, had little sympathy with anyone who spoke of anything else or encouraged any other activity. For love of the Holy War and on God's path he left his family and his sons, his homeland, his house and all his estates, and chose out of all the world to live in the shade of his tent, where the winds blew on him from every side ...'*

### **The Battle of Montgisard**

The crusader kingdom planned another invasion of Egypt in 1177, involving forces from Outremer, Byzantium and Philip of Flanders' troops. Nothing came of it, however, because the participants could not agree who would rule Egypt once it was conquered. At this time Saladin was not yet strong enough to comprehensively defeat the united Christian forces, so a great opportunity was missed. Instead, Saladin attacked the kingdom but was caught by surprise at Montgisard, near Ibelin, by a crusader army led by Baldwin IV. He narrowly escaped. Hundreds were killed on both sides, but Saladin certainly came off worse. The battle proved that Saladin was not that powerful, even with the combined forces of Egypt and Syria behind him.

### The castle at Jacob's Ford

In 1178 the crusaders built a castle at Jacob's Ford, on the River Jordan, only 30 miles from Damascus, a direct threat to Damascus and a highly aggressive act. The planning and building were partly supervised by King Baldwin IV. The castle was expansive and well built and would house 80 Templars and 900 footsoldiers. Saladin offered to buy off the crusaders with 100,000 dinars, but was turned down. However, in August 1179 Saladin marched on the castle and captured it in five days; it was probably unfinished, but this did not help the garrison. The Templars and archers were all executed. It was a severe blow to the crusader kingdom, but fortunately for them Saladin could not follow up this success because of an epidemic in his army and a drought in Syria.

### Saladin takes Mosul and Aleppo

Powerful though he undoubtedly was in 1180, Saladin was still not the supreme leader of Islam he needed to be in order to destroy Outremer once and for all. A truce with the kingdom was arranged for two years from 1180 to 1182, and in the summer of 1182 Saladin's forces were defeated in southern Galilee and his blockade of the port of Beirut thwarted. However, the death of Nur ad-Din's son, as-Salih, ruler of Mosul, gave Saladin the opportunity he needed to march into the town. In 1183 he forced Aleppo to surrender to him. Saladin could now say that he was truly the rightful champion of Islam and the one person who could defeat the Christian kingdom. Earlier in 1183 he had captured crusaders who had launched a daring raid in the Red Sea and killed many Muslim merchants and pilgrims at sea and on land. Saladin hit back hard, executing the Christians in towns and villages across his lands, and taking two captives to Mecca where they were executed in front of massed pilgrims. By 1185 Saladin had forced Mosul to recognise him as overlord and his prestige was at its height – just as the kingdom of Jerusalem was about to plunge into dissent, dispute and total division.

### How did attitudes between East and West change in the period 1119–92?

During the early years of the crusader kingdom the westerners were in a tiny minority; despite the slaughter of those in Jerusalem in 1099, the Christians could not be at war continuously with the Muslims. The crusaders in the early decades of the new kingdom often established alliances with Muslim factions; they needed the military and economic support of the indigenous populations and could not afford to overtax or treat them harshly for fear of rebellion.

#### Source

**E** Usama ibn Munqidh, writing in the twelfth century, describes his experience of Christian–Muslim relations:

*There are some Franks who have settled in our land and taken to living like Muslims. A very important Frankish knight was staying in the camp of King Fulk, the son of Fulk. He had come on a pilgrimage and was going home again. We got to know one another, and became firm friends. He called me 'brother' and an affectionate friendship grew up between us.*

#### ACTIVITY

How far was the Muslim conquest of Egypt the **main** reason for Saladin's rise to power?

You could include the following reasons in your answer before making a judgement on the main reason:

- the achievements of Nur-ad-Din 1148–74
- the growing movement of the jihad in the Arab world
- the increasing weakness in the Christian kingdom
- the conquest of Egypt itself.

The defeat at the Battle of the Field of Blood in 1119, where Prince Roger of Antioch and large numbers of the Antioch nobility were killed, was something of a turning point. The church council at Nablus in 1120 forbade sexual relations between Muslims and Christians (see pages 58–59). The severity of the punishments imposed certainly suggests that people were conducting sexual relations across the religious divide.

Attitudes after the Second Crusade (1146–49) continued to harden. While it used to be thought that the western settlers adapted to the eastern way of life, they probably remained more aloof and segregated, inhabiting only certain areas. Even so, they farmed the countryside and lived in houses in villages rather than purely behind the defensive gates of the castles, especially in the first half of the twelfth century.

### Sources

**F** Imad ad-Din, writing in the 1190s, describes the licentiousness of western women:

*There arrived by ship three hundred lovely Frankish women, full of youth and beauty, assembled from beyond the sea and offering themselves for sin. They dedicated as a holy offering what they kept between their thighs; they were openly licentious and devoted themselves to relaxation; they removed every obstacle to making of themselves free offerings. They interwove leg with leg, slaked their lovers' thirsts, caught lizard after lizard in their holes, guided pens to inkwells, torrents to the valley bottom, streams to pools, swords to scabbards, gold ingots to crucibles ...*

**G** Ibn Jubayr was a Spanish Muslim from Granada. This account, written in 1184, reveals how far the Christian and Muslim co-existence had developed by then:

*One of the astonishing things that is talked of is that although the fires of discord burn between the two parties, Muslim and Christian, two armies of them may meet and dispose themselves in battle array, and yet Muslim and Christian travellers will come and go between them without interference. The Christians impose a tax on the Muslims in their land which gives them full security; and likewise the Christian merchants pay a tax upon their goods in Muslim lands. Agreement exists between them, and there is equal treatment in all cases. ... Our way lay through continuous farms and ordered settlements, whose inhabitants were all Muslims, living comfortably with the Franks. God protect us from such temptation. They surrender half their crops to the Franks at harvest time and pay as well a poll-tax of one dinar and five qirat for each person. Other than that, they are not interfered with, save for a light tax on the fruits of trees. Their houses and all their effects are left to their full possession.*

### ACTIVITY

Read Sources F and G, and answer the following questions.

- 1 In what ways is the author of Source F disapproving of western women?
- 2 Why did Christians and Muslims manage to maintain peaceful commercial relations, according to Source G?

## Conclusion

It is clear that the jihad was provoked by the seizure of Jerusalem and the creation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem after 1100. Gradually, the Arab world fought back, but it was not until the leadership of Nur ad-Din and Saladin – helped by the increasing weakness of the crusader kingdom – that the dreams of restoring Jerusalem to the Muslim world were realised. Jihad became a political and military tool, skilfully used by both leaders to create a semblance of unity at least in the Holy Land, if not in the wider Arab world. Nur ad-Din achieved a great deal, laying the foundations for the ultimate success of Saladin, who used the jihad and his vast resources to attack and to destroy the crusader kingdom when it was at its weakest in 1187, to which we now turn.

### Review questions

- 1 How successful was Nur ad-Din in uniting the Muslims?
- 2 To what extent did Saladin exploit the jihad to gain military ends?
- 3 Using Sources A to G and your own knowledge, what evidence is there of tolerance between the two religions?