

# Islam and the Crusades

1096–1699

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## *Expectations of the Day*

DETAILS of how the world would end were so well known to medieval Muslims that the fourteenth-century Arab chronicler, Ibn Kathir, felt able to round off his chronicle of Islamic history, *The Beginning and the End*, with a circumstantial account of the expected sequence of events. Many Muslims in the crusading period believed that the Last Days would be inaugurated by a dark sun rising in the west, followed by the appearance of the barbarous hordes of Gog and Magog. Then the hordes of Gog and Magog would disappear (and, according to one account written in twelfth-century Syria, they would drink Lake Tiberias dry before heading off east). The appearance of Gog and Magog would be followed by that of the one-eyed Antichrist, Dajjal, who would ride through Palestine on an ass, followed by a retinue of 70,000 Jews. Dajjal would perform false miracles in parody of Jesus. But after forty days Jesus would descend from the heavens and slay the Antichrist, before destroying the cross and calling on all people to follow the religion of Islam. Finally the sun would set in the east, the first blast of the trumpet would sound and with it all living things would die. At the second blast every man and woman who had ever lived would be resurrected and brought to Jerusalem to be judged. Other accounts gave slightly differing chronologies and some stressed the role of the Mahdi, a divinely guided figure who would appear in the Last Days, prior to the appearance of the Antichrist, and who would bring victory and justice to the Muslims.

Speculations about the Last Days and the role of the Mahdi in them were frequently intertwined with prophecies about Islam's triumph over Christianity and about the future fates of Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Rome. According to a *hadith*, or saying, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, which was already circulating before the coming of the First Crusade, 'The Hour will not come until God gives my community victory over Constantinople.' Apart from *hadiths*, much apocalyptic material was spuriously attributed to Ka'b ibn al-Akhbar, a seventh-century companion of the Prophet. A literary genre of *malahim* (literally 'slaughter-

ings'), writings dealing with the fierce wars of the Last Days, was spuriously attributed to the biblical prophet Daniel, or, later, the thirteenth-century Andalusian Sufi mystic, Ibn al-Arabi. Much of the early *malahim* literature was produced at a time when Muslims were struggling to defend their Syrian territory from Byzantine attempts to retake it. The prophecies tended to stress that the Muslims would face many hardships and setbacks—they might even lose Jerusalem to the Christians for a while—before ultimately triumphing. There were tales of a talismanic statue standing in the centre of Constantinople, which used to hold a sphere, on which were written the words 'I will reign over the world as long as this sphere is in my hands', but Arab sources reported that the sphere was no longer in the statue's hand. According to some Muslim legends it was the Mahdi who would conquer Constantinople, after first having taken Rome. In the period just prior to the coming of the First Crusade, Muslim (and Jewish) expectations were particularly focused on the imminence of the Muslim year 500 AH (corresponding to AD 1106–7).

For Muslims, Christians, and Jews the late eleventh-century Near East was a time of acute insecurity. While some expected the revival of the Islamic faith at the end of the fifth Islamic century, others fearfully awaited the appearance of the Mahdi and the End of the World. At a more mundane level, many Muslims hoped for a decisive victory in the long-drawn-out struggle for control of Syria between the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt and the Seljuk sultans in the eastern Islamic lands. Whatever people were expecting it certainly was not a religiously inspired invasion of people from western Europe.

### *A Middle Eastern Mosaic*

The success of the First Crusade and the establishment of Christian principalities in the Near East was one of the relatively minor consequences of the disintegration of the Seljuk sultanate after the death of the Sultan Malik-Shah in 1092. The tribal traditions of the Seljuk Turks favoured the sharing of rule amongst the family and, after Malik-Shah's death, his kinsmen fought over his empire, in Iran, Transoxania, Caucasus, Iraq, and Syria. Turkish generals and client warlords in Syria and elsewhere supported rival princes and pursued increasingly independent local policies. At the same time, generals in the service of the Egyptian Fatimids took advantage of Seljuk disarray to make gains at their expense in Palestine and Syria. Barkayaruq, the eldest son of Malik-Shah, struggled to establish a precarious suzerainty over the heartlands of the empire, but he was still only the senior figure in a territorial confederation when he died in 1105.

From 1038 onwards, the Seljuk sultans had pretended to rule as the servants of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad and as the defenders of the Sunni Islamic faith. In practice, the eleventh-century Abbasids had little effective political authority, even within the city of Baghdad, and the Caliph al-Mustazhir (1094–1118) had plenty of time to pursue his enthusiasm for poetry and calligraphy. Even so, the Abbasid caliph was, formally at least, recognized as the political and religious head of the Islamic world by most Sunni Muslims. Sunni Muslims took



NOMADIC TURKISH TRIBESMEN furnished a large part of the auxiliary forces which fought against the crusaders. The Mamluks, or slave soldiers, were also customarily recruited from the steppe-dwelling Turks. The composite recurved bow (depicted top right) was the chief source of the Turks' military prowess.

their name from the *Sunna*, or words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, a body of orally transmitted traditions which helped shape both Islamic law (the *Sharia*) and the conduct of individual Muslims. Sunni Muslims recognized the supreme political authority of the caliphs, even though this authority was by now a legalistic fiction.

In this they differed from Shi'i Muslims who held that ultimate religious and political authority could only be held by 'Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, and then by the imams who were his descendants and spiritual successors. *Shi'a 'Ali* meant the party of Ali. One major group of Shi'is held that after the disappearance, or occultation, of the twelfth imam in 878, ultimate spiritual authority was in abeyance. Twelver Shi'is waited for the return of the Hidden Imam and with his coming the imposition of Islamic justice on the whole world. However, another group of Shi'is, the Isma'ilis, held that it was after the disappearance in 760 of Isma'il, whom they regarded as the rightful seventh imam, that the imamate had gone into occultation. In the course of the eleventh century there were further schisms, as first the Druze and then the Nizari Isma'ilis, or Assassins, broke away from and opposed the pretensions of the Isma'ili Fatimid caliphate in Cairo.

Although it is impossible to be dogmatic on such a matter, it seems probable that most Muslims in Greater Syria (that is Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were Sunnis who professed allegiance to the Abbasid caliphs. However, the distinctions between Sunni and Shi'i doctrines and rituals were not always very clear and many Sunnis had Shi'i leanings, while there were many Shi'is who had no compunctions about taking service with the Abbasid caliphs and the Seljuk sultans. Sunnis and Shi'is lived cheek by

jewel in the big Muslim cities. Although the Sunnis were in the majority, the Shi'i minority was very large and in some parts of Syria the Shi'is were in the majority. Most Syrian Shi'is were probably Twelvers, but supporters of the Assassin version of Isma'ilism made repeated attempts to take over in Aleppo and other big Syrian towns in the early twelfth century, before finally electing to create a small territorial principality centred around the fortress of Masyaf in the Syrian highlands.

Outside the territories of the Fatimid caliph, in most other regions of the Islamic world Shi'is found themselves in an adversarial position. Although modern Iran is overwhelmingly Shi'i, in the medieval period it was a bastion of Sunnism. However, Hasan-i Sabah, who was born in Iran, but of Arab descent, established an Isma'ili Assassin enclave in the highlands south of the Caspian Sea. His followers seized the castle of Alamut in 1090 and subsequently other castles in the region fell under Isma'ili control.

Evidently it would be a mistake to think of Greater Syria prior to the coming of the First Crusade as monolithically Muslim. Not only were there religious schisms among the Muslims, but, as has been described in Chapter 6, there were still significant communities of native Christians in both the cities and the countryside. One group of Christians, the Melkites (or Orthodox), looked to the Byzantine emperor for leadership and protection, but other Christian sects—among them the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Maronites—may well have preferred to practise their faith freely under Muslim overlords. Many found advancement under



MUSLIM RULERS CUSTOMARILY SHUNNED figurative imagery on coins in favour of Arabic inscriptions. However, in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Near East some Muslim princes who ruled over large numbers of Christians did issue coins with images on them, probably to conform to the expectations of their subjects. On the left a Seljuk copper coin shows a mounted warrior. On the right a Mosuli coin shows the crescent moon (a symbol of Islam) being held by the seated prince.



soldiers appointed to rule over Seljuk towns and provinces took advantage of dynastic strife to establish themselves as independent rulers. Some of those who did so used their formal tenure of the office of *atabak* (literally 'father-prince') to conceal the fact of their usurpation of independent power. An *atabak* was a sort of military nanny who was deputed to protect and advise an under-age scion of the Seljuk dynasty who had been sent out as a provincial governor. However, as one might expect, in one province after another the *atabaks* set the princes aside and effectively took independent power for themselves. Thus, for example, Mosul in the 1090s had come under the control of Karbuqa, its *atabak*. Elsewhere in Iraq, western Iran, and Syria, independent Turkish warlords and ambitious mercenaries, as well as usurping *atabaks*, sought to increase their territories at each other's expense.

In the late eleventh century Greater Syria was a vast war zone fought over by generals and former clients of the Seljuks on the one hand and armies in the service of the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt on the other. From 1064 onwards Turkomans, nomadic Turkish tribal forces, entered Syria. These Turkomans were not under the control of the Seljuk Sultan, but a few years later regular Seljuk troops occupied a large part of Syria, including the axis of large Muslim towns in the Syrian interior, running from Aleppo in the north, via Hama and Homs, to Damascus in the south. However the Seljuks and their allies were less successful in taking coastal towns and the Fatimids still retained a presence on the coast and in Palestine.

On the eve of the First Crusade, Aleppo and most of northern Syria was ruled, or if not ruled at least claimed, by Ridwan, a nephew of Malik-Shah. Ridwan was later to come under the influence of Assassin agents and was always unpopular in Aleppo. Not only was he unpopular in that city, but his ambitions in Syria were also opposed by his younger brother Duqaq, who was nominal ruler of Damascus. Moreover the city of Antioch to the west of Aleppo governed by the emir Yaghi Siyan was allied with Damascus against Aleppo. Antioch's Muslim population was probably small, for until 1084 it had been a Byzantine city. Ridwan's territory was also threatened from the east by the ambitions of Karbuqa, the *atabak* of Mosul.

Almost every town in Syria seemed to have its own ruler. Many of those rulers were Turks and soldiers. Thus Homs was under the control of Janah al-Dawla, another Turkish *atabak*. It is worth noting here that although most of Syria's population was Arab, most of the military élite in the region was of Turkish and, to a lesser extent, Kurdish stock. However, from 1086 onwards, the town and fortress of Shayzar in northern Syria were ruled by the Banu Munqidh, an Arab clan of Twelver Shi'ites. The city port of Tripoli had successfully rebelled against the Fatimids in 1070 and was governed by a dynasty of *qadis* (judges) until its capture by the crusaders in 1109. It had a predominantly Shi'ite population. The port of Jabala was also an independent republic. The port of Beirut was governed by the Fatimids and supplied by their fleets. Tyre, Sidon, and Acre were also under Fatimid control, but only since 1089 and only precariously so and there were repeated revolts against Egyptian rule.

As for Jerusalem, it had been taken from the Fatimids by Atsiz, a Turkish general, in 1071, but in 1098 the Fatimids, taking advantage of Turkish preoccupation with the arrival of the

First Crusade in northern Syria, had reoccupied the city. According to the Persian traveller, Nasr-i Khosraw, who visited Jerusalem in the 1050s, the place had a population of about 20,000 and was much visited by Muslim pilgrims, who for one reason or another were unable to perform the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca and Medina. The city was 'the third most holy place of God' and many Muslim mystics chose to reside there. Jerusalem had a special status in the Muslim scenario of the Last Days. On the Day of Judgement when the Trumpet of the Resurrection would be blown for the second time and all creatures brought to life once more, mankind would find itself assembled in the Valley of Gehenna, just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem. Many Muslims therefore chose to be buried at or close to this site. The Muslim shrine of the Dome of the Rock in the Temple Mount area of Jerusalem had been completed in 692. The reasons for its construction are mysterious, but by the eleventh century it was widely believed by Muslims that it was from the rock in the centre of the shrine that the winged steed Buraq sprang when he carried the Prophet Muhammad up to the heavens on the Night Journey.

Although the Fatimids did exert themselves to reoccupy Jerusalem in 1098, the place was not of vast importance to them. Ramla was their capital in Palestine and Ascalon their chief naval base. Outside the towns in Palestine their writ hardly ran at all and bedouin and Turkoman freebooters terrorized villagers, merchants, and pilgrims of all religions. A letter written in 1100 by a Jewish pilgrim stranded in Egypt reveals how he had vainly been trying to reach Jerusalem for five years, but bandits and bedouin had made the road to the city impassable.

However the danger faced by pilgrims in Palestine was not the immediate cause of the First Crusade. Rather the territorial gains made at the expense of the Greeks in Asia Minor by the Seljuk sultan of Rum, Kilij Arslan I, led the Byzantine emperor, Alexius I, to ask for military help from the West. Kilij Arslan belonged to a separate branch of the Seljuk clan and it was one which was constantly at odds with the 'Greater Seljuks' of Iran and Iraq. Indeed it was Kilij Arslan's attempt to profit from the Greater Seljuk's disarray in Upper Iraq which was to lead to his death in 1107. In Asia Minor itself, the supremacy of the Seljuks of Rum was contested by a rival dynasty of Turkish frontier warriors, the Danishmendids, whose centre of power was in northern Anatolia. Both the Seljuks of Rum and the Danishmendids ruled over territories whose populations were overwhelmingly composed of Greek Christians.

### *The Christian Jihad and the Muslim Response*

Given the divided state of the Islamic world, the successive triumphs of the armies of the First Crusade in Anatolia, northern Syria, and Palestine are hardly surprising. Although Turkish armies were dispatched from Aleppo, Damascus, and Mosul for the relief of Antioch in 1097-8, their movements were unco-ordinated. The smaller coastal cities to the south were far too weak to resist the Christian advance, and when the Fatimids lost Jerusalem to the crusaders there may have been some among the Sunni Muslims who viewed the loss of that place by their Shi'ite enemies with quiet satisfaction.

The letter written in 1100 by a Jewish pilgrim stranded in Egypt gives us a picture of how things appeared in the immediate aftermath of the Christian conquest of Jerusalem. It reveals that plague had ravaged and weakened Egypt but that nevertheless, al-Afdal, the Egyptian vizier and general, was confidently expected to retake Jerusalem later that year. Many Muslims also failed to appreciate at first the full significance of the crusading movement and of the Christian occupation of Jerusalem. The Franks were widely mistaken for Byzantine troops and they were not expected to hang on to Jerusalem for very long. Even so, despite all the political and religious divisions in the Muslim community and despite widespread Muslim ignorance about the origins and motives of the crusaders, there was immediate outrage over crusader atrocities at such places as Ma'arrat al-Numan, where many inhabitants had been massacred, and their capture of the Holy City.

Towards the end of 1099 the chief *qadi* of Damascus, al-Harawi, led a delegation of refugees to Baghdad to seek the help of the Caliph al-Mustazhir. Al-Harawi's address to the caliph, which brought tears to the eyes of his audience, was soon afterwards adapted and turned into verse by the Iraqi poet Ibn al-Abiwardi.

How can the eye sleep between the lids at a time of disasters that would waken any sleeper?  
While your Syrian brothers can only sleep on the backs of their chargers or in vultures' bellies?

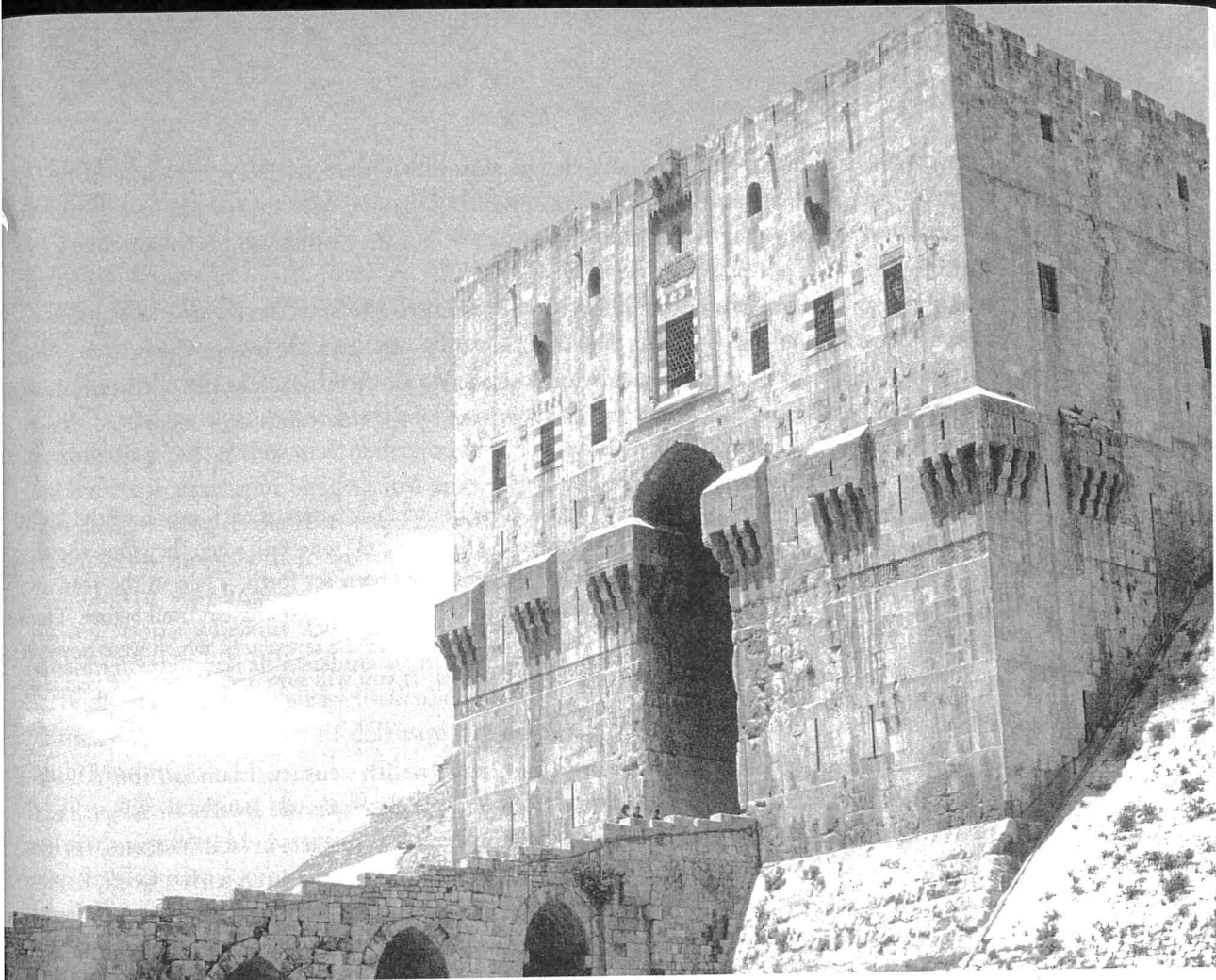
The caliph, who had no soldiers of his own to speak of, wrote to Barkayaruq asking him to do something, but the Seljuk sultan, who at that time was engaged in a war in northern Iran with his brother, Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad, did nothing.

In 1110 a similar delegation, this time headed by the Shi'ite *qadi* of Aleppo, Ibn al-Khashshab, came to Baghdad determined to stir up opinion at the caliph's court in favour of concerted action against the Franks. With the support of Sufis and merchants, Ibn al-Khashshab organized a demonstration in the caliph's mosque in Baghdad during the Friday prayers and this action was repeated a week later. Then the processional entry of the caliph's wife into Baghdad was similarly disrupted. The caliph was furious. It is true that Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad I, who on Barkayaruq's death in 1105 had taken over the latter's pretensions to rule over the Seljuk sultanate, promised that he would do something and went through the motions of preparing for a jihad. However, the victims of the crusaders in Syria were never to receive any substantial help from any of the claimants to the Seljuk sultanate.

Much early Muslim propaganda against the crusades was couched in poetry and conformed to the conventions which governed Arabic poetry's various genres. Thus poetry about the destruction and exile brought about by the crusaders tended to be expressed in a form first developed by the pre-Islamic nomadic Arabs to lament vanished camp-sites, 'places of lost bliss': as for example in this poem which recycles traditional motifs in a lament for the crusaders' sack of Ma'arrat al-Numan in 1098.

This my friend is a town which God has doomed to its destruction.  
Stop [your] camel and bewail with me its former residents, old and young,  
And remember, if you enter it one day, that it was the residence of the beloved!





ALEPPO, ONE OF THE CHIEF CITIES OF MUSLIM SYRIA, was dominated by its vast citadel, whose construction was largely the work of Zengid and Ayyubid rulers. However, an inscription over the entrance of the gatehouse commemorates the achievements of the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun as 'the suppressor of worshippers of the cross, the Alexander of his time, conqueror of capitals and of the armies of the Franks'.

### *The Idea of Jihad*

Although initial Muslim responses to the coming of the crusades were inevitably confused and often couched in inappropriately archaic forms, some Muslim leaders swiftly came to grips with the full significance of the Christian invasion and set about trying to organize a counter-crusade. 'Ali ibn Tahir al-Sulami (1039–1106) was a Sunni Muslim religious scholar attached to the great mosque of Damascus. His *Kitab al-jihad* (1105) was the first treatise on the Holy War to be produced after the arrival of the Franks in the Near East. Unlike some of his contemporaries, al-Sulami did not confuse the crusaders with Byzantines. Rather, he regarded the expedition of the Franks as part of a Christian 'jihad' from the West, which had the aim of helping native Christians as well as conquering Jerusalem. He presented the triumph of the crusaders in Syria as a symptom of the moral and political decay of Islam and

of the enfeebled state of the caliphate, but he also offered his readers the certainty of future victory, since the Prophet Muhammad had predicted that the Muslims would lose Jerusalem for a while, but then they would not only retake it, but they would go on to conquer Constantinople.

Al-Sulami was also aware of conflicts between Christianity and Islam which were going on in Spain, Sicily, and North Africa. His readiness to see the crusade within the broader context of a struggle between the two religions, extending all the way across the Mediterranean, was later to be closely echoed in a chronicle written by the thirteenth-century Mosuli historian Ibn al-Athir.

The first appearance of the empire of the Franks, the rise of their power, their invasion of the lands of Islam and occupation of some of them occurred in the year 478 [1085-86], when they took the city of Toledo and others in the land of Andalus, as has already been set forth. Then in the year 484 [1091-92] they attacked the island of Sicily, and conquered it, and this too I have related before. Then they forced their way even to the shore of Africa, where they seized a few places, which were however recovered from them. Then they conquered other places, as you will now see. When the year 490 [1096-97] came, they invaded the land of Syria.

Another historian based in Aleppo in the early twelfth century, Hamdan ibn Abd al-Rahim, actually wrote a book devoted to *The History of the Franks who Invaded the Islamic Lands*. Ibn Abd al-Rahim's book has not survived, except in quoted extracts in later histories. Its loss is particularly sad as Ibn Abd al-Rahim was well placed to have written such a work, having first held a village from the Frankish lord of al-Atharib and then later taken service with the first great leader of the jihad, Zangi.

Although al-Sulami's was the first jihad treatise to be written in response to the crusade, it was not the first book to be written on the subject. The ultimate authority for jihad is to be found in the Qur'an itself.

Prescribed for you is fighting, though it be hateful to you. (Qur'an II. 216)

Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden—such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay tribute out of hand and have been humbled. (Qur'an IX. 29)

And fight the unbelievers totally even as they fight you totally; and know that God is with the god-fearing. (Qur'an IX. 36)

Jihad, which is commonly translated as 'holy war', literally means 'striving': that is striving to advance Islam. According to traditional Sunni Muslim doctrine, leadership of the holy war to extend the territories of Islam was vested in the caliph. In the eighth and ninth centuries it had been one of the duties of the Abbasid caliph to direct the jihad. Harun al-Rashid, for example, led his troops against the Byzantines every other year; in the alternate years he led the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Jihads were also launched in the eastern lands against the

pagan Turks in Transoxania and central Asia as well as against idolatrous Hindus in northern India. Volunteers for these and other holy wars were known as *ghazis*. They fought in the expectation of booty and, if they fell in the course of campaigning, they were assured of the status of martyrs.

The *Babr al-Fawa'id* or 'Sea of Precious Virtues', is an encyclopaedic and rather preachy treatise in the mirrors-for-princes genre, written in the 1150s or 1160s by an anonymous Persian, probably resident in Nur al-Din's Aleppo. Since the author was evidently intensely concerned with the struggle against the Franks in Syria, he sets out the doctrines and regulations concerning the jihad, as they were understood in the mid-twelfth century. There are two sorts of jihad: there is an interior jihad against one's own moral flaws and an exterior jihad against the infidel. According to the *Babr*—and here, as elsewhere, it reflected conventional thinking on the subject—there are then two sorts of exterior jihad. First, there is the offensive jihad. This is a collective duty imposed on the Muslim community to extend the Muslim territories (*Dar al-Islam*). Some Muslims will wish to take part in these aggressive campaigns against non-Muslim neighbours; all Muslims are obliged to support them with money and approbation. Secondly, there is the defensive jihad to drive out aggressors who have occupied territory held by the Muslims. This sort of defensive war is an obligation that falls on every able-bodied, adult Muslim.

The *Babr* examines the rights and duties of those going on jihad in some detail. The warrior must seek his parents' permission if he is under-age. If he is married he must make sure that his wife is properly provided for. He should not expect to be paid. (However, the Muslim treasury may pay Christians and Jews to fight alongside Muslims in the jihad.) A Muslim on the battlefield may only flee when he is confronted by more than two infidels. Women and children may not be killed.

The rules regarding booty are extremely complex. Here some of the *Babr's* claims seem eccentric. It argues that even animals who participate in the jihad deserve presents, 'and the gift for an elephant should be more than that for a camel or an ass'. Elsewhere in his treatise, the author, who is evidently an *'alim*, or religious scholar, insists that religious scholars also have a right to a share in the spoils of the war against the infidel: 'Beware lest you think that a *ghazi* is only he who holds a sword in his hand and confronts the infidel; for indeed that scholar who in a mosque and *mibrab* [prayer niche] holds pen in hand and knows the proofs of Islam, is a warrior and his pen is sharper than the sword.' Although the author of the *Babr* loathed and despised Christians, heretics within the fold of Islam were perceived by him as an even greater threat. 'Shedding the blood of a heretic is the equal of seventy holy wars.'

While some theorists in the Middle Ages argued that the jihad was a defensive war only, this was the view of a minority and most authorities held that the obligation of jihad did not lapse until all the world was brought under the sway of Islam. The *Babr* insists that the first duty of a Muslim ruler is to prosecute the jihad and bring about the victory of Islam, and if he does not do so and he makes peace with the infidel, that ruler would be better dead than alive, for he would be corrupting the world. However, the author of the treatise recognized

that, whatever pious theorizing might hope for, the Franks in Syria continued to prosper, while Muslim made war upon Muslim.

In Shi'i theology only the imam may call for an offensive jihad, and, since the imam is in occultation, this particular duty is in abeyance until the Last Days approach. Thus, for example, although the Isma'ili Fatimids and the Twelver Shi'ite Banu Munqidh lords of Shayzar repeatedly engaged in battles with the crusaders, jihad played no part in their ideology. Also, many Muslims, particularly Shi'is and Sufis, stressed that the external jihad took second place to the jihad against the evil in one's own soul.

Propagandists for the jihad stressed the special status of Jerusalem in Islam and in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries treatises were produced which were devoted to the special excellences (*fada'il*) of Jerusalem, or of Palestine, or of Syria as a whole. Such treatises drew on similar works which had been produced during the Arab wars with the Byzantines. A related genre dealt with the lesser pilgrimages, or *ziyarat*, to the tombs of prophets, martyrs, and Sufi holy men, many of which happened to lie in territory then occupied by the infidel Franks.

### *Jihad in Practice*

The history of the Near East as a whole in the period from the 1090s to the 1290s was dominated politically by the fall of Seljuks, the rise and fall of the Khorezmians, and the coming of the Mongols. The same period saw the fairly widespread political triumph of the partisans of Sunnism over the Shi'is. In particular, the territorial power of the Assassins was destroyed first in Iran and then in Syria. Although it would be seriously misleading to label this period of Near Eastern history 'the Age of the Crusades', it still remains true that the history of Syria and Egypt in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is primarily the story of the growing unity of those Islamic lands in response to the challenge posed by the existence of the Latin settlements.

There were no Muslims left in Jerusalem after crusaders had slaughtered or taken captive the entire Muslim population in 1099; Christian Arabs from the Transjordan were later invited to settle in Jerusalem to help repopulate the city. In some places, such as Ramla, the population fled in advance of the crusaders. In other towns and villages they chose to stay. Frankish settlement brought better policing to the coastal areas and a degree of protection for the agriculturalists from marauding bedouin and Turkomans. The Muslims who remained in crusader territory had to pay a special poll tax, reversing the situation in Muslim lands where it was the Christians and Jews who had to pay the poll tax, or *jizya*. On the other hand, unlike Latin Christians, they did not pay the tithe. Ibn Jubayr, a Spanish Muslim pilgrim to Mecca who, on his way home, passed through the kingdom of Jerusalem in 1184, claimed that the Muslim peasantry were well treated by their Frankish masters and paid fewer taxes than peasants under neighbouring Muslim rulers. He even thought that there might be a long-term danger of them converting to Christianity.

Nevertheless, the evidence does not all run one way and, even in some of those areas where the Muslims had elected to stay, there were subsequent revolts and mass exoduses. There were Muslim rebellions in 1113 in the Nablus region, in the 1130s and 1180s in the Jabal Bahra region, in 1144 in the southern Transjordan, and later on in the century there were sporadic peasant uprisings in Palestine which coincided with Saladin's invasions. In the 1150s, after several protests against the exactions and injustice of the lord of Mirabel, the inhabitants of eight villages in the Nablus region decamped en masse and fled across the Jordan to Damascus. These and earlier refugees from the kingdom of Jerusalem and the other Latin principalities settled in the cities of the interior, especially in certain quarters of Aleppo and Damascus, where they constituted a vociferous lobby for the prosecution of a jihad which would restore their homes to them. They looked for a leader.

Ilghazi, the first plausible candidate to present himself, was a member of the clan of Artuq, one of the many Turkish tribal groups who had taken advantage of the break-up of the Seljuk empire to carve out small territorial principalities for themselves. He was governing Mardin when, in 1118, he was asked by the citizens of Aleppo to take over in their city and defend it against Roger of Antioch. Ilghazi took oaths from his Turkoman following that they would fight in the jihad and he went on to win the first victory in the Muslim counter-crusade at the Field of Blood. However, in various respects Ilghazi failed to conform to the ideal image of a leader of the jihad. Not only was he a hard drinker, but he was really more interested in consolidating his own power around Mardin than he was in destroying the principality of Antioch. Ilghazi died in 1122 without having lived up to the hopes the Aleppans had invested in him.

Imad al-Din Zangi, the *atabak* of Mosul (1127-46), was more successful at presenting himself as the leader of the jihad. The thirteenth-century Mosuli historian Ibn al-Athir was to write that if 'God in his mercy had not granted that the atabak [Zangi] should conquer Syria, the Franks would have completely overrun it.' Zangi moved to occupy Aleppo in 1128. Its citizens, fearful both of threats by the Assassin sect within the city and of the external threat from the Franks, did not resist him. Like so many *atabaks* nominated by the Seljuks, Zangi made use of his position to establish what was effectively an independent principality in northern Iraq and Syria. In this principality, Zangi imitated the protocol and institutions of the Seljuk sultans of Iran. Like the Seljuks, he and his officers sponsored the foundation of *madrasas* and *khanqas*.

The *madrasa*, which had its origins in the eastern lands of the Seljuk sultans, was a teaching college whose professors specialized in the teaching of Quranic studies and religious law. It was an entirely Sunni Muslim institution and indeed one of the most important aims of such colleges was to counteract Shi'i preaching. *Khanqas* (also known as *zawiyas*) were hospices where Sufis lodged, studied, and performed their rituals. Sufi preachers and volunteers were to play an important part in the wars against the crusaders. The proliferation of *madrasas* and *khanqas* in Syria under Zangi and his successors was part of a broader movement of moral rearmament, in which both rulers and the religious élite devoted themselves to stamping out cor-



MUSLIM WARRIORS FIGHTING. Although the bedouin Arabs rarely wore armour, professional Muslim cavalry wore chain armour very similar to that of their Christian opponents. In this crude twelfth-century Egyptian drawing the Fatimid warriors are shown bearing the same sort of kite-shaped shields that were favoured by their Western contemporaries.

ruption and heterodoxy in the Muslim community, as part of a grand jihad which had much wider aims than merely the removal of the Franks from the coastline of Palestine. The *Bahr al-Fava'id*, discussed above, faithfully reflects the ideology of the time. Besides preaching holy war against the Franks, it counsels its readers against reading frivolous books, sitting on swings, wearing satin robes, drinking from gold cups, telling improper jokes, and so on.

Although Muslim pietists, particularly in Aleppo, looked to Zangi as the man of destiny and the new leader of the jihad, for the greater part of his career he did little to meet their expectations and in fact he spent most of his time warring with Muslim rivals. He particularly hoped to add Muslim Damascus to his lands in Syria, but Damascus's governor, Mu'in al-Din Unur, was able to block Zangi's ambitions by making an alliance with the kingdom of Jerusalem. However, in 1144, thanks to a fortunate though unplanned concatenation of circumstances, Zangi did succeed in capturing the Latin city of Edessa. The historian Michael the Syrian lamented the capture of the city: 'Edessa remained a desert: a moving sight covered with a black garment, drunk with blood, infested by the very corpses of its sons and daughters! Vampires and other savage beasts ran and entered the city at night in order to feast

on the flesh of the massacred, and it became the abode of jackals; for none entered there except those who dug to discover treasures.'

But according to Ibn al-Athir: 'when Zangi inspected the city he liked it and realized that it would not be sound policy to reduce such a place to ruins. He therefore gave the order that his men should return every man, woman and child to his home together with all the chattels looted from them . . . The city was restored to its former state, and Zangi installed a garrison to defend it.'

Zangi, who was assassinated by a slave in 1146, was succeeded in Aleppo by his son Nur al-Din, and it was Nur al-Din who, with the assistance of an eager pro-jihad faction within the walls of Damascus, made a triumphal entry into that city in 1154. There Nur al-Din commissioned a *minbar*, or pulpit, to be installed in the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, in expectation of that city's imminent reconquest by his armies. However, the conquest of Egypt proved to be a more urgent priority. Ascalon had fallen to the Franks in 1153, giving crusader fleets a port within striking distance of the Nile Delta. The Fatimid caliphs of Egypt had become the impotent pawns of feuding military viziers and ethnically divided regiments. There were some in Egypt in the 1150s and 1160s who favoured coming to terms with the kingdom of Jerusalem in order to secure its assistance in propping up the Fatimid regime, while others rather looked to Nur al-Din in Damascus for help in repelling the infidel.

### *The Rise of Saladin*

In the end it was a Muslim army sent by Nur al-Din which succeeded in taking power in Egypt and in thwarting Christian ambitions in the region. But Nur al-Din himself gained very little from the success of his expeditionary force. The largely Turkish army he sent to Egypt was officered by a mixed group of Turks and Kurds, and it was one of the Kurdish officers, Saladin (or Salah al-Din) from the Kurdish clan of Ayyub, who took effective control as vizier of Egypt in 1169. In 1171 Saladin took advantage of the death of the incumbent caliph of Egypt to suppress the Fatimid caliphate and from then on the symbolically significant Friday sermons in the congregational mosques were preached in the names of the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad and of Nur al-Din, the sultan of Damascus. In Egypt, Severe Shi'ism had been the affair of an élite and, even then, there had been many powerful Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Although there was little resistance to the enforced return to Sunnism, Saladin and his successors in Egypt were careful to foster orthodoxy by founding *madrasas* and by patronizing Sufis.

Saladin was ever ready to offer declarations of loyalty to Nur al-Din, but he was less forthcoming about actually providing his master with the money and military assistance which he was repeatedly asked for. When Nur al-Din died in 1174, Saladin advanced into Syria and occupied Damascus, displacing Nur al-Din's son. The greater part of Saladin's career as ruler of Egypt and Damascus is best understood first in terms of his unsuccessful attempts to take Mosul from its Zangid prince and secondly in terms of his drive to create an empire to be

ruled by his clan. He had to satisfy his Ayyubid kinsmen's expectations by carving out appanages for them. This clan empire was largely created at the expense of Saladin's Muslim neighbours in northern Syria, Iraq, and the Yemen. Throughout his whole career, an enormous part of Saladin's resources were devoted to fulfilling the expectations of kinsmen and followers. Generosity was an essential attribute of a medieval Muslim ruler.

However, Saladin was also under pressure of a different kind from pious idealists and refugees from Palestine to prosecute the jihad against the Latin settlements. Leading civilian intellectuals, like al-Qadi al-Fadil and Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, both of whom worked in Saladin's chancery, incessantly nagged their master, exhorting him to cease fighting against neighbouring Muslims and to turn his armies against the infidel. Al-Qadi al-Fadil and his subordinates were to turn the chancery into a major instrument of propaganda for Saladin, and, in letters dispatched all over the Muslim world, they presented Saladin's activities as having one ultimate goal, the destruction of the Latin principalities. When partisans of the house of Zangi and other enemies of Saladin attacked him as a usurper and as a nepotist bent on feathering his family's nest, Saladin's supporters were able to point to his prosecution of the jihad as something which legitimized his assumption of power. Even so, Saladin was not really very active in the field against the Christians until 1183, after Zangid Aleppo had recognized his supremacy.

### *The Armies of Saladin*

Although the armies that Saladin led against the Latin principalities were formally dedicated to the jihad, they were not composed of *ghazis*. Instead, Saladin's army, like those of Zangi and Nur al-Din, was primarily composed of Turkish and Kurdish professional soldiers. Most of the officers, or emirs, received an *iqta*, an allocation of tax revenue fixed upon a designated village, estate, or industrial enterprise, which they collected for themselves and in return for which they performed military service. Despite being the recipients of *iqta*, they also expected handouts on campaign. In addition Mamluks, or slave soldiers, formed an important part of Saladin's élite force, as they did of almost every medieval Muslim army. Saladin and his contemporaries also recruited mercenaries, and the Seljuks in Anatolia even made use of Frankish mercenaries. Finally, the numbers of Saladin's armies on campaign were swelled out by tribal contingents of bedouins and Turkomans who fought as light cavalry auxiliaries in expectation of booty.

The élite Turkish troops were experts in the use of the composite recurved bow made of layers of horn and sinew and commonly about a metre in length when unstrung. Like the English longbow, the Turkish bow could only be handled by someone who had been trained and who had developed the necessary muscles. Unlike the English longbow, it was an offensive cavalry weapon and it had more penetrating power and an even longer target range than the longbow. However, the mass of bedouin and Turkoman auxiliaries used simpler bows, whose arrows had much less force, and hence those accounts of the English crusaders march-



ing towards Arsuf in 1191, so covered with arrows that they looked like hedgehogs, even though they were more or less unscathed. Muslim troops in close combat generally made use of a light lance, javelin, or sword. Although most men were protected only by leather armour—if that—the emirs and Mamluks in lamellar armour or mail were as heavily protected as their knightly opponents. With the exception of the introduction of the counterweight mangonel as a launcher of projectiles for siege purposes, there were no significant innovations in Muslim military technology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

### *An Arab-Syrian Intriguer in the Age of Saladin*

*Kitab al-It'ibar* ('The Book of Learning by Example') sheds an interesting light on encounters between Muslims and Christians on and off the battlefield. Its aristocratic author, Usamah ibn Munqidh, was born in Shayzar in northern Syria in 1095 and died in 1188. He was almost 90 when he wrote his treatise on how divinely ordained fate determines everything, especially the length of a man's life. Since most of the examples (*'ibrat*) are taken from Usamah's own life, the book has the appearance of an autobiography. Viewed as autobiography it is however an extremely gappy and evasive piece of work and it presents a wilfully fragmentary account of his numerous dealings with the Franks. In fact, during the early 1140s Usamah and his patron, Mu'in al-Din Unur, the general who controlled Damascus, were in regular communication with King Fulk and both visited the kingdom of Jerusalem on diplomatic business. But business was often mixed with pleasure and, for all his ritual cursing of the Franks, Usamah went hunting with them and he had plenty of opportunities to get to know them socially.

According to Usamah the 'Franks (may Allah render them helpless!) possess none of the virtues of men except courage'. But this was the virtue that Usamah himself valued above all others, and, in his remarkably balanced account of the customs of the Franks, he is at pains to point to both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, some Frankish medical procedures are stupid and dangerous; on the other hand, some of their cures work remarkably well. On the one hand, the Frankish judicial procedure of trial by combat is grotesque and absurd; on the other hand, Usamah himself received justice from a Frankish court. On the one hand, some Franks who have newly arrived in the Holy Land behave like barbarous bullies; on the other hand, there are Franks who are Usamah's friends and who have a real understanding of Islam.

While Usamah chose to stress the many times he had encountered the Franks in hand-to-hand combat, his book is singularly free of any reference to jihad. In part this may reflect retrospective embarrassment about his diplomatic dealings with the Franks, but it is also the case that Usamah was, like the rest of the Banu Munqidh, a Shi'ite Muslim and therefore he had no belief in the special religious validity of a jihad waged under the leadership of a usurping warlord like Saladin.

Incidentally, quite a number of Usamah's contemporaries, eyewitnesses of the crusades,

also wrote autobiographies, which we only know about from quotations in the works of others. 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (1161/2–1231/2), an Iraqi physician, wrote one such book. Had it survived, it might have been even more interesting than Usamah's autobiography, for 'Abd al-Latif, an exceptionally intelligent man who led an interesting life, visited Saladin during the siege at Acre and then later at Jerusalem after the peace with the Richard. 'Abd al-Latif also wrote a refutation of alchemy, in which he discusses the alchemists' belief that the Elixir was to be found in the eyeballs of young men. 'Abd al-Latif remembered being present at the aftermath of one of the battles between the crusaders and the Muslims and seeing scavenging alchemists moving from corpse to corpse on the bloody field and gouging out the eyeballs of the dead infidel.

### *The War Poets*

In his own times Usamah was famous not as an autobiographer, but as a poet. Although he had studied the Qur'an with care, his moral values were only drawn in part from the Qur'an and both the code of conduct he subscribed to and the language in which he described his battles with the Franks and others owed at least as much to the traditions of the pre-Islamic poetry of the nomadic Arabs of the Hijaz. In this respect, Usamah was no different from many of the leading protagonists in the Muslim counter-crusade. The council of advisers around Saladin in the 1170s and 1180s included some of the most distinguished writers of the twelfth century. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who worked in Saladin's chancery, was not only a panegyric historian, but also one of the most famous poets of his age. Al-Qadi al-Fadil, who headed Saladin's chancery, was similarly a poet. He was also a crucially influential innovator in Arabic prose style and his metaphor-laden, ornate, and bombastic prose style was to be imitated by Arabic writers for centuries to come.

Usamah was said to know by heart over 20,000 verses of pre-Islamic poetry. Usamah's mnemonic powers were exceptional. But even Saladin, a Kurdish military adventurer, was nevertheless steeped in Arabic literature. Not only did Saladin carry an anthology of Usamah's poetry about with him, he had also memorized the whole of Abu Tammam's *Hamasa*, and he delighted in reciting from it. In the *Hamasa* ('Courage'), Abu Tammam (806?–845/6) had collected bedouin poems from the pre-Islamic period and presented them to his readers as a guide to good conduct. In the Ayyubid period 'people used to learn it by heart and not bother to have it on their shelves'. According to Abu Tammam, 'The sword is truer than what is told in books: In its edge is the separation between truth and falsehood.' The poems he had selected celebrated traditional Arab values, especially courage, manliness, and generosity.

More generally the genres, images, metaphors, and emotional postures pioneered by the pre-Islamic poets helped to dictate the forms of the poetry commemorating defeat and victory in the war against the crusaders and indeed to form the self-image of the élite of the Muslim warriors. Thus tropes developed for boasting about hand-to-hand combat and petty successes in camel raiding in seventh-century Arabia were revived and reapplied to a Holy

War fought by ethnically mixed, semi-professional warriors in Syria and Egypt. Saladin's kinsmen and successors shared his tastes and quite a few of them wrote poetry themselves. Al-Salih Ayyub, the last great Ayyubid Sultan of Egypt (1240–9) employed and was advised by two of the greatest poets of the late Middle Ages, Baha al-Din Zuhayr and Ibn Matruh.

### *Cultural Interchange*

Muslim and Frankish military aristocrats were capable of enjoying each other's company and might go hunting together. There was also a lot of trade between Muslim and Christian and, in particular, merchants passed backwards and forwards between Damascus and the Christian port of Acre. The traveller Ibn Jubayr observed that 'the soldiers occupied themselves in their war, while the people remained at peace'. However, though there were numerous contacts between Muslims and Christians, there was little cultural interchange. Proximity did not necessarily encourage understanding. According to the *Bahr al-Fava'id*, the books of foreigners were not worth reading. Also, according to the *Bahr*, 'anyone who believes that his God came out of a woman's privates is quite mad; he should not be spoken to, and he has neither intelligence nor faith.'

Although Usamah could not speak French, it is clear from his memoirs that several Franks could speak Arabic. They learned the language for utilitarian purposes. Rainald of Châtillon, the Lord of Kerak of Moab, spoke Arabic and worked closely with the local bedouin in the Transjordan. Rainald of Sidon not only knew Arabic, but he employed an Arab scholar to comment on books in that language. However, no Arab books were translated into Latin or French in the Latin East, and the Arabs for their part did not interest themselves in western literature. King Amalric employed an Arab doctor, Abu Sulayman Dawud, whom he had brought back from Egypt some time in the 1160s, and this doctor was to treat his leper son, Baldwin. Far more common though was the Muslim use of native Christian doctors. Speculations about the transmission from East to West, via the Latin East, of such things as the pointed arch, heraldic blazons, sexual techniques, cookery recipes, and so forth remain just speculations. Muslim and Christian élites in the Near East admired each other's religious fanaticism and warrior-like qualities. They had no interest in each other's scholarship or art. The important cultural interchanges had taken place earlier and elsewhere. Arabic learning was mostly transmitted to Christendom via Spain, Sicily, and Byzantium.

### *Hattin and After*

Saladin occupied Aleppo in 1183 and Mayyafariqin in 1185 and he received the nominal overlordship of Mosul in 1186. Only then did he embark on his greatest offensive against the kingdom of Jerusalem. In June 1187 he crossed the Jordan with an army of perhaps 30,000, of which 12,000 were regular cavalry. Some of the remainder were *mutawwiun*, civilian volunteers for the jihad, and Muslim chroniclers noted the role that these volunteers had, performing

such tasks as setting light to the grass in advance of the Christian army. Saladin may have been hoping to capture the castle of Tiberias. He was probably not expecting to encounter King Guy of Jerusalem's army in battle and he does not seem to have made advance preparations to take advantage of the sensational victory he did win at Hattin. Most of the distinguished Christians taken in the battle were eventually ransomed, but Sufi mystics in Saladin's entourage were granted the privilege of beheading the captured Templars and Hospitallers.

In the immediate aftermath of the battle, Saladin moved swiftly to occupy a series of weakly defended places on the coast and elsewhere, before turning against Jerusalem, the surrender of which he received on 2 October. Saladin had failed to take the great port of Tyre and this would later serve as an important base for the Third Crusade. In a conversation a couple of years after Hattin, as they were riding towards Acre, Saladin told his admiring biographer, Baha al-Din ibn Shaddad, of his dream for the future: 'When by God's help not a Frank is left on this coast, I mean to divide my territories, and to charge [my successors] with my last commands; then, having taken leave of them, I will sail on this sea to its islands in pursuit of them, until there shall not remain on the face of this earth one unbeliever in God, or I will die in the attempt.' However Saladin and his advisers failed to anticipate that the fall of Jerusalem to the Muslims would result in the preaching of yet another great crusade in the West. In the meantime, Saladin's chancery officials wrote to the caliph and other Muslim rulers. Their letters boasted of the capture of 'the brother shrine of Mecca from captivity' and insinuated that Saladin's earlier wars against his Muslim neighbours could now be seen to be justified in that they had enforced unity in service of the jihad.

Then, as the contingents of the Third Crusade arrived from the West, a war of march and countermarch began. It was effectively a war of attrition, which strained Muslim resources to the limit. In the words of al-Qadi al-Fadil, Saladin 'spent the revenues of Egypt to gain Syria, the revenues of Syria to gain Mesopotamia, those of Mesopotamia to conquer Palestine'. Constantly short of money, Saladin had great difficulties in keeping large armies in the field. Holders of *iqtas* wished to supervise the harvests in the villages from which they collected their income, while Saladin's kinsmen were sometimes more interested in pursuing ventures of their own on the edges of Ayyubid empire than they were in helping him maintain a stand-off against the armies of the Third Crusade. There are hints in Arabic literature of the period that there were some who regarded Saladin as an eschatological figure, a warrior of the Last Days, but shortly after the return of the crusader contingents to Europe, Saladin, worn out by the years of campaigning against the crusaders, died of a fever in 1193.

### *The Heirs of Saladin*

Saladin's successes had been achieved at a considerable cost and his successors were chary of pursuing an unduly aggressive policy which might bring them territorial gains in Syria or Palestine, but at the cost of provoking yet another crusade. After Saladin's death, his empire