

The Race for Paradise

AN ISLAMIC HISTORY OF
THE CRUSADES

PAUL M. COBB



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on acid-free paper

For Emily,

who overtook me

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Maps and Illustrations

[A Note about Names](#)

Despite the eagerness of readers to learn more about Islamic history, medieval Islamic naming practices can confuse and deter even the most determined of us. Medieval Muslims, particularly those with a noble lineage, might be known by any number of names or titles or their combinations. Here is an example of a perfectly ordinary medieval Muslim name in all its glory: Majd al-Din Muhammad ibn Khalid ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Tamimi.

That can be broken into its component parts as follows: **Majd al-Din** is an example of a fancy formal title, usually bestowed by the state au-

thorities. These titles generally are constructs having to do with “al-Din”

(the Religion, i.e., Islam) or “al-Dawla” or “al-Mulk” (the State,

Kingdom). In this case, Majd al-Din means “The Glory of Religion,” but

since these are largely empty titles, it doesn’t necessarily mean the bearer was particularly glorious or religious. **Muhammad** is this person’s given name, used only in the most intimate settings; **ibn** means “son of ” (**bint** in women’s names means “daughter of ”; **Banu**, often used in tribal

names, is the plural, meaning “sons of ”), so his father was named **Khalid** and his grandfather was named ‘**Abd Allah**. His grandfather’s name is

one of those common Arabic names that describes the bearer as the

servant (‘Abd) of God (Allah). Very often “Allah” is replaced with one of

His attributes—hence ‘Abd al-Rahman (“Servant of the Merciful”).

Genealogy was very important to the medieval Arabs (and others), and

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this is reflected in their names, which can extend back many generations,

linked by series of “ibns” and “bints.” Finally, **al-Tamimi** is what is known as a *nisba*, an adjective that can describe a number of attributes, such as a person’s birthplace, profession, sect, or tribe (as in this case, indicating that the man hailed from the tribe of Tamim). It is common

for modern authors to drop the “al-” prefix of *nisbas* like this, so al-Tamimi might equally be encountered as Tamimi. Additionally people

might be known by an array of nicknames. Men, most typically, were

known by the name of their eldest male child, say, “Father of Yusuf,” in

Arabic Abu Yusuf (“Abu” meaning “father”; in women’s names, “Umm” means “mother”).

Most of the Muslim figures in this book bear Arabic or Turkish

names of varying degrees of complexity. Since this book is intended for

readers with no background in Arabic or Islamic history, I have tried

whenever possible to simplify and regularize these names. However, as

the reader can see, by mustering some patience with them, one can

yield precious information about the bearer's background and lineage.

For similar reasons, I have not used the daunting dots and dashes

and other scholarly conventions used in academic circles for represent-

ing non-Latin alphabets like Arabic in the Latin alphabet. The excep-

tions are the symbols ‘ and ’, which represent two Arabic letters (‘ *ayn* and *hamza*, respectively) that have no close equivalent in English.

Finally, if a commonly accepted English version of a name or term

exists, I have used it. Thus I use Mecca, not the scholarly form, Makka,

and Saladin, not Salah al-Din.

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A Note about Names

[Principal Historical Figures](#)

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‘**Abbasids**: Sunni dynasty of caliphs in Baghdad, 750–1258. During the period covered in this book, the power of these caliphs was largely symbolic.

‘**Abd al-Mu’min**: First caliph of the **Almohad** Empire in al-Andalus and the Maghrib, 1147–63.

Al-‘Adil: Also Saphadin, etc. **Ayyubid** sultan (1200–1218). He died while on campaign against the Frankish invasion of Damietta.

Al-Afdal: A title borne by a number of individuals in this book, principally the **Fatimid** vizier (1094–1121), who led Egyptian campaigns against the Franks during and after the First Crusade, and the son of **Saladin**, who served his father as a commander and reigned as **Ayyubid** amir of Damascus, 1193–96.

Afonso Henriques: King Afonso I of Portugal, reigned 1139–85, active foe of the Muslims of western al-Andalus.

Alexios Komnenos: Emperor of Byzantium, reigned 1081–1118. His appeal to the West for military assistance against the Turks on his eastern frontier contributed to the calling of the First Crusade.

Alfonso I of Aragon: King of Aragon and Navarre, reigned 1104–34.

Nicknamed El Batallador, “The Battler,” due to his many campaigns against

the Muslims of al-Andalus, among them the conquest of Zaragoza in 1118.

Alfonso VI: King of Leon and Castile, reigned 1077–1109. Nicknamed El Bravo, “The Brave.” Conqueror of the Muslim city of Toledo in 1085,

among many other places.

Almohads: The second of the two great Berber dynasties of the Maghrib and al-Andalus, following the **Almoravids**, whom they opposed and ousted.

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Based usually in Marrakesh, from 1130 until (with greatly reduced power)

1269.

Almoravids: The first of the two great Berber dynasties of the Maghrib and al-Andalus, preceding the **Almohads**, who supplanted them. They ruled

from their capital of Marrakesh from ca. 1040 until 1147.

Alp Arslan: Sultan of the Great **Saljuq** Turks, reigned 1063–72. The first Turkish sultan to cross into Syria, which he claimed for the Saljuqs before marching north to defeat the **Byzantines** at Manzikert in 1071.

Amalric I: Also known as “Amaury.” King of Jerusalem, reigned 1163–74. He ruled over the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem at the height of its power.

Artuqids: Also “Ortoqids,” etc. Turcoman dynasty ruling in many branches throughout northern Mesopotamia, northern Syria, and eastern Anatolia

in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Al-Ashraf Khalil: **Mamluk** sultan, reigned 1290–93. He succeeded his father, the sultan **Qalawun**, and oversaw the conquest of Frankish Acre and the expulsion of the last of the Franks from the Near East.

Atsiz: Atsiz ibn Uwaq, a Khwarizmian mercenary in the employ of the **Saljuqs** and **Fatimids**. While pursuing Fatimid goals in Palestine, he brought much of central and southern Syria under his control in the 1070s, before

being toppled and killed by the Saljuq general **Tutush**.

Ayyubids: Dynasty founded by **Saladin**. The Ayyubids were centered in Egypt, but governed most of the Near East, including Syria, northern

Mesopotamia, western Arabia, and Yemen, at various points between the

dynasty’s founding in 1171 and its effective extinction in 1250 at the hands of the **Mamluks**.

Al-Bakri: Geographer from al-Andalus (ca. 1014–94), notable for his coverage of Rome and for

preserving the much earlier European travelogue of

Ibrahim ibn Ya‘qub.

Baldwin: Also Baudouin. A common name among Frankish rulers in the Near East, principally Baldwin of Boulogne, who founded the Frankish State of

Edessa and later became the first King of Jerusalem (reigned 1100–18),

succeeding his brother Godfrey, who had refused to bear the title of king;

Baldwin II of Jerusalem, his successor, also known as Baldwin du Bourcq,

who replaced Baldwin I as Count of Edessa (1100–18) and then succeeded

him as King of Jerusalem (1118–31); Baldwin IV of Jerusalem also known

as Baldwin the Leper (reigned 1174–85), an early Frankish foe of **Saladin**.

Barkiyaruq: Sultan of the Great **Saljuqs** from 1094 to 1105. He came to power after a bitter succession struggle following the death of his father, **Malikshah**.

Baybars: Also known as al-Malik al-Zahir, “The Conquering King.” **Mamluk** sultan who began his career as a commander in the service of the **Ayyubid** sultan **al-Salih Ayyub**. During his reign (1260–1277), Baybars conquered much of what was left of Frankish territory in the Near East after **Saladin**’s reconquests.

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Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties

Beyazid: Also known as Beyazid I Yildirim, “The Thunderbolt.” Sultan of the **Ottoman** Empire in its early years, 1389–1402. Beyazid was constantly occupied with extending Ottoman control into the Balkans and eastern Europe.

Boabdil: Also known as Muhammad XII of Granada. Last ruler of Muslim Granada (1487–92), the seat of the **Nasrid** dynasty in al-Andalus. He was thus the last Muslim to rule independently in the old territory of al-Andalus.

Bohemond: A common name among Frankish rulers in the Near East,

principally Bohemond I of Antioch, also known as Bohemond of Taranto.

Son of the Norman warlord **Robert Guiscard**, he became prince of Antioch (1098–1111), whose capture he had secured, and was a prominent leader of

the first Frankish invasion of the Near East; Bohemond VI of Antioch-

Tripoli, the two Frankish States having fallen under his rule in from 1252 to 1268. He had openly

sided with the Mongols during their confrontation

with the **Mamluks** in 1260 and was ruler of Antioch when it fell to the **Mamluks** in 1268. He continued on as ruler of Tripoli until his death in 1275.

Byzantines: The Christian, Greek-speaking continuation of the Roman

Empire, sometimes called the Eastern Roman Empire. Its capital was

located in Constantinople, founded by Constantine the Great in 330, until

its capture by the **Ottomans** in 1453.

Conrad III of Germany: King of Germany, 1138–52, first of the Hohenstaufen dynasty to bear this title. With Louis VII of France, he was the principal

leader of the so-called Second Crusade.

Constantine XI: Last of the Byzantine Emperors. He took the throne as a member of the Paleologos dynasty in 1449 and ruled from Constantinople

when it captured by the **Ottoman** Turks in 1453. He died during the final siege of the city.

Danishmendids: A Turcoman dynasty that ruled in north-central and eastern Anatolia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They were rivals and

occasional allies of the **Saljuqs** of Rum.

Duqaq: Also Shams al-Muluk, etc. **Saljuq** prince of Damascus, 1095–1104.

Son of the mighty Saljuq general **Tutush**.

El Cid: Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, a Castilian nobleman and mercenary who made his fortune fighting for Christian and Muslim princes on the Iberian

Peninsula. He ruled as Prince of Valencia from 1094 until his death in 1099.

Fakhr al-Mulk: Judge (*qadi*) and independent ruler of Tripoli before it was captured by Franks in 1109. During the siege of his city, he moved first to nearby Jabala and then to Damascus and finally Baghdad, where he sought

the aid of the ‘**Abbasid** caliph in ousting the Franks.

Fatimids: Isma‘ili Shi‘ite dynasty. Originally based in the Maghrib at the city of Mahdiya, the Fatimids moved the center of their caliphate to Cairo,

which they founded shortly after their conquest of Egypt (969–1171).

They quickly expanded into southern Syria and Palestine and Yemen, and

were the nominal overlords of Jerusalem when the Franks appeared before

its walls in 1099.

Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties

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Frederick II: Holy Roman Emperor of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, 1220–50.

Frederick had also been King of Sicily from 1198 to 1250, brutally crushing a Muslim uprising there even as he portrayed himself as an Islamophile

and reluctant crusader to the **Ayyubids** of the Near East.

Guy of Lusignan: King of Jerusalem, 1186–92, through his consort, Sibylla of Jerusalem. Reigning king of Jerusalem during **Saladin's** great conquests in the Near East, he was captured at the Battle of Hattin and later

ransomed. He later became king of Cyprus from 1192 until 1194 and

founder of the Lusignan dynasty there.

Harun ibn Yahya: Arab, possibly Christian, captive of the **Byzantines**, captured in the ninth century. He left an eyewitness account of Constantinople and

Rome, among other places in Christendom.

Hülegü: Mongol prince and commander of the great Mongol conquests of Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, and parts of Syria, 1256–65. He laid the foundations

for the Mongol **Il-Khanate** in the Near East.

Ibn 'Abbad: Leader of a Muslim revolt against Norman rule in Sicily in the early decades of the thirteenth century. Proclaimed amir of Sicily. Arguably the last Muslim leader to hold power on the island.

Ibn 'Asakir: Syrian theologian, jurist, and historian (1105–75), his work was patronized by **Nur al-Din** of Damascus. This work includes his most

famous book, the massive *History of Damascus*.

Ibn al-Athir: Arabic chronicler from northern Mesopotamia (1160–1232).

His chronicle, *The Perfect Work of History*, is considered to be one of the standard chronicles of Islamic history.

Ibn Jubayr: Andalusí pilgrim who passed through Sicily and Syria, including Frankish lands, during his travels (between 1183 and 1185).

Ibn al-Thumna: Independent Arab warlord on Sicily. To assist him in his wars against his rivals on the island, he made an alliance with Norman

mercenaries under **Robert Guiscard**, who eventually conquered all of Sicily for themselves.

Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub: Tenth-century Andalusí traveler of Jewish origin.

Excerpts of his description of western and central Europe were preserved by the geographer **al-Bakri** many years later.

Il-Ghazi: Also known as Najm al-Din, etc. Turcoman ruler from the **Artuqid** dynasty, he was involved in much of the earliest Muslim campaigns against

the Franks and led his troops to a spectacular victory at the battle of the Field of Blood in 1119.

Al-Idrisi: Maghribi geographer and scientist, 1099–1161. He served in the court of Roger II, Norman king of Sicily, and composed a detailed

geographical treatise for him, known commonly as the *Book of Roger*.

Il-Khanate: The Mongol “sub-khanate” representing those parts of the Near East under Mongol suzerainty (1256–1335), ruled by a line of *il-khans*

loyal to the Great Khans in China.

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Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties

John Hunyadi: A leading Hungarian lord and crusader. One of the leaders of the Crusade of Varna in 1444, which resulted in an **Ottoman** victory. He died in 1456.

Joscelin: A common name among Frankish rulers in the Near East, principally Joscelin I of Edessa, also known as Joscelin of Courtenay. Count of Edessa

during its heyday, 1119–31; Joscelin II, count of Edessa, 1131–59 ruler of

the Frankish county of Edessa when **Zangi** took the city; he died in prison in 1159.

Al-Kamil: **Ayyubid** sultan, 1218–38. Became sultan while the Franks occupied Damietta and later arranged a treaty with **Frederick II**, ceding control of Jerusalem to him.

Karbuqa: Also Kerbogha, etc. **Saljuq** atabeg of Mosul, sent to relieve the city of Antioch, which was under siege by the Franks during their first invasion of the Near East. Disgruntled former colleague of **Yaghi-Siyan** of Antioch.

Louis IX: Also St. Louis, etc. King of France, 1226–70. Led an invasion of **Ayyubid** Egypt in 1249 and of Tunis in 1267, where he became ill and died.

Malikshah: Sultan of the Great **Saljuqs**, 1072–92. He oversaw the final Saljuq subjugation of Syria, appointing his brother **Tutush** as its governor.

Mamluks: Dynasty of military men of slave origin that ruled over Syria and Egypt from 1250 to 1517. Their most active sultans, notably **Baybars**, were responsible for spectacular victories against the Mongols and the

Franks, and led the campaign that ousted the last of them from the Near East.

Mawdud: **Saljuq** atabeg of Mosul, 1109–1113. He led many (ultimately unsuccessful) campaigns against the Franks of the Near East, some in

concert with his colleague **Tughtakin** of Damascus.

Mehmed II: Also known as Fatih Sultan Mehmet, “Mehmed the Conqueror,”

etc. Ottoman sultan, 1451–81 (his earlier reign having been interrupted by

the return of his father, **Murad II**, to the throne). Conqueror of

Constantinople in 1453.

Al-Mu‘azzam: **Ayyubid** lord of Damascus, 1218–27.

Muhyi al-Din: Also Ibn al-Zaki. Prominent preacher and religious scholar whom **Saladin** chose to give the first Friday sermon in Jerusalem after the city was returned to Muslim rule.

Al-Muqtadir: **Taifa** king of Zaragoza in al-Andalus, 1049–82.

Murad: The name of two **Ottoman** sultans: Murad I (1362–89), who expanded Ottoman control of the Balkans and died in battle at Kosovo;

and Murad II, who reigned twice, in 1421–44 and 1446–51. He was involved

in the prolonged Ottoman invasion of the Balkans and eastern Europe,

including the Battle of Varna.

Naser-i Khusraw: Also Naser-e Khosrow, etc. Persian poet, philosopher, and traveler, 1004–88. Wrote a description of Muslim lands during his travels

from 1046–52.

Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties

Nasrids: Last Muslim dynasty of al-Andalus, based in their capital of Granada (1232–1492).

Nizam al-Mulk: All-powerful vizier of the early Great **Saljuq** sultans, 1063–92.

Nizar: **Fatimid** prince and imam of the Nizari Isma‘ilis who followed him, 1045–97.

Nur al-Din: Son and successor of the atabeg **Zangi** in the Near East, 1146–74. United Aleppo and Damascus and extinguished the **Fatimid** caliphate.

Orhan: Son of Osman Ghazi and **Ottoman** sultan, 1326–62.

Osman Ghazi: Founder of the **Ottoman** Empire, 1299–1326.

Ottomans: Dynasty founded by Osman Ghazi, eventually claiming Constantinople/Istanbul as its capital. Ruled one of the greatest Muslim empires in history, which lasted from 1299 to 1922.

Philip Augustus: Also Philip II, etc. King of France, 1180–1223. With **Richard** the Lionheart, led an invasion of the Near East after **Saladin’s** reconquest of Jerusalem.

Qalawun: Also Qalavun, etc. **Mamluk** sultan, 1279–90.

Qilij Arslan: Also Kiliq Arslan, etc. The name of many of the sultans of the **Saljuqs** of Rum. Of particular note are Qilij Arslan I (1092–1107), who faced the brunt of the first Frankish invasions of Anatolia; and Qilij Arslan II (1156–92), who was unable to stop a Frankish invasion under the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

Ramiro I of Aragon: First king of Aragon in Spain, 1035–63.

Raymond: The name of various Frankish rulers in the Near East. Most prominent among them are Raymond of St.-Gilles, also Raymond IV of Toulouse, ca. 1042–95, Provençal leader during the first Frankish invasions of the Near East; he died besieging the city of Tripoli, which was added to his family’s domain; his descendant, Raymond III, count of Tripoli in

1152–87, regent for Baldwin IV of Jerusalem.

Reynald of Châtillon: Also Reynaud, etc. Prince of Antioch, 1153–60; lord of Transjordan, 1177–87. Relentless nemesis of **Saladin**.

Richard the Lionheart: King of England, 1189–99. With **Philip Augustus**, led invasion of the Near

Jerusalem.

Ridwan: Son of **Saljuq** general **Tutush**, he was Saljuq lord of Aleppo, 1095–1113.

Robert Guiscard: Norman duke of Apulia and Calabria, 1057–85. Mastermind of the Norman conquest of Sicily.

Roger of Salerno: Regent of Antioch, 1112–19. Defeated and killed at the Field of Blood.

Roussel de Bailleul: Also Urselius, etc. Norman mercenary and adventurer who alternately served and opposed the Byzantines from his bases in

Anatolia. He died in 1077.

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Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties

Sa'id al-Andalusi: Precocious Andalusi jurist, historian, and scientist, 1029–70. Author of, among other things, *The Book of the Categories of*

Nations.

Saladin: Also Salah al-Din, etc. Founder of the **Ayyubid** dynasty, which he ruled as sultan from 1174–93. Renowned Muslim leader and warrior

against the Franks, from whom he reconquered Jerusalem.

Al-Salih Ayyub: Also Najm al-Din, etc. **Ayyubid** sultan, 1240–49, supported in his contests with his kinsman **al-Salih Isma'il** by allies from among Khwarizmian mercenary troops.

Al-Salih Isma'il: **Ayyubid** lord of Damascus, 1237–45.

Saljuqs: Family of Turkish sultans who ruled most of the Near East in two branches: the Great Saljuqs, who generally ruled from Iran, from 1016–

1157; the Saljuqs of Rum, who ruled Anatolia from their capital of Konya,

1060–1307.

Sibt ibn al-Jawzi: Firebrand preacher, jurist, and historian. He died in Damascus in 1256.

Al-Sulami: Syrian jurist and philologist who was the first Muslim to preach against the Frankish invasions whose account has survived. He died around

1106.

Taifa Kings: Also “Party Kings.” Term used to describe the various rulers who emerged as

independent sovereigns of their own petty kingdoms in

al-Andalus after the collapse of **Umayyad** central authority in 1031.

Timur: Also Tamerlane, etc. Turco-Mongol warlord, 1370–1405. From 1399 to 1402 he was engaged in campaigns against Muslim rulers in the Near East.

Tughtakin: Also Toghtekin, etc. Powerful atabeg of Damascus, 1104–1128. Founder of the Burid dynasty.

Al-Turtushi: Also Tartushi, etc. Andalusí jurist and political philosopher who lived and worked in Fatimid Egypt, 1059–1127.

Tutush: Also Taj al-Dawla, etc. Powerful **Saljuq** general and governor of Syria, 1079–95.

Umayyads: Dynasty of caliphs who first ruled in Syria in early Islamic times, 661–750; a branch of the dynasty subsequently ruled as caliphs in al-Andalus from Córdoba, 929–1031.

Usama ibn Munqidh: Muslim warrior-poet and diplomat from Shayzar in Syria, 1095–1188. He served many of the Muslim lords of the Near East and wrote a collection of autobiographical reflections called the *Book of Contemplation*.

Vladislav: Also Wladislaw III of Poland, etc. Ruled also as King of Hungary, 1440–44. Killed by the **Ottomans** at the Battle of Varna.

William II: Norman king of Sicily from 1166 to 1189.

Yaghi-Siyan: **Saljuq** lord of Antioch, 1090–98. A favorite of **Tutush**, he was in command of Antioch when it fell to the Franks during their first invasion of the Near East.

Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties

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Yusuf I: Also Abu Ya‘qub, etc. **Almohad** caliph in the Maghrib and al-Andalus, 1163–84.

Zangi: Also ‘Imad al-Din, etc. Turcoman warlord in the service of the **Saljuqs**.

Atabeg of Mosul and Aleppo (1127–46) and father of **Nur al-Din**.

Reconquered Edessa from the Franks.

Zirids: Berber dynasty that ruled in Tunisia from 973 to 1148, occasionally involved in Sicilian affairs.

*Principal Historical Figures and Dynasties**The Race for Paradise*[Prologue: Damascus Crossroads](#)

By a quirk of contemporary traffic patterns, he takes the visitor to Damascus by surprise. Suddenly a large modern bronze statue looms up just outside the walls of the old city, beneath the redoubtable towers of the citadel used by his descendants: this is Saladin, or Salah al-Din, as he is known in Arabic, perhaps the best known of the many Muslim rulers who rose to prominence during the historical events generally called “the Crusades.”

His is a remarkable story, one of a meteoric rise from humble beginnings. Though he came to rule as sultan of the Ayyubid dynasty of Egypt and Syria, Saladin started out as an ordinary Kurdish soldier in the army of a local potentate in Syria. He grew to become the most powerful military leader of his day, legendary for his victory at the Battle of Hattin in 1187 that allowed him to retake Jerusalem and much of Palestine after nearly a century of Crusader occupation. In both the Middle East and the West he remains admired, a symbol of statesmanship and chivalry.

The bronze statue of him in Damascus proves that Saladin can stand for other things too. Erected in 1992 to mark the 800th anniversary of his death, it shows Saladin, accompanied by three armed companions, on horseback, his cloak trailing in the wind. Behind him kneel two Crusader prisoners, the expression on their faces abject and de-

feated. One hand holds the reins of his galloping horse; the other is

tightened around his scimitar, as he gazes intently at the West (Fig. 1).¹

This statue depicts a leader with both worldly and spiritual con-

cerns, a triumphant monarch who was also a pious Sunni Muslim; his

companions include a Muslim mystic, or Sufi, a personification of

Saladin's Islamic credentials. And yet it stands in the capital of Syria, a secular Arab socialist republic inspired by Western models, and now

deep in a civil war made all the more tragic by the sectarian violence

between Sunnis and Shi'ites that has colored it. Saladin's heroic pose,

evoking Victorian etchings, has no roots in Islamic art; its very medium—

statuary—would likely have been condemned as idolatrous by the man

it depicts. But maybe we shouldn't be surprised by these ironies. After

all, the statue stands just up the hill from Syria's modern nationalist

memorial at Martyrs' Square and around the corner from the medieval

gates of Old Damascus. This is the Syrian capital's Sharia al-Thawra,

“Revolution Boulevard”: a kind of no-man's land of historical memory.

For those seeking the Arabic perspective of the Crusades, Saladin

has long been the focus, no less so in the region where those events

took place. Syria is certainly not alone in claiming him. Streets named

after him appear in many Middle Eastern cities, including Jerusalem

and the former Crusader bastion of Acre. Schools too. There is an

entire Salah al-Din province in Iraq. In the provincial Jordanian town

of Kerak, whose castle dates from the Crusader period, another statue

of Saladin can be found, much smaller than the one in Damascus. Here

he is depicted as a lone rider, his steed rearing and his unsheathed

scimitar slicing the air. In Cairo, which was also the capital of Saladin's Ayyubid dynasty, the city's

magnificent citadel, bristling with nineteenth-century Ottoman minarets, is usually called “Saladin Citadel.”

Many see Saladin as a unifier or liberator, a Middle Eastern Simón Bolívar or George Washington. In the Middle East today it is not uncommon for someone to quietly express a wish that his or her country had a leader like Saladin. Middle Eastern politicians, already keen to gain a bit of Saladin’s glamour for themselves, have been quick to take advantage. Saddam Hussein rarely missed the opportunity to remind people that he had been born in Saladin’s hometown, Tikrit; he even altered his date of birth by two years to coincide with the 800th anniversary of Saladin’s birth. In public art and state propaganda, Saddam was often described as a new Saladin or, as in one Iraqi children’s book, “Saladin II Saddam Hussein.”²

Saladin’s revered status in the Middle East is not a recent thing, concurrent with the rise of “political Islam” or with anti-Western sentiment accompanying the “war on terror.” Muslim authors from the thirteenth century onward kept alive the memory of Saladin and his

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accomplishments, especially in original works devoted to the history and religious sites of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, to say nothing of their constant copying and reuse of earlier works about him.³

Nonetheless it is modern nationalism that has made him something like a household name.⁴ The first biography devoted purely to Saladin after the Middle Ages was published in Ottoman Turkey in 1872 by the prominent Turkish nationalist and intellectual Namik Kemal.

Significantly it was later edited and published with biographies of

two Ottoman sultans whom Kemal also cast as warrior-heroes pitted

against the empire's foes. Other works devoted to Saladin soon fol-

lowed, many under the foreign influence of Sir Walter Scott, whose

popular romance *The Talisman* (1825), set during the Crusades, depicts a palatably noble and chivalrous Saladin. This version of the sultan was

picked up during the nineteenth-century Arab literary renaissance known

as the *Nahda* (Awakening), which added intellectual fuel to emerging Arab nationalism.

The "branding" of Saladin by various intellectual subcultures in the

Middle East has been reflected in the West, where he is best known as

the "Saracen" who was more knightly than the knights of Christendom.

This is best exemplified in Ridley Scott's 2005 film, *Kingdom of Heaven*, which received almost exclusively positive acclaim in the (largely secular) Arab press. In Scott's film, a tolerant Saladin is played by the Syrian actor Ghassan Massoud, who grants the sultan an enigmatic cool.

Today's Saladin is, as a result, protean, capable of being all things to

all people. The twenty-first-century Saladin naturally has a Facebook

page and, as of this writing, boasts nearly ninety-five thousand Facebook

friends—far above the twenty thousand-odd followers he brought

with him to his great victory at Hattin. Saladin has gone global.

Millions have at least heard of him, whereas few, even in the Middle

East, know about, say, the sultans Nur al-Din or Baybars, men who also

had spectacular military and diplomatic successes against the Crusaders

to their credit and whose stories deserve to be told.

Saladin's global embrace is also coincidental to growing interest in the

Crusades, which have become a subject of keen interest, shaped by a

growing cadre of experts, some trained and others not. Most of their

works retain none of the messiness and nuance evident in the medieval

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