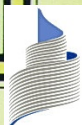


AMIN MAALOUF

THE CRUSADES THROUGH ARAB EYES





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Amin Maalouf is a Lebanese writer and journalist. He was formerly director of the weekly international edition of the leading Beirut daily *an-Nahar*, and was also editor in chief of the monthly magazine *Jeune Afrique*. He is the author of historical monographs on the Muslim Brethren and on the civil war in Lebanon. He has lived in Paris since 1976.

YABHG TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD



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Amin Maalouf

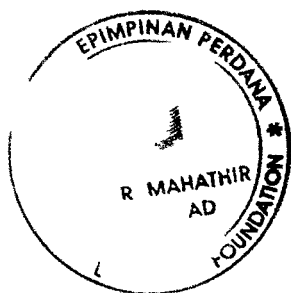
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TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

The Crusades Through Arab Eyes



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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Translated by Jon Rothschild



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Translator's Note

Arabic words and names in this book have been transliterated according to a system that allows those who know the Arabic alphabet to reconstruct the original spelling. Readers curious about the pronunciation of these names and words can refer to the 'Note on Pronunciation' at the back of the book. Others will not miss much if they simply ignore the dots and bars of the transliteration and pronounce the words as if they were English. Where a name or word has a standard English form (like Saladin), it has been used. The glossary gives brief definitions of all the Arabic words that occur in the book, whether they have been Anglicized or not. The intent of the glossary is not to provide scholarly descriptions of the terms, but to help in achieving one of the author's main goals: to make his book intelligible to those who have no specialist knowledge of Arab history.



To Andrée



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Foreword

The basic idea of this book is simple: to tell the story of the Crusades as they were seen, lived, and recorded on ‘the other side’—in other words, in the Arab camp. Its content is based almost exclusively on the testimony of contemporary Arab historians and chroniclers.

These latter spoke not of Crusades, but of Frankish wars, or ‘the Frankish invasions’. The word designating the Franks was transcribed in many ways, according to region, author, and period. In the various chronicles, we find Faranj, Faranjat, Ifranj, Ifranjat, and other variants. For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the briefest form, *Franj*, a word which is used in colloquial Arabic even today to designate Westerners, and the French in particular.

I was concerned not to burden my narrative with the many bibliographical, historical, or other notes that are necessary in a work of this kind, and I have therefore grouped them all together at the back of the book, where they are arranged by chapter. Those who want to know more can usefully read them, but they are by no means indispensable to an understanding of the story, which is meant to be accessible to all. Rather than offer yet another history book, I have sought to write, from a hitherto neglected point of view, what might be called the ‘true-life novel’ of the Crusades, of those two centuries of turmoil that shaped the West and the Arab world alike, and that affect relations between them even today.



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Prologue

Baghdad, August 1099.

Wearing no turban, his head shaved as a sign of mourning, the venerable *qāḍī* Abū Ṣa'ad al-Ḥarawī burst with a loud cry into the spacious *dīwān* of the caliph al-Mustazhir Billāh, a throng of companions, young and old, trailing in his wake. Noisily assenting to his every word, they, like him, offered the chilling spectacle of long beards and shaven skulls. A few of the court dignitaries tried to calm him, but al-Ḥarawī swept them aside with brusque disdain, strode resolutely to the centre of the hall, and then, with the searing eloquence of a seasoned preacher declaiming from his pulpit, proceeded to lecture all those present, without regard to rank.

'How dare you slumber in the shade of complacent safety', he began, 'leading lives as frivolous as garden flowers, while your brothers in Syria have no dwelling place save the saddles of camels and the bellies of vultures? Blood has been spilled! Beautiful young girls have been shamed, and must now hide their sweet faces in their hands! Shall the valorous Arabs resign themselves to insult, and the valiant Persians accept dishonour?'

'It was a speech that brought tears to many an eye and moved men's hearts', the Arab chroniclers would later write. The entire audience broke out in wails and lamentations. But al-Ḥarawī had not come to elicit sobs.

'Man's meanest weapon', he shouted, 'is to shed tears when rapiers stir the coals of war.'

If he had made this arduous trip from Damascus to Baghdad, three long summer weeks under the merciless sun of the Syrian desert, it was not to plead for pity but to alert Islam's highest



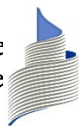
authorities to the calamity that had just befallen the faithful, and to implore them to intervene without delay to halt the carnage. 'Never have the Muslims been so humiliated', al-Harawi repeated, 'never have their lands been so savagely devastated.' All the people travelling with him had fled from towns sacked by the invaders; among them were some of the few survivors of Jerusalem. He had brought them along so that they could relate, in their own words, the tragedy they had suffered just one month earlier.

The Franj had taken the holy city on Friday, the twenty-second day of the month of Sha'bān, in the year of the Hegira 492, or 15 July 1099, after a forty-day siege. The exiles still trembled when they spoke of the fall of the city: they stared into space as though they could still see the fair-haired and heavily armoured warriors spilling through the streets, swords in hand, slaughtering men, women, and children, plundering houses, sacking mosques.

Two days later, when the killing stopped, not a single Muslim was left alive within the city walls. Some had taken advantage of the chaos to slip away, escaping through gates battered down by the attackers. Thousands of others lay in pools of blood on the doorsteps of their homes or alongside the mosques. Among them were many *imāms*, '*ulamā*', and Sufi ascetics who had forsaken their countries of origin for a life of pious retreat in these holy places. The last survivors were forced to perform the worst tasks: to heave the bodies of their own relatives, to dump them in vacant, unmarked lots, and then to set them alight, before being themselves massacred or sold into slavery.

The fate of the Jews of Jerusalem was no less atrocious. During the first hours of battle, some participated in the defence of their quarter, situated on the northern edge of the city. But when that part of the city walls overhanging their homes collapsed and the blond knights began to pour through the streets, the Jews panicked. Re-enacting an immemorial rite, the entire community gathered in the main synagogue to pray. The Franj barricaded all the exits and stacked all the bundles of wood they could find in a ring around the building. The temple was then put to the torch. Those who managed to escape were massacred in the neighbouring alleyways. The rest were burned alive.

A few days after the tragedy, the first refugees from Palestine arrived in Damascus, carrying with them, with infinite care



Koran of 'Uthmān, one of the oldest existing copies of the holy book. Soon afterwards the survivors of Jerusalem duly approached the Syrian capital. When they glimpsed the distant outlines of the three minarets of the Umayyad mosque looming up from its square courtyard, they unrolled their prayer rugs and bowed to give thanks to the Almighty for having thus prolonged their lives, which they had thought were over. Abū Ṣa'ad al-Ḥarawī, grand *qāḍī* of Damascus, welcomed the refugees with kindness. This magistrate, of Afghan origin, was the city's most respected personality, and he offered the Palestinians both advice and comfort. He told them that a Muslim need not be ashamed of being forced to flee from his home. Was not Islam's first refugee the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who had to leave Mecca, his native city, whose population was hostile to him, to seek refuge in Medina, where the new religion had been more warmly received? And was it not from his place of exile that he launched the holy war, the *jihād*, to free his country of idolatry? The refugees must therefore consider themselves *mujāhidīn*, soldiers of the holy war, so highly honoured in Islam that the *hijra*, the Prophet's 'emigration', was chosen as the starting point of the Muslim calendar.

Indeed, for many believers, exile is a duty in the event of occupation. The great traveller Ibn Jubayr, an Arab of Spain who visited Palestine nearly a century after the beginning of the Frankish invasion, was to be shocked when he found that some Muslims, 'slaves to their love for their native land', were willing to accept life in occupied territory.

'There is no excuse before God', he would say, 'for a Muslim to remain in a city of unbelief, unless he be merely passing through. In the land of Islam he finds shelter from the discomforts and evils to which he is subjected in the countries of the Christians, as, for example, when he hears disgusting words spoken about the Prophet, particularly by the most besotted, or finds it impossible to cleanse himself properly, or has to live among pigs and so many other illicit things. Beware! Beware of entering their lands! You must seek God's pardon and mercy for such an error. One of the horrors that strikes any inhabitant of the Christian countries is the spectacle of Muslim prisoners tottering in irons, condemned to hard labour and treated as slaves, as well as the sight of Muslim captives bearing iron chains round their legs. Hearts break at the sight of



them, but they have no use for pity.'

Although excessive from a doctrinal standpoint, Ibn Jubayr's words nevertheless accurately reflect the attitude of the thousands of refugees from Palestine and northern Syria who gathered in Damascus in that July of 1099. While they were sick at heart at having been forced to abandon their homes, they were determined never to return until the occupiers had departed for ever, and they resolved to awaken the consciences of their brothers in all the lands of Islam.

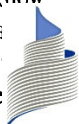
Why else would they have followed al-Ḥarawī to Baghdad? Was it not to the caliph, the Prophet's successor, that Muslims must turn in their hour of need? Was it not to the prince of the faithful that they should address their complaints and their tales of woe?

In Baghdad, however, the refugees' disappointment was to be as great as their hopes had been high. The caliph al-Mustazhir Billāh began by expressing his profound sympathy and compassion. Then he ordered seven exalted dignitaries to conduct an inquiry into these troublesome events. It is perhaps superfluous to add that nothing was ever heard from that committee of wise men.

The sack of Jerusalem, starting point of a millennial hostility between Islam and the West, aroused no immediate sensation. It would be nearly half a century before the Arab East would mobilize against the invader, before the call to *jihād* issued by the *qāḍī* of Damascus in the caliph's *dīwān* would be celebrated in commemoration of the first solemn act of resistance.

At the start of the invasion, few Arabs were as perspicacious as al-Ḥarawī in weighing the scope of the threat from the West. Some adapted all too rapidly to the new situation. Most, bitter but resigned, sought merely to survive. Some observed more or less lucidly, trying to understand these events, as unexpected as they were novel. The most touching of these was the Damascene chronicler Ibn al-Qalānisi, a young scholar born of a family of notables. A witness to the story from the outset, he was twenty-three when the Franj arrived in the East in 1096, and he assiduously and regularly recorded all the events of which he had some knowledge. His chronicle faithfully recounts, in a fairly detailed manner, the advance of the invaders as seen from his native city.

For him it all began during those anxious days when the rumours drifted into Damascus.



Part One

Invasion (1096 — 1100)

Regard the Franj! Behold with what obstinacy they fight for their religion, while we, the Muslims, show no enthusiasm for waging holy war.

SALADIN



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The Franj Arrive

In that year, news began to trickle in about the appearance of Franj troops, coming down from the Sea of Marmara in an innumerable multitude. People took fright. This information was confirmed by King Kilij Arslan, whose territory was closest to these Franj.

The King Kilij Arslan whom Ibn al-Qalānisi mentions here was not yet seventeen when the invaders arrived. The first Muslim leader to be informed of their approach, this young Turkish sultan with the slightly slanting eyes would be the first to inflict a defeat upon them—but also the first to be routed by the formidable knights.

In July 1096 Kilij Arslan learned that an enormous throng of Franj was en route to Constantinople. He immediately feared the worst. Naturally, he had no idea as to the real aims of these people, but in his view nothing good could come of their arrival in the Orient.

The sultanate under his rule covered much of Asia Minor, a territory the Turks had only recently taken from the Greeks. Kilij Arslan's father, Süleymān, was the first Turk to secure possession of this land, which many centuries later would come to be called Turkey. In Nicaea, the capital of this young Muslim state, Byzantine churches were still more numerous than Muslim mosques. Although the city's garrison was made up of Turkish cavalry, the majority of the population was Greek, and Kilij Arslan had few illusions about his subjects' true sentiments: as far as they were concerned, he would never be other than a barbarian chieftain. The only sovereign they recognized—the man whose name, spoken in a low whisper, was murmured in all their prayers—was the basileus



Alexius Comnenus, 'Emperor of the Romans'. Alexius was in fact the emperor of the Greeks, who proclaimed themselves the inheritors of the Roman empire. The Arabs, indeed, recognized them as such, for in the eleventh century—as in the twentieth—they designated the Greeks by the term Rūm, or 'Romans'. The domain conquered from the Greek empire by Kilij Arslan's father was even called the Sultanate of the Rūm.

Alexius was one of the most prestigious figures of the Orient at the time. Kilij Arslan was genuinely fascinated by this short-statured quinquagenarian, always decked in gold and in rich blue robes, with his carefully tended beard, elegant manners, and eyes sparkling with malice. Alexius reigned in Constantinople, fabled Byzantium, situated less than three days' march from Nicaea. This proximity aroused conflicting emotions in the mind of the young sultan. Like all nomadic warriors, he dreamed of conquest and pillage, and was not displeased to find the legendary riches of Byzantium so close at hand. At the same time he felt threatened: he knew that Alexius had never abandoned his dream of retaking Nicaea, not only because the city had always been Greek, but also and more importantly because the presence of Turkish warriors such a short distance from Constantinople represented a permanent threat to the security of the empire.

Although the Byzantine army, torn by years of internal crisis, would have been unable to undertake a war of reconquest on its own, it was no secret that Alexius could always seek the aid of foreign auxiliaries. The Byzantines had never hesitated to resort to the services of Western knights. Many Franj, from heavily armoured mercenaries to pilgrims en route to Palestine, had visited the Orient, and by 1096 they were by no means unknown to the Muslims. Some twenty years earlier—Kilij Arslan had not yet been born, but the older emirs in his army had told him the story—one of these fair-haired adventurers, a man named Roussel of Bailleul, had succeeded in founding an autonomous state in Asia Minor and had even marched on Constantinople. The panicky Byzantines had had no choice but to appeal to Kilij Arslan's father, who could hardly believe his ears when a special envoy from the basileus implored him to rush to their aid. The Turkish cavalry converged on Constantinople and managed to defeat Roussel; Süleymān received handsome compensation in the form of gold, horses, and land

The Byzantines had been suspicious of the Franj ever since, but the imperial armies, short of experienced soldiers, had no choice but to recruit mercenaries, and not only Franj: many Turkish warriors also fought under the banners of the Christian empire. It was precisely from his congeners enrolled in the Byzantine army that Kiliç Arslan learned, in July 1096, that thousands of Franj were approaching Constantinople. He was perplexed by the picture painted by his informants. These Occidentals bore scant resemblance to the mercenaries to whom the Turks were accustomed. Although their number included several hundred knights and a significant number of foot-soldiers, there were also thousands of women, children, and old people in rags. They had the air of some wretched tribe evicted from their lands by an invader. It was also reported that they all wore strips of cloth in the shape of a cross, sewn onto the backs of their garments.

The young sultan, who doubtless found it difficult to assess the danger, asked his agents to be especially vigilant and to keep him informed of the exploits of these new invaders. He had the fortifications of his capital inspected as a precaution. The walls of Nicaea, more than a *farsakh* (six thousand metres) in length, were topped by 240 turrets. South-west of the city, the placid waters of the Ascanian Lake offered excellent natural protection.

Nevertheless by early August the serious nature of the threat had become clear. Escorted by Byzantine ships, the Franj crossed the Bosphorus and, despite a blazing summer sun, advanced along the coast. Wherever they passed, they were heard to proclaim that they had come to exterminate the Muslims, although they were also seen to plunder many a Greek church on their way. Their chief was said to be a hermit by the name of Peter. Informants estimated that there were several tens of thousands of them in all, but no one would hazard a guess as to where they were headed. It seemed that Basileus Alexius had decided to settle them in Civitot, a camp that had earlier been equipped for other mercenaries, less than a day's march from Nicaea.

The sultan's palace was awash with agitation. While the Turkish cavalry stood ready to mount their chargers at a moment's notice there was a constant flow of spies and scouts, reporting the smallest movements of the Franj. It transpired that every morning hordes several thousand strong left camp to forage the surrounding

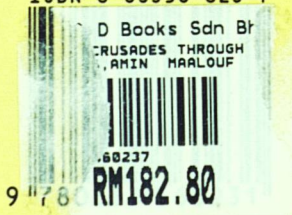


European and Arab versions of the Crusades have little in common. For the Arabs, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were not a time of awakening from medieval slumber, but years of strenuous efforts to repel a brutal and destructive invasion by barbarian hordes. When, under Saladin, a powerful Muslim army — inspired by prophets and poets — succeeded in destroying the most powerful Crusader kingdoms, it was the greatest and most enduring victory ever won by a non-European society against the West. The memory of it still lives in the minds of millions of Arabs today.

Amin Maalouf has combed the works of a score of contemporary Arab chroniclers of the Crusades, eyewitnesses and often participants in the events. In this intriguing and entertaining book, he retells their story, in the vivacious style of the chroniclers themselves, giving us a vivid portrait of a society rent by internal conflict and shaken by a traumatic encounter with an alien culture. He retraces two critical centuries of Middle Eastern history, and offers fascinating insights into some of the forces that shape Arab and Islamic consciousness today.

Although the book is written from the Arab point of view, Maalouf does not ignore the defects of Arab society and the misdeeds of its leaders. He concludes with an epilogue raising a provocative question: Why was it that soon after this great victory, the Arab world sank into decline, while the epicentre of world history shifted to Western Europe? His answer suggests that relations between the Arab world and the West are stamped, even now, by the enduring effects of a titanic battle that ended some seven centuries ago.

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