

THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM IN SALADIN'S DIPLOMACY

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Abstract: This article highlights the most important and central part of Salah ad-Din Ayyubi's career — the conquest of the city of Jerusalem. It covers his efforts and battles to capture the city. It also describes the assistance he provided to the Crusaders after the conquest of Jerusalem.

Keywords: Battle of Hattin, Balian de Ibelin, Jamal ad-Din Sharwin ibn Hasan ar-Razi, Izz ad-Din Isa ibn Malik, Patriarch Heraclius.

Hattin is regarded as a decisive battle in the history of the Muslim-Crusader wars, as the kingdom of Jerusalem lost its main military forces in this battle, and the greatest Crusader army ever put together since the establishment of that Crusader entity was destroyed. The victorious commander in this battle, who prevailed over the Crusaders, became the leader of the whole Muslim world. After Hattin, the Crusaders, especially in the holy kingdom, no longer had any strength to boast about. Hence as soon as Ascalon and Gaza surrendered to Salah ad-Deen in September of the same year, Salah ad-Deen decided to set out with his army that had regrouped in southern Palestine, after having been spread out for several years to complete the unification of Greater Syria. As soon as this army began to head north towards Jerusalem to take it by the sword, the city of Jerusalem began to prepare to resist the Muslim commander who had come to challenge its strength and might after eighty-eight years of Crusader occupation.

The number of Crusader fighters inside Jerusalem was more than sixty thousand horsemen, apart from the women and children, according to Abu Shamah in Kitab ar-Rawdatayn. It seems that the number of inhabitants, and hence the number of fighters, had increased due to the arrival of refugees from neighboring cities and villages of Palestine which had been exposed to danger during the Muslim-Crusader fighting. Runciman states that most of these refugees did not know how to fight and there were very few men among them; for every man there were fifty women and children. There were no more than two knights in the city, which prompted Balian to appoint as a knight every boy over the age of sixteen who was descended from a noble family. He recruited all the males who had reached this age and distributed weapons to everyone who was able to bear arms. The fighters spread out along the walls and fortifications, set out the mangonels and dug ditches. Abu Shamah remarked, "They (the Crusaders) set up a mangonel on every hill, dug deep ditches and fortified every part of the wall, and they put a group of fighters in every tower. Ibn al-Atheer differed with Runciman concerning the number of knights in Jerusalem before the recruitment of boys from noble families and their

appointment as knights. He says that there were the Crusader knights who had survived the battle of Hattin, and that a lot of people had gathered in the city from surrounding areas, such as Ascalon and elsewhere. They all climbed onto the walls with their armour and weapons, set up the mangonels and fortified the walls as much as they could.[1. P-153.]

Salah ad-Deen's military ability was manifested in the military plan that he followed in his jihad against the Crusaders to regain Jerusalem. This plan was based on forming a united Islamic front that included Egypt, Greater Syria and parts of Iraq, then confronting the Crusaders on their own territory and dealing a heavy blow to them, as happened at the Battle of Hattin. That was followed by his march to the cities of the Syrian coast in order to weaken the Crusaders physically and morally. If Salah ad-Deen had headed towards Jerusalem straight after his victory at Hattin, he would have been able to enter it without any difficulty. However, capturing Jerusalem before gaining control of the coastal cities would not have guaranteed him full stability in Jerusalem. It was to be expected that Western Europe would send Crusader armies to the ports of Syria and their knights would come, in groups and individually, and enter into a heated conflict with Salah ad-Deen to take back Jerusalem. Jerusalem was dear to them because it contained the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which according to their false belief, as Imad ad-Deen al-Isfahani says, was where the Messiah was crucified, and offered as a sacrifice, the divine was incarnated and the human became divine, and the cross was raised.

By the grace of Allah and this military plan that was implemented by Salah ad-Deen to gain control of the coastal strip, he isolated Jerusalem and prevented the arrival of reinforcements, thus dashing the hopes of all the Crusaders, whether in Western Europe or in Greater Syria, of reaching Jerusalem and saving it from the Muslim armies. When Salah ad-Deen took Ascalon and other cities that surrounded Jerusalem back from the Crusaders, and thus ensured that the Kingdom of Jerusalem was thoroughly isolated, he then resolved to take action and decided to head for Jerusalem. They issued commands and all the Muslim troops that were spread out along the coast rallied behind him.[2. P-67.]

The Crusaders began to fight before the Muslim army took up positions around the walls of the city, before 20th September, when a detachment of scouts from the Muslim army approached the walls, led by the emir Jamal ad-Deen Sharween ibn Hasan ar-Razi. A detachment of guards from the city came out to fight them and was defeated, and the (Crusader) commander was killed. This happened before Salah ad-Deen positioned his army on the west side of the city.

Whatever the case, Salah ad-Deen began the actual fighting against the enemy besieged behind the walls of the city in the morning of 21 Rajab 583 AH/26 September 1187 CE/. He advanced with his army towards the walls under heavy artillery cover from the mangonels, as was common practice at that time. There were twelve large mangonels capable of throwing heavy rocks. Under this artillery cover the sappers also advanced, and began to dig holes in the walls. There was fierce fighting between the two sides, those guarding the city tried to strike the Muslims and stop their advance with their arrows and mangonels from atop the walls and battlements. They fought with unprecedented ferocity, whilst the knights came out of the city and engaged in combat. But that did not deter the Muslims from their advance and their efforts to undermine the walls and destroy the fortifications with their mangonels. Many were killed on both sides during this battle. Among the slain was the emir Izz ad-Deen 'Eesa ibn Malik, whose father was the ruler of the citadel of Ja'bar. The fighting continued violently after that, Grossier describes the battle that took place at the walls of the city as being so fierce that it had no precedent, with a very real thirst for martyrdom. He goes on to say that it was the fiercest of battles, such as humankind had never before seen. Each man in both armies regarded this

conflict as a religious act and an absolute obligation. Salah ad-Deen's artillery was so superior that the fall of the walls was inevitable, the sappers working under cover of the mangonel attack succeeded in opening a gap in the wall, and the Crusader knights and nobles decided to launch a suicide attack against the Muslims outside the walls, but the Patriarch Heraclius deterred them from doing so after convincing them that this "heroic action" of theirs would mean abandoning the women and children to the enemy with no defence.[3. P-85.]

After this violent fighting, Salah ad-Deen decided to launch a decisive attack on the city. He intensified the mangonel fire as a cover for the attackers to advance. They were also covered by a hail of arrows shot by the archers towards the defenders on the walls, aimed at rendering them unable to resist. This made those defenders retreat from their positions, whilst the Muslims advanced and crossed the outer ditch that had been dug around the wall. They then stuck close to the wall and began to knock holes in it and destroy it. The assault from the mangonels intensified and the archers kept shooting their arrows, advancing behind the attackers and protecting them. The attackers succeeded in creating several gaps in the wall, which was almost taken over by the attackers. At the same time on 29 September, the attackers managed to open a large gap in the wall, through which the Muslims entered and raised their banners on the wall. The defenders soon rallied, however, and drove the Muslims back from the wall, but despite that the defenders realized that their defense was futile and that they would be destroyed, in fact they would be doomed for certain if they persisted in their stubbornness. The people crowded into the churches to pray and confess their sins, and began beating themselves with rocks, hoping for help and mercy from God. The women cut their daughters' hair in hopes of stirring the men to defend them from being taken captive by the Muslims.[4. P-132.]

The Crusaders agreed to send envoys to ask for safety in return for handing over the city to Salah ad-Deen, but Salah ad-Deen refused to respond to that request, saying, "I will only do to you what you did to its people when you took possession of it in 491 AH, when you killed them and took them captive, for the recompense for an evil is an evil like unto it."

When Salah ad-Deen sent the envoys back empty-handed and frustrated, the Crusaders met together again in Jerusalem and tried to launch a sudden attack against the Muslims, but the Patriarch Heraclius objected to that and explained to them that if they did that, they would be driving their women and children into slavery, and he urged them to seek safety from Salah ad-Deen. Balian de Ibelin sent word to Salah ad-Deen, asking him for safety for himself, so that he could come and negotiate. Salah ad-Deen responded to that and Balian came to him and asked him to grant safety to the Crusaders, but Salah ad-Deen insisted on conquering the city by the sword. However, later Saladin agreed to accept his offer.[5. P-93.]

The city was handed over on Friday 27 Rajab 583 AH/12 October 1187 CE. Abu Shamah said, quoting allsfahani in Sana al-Barq ash-Shami, that following the signing of the agreement to handover the city, the Crusaders began to ransack their own houses, selling the supplies and food that they had stored for the cheapest price, virtually giving it away for free, especially things that could not be moved or were difficult to carry.

The agreement between Salah ad-Deen and Balian was that the city was to be handed over according to the conditions that we have mentioned. Salah ad-Deen entered the city on Friday 27 Rajab 583 AH, after giving his instructions to its garrison to lay down their weapons and surrender to the Muslim troops. It was a great day on which the Islamic banners were raised on the walls of the holy city. Salah ad-Deen's siege of the city had lasted for twelve days.

History has never known any conqueror more merciful than the Muslims. Salah ad-Deen fulfilled his promise to allow whoever paid a set amount to leave, at every gate he allocated an

emir, one of the senior commanders, to keep track, whoever paid the ransom was allowed to leave. Despite the small amount that Salah ad-Deen stipulated in return for allowing them to leave Jerusalem and guarantee them safe passage to their destination, a great many of them were unable to pay this sum for themselves, so after forty days had passed they became prisoners of the Muslims. Not one of the rich crusaders did anything to ransom the poor. The Patriarch Heraclius left Jerusalem with his great wealth, not paying attention to anyone else. It seems that this was due to the lack of family or other ties among the Crusaders at that time. The prisoners were a mixture of different European ethnic groups and peoples, and western mercenaries who had travelled to the east in order to escape the serfdom that was prevalent in European society.[6. P-137.]

In conclusion, the conquest of Jerusalem by Salah ad-Din and his remarkable courage throughout this endeavor are truly worthy of admiration. This historic moment marked the realization of a long-awaited aspiration for the Islamic world, which had yearned for the liberation of Jerusalem ever since it fell into Crusader hands. It became an unforgettable event in Muslim history. Moreover, the recapture of Jerusalem symbolizes a rare moment of unity, wherein a significant portion of the Muslim world across the Near East rallied around a single leader and a common purpose.

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