

## NUR AL-DIN MAHMUD ZANKI'S (1146-1174 CE) PERSPECTIVE ON BAYT AL-MAQDIS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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### Abstract

Since the Crusaders' takeover of Bayt al-Maqdis in 1099 CE, several Muslim leaders made efforts to reclaim the holy city. One of them was Nur al-Din Mahmud Zanki of the sixth century AH who gave special consideration to the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis. He initially attempted to unify the regions in Syria and move the mission towards the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis. However, some Western writers evaluate Nur al-Din's efforts as purely political with the propaganda of Jihad to liberate Bayt al-Maqdis. This claim is outrightly different from the various sources of early Muslim historians who praised Nur al-Din's efforts. This article discusses the position of Bayt al-Maqdis and the efforts made by Muslim leaders, especially Nur Al-Din throughout his reign under the Zengid Dynasty to liberate Bayt al-Maqdis. This is historical research with a qualitative approach. The primary sources analysed using inductive methods to achieve the desired objectives. Therefore, Nur Al-Din was a leader with a clear vision to recapture Bayt al-Maqdis against the Orientalist allegations of political and military missions.

**Keywords:** *Nur Al-Din, Bayt Al-Maqdis, Liberation, Political, Military*

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## Introduction

Nur al-Din Mahmud bin Imad al-Din Zanki was a successful Islamic ruler who managed to reunite several Islamic territories, particularly in Syria, around the 12th century AD. He used the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad as a symbol to unite the Muslim community. Syria in the 12th century witnessed various significant events throughout Islamic history. The call of Pope Urban II to European Christian followers to join the holy war to liberate Bayt al-Maqdis was well-received by a considerable number of European Christians, including nobles, royal family members, and even the poor. This sermon became the starting point for the formation of the Crusader movement aimed at the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis.<sup>1</sup> Since the fall of Bayt al-Maqdis and the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of the East through the First Crusade, the Islamic world has never been devoid of efforts and movements to reorganize strategies and build strength to reclaim colonized Islamic territories, including the holy city of Bayt al-Maqdis.<sup>2</sup>

At that time, most of the Islamic territories were predominantly under the rule of the Saljuk Empire, which pledged allegiance to the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad. However, the position of the Abbasid Caliphate was exceptionally weak and considered symbolic, given the nearly absolute control of the Saljuk rulers, who were essentially seen as the masters of the Abbasid governance. On the other hand, the Saljuk Empire itself had numerous leaders who formed small administrations led by Amirs and tribal chiefs. The atmosphere following the fall of Bayt al-Maqdis necessitated an Islamic hero to reunite the Islamic world, confront the threat of the Crusader armies, and reclaim the colonized territories. This anticipation reached its culmination when several Islamic leaders emerged, initiating resistance against the Crusader's military occupation. Some even succeeded in recapturing Bayt al-Maqdis. Among these Islamic leaders were Imad al-Din Zanki, Nur al-Din Zanki, and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi. The success of Imad al-Din in reclaiming the city of Edessa (al-Ruha') dealt a severe blow to the Crusader forces, triggering the occurrence of the Second Crusade. Following the death of Imad al-Din, his son Nur al-Din took on the responsibility of continuing his father's legacy in the endeavor to liberate the colonized Islamic territories.<sup>3</sup>

His full name is Nur al-Din Abu al-Qasim Mahmud bin Imad al-Din Abu Sacid Qasim al-Dawlah Atabik Zanki b. Qasim al-Dawlah Aq Sunqūr al-Turki al-Saljuqi. He is also known as Ibn al-Qasim. He is renowned in most historical sources as al-Malik al-Adil (The Just King), al-Malik al-Shahid (The Martyred King), and al-Malik al-Sa'id (The Content King).<sup>4</sup> According to Ibn al-Athir, Nur al-Din was born on the 19th of Shawwal, 511 Hijrah. Nur al-Din's upbringing and development into a prominent figure in both political and military spheres can be attributed to his family background.<sup>5</sup> His father, Imad al-din Zanki, held a leadership position in the city of Aleppo and was renowned not only as a political figure but also as a formidable military commander with exceptional skills in battle. Given Imad al-Din's multifaceted role, it comes as no surprise that Nur

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<sup>1</sup> Steven R. *The First Crusade*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1980). 58

<sup>2</sup> Hussain O. *Salib & Penjajahan Dunia Islam*. (Johor: Penerbit UTHM; 2018). 62.

<sup>3</sup> Hussain O. *Salib & Penjajahan Dunia Islam*. (Johor: Penerbit UTHM; 2018). 63.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, (Beirut-Dimasyq: Dar Ibn Kathir; 2010). 12/247. Ibn al-Athir. *Kitab al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Ilmiyyah, 2003.) 191. Abu Shamah. *Kitab al-Rawdatain fi Akhbar al-Dawlatain: al-Nuriyyah wa al-Salahiyyah*, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Riasalah; 1997.) 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-Athir. *Kitab al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Ilmiyyah, 2003.). 162.

al-Din, following in his father's footsteps, emerged as a formidable leader and a resilient warrior, particularly against adversaries like the Franks.<sup>6</sup>

Nur al-Din's proficiency in leadership and military matters is a direct outcome of the guidance provided by his father. Moreover, in terms of lineage, Nur al-Din's grandfather, Aq-Sunqur, served as the ruler or governor of the Aleppo region. Consequently, Nur al-Din inherited and even surpassed the abilities of his predecessors, solidifying his position as a capable leader and surpassing the achievements of those who came before him. Nur al-Din had three brothers: Sayf al-Din Ghazi, the eldest son, Qutb al-Din Mawdud, and Nusrah al-Din. All of them inherited courage, excellence, and good qualities from their father.<sup>7</sup>

According to Sivan, the fall of the city of Edessa has shifted the attitude of the Muslim community from a defensive stance to an offensive one. Before the fall of Edessa, the momentum of the Islamic jihad struggle became uncertain, fragmented, and lacked focus. However, when Imad al-Din successfully recaptured the territory, poets began to assist in consolidating the jihad for the struggle to liberate Bayt al-Maqdis.<sup>8</sup> Hillenbrand suggests that it is difficult to pinpoint when Islamic leaders began prioritizing the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) as a key mission. Although the Fatimid campaign and Crusader occupation in 1099 CE were significant events, there were no immediate Muslim efforts to reclaim the city. Hillenbrand agrees with Sivan that the Muslim victory in Edessa in 1144 CE was a major turning point, sparking a broader jihad against the Crusaders. She also argues that Bayt al-Maqdis became a central focus for jihad during Imad al-Din's later years.<sup>9</sup>

Newby agrees that Imad al-Din's primary goal appeared to be the capture of Damascus. After gaining control of the three major cities in Syria (Damascus, Aleppo, and Mosul) Imad al-Din might have considered attacking the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. However, the drive for the liberation of Jerusalem intensified under Nur al-Din's leadership. During his rule, the city became the central focus of his jihad movement, marking a significant shift in Islamic efforts against the Crusaders.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Hillenbrand also argues that during Nur al-Din's career, Bayt al-Maqdis became his goal and focus, although it is not precisely clear when this shift occurred during his twenty-eight-year tenure.<sup>11</sup>

However, some criticisms labelled against Nur al-Din's Jihad campaign, including those by Stevenson, who posits that Nur al-Din was not an imperialist or a great military leader like his father.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Alex Mallet expresses a nearly identical sentiment, suggesting that Nur al-Din was a weak figure at the beginning of his rule, only reacting to events rather than evolving into a formidable Islamic leader against the Frankish forces.<sup>13</sup> According to Mu'nis Awad, contemporary

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<sup>6</sup> Rahman A. Peranan Nuruddin Zanki Sebagai Amir Dinasti Abbasiyyah dan Perjuangannya Melawan Tentara Salib (1148-1174 M), *Jurnal Tamaddun*. 2016; 4(2): 35

<sup>7</sup> Burhan CH, Al-Malik Al-Adil Nur Al-Din Mahmud B. Zanki: An Introduction, *International Journal of Business and Social Science*. 2010; 1(3): 291.

<sup>8</sup> Sivan E. Réfugiés syro-palestiniens au temps des croisades. Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner; 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Hillenbrand C. *The crusades: Islamic perspectives*. (Routledge; 2018)

<sup>10</sup> Newby PH. *Saladin in His Time*. London:Faber and Faber; 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Hillenbrand C. *The crusades: Islamic perspectives*. (Routledge; 2018)

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson W B. *The Crusaders in The East*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1907). 155.

<sup>13</sup> Mallett A. The battle of Inab. *Journal of Medieval History*. 2013. 1;39(1). 55.

studies on Nur al-Din Zanki are essential to assess his role and contributions during the Crusades. This is because there exists a group of Orientalists who argue that Nur al-Din Zanki's Jihad movement was politically motivated rather than rooted in religious principles. Therefore, this paper discusses the position of Bayt al-Maqdis in Nur al-Din's eyes and elucidates his efforts to liberate Bayt al-Maqdis.

## Methodology

This study is historical research employing a qualitative approach. According to Chua Yan Piaw,<sup>14</sup> historical research is a method conducted through systematic data collection and objective evaluation of events that occurred in the past. Historical research aims to explain and predict events. In this paper, the authors utilize the documentary method as the data collection instrument involving several primary source books such as the works of Ibn al-Athir and others. These works are contemporary with the era of Nur al-Din Mahmud Zanki, making them the main references for this paper. Secondary source materials, including theses, journal articles, and research papers from seminars, were also used as additional references for the study. For the method of data analysis, an inductive approach was employed. According to Sabitha Marican inductive analysis refers to an approach that prioritizes detailed readings of raw materials or data to obtain concepts and themes.<sup>15</sup> Through this presented method, a comprehensive and objective portrayal of Bayt al-Maqdis in the eyes of Nur al-Din 's-can be clearly articulated.

## Results And Discussion

According to Hillenbrand<sup>16</sup> and Elisseff,<sup>17</sup> Nur al-Din was one of the medieval Islamic military leaders who focused on the Jihad movement to liberate Bayt al-Maqdis in fullest scope, particularly with the strategic move and initial preparation for its capture. This further explains that his conquest of Damascus and Egypt was only to serve as the strategic bulwark to recapture the Latin Kingdom of Bayt al-Maqdis from the Franks. Nur al-Din adhered to a clear principle, a united faith following the *Sunni* tradition, a nation capable of surrounding Crusader territories from various directions, and a singular objective, *jihad* to reclaim all occupied regions and liberate Bayt al-Maqdis.<sup>18</sup>

Burhan argues that Nur al-Din's concept of *Tawhid al-Bilad* (the Unification of the States) could be interpreted as an intentional internal strategy to fortify Muslim authority under Sunnism in opposition to internal strife and conflict. Conversely, the concept of *Tahrir al-Bilad*, which refers to the Conquest or Liberation of the States, is a comprehensive plan from the outside that aims to pave the way for the conquest of key Syrian cities, with Bayt al-Maqdis serving as the focal point.

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<sup>14</sup> Chua Y P, *Kaedah Penyelidikan*, (Kuala Lumpur: McGraw Hill; 2011). 228.

<sup>15</sup> Marican S. *Kaedah Penyelidikan Sains Sosial*. (Petaling Jaya: Prentice Hall; 2008). 45.

<sup>16</sup> Hillenbrand C. *The crusades: Islamic perspectives*. (Routledge; 2018). 150.

<sup>17</sup> Elisseff N. *Nur al-Din: Un Grand Prince Musulman de Syrie au temps des Croisades*, (Damascus; 1967).337.

<sup>18</sup> Amin M. *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, translated by Jon Rothscild, (London:Al-Saqi Books; 1984). 144.

It was evident that these two strategies were combined and carried out in the aftermath of Damascus' conquest and Egypt's annexation from the Faṭimids. Nur al-Din is said to have focused on conquering Bayt al-Maqdis over four years before to his death. During this time, he issued a command to construct and establish a pulpit at the al-Aqsa mosque in Bayt al-Maqdis. The political goal of Nur al-Din is Muslim unification and the reoccupation of Bayt al-Maqdis with Egypt's financial and material assistance.<sup>19</sup>

### **Battle Against the Crusaders on Second Crusade 1148**

The capture of Edessa by the Muslims brought sorrow to Antioch, Bayt al-Maqdis, and other Crusader regions. Consequently, emissaries were dispatched by the leaders of the cross to the Pope in Rome. At that time, Pope Eugenius III (d. 1153) was at the helm. Towards the close of 1145, Pope Eugenius III initiated the Second Crusade and assigned Bernard of Clairvaux to advocate for the cause. This endeavour proved highly successful, garnering pledges from thousands of individuals, including leaders such as King Conrad III of Germany and King Louis VII of France, who actively participated in the Second Crusade.<sup>20</sup> During this campaign, Christian forces from Europe encountered formidable resistance from determined Muslim defenders striving to protect their territory.<sup>21</sup> In July 1148, a considerable contingent of Crusaders set out towards Damascus. Initially, Mu'inuddin Unur, the Governor of Damascus, harboured doubts about the crusaders' plans. However, upon confirming that a sizable army of the cross was indeed poised to attack Damascus, he promptly dispatched a messenger to solicit aid from nearby cities. Simultaneously, he sent envoys to Nur al-Din Zanki in Aleppo and Sayf al-Din Ghazi in Mosul, urgently seeking their assistance in defending Damascus.<sup>22</sup> The Governor began preparing their forces to confront the impending Crusader assaults. Unfortunately, Nur al-Din and Sayf al-Din's troops were unable to reach Damascus in time, attributed to the considerable distance and the brevity of the conflict in Damascus.

On the evening of July 27, 1148, AD, the Crusaders altered their tactics by relocating to the East of the city. Unfortunately, the occupied area proved to be excessively open and lacked water sources. The combination of scorching daytime temperatures and the scarcity of water began to sap the Crusaders' fighting spirit.<sup>23</sup> It was at this juncture that they received a message from Unur. Realizing their vulnerability and anticipating the imminent arrival of Nur al-Din and Sayf al-Din on the horizon, unease set in, compelling them to yield. Within moments of receiving this news, they started to abandon their ambition to capture the city. Rahman argued the Second Crusade marked the commencement of a period of conflict, with Nur al-Din Zanki leading the resistance against the encroaching Crusader forces oppressing Muslims. Although Nur al-Din played a limited role in the relatively brief battle, his commitment persisted beyond the war's conclusion. Post the Second Crusade, Nur al-Din Zanki continued to harbour a fervent agenda

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<sup>19</sup> Burhan CD, Abdul AE, Mohd RMN. Historical and Geopolitical Analysis of Nur Al-Din Mahmud Zanki's Plan for Liberating Bayt Al-Maqdis, *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies*. 2018; 18(3); 2.

<sup>20</sup> Alwi A, *Nuruddin Zanki & Perang Salib*. (Jakarta: Zikrul Hakim; 2012). 305.

<sup>21</sup> Munir Subarman, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam klasik Perkembangan Politik, Filsafat, Sains & Seni*. (Cirebon: Pangger Press; 2008). 278.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas A. *The Crusades, the War for the Holy Land*. (London: Simon & Schuster; 2010). 200.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas A. *The Crusades, the War for the Holy Land*. (London: Simon & Schuster; 2010). 200.

against the Crusader troops entrenched in Muslim territories. His noble aspiration was the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis from the clutches of the Crusaders.<sup>24</sup>

### The Unification of the Islamic Territory

After the Second Crusade, Nur al-Din began to intensify his Jihad movement towards several Islamic territories that had been occupied by the Crusaders. One by one, strongholds and cities of the Crusader forces were captured. Hussein Othman asserts that the battles in Inab against the Crusaders elevated Nur al-Din's name as another Islamic hero following the footsteps of his father, Imad al-Din, who was born out of the spirit of Jihad to liberate the holy city of Bayt al-Maqdis.<sup>25</sup> The battle between the Islamic forces led by Nur al-Din and the Crusader forces commanded by the ruler of Antioch, Raymond, took place on June 29, 1149, AD, in an area called Inab, located in Antioch. According to Ibn Athir, this event occurred while Nur al-Din was leading his army in an expedition to capture several fortified cities in the Antioch region. Among the first strongholds successfully captured was the city of Harim. Subsequently, they advanced towards Inab to face Raymond and his troops. Nur al-Din's success in defeating the Crusader forces in the battle of Inab marked the greatest triumph for the Islamic forces after the capture of the city of Edessa.<sup>26</sup> However, Alex argues the conflict at Inab stemmed from Nur al-Din's broader strategy to safeguard and strengthen his rule in the vulnerable city of Aleppo during the initial years of his leadership. Faced with threats from various directions, the relatively youthful ruler exerted considerable effort to withstand external pressures. The engagement at Inab was part of a series of actions taken in Antiochene territory in response to aggressive moves by the Franks. It likely aimed at preventing the Franks from exerting the historical pressure they had on Aleppo in preceding decades and were once again poised to do.<sup>27</sup>

Burhan contends that approximately three years following the reclaiming of Edessa in 541 AH/1146 CE, the seizure of Antioch marked the second pivotal moment for Nur al-Din in shaping his subsequent strategic moves. Recognizing that the most formidable bastion of the Crusaders in the northern region could be conquered, Nur al-Din likely gleaned a significant insight the potential for victory over the remaining Crusader states.<sup>28</sup> Nur al-Din Mahmud harboured a significant aspiration to end the Crusader dominance in Bayt al-Maqdis. Recognizing the crucial necessity of Muslim unity for the success of this endeavour, he strategically pursued a policy focused on achieving union in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria). The major impediment to this union was the Burid dynasty in Damascus, which had opted to collaborate with the Crusaders to safeguard its independence against the Zangids and had been allied with the Crusader Kingdom of Bayt al-Maqdis since 1140. Although Damascus was a key target for Nur al-Din, realizing his dream in the short term proved challenging. Fortunately, an opportunity arose for Nur al-Din during the conflict between Unur, the Governor of Damascus, and his allies, the Franks, in 1147. Unur, compelled to seek Nur al-Din's assistance against the Franks when the Kingdom of Bayt al-Maqdis attacked the

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<sup>24</sup> Rahman A. Peranan Nuruddin Zanki Sebagai Amir Dinasti Abbasiyyah dan Perjuangannya Melawan Tentera Salib (1148-1174 M), *Jurnal Tamaddun*. 2016; 4(2): 35.

<sup>25</sup> Hussain O. *Salib & Penjajahan Dunia Islam*. (Johor: Penerbit UTHM; 2018). 87.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-Athir. *Kitab al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Ilmiyyah, 2003). 9: 362.

<sup>27</sup> Mallett A. The battle of Inab. *Journal of Medieval History*. 2013 Mar 1;39(1): 56.

<sup>28</sup> Burhan CD, Abdul AE, Mohd RMN. Historical and Geopolitical Analysis of Nur Al-Din Mahmud Zanki's Plan for Liberating Bayt Al-Maqdis, *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*. 2018; 18(3); 6.

Hauran region within Damascus's borders, offered to cede control of the city of Hama to Nur al-Din by marrying his daughter to him, in exchange for supporting his independence in Damascus. Consequently, a treaty of alliance was forged between the parties in March 1147, leading to the destruction of the kingdom's army with Nur al-Din's assistance.<sup>29</sup>

Coincidentally, following the victory at Inab, Damascus suffered the loss of its most instrumental leader in repelling the Second Crusade, Unur. Unur's death created an opportunity for negotiations between Nur al-Din and the new Governor of Damascus, Abaq. The residents of Damascus warmly welcomed Nur al-Din's arrival, hoping that Abaq would agree to place the city under Nur al-Din's protection. Initially reluctant, Abaq hesitated and even considered negotiating an alliance with the Crusader government in Bayt al-Maqdis. However, with Nur al-Din's diplomacy, Abaq eventually agreed to surrender Damascus to him. Thus, Nur al-Din's cherished goal of uniting the Muslim community was achieved, to the delight of the entire population of Damascus.<sup>30</sup> Stevenson argues that the acquisition of Damascus by Nur al-Din is a landmark in history, he adds that with the unification of all the Muslims in Syria under his rule, Nur al-Din's military power was now consolidated.<sup>31</sup> Burhan et. al. claims the capture of Damascus marked the culmination of Nur al-Din's practical initiatives in Syria. This achievement could be seen as the initial practical phase in the broader goal of reclaiming the remaining Crusader states. By the conclusion of this phase, Nur al-Din had successfully accomplished two significant milestones: fostering Muslim unity in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) and establishing a robust military foundation for the Muslims in the northern region. Following El-Awaisi's new geopolitical theory, Nur al-Din's subsequent move would involve the conquest of Egypt, setting the stage for the second liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis at the conclusion of the second phase of his campaigns<sup>32</sup>.

## **The Conquest of Egypt**

Egypt was once threatened with colonization by King Baldwin III, the ruler of the Crusader state of Bayt al-Maqdis in 1160 AD. However, swift diplomatic actions by the Egyptian government led King Baldwin to abandon his intentions, albeit with the condition that Egypt pay 160,000 gold dinars. King Baldwin passed away in 1163 AD and was succeeded by his brother, King Amalric, a ruler more interested in conquering Egypt than accepting a relatively small compensation based on Egypt's wealth. Shortly after assuming power, Amalric mobilized his forces to capture Bilbais, a city at the mouth of the Nile River. Amalric's first attempt, however, was thwarted by the Egyptian government.<sup>33</sup> Despite several subsequent attempts, Amalric's determination to conquer Egyptian territory sent a clear message to Nur al-Din that Egypt was crucial to the Crusader state as a stage to enhance economic and strategic power.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Nur al-Din took proactive measures, one of the most significant in the history of the Islamic resurgence against the Crusaders,

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<sup>29</sup> Altan E. Nur Al-Din Mahmud B. Zangi (1146-1174): One of The Prominent Leaders of The Struggle Against The Crusaders. *Tarik Dergisi*, 2014; 59 (1): 59.

<sup>30</sup> Hussain O. *Salib & Penjajahan Dunia Islam*. (Johor: Penerbit UTHM; 2018). 85.

<sup>31</sup> Stevenson W B. *The Crusaders in The East*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1907). 173.

<sup>32</sup> Burhan CD, Abdul AE, Mohd RMN. Historical and Geopolitical Analysis of Nur Al-Din Mahmud Zanki's Plan for Liberating Bayt Al-Maqdis, *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*. 2018; 18(3); 9.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas A. *The Crusades, the War for the Holy Land*. (London: Simon & Schuster; 2010). 225.

<sup>34</sup> Amin M. *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, translated by Jon Rothschild, (London: Al-Saqi Books; 1984). 160.

by sending his forces led by Asad al-Din Shirkuh, one of Nur al-Din's most feared military commanders. Shirkuh's mission was crucial as it led to the birth of another revered Islamic hero and warrior respected even by Islamic adversaries.<sup>35</sup>

According to Newby,<sup>36</sup> the political division between Egypt and *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) provided strength to the Crusader states. Additionally, he asserts that Nur al-Din had no intention of capturing Egypt as a preliminary step to liberating Bayt al-Maqdis because he couldn't simultaneously combat both the Fatimids and the Crusaders. Consequently, if Nur al-Din were to conquer Egypt, the union of *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) and Egypt would enhance the collective strength of the Muslims. Ibn al-Athir contends that the Crusaders were aware that if Egypt came under Nur al-Din's control, it would put them in a precarious situation.<sup>37</sup> Asad al-Din played a crucial role in the conquest of Egypt. During the third offensive by Nur al-Din's forces, they successfully toppled the Fatimid kingdom, resulting in the unification of the territories of *Bilad al-Sham* and Egypt under a single ruler. Asad al-Din played a crucial role in the conquest of Egypt. During the third offensive by Nur al-Din's forces, they successfully toppled the Fatimid kingdom, resulting in the unification of the territories of *Bilad al-Sham* and Egypt under a single ruler.

Numerous battles took place in Egypt involving the forces of Nur al-Din and the Crusaders, until finally in the year 1169 AD, Shirkuh successfully defeated the Crusader forces and forced them to leave Cairo. In addition, Nur al-Din's forces managed to kill Shawar, who had committed many errors and inflicted much suffering on the people of Egypt. Nur al-Din gained complete control of the territory of Egypt in 1171 AD, following the death of Al-Adid, the last caliph of the Fatimid Dynasty. With the conquest of Egypt, Nur al-Din's desire to reclaim Bayt al-Maqdis grew closer, as the control of both Syria and Egypt meant that Nur al-Din effectively controlled the two gateways through which Crusader forces from Europe sought to reach Bayt al-Maqdis. With the automatic control of these two territories by Nur al-Din, the Crusader forces ruling in Bayt al-Maqdis grew weaker over time. But, before he could realize his desire, Nur al-Din Zanki passed away, specifically on May 15, 1174, AD. Despite Nur al-Din's death, his actions during his lifetime were not in vain. Although Nur al-Din did not have a successor from his own lineage, reason that led Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi to continue his leadership and carry on the struggle of the Islamic community against the Crusader forces. This was evident in the year 1187 AD when Salahuddin successfully recaptured Bayt al-Maqdis into the mainstream of Islamic community.<sup>38</sup>

### **Building a Generation of Jihadists Through Educational Aspects**

Nur al-Din was an Islamic leader who placed special emphasis on the study of hadith during his reign. His fervour and love for hadith prompted him to establish an educational centre known as Dar Al-Hadis An-Nuriyah in Damascus. The development of this centre marked a pioneering initiative in the history of Islam. The administrative and educational affairs of Dar Al-Hadis were

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<sup>35</sup> Alwi A, *Nuruddin Zanki & Perang Salib*. (Jakarta: Zikrul Hakim; 2012). 335.

<sup>36</sup> Newby PH. *Saladin in His Time*. (London: Faber and Faber; 1983).23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn al-Athir. *Kitab al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Ilmiyyah, 2003). 9:465.

<sup>38</sup> Hussain O. *Salib & Penjajahan Dunia Islam*. (Johor: Penerbit UTHM; 2018). 122.



entrusted to Al-Hafizh Abu Al-Qasim bin Asakir, more commonly known as Ibn Asakir, who passed away in 571 H./1176 M.<sup>39</sup> The establishment of Dar Al-Hadis stemmed from Nur al-Din's awareness of the need to propagate the Sunni tradition to replace the dominance of Shi'a teachings in certain Islamic regions at that time. Additionally, it aimed to foster a spirit of Jihad against the Crusader forces. In addition to hadith learning activities, the educators at *Dar Al-Hadis* also played a role in training students as dedicated jihadists against the enemies of Islam. Studies and works highlighting the virtues of Jihad and encouragement for engaging in jihad were prolifically produced during Nur al-Din's reign, serving as motivational resources for the Muslim community.<sup>40</sup>

According to Ash-Shallabi, the figure of Ibn Asakir emerged alongside Sultan Nur al-Din Mahmud in his support for the resistance movement and the unification of Islamic groups. Nur al-Din asked Ibn Asakir to gather forty hadiths for him regarding jihad, with clear and connected chains of narration, to serve as motivation for his soldiers in battle.<sup>41</sup> Ibn Asakir promptly fulfilled Nur al-Din's request, and these hadiths were then disseminated among the commanders and soldiers. Nur al-Din empowered Ibn Asakir's efforts in mobilizing the community ideologically and religiously. Amin Maalof affirmed that the clarity of Nur al-Din's goal for the liberation of the Holy City of Bayt al-Maqdis cannot be denied, particularly through his words and actions. He hoped that this goal would be shared by all Muslims. To realize this aspiration, he not only relied on verbal expressions but also directed scholars and intellectuals to write books explaining the virtues of Bayt al-Maqdis. These books were later disseminated through teaching and learning in mosques and schools.<sup>42</sup>

Through these actions, it is evident that Nur al-Din can be considered not only a leader prioritizing the political aspects of Jihad but also an advocate for education, particularly the education of the entire community to ensure a clear understanding of the meaning, concepts, and obligations of jihad. Nur al-Din revolutionized the dynamic between rulers and scholars by adopting an inclusive approach, a departure from the traditional exclusivity. His policy fostered a marriage of knowledge and power, prompting Syrian Muslims to champion religious and political unity over discord and division. This shift can be argued as a pivotal factor contributing to Nur al-Din's success in advancing his agenda of renewal and Jihad.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mourad, Suleiman, and James Lindsay. *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period: Ibn Asakir of Damascus (1105–1176) and His Age, with an Edition and Translation of Ibn Asakir's The Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad*. Vol. 99. Brill, 2012. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim MAA. *Al-Hayah al-ilmiah fi al-ahdi al-Zanki*, (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Malik Fahd Al-Wataniyah; 2003). 249.

<sup>41</sup> Ash-Shallabi AM. *Bangkit dan Runtuhnya Daulah Zankiyah*, translated by Masturi I & Iman MA, Jakarta Timur: Pustaka Al-Kautsar; 2020. 554.

<sup>42</sup> Amin M. *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, translated by Jon Rothscild, London: Al-Saqi Books; 1984. 175.

<sup>43</sup> Burhan CH. Nur Al-Din and Tajdid: The Role of Scholars and Religious Institutions Towards Islamic Renewal in Twelfth-Century Syria. In: E-Proceeding of the 2 nd International Conference on Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization, iCASiC2015 (e-ISBN 978-967-0792-02-6), 2015 March 9-10, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: 2003. 414.

## The Construction of the *Minbar* (Pulpit)

One of the inscriptions found on the minbar indicated that it was ordered by Nur al-Din in the year 564/1168-9. Initially installed in the Great Mosque of Aleppo, it was later transported to Bayt al-Maqdis, following Nur al-Din's death, at the request of Saladin. The minbar remained housed in the Aqsa Mosque until its unfortunate destruction by an Australian fanatic in 1969. In the broader context of Bayt al-Maqdis's significance in the Counter Crusade, the minbar assumes a pivotal role. Nur al-Din's minbar serves as a powerful testament to Jihad, as affirmed by a significant inscription. Tabbaa describes it as the most elaborate among all of Nur al-Din's inscriptions proclaiming the triumph of Islam and the defeat of the unbelievers.<sup>44</sup>

Tabbaa suggests that the calligraphic transformation observed in the monuments represented one of the most conspicuous indicators of Nur al-Din's extensive movement, which had been relatively dormant in Syria during the tumultuous decades of the first half of the twelfth century. Additionally, Tabbaa argues that it may not be coincidental that some of the most exceptional works in Syria during the mid-6th century AH/12th century CE were commissioned by Nur al-Din for various institutions in Aleppo, Hamah, Damascus, and even in Bayt al-Maqdis (28). These monuments effectively conveyed Nur al-Din's character as a Jihad fighter against the Crusaders in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria). Hillenbrand claims that it is plausible to infer that in the later stages of his career, Nur al-Din harbored aspirations for Bayt al-Maqdis, and the minbar he commissioned likely aimed to immortalize his role in such an endeavor for future generations. The minbar can be seen at a more profound level, as a precursor to the colossal monument of intersecting scimitars erected by Saddam Hussein in 1985 to commemorate his anticipated triumph in the Iraq-Iran war a victory he, too, never witnessed it. The Aqsa minbar stood as a tangible and enduring symbol of the Muslim Counter-Crusade, functioning essentially as a form of sympathetic magic.<sup>45</sup>

According to Burhan, the construction of the *Minbar* and its distinctive features underscored the earnestness of Nur al-Din in his strategic pursuit of liberating Bayt al-Maqdis. Furthermore, the *Minbar*'s creation stands out as the most conspicuous remaining evidence, vividly representing Nur al-Din's resolute vision for Bayt al-Maqdis and serving as a tangible component of his preparatory efforts.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusions and Newness

In summary, Nur al-Din Mahmud, a prominent ruler of the 12th century, emerged as a stalwart defender of Islam against the Crusaders and a leader of the Jihad movement, committing his heart and soul to the cause. His impactful reign of 27 years was marked by relentless conflicts and struggles, driven by ambitious objectives. His foremost goal was to unite Islamic states and reclaim Bayt al-Maqdis from the Crusaders. To achieve this, he adopted a deliberate and farsighted policy,

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<sup>44</sup> Hillenbrand C. *The crusades: Islamic perspectives*. (Routledge; 2018). 156.

<sup>45</sup> Hillenbrand C. *The crusades: Islamic perspectives*. (Routledge; 2018). 160

<sup>46</sup> Burhan CD, Abdul AE, Mohd RMN. Historical and Geopolitical Analysis of Nur Al-Din Mahmud Zanki's Plan for Liberating Bayt Al-Maqdis, *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*. 2018; 18(3); 12.

sustaining the Jihad movement with unwavering effort until his demise. While he didn't live long enough to realize his dream of conquering Bayt al-Maqdis, Nur al-Din paved the way for it through his persistent struggle. After consolidating his rule over Syria, he expanded his dominance to Egypt, putting an end to the Shiite Fatimid State. As the ruler of Egypt, he trapped the Crusaders from both the East and West. His strong belief in the conquest of Bayt al-Maqdis is evident in the commissioning of a highly artistic wooden minbar in Aleppo, intended for placement in Masjid al-Aqsa (al-Aqsa Mosque) when the time came. Unfortunately, this pulpit, ordered by Saladin, was destroyed in a fire in 1969. Additionally, Nur al-Din played a crucial role in educating and shaping Saladin, the eventual Conqueror of Bayt al-Maqdis, thereby leaving an indelible mark on the history of Islam. Throughout his leadership, Nur al-din actively engaged in physical resistance, waging wars against Crusader forces that, during his time, subjected Muslims in the Middle East to various oppressions. However, his contributions were not limited to resisting the Crusaders; Nur al-Din also made significant contributions to the Islamic community in various other areas, including infrastructural development, economy, religion, education, and more.

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