

# Arab Historians of the Crusades

Selected and translated  
from the Arabic sources

by

FRANCESCO GABRIELI

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by E. J. Costello

xxvii

'Izz ad-Din Ibn al-Athīr (Jazirat Ibn 'Umar, 555/1160–Mosul 630/1233) came of a Mesopotamian family and is the most famous of three brothers, all well known to Muslims of Arabic education. His most important work is *Kamil at-Tawarikh* (*The Perfect History, or The Collection of Histories*), an enormous history of the whole Muslim world from Arabic and Hebrew legends and the history of pre-Muhammedan times to the year 628/1231. For the earlier period (to the beginning of the tenth century A.D.) he reproduces for the most part at-Tābari's great collection, but for the last three centuries and in particular for his own period the breadth and balance of his statements, the wealth of material collected and above all his robust and personal view of history make him a very important source; some would call him the only real Arab historian of the period. This marked individuality is also the cause of his defects as an author: a tendency sometimes to favour the Zangid dynasty (Zangi, Nur ad-Din and their successors), inaccurate chronology and sometimes a certain lack of respect for his sources. But with these reservations one can only admire the unity of a work that embraces the whole Muslim world from Transoxiana to the farthest Maghrib and Spain, one in which the author seeks to trace the causal links of events, and is able to overcome the difficulties of the annalist's technique and present his facts clearly and convincingly.

For his history of the Crusades Ibn al-Athīr was an eyewitness, although not always a sympathetic one, of Saladin's career, and made use of Ibn al-Qalānisi, Bahā' ad-Din and 'Imād ad-Din as sources. The clarity and simplicity of his style, which avoids archaisms and embellishments and aims at pre-

xxviii

senting the essential facts, has contributed to his reputation as the chief historian of the later Crusades.

Text: Tornberg's edition, vols. X, XI, XII, Leiden, 1853–64.