
Arab Historians of the Crusades

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES 1969

Selected and translated
from the Arabic sources
by

FRANCESCO GABRIELI

*Translated from the Italian
by E. J. Costello*

FROM GODFREY TO SALADIN

59

(IBN AL-ATHĪR, XI, 85-6)

In this year (543/1148) the King of Germany left his homeland with a large army of Franks to attack the Muslim empire. He had no doubt that with his vast supplies of men, money and equipment he would be victorious after only a brief struggle. On his arrival in Syria the Franks there presented themselves

¹ Among whom, perhaps, 'freed from the deceptive world', lay Cacciaguida, the great-great-grandfather of Dante, the only relative of his to figure significantly in the *Divine Comedy* (Paradiso XV).

to offer their obedience and put themselves at his command. He ordered them to follow him to Damascus, to besiege and take it, as he thought. They marched off with him and surrounded the city.

The ruler of Damascus was Mujir ad-Din Abaq ibn Muhammad ibn Buri ibn Tughtikin, but he wielded no effective power, the real commander being Mu'in ad-Din Unur, one of his grandfather Tughtikin's mamluks. It was he who had put Mujir ad-Din on the throne. He was a wise and just man, upright and God-fearing. He assumed responsibility for mustering an army and defending the city. For a while the Franks kept up the siege, and then on 6 rabi' I/24 July they moved in to attack, cavalry and infantry together. The army came out of Damascus to meet them and fought relentlessly. Among the soldiers was the lawyer Hujjat ad-Din Yusuf ibn Dibas al-Findalawi of the Maghrib, a very old man and a lawyer of absolute probity. When Mu'in ad-Din saw him marching on foot he went to meet him, greeted him and said: 'Sir, your age gives you dispensation; I will concern myself with the defence of Islām!' and he begged him to retire. But the old man refused, saying: 'I have offered myself for sale, and He has bought me. By God, I neither agreed nor asked that the contract should be annulled!' He was referring to the words of Almighty God: 'God has bought the faithful, both themselves and their possessions, and given them Paradise in exchange.'¹ He went on to fight the Franks until he was killed, near an-Nairab, half a *farsakh* from Damascus.

The Franks gained ground and the Muslims weakened. The German king advanced as far as al-Maidān al-Akhdar (the Green Square), and everyone was convinced that he would take the city. Meanwhile Mu'in ad-Din had sent a message to Saif ad-Din Ghazi, son of the Ata-beg Zangi and ruler of Mosul, calling on him to come to the aid of the Muslims and to

¹ Qur'ān IX, 112.

drive off the enemy. Saif ad-Din marshalled his army and marched into Syria, bringing with him his brother Nur ad-Din Mahmūd¹ from Aleppo. When they reached Hims, Saif ad-Din sent to Mu'in ad-Din to say: 'I have come with every man in my realm capable of bearing arms. I ask that a condition of my attacking the Franks shall be the presence of my representatives in Damascus. If I am defeated, I shall take my army inside the city and defend it from within. If we are victorious, the city is yours, and I shall not question your right to it.' To the Franks he sent a threatening message urging them to retreat from Damascus. The Franks broke off the fight, for they had many casualties, and were alarmed at the prospect of having to face Saif ad-Din as well as the army from Damascus. They decided to conserve their forces, while the citizens repaired the defences and drew breath after the labour of unceasing combat. Meanwhile Mu'in ad-Din sent to the Franks to say: 'The King of the East has arrived; if you do not retreat I shall hand the city over to him, and then by God you will repent.' To the Syrian Franks he wrote: 'What reason have you for supporting these people against us when you know that if they take the city they will seize your possessions on the coast? I warn you that if I feel that I am losing the battle I shall hand the city over to Saif ad-Din, and you may be sure that if he becomes ruler of Damascus you will not be allowed to keep a foothold in Syria.' This message persuaded them to break their alliance with the King of Germany in exchange for the fortress of Baniyās from Mu'in ad-Din. So the Syrian Franks had a private discussion with the King of Germany and frightened him with their tales of Saif ad-Din, his vast army, his constant reinforcements, and the probability that he would take Damascus despite anything that they could do to prevent him. They were so persuasive that the king withdrew his troops from Damascus. The Syrian Franks took over Baniyās and the German Franks returned to

their homeland, which is north of Constantinople and to one side. Thus God delivered the believers from their distress. Abu l-Qasim ibn 'Asakir, in his history of Damascus, says that a certain learned lawyer said that he saw al-Findalawi in a dream and asked him: 'How has God treated you and where are you?' and received the reply, 'God has pardoned me. I am in the garden of Eden (among the blessed) stretched on couches set to face one another.'¹