

Arab Historians of the Crusades

Selected and translated
from the Arabic sources

by

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(SIBT IBN AL-JAUZI, 300)

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... It was harvest time. The Franks went down into the valley and ate much of the crop, and this gave them dysentery. Many died of it, and all the others were ill. The people of Damascus were in great need, but gave alms of what they had, each in proportion to his possessions. The whole population, men, women and children, assembled in the Great Mosque. Uthmān's Qur'ān² was displayed, and the people sprinkled their heads with ashes and wept tears of supplication. And God heard their prayers.

The Franks had with them a great Priest with a long beard, whose teachings they obeyed. On the tenth day of their siege of Damascus he mounted his ass, hung a cross round his neck, took two more in his hand and hung another round the ass's neck. He had the Testaments and the crosses and the Holy Scriptures set before him and assembled the army in his presence; the only ones to remain behind were those guarding the tents. Then he said: 'The Messiah has promised me that today I shall wipe out this city.' At this moment the Muslims opened the city gates and in the name of Islām charged as one man into the face of death. Never, in pagan times or since the

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coming of Islām, was there a day like this. One of the men of the Damascus militia reached the Priest, who was fighting in the front line, struck his head from his body and killed his ass too. As the whole Muslim army bore down upon them the Franks turned and fled. The Muslims killed 10,000, smote their crosses and their cavalry with Greek fire, and pursued the army as far as the tents. Night separated them, and in the morning the Franks were gone and no trace of them remained.

¹ Qur'ān XXXVII, 42-43.

² A precious copy of the Holy Book dating from the time of the first collation of the text under the Caliph 'Uthmān (644-56); it might even be the very copy he was reading when he was murdered.