

*An Arab-Syrian  
Gentleman and Warrior  
in the Period  
of the Crusades*

MEMOIRS OF **USĀMAH IBN-MUNQIDH**

TRANSLATED BY PHILIP K. HITTI



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ARAB-SYRIAN  
GENTLEMAN  
AND WARRIOR

IN  
THE PERIOD OF THE CRUSADES  
MEMOIRS OF USĀMAH IBN-MUNQIDH  
(KITĀB AL-I'TIBĀR)

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

BY

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With a new foreword by Richard W. Bulliet

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the house. As soon as the caliph was seated, the band rushed upon him and killed him. This took place during the night preceding Thursday, the last day of Muḥarram, year 549.<sup>61</sup> Naṣr threw the body in a deep pit under his home. The caliph was accompanied by a black servant named Sa'īd-al-Dawlah, who never left his company. He also was killed.

The next morning 'Abbās proceeded to the palace, as he was wont to do, in order to present his greetings, the day being Thursday. He took his berth in the vizierate assembly room as if he was expecting the arrival of al-Zāfir to receive the usual morning homage. When the time in which al-Zāfir was accustomed to give audience had passed, 'Abbās called the major-domo of the palace and said to him, "What is the matter with our lord that he has not yet taken his seat in order to receive our homage?" The major-domo hesitated, not knowing what to answer. 'Abbās then yelled at him, saying, "Why dost thou not answer me?" "My master," he replied, "we know not where our lord is." 'Abbās then said, "Can the like of our lord be lost? Hasten back and find out what the matter is." The major-domo departed and returned, saying, "We have not found our lord." 'Abbās thereupon said, "The Moslem community cannot stay without a caliph. Go in, therefore, to where the amīrs, his brothers, are, so that one of them may come out and we shall swear allegiance to him as the new caliph." He departed and then returned saying, "The amīrs say to thee, 'We have nothing whatsoever to do in the matter. Al-Zāfir's father has disinherited us all from authority and invested it in al-Zāfir. After him, authority belongs to his son.'" "Bring him out," said 'Abbās, "so that we may swear allegiance to him."

*Al-Zāfir's son proclaimed caliph.* — 'Abbās, having put al-Zāfir to death, proposed now [12] to claim that it was his own brothers who had killed him, and then to punish them for the crime by putting them to death. The son of al-Zāfir, who was still an infant, appeared before the people, carried on the shoulder of one of the prefects. 'Abbās took the boy and carried him in his arms. The people wept. Then 'Abbās, still carrying the child, entered the audience chamber of al-Zāfir, in which were gathered the sons

<sup>61</sup> April 15, 1154.



entered into correspondence with the leading champion of the Moslems, abu-al-Ghārāt Ṭalā'i' ibn-Ruzzīk (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!), appealing to him for aid. He set out from the province <sup>63</sup> over which he ruled and marched towards Cairo. 'Abbās issued his orders, and the fleet was immediately put in repair and provided with the necessary provisions, weapons and coffers. He then ordered his troops to mount and march with him. This took place on Thursday, the tenth of Ṣafar, in the year 49.<sup>64</sup> He ordered his son, Nāṣir-al-Dīn, to remain in Cairo and said to me, "Thou shalt remain with him."

As 'Abbās left his home to meet ibn-Ruzzīk, the army hatched a plot against him and closed the gates of Cairo. The battle raged between them and us in the streets and in the alleys, their cavalry fighting us in the streets, their infantry showering us [13] with arrows and stones from the roofs, and their women and children hurling stones at us from the windows. The fighting between us lasted from early morning till late afternoon, resulting in the victory of 'Abbās. The rebels opened the gates of Cairo and took to flight. 'Abbās chased them into the interior of the land of Egypt, and having killed whom he could of their number, he returned to his home and reestablished himself in his position of issuing orders and prohibitions. He issued orders for the destruction of al-Barqiyyah <sup>65</sup> quarter by fire, because the homes of the soldiers were all grouped in it; but I sought gently to cool him down on this matter by saying to him, "O my lord, in case the fire is started it will consume what thou pleasest and what thou dost not please, and thou wouldst not know how to extinguish it." Thus I succeeded in changing his idea regarding this. I also succeeded in securing from him a guarantee of safety in behalf of al-Amīr al-Mu'taman ibn-abi-Ramādah after he had ordered his execution. I offered an apology for him, and 'Abbās pardoned his guilt.

*'Abbās resolves to depart for Syria.* — The rebellion now subsided, but 'Abbās was greatly alarmed on account of it, because it demonstrated beyond doubt to him the hostility of the army and amīrs, and convinced him that he could no more live among them. He made up his mind to depart from Egypt and go to Syria to

<sup>63</sup> Muniyah bani-Khaṣīb, in Upper Egypt.

<sup>64</sup> That is, 549 = April 26, 1154.

<sup>65</sup> A quarter of Cairo in the eastern part of the city, so called after the regiment from Barqah (Barca).



al-Malik al-‘Ādil Nūr-al-Dīn (may Allah’s mercy rest upon his soul!) in order to implore his assistance. In the meantime, the messengers between those who were in the palaces<sup>66</sup> and ibn-Ruzzīk were going back and forth. With the latter (may Allah’s mercy rest upon his soul!) I was bound by ties of amity and fellowship ever since I entered the land of Egypt. He now dispatched a messenger to me, saying:

‘Abbās will not be able to stay in Egypt; he is rather departing from it to Syria. I shall then rule over the land, and thou knowest what exists between me and thee. Depart not therefore with him; though he, in his need for thee in Syria, shall encourage thee to accompany him. I conjure thee by Allah to join him not, for thou art my partner in everything good that I may attain.

It must have been the devils who whispered all this into the ears of ‘Abbās, or perhaps he suspected it because he was cognizant of the bond of friendship between me and ibn-Ruzzīk.

*‘Abbās prepares for the trip.* — As for the conspiracy which resulted in the departure of ‘Abbās from Egypt and his death at the hands of the Franks, its story is as follows:

When he suspected what he suspected regarding the accord between ibn-Ruzzīk and myself, or when he was informed about it, he called me to his presence and made me take the most solemn oaths, from which there is no escape, that I should depart with him and keep his constant company. Even that did not satisfy him until he sent in the nighttime the chief prefect of his palace, who had permission to enter into his harem apartment, and made him take my wife,<sup>67</sup> my mother and my children into his palace, and said to me, “I shall defray for thee all expenses connected with their travel and shall transport them with the mother of Nāṣir-al-Dīn.” ‘Abbās made ready for the voyage his horses, camels and mules, which numbered two hundred horses and mares led by ropes attached to the hands of footmen, according to the custom of Egypt, two hundred saddle mules, and four hundred camels for carrying the baggage.

‘Abbās was devoted to the study of the stars, and under the influence of a favorable horoscope he had fixed Saturday, the

<sup>66</sup> That is, between the members of the royal family.

<sup>67</sup> *ahl*, which may also mean “wives.”

fifteenth of Rabī' I <sup>68</sup> of that year as the day of departure. I was in his presence when an attendant, called 'Antar <sup>69</sup> al-Kabīr ["the great"], who was in charge of all his affairs, big and small, entered and said:

O my lord, what thing is there to hope for from our departure to Syria? Rather take thy treasure, family, servants and those who [14] wish to follow thee and take us to Alexandria, where we can recruit and muster new troops and then return to fight ibn-Ruzzīk and his partisans. If we win the victory, thou shalt reestablish thyself in thy home and in thy kingdom; but if we fail, we shall return to Alexandria, to a town where we can fortify ourselves and which our enemy will find impossible to reduce.

'Abbās rebuked him and declared his counsel wrong, although it was the right one.

The second day, Friday, 'Abbās summoned me early in the morning; and when I presented myself before him, I said to him, "O my lord, if I am going to be in thy company from dawn till night, when am I then to make the necessary preparation for the voyage?"

"We have with us some messengers from Damascus," said he. "Thou shalt see them off and then go and attend to thy business."

*A conspiracy is hatched.* — Previous to this, he had brought before him certain amīrs from whom he exacted an oath that they would not betray him nor enter into a conspiracy against him. He had also brought before him a group of the chiefs of certain Arab tribes, including Darmā', Zurayq, Judhām, Sinbis, Ṭalḥah, Ja'far and Lawātah,<sup>70</sup> and made them take an oath by the Koran and by divorce, for the same object. But as I was in his company early Friday morning, we were startled to see the people in full armor marching against us, headed by the same amīrs whose oaths he had exacted the day before.

'Abbās immediately ordered that his mounts be all saddled. Accordingly they were saddled and brought to halt before the door of his residence, thus forming a barrier between us and the Egyptians, which prevented the Egyptians from reaching us on account

<sup>68</sup> May 30, 1154.

<sup>69</sup> Or 'Anbar, as his name occurs in Usāmah's *Dīwān* and in *al-Rawḍatayn*, vol. I, p. 98.

<sup>70</sup> This is a Berber and not an Arab tribe.



us alone until we slept, and then they would send a hundred horsemen who would mount and hurl their horses at the sides of our camp, yelling with loud voices. Such of our horses as were startled and ran in their direction they would immediately seize.

*Usāmah wounded.* — One day I found myself separated from my companions, with a white horse under me which was the worst of all my horses. The groom had saddled it without knowing what was going to happen. I had no weapon except my sword. The Arabs made an assault on me, but I found nothing with which to repulse them, my horse was incapable of carrying me outside of their reach, and their lances were already reaching me. I said to myself, "I shall jump down from my horse, draw my sword and repulse them." As I collected myself in order to jump, my horse stumbled and I fell upon stones and rough ground. A piece of skin was cut from my head, and I became so dizzy that I knew not where I was. As I sat there stunned, with my head covered and my sheathed sword thrown off, some of the Arabs stood by me. One of them struck me twice with the sword, saying, "Deliver the money!" But I knew not what he said. They then made off with my horse and my sword.

Seeing me, the Turks hurried back to me. Nāṣir-al-Dīn ibn-'Abbās dispatched to me a horse and a sword. And I started without having even a bandage to dress my wounds. Worthy of admiration is he whose kingdom lasts forever!

We all set out with none of us having a handful of provisions. When I wanted to drink, I would dismount and drink from the palm of my hand, while the night before I started, as I was sitting on a chair in one of the hallways of my home, somebody had offered me sixteen camels for carrying water,<sup>73</sup> with as many as Allah the praiseworthy wanted of water and food bags.

Finding myself unable to transfer my family, I made them go back from Bilbīs to al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ abu-al-Ghārāt Ṭalā'i' ibn-Ruzzīk (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) who treated them with favor, assigned to them a dwelling place and fixed a stipend to pay for their needs.

When the Arabs who were fighting us wanted to desist and go

<sup>73</sup> *jamal rawḍya*. It may, however, read *ḥamlah rawḍya*, which would make it "skin water bags."

back, they came to us demanding a guaranty of safety for the period after our return.<sup>74</sup>

*'Abbās killed by the Franks.* — We continued our march until Sunday, the 23d of Rabī' I,<sup>75</sup> on the morning of which the Franks suddenly encountered us *en masse* at al-Muwayliḥ.<sup>76</sup> They killed 'Abbās and his son Ḥusām-al-Mulk and captured his other son Nāṣir-al-Dīn.<sup>77</sup> They took the treasures of 'Abbās and his harem, and put to death all those [of the troops] who fell into their hands. They also took my brother Najm-al-Dawlah abu-'Abdallāh Muḥammad (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) captive. They finally turned away from us after we had fortified ourselves against them in the mountains.

*Perils at Petra.* — Then we made our way in the territory of the Franks in a state worse than death, with no provisions for the men and no fodder for the horses until we arrived in [16] the mountains of the banu-Fuhayd (may Allah's curse be upon them!) in Wādi-Mūsa.<sup>78</sup> Our climb was effected through narrow rough roads leading into a vast plain and among men who were accursed devils. Any one of us they found isolated from the rest, they put to death.

That region is never free from some Rabī'ah amīrs of the banu-Ṭayy. So I asked, "Who is here now of the banu-Rabī'ah amīrs?" And I was answered, "Manṣūr ibn-Ghidāfl." Now this man was my friend. So I paid someone two dīnārs and said, "Go to Manṣūr and tell him, 'Thy friend, ibn-Munqidh, presents his salaams and asks thee to come to him early in the morning.'" That night we spent ill for fear of them.

When the morning light dawned, they came fully equipped and stationed themselves at the spring and said, "We shall not let you drink our water and let ourselves die of thirst." They said this, in spite of the fact that the spring had sufficient water for both Rabī'ah and Muḍar,<sup>79</sup> and that they had many other springs like it in their lands. Their object was simply to provoke trouble between them and us and then to capture us.

<sup>74</sup> *Al-Rawḍatayn*, vol. I, p. 98.      <sup>75</sup> June 7, 1154.

<sup>76</sup> A station on the route between Egypt and Palestine, lying in the mountain of the same name separating the Sinaitic Peninsula from Arabia Petraea.

<sup>77</sup> His sad fate is described by ibn-Khallikān, *Ta'rikh* (Cairo), vol. II, p. 123 = *Biographical Dictionary*, translated by de Slane (Paris, 1842-71), vol. II, p. 427.

<sup>78</sup> The valley in which Petra is located. This name it still bears.

<sup>79</sup> The two main groups into which the north Arabs are divided by Arab writers. The meaning here is that there was enough water for all the Arabs put together.



As we were in this juncture, lo, Manṣūr ibn-Ghidāfl arrived, howled at them and cursed them. So they dispersed. Then he said, "Mount!" So we rode and descended, following a road even narrower and rougher than the one which I had followed going up. We arrived at the bottom of the valley safe and sound after coming very near losing our lives. I then made a collection of a thousand Egyptian dīnārs for al-Amīr Manṣūr and paid it to him. He then returned.

*Arrival in Damascus.* — We continued our march with those of us who escaped the massacre of the Franks and banu-Fuhayd until we arrived in Damascus on Friday, the fifth of Rabī' I, of the same year.<sup>80</sup> Our safety on such a journey was one of the manifest signs of the almightiness of Allah (powerful and majestic is he!) and of his magnificent protection.

*The story of a rich saddle belonging to Usāmah.* — One of the amazing things that happened to me during that conflict was the following:

Al-Zāfir had once sent to ibn-'Abbās a young graceful ambler of Frankish breed. One day I went to a village which belonged to me, while my son abu-al-Fawāris Murhaf was in the company of ibn-'Abbās. The latter said, "We wish to secure for this ambler an elegant saddle, one of those made in Ghazzah." My son replied, "I know one, my lord, which is above desire." "Where is it?" he asked. "It is in the home of thy servant, my father," replied my son. "He has a Ghazzi saddle which is elegant." Ibn-'Abbās said, "Send someone to fetch it." So he sent a messenger to my home and took the saddle. Ibn-'Abbās admired the saddle and fixed it on the ambler. This saddle was brought with me from Syria on one of the extra horses led by my side. It was quilted, had a black border and was of extraordinarily beautiful effect. It weighed one hundred thirty *mithqāls*.<sup>81</sup>

On my return from my fief, Nāṣir-al-Dīn said to me, "Taking advantage of our friendship, we felt bold to take this saddle from thy house." To this I replied, "O my lord, how happy I am to be of service to thee!"

Now when the Franks made the attack on us at al-Muwayliḥ,

<sup>80</sup> June 19, 1154.

<sup>81</sup> A *mithqāl* is ordinarily three to four grams. This would make the saddle entirely too light.

I had with me five of my mamelukes riding on camels, the Arabs having taken their horses. When the Franks attacked and defeated us, some horses were left riderless and my attendants dismounted from [17] their camels, intercepted the course of the horses and took of them such as they required to ride. And, behold, on one of the horses which they took was that same saddle of gold which ibn-'Abbās had appropriated for himself.

Among those who survived from our party were Ḥusām-al-Mulk, a cousin of 'Abbās, and a brother <sup>82</sup> of 'Abbās ibn-al-'Ādil.<sup>83</sup> Ḥusām-al-Mulk, who had heard the story of the saddle, said in my hearing, "Everything that this poor fellow (referring to ibn-'Abbās) possessed has been pillaged, some by the Franks and some by his own companions." I said to him, "Perhaps thou art alluding to the saddle of gold." "Yes," said he. So I ordered that the saddle be brought and said to him, "Read what is on it. Is it 'Abbās' name and his son's, or is it my name? And who else in the days of al-Ḥāfiẓ could ride in Egypt on a gold saddle but I?" My name was written in black around the border of the saddle, the center of which was quilted. Having read what was on it, he apologized and kept his silence.

*The unheeded example of al-Afdal.* — Had it not been for the unavoidable execution of the divine will on 'Abbās and his son and for the consequences of injustice and ingratitude, 'Abbās would certainly have learned a lesson from what had happened before him to al-Afdal Riḍwān ibn-al-Walakhshi (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!). The latter was a vizier when the troops, at the instigation of al-Ḥāfiẓ, rose against him just as they rose against 'Abbās, and he departed from Egypt for Syria. His home and his harem were pillaged to such an extent that a man known by the name of al-Qā'id <sup>84</sup> Muqbil saw with the Sūdānese a maid whom he bought from them and sent to his own home. Muqbil had a virtuous wife who took the maid up to a chamber in the uppermost part of the house. There she heard the maid say, "May Allah enable us to triumph over those who have dealt so unjustly with us and abjured our benefactions to them!" So she asked her, "Who art thou?" And the maid replied, "I am Qaṭr-al-Nada,<sup>85</sup> daughter of

<sup>82</sup> In fact, a half brother.

<sup>83</sup> This al-'Ādil was the vizier ibn-al-Sallār.

<sup>84</sup> Commander of a hundred, al-Ṭabari, *Ta'riḥh* (Leyden, 1883-84), vol. III, p. 1799.

<sup>85</sup> "Dewdrop."



Riḍwān." The wife immediately sent word to her husband, al-Qā'id Muqbil, who was on duty at the door of the [royal] palace, made him come home and acquainted him with the condition of the young girl. So he wrote a report to al-Ḥāfiẓ and acquainted him with the facts. Al-Ḥāfiẓ dispatched certain servants to the palace, who took her from the Muqbil's home and brought her back to the palace.

*Usāmah on a mission to al-Afḍal.* — After that, Riḍwān arrived in Ṣalkhad<sup>86</sup> where was Amīr-al-Dawlah Ṭughdakīn<sup>87</sup> Atābek (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!). The latter received Riḍwān with special honor, offered him a dwelling place and put his services at his disposal. At this time, the Malik-al-Umarā'<sup>88</sup> Atābek Zanki ibn-Āqsunqur (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) was camping outside of Ba'labakk besieging it. So he communicated with Riḍwān and it was agreed that the latter would join him. Riḍwān was a perfect man, generous, courageous, good in writing and learned; the troops felt special inclination toward him on account of his generosity. Therefore al-Amīr Mu'in-al-Dīn<sup>89</sup> (may Allah's favor be upon him!) said to me, "If this man should join the atābek, a great deal of disadvantage will ensue to us on account of him." "What dost thou propose, then?" asked I. "Thou shalt go to him," said he, "and perhaps thou shalt succeed in changing his mind regarding joining the atābek. Let him go to Damascus. Thou shalt use in carrying out this project thine own judgment and discretion."

Accordingly I made my way to Riḍwān in Ṣalkhad, where I met with him and with his brother, al-Awḥad, and held an interview with them. Al-Afḍal Riḍwān said to me, "This matter has now passed out of my hand. I have already given my promise to [18] this sultan that I shall join him. The fulfillment of my promise is now binding upon me." "May Allah have nothing but good awaiting thee!" said I. "As for me, I shall return to my master, for I know that he can never do without me; but he counted on me to disclose to thee what is in my heart." "Disclose it!" said he.

<sup>86</sup> One of the towns still standing in Ḥawrān.

<sup>87</sup> This is probably a scribal error for "Kumushtakīn," since Ṭughdakīn was already dead by this time.

<sup>88</sup> "The king of princes," a title of 'Imād-al-Dīn Zanki.

<sup>89</sup> Mu'in-al-Dīn Anar, vizier of Damascus.

set out, so that I may meet thee midway, and thus enter Damascus in thy company." This was agreed upon. So I took leave of him and departed.

*Riḍwān imprisoned in Egypt.* — Amīn-al-Dawlah, on his part, was anxious that Riḍwān should return to Egypt, in view of the promises he had made in his behalf and the ambitions he had aroused in him. So he mustered the men whom he could and sent them out with him after I had left him. As soon as Riḍwān had crossed the frontiers of Egypt,<sup>92</sup> the Turkish troops who were with him betrayed him and pillaged his baggage. He himself took refuge in one of the Arab camps and opened correspondence with al-Ḥāfiẓ and asked him for a safe-conduct. He entered Cairo,<sup>93</sup> and the moment he arrived there both he and his son, on the orders of al-Ḥāfiẓ, were put in prison.

When I returned to Cairo<sup>94</sup> it happened that he was still in prison in a building on one side of the palace. By means of an iron nail he later dug a hole fourteen cubits [*dhirā'*] long and escaped the night preceding Thursday. He had among the amīrs a relative who was cognizant of his plans and who waited for him by the palace, together with a protégé of his belonging to the Lawātah tribe. The three walked to the Nile and crossed over into al-Jīzah.<sup>95</sup> Cairo was all in commotion [19] on account of his flight. The second morning found him in a belvedere in al-Jīzah; people rallied around him while the Egyptian army was getting ready for the combat against him. Early in the morning of Friday he recrossed into Cairo while the Egyptian army under the leadership of Qaymāz<sup>96</sup> Ṣāhib-al-Bāb,<sup>97</sup> clad in their coats of mail, were all ready for the encounter. As soon as Riḍwān met them, he put them to flight and entered Cairo.

*Riḍwān killed by one of his own men.* — Riding on my horse, with my companions I had started towards the palace door before Riḍwān had made his entrance into the city. But I found the doors of the palace closed, with nobody standing by. So I turned back

<sup>92</sup> September, 1139.

<sup>93</sup> *miṣr*, which may as well mean Egypt.

<sup>94</sup> November, 1144.

<sup>95</sup> Pronounced "al-Gīzah" by the modern Egyptians; ancient Memphis.

<sup>96</sup> Tāj-al-Mulūk Qaymāz was his full name.

<sup>97</sup> "Master of the gate," a title given to an under-vizier. Qalqashandi, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 483.



and entered my own home. Riḍwān established himself in al-Aqmar Mosque.<sup>98</sup>

The amīrs came to him *en masse* bringing to him food and money. In the meantime, al-Ḥāfiẓ had assembled a group of Sūdānese in his palace, who drank to the point of intoxication. He then opened for them the door of the palace and they rushed in seeking Riḍwān. When the screams were heard, all the amīrs who were with Riḍwān mounted their horses and dispersed. In his turn, Riḍwān went out of the mosque only to find that his horse had been taken away by the groom, who had disappeared.

A young man of the bodyguard saw Riḍwān standing by the door of the mosque and said to him, "O my lord, dost thou not want to ride my horse?" "Surely," replied Riḍwān. So the young man came at a gallop towards him with his sword in his hand. He then moved his arm as though he were bending to dismount and struck him with the sword. Riḍwān fell to the ground. The Sūdānese rushed and put him to death. The people of Egypt parceled out his flesh among them and ate it in order to acquire bravery.

His case was an object lesson, for learning by example,<sup>99</sup> and a warning — but the divine will must be executed.

*Bloodletting saves the life of a wounded soldier.* — On that battle day, one of our Syrian comrades received a number of wounds. His brother came to me and said, "My brother is in desperate plight. He has received so many wounds from swords and other weapons, and he is now unconscious and does not come to his senses." "Go back," said I, "and bleed him." He replied, "He has already lost twenty rotls<sup>100</sup> of blood!" "Go back," I repeated, "and bleed him! I have had more experience with wounds than thou. There is no other remedy for him but bloodletting." He went away, absented himself for two hours and then returned with his face showing signs of gratification, and said, "I have bled him and he regained his senses, sat up, ate and drank. All ill has departed from him." "Praise be to Allah!" said I. "Had I not tried this on my own self a number of times, I would not have prescribed it to thee."

<sup>98</sup> Built by the Fāṭimite Caliph al-Āmir in 1125.

<sup>99</sup> *mu'tabar*, related to *i'tibār*, which is the name of this book.

<sup>100</sup> An Oriental way of saying that he had already lost a great deal of blood. The Egyptian rotl today is equal to one pound avoirdupois.

4. USĀMAH'S SECOND SOJOURN IN DAMASCUS  
1154-1164 A.D.

After that I attached myself to the service of al-Malik al-‘Ādil Nūr-al-Dīn (may Allah’s mercy rest upon his soul!). He entered into correspondence with al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ<sup>1</sup> with a view to letting my wife and children, who had lingered in Egypt and had been treated with benevolence, start on their journey. Al-Ṣāliḥ sent back the messenger and gave as excuse the fact that he feared for their safety from the Franks. He also wrote to me, saying:

Thou shalt return to Egypt, and thou knowest well what is between me and thee. If thou dost feel that the personnel of the palace cherish ill feeling towards thee, then proceed to Mecca, where I shall deliver to thee a communication granting thee the governorship of the city of Uswān.<sup>2</sup> I shall, moreover, reënforce thee with whatever is necessary for thee to wage successful warfare against the Abyssinians (Uswān being one of the border fortifications of the Moslem territory). I shall then let go to thee thy wives and thy children.

I consulted al-Malik al-‘Ādil and sought his opinion and he said:

O Usāmah,<sup>3</sup> thou wert so glad to get rid of Egypt with its rebellions that thou didst hardly believe the day when it came, and now thou wantest to return to it! Life is too short for that. I [20] shall communicate with the king of the Franks<sup>4</sup> in order to secure a safe-conduct for thy family, and I shall then send someone to bring them hither.

Accordingly Nūr-al-Dīn (may Allah’s mercy rest upon his soul!) dispatched a messenger and secured the safe-conduct of the king, with the cross on it,<sup>5</sup> good for both land and sea.

*Usāmah’s family pillaged by Franks on way from Egypt.* — This safe-conduct I sent with one of my servants, who carried also a letter from al-Malik al-‘Ādil and my letter to al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ. Al-Ṣāliḥ transported my family on one of his private boats to

<sup>1</sup> Ibn-Ruzzik.

<sup>2</sup> Present day Aṣwān, in Upper Egypt.

<sup>3</sup> *fulān*, used in place of any proper noun.

<sup>4</sup> King Baldwin III of Jerusalem (1142-62).

<sup>5</sup> *waṣalibahu*, which may be read *waṣṣalanīhi* = “which was delivered to me.”



Dimyāṭ, provided them with all the money and provisions they needed and gave them the proper recommendation. From Dimyāṭ they sailed in a Frankish vessel. As they approached 'Akka [Acre] where the king (may Allah's mercy not rest upon his soul!) was, he sent, in a small boat, a few men who broke the vessel with their axes under the very eyes of my people. The king mounted his horse, stood by the coast and pillaged everything that was there.

One of my retainers came swimming to the king, taking the safe-conduct with him, and said, "O my lord the king, is this not thy safe-conduct?" "Sure enough," replied the king. "But this is the usage for the Moslems. Whenever one of their vessels is wrecked near a town, the people of that town pillage it." "Art thou going, then, to take us captive?" inquired my retainer. "No," replied the king. The king (may Allah's curse be upon him!) then put them in a house, had the women searched and took everything they all possessed. In the vessel were jewelry, which had been intrusted to the women, clothes, gems, swords, weapons and gold and silver amounting to about thirty thousand dīnārs. The king took it all. He then sent my people five hundred dīnārs and said, "This will see you home," though they were no less than fifty persons, men and women.

At that time I was in the company of al-Malik al-'Ādil in the land of King Mas'ūd<sup>6</sup> in Ra'bān and Kaysūn. The safety of my children, my brother's children, and our harem made the loss of money which we suffered a comparatively easy matter to endure — with the exception of the books, which were four thousand volumes, all of the most valuable kind. Their loss has left a heartsore that will stay with me to the last day of my life.

Verily these are calamities which shake mountains and annihilate riches! But may Allah (worthy of admiration is he!) recompense [us] with his mercy and bring things to a good end by his kindness and forgiveness! Those were great happenings which I have experienced in addition to the calamities with which I was afflicted and out of which my person came safe, until the hour of fate should strike, but they left me ruined in my fortune.

Between those happenings were intervals in which I took part in innumerable battles against unbelievers as well as Moslems.

<sup>6</sup> Sultan of Iconium.

And now I shall proceed to recount what my memory has retained of the marvels I witnessed and experienced in warfare; for oblivion is not to be considered a cause for blame in the case of one by whom has passed a long series of years. Oblivion is rather a heritage of the children of Adam from their first father (may Allah's blessing and peace be upon him!).



## 5. BATTLES AGAINST FRANKS AND MOSLEMS

*The cavalier's sense of honor: Jum'ah avenges his honor.* — Among those marvels is what I witnessed of the horsemen's sense of honor and their intrepidity in facing dangers as illustrated in the following:

There was an encounter between us and Shihāb-al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn-Qarāja, the lord of Ḥamāh at that time.<sup>1</sup> The contest between us [21] continued without respite, the detachments being always ready and the swift riders<sup>2</sup> ever on the chase. There came to me one of our most distinguished soldiers and horsemen, named Jum'ah of the banu-Numayr, in tears. I asked him, "What is the matter with thee, O abu-Maḥmūd? Is this the time for crying?" "I have been pierced by a lance," he replied, "from the hand of Sarhank<sup>3</sup> ibn-abi-Manṣūr." "And suppose thou didst receive a wound from Sarhank," I asked, "what of it?" "Nothing at all," he replied, "except the idea that one like Sarhank should stab me! By Allah, death would have been easier for me than to have been wounded by him! But he took me by surprise and unaware." I then began to calm him and make matters look easy for him; but he turned the head of his horse and started back. "Where goest thou, O abu-Maḥmūd?" I asked. "To Sarhank," he replied. "By Allah, I shall either smite him or die in the attempt!" He absented himself for a short period, while I was busy with those [of the enemy] who were facing me. Then he came back laughing. I asked him, "What hast thou done?" And he replied, "I did stab him, by Allah! And had I not stabbed him, my soul would have surely departed from me."<sup>4</sup> What he did was to make an attack upon him while the latter was in the midst of his comrades, smite him and come right back.

<sup>1</sup> About 1123.

<sup>2</sup> *mutasarri'ah*, which may be taken to mean "champion knights of duel," "leaders."

<sup>3</sup> Persian *sar-hang* = "combatant," "champion," "chief."

<sup>4</sup> He means to say that he would have died of regret for having failed to wound his adversary.

The following verses were composed as if with reference to Sarhank and Jum'ah:

Hast thou considered, by Allah, how grand is the deed of one  
Thirsty for vengeance, unforgetful of wrong!  
Thou hast awakened him, then thou hast gone to sleep thyself; but he  
did not sleep,  
On account of his rage against thee. And how can one so vigilant  
slumber?  
If the vicissitudes of time shall yield him a chance — and perhaps they  
will  
Some day — then will he mete out to thee an overflowing measure.

This Sarhank was one of the most noteworthy horsemen, a chief among the Kurds. But he was a young man, while Jum'ah was middle-aged, having the distinction of seniority of age as well as experience in acts of courage.

*A duel between two Moslem champions.* — In connection with this case of Sarhank I am reminded of what Mālik ibn-al-Ḥārith al-Ashtar (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) did with abu-Musaykah al-Iyādi. It happened when the Arabs apostatized from Islam in the days of abu-Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (may Allah's high favor rest upon him!) and Allah (worthy of admiration is he!) made him resolve to fight them. He mustered his troops and set them against the apostate Arabs. Abu-Musaykah al-Iyādi was on the side of banu-Ḥanīfah, who were the most powerful of the Arabs, while Mālik al-Ashtar was at the head of the army of abu-Bakr. As the armies stood in battle array, Mālik stepped forward between the two ranks and shouted, "O abu-Musaykah!" In response, the latter stepped forward. Mālik then said to him, "Woe unto thee, O abu-Musaykah! After thy Islam and thy being one of the readers of the Koran, thou hast gone back to unbelief!" Abu-Musaykah replied, "Away from me, O Mālik! Moslems forbid the use of wine, and I cannot do without it." Mālik said, "I challenge thee to a duel with me." "I accept," replied abu-Musaykah. So the two had an encounter with the lances, and another encounter with the swords, in the course of which abu-Musaykah struck Mālik, split his head and inverted his eyelids. [22] On account of that blow, he was nicknamed al-Ashtar.<sup>5</sup> Mālik then retreated to his tent, hugging the neck of his horse. A group

<sup>5</sup> The man with the inverted eyelids.



of his relatives and friends gathered around him crying. So he said to one of them, "Put thy hand in my mouth." The man put his finger inside of Mālik's mouth and the latter bit it. The man twisted with pain. "Well," said Mālik, "nothing wrong with your man. For it is said that as long as the teeth are safe the head is safe. Stuff it (referring to the wound) with fine flour and bandage it with a turban." As soon as they had it stuffed and bandaged, he said, "Fetch my mare." "Whereto?" asked they. "To abu-Musaykah," he replied. Presently he issued between the two ranks and shouted, "O abu-Musaykah!" Abu-Musaykah sallied forth towards him like an arrow. Mālik struck him with the sword on his shoulder, which he split as far down as the saddle, and killed him. Mālik returned to his camp, where he remained forty days unable to move. After that he recovered and was healed from his wound.

*Fāris's miraculous escape from a deadly blow.* — Another illustration of the recovery of a stabbed person after it was thought that he was sure to die is the following case which I witnessed:

We had an encounter with the advance cavalry of Shihāb-al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn-Qarāja,<sup>6</sup> who had invaded our territory and laid for us an ambush. After our forces and his had stood in battle array, our cavalry disbanded. One of our horsemen, named 'Ali ibn-Salām, a Numayrite, came to me and said, "Our horsemen have spread out. If the enemy should now attack them, they will annihilate them." I said to him, "Hold back from me my brothers and cousins so that I may bring those horsemen back." So he shouted, "O amīrs, let him bring back our men and follow him not. Otherwise the enemy will attack them and dislodge them." "Let him go," they replied. Accordingly I set out, trotting my horse until I brought them back, the enemy having kept away from them in order to draw them away as far as possible and then be able to overpower them. Seeing that I was bringing them back, the enemy attacked us; and those of them who lay in ambush came out, as I was at some distance from my comrades. I immediately turned back to oppose them, desiring thereby to defend the rear of my comrades, and found that my cousin, Layth-al-Dawlah Yahya (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!), had already turned around

<sup>6</sup> Lord of Ḥamāh.

from the rear of my comrades on the south side of the road while I was on the north side of it. So we both made a joint assault on them.

One of their horsemen, Fāris ibn-Zimām by name, a well-known Arab horseman, hurriedly passed us desiring to exercise his lance on our comrades. My cousin got to him before I did and smote him with his lance. Both he and his horse fell. The lance broke with such a crack that I and the others could hear it.

My father (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) had previous to this sent a messenger to Shihāb-al-Dīn who brought the messenger along with him when he set out to fight against us. Now when Fāris ibn-Zimām was stabbed and Shihāb-al-Dīn failed in his plan against us, he sent back that same messenger from where he was, carrying a reply to the message he had brought him, and returned to Ḥamāh.

I asked the messenger, "Did Fāris ibn-Zimām die?" "No," he replied, "By Allah, there isn't even a wound in him." To this he added:

Layth-al-Dawlah smote him with the lance, while I was looking at him. He threw him and his horse down. I myself heard the crack of the lance when it broke. When Layth-al-Dawlah enveloped him from the left, Fāris turned his right side, holding in his hand his lance, upon which his horse fell, [23] while the lance fell under it into a ditch and broke. Layth-al-Dawlah turned behind his adversary to smite him with the lance, but the lance fell from his hand. What thou hast heard therefore was the crack of the lance of Fāris ibn-Zimām. As for the lance of Layth-al-Dawlah, it was brought before Shihāb-al-Dīn in my presence, and it was intact — not a break in it. And Fāris had not the least wound on him. I was amazed at his safety. That thrust was just as effective as the "stab of a consummate master of combat" mentioned by 'Antar:

The horses and the horsemen know that I have  
Dispersed their assembly with the stab of a consummate master.

The whole army, including those who lay in ambush, returned without accomplishing what they had started out to do.

The verse quoted above is from a poem by 'Antarah ibn-Shaddād, in which he says:

Verily I am a man of whom one part belongs to the noble lineage of 'Abs,  
But the other part I protect with my own sword.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 'Antarah's mother was a slave; so what he means to say here is that he is on one side of noble Arab descent but on the other self-made.



At the time in which the forces halt their advance and look askance,  
I am found better than he who takes pride in his paternal and maternal  
uncles.

If there was a way of representing death, it should certainly be presented  
In my form — when they find themselves in a tight place.

The horses and the horsemen know that I have

Dispersed their assembly with the stab of a consummate master.

And as they challenged me to fight on horseback,

I was the first to enter the arena.

For why should I ride a horse unless I am going to fight on its back?

*Usāmah's first experience in warfare against the Franks.* —  
Something similar to that happened to me during an attack on  
Afāmiyah.<sup>8</sup> It happened that Najm-al-Dīn Īlghāzi<sup>9</sup> ibn-Urtuq  
(may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) defeated the Franks at  
al-Balāṭ,<sup>10</sup> on Friday, the fifth of Jumāda I, in the year 513,<sup>11</sup> and  
annihilated them. He killed Roger [*rūjār*], the lord of Antioch,  
and all his cavalry. Thereupon my paternal uncle, 'Izz-al-Dīn  
abu-al-'Asākir Sulṭān (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!),  
set out to join Najm-al-Dīn, while my father (may Allah's mercy  
rest upon his soul!) remained behind in the Castle of Shayzar.  
My uncle had instructed my father to send me against Afāmiyah  
at the head of the men who were with me in Shayzar, and to call  
out the people, together with the Arabs,<sup>12</sup> for the pillage of the crops  
of Afāmiyah. A great number of the Arabs had recently joined us.

A few days after the departure of my uncle, the public announcer  
called us to arms, and I started at the head of a small band, hardly  
amounting to twenty horsemen, with full conviction that Afāmiyah  
had no cavalry in it. Accompanying me was a great body of pil-  
lagers and Bedouins. As soon as we arrived in the Valley of Bohe-  
mond,<sup>13</sup> and while the pillagers and the Arabs were scattered all  
over the planted fields, a large army of the Franks set out against  
us. They had been reinforced that very night by sixty horsemen

<sup>8</sup> Apamea, north of Shayzar, represented today by Qal'ah-al-Muḍīq.

<sup>9</sup> "ibn-al-Ghāzi" in the manuscript. He was the amīr of Māridīn.

<sup>10</sup> A narrow gorge between two mountains north of al-Athārib. Kamāl-al-Dīn,  
*Zubdah*, in *Recueil: historiens orientaux*, vol. III, p. 617; R. Röhrich, *Beiträge zur  
Geschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 1874), vol. I, p. 255.

<sup>11</sup> August 14, 1119. This is the date of the second battle of Dānīth, with which  
this battle was evidently confused by the author. The battle of al-Balāṭ, in which  
Roger was killed, took place June 28.

<sup>12</sup> The reference is to nomadic Arabs — Bedouins.

<sup>13</sup> *wādi-abu-al-maymūn*.

and sixty footmen. They repulsed us from the valley, and we retreated before them until we joined those of our number who were already in the fields, pillaging them. Seeing us, the Franks raised a violent uproar. Death seemed an easy thing to me in comparison with the loss of that crowd [24] in my charge. So I turned against a horseman in their vanguard, who had taken off his coat of mail in order to be light enough to pass before us, and thrust my lance into his chest. He instantly flew off his saddle, dead. I then faced their horsemen as they followed, and they all took to flight. Though a tyro in warfare, and having never before that day taken part in a battle, I, with a mare under me as swift as a bird, went on, now pursuing them and plying them with my lance, now taking cover from them.

In the rear guard of the Franks was a cavalier on a black horse, large as a camel, wearing a coat of mail and the full armor of war. I was afraid of this horseman, lest he should be drawing me further ahead in order to get an opportunity to turn back and attack me. All of a sudden I saw him spur his horse, and as the horse began to wave its tail, I knew that it was already exhausted. So I rushed on the horseman and smote him with my lance, which pierced him through and projected about a cubit in front of him. The lightness of my body, the force of the thrust and the swiftness of my horse made me lose my seat on the saddle. Moving backward a little, I pulled out my lance, fully assuming that I had killed him. I then assembled my comrades and found them all safe and sound.

In my company was a young mameluke holding the halter of an extra black mare which belonged to me. Under him was a good female riding mule with a saddle the tassels of which were silver. The mameluke dismounted from the mule, left it by itself and jumped on the back of the mare, which flew with him towards Shayzar.

On my return to my comrades, who had caught the mule, I asked about that boy. They said, "He's gone." I immediately knew that he would reach Shayzar and cause anxiety to my father (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!). I therefore called one of the soldiers and said to him, "Hasten to Shayzar and inform my father of what has happened."

In the meantime the boy had arrived and my father had him



lance should hold his lance as tightly as possible with his hand and under his arm, close to his side, and should let his horse run and effect the required thrust; for if he should move his hand while holding the lance or stretch out his arm with the lance, then his thrust would have no effect whatsoever and would result in no harm.

*A Moslem cavalier survives a Frankish thrust which cuts his heart vein.* — I once witnessed in an encounter between us and the Franks one of our cavaliers, named Badi ibn-Talil al-Qushayri, who was one of our brave men, receive in his chest, while clothed with only two pieces of garment, a lance thrust from a Frankish knight. The lance cut the vein in his chest and issued from his side. He turned back right away, but we never thought he would make his home alive. But as Allah (worthy of admiration is he!) had predestined, he survived and his wound was healed. But for one year after that, he could not sit up in case he was lying on his back unless somebody held him by the shoulders and helped him. At last what he suffered from entirely disappeared and he reverted to his old ways of living and riding. My only comment is: How mysterious are the works of him whose will is always executed among his creatures! He giveth life and he causeth death, but he is living and dieth not. In his hand is all good, and he is over all things potent.<sup>15</sup>

*An artisan dies from a needle prick.* — We had once with us an artisan, 'Attāb by name, who was one of the most corpulent and tall of men. He entered his home one day, and as he was sitting down he leaned on his hand against a robe which happened to be near him and in which there was a needle. The needle went through the palm of his hand and he died because of it. And, by Allah, as he moaned in the lower town [of Shayzar], his moan could be heard from the citadel on account of the bulk of his body and the volume of his voice. This man dies of a needle, whereas al-Qushayri is pierced with a lance which penetrates through his chest and issues out of his side and yet suffers no harm!

*The exploits of al-Zamarrakal, the brigand.* — In a certain year,<sup>16</sup> the lord of Antioch<sup>17</sup> (may Allah's curse be upon him!) came to attack us with his cavalry, infantry and tents. Mounting on our

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Koran III : 25.

<sup>16</sup> About 1122.

<sup>17</sup> Probably Baldwin II.

*image  
not  
available*



*image  
not  
available*

