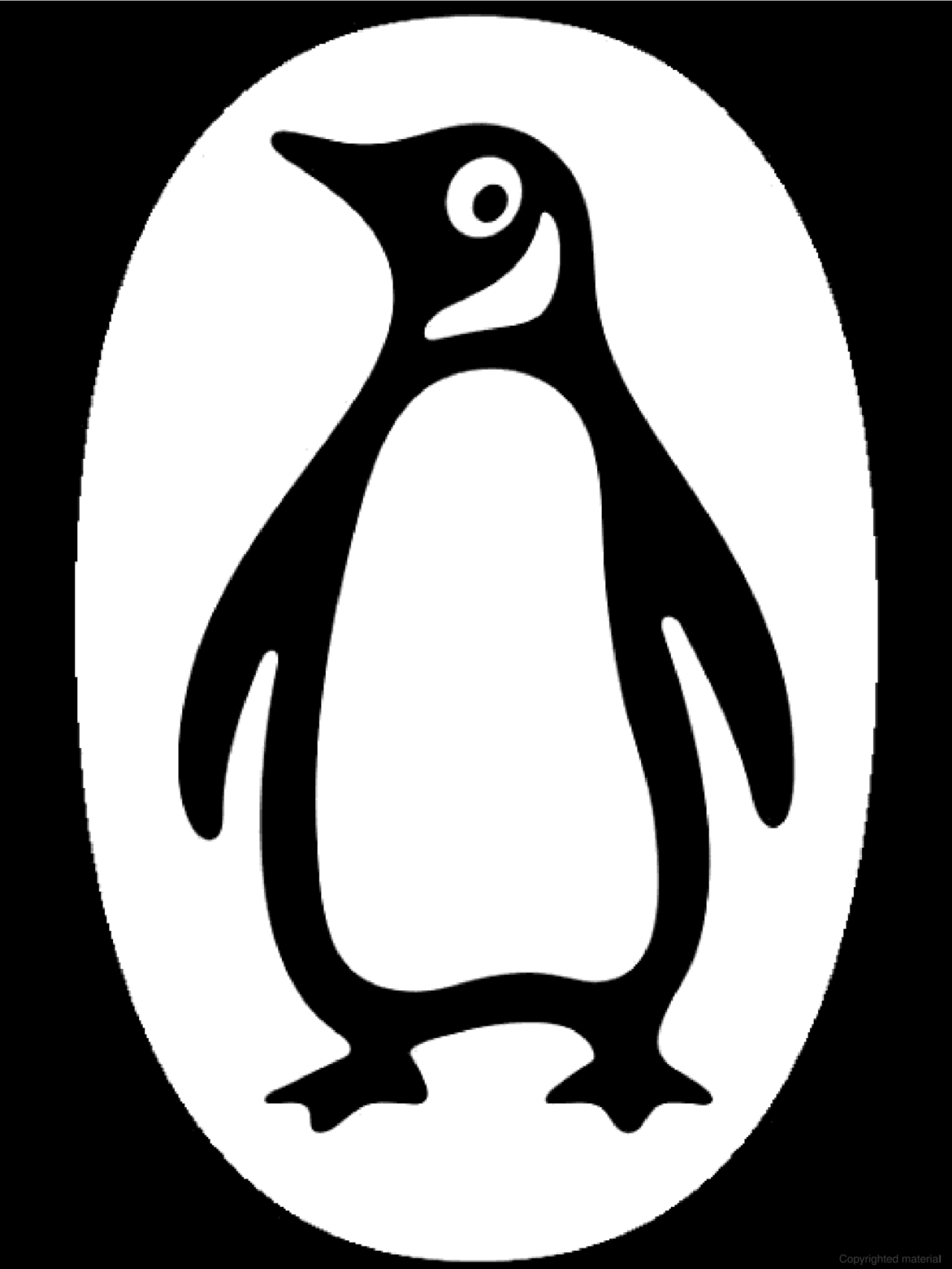

USAMA IBN MUNQIDH

# The Book of Contemplation

*Islam and the Crusades*

*Translated with an Introduction and Notes by*

PAUL M. COBB

PENGUIN BOOKS

FORLMH

*Concordiam in populo*

PENGUIN CLASSICS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published in Penguin Classics 2008
1

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

Much of this book was written with the support of an utterly undeserved Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. The History department of the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Notre Dame rather too gleefully provided me with the semesters off to enjoy the honour, and Notre Dame's Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts provided the administrative help in dealing with it all.

Many individuals had some role to play in the final form of this book, though I can name only a few of them here. Any faults that remain are of course entirely my own. Niall Christie, Don-John Dugas, Anne Lester and John Meloy were valued sounding-boards for some of my editorial decisions at an early stage. Andrew Dimock and Megan Reid read more mature and lengthy versions of the text, and their comments were correspondingly crucial. Drs Meloy and Reid in particular gave generously of their time to help me hunt down and bag superfluities of prose. Many others provided key moments of clarity and assistance, including Remie Constable, Bruce Craig, Michael Driscoll, Steve Humphreys, Hilary Kilpatrick, Yaacov Lev, Alexander Martin, Megan Montague, Carl Petry, Nasser Rabbat, Warren Schultz, Daniella Talmon-Heller and Cristina Tonghini. My parents and siblings provided the usual chorus of warm approval. The people at Penguin made the writing of the book a true pleasure, especially

Charlene Davis at the very beginning and Mariateresa Boffo, Elisabeth Merriman and Monica Schmoller at the very end.

I also thank the publisher Taylor and Francis for granting me permission to print slightly amended versions of translations that originally appeared in two articles by me: 'Usama ibn Munqidh's *Book of the Staff (Kitab al-'Asa):* Autobiographical and Historical Excerpts', *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 17 (2005), pp. 109–23, and 'Usama ibn Munqidh's *Kernels of Refinement (Lubab al-Adab):* Autobiographical and Historical Excerpts', *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 18 (2006), pp. 67–78. For further details see www.informaworld.com. The family tree of the Banu Munqidh included in this book is based upon that found in André Miquel's translation, *Des Enseignements de la Vie* (Paris, 1983), pp. 78–9, with some emendations.

A few people gave me special gifts. David Nicolle kept me honest about my translations of medieval military technical terms and helped me crack the vexing mystery of the 'chisel-headed' arrow. Qasim al-Samarrai, in a gesture that Usama would have found *min al-'aja'ib,* sent me from Leiden his personal copy of his hard-to-find edition of the *Kitab al-I'tibar* so that I might make my own copy for use in this translation. Ella Almagor greatly helped this translation through gentle correction over the years and sheer inspiration as we spent a memorable Jerusalem evening swapping stories like a couple of old Munqidhites. Her own labour of love, a Hebrew translation of Usama's work, is eagerly expected. Finally, L. M. Harteker waited with beauty, wit and patience while I finally found the good sense to dedicate a book to her.

# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| Cobb | Paul M. Cobb, *Usama ibn Munqidh: Warrior – Poet of the Age of Crusades* (Oxford: One-world, 2005). |
| Dussaud | René Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927). |
| *El2* | *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954–2001). |
| Gibb | H. A. R. Gibb, book review of Philip K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 6 (1943), pp. 1003–11 |
| Hitti | Usama ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-I'tibar,* ed. Philip K. Hitti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930). |
| Hitti, *Memoirs* | Philip K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usama Ibn Munqidh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929). |
| *Kamil* | Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil,* ed. C. J. Tornberg (Beirut: Dar Sadir reprint, 1966), 14 vols. |
| *Lubab* | Usama ibn Munqidh, *Lubab al-Adab* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1980). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Miquel | André Miquel, *Des Enseignements de la Vie: Souvenirs d'un gentilhomme syrien du temps des Croisades* (Paris: Collection Orientale de l'Imprimerie Nationale, 1983). |
| Rotter | Gernor Rotter, *Ein Leben im Kampf gegen Kreutzritterheere* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann, 1978). |
| Samarrai | Usama ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-I'tibar,* ed. Qasim al-Samarra'i (Riyadh: Dar al-Asala, 1987). |
| *Siyar* | Shams al-Din al-Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam al-nubala',* ed. Bashshar Ma'ruf, 28 vols. (Beirut: Mu'asasat al-Risala, 1996). |
| Smith | G. Rex Smith, 'A New Translation of Certain Passages of the Hunting Section of Usama ibn Munqidh's *I'tibar'*, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 26 (1981), pp.235–55. |
| *Ta'rikh* | Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Ta'rikh Dimashq,* ed. Suhayl Zakkar (Damascus: Dar Hassan, 1983) |
| *Vie* | Hartwig Derenbourg, *Ousâma ibn Mounkidh: Un Émir syrien au premier siècle des Croisades (1095–1188). Tome Premier: Vie d'Oustâma* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889). |

# Chronology of Events in the Life of Usama ibn Munqidh

1095 *4 July* Usama born at Shayzar; *27 November* Pope Urban II calls for the First Crusade at Clermont.

1098 Usama's uncle Nasr dies; his uncle Sultan rules as lord of Shayzar; *9 March* County of Edessa founded by Baldwin of Boulogne; *3 June* Antioch taken by First Crusade.

*1099 15 July* Jerusalem taken by First Crusade.

1101 Baldwin I, King of Jerusalem; Bohemund I of Antioch taken prisoner; Tancred regent at Antioch.

1103–5 Second reign of Bohemund at Antioch; he then departs for Europe.

1104 Muslim offensive against the Franks in northern Syria; *May* Franks capture Acre.

1105–8 Second regency of Tancred at Antioch.

1105 Frankish counter-offensive in northern Syria led by Tancred.

1108–12 Tancred, Prince of Antioch.

*1109 12 July* Franks capture Tripoli.

*1110 May* Edessa besieged by Mawdud of Mosul; *5 December* Baldwin I captures Sidon.

*1112 12 December* death of Tancred; Roger of Salerno succeeds him at Antioch.

*1113 June* failed Frankish attempt on Damascus.

*1114 March* Nizari assault on Shayzar.

1115 *June* Frankish offensive in northern Syria thwarted; *15 September* Frankish victory at Danith; Muslim counter-offensive led by Bursuq of Hamadhan thwarted.

1118 Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem.

*1119 28 June* Muslim victory under Il-Ghazi at al-Balat, 'The Field of Blood'; death of Roger of Salerno; Baldwin II of Jerusalem rules as regent in Antioch; *14 August* victory of Baldwin II over Il-Ghazi at Danith; *September* Joscelin I Count of Edessa.

1119/20 Templars founded.

1123 Baldwin II taken captive in Aleppo.

*1124 19 June* Baldwin II a hostage at Shayzar; *7 July* Franks capture Tyre; *30 August* Baldwin II is released.

*1126 October* Bohemund II arrives from Italy and takes over as Prince of Antioch.

*1127 September* Zangi made atabeg of Mosul.

*1128 January* Zangi captures Aleppo.

*1129 November* failed Damascus Crusade of Baldwin II.

*1130 February* Bohemund II killed in Cilicia; Baldwin II regent again at Antioch.

1131 Joscelin II Count of Edessa; *6 June* Usama exiled from Shayzar; *31 August* Fulk V of Anjou, King of Jerusalem; *3 September* Zangi attacks Hama and Homs; Usama enters his service; *November* Usama in Mosul.

1132 Zangi (with Usama) at Tikrit; Zangi (with Usama) campaigns against the caliph al-Mustarshid near Baghdad.

1134 Usama with Zangi on campaign against Artuqids near Amid.

1135 Failed campaign against Damascus by Zangi, followed by raids on Antioch.

1136 Raymond of Poitiers Prince of Antioch.

1137 Campaign of Zangi against Homs; *11 July* Usama with Zangi against the Franks at Ba'rin/Rafaniya; Raymond II Count of Tripoli; *30 May* death of Usama's father.

1138 Zangi (with Usama) in battle against the Franks near Qinnasrin; *April-May* Byzantine-Frankish siege of Shayzar; Usama arrives at Burid court in Damascus; *8 September* Usama on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

1139 Usama meets Ridwan, exiled vizier of Egypt; Ridwan imprisoned in Egypt; *10 October* Zangi conquers Baalbek.

1140–43 Voyages of Usama and Mu'in al-Din to Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

1143 *10 November* death of Fulk V, King of Jerusalem.

1144 Edessa recaptured by Zangi; *30 November* Usama arrives in Cairo.

1146 *14 September* death of Zangi; succeeded by Nur al-Din at Aleppo; Joscelin II's failed attempt to retake Edessa; Nur al-Din sacks the city.

1147–8 Nur al-Din campaigns against Antioch.

1148 Ridwan escapes from prison and attempts to seize power in Cairo; he is killed; *July* armies of the Second Crusade fail at Damascus.

*1149 30 August* death of Mu'in al-Din in Damascus; renewed campaigns by Nur al-Din against Antioch; *29 June* defeat and

death of Raymond of Poitiers; *10 October* death of Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz in Egypt; al-Zafir succeeds him; Cairo seethes.

*1150 January* failed assassination plot on Ibn al-Sallar; *May* Usama, on a mission from Cairo, meets with Nur al-Din outside Damascus; *end of year* Usama in Ascalon, raids Franks in the vicinity.

1152 Usama returns to Cairo; Raymond II, Count of Tripoli, assassinated; Raymond III succeeds him.

1153 Usama with the Fatimid army defending Bilbays; *3 April* Ibn al-Sallar assassinated; *22 August* Ascalon captured by Franks; Reynald of Châtillon regent at Antioch.

*1154 15 April* al-Zafir, Fatimid caliph, assassinated in Cairo; al-Fa'iz succeeds him; military revolt in Cairo; *26 April* Nur al-Din captures Damascus; *30 May* Usama flees Egypt; *19 June* he arrives at Damascus.

1155 Usama on campaign with Nur al-Din in Anatolia.

*1157 August* massive earthquake in Syria; Shayzar destroyed; brief Frankish occupation.

*1158 February* Franks besiege Harim; *April* Egyptian campaigns against Ascalon.

1160 *23 July* death of Fatimid caliph al-Fa'iz; al-'Adid succeeds him; *December* Usama visits Aleppo and Mosul, then proceeds on pilgrimage to Mecca.

1163 *10 February* death of Baldwin III; Amalric I, King of Jerusalem, campaigns against Egypt; Nur al-Din (with Usama) on campaign against Antioch; Nur al-Din thwarted against Tripoli.

1164 *12 August* Nur al-Din recaptures Harim; Bohemund III and Raymond III are captured; *end of the year* Usama moves to Hisn Kayfa in service to Qara Arslan.

1166–7 Residence and travels of Usama in Upper Mesopotamia.

*1169 26 March* Saladin named vizier in Egypt.

1170 Usama visits Mosul.

*1171 13 September* Fatimid caliph al-'Adid dies; end of Fatimid dynasty; Saladin seizes power in Egypt for Nur al-Din.

1171/2 Usama composes his *Book of the Staff* and (about this time) his *Dwellings and Abodes.*

1174 *15 May* Nur al-Din dies at Damascus; *11 July* death of Amalric; Baldwin IV, King of Jerusalem; *28 October* Saladin enters Damascus; Usama arrives shortly thereafter; he completes his *Creator of High Style* (about this time).

1176 Saladin (possibly with Usama) on campaign in north Syria.

1183 Saladin captures Aleppo; Usama completes his *Kernels of Refinement* and (about this time) his *Book of Contemplation.*

1185 Death of Baldwin IV, King of Jerusalem; Baldwin V succeeds him, with Raymond III of Tripoli as regent.

1186 Death of Baldwin V; Saladin lord of Mosul.

1187 Death of Raymond III of Tripoli; *2 October* Saladin recaptures Jerusalem.

1188 Saladin captures Latakia; *15 November* death of Usama in Damascus.

# Introduction

Usama ibn Munqidh, the author of our texts, was born at his family's castle at Shayzar in northern Syria on Wednesday, 4 July 1095. Later that same year, on Tuesday, 27 November, Pope Urban II gave a speech thousands of miles away to an assembled crowd at Clermont in the Auvergne in France that ultimately led to the First Crusade and to thousands of European Christians marching from their homelands towards Jerusalem in Palestine, some passing in the very shadow of Usama's home. This, of course, was only the first of many crusades to the Near East, the genesis of a centuries-long sequence of expeditions that intensified the encounter between the Islamic world and the West. Usama, a witness present at the creation, provides through his writings a moving and memorable record of one Muslim's experience of that long encounter.

Usama was known among his contemporaries as a warrior, courtier and distinguished man of letters. He was celebrated not just for his own original creations, but also for his prodigious grasp of the vast and venerated body of older classical Arabic poetry. Although only a few of his works have survived, it seems clear that Usama specialized in topical anthologies – collections of poems and anecdotes grouped around a particular theme. The last texts translated in this book come from two such anthologies, one on walking-sticks – the *Book of the Staff* – and another on refined conduct – *Kernels of Refinement. In* these two works, as perhaps

with others now lost, Usama included anecdotes from his own chequered life that are as informative for students of the medieval Near East as they are entertaining for any curious reader.

But it is through the work that forms the bulk of the present book that Usama has rightly achieved his greatest fame. This is his collection devoted to the inevitability of Fate, called the *Kitab al-I'tibar* or *The Book of Contemplation*. Unlike his other works, *The Book of Contemplation* includes only scant samples of poetry, relying instead on narrative anecdotes to illustrate the inscrutability of God's will in our lives. Remarkably for his day, Usama chose anecdotes that are heavily autobiographical, featuring chatty tales in often informal language about himself, his family, or the people he encountered over the course of his many adventures. These extend from his early years at Shayzar to his service with various Muslim lords in the Near East, including the leaders of the Muslim 'counter-crusade': the warlord Zangi, his son Nur al-Din and the mighty sultan Saladin. Most famously, his recollections also include his interactions with the Crusaders and European settlers who were his neighbours (known collectively as 'Franks', despite their varied origins) and his exasperated observations of their curious ways. Written at the end of his long life, *The Book of Contemplation* is shot through with precious detail, sharp wit, deep melancholy and, as with all autobiography, gilded artifice. It is, by any token, a remarkable record of one man's vision of his times. Taken together, the writings presented in this book are not just curious samples of medieval Arabic prose and autobiography. They are in fact among the most complete and human examples of Islamic perspectives on the crusades and a window into the new

world that was formed after those 'marked with the cross' first arrived at the close of the eleventh century.

## Usama's World

The Islamic world in which both the first crusaders and Usama found themselves was a divided one. As in Christendom, there had been political and theological divisions within the Islamic community from an early period. In the first Islamic centuries, Islamic lands were unified in theory by the caliph, who was held to be the sole ruler of the entire Muslim community, a successor for the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), Islam's founder, though not a prophet himself. In practice, many Muslims disputed the claims of certain individuals or lineages to hold the office of caliph. The most notable such dispute over a claimant involved the Prophet's cousin 'Ali, whose followers felt he and his descendants were the only legitimate successors to the Prophet, and so venerated them as their religious leaders or *imams* (though all Muslims hold 'Ali in high regard). Over time, slightly different attitudes towards Islamic law, theology and practice developed between the minority of Muslims who revered 'Ali and his kin as imams and the majority who did not, and the two groups coalesced into sects – the former known as Shi 'ites, the latter known as Sunnis. Whereas Shi 'ites took a sceptical view of the claims of Sunni rulers to be the heirs of the Prophet's right to rule the Muslim community, most Sunni Muslims simply acquiesced to the political realities of the day and recognized as legitimate the various groups and dynasties that held the caliphate. Since 750, the 'Abbasid dynasty held the office of

caliph, and they would stand as the very emblem of Sunni religious authority for most of the Middle Ages. The ‘Abbasid caliphs chose Iraq as their central province, founding Baghdad as their capital. And so it remained, even as, by the tenth century, the central authority of the caliphs waned and province after province became the domain of independent successor-states, some loyal to Baghdad, some not so loyal.

Throughout these formative centuries, Shi’ism only occasionally posed a serious political threat to the caliphate and Shi’ites settled down tensely but tolerantly with their Sunni neighbours, holding to their differences from the religious mainstream, but remaining politically quiescent. However, towards the end of the tenth century, all this changed when Shi’ism was embraced by a number of provincial successor dynasties, in Iran, Syria, and even in the ‘Abbasid heartland of Iraq.

Foremost among these new Shi’ite states was the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt and Syria. The Fatimids came to power first in North Africa and then, in 969, captured Egypt and founded their capital city, Cairo. The Fatimid rulers adopted the title of caliph and made it perfectly clear that one of their top priorities was to eradicate their Sunni ‘Abbasid rivals. At various times, the Fatimid caliphs controlled Egypt, Syria and Palestine, Sicily, and the coastal lands of the Red Sea in Africa and Arabia. A Fatimid agent had once even infiltrated Baghdad. Nevertheless, by Usama’s day, the Fatimids had long settled into their role as a major Muslim power, and they were experiencing the ill effects of that complacency. Although the Fatimid caliph was the titular head of state in his realm, real power came to be held by a string of mighty

viziers, who controlled not just the administration, but also Egypt's large and diverse military.

The Fatimids embraced a form of Shi'ism that was itself an offshoot from mainstream Shi'ism, called Isma 'ili Shi'ism. Isma 'ili Shi'ism, in its turn, experienced its own share of fissures, most notably in 1094, when Nizar, a prince of the Fatimid dynasty, was passed over in the succession to rule his family's Shi'ite caliphate and rebelled. When Nizar was defeated and killed, some members of the Isma'ili community broke away and founded their own Nizari sect loyal to the line of the slain prince. By the early twelfth century, the Nizaris had spread their teaching among the Isma 'ili community already present in Syria, and made northern Syria and the mountains near Usama's home of Shayzar their favoured local refuge. In the process, they now found themselves in open conflict with fellow Shi'ites as well as with Sunnis. Outnumbered and persecuted, the Nizaris preferred to base themselves in remote locations or mountain fortresses and, unable to send vast armies to confront their foes, they chose the craftier and psychologically effective method of selectively and unpredictably murdering the leaders of their enemies. Contemporaries attributed all manner of strange beliefs and practices to the Nizaris, and explained their unwavering faith by claiming their agents worked under hashish-soaked delusions. As a result, the Arabic word for hashish-eaters, *hashishiyin*, entered into Western lexicons as 'Assassins' as the name for this sect and anyone else who employed their tactics. In Usama's world, the Nizaris found their victims among the Franks, local Muslims, and even Usama's household.

The Nizaris had felt the need to move into Syria largely because Iran, their original home-base, had become the heartland of a new and muscular Sunni political force: the Seljuk Turks. By the middle of the eleventh century, a confederation of nomadic Turkoman tribesmen known as the Oghuz, under the leadership of the Seljuk (or Saljuq) family, had migrated from Central Asia into north-eastern Iran and taken over much of the region from local rulers. In 1055, the Seljuks entered Iraq and crushed the local Shi'ite dynasty then dominating the 'Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, a clear message to the Shi'ite Fatimids in Egypt. The 'Abbasid caliph granted the Seljuk rulers the title of 'sultan', in recognition of the fact that they wielded effective power in the region, possessed seemingly limitless military might and rendered timely services for the caliphate and for Sunnism in general. Over the next few decades, the Seljuk sultans extended their control over Iran, Iraq, and most of Syria-Palestine.

The Seljuks governed their far-flung territories as a collection of provinces ruled by kinsmen, vassals and trusted commanders (known as *amir*s or emirs) rather than as a centralized empire, and this certainly contributed to the divisions already apparent in the region. To help them govern, the Seljuks used a combination of tribal armies of nomadic Turkomans and, like many dynasties before them, a standing army of (usually) Turkish slave-troops called *mamluks.* The Seljuks liked to prepare their princes for their future political careers by giving them governorates as children, sending with them a trusted commander to rule for them and to act as a tutor and adviser. These men were known as atabegs. Like many rulers before them, the Seljuk sultans and their men

cultivated strong ties with scholars of Islamic law and men of religion to bolster their Sunni credentials; they also relied upon their city's locally chosen headman or chief *(ra'is)* to serve as interlocutor with their local subjects. These strategies of rule, a mixture of 'Abbasid precedent and Seljuk innovation, became the standard tools for organizing Islamic states throughout the Middle Ages. For Usama, the Seljuk sultans were distant lords, and it was their semi-autonomous representatives, the atabegs, amirs and chiefs of the cities of Syria and Iraq, that most concretely constituted Seljuk power for him.

These Seljuk sultans are often referred to as the 'Great Seljuks' to distinguish them from another enterprising branch of the family that had left its kin behind in Iran and forged ahead with their own Turkoman troops into Anatolia – the first Turks to settle in what is now known as Turkey. Anatolia had for centuries stood as the core province of the Byzantine, or eastern Roman, empire. As a result, for Muslims Anatolia came to epitomize the empire as a whole and was known as The Land of the Romans', *Bilad al-Rum,* or just *al-Rum* for short. The members of the branch of the Seljuks that conquered it were therefore known as the Seljuks of Rum. Despite the proximity of Anatolia to northern Syria, Usama had only limited interaction with the Seljuks of Rum, as when he fought them as the foes of the many local lords he served.

Beyond the Seljuks of Rum, at the horizon of Usama's world, stood Constantinople, the redoubtable and venerable capital of the Christian, Greek-speaking Byzantine empire. Ever since the arrival of the Turks in Anatolia, the Byzantines had been on the defensive, trying, but never effectively succeeding, to hold on to their lands

there. In Usama's infancy, the Byzantines were experiencing something of a revival of fortune under an active new emperor, Alexius Comnenus. He and his successors felt keenly the pressures that Muslim expansion placed on their borders in Anatolia, and they never lost sight of the fact that Syria, including Usama's homeland, had once been Byzantine territory.

It was into this frontier, the fractured meeting-ground of Shi'ite Fatimids, Sunni Seljuks and Christian Byzantines, that the first crusaders plunged. The Byzantine emperor Alexius had hoped he might be able to channel the military capabilities of the first crusaders to reconquer formerly Byzantine lands in Anatolia and Syria. In fact, the Byzantines gained very little from the affair; instead, the Franks wrested control of large swathes of land in the region for themselves and made them the basis for four Latin states. The first of these to be created was the County of Edessa, in Upper Mesopotamia, founded in 1098, followed by the Principality of Antioch (later in 1098), the Kingdom of Jerusalem (in 1099) and the County of Tripoli (1109). From these lands, the armies of the Latin settlers ranged throughout Syria and Palestine and as far afield as Egypt, Jordan, Anatolia and northern Iraq.

This Frankish threat elicited only modest concern from the sultans in the East. From the point of view of the Great Seljuk sultans, who were usually (when not on campaign) based in Baghdad or Isfahan in Iran, Syria was an impoverished outlier of the Seljuk world. The sultans only occasionally made defending Syria a priority; more often, it was an arena for ambitious atabegs, amirs, princelings and local native vassals like Usama's family, the Banu Munqidh. By the time Usama was born, the Banu Munqidh

had established themselves as a native Arab household of consequence, having been involved in the politics of Aleppo and northern Syria for some decades. Their domain was centred on the castle of Shayzar, which sat, as it does today, nearly impregnable, on a hairpin bend in the Orontes River at a crucial bridge and crossing-point, overlooking Shayzar town. Although some members of the family had served the Fatimids in Cairo, the lords of Shayzar became vassals of the Great Seljuks shortly before Usama's birth. Wedged between the borders of its Frankish and Muslim neighbours, Shayzar in northern Syria sat on a frontier in a region that was itself a frontier. This made for interesting times at Shayzar, and perhaps contributed to Usama's penchant for acute observations of the mysteries of God's plan and the varieties of human nature.

Usama's world was but a smaller part of the world of Islam, specifically that experienced by its warrior elites. Like his Muslim contemporaries, Usama strove to live his life in a way that was most pleasing to God, and he received guidance on how to do so from the teachings of the Qur'an and the injunctions of Islamic law. He worked for both Fatimid and Seljuk (or Seljuk-allied) regimes, and it is still an open question as to whether he considered himself a Shi'ite or a Sunni (probably the latter). That this is so is largely because the record of his own religious practice in his writings is rather generic, devoid of any doctrinal red flags. What his writings do provide, though, is a record of the private practice of a family of medieval Muslims, as opposed to the institutional or public displays of religious belief that one typically finds in the sources. For example, Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, does not

feature much in Usama's religious landscape. Indeed, he did not encounter any organized Sufi brotherhoods until late in life. Rather, Usama seems to have occupied himself with more individual expressions of devotion, inflected by popular asceticism: praying, fasting, giving alms, pilgrimage to Mecca and Jerusalem, rescuing prisoners, reciting the Qur'an, and so on. He praises in others the related virtue of engaging in jihad, meaning (in this case) holy war against the Franks. Significantly, however, he does not describe his own military experiences in this way, much as we might think this would have suited the men he served, a fact which reveals something of Usama's character and the limits of jihad-speak, even during the counter-crusade. Usama also had a particular, but quite ordinary, fondness for visiting holy places and holy men – if the latter should be living exemplars of piety, so much the better. Indeed, Usama devotes a separate appendix in *The Book of Contemplation* to miraculous deeds associated with such holy men. These stories are set alongside tales of remarkable cures, which are related to the feats of holy men by the way in which accidental remedies brought on by dream-visions or certain diets give proof to the vagaries of God's will.

In tandem with Usama's refined code of honour and politesse, Islam further structured Usama's relationship with other men and, of course, other women. In Usama's world, it was taken for granted that the affairs of men overshadowed those of women, who were seen as the building-blocks of the family and of society, and whose chastity, therefore, men must anxiously guard. As a result, the domestic seclusion of women was normal, and their lives, even their names, are only sparsely mentioned in the sources. It is thus

all the more delightful that Usama has left us precious (though discreet) glimpses into this aspect of his world.

Usama's world was crowded with human variety. The men and women he encountered included groups that we would nowadays call Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Africans, Greeks and Europeans. The people were Muslims of various kinds, of course, but also Latin Christians loyal to Rome, Greek Christians and Melkites loyal to Constantinople, and other native Near Eastern Christians, whether Copts in Egypt or Syrian Orthodox Christians in Syria, Iraq and Upper Mesopotamia, to name only the largest groups. Usama alludes (possibly) to Druze communities in the mountains, and the larger cities of the region always included ancient and active Jewish communities. At Shayzar itself, Usama's kin were of course central to his life. These included his father Murshid, but also his domineering uncle Sultan, who was lord of Shayzar for most of Usama's life. His family also included a dizzying array of uncles, cousins and nephews, as well as their women and children. Finally, it also embraced, like the households of sultans and atabegs, servants and slaves of various kinds, including concubines and soldiers, but also domestic help, nannies, physicians, craftsmen, grooms, huntsmen, animal-keepers, and so on, most referred to generically as *ghilman* (singular *ghulam),* often translated here with equal vagueness as 'attendant'. The Banu Munqidh were a clan composed of many families, and so Shayzar was, quite literally, a house of many mansions.

Then there are the Franks. Usama is most famous today for his observations on the manners and customs of the Latin settlers who inhabited his part of the world, and he is certainly the most

cherished of all the Muslim eyewitnesses of the crusades. This is due, no doubt, to his marvellous eye for detail and human portraiture. And it helps that his stories are also rather funny and a bit risqué too. But as it happens, despite his personal interactions with the Franks, Usama generally indulged in the stereotypes about Franks that were already commonplace in his day – their lack of refinement, their low intelligence, their animal qualities, and so on – and his own contribution to our general knowledge of the culture of the European settlers in the Levant should not be exaggerated. Nevertheless, Usama's writings concerning the Franks are undeniably valuable in two specific areas: regional politics, where he provides a localized and personal glimpse of some of the key events, people and practices of the day; and social relations, where he shines as a decidedly non-detached ethnographic participant-observer of, *inter alia,* Frankish mores, medicine, law and religion. Usama's works would still be valuable and moving without his accounts of the Franks, but we would have very little sense of what the crusades truly meant to medieval Muslims without them.

Humans, Franks grudgingly included, were only the loudest inhabitants of Usama's world, which was also home to animal species so multifarious that it startles readers who think of the Near East solely as a place of desolate landscapes and camels (winsome as they may be). Songbirds, cats, dogs, mice, flies, cattle, gazelles, wild asses, wild boar, deer, hares, waterfowl, horses, hawks, falcons, serpents, hyenas, cheetahs, leopards and, most importantly, lions are just some of the animals that appear in his writings. Usama, whose name indeed means 'lion', was a keen observer of the natural world, a fact which was an advantage for

him as a poet and an absolute necessity for him as a hunter. Like many men of the upper strata of medieval Islamic society, Usama found hunting to be an absorbing pastime, one pursued more for sport than for acquiring food. At Shayzar, hunting was pursued passionately, one might even say pathologically in the case of Usama's father, who seems to have spent most of his free time on the chase. Usama's writings abound with references to hunting practices, especially his *Book of Contemplation,* to which he even added an appendix devoted to hunting-stories. His days spent hunting were pleasant times, and, as one reads his tales of the hunt, one gets a vivid sense of the landscape around Shayzar and a palpable sense of an elderly man's nostalgia for endless days of youth spent with longpassed friends and kin running game to ground amidst the liquorice-bushes, cane-brakes and asphodel of home.

## The Author

When Usama was born in 1095, it may well have been expected that he would in time become lord of Shayzar himself, and he seems to have harboured this ambition in his later life. After the death of his uncle Nasr in 1098, his father Murshid and his uncle Sultan were the leading men of the Banu Munqidh (see Family Tree, pp. 272–3). Usama's father found that politics did not agree with his religious scruples or his ascetic bent (or his preoccupation with hunting) and so he withdrew, leaving Sultan to become lord of Shayzar. Sultan had no male children at the time and so the

young Usama must have been raised to think that Shayzar would one day be his. He certainly acted that way, hunting, fighting and helping to administer the lands of his family's domains. Usama had no formal education as we would call it today, but instead studied under tutors who were retained in his father's household. From these men, some of them refugees from the Frankish invasions, he learned rhetoric, grammar and poetry – the literary arts any future prince should know, and which he came to embody.

He witnessed combat, beginning in his teens, and honed his skills fighting Shayzar's local Muslim rivals. He also had his share of experience with the Franks, particularly those from Antioch or Tripoli, who made frequent raids to pillage the countryside and rustle livestock. But then prolonged engagements were often sealed with treaties and even festivities, and this allowed Usama the opportunity to study the Franks at his ease. An even closer study was made possible in 1124, when the captive Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, resided at Shayzar as a guest of his uncle Sultan while the details of a prisoner exchange were worked out. It was a kindness that put Usama and the Banu Munqidh in good standing with the Franks.

Family, poetry, hunting and fighting: life at Shayzar for a young man like Usama was a dream. The rude awakening came in 1131. By then, Usama's uncle Sultan had managed to have a son, Muhammad, a fact which made the continued presence of Usama at Shayzar rather troubling for him. After all, Usama's father had refused the lordship of Shayzar and as he grew old and infirm his brother Sultan was increasingly the sole figure of authority left at Shayzar. Why shouldn't the amirate pass down to Sultan's own

son, Muhammad, instead of the sons of his brother, especially the precious Usama? One night, according to Usama, Sultan had a fevered conversation with him and demanded that he collect his belongings and leave home. In June of 1131, Usama solemnly embraced this exile, his first of many, and left Shayzar.

With Shayzar behind him, Usama sought service in the nearby principality of Homs, which was just then under siege by Zangi, the ambitious atabeg of Mosul and lord of Aleppo. When Homs finally fell to Zangi, Usama was captured and, it appears, entered the atabeg's service, residing in Mosul in Upper Mesopotamia, where he hunted, campaigned and held literary gatherings. In 1132, Zangi was on campaign again in Syria, and Usama was posted to the city of Hama under Zangi's trusted general, al-Yaghisiyani. He may well have visited Shayzar in 1137 when his father died, and he certainly was there by the spring of 1138 when, contrary to Zangi's command, he left Hama to assist in the defence of his home against a joint Frankish-Byzantine siege. As a result of this infraction, when the siege was lifted Usama found himself now abandoned by his commander yet still unwelcome in his ancestral home. He tightened his belt and sought service in Damascus.

Damascus was the capital of a petty Turkish dynasty of Seljuk vassals called the Burids, but the Burid princes were at the time mere figureheads who deferred to their powerful Rasputin, the atabeg Mu'in al-Din Unur. Faced with Zangi's unambiguous goal of conquering their city, the Burids under Mu'in al-Din sought to enlist the support of al-Afdal Ridwan, a former Fatimid vizier who was in Syria hiding out from his enemies. Usama was sent on a diplomatic mission to seal the deal, and he almost succeeded, had

Ridwan not skived off back to Egypt, where he was captured and imprisoned. After this setback, Damascus was now obliged to make common cause with their Frankish neighbours in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, so both Mu'in al-Din and Usama travelled to Frankish territory on numerous occasions between 1140 and 1143, visiting (at least) the Frankish-controlled towns of Jerusalem, Acre, Nablus, Sebaste, Haifa and Tiberias, meeting and treating with various Frankish leaders and their subjects. It is these visits that provide the setting for many of his observations of Frankish customs related in this volume. The treaty settled, he seems to have spent the rest of his tenure with the Burids getting into trouble. Indeed, by 1144 his political intrigues in Damascus had so vexed the local *ra'is* that the man refused to return to the city until Mu'in al-Din had expelled Usama, his family and his followers. His welcome overstayed, Usama took the hint and arrived in Cairo, the capital of the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt, later that year.

In Cairo, the reigning caliph, al-Hafiz, was in need of seasoned commanders, so Usama found a ready welcome for his talents as a warrior and courtier. He also found Egypt a tempting laboratory for his own personal ambitions. Even though he would later tell the story as a cautionary tale about testing fate, Usama may have been inspired by what he saw of the politically fluid situation in Egypt during the attempted coup of al-Afdal Ridwan, the once-exiled vizier whom he had tried to enlist for the Burids against Zangi. In 1148, al-Afdal Ridwan escaped from his confinement in Egypt and rallied sufficient troops to contest the caliph, but he failed, spectacularly so, and was killed. Usama's own involvement was

ambiguous. By 1149, much of Usama's old life was behind him and he was facing an acute crisis of patronage: his first patron Zangi had died in 1146; Mu'in al-Din the Burid was gone too, having died after the failed Frankish siege of Damascus during the Second Crusade (1148); and now in Egypt the ageing caliph al-Hafiz was ill and weakened. In this setting, Usama decided to take steps to secure his future.

The next years in Egypt were ones of plot and counter-plot, and given Usama's reticence about his involvement in the disasters that resulted, the scene deserves a careful outline here. Usama found the security that he sought, or so he thought, in an unexpected quarter. The Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz died in October of 1149 and was succeeded by his teenage son, al-Zafir. For his vizier, al-Zafir was forced to recognize the commander Ibn al-Sallar, who seized power upon the succession. Ibn al-Sallar brought with him his impetuous stepson, the amir 'Abbas, who would later follow cataclysmically in his stepfather's footsteps. Both Ibn al-Sallar and 'Abbas profited from the counsel and experience of Usama, even as the resentful caliph al-Zafir hatched his plans for revenge. Having settled into power as vizier, Ibn al-Sallar was keen to wage war on the Franks, but he needed outside help to do so. And so he concocted a plan to make an alliance with the rising power in Syria, the son of Zangi, named Nur al-Din, and turned to his trusted Syrian amir Usama to see to it. Ibn al-Sallar hoped Usama could persuade Nur al-Din to join him against the Franks, who were threatening Ascalon, the Fatimid foothold in Palestine. After a series of tribulations, Usama eventually made it to Syria, but was unable to forge the necessary alliance. Nur al-Din had his own

plans, which did not (yet) include involving himself in Egyptian affairs. Usama gathered what troops he could and returned to Cairo, pausing in Ascalon to participate in various small campaigns against the Franks.

Returning to Cairo, Usama threw himself again into the poisonous polygonal relationship of the caliph al-Zafir, Ibn al-Sallar, his stepson ‘Abbas and the latter’s young son, Nasr. In 1153, Ibn al-Sallar was the first to go, assassinated in a plot hatched by al-Zafir, ‘Abbas and Nasr and, some sources say, egged on by Usama, who was never known to ignore the knock of a Machiavellian opportunity. The next to go, in 1154, was the caliph himself, al-Zafir, whom ‘Abbas had brutally rubbed out, putting an infant on the throne as his successor. Cairo exploded, and a new vizier seized power, named Ibn Ruzzik. Arriving in Cairo, the latter forced the triumvirate of ‘Abbas, Nasr and Usama to abandon Egypt. Usama, who was now an expert at burning bridges, had very little choice of a destination. The three fled to Syria, facing en route a series of misadventures and conflicts with Franks and Bedouin so dire that only Usama and his men survived to reach Damascus, the newly conquered capital of Nur al-Din’s Syrian domain.

Under Nur al-Din’s patronage, Usama tried to reconstruct his life in Syria as best he could, fully conscious of his proximity to his old home, Shayzar. He arranged to have his family sent from Egypt, though the boat was attacked by Franks and he lost much of his property and, more tragically, his personal library. His family reconstituted, he could now turn his attentions to Shayzar. As his uncle Sultan had recently died, Usama saw his opportunity to make

amends with his cousin Muhammad, the new lord of Shayzar, but it was all in vain. For in August 1157, an earthquake struck, levelling cities throughout northern Syria. At Shayzar, where Usama's cousin had gathered most of the family to celebrate the circumcision of his young son, the earthquake had been indiscriminate and destroyed the castle and nearly all who were in it. Virtually all of Usama's relatives were wiped out in one blow. In just one of the twists in Usama's fate-struck life, he, alone in Damascus, was saved from the calamity at Shayzar by the very exile he so resented.

Usama spent the next decades as a dutiful courtier in Nur al-Din's Syria and then, in 1164, he entered the service of one of Nur al-Din's vassals, Qara Arslan of the Artuqid dynasty of Hisn Kayfa, far off in the province of Diyar Bakr in the upper reaches of the Tigris River. His decade in Diyar Bakr is especially vague to us, though he seems to have slowed down and taken to writing. For it is in Diyar Bakr where he did much of the work for which he was known, including the *Book of the Staff,* excerpted in the present volume.

In 1174, Usama was delighted to be asked to join the court of the new ruler of Damascus. This was the mighty sultan Saladin, a former commander for Nur al-Din, who, now that Nur al-Din had died, was well on his way towards building a new and powerful state that united Egypt, Syria and Upper Mesopotamia, whether his Frankish or Muslim rivals liked it or not. Saladin accorded the old warrior and diplomat a certain amount of respect while he used Damascus as his base for further conquests in Syria and Palestine. According to one source, he would even meet with Usama for


image
not
available


image
not
available

writers, including Usama. A good anthologist was sensitive to reader fatigue, so anthologists intentionally flit about from subject to subject or insert humour when the tone gets too heavy. Usama also used these techniques. This 'rambling' mode is often depicted as a product of Usama's old age, but in fact he is keeping to the rules of his genre. Jahizian foundations aside, Usama's most direct inspiration was undoubtedly al-Tha'alibi (d. 1038), a towering figure wholly underestimated today, who wrote nearly a hundred works, of which about half seem to have survived, and only a quarter to have been published. His anthological interests were Jahizian in scope, but it was his great masterpiece, a geographically arranged sampler entitled *Yatimat al-dahr (Unique Pearl of the Age),* that Usama mined in his works for snippets of exquisite and ancient poetry and (less often) prose. And there were very few writers in Usama's time who did not turn to al-Tha 'alibi in this way. Indeed, like others of his peers, Usama is credited with composing a continuation of the *Yatimat,* updating it to his own era.

Like al-Jahiz and al-Tha'alibi, Usama composed works devoted to an admirable variety of subjects, including the three works included or sampled in the present volume (discussed below). It was only a matter of time before a respected *adib* like Usama would decide to compose a work on rhetoric and eloquence, and his *al-Badi' fi 'l-Bad' (Creator of High Style)* was his answer. It is devoted to the standard rhetorical figures used in poetry, such as antithesis, double entendre or pun, each decked out with examples selected from the finest poets. Usama admits in his introduction to the work that it is more of a distillation of older treatises than a

work of originality. His model seems to have been the great rhetorician Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 908), who wrote a similar work on rhetorical figures. The baroque deployment of these figures was the hallmark of the 'modern' poets that many of Usama's peers sought to emulate, as opposed to the allegedly natural and conservative style of the 'ancient' poets of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras. To judge from the evidence of his own poetry, Usama put himself in the modernist camp, but he possessed an aficionado's love for the ancients, taking every opportunity to show off his knowledge of them by allusion and quotation.

This is most evident in his *Kitab al-Manazil wa'l-Diyar (Book of Dwellings and Abodes)*. It is a masterful analysis of the conventions used in the preludes of classical Arabic odes, and the images of campsites and dwellings they employed. It is also a very personal work. Composed in distant Diyar Bakr, what he called 'a forsaken corner of the world', Usama, a restless and now ageing exile, one of the few survivors of his devastated house, passed his idle moments compiling a book about the longing of poets for their Time-effaced homes. Whatever his faults, to know this is to know much about Usama and the sympathy he elicits.

Usama extended his interest to other realms. One early work was devoted to youth and old age, and was written for his father; another seems to have been a collection of political wisdom or a 'mirror for princes' for the ruler of Diyar Bakr; still others were devoted to castles and fortresses, rivers, dream visions, consolation, bearing loss, notable women, and other matters. For those who know Usama's penchant for juicy anecdotes, this list is

both thrilling and mournful: not a single word of these works survives.

Usama ibn Munqidh died in Damascus on Tuesday, 15 November 1188, at the astonishing age of ninety-three, just over a year after his lord Saladin recaptured Jerusalem from the Franks and turned the tide of the invasion from Europe that had begun in Usama's infancy. He was buried in a mausoleum on the north bank of the Yazid River, on the east side of Mount Qasiyun, which looms over the city now as it did then. Usama's tomb did not last through the centuries and it is lost. All that remains of the man are his works, only some of which comprise the present volume.

## The Works

The last two of the three works treated in this volume are quite typical of the thematic anthology genre discussed above, though only their longer prose anecdotes have been included here. The first of these, the *Kitab al-'Asa* or *Book of the Staff,* is devoted to the subject of famous staves and walking-sticks. The reader may well wonder how many of these there could possibly be, but Usama had no trouble rounding out what is in fact a delightful sampling of poetry, stories, history, proverbs, exegesis, tradition and random lexicographical detours. The poetry includes selections from every era of Arabic poetry, ancients and moderns, including poetry by Usama and other members of his family. The prose includes some well-worn tales about, for example, the staff of Moses, but also anecdotes from Usama's own day, as vivid and

autobiographical as any to be found in his more famous *Book of Contemplation.* The book was composed in 1171 or 1172 in Diyar Bakr. Of particular note among the excerpts from the book included here is Usama's introduction to the text, which vividly illustrates the place of books in medieval Islamic society (and the sort of characters that associate with them). Other anecdotes reveal much about the religious setting of Usama's world, such as his account of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, of a miraculous staff which saves a man from the Franks and of Usama's visit to the tomb of St John the Baptist. This last account, thanks to Derenbourg's early and admittedly speculative readings, has long been read as a description of the Hospitallers; the present translation offers a slightly different reading.

The second of these texts, the *Lubab al-Adab* or *Kernels of Refinement,* is, as its title suggests, a collection of examples (the 'kernels') to guide the reader to refined social conduct. A manuscript of the work is dated to 1183 and was presented to Usama's son Murhaf in 1186, and so it would have been composed during Usama's last years under Saladin in Damascus. Like the *Book of the Staff,* it consists of varied selections of Arabic poetry, including some by Usama, pungent narratives, bits of wisdom, Qur'anic commentary, traditions of the Prophet and, luckily for us, some meandering autobiographical accounts. The book is divided into chapters devoted to those features that Usama thought were absolute requirements for readers seeking refinement and courtly poise – in short, *adab:* political wisdom, generosity, courage, flawless manners, eloquence, literacy and wit, and so on. The book is not just an etiquette manual, but a blueprint for how to become

the ideal Muslim courtier in the age of the Crusades. As such, it deserves much greater attention from historians of the period than it has so far received. Among the few excerpts included here, of particular interest is Usama's account of the sequel to the First Crusade in northern Syria, his only reference to those events that is known to have survived.

Finally, the text which makes up the bulk of this book is Usama's famous *Kitab al-I'tibar* or *The Book of Contemplation,* composed, as the author states, perhaps with some inaccuracy, in his ninetieth Muslim year, or *c.* 1183. Given the long encomium that ends the work, it seems likely that it was Usama's patron, the mighty Saladin, who was the work's intended recipient.

Because of the book's heavily autobiographical nature, it is often referred to as Usama's 'memoirs', but that is not really an acceptable label. Usama certainly filled the book with accounts about himself and about people and events from his own long life. But it is not intended to be a narrative of his life, still less a soul-searching reflection upon his contribution to history. The focus of the book, evident in its Arabic title, if not in all of its many English approximations, is rather different.[1] The *i'tibar* promised in the title is not just learning or reflection, but the gaining of knowledge by contemplation of *'ibar* (singular *'ibra),* instructive examples or proofs of divine omnipotence. The term is Qur'anic: the story of Joseph, for example, ends with the statement, 'There is a lesson ['*ibra]* in the stories of such people for those who understand.'[2] The Qur'an frequently exhorts its audience to learn from the fate of hard-hearted pagans and the ruins of their once-proud civilizations. Usama makes use of this theme or its variants throughout his own

work. Contemplation of the passing of what had once been was also something of a sub-genre in Arabic literature, from the belles-lettrist al-Jahiz (d. 868) to the philosopher of history Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). Usama's *Book of Contemplation,* then, is a meditation upon the basic fact that God works in mysterious ways, and nothing we can do will hasten or slow the fate that He has decreed for us. Readers are surely grateful that most of the richly detailed examples he adduces to demonstrate this fact come from his own fateful life, but Usama is not the hero of the book – God is.

Usama, his family, the Franks, Egyptians, Syrians, men, women, friends, foes, creatures natural and supernatural all populate the pages of this remarkable book and provide fodder for our contemplation. No matter the person (or beast) or the context, God alone chooses the moment to effect His will and to cause success or failure, often with utter disregard of our own expectations. A mighty warrior cannot overcome his fate, but even the lowliest person can survive lethal blows if their time has not yet come. A hornet sting may kill one man if God so decides, but a dog might save another man from a vicious lion. A Frank might wound one of Usama's kinsmen but, then again, that Frank might just as easily be eaten by a leopard. Repeatedly, we see the marvels of God's creation, in the bizarre behaviour of barbarians like the Franks, in remarkable cures for ailments, in the miracles of holy men and in the strength of character in unexpected quarters: in women, slaves and even animals.

*The Book of Contemplation* consists of individual anecdotes strung together, usually grouped in clusters of sub-themes, like 'pearls on a necklace', to use an image beloved of the medieval


image
not
available


image
not
available


image
not
available

tales that Usama has given us in this book, there is an *ʿibra* in the stories of these people for those who understand.


image
not
available

# NOTES

1. The book has been variously called *Memoirs*, *Autobiography*, the *Book of Learning by Example*, *Life's Examples*, *Life's Lessons* and *Reflections* to name only a few choices. The title used here, *The Book of Contemplation*, is no great improvement.
2. Qur'an 12:111.
3. On Usama's use of Middle Arabic, the technical study by Schen is fundamental: I. Schen, 'Usama ibn Munqidh's Memoirs: Some Further Light on Muslim Middle Arabic, Part I', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972), pp. 218–36; and 'Part II', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 18 (1973), pp. 64–97.
4. Philip K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usama Ibn Munqidh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929). Here I do not reckon the rendering of George R. Potter, *The Autobiography of Ousama* (London: Routledge, 1929), which is simply an English translation of Derenbourg's French (see note 5). For the same reason, I exclude Georg Schumann's German rendering, *Usama Ibn Munkidh, Memoiren eines syrischen Emirs aus der Zeit der Kreuzzüge* (Innsbruck: Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1905) and the Russian rendering of M. A. Salier, *Kniga nazidaniia* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1922).
5. Hartwig Derenbourg, *Ousâma ibn Mounkidh: Un Émir syrien au premier siécle des Croisades (1095–1188). Texte arabe de*

*l'Autobiographie d'Ousâma publié d'après le manuscrit de l'Escurial* (Paris and Leiden: Ernest Leroux, 1886); *idem, Ousâma ibn Mounkidh: Un Émir syrien au premier siècle des Croisades (1095–1188), Tome Premier: Vie d'Ousâma* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889); *idem, Souvenirs historiques et récits de chasse par un émir syrien du douzième siècle. Autobiographie d'Ousâma Ibn Mounkidh intitulée «L'instruction par les exemples»* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1895).

6. Hartwig Derenbourg, 'Comment j'ai découvert en 1880 à l'Escurial le manuscrit arabe contenant l'Autobiographie d'Ousâma Ibn Mounkidh (1095–1188)', preface to Schumann, *Memoiren,* pp. v-ix.
7. Usama ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-I'tibar,* ed. Philip Khuri Hitti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930).
8. André; Miquel, *Des Enseignements de la Vie: Souvenirs d'un gentilhomme syrien du temps des Croisades* (Paris: Collection Orientale de l'Imprimerie Nationale, 1983); Gernot Rotter, *Ein Leben im Kampf gegen Kreutzritterheere* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann, 1978); Holger Preissler, *Die Erlebnisse des syrischen Ritters Usama ibn Munqid* (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1981).
9. Usama ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-I'tibar,* ed. Qasim al-Samarra'i (Riyadh: Dar al-Asala, 1987).
10. Hitti, *Memoirs.*
11. H. A. R. Gibb, book review of Philip K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 6 (1943), pp. 1003–11.


image
not
available

# Further Reading

## *Editions*


Derenbourg, Hartwig, *Ousâma ibn Mounkidh: Un Émir syrien au premier siècle des Croisades (1095–1188). Texte arabe de l'Autobiographie d'Ousâma publié d'après le manuscrit de l'Escurial* (Paris and Leiden: Ernest Leroux, 1886). The first scholarly edition of *The Book of Contemplation.*

Usama ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-'Asa,* ed. Hasan 'Abbas (Alexandria: al-Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Amma li'l-Kitab, 1978). The first complete scholarly edition of the *Book of the Staff,* which provides some excerpts in the present volume.

—, *Kitab al-I'tibar,* ed. Philip K. Hitti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930). The standard edition of *The Book of Contemplation,* greatly improves upon Derenbourg. The basis for the present translation.

—, *Kitab al-I'tibar,* ed. al-Qasim al-Samarra'i (Riyadh: Dar al-Asala, 1987). The most recent edition of *The Book of Contemplation,* with some important readings at variance with the standard Hitti edition.

—, *Lubab al-Adab,* ed. A. M. Shakir (Cairo: Maktabat Luwis Sarkis, 1935). The first edition of the *Kernels of Refinement,* which provides some excerpts in the present volume.

# THE BOOK OF CONTEMPLATION

## Guide to Contents

## PART I: GREAT EVENTS AND CALAMITIES DURING MY LIFE

# OTHER EXCERPTS

# Guide to Contents

## *Lost Fragments from* The Book of Contemplation



## Fragments from the *Book of the Staff*



## Fragments from *Kernels of Refinement*

# Index

(Note: The Arabic definite article ‘al-’ has been ignored for purposes of alphabetization.)


image
not
available