**Saladin**

An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (Arabic: صلاح الدين يوسف بن أيوب‎ / ALA-LC: Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb; Kurdish: سەلاحەدینی ئەییووبی‎ / ALA-LC: Selahedînê Eyûbî), known as Salah ad-Din or Saladin (/ˈsælədɪn/; 1137 – 4 March 1193), was the first sultan of Egypt and Syria[4] and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty. A Sunni Muslim of Kurdish ethnicity,[5][6][7] Saladin led the Muslim military campaign against the Crusader states in the Levant. At the height of his power, his sultanate included Egypt, Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, the Hejaz, Yemen and other parts of North Africa.

He was originally sent to Fatimid Egypt in 1164 accompanying his uncle Shirkuh, a general of the Zengid army, on orders of their lord Nur ad-Din, an atabeg of the Seljuks, to consolidate Shawar amid his ongoing power struggle for vizier to the teenage Fatimid caliph al-Adid. With Shawar reinstated as vizier, he engaged in a power struggle with Shirkuh, which saw the former realigning himself with Crusader king Amalric. Saladin climbed the ranks of the Fatimid government by virtue of his military successes against Crusader assaults against its territory and his personal closeness to al-Adid. With Shawar assassinated in 1169 and Shirkuh's natural death later that year, al-Adid appointed Saladin vizier, a rare nomination of a Sunni Muslim to such an important position in the Isma'ili Shia caliphate. During his tenure as vizier, Saladin began to undermine the Fatimid establishment and, following al-Adid's death in 1171, he abolished the Fatimid Caliphate and realigned the country's allegiance with the Sunni, Baghdad-based Abbasid Caliphate.

In the following years, he led forays against the Crusaders in Palestine, commissioned the successful conquest of Yemen, and staved off pro-Fatimid rebellions in Upper Egypt. Not long after Nur ad-Din's death in 1174, Saladin launched his conquest of Syria, peacefully entering Damascus at the request of its governor. By mid-1175, Saladin had conquered Hama and Homs, inviting the animosity of other Zengid lords, the official rulers of Syria's various regions. Soon after, he defeated the Zengid army at the Battle of the Horns of Hama and was thereafter proclaimed the "Sultan of Egypt and Syria" by the Abbasid caliph al-Mustadi. Saladin made further conquests in northern Syria and Jazira, escaping two attempts on his life by the "Assassins", before returning to Egypt in 1177 to address issues there. By 1182, Saladin had completed the conquest of Muslim Syria after capturing Aleppo, but ultimately failed to take over the Zengid stronghold of Mosul.

Under Saladin's command, the Ayyubid army defeated the Crusaders at the decisive Battle of Hattin in 1187, and thereafter wrested control of Palestine – including the city of Jerusalem – from the Crusaders, who had conquered the area 88 years earlier. Although the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem continued to exist until the late 13th century, its defeat at Hattin marked a turning point in its conflict with the Muslim powers of the region. Saladin died in Damascus in 1193, having given away much of his personal wealth to his subjects. He is buried in a mausoleum adjacent to the Umayyad Mosque. Saladin has become a prominent figure in Muslim, Arab, Turkish and Kurdish culture,[9] and he has often been described as being the most famous Kurd in history.

**Early life**

Saladin was born in Tikrit in modern-day Iraq. His personal name was "Yusuf"; "Salah ad-Din" is a laqab, an honorific epithet, meaning "Righteousness of the Faith."[14] His family was of Kurdish ancestry,[5] and had originated from the city of Dvin in medieval Armenia.[15][16] The Rawadiya tribe he hailed from had been partially assimilated into the Arabic-speaking world by this time.[17] In 1132, the defeated army of Imad ad-Din Zengi, the ruler of Mosul, found their retreat blocked by the Tigris River opposite the fortress of Tikrit, where Saladin's father, Najm ad-Din Ayyub served as the warden. Ayyub provided ferries for the army and gave them refuge in Tikrit. Mujahed al-Din Bihruz, a former Greek slave who had been appointed as the military governor of northern Mesopotamia for his service to the Seljuks, reprimanded Ayyub for giving Zengi refuge and in 1137 banished Ayyub from Tikrit after his brother Asad al-Din Shirkuh killed a friend of Bihruz in an honour killing. According to Baha ad-Din ibn Shaddad, Saladin was born on the same night that his family left Tikrit. In 1139, Ayyub and his family moved to Mosul, where Imad ad-Din Zengi acknowledged his debt and appointed Ayyub commander of his fortress in Baalbek. After the death of Zengi in 1146, his son, Nur ad-Din, became the regent of Aleppo and the leader of the Zengids.

Saladin, who now lived in Damascus, was reported to have a particular fondness for the city, but information on his early childhood is scarce.[19] About education, Saladin wrote "children are brought up in the way in which their elders were brought up." According to his biographers, Anne-Marie Eddé[20] and al-Wahrani, Saladin was able to answer questions on Euclid, the Almagest, arithmetic, and law, but this was an academic ideal and it was study of the Qur'an and the "sciences of religion" that linked him to his contemporaries.[18] Several sources claim that during his studies he was more interested in religion than joining the military.[21] Another factor which may have affected his interest in religion was that, during the First Crusade, Jerusalem was taken by the Christians.[21] In addition to Islam, Saladin had a knowledge of the genealogies, biographies, and histories of the Arabs, as well as the bloodlines of Arabian horses. More significantly, he knew the Hamasah of Abu Tammam by heart.[18] He spoke Kurdish and Arabic.

**Early expeditions**

Saladin's military career began under the tutelage of his uncle Asad al-Din Shirkuh, a prominent military commander under Nur ad-Din, the Zengid emir of Damascus and Aleppo and the most influential teacher of Saladin. In 1163, the vizier to the Fatimid caliph al-Adid, Shawar, had been driven out of Egypt by his rival Dirgham, a member of the powerful Banu Ruzzaik tribe. He asked for military backing from Nur ad-Din, who complied and, in 1164, sent Shirkuh to aid Shawar in his expedition against Dirgham. Saladin, at age 26, went along with them.[23] After Shawar was successfully reinstated as vizier, he demanded that Shirkuh withdraw his army from Egypt for a sum of 30,000 gold dinars, but he refused, insisting it was Nur ad-Din's will that he remain. Saladin's role in this expedition was minor, and it is known that he was ordered by Shirkuh to collect stores from Bilbais prior to its siege by a combined force of Crusaders and Shawar's troops.

After the sacking of Bilbais, the Crusader-Egyptian force and Shirkuh's army were to engage in a battle on the desert border of the River Nile, just west of Giza. Saladin played a major role, commanding the right wing of the Zengid army, while a force of Kurds commanded the left, and Shirkuh was stationed in the center. Muslim sources at the time, however, put Saladin in the "baggage of the centre" with orders to lure the enemy into a trap by staging a feigned retreat. The Crusader force enjoyed early success against Shirkuh's troops, but the terrain was too steep and sandy for their horses, and commander Hugh of Caesarea was captured while attacking Saladin's unit. After scattered fighting in little valleys to the south of the main position, the Zengid central force returned to the offensive; Saladin joined in from the rear.

The battle ended in a Zengid victory, and Saladin is credited with having helped Shirkuh in one of the "most remarkable victories in recorded history", according to Ibn al-Athir, although more of Shirkuh's men were killed and the battle is considered by most sources as not a total victory. Saladin and Shirkuh moved towards Alexandria where they were welcomed, given money, arms and provided a base.[26] Faced by a superior Crusader-Egyptian force attempting to besiege the city, Shirkuh split his army. He and the bulk of his force withdrew from Alexandria, while Saladin was left with the task of guarding the city.[27]

**In Egypt**

Shirkuh was in a power struggle over Egypt with Shawar and Amalric I of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, in which Shawar requested Amalric's assistance. In 1169, Shawar was reportedly assassinated by Saladin, and Shirkuh died later that year.[28] Nur ad-Din chose a successor for Shirkuh, but al-Adid appointed Saladin to replace Shawar as vizier.[29]

The reasoning behind the Shia caliph al-Adid's selection of Saladin, a Sunni, varies. Ibn al-Athir claims that the caliph chose him after being told by his advisers that "there is no one weaker or younger" than Saladin, and "not one of the emirs [commanders] obeyed him or served him". However, according to this version, after some bargaining, he was eventually accepted by the majority of the emirs. Al-Adid's advisers were also suspected of promoting Saladin in an attempt to split the Syria-based Zengids. Al-Wahrani wrote that Saladin was selected because of the reputation of his family in their "generosity and military prowess". Imad ad-Din wrote that after the brief mourning period for Shirkuh, during which "opinions differed", the Zengid emirs decided upon Saladin and forced the caliph to "invest him as vizier". Although positions were complicated by rival Muslim leaders, the bulk of the Syrian commanders supported Saladin because of his role in the Egyptian expedition, in which he gained a record of military qualifications.

Inaugurated as vizier on 26 March, Saladin repented "wine-drinking and turned from frivolity to assume the dress of religion", according to Arabic sources of the time.[31] Having gained more power and independence than ever before in his career, he still faced the issue of ultimate loyalty between al-Adid and Nur ad-Din. Later in the year, a group of Egyptian soldiers and emirs attempted to assassinate Saladin, but having already known of their intentions thanks to his intelligence chief Ali ibn Safyan, he had the chief conspirator, Naji, Mu'tamin al-Khilafa—the civilian controller of the Fatimid Palace—arrested and killed. The day after, 50,000 Black African soldiers from the regiments of the Fatimid army opposed to Saladin's rule, along with a number of Egyptian emirs and commoners, staged a revolt. By 23 August, Saladin had decisively quelled the uprising, and never again had to face a military challenge from Cairo.

Towards the end of 1169, Saladin, with reinforcements from Nur ad-Din, defeated a massive Crusader-Byzantine force near Damietta. Afterward, in the spring of 1170, Nur ad-Din sent Saladin's father to Egypt in compliance with Saladin's request, as well as encouragement from the Baghdad-based Abbasid caliph, al-Mustanjid, who aimed to pressure Saladin in deposing his rival caliph, al-Adid.[33] Saladin himself had been strengthening his hold on Egypt and widening his support base there. He began granting his family members high-ranking positions in the region; he ordered the construction of a college for the Maliki branch of Sunni Islam in the city, as well as one for the Shafi'i denomination to which he belonged in al-Fustat.