

# Primary Source Analysis: The Conquest of the Holy Land by Saladin

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## ABSTRACT

Ralph of Coggeshall becomes a part of the crusade in his own way by keeping the historical significance of the crusades alive. His account of the conquest of the holy land by Saladin explains the purpose and significance of crusading. And making contributions to his religion may be a means of seeking salvation as well. The text embodies a belief that through invoking people's desire of joining crusading and educating the importance of piety, they may one day reclaim the Holy Land.

**Keywords:** *The Conquest of the holy, Ralph of Coggeshall*

## 1. INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ralph of Coggeshall (—1227), born in Cambridge, is an English chronicler at Coggeshall. He was the monk and abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Essex from 1207 to 1218, when he had to leave the post due to his health condition. The composition of *Chronicon Anglicanum* had already been started in 1066, which was the year of the Norman conquest of England. It was from 1187 to 1224 when Ralph was in charge of it [1].

Ralph was a member of the Cistercian order, a Roman Catholic monastic order founded in 1098. Its name derived from Citeaux, France, where the order was founded. The order lived solitarily under the strictest interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict, rejecting all forms of feudal revenues and reintroduced manual labours. They were also known as the White monks or Bernardines [2]. The Cistercian order had been supportive towards the crusades that its members participated in preaching for those against heresy [3].

## 2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEXT

*The Conquest of the Holy Land by Saladin* is included in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*. The text incorporates an eyewitness account from a soldier who participated in the defense of Jerusalem and got wounded in the siege. The account of the conquest started from the anointment of Countess Sybilla of Jaffa followed by the quarrels of nobles within Jerusalem; ended with the arrival of King Phillip of France and King Richard of England at Acre. There were no descriptions of the results of the siege of Acre except that it was the victory of the crusaders.

### 2.1. The Crusades

"Crusade" in English originates from *cruce signati*, meaning "those signed by the cross" [4]. The First Crusade originates from Pope Urban II of the Catholic church's decision to respond to Byzantine emperor Alexius I's call for aid against the Turks approaching Constantinople. But it's been endowed religious purposes as well: the liberation of eastern churches including those of Jerusalem from Muslim control; the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre, which had been previously vandalized in 1009 (86 years before the decision of crusading was made). Pilgrimages had been made even before the Christians captured the holy land. And crusading was, besides a military act, a form of pilgrimage and an action that served for the soul's salvation after one's death. People of the Middle Ages's enthusiasm for religion caused them to be deeply concerned about sinfulness. Thus, salvation of souls could be a strong motive for people to join the crusades. In fact, crusading had been considered an alternative to a monastic life as a form of religious profession [5].

### 2.2. Politics within Jerusalem

The marriage considered the reason for the sack of Jerusalem by Saladin was between Sibylla of Jaffa and Guy of Lusignam. Sibylla was the sister of Baldwin IV, also known as "the leper king". Because Baldwin IV suffers from leprosy, he could not produce an offspring. The responsibility of producing a royal heir fell to his sister Sibylla. Her brother's first regent, Raymond III of Tripoli, married her to William Longsword, marquis of Montferrat, in October 1176. Although she soon became a widow, they did have a son who later became Baldwin V.

Guy of Lusignam was expelled from his fief in France for attacking agents of Richard the Lionheart. He acquired the land of Jaffa and Ascalon through marrying Sibylla, which also gave him the title of brother-in-law to the king and guardian of the royal heir. When leprosy had physically blinded Baldwin IV, he naturally became the regent.

Guy had proved himself a capable general through his fight against Saladin in 1183. His strategy of keeping distance forced Saladin to retrieve because the latter's troops could only remain in the field for a short amount of time. However, Baldwin IV did not appreciate it. He accused Guy of cowardice and treason for not attacking Saladin's army. He even attempted to divorce his sister and Guy. In the end he didn't get to divorce the two of them, but he indeed harmed the kingdom's unity.

Guy's regency ended; Raymond agreed to resume that of him with a condition. He required, predicting Baldwin V's early death, that he shall remain regent even after the king's death if the pope and kings of Europe have not settled the affair regarding the royal air. He was indeed insightful that both Baldwin IV and V died shortly. But when he left the city, Joscelin III of Edessa betrayed him through closing the capital and seizing control of Acre and Beirut, an action resulting in a sequence of civil war among Christians, further weakening their power—until Saladin's invasion.[6]

### **2.3. Saladin**

Salah-ad-Din Yusuf bin-Aiyub (Righteousness of the Faith, Joseph son of Job) joined in the service of Nur ed-Din, ruler of the Syrian provinces of the Seljuk empire, when he was fourteen (1152). Saladin followed Nur-ad-Din into his campaigns in Egypt [7]. When Nur ed-Din died in May 1174, Saladin seized Damascus swiftly—providing him a military foothold in Syria—for Nur ed-Din's throne. He allowed two Zengids to take Aleppo and Mosul to settle the power struggle, while himself receiving the name of Saladin overlord of Syria and Egypt from the Abbasid caliph. He even married Nur ed-Din's widow to secure his relations to the Zengids. Thus, he united the Muslim kingdoms and became the crusaders' most dangerous enemy.

Jerusalem was a part of Nur ed-Din's jihad—he also had concerns about the salvation of his soul—but he did not conquer it while he was alive. In Islam, Jerusalem was where Mohammed ascended into heaven. Nur ed-Din sponsored the construction of the minbar in 1169. Although it was placed in the Great Mosque of Aleppo, Nur ed-Din's true intention was to have it decorate the Aqua Mosque in Jerusalem when he one day conquered the city. The jihad Nur ed-Din couldn't achieve alive was passed on to Saladin.[8]

## **3. TERMINOLOGY**

Emir: a ruler of particular countries in the Muslim world.

Saracen: a word used in the past by Christians for a Muslim who fought in one of the religious wars of the 11th, 12th, 13th, and 17th centuries, against Christians.

Fakir: a member of an Islamic religious group, or a Hindu holy man [9].

## **4. SUMMARY OF THE PRIMARY SOURCE**

In "The Destruction of Bethlehem and the Siege of Jerusalem", Saladin marched his army into hills surrounding Jerusalem. He offered a condition to the Hospitallers in Bethlehem that they may surrender the city to leave in peace. However, the Hospitallers refused. Ralph then listed the names of holy places destroyed or left desolate by Saladin's army with a precise introduction to backgrounds of each. The focus was then moved to Bethany, which was also destroyed by the Muslims. The holy places at Bethany—including Virgin Mary's burial place—were damaged as well.

In "The Appalling Distress of the People of Jerusalem", Ralph described the battles. The soldiers from both sides fought bravely, while the people inside the city prayed in desperation. Wounded men overwhelmed the hospitals of Jerusalem. The soldier who provided the eyewitness account was wounded in this process. After a week of fighting which made no progress, Saladin ordered his army to move their tents into the valley of Josaphat, while the people of Jerusalem mistook it as a sign of retreat with joy. The Muslims set up siege engines and catapults aiming at the city's weak point and gathered their forces, planning to attack at dawn. The Christians, exhausted by the fight, left the city wall unguarded. As a result, the Muslims broke in at dawn. Although the Christian defended the city with all efforts, the Turks took advantage with advanced weapons and their military enclosures. The power of Christians was weakening; people of the city were lamenting. At the end, Ralph pointed out that the men living at Jerusalem preferred the earthly sins rather than piety, suggesting the sack of the holy land was a form of punishment.

In "Of the Tribute imposed upon the People of Jerusalem", Ralph provided descriptions of what had become of the people of Jerusalem. People who paid their ransom could leave freely, those who did not would be taken as slaves. Besides those who did pay their ransom, there were people who could not afford their freedom, and people who would not dishonor their religion. The prophet Jeremiah mourned these matters. He called those who paid their ransom impenitent and shameful; and the city, according to Jeremiah, was left a widow.

In “How the city of Jerusalem was betrayed to Saladin” and “The Overthrow of the Golden Cross”, the Turks polluted the holy places of Jerusalem, according to Ralph, with their impurity. The Holy Sepulchre and the Cross of redemption were both stripped and spoiled.

In “How Saladin gained almost all the land of Judea”, the rest of the Christian world reacted to the sack of Jerusalem. Starting from Count Richard of Poitou, lords of Europe took the cross one after another and joined the siege of Acre. Christians were gathering at Acre, while the Turks were suffering from hunger which almost made them surrender to the besiegers. The two sides continued fighting in a stalemate—publicly executing captives, cutting supplies and sending reinforcements. Miracles occurred, Ralph highlighted, during this long siege such as Christian soldiers remaining uninjured when struck by stone and Muslims harming themselves when trying to attack the Christians. On the other hand, Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury died of fever because “The army was completely given up to taverns, whores and games of dice”, the army suffered a terrible famine. The Christians’ predicaments resembled what took place in Jerusalem, where loss in battle were taken as a form of punishment to the impious Christians. Eventually, the famine was settled by a ship arriving with supplies.

The records ended with the arrival of King Philip of France and King Richard of the English at Acre. Ralph only roughly mentioned the victory of the Christians at the siege of Acre. If anyone wishes to know more, Ralph suggested, they should read the book that the lord prior of Trinity, London, translated from French to Latin.

## **5. INTERPRETATION AND ARGUMENTATION**

Ralph of Coggeshall died in 1227, which means he was alive during the fifth crusade which ended in a miserable failure. Although the particular time when this primary source was written was unclear, Ralph indeed lived in the time enthusiastic about crusading. The Christians went on five crusades motivated by religion. Participating in the liberation of the Holy Land was a form of penitence, a way to salvation of one’s soul. It is possible that writing about crusading is, in a way, a form of crusade.

*The Conquest of the Holy Land by Saladin* tells the reason of crusading starting from the third crusade. The Holy Land fell into the hands of unbelievers miserably, and still hasn’t been retrieved. Ralph’s portrayal of this history has both emotional and educational significance.

His narrative of the battle is dotted with introduction of the holy sites: name of the place, its connection to a certain piece of history or a certain saint, and its significance. In “The Destruction of Bethlehem and the Siege of Jerusalem”, Ralph introduces Beitgibrin, where the sworn treaty which “the faithful should enter pon the

seventh spring, that is baptism, for what was sworn through the power of the seven-formed Holy Spirit, would be blessed and consecrated” was made. But what is present is the unbelievers “chattering away to each other and blaspheming with their filthy mouths the name of Christ and the Cross of our redemption”. The ideal past has been cut off from the present. In the same article, Ralph listed the holy places damaged by the Muslims. Bethlehem, where Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ with joy, is destroyed. Ralph spent a whole long paragraph describing the birth of Christ and what follows instead of what has become of Bethlehem. The Bethlehem conquered by Saladin is isolated from the Bethlehem where Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ—its joyful and sacred past. Ralph then moves to Bethany, another place destroyed, where Jesus summoned Lazarus four days after his death; and then he moved to the church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Josaphat, where Virgin Mary is buried; he also introduced the brook of Kedron, where Jesus entered with his disciples. If a reader of the text has never been to Jerusalem, he or she should be able to know what it has. Ralph’s portrayal of Jerusalem being invaded is a map of its history. The purpose of the crusades is to restore their connection with their history. Ralph wants to invoke readers’ compassion in order to make them understand the point of crusading—they have lost more than soil and brick—so that the crusades can be kept alive.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Ralph also tries to conclude a reason for the Christians to lose Jerusalem. In a religious view, Jerusalem could only fall to the unbelievers by the Divine will— “except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”. Ralph seems to believe that the impiety of the Christians within Jerusalem is the reason. In “The Appalling Distress of the People of Jerusalem” (the title gets to explain a part of the problem), the men living in Jerusalem are thinking about their materialistic life and plans to escape while the soldiers defending the city hold the believe that dying in faith of Christ in the holy city shall bring them their own share of the Promised Land. And when Saladin announces that people can pay ransom to leave the city, Ralph calls such an action shameful and evil; the next chapter is even named “How the city of Jerusalem was betrayed to Saladin”. It seems like it’s not the army that has conquered Jerusalem, but the impious people who have sold it. The author uses the Jews to exemplify a people who have never left the holy land without a fight, implying that the people remaining should resist instead of surrendering for their lives. The prophet Jeremiah is Ralph’s voice in this narrative, he points out that it is because the people abandoned Jerusalem first, God is away from Jerusalem. A similar pattern appears in the sections about the Siege of Acre as well: multiple miracles, which never appear in the defense of Jerusalem, occur. It is because the Christians

join the siege faithfully and courageously. But when the army is addicted to depravity, the archbishop dies and famine occurs. Ralph's portrayal of the sack of Jerusalem and the third crusade educates the readers of the importance of piety. It also points out that the crusades that followed are redemptions to the loss of faith in Jerusalem.

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