

Nur Al-Din Mahmud Zanki's Plan for Liberating Islamic Jerusalem: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract: The objective of this article is namely to examine Nur al-Din's preparation plan to liberate Islamic Jerusalem, in particular if he had prepare the ground to achieve such a goal which was successfully accomplished during the time of his successor, Sal-h al-Din al-Ayyub, in 583 AH/ 1187 CE. However, relying merely on the religious impact might not be sufficient to build up a solid argument that Nur al-Din has a clear and distinctive plan towards liberating Islamic Jerusalem. Therefore, this article examines Nur al-Din's twenty-eight years of his career to strengthen and construct a strong argument concerning his plan for Islamic Jerusalem. The main focus is on examining his preparation steps towards the unification of Syria with Egypt.

Key words: Islamic Jerusalem % Nur al-Din Zanki % Crusades % Jerusalem % Sal-h al-Din

INTRODUCTION

Al-Malik al-} dil Nur al-Din Mahmud Zanki (511-569 AH/1118-1174 CE) was a member of the Zanki dynasty, who ruled Syria from 541 to 569 AH/ 1146 to 1174 CE after the death of his father, Im-d al-Din Zanki. He succeeded his father in Aleppo in 541 AH/1146 CE while Mosul was put under the control of his brother, Sayf al-Din Gh-z. What was so special about Nur al-Din that he was one of the 6th century AH Muslims leaders who particularly had thought very carefully of how to liberate Islamic Jerusalem¹. Since the occupation of Islamic Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 492 AH/1099 CE, none of the Muslims leaders in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical

Syria) had a closer connection with Islamic Jerusalem stronger than that of Nur al-Din. The atmosphere in which he lived and the various situations he faced made him an experienced leader to plan for the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem.

However, relying merely on the religious impact might not be sufficient to build up a solid argument that Nur al-Din has a clear and distinctive plan towards liberating Islamic Jerusalem. Therefore, examining the remaining material evidence and the practical steps that had been taken by Nur al-Din throughout twenty-eight years of his career would strengthen the previous evidences and construct a strong argument concerning his plan for Islamic Jerusalem. At this stage, we focus

¹"Islamic Jerusalem (one word) is a new terminology for a new concept, which may be translated into the Arabic language as *Bayt al-Maqdis*. It can be fairly and eventually characterised and defined as a unique region laden with a rich historical background, religious significances, cultural attachments, competing political and religious claims, international interests and various aspects that affect the rest of the world in both historical and contemporary contexts. It has a central frame of reference and a vital nature with three principal intertwined elements: its geographical location (land and boundaries), its people (population) and its unique and creative inclusive vision, to administer that land and its people, as a model for multiculturalism, cultural engagement and *Aman* (peaceful co-existence and mutual respect)." See the original definition in Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (2007: 11).

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mainly on examining his preparation steps which had been put into operation by Nur al-Din towards the unification of Syria and afterwards the unification of Syria with Egypt.

The objective of this article is namely to examine Nur al-Din's preparation plan to liberate Islamic Jerusalem, in particular if he had prepared the ground to achieve such a goal which was successfully accomplished during the time of his successor, Sal-h al-Din al-Ayyub, in 583 AH/1187 CE.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors have adopted El-Awais's historical methodology where they endeavoured in their analysis to "concentrate on and look with complete openness at most if not all of the aspects surrounding the issue under discussion and focus on the key and fundamental ones related to the topic" [1]. They also adopted El-Awais's interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches.

In addition, this article depends mainly on a number of primary sources, such as Ibn al-Athir, (born 1160, died 1233 AD) and Abu Shamah, (born 1203, died 1267 AD); and secondary historical references. Although none of the primary sources can be considered as written at the time of Nur al-Din ruling period (first hand), they are very close to his period. For example, Ibn al-Athir was 14 years old when Nur al-Din died in 1174 AD.

The authors also employed El-Awais's approach in dealing with translating original texts from Arabic to English. "When translating terminologies from Arabic into English, an attempt has been made by the author to strike a balance between the strength of expression in the original and its exact meaning. However, to avoid the mistranslating of any particular Arabic terminologies, the author employed an approach of not translating these into English but leaving them in their original Arabic language which helps to avoid any leading to different or strange understandings and interpretations" [1].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nur al-Din Zanki's Plan for Islamic Jerusalem: Hillenbrand argues that it is difficult to pinpoint precisely when Muslim leaders began to focus their attention on the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem as an integral or central part of their aims [2]. Apart from the Fatimid initiative,

immediately after the Crusaders' occupation of Islamic Jerusalem in 492 AH/1099 CE, the loss of Islamic Jerusalem did not prompt any further effective attempts on the part of the Muslims to liberate it from the Crusaders. Nevertheless, the Muslim victory at Edessa in 539 AH/1144 CE under the leadership of 'Im-d al-Din Zanki could be the key turning point for them in launching further *jih-d* against the Crusaders. Hillenbrand also argues that Islamic Jerusalem began to appear in the Muslim agenda as a focus for *jih-d* against the Crusaders in the last years of 'Im-d al-Din's life [2]. Newby seems to be in agreement with this argument [3]. He argues that the capture of Damascus seems to have been the height of 'Im-d al-Din's ambition. He might have thought of attacking the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem after becoming the leader of the three key cities in Syria; Damascus, Aleppo and Mosul.

However, the momentum for the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem was considerably augmented during the ruling period of Nur al-Din. At some point in his reign, Islamic Jerusalem became a major theme of the programme of *jih-d*. Hillenbrand argues that during Nur al-Din's career, Islamic Jerusalem became his ultimate ambition and focus, although it is not clear precisely when this took place during the twenty-eight years of his career [2].

Evidences

Religious Impact: Examining historical sources, shows that Islamic Jerusalem had a special status for Nur al-Din which connected with him religiously and spiritually. The call for *jih-d* by the well known jurists and Philologist from Damascus, al-Sulam, in 499 AH/ 1105 CE, some forty years before his reign seems to have influenced his thought on liberating Islamic Jerusalem. Moreover, the emergence of such concern during Nur al-Din's reign may well be closely connected to his intimate relationship with the religious groups in Syria. Hillenbrand argues that an important aspect of the development of the religious image of Nur al-Din was the patronage, which Nur al-Din extended to the religious classes of Syria and the increasingly close relationship he enjoyed with them [2]. As a result, those religious classes were directly involved in the military campaigns of Nur al-Din in which Elisseff argues that the army of Nur al-Din contained religious men, prayer leaders, al-Qur'-n readers, preachers, judges as well as lawyers and mystics who were actually prepared to fight in the ranks [4].

²Al-Sulam is cAl§ ibn T-hir ibn Jacfar ibn cAbdullah Abā al-Hasan al-Qays§ al-Sulam§ al-Nahw§, born in 431 AH/ 1039 CE and died on 21st of Rab§c al-Awwal 500 AH/1106 CE. A well-known Damascene jurist and philologist, he is considered a trustworthy scholar and a religious man.

In addition, Nur al-Din's intimate affiliation with the religious classes might have influenced his policies and approaches during the process of number of conquests in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) including Islamic Jerusalem. For instance, Nur al-Din had a strong relationship with Ibn 'As-kir, the famous *muhaddith* and historian who was the head of *D-r al-Hadsh al-Nariyyah* (*Al-Nariyyah* Centre for Hadsh Scholarship) in Damascus. Abā Sh-mah narrated an account from al-Hasan Ibn Hibatullah who had attended a circle of *hadsh* with his uncle Ibn 'As-kir in Damascus. Al-Hasan described the concern of Nur al-Din regarding the practice of the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. In that particular occasion, Nur al-Din and the audience came across a *hadsh* which described that Prophet Muhammad used to hold his sword when he went out for any campaign. Comparing the practice of his army with that of the Prophet, Nur al-Din concluded that his army was not doing the same. Accordingly, on the following day, he changed the way of holding sword to be similar to what Prophet Muhammad had done [5]. Moreover, Nur al-Din also had benefited from his regular correspondence with another well-known preacher, jurist and historian Ibn al-Jawz who was in Baghdad at that time [6].

Moreover, the emergence of several writings and poems about *jih-d* and *Fad-il of al-Quds* Merits of Islamic Jerusalem and al-Aqs Mosque in particular may have also played its part in developing his concerns towards Islamic Jerusalem. Muj al-D al-Hanbal argues that at the time of Nur al-Din's reign, there was a renown scholar namely Majd al-D T-hir Ibn Nasr All-h Ibn Jahbal, who was *Shaykh al-Isl-m* and expert in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), mathematics and law of inheritance³. He had composed a book about the merit of *jih-d* to present it specifically to Nur al-Din [7]. Furthermore, in one of Ibn al-Qaysar-n's poem which described the victory of Nur al-Din over Josceline, he clearly reiterates the position and merit of Islamic Jerusalem and al-Aqs Mosque [8]. El-Awaisi argues that 'Since Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey, Islamic Jerusalem has always been the location and source of Muslim hope. It has been closely linked to the Muslim faith and has come to represent a living image in Muslim minds and hearts. It has also mobilised the souls, feelings and emotions of Muslims, attaching their hearts to it and making them yearn towards it' [1]. Hillenbrand argues that it was during the career of Nur al-Din that the idea of liberating

Islamic Jerusalem seems to have been reinforced by official or government-approved propaganda campaign which used the writings on the merit of Islamic Jerusalem as a weapon [2].

Some of the religious poetry at that particular era called for Muslim unification and emphasized on *jih-d* against the Crusaders and focused on the sanctity of Islamic Jerusalem especially of al-Aqs Mosque. For instance, the poet of Ibn Mun urges Nur al-Din to fight against the Crusaders in which he emphasizes "until you see Jesus fleeing from Jerusalem" [2]. Another poet of Ibn al-Qaysar-n reiterates the centrality of Islamic Jerusalem and al-Aqs Mosque in particular, in the aims of Nur al-Din when he says:

May it, the city of Jerusalem, be purified by the shedding of blood..The decision of Nur al-Din is as strong as ever and.. The iron of his lance is directed at al-Aqs [2].

Abā Sh-mah narrated an account from Rad al-D Abā S-lim 'Abd al-Mun'im Ibn al-Mundhir about the story of Nur al-Din and Abā Gh-nim Ibn al-Mundhir whilst they marched towards Shayzar. According to an account from Ibn al-Ath, the movement of Nur al-Din to conquer Shayzar was in 552 AH/ 1157 CE [8, 9]. Nur al-Din asked Abā Gh-nim to write a letter containing his instruction to eliminate all of the violated policies, which were practiced in Aleppo, Damascus, Hims, Harr-n, Sinj-r, al-Rahbah, 'Az-z, Tall B-shir and several other places. In the letter, Nur al-Din clearly referred to 'the conquests of 'Umar Ibn al-Khatt-b' [5]:

May Allah reward them back what has been stolen from their wealth, which Allah already gifted to them during *the conquests of 'Umar* (in historical Syria)...

Thus, it could be argued that the conquests of 'Umar including the first conquest of Islamic Jerusalem were the practical model adopted by Nur al-Din in realising his mission. One also can argue that the conquest of Islamic Jerusalem might well have been his main concern and aim nine years after his succession.

In short, the close-relationship between Nur al-Din and the '*ulam~*' (religious scholars) during his period in which the '*ulam~*' were intimately involved in the military campaigns of Nur al-Din. Some *jih-d* literature was

³Majd al-D T-hir Ibn Nasr All-h Ibn Jahbal taught at *al-Madrasah al-Nariyyah* in Damascus and is believed to be the first scholar who taught at *al-Madrasah al-Sal-hiyyah* in Islamic Jerusalem. He was born in Aleppo and died in Islamic Jerusalem in 596 AH at the age of 64.

written as well as the *Fad~'il of al-Quds* Merits of Islamic Jerusalem literature was read and extended widely. It could be argued that these measures could have its direct impact on the heart and mind of a Muslim leader like Nur al-Din. Moreover, it could be argued that the vision of liberating Islamic Jerusalem had rooted a long time among these religious connections before the rise of Nur al-Din. However, the idea had not occupied the agenda of Muslim leaders until the time of Nur al-Din. This is due to the fact that he had a strong and special relationship with them.

Preparations: Practical Steps Towards Liberating Islamic Jerusalem: Elisseff argues that once the Crusaders were firmly established in the West Asia, the person who would realize the concept of the *jih~d*, which al-Sulam§, al-Ghazal§ and the Muslim scholars of Damascus had advocated, was Nur al-Din. Therefore, the implementation of the concept of *jih~d* had been fulfilled by Nur al-Din through his practical steps [10].

First: The Unification of Syria in 549 AH/1154 CE: The first aim of Nur al-Din was to unite all Muslim territories in Syria under his rule, which had been achieved by the unification of Syria in 549 AH/1154 CE. For Nur al-Din, the capture of Damascus from Mujsr al-D§n Abaq was very significant in terms of preparing a strategic base in Syria to fight against the Crusaders systematically.

After the death of Im~d al-D§n Zanki, Nur al-Din succeeded his father in Aleppo and his brother, Sayf al-D§n Gh~z§ became the ruler of Mosul. Both of them endeavoured to form a strong alliance and collaboration between Aleppo and Mosul. Ibn al-Ath§r and Abā Sh-mah assert that a few attempts had been carried out by Nur al-Din and his troops in order to provide supporting force to Mosul and to stay over there. Once, Sayf al-D§n Gh~z§ stated to Nur al-Din [8, 5]:

It is not my aim that you would stay here (in Mosul) with me, but my aim (from our collaboration) is that for the Kings and the Crusaders, to know our agreement (alliance and cooperation). If there were any attempt (from them) to strike on us, they will not proceed (with their intention).

However, we can argue that their alliance and cooperation were restricted to the areas surrounding Aleppo, Edessa and Mosul while other important territories were still under the control of either several other Muslim kings or the Crusaders. To some degree, the alliance could indicate the authority of the Zanki's family in the north Syria. However, this was not sufficient to

launch any massive campaigns towards the Crusaders in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Instead, Nur al-Din and Sayf al-D§n had to conquer several other key cities in the north and south of Syria to smooth the progress of their campaigns towards the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem.

In order to encounter the massive progress of the Second Crusade, Nur al-Din realized that Aleppo should be the most powerful Muslim stronghold in the north. Therefore, with the assistance from two experienced lieutenants, Asad al-D§n Shirkāh and Majd al-D§n ibn al-D-yah, Nur al-Din had successfully established a strong military base in Aleppo in 541 AH/1146 CE. Newby (1983: 68) argues that "Aleppo was the most strategic base for Nur al-Din in which its defences were so strong that it never fell to the Crusaders. In flat and tawny northern Syria, the citadel of Aleppo could be seen three days' march away, which the city itself was protected by great walls". We can argue that the setting up of Nur al-Din's practical steps was well designed with Aleppo as his military base in Syria. The fact that Aleppo has been for a long time under the control of the Muslims may well justify his judgment. Nur al-Din might realise that there was no other appropriate military base but Aleppo in order to launch forthcoming campaigns against the Crusaders.

Moreover, Hillenbrand argues that the Arab chroniclers enthusiastically record the boost in morale, which the Muslims in Syria experienced with the conquest of Edessa in 539 AH/ 1144 CE, under the leadership of Im~d al-D§n Zanki, but they are also aware of Edessa's strategic importance [11]. In addition, she argues that Ibn al-Ath§r pointed out that the Crusaders hold on Edessa had harmed the Muslims and that it was the eye of the *Jaz~rah* and the fortress of the Muslim land. Having realised the significance of Edessa to his campaign, Nur al-Din, who was in Aleppo, marched towards the city immediately. This happen after he had heard that Josceline II went to recapture the city with support from the Armenian inhabitants. Indeed, the re-conquest of Edessa in 541 AH/1146 CE was the first challenge faced by Nur al-Din in order to protect his territories from the Crusaders' attacks. The Crusaders themselves, with this particular attempt, wanted to measure the strength of Nur al-Din, so that they would not underestimate the potency of their enemy. Obviously, Nur al-Din had successfully demonstrated his control in the north with the re-conquest of Edessa in which Ibn al-Ath§r argues that 'this was the second conquest' [8]. Moreover, Stevenson argues that "the gain of Nur al-Din in Aleppo when Edessa was conquered was threefold: its

communication with the east was secured, its enemy was now in front and no longer in the rear as well and it in turn began to encircle what was left of the Crusaders territory” [12].

Baldwin argues that the most spectacular of Nur al-Din’s victories over the Crusaders was that of Antioch in which Raymond of Antioch and his barons were disastrously defeated and Raymond himself was killed in the battle of In-b in Safar 544 AH/ June 29 1149 CE [13]. Runciman argues that the death of the Prince Raymond of Antioch had left serious dynastic troubles in the ruling Frankish families. Therefore, not only the Principality of Antioch but also other Crusader states were in concern about the current state of affairs in their territories [14].

According to Abā Sh-mah and Ibn al-Athār, Nur al-Din had successfully conquered Antioch after his second strike in which the successor of Raymond, Reginald of Chatillon was detained [15, 9]. Stevenson argues that Nur al-Din’s early policy of attack on Antioch had accomplished its immediate purpose and the last of the possessions of Antioch east of the so-called ‘backbone of Syria’ had been gained by the conquest of the castle of F-miy~ (Af-miyah) [12]. We may argue that almost three years after the recapture of Edessa in 541 AH/ 1146 CE, the conquest of Antioch became the second turning point for Nur al-Din in determining his next practical steps. Having realized that the bravest stronghold of the Crusaders in the north could be defeated, Nur al-Din might learn a meaningful lesson in the fact that he could possibly gain victory over the remaining Crusaders states.

Finally, Nur al-Din’s capture of Damascus in 549 AH/1154 CE marked a significant outcome in the situation of the Muslims in Syria. Prior to the capture, the Muslims were divided into several states and factions. Each entity was administrated by their own ruling family. Stevenson argues that the acquisition of Damascus by Nur al-Din is a landmark in history [12], while Baldwin argues that with the unification of all the Muslims in Syria under his rule, Nur al-Din’s military power was now consolidated [13]. Brundage points out that the Second Crusade had done nothing to halt the advance of the Muslims against the Latin states and in the years immediately following the fiasco of the Crusaders at Damascus, the Muslims advance continued rapidly [16].

Moreover, Runciman argues that Nur al-Din’s capture of Damascus “heavily outbalanced Baldwin’s capture of Ascalon. His territory now stretched down the whole

eastern frontier of the Crusaders states which are from Edessa to Oultrejourdain. Only a few petty emirates in Syria retained their independence such as Shayzar. Runciman continues to emphasize that though the Crusaders territories were larger in area and richer in resources, Nur al-Din had the advantage of union under one master who was far less trammelled by arrogant vassals than the ruler of the Crusaders states was” [14]. In the same line of argument, Elisseff agrees that “the capture of Damascus marked the beginning of a new era for Syria. At the time, Aleppo and Damascus had the same sovereign, but Nur al-Din’s state was no more than a mosaic of often mutually hostile emirates” [10].

In short, the capture of Damascus was the peak of Nur al-Din’s practical steps in Syria. This could be considered as the first practical phase towards reconquering the remaining Crusaders states. At the end of the first phase, Nur al-Din had successfully completed two major steps; the Muslim unity in Syria and the strong military foundation for the Muslims in the north. Therefore, his subsequent step would be the conquest of Egypt which will lead to the second liberation of Islamic Jerusalem at the end of the second phase of his movements.

Second: The Conquest Of Egypt In 564 Ah/1169 Ce:

One can argue that Nur al-Din wanted to unite all Muslims under one caliph, the Sunni ‘Abb-sid Caliph in Baghdad as a first step to launch massive campaigns against the Crusaders. Nur al-Din might feel that it is crucial to eliminate and abolish the influences of the Shi’ites in order to make his path through to Islamic Jerusalem smooth and without any internal dispute or division. Newby argues that the political division between Egypt and *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) was a source of strength to the Crusaders states [3]. Moreover, he claims that Nur al-Din had no thought of conquering Egypt as a preliminary step to liberate Islamic Jerusalem for the reason that he could not fight both the F-timids and the Crusaders at the same time. Therefore, if Nur al-Din were to conquer Egypt, then *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) and Egypt will be united and the Muslims themselves will gain massive strength. Ibn al-Athār argues that the Crusaders knew the fact that if Egypt fell under the control of Nur al-Din, then they will be in a dangerous situation [8, 9]. We may agree with Newby to the fact that at an earlier stage of conquering Egypt, Nur al-Din was unenthusiastic but ambitious and Asad al-Dīn Shirkāh made it possible. In the same line of argument, Stevenson emphasizes that Nur al-Din hesitated to proceed towards Egypt when Sh-war reached

Damascus seeking for military support. Instead, he argues that throughout the whole history of the attack on Egypt, Shirkāh was the moving spirit [12, 17].

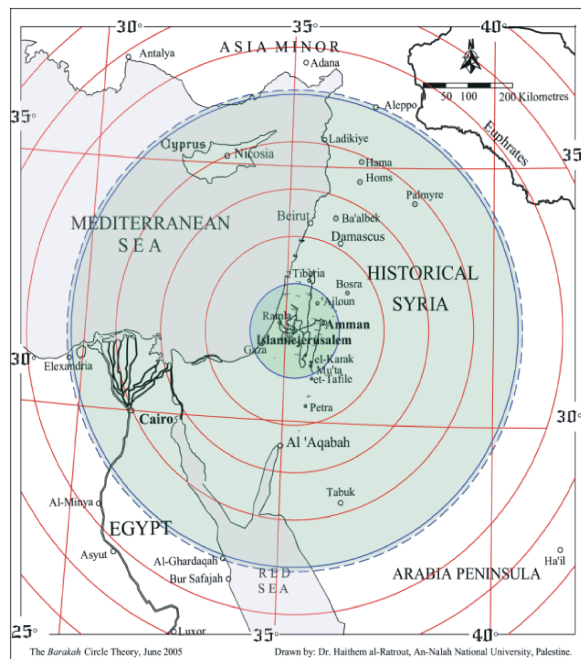
Indeed, after the F-timids Shi'ite of Egypt had fallen, all the territories under the control of Nur al-Din had been restored under the 'Abb-sid Caliph in Baghd-d. Lyons and Jackson argue that soon after the elimination of the F-timids, coins were minted in Egypt with the name of the 'Abb-sid Caliph, al-Mustad§ on one side and that of Nur al-Din on the other. Nur al-Din himself had sent Sharaf al-D§n Ibn Ab§'Asrān to bring the official news of the death of al-} did to Baghd-d in which he came back with robes of honour for Nur al-Din and Sal-h al-D§nn [18]. From this particular movement, it could be argued that Nur al-Din had successfully united the Muslims in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) and Egypt under the doctrine of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jam-ah* (Sunn§). This could be among the key factors in the process of the unification of the Muslims in the 6th century AH/ 12th century CE under the leadership of Nur al-Din.

Evidently, the unification of the Muslims had resulted in immediate positive outcomes in which the Crusaders in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem were in the most dangerous situation at the time. Stevenson argues that "the territories of the Kingdom of Jerusalem intervened between Damascus and Egypt in which the hostility of Amalric had to be reckoned with. With the Muslims in Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*, Historical Syria) and Egypt under one ruler, the Kingdom of Jerusalem would lie between two fires. From the Delta of Egypt, Nur al-Din might employ a fleet against the Syrian coastal areas and interrupt communications with Europe" [12]. Indeed, the attack of Salah al-Din on the south-western territory of IslamicJerusalem including districts of 'Asqalan, al-Rummah and outskirts of Gaza in Rabi' al-Thani 566 AH/December 1170 CE and his capture of Aila on the Red Sea has made Amalric alarmed by the situation [9, 12]. The unified forces of Salah al-Din in Egypt (south) and Nur al-Din in Syria (north) could possibly strike the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem from opposite sides. This critical situation, led Amalric to sent an embassy to the kings of France and England but they turned him down. As a result, he asked help from Manuel of Constantinople [12]. In short, the establishment of this encircled area between north and south of IslamicJerusalem strengthen the argument that Nur al-Din had done all the required practical steps towards the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis for the second time in Islamic history.

According to the second circle of El-Awaisi's new geopolitical theory of *Barakah Circle Theory* of IslamicJerusalem, '*Al-Ardh al-Mubaraka* is not only (*Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) or Egypt but both of them together'. El-Awaisi argues that [1]:

ignoring this Qur'anic fact has led to the loss of IslamicJerusalem to foreign powers several times in history. However, when the Muslims at the time of (Nur al-Din and) Salah al-Din realised the unity of the two parts of the circle, they liberated IslamicJerusalem from foreign invasion. Indeed, the uniting of Egypt with Syria was an important factor in liberating IslamicJerusalem. Accordingly, the liberation of IslamicJerusalem, one could argue, will not happen until Muslims realise and implement the unity of the two sides in the circle. (Moreover), there is an obvious link between three distinctive places on earth: IslamicJerusalem, Sinai and Makkah. 'By the figs and the olives [in IslamicJerusalem] and Mount Sinai and this secure land [in Makkah]' [19]. Indeed, one can argue that there is a unity between al-Sham and Egypt, with its centre in IslamicJerusalem and the Arabian Peninsula, with its centre in Makkah and extending between the Nile and the Euphrates.

Bellow is the map of the second circle of El-Awaisi's new geopolitical theory of *Barakah Circle Theory* of IslamicJerusalem [1].



Remaining Evidence: the Construction of the Minbar (Pulpit): In the same year (564 AH/1169 CE), Nur al-Din conquest Egypt, he ordered the construction of the *minbar*. Indeed, this could be seen as a good sign of his preparation to the historical moment of liberating Islamic Jerusalem. Here, one could trace back the plan of Nur al-Din to liberate Islamic Jerusalem to his instruction to construct a Minbar for Al-Aqsa Mosque. Tabbaa argues also that the construction of the *minbar* marks the peak of creativity of the Aleppo school of woodcarvers [20]. Tabbaa also argues that the *minbar* which was one of the best-executed and most famous *minbar* ever made [20]. Hillenbrand argues that according to Tabbaa, the *minbar* is an eloquent statement of *jih-d* in which it was the richest of all Nur al-Din's inscriptions in proclamation of the victory of Islam against the infidels. Indeed, the inscription on the *minbar* is very unusual, both in length and in its emotional invocations to Allah [2]. Indeed, Ibn Jubayr, who visited Aleppo in 580 AH/1185 CE, illustrate the uniqueness of the *minbar* in which he writes in his '*Rih?lah Ibn Jubayr*' [21]:

I have not seen in any other country a *minbar* which resembles its shape and the uniqueness of its manufacture...It raises like an enormous crown above the *mih-r-b* until it reaches the ceiling [2].

Tabbaa argues that the calligraphic transformation in the monuments was one of the most visible signs of Nur al-Din's broad movement, which had lain dormant in Syria during the turbulent decades of the first half of the twelfth century [20]. Tabbaa also argues that perhaps not coincidentally, some of the finest works in Syria in the mid 6th century AH/ 12th century CE were commissioned by Nur al-Din for his various institutions in Aleppo, Ham-h, Damascus and even in Islamic Jerusalem. Indeed, these monuments had conveyed the character of Nur al-Din as the *jih-d* fighter against the Crusaders in *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) [20].

Nur al-Din himself had ordered a *minbar* to be built, some five years before his death, with the intention to place it in al-Aqs~ Mosque after liberated Islamic Jerusalem. Evidently, some inscriptions that have been found revealed the strong vision and eagerness of Nur al-Din to liberating Islamic Jerusalem and return it back under the Muslim rule [2]. The two dates engraved in the *minbar* 564 AH/1168-9 CE and 572 AH/1176 CE suggests that its construction begun at the time of Nur al-Din but perhaps not completed until the reign of his son al-S~lih Ism~\$.

One of the inscriptions on the *minbar* stated that it had been commissioned by Nur al-Din in 564 AH/1168-9 CE. The beginning of the inscription reads:

Its construction has been ordered by the servant, the one needful of His mercy, the one thankful for His grace, the fighter of *jih-d* in His path, the one who defends against the enemies of His religion, the just king, Nur al-Din, the pillar of Islam and the Muslims, the dispenser of justice to those who are oppressed in the face of the oppressors, Abā al-Q-sim Mah?mād b. Zanki b. Aq Sunqār, the helper of the Commander of the Faithful [2].

Nur al-Din had appointed four outstanding carpenters whose signatures appeared on the inscriptions of the *minbar*. Tabbaa mentions that the *minbar* was signed by four different artisans: Humayd Ibn Z-fir, Abā al-Hasan Ibn Yahy~, Abā al-Fad~'il Ibn Yahy~ and Salm-n Ibn Ma~l\$ all from the village of Akhtar\$ in the vicinity of Aleppo. The recent analysis of its geometric patterns, preliminary studies for building a replica, shows that it contained twenty-five different geometric patterns in its various panels in addition to vegetal arabesque, openwork, *muqarnas* and inscriptions [20].

It is significant to indicate here that the text of the inscription seems even to be asked Allah to grant him a personal favour in liberating Islamic Jerusalem himself; 'May He grant liberation to him (Nur al-Din) and at his own hand.' Al-Bund-r\$ in his summary of '*al-Barq al-Sh-m\$*' by 'Im~d al-D\$ al-K~t\$ recorded the story of the *minbar* before it was brought to Islamic Jerusalem in which he says [22].

By the light of his discernment the just prince Nur al-Din Mahmud b. Zanki had known in his time about the conquest of Islamic Jerusalem after him. So, he commissioned in Aleppo the making of a *minbar* for Islamic Jerusalem; carpenters, craftsmen and architects laboured on it for years and they made it outstanding in its solidness and decoration. That *minbar* remained installed in the mosque of Aleppo, sheathed like a sword in the scabbard of protection until the sultan (Sal-h al-D\$) in this age ordered the fulfilment of the Nur al-Din's vow and the *minbar* was brought to its place in Islamic Jerusalem [2].

However, Ibn al-Ath\$'s account regarding the *minbar* of Nur al-Din seems more provoking and admiring. Ibn al-Ath\$ states that [9].

He (Sal-h al-D§n) ordered that a *minbar* should be made for him. He was told that Nur al-Din Mahmud had made a *minbar* in Aleppo. He ordered craftsmen to go to great lengths to decorate it beautifully and to perfect it and he said: “we have made it to be erected in Islamicjerusalem.” So, carpenters made it in a number of years in which *nothing like it was made in Islam*. So, he (Sal-h al-D§n) ordered that it should be brought and it was carried from Aleppo and erected in Islamicjerusalem. Between the making of the *minbar* and its being carried (to Islamicjerusalem) was more than twenty years. *This was one of the blessings and good intentions of Nur al-Din*, may Allah have mercy on him [2].

It could also be argued that Nur al-Din’s had intentionally decided to construct a *minbar* and not any other Muslim monuments. This is due to the fact that the *minbar* signifies the most important part of a mosque in Islamic tradition. Therefore, creating a *minbar* to be installed in al-Aqs~ Mosque in Islamicjerusalem indicates the fact that Nur al-Din optimistically knew that the liberation of Islamicjerusalem would be accomplished in the near future. Additionally, Nur al-Din had understood, definitely, that the *minbar* would last for centuries and this could be the most significant monument in Islamicjerusalem in the context of *jih-d* and counter-Crusades. The *minbar* was first used in the Great Mosque of Aleppo and was eventually brought to Islamicjerusalem after the death of Nur al-Din at S?al-h? al-D§n’s request. The *minbar* remained in al-Aqs?~ Mosque for about eight centuries from 564 AH/1168 CE until it was destroyed by an Australian fanatic in 1969 CE. as part of a systematic planned attempt to destroy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

On the other hand, Hillenbrand claims that the inscription in *al-J-mi? al-N?r§* in Mosul, in particular verse 149 from *s?arah al-Baqarah* ‘From wherever you start forth, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (in Makkah); that is indeed the truth from your Lord. And Allah is not unmindful of what you do.’, is another evidence to support the argument that Nur al-Din was preoccupied with Islamicjerusalem. We disagree with what Hillenbrand presented as evidence. This verse is only asking Muslims to turn their face towards the *Ka’bah* in Makkah when they are praying. Most if not all the mosques in the Muslim countries have engraved such a verse [2].

In short, the construction of the *minbar* and its uniqueness proved the seriousness of Nur al-Din in his plan towards the liberation of Islamicjerusalem. Moreover,

the construction of the *minbar* seems to be the most noticeable remaining evidence representing the strong vision of Nur al-Din towards Islamicjerusalem and part of his preparations plan.

Nur al-Din Zanki’s Plan to Liberate Islamicjerusalem:

It seems obvious that all these practical steps are apparent indications of the plan of Nur al-Din towards the liberation of Islamicjerusalem. His campaigns from Aleppo in the north towards Damascus and Cairo in the south appeared to be part of strategic military steps in order to move at a later stage to liberate Islamicjerusalem. Using the same argument of El-Awaisi regarding the first Muslim conquest, we argue that the second Muslim conquest of Islamicjerusalem, 13 years after the death of Nur al-Din (569 AH/ 1174 CE), ‘was a natural progression. These events helped to create a supportive environment which would help to establish and direct future events. Indeed, they were preliminary steps on the way to the great campaign which was launched and directed’ by Nur al-Din and crowned by the conquering of Islamicjerusalem by Salah al-Din in 569 AH/ 1174 CE [1].

In comparison with ‘the first *Fatih* of Islamicjerusalem’, the practical steps of Nur al-Din were following the same pattern of the Prophet Muhammad’s steps of preparations. Although these preparations for the first conquest started at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, it was only concluded by the first and second Muslim Caliphs, Abu Baker and Umar Ibn al-Khattab. Nur al-Din, like Prophet Muhammad, died before fulfilling his mission to liberate Islamicjerusalem. Salah al-Din, like Abu Bakr and Umar Ibn al-Khattab, took the leadership and accomplished his mission [1]. From these two turning points in the history of liberating Islamicjerusalem, we learn that well preparations at all fronts are essential steps for concluding the liberation successfully. This might take generations of preparations and it will not happen suddenly. Indeed, one verse of the Qur’an instructs Muslims to ‘prepare against them (make ready) whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may frighten the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows’ [23].

Finally, the plan of Nur al-Din for liberating Islamicjerusalem went through two main stages.

First: Nur al-Din’s concern has been developed as early as he succeeded his father, ‘Im-d al-D§n Zanki in Aleppo. Putting the ideas of Muslim scholars, in particular, al-Sulam§ into action, Nur al-Din started to conquer

several states which were under the Crusaders occupation one by one. This began with the re-conquest of Edessa and concluded with the conquest of Egypt. This argument would be supported with the appearance of internal disagreement in 567 AH/ 1172 CE between Nur al-Din and Sal-h al-Din in which Ibn al-Athir had recorded in details [8, 9]. This disagreement emerged as a result of the negligence and lack of enthusiasm from Sal-h al-Din's side to carry out Nur al-Din's plan to march towards Karak and Shawbak and later on headed for the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem. Moreover, Elisseff argues that reconquest and unity were two new slogans in the written propaganda, essentially in the re-conquest of *al-S-hil* (the Mediterranean coast) and of Islamic Jerusalem [10].

Second: Nur al-Din's plan for Islamic Jerusalem reached its peak towards the end of his life. It could be claimed that after his defeat to the Crusaders at the battle of al-Buqay'ah in 558 AH/ 1163 CE, Nur al-Din suffered a lot. Hillenbrand argues that this could be the most important turning point in the religious development of Nur al-Din. This defeat had a yawning consequence on the personal life and policies of Nur al-Din during the rest ten years of his reign. From this time forth, he adopted a life of piety and asceticism (Is this a direct quote from the source?) [2]. However, according to Ibn al-Adim, there was an early incident before the battle of al-Buqay'ah, which seems to have re-sharpened Nur al-Din's religious determination. Burh-n al-Din al-Balkh, who died in 1153, before capturing Damascus, said to Nur al-Din: "Do you want to celebrate victory whilst in your camp there are intoxicating drinks and drums and wind instruments?". According to this narration, Nur al-Din was deeply affected by these reprimands and he vowed regret and repentance [24]. This argument could be strengthened by the fact that Nur al-Din's campaigns towards the conquest of Egypt only achieved after the third mission sent under Asad al-Din Shirkah which was in 564 AH/ 1169 CE. Therefore, Nur al-Din realized that he had acquired strong power in which the Muslims had established an encircled area around the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem from Aleppo and Antioch in the north to Cairo in Egypt in the south. Perhaps he thought that he could further move towards the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and it is the right time to liberate Islamic Jerusalem from the Crusaders. His order to construct the *minbar* in the same year of the conquest of Egypt in 564, could be argued as a good sign of Nur al-Din's preparation to the historical moment to liberate Islamic Jerusalem.

What is more convincing, regarding the central argument of this article, was the fact that he did mention clearly his plan in a letter sent to the 'Abb-sid caliph in Baghdad. Abā Sh-mah recorded the text of the letter of Nur al-Din to al-Mustadif Ibn Amr All-h in 568 AH/1173 CE, a year before his death, in which Nur al-Din stresses the urgent need to liberate Islamic Jerusalem from the Crusaders. He emphasizes that his main aim is to banish the worshippers of the cross from al-Aqs Mosque. The content of the letter reveals the intention of Nur al-Din to liberate Islamic Jerusalem. It reads:

And Constantinople and Jerusalem are running to the conquests time in the field of competition. Both of them are in the desolation of the night of the black darkness waiting in the morning of the intimacy. May Allah with His generosity brings near the harvest of the both conquests to the Muslim and guides the servant to the possession of satisfaction of the Creatures [5].

At the end of the letter, Nur al-Din reveals precisely his strong consciousness and plan in liberating Islamic Jerusalem. Its read:

And we ask Allah for His guidance to lead to the accomplishment of the aim and the exclusion of the dirty worshippers of the cross from Al-Aqs Mosque. May Allah the Almighty make the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem His starting point of His will and the goal of His trigger and His suggestion in its fight; and help him (Nur al-Din) to reinstate his authority in *al-S-hil* (coastal area) including all of its countries (*Bilad al-Sh-m*) [5].

An additional supporting evidence comes from Ibn al-Jawzi who had mentioned clearly that the ultimate goal of Nur al-Din was to liberate Islamic Jerusalem from the Crusaders.

He (Nur al-Din) regularly wrote to me (seeking my advice)...and he set his goal for the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem but his death on Syawal this year (569 AH/1174 CE) made it impossible... [6].

CONCLUSION

In short, the plan of Nur al-Din towards the second liberation of Islamic Jerusalem was well developed during the first phase of his reign in Syria. The call for *jih-d* of

al-Sulam, the writing on *jih-d* by Muslim scholars, in particular Ibn Jabbal and Nur al-Din intimate relationship with the Muslim scholars in Syria are the main factors behind developing such a plan. Indeed, this article shows that the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem for Nur al-Din was in his heart and mind; and it was his ultimate aim behind several practical steps throughout twenty-eight years of his reign. Indeed, Nur al-Din has paved the way to the second Muslim liberation of Islamic Jerusalem in 583 AH/ 1187 CE by Sal-h al-Din, 13 years after the death Nur al-Din. In other words, Nur al-Din's preparation plan was his outstanding contributions towards the liberation of Islamic Jerusalem for the second time in Muslim history. His practical steps which can be divided into two major series of campaigns; the unification of *Bilad al-Sham* (Historical Syria) at the local level and he conquest of Egypt at the regional level, could be considered as Nur al-Din most excellent achievement throughout the Muslim history.

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