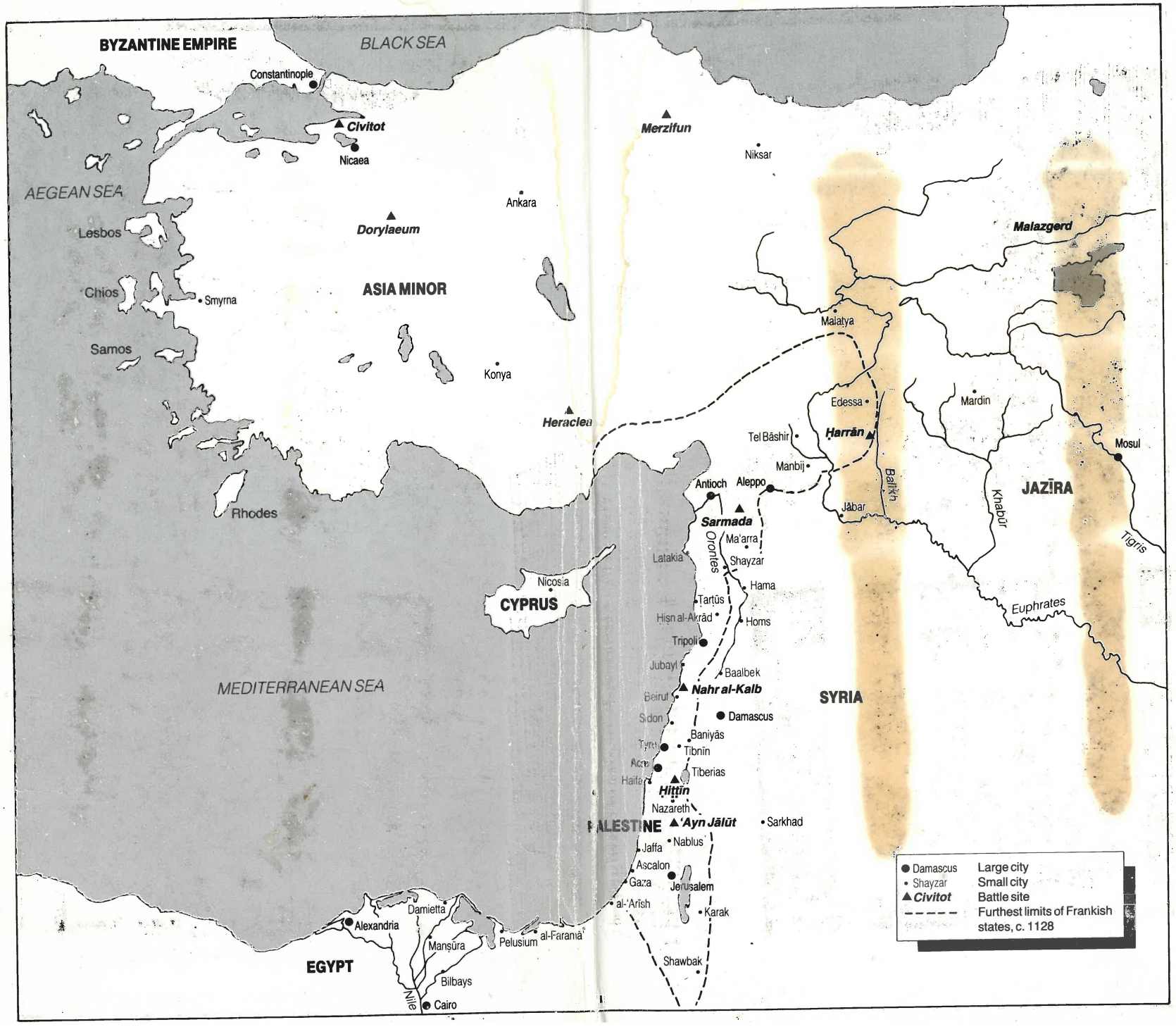
BYZANTINE EMPIRE
BLACK SEA
Constantinople
Civitot
Nicaea
Merzifun
Niksar
AEGEAN SEA
Ankara
Dorylaeum
Lesbos
Malazgerd
Chios
Smyrna
ASIA MINOR
Malatya
Samos
Konya
Heraclea
Edessa
Mardin
Tel Bāshir
Ḥarrān
Mosul
Manbij
Balīkh
Antioch
Aleppo
JAZĪRA
Rhodes
Jābar
Khabūr
Sarmada
Ma'arra
Tigris
Orontes
Latakia
Shayzar
Nicosia
Hama
CYPRUS
Euphrates
Tartūs
Ḥiṣn al-Akrād
Homs
Tripoli
Jubayl
Baalbek
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Nahr al-Kalb
SYRIA
Beirut
Damascus
Sidon
Baniyās
Tibnīn
Tiberias
Ḥiṭṭīn
Nazareth
'Ayn Jālūt
Sarkhad
PALESTINE
Jaffa
Nablus
Ascalon
Gaza
Jerusalem
al-'Arīsh
Karak
Damietta
Alexandria
Pelusium
al-Faramā
Manṣūra
Shawbak
EGYPT
Bilbays
Nile
Cairo
Damascus Large city
Shayzar Small city
Civitot Battle site
Furthest limits of Frankish states, c. 1128

THE CRUSADES THROUGH ARAB EYES

Amin Maalouf

Prologue

Baghdad, August 1099.

Wearing no turban, his head shaved as a sign of mourning, the venerable *qāḍī* Abū Ṣa'ad al-Ḥarawi burst with a loud cry into the spacious *dīwān* of the caliph al-Mustaẓhir Billāh, a throng of companions, young and old, trailing in his wake. Noisily assenting to his every word, they, like him, offered the chilling spectacle of long beards and shaven skulls. A few of the court dignitaries tried to calm him, but al-Ḥarawi swept them aside with brusque disdain, strode resolutely to the centre of the hall, and then, with the searing eloquence of a seasoned preacher declaiming from his pulpit, proceeded to lecture all those present, without regard to rank.

'How dare you slumber in the shade of complacent safety', he began, 'leading lives as frivolous as garden flowers, while your brothers in Syria have no dwelling place save the saddles of camels and the bellies of vultures? Blood has been spilled! Beautiful young girls have been shamed, and must now hide their sweet faces in their hands! Shall the valorous Arabs resign themselves to insult, and the valiant Persians accept dishonour?'

'It was a speech that brought tears to many an eye and moved men's hearts', the Arab chroniclers would later write. The entire audience broke out in wails and lamentations. But al-Ḥarawi had not come to elicit sobs.

'Man's meanest weapon', he shouted, 'is to shed tears when rapiers stir the coals of war.'

If he had made this arduous trip from Damascus to Baghdad, three long summer weeks under the merciless sun of the Syrian desert, it was not to plead for pity but to alert Islam's highest

authorities to the calamity that had just befallen the faithful, and to implore them to intervene without delay to halt the carnage. 'Never have the Muslims been so humiliated', al-Ḥarawi repeated, 'never have their lands been so savagely devastated.' All the people travelling with him had fled from towns sacked by the invaders; among them were some of the few survivors of Jerusalem. He had brought them along so that they could relate, in their own words, the tragedy they had suffered just one month earlier.

The Franj had taken the holy city on Friday, the twenty-second day of the month of Sha'bān, in the year of the Hegira 492, or 15 July 1099, after a forty-day siege. The exiles still trembled when they spoke of the fall of the city: they stared into space as though they could still see the fair-haired and heavily armoured warriors spilling through the streets, swords in hand, slaughtering men, women, and children, plundering houses, sacking mosques.

Two days later, when the killing stopped, not a single Muslim was left alive within the city walls. Some had taken advantage of the chaos to slip away, escaping through gates battered down by the attackers. Thousands of others lay in pools of blood on the doorsteps of their homes or alongside the mosques. Among them were many *imāms, 'ulamā'*, and Sufi ascetics who had forsaken their countries of origin for a life of pious retreat in these holy places. The last survivors were forced to perform the worst tasks: to heave the bodies of their own relatives, to dump them in vacant, unmarked lots, and then to set them alight, before being themselves massacred or sold into slavery.

The fate of the Jews of Jerusalem was no less atrocious. During the first hours of battle, some participated in the defence of their quarter, situated on the northern edge of the city. But when that part of the city walls overhanging their homes collapsed and the blond knights began to pour through the streets, the Jews panicked. Re-enacting an immemorial rite, the entire community gathered in the main synagogue to pray. The Franj barricaded all the exits and stacked all the bundles of wood they could find in a ring around the building. The temple was then put to the torch. Those who managed to escape were massacred in the neighbouring alleyways. The rest were burned alive.

A few days after the tragedy, the first refugees from Palestine arrived in Damascus, carrying with them, with infinite care, the

Koran of 'Uthmān, one of the oldest existing copies of the holy book. Soon afterwards the survivors of Jerusalem duly approached the Syrian capital. When they glimpsed the distant outlines of the three minarets of the Umayyad mosque looming up from its square courtyard, they unrolled their prayer rugs and bowed to give thanks to the Almighty for having thus prolonged their lives, which they had thought were over. Abū Ṣa'ad al-Ḥarawi, grand *qāḍī* of Damascus, welcomed the refugees with kindness. This magistrate, of Afghan origin, was the city's most respected personality, and he offered the Palestinians both advice and comfort. He told them that a Muslim need not be ashamed of being forced to flee from his home. Was not Islam's first refugee the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who had to leave Mecca, his native city, whose population was hostile to him, to seek refuge in Medina, where the new religion had been more warmly received? And was it not from his place of exile that he launched the holy war, the *jihād*, to free his country of idolatry? The refugees must therefore consider themselves *mujāhidīn*, soldiers of the holy war, so highly honoured in Islam that the *hijra*, the Prophet's 'emigration', was chosen as the starting point of the Muslim calendar.

Indeed, for many believers, exile is a duty in the event of occupation. The great traveller Ibn Jubayr, an Arab of Spain who visited Palestine nearly a century after the beginning of the Frankish invasion, was to be shocked when he found that some Muslims, 'slaves to their love for their native land', were willing to accept life in occupied territory.

'There is no excuse before God', he would say, 'for a Muslim to remain in a city of unbelief, unless he be merely passing through. In the land of Islam he finds shelter from the discomforts and evils to which he is subjected in the countries of the Christians, as, for example, when he hears disgusting words spoken about the Prophet, particularly by the most besotted, or finds it impossible to cleanse himself properly, or has to live among pigs and so many other illicit things. Beware! Beware of entering their lands! You must seek God's pardon and mercy for such an error. One of the horrors that strikes any inhabitant of the Christian countries is the spectacle of Muslim prisoners tottering in irons, condemned to hard labour and treated as slaves, as well as the sight of Muslim captives bearing iron chains round their legs. Hearts break at the sight of

them, but they have no use for pity.'

Although excessive from a doctrinal standpoint, Ibn Jubayr's words nevertheless accurately reflect the attitude of the thousands of refugees from Palestine and northern Syria who gathered in Damascus in that July of 1099. While they were sick at heart at having been forced to abandon their homes, they were determined never to return until the occupiers had departed for ever, and they resolved to awaken the consciences of their brothers in all the lands of Islam.

Why else would they have followed al-Ḥarawi to Baghdad? Was it not to the caliph, the Prophet's successor, that Muslims must turn in their hour of need? Was it not to the prince of the faithful that they should address their complaints and their tales of woe?

In Baghdad, however, the refugees' disappointment was to be as great as their hopes had been high. The caliph al-Mustaẓhir Billāh began by expressing his profound sympathy and compassion. Then he ordered seven exalted dignitaries to conduct an inquiry into these troublesome events. It is perhaps superfluous to add that nothing was ever heard from that committee of wise men.

The sack of Jerusalem, starting point of a millennial hostility between Islam and the West, aroused no immediate sensation. It would be nearly half a century before the Arab East would mobilize against the invader, before the call to *jihād* issued by the *qāḍī* of Damascus in the caliph's *dīwān* would be celebrated in commemoration of the first solemn act of resistance.

At the start of the invasion, few Arabs were as perspicacious as al-Ḥarawi in weighing the scope of the threat from the West. Some adapted all too rapidly to the new situation. Most, bitter but resigned, sought merely to survive. Some observed more or less lucidly, trying to understand these events, as unexpected as they were novel. The most touching of these was the Damascene chronicler Ibn al-Qalānisi, a young scholar born of a family of notables. A witness to the story from the outset, he was twenty-three when the Franj arrived in the East in 1096, and he assiduously and regularly recorded all the events of which he had some knowledge. His chronicle faithfully recounts, in a fairly detached manner, the advance of the invaders as seen from his native city.

For him it all began during those anxious days when the first rumours drifted into Damascus.

Part One

Invasion
(1096 — 1100)

Regard the Franj! Behold with what obstinacy they fight for their religion, while we, the Muslims, show no enthusiasm for waging holy war.

SALADIN

1
The Franj Arrive

> In that year, news began to trickle in about the appearance of Franj troops, coming down from the Sea of Marmara in an innumerable multitude. People took fright. This information was confirmed by King Kilij Arslan, whose territory was closest to these Franj.

The King Kilij Arslan whom Ibn al-Qalānisi mentions here was not yet seventeen when the invaders arrived. The first Muslim leader to be informed of their approach, this young Turkish sultan with the slightly slanting eyes would be the first to inflict a defeat upon them—but also the first to be routed by the formidable knights.

In July 1096 Kilij Arslan learned that an enormous throng of Franj was en route to Constantinople. He immediately feared the worst. Naturally, he had no idea as to the real aims of these people, but in his view nothing good could come of their arrival in the Orient.

The sultanate under his rule covered much of Asia Minor, a territory the Turks had only recently taken from the Greeks. Kilij Arslan's father, Süleymān, was the first Turk to secure possession of this land, which many centuries later would come to be called Turkey. In Nicaea, the capital of this young Muslim state, Byzantine churches were still more numerous than Muslim mosques. Although the city's garrison was made up of Turkish cavalry, the majority of the population was Greek, and Kilij Arslan had few illusions about his subjects' true sentiments: as far as they were concerned, he would never be other than a barbarian chieftain. The only sovereign they recognized—the man whose name, spoken in a low whisper, was murmured in all their prayers—was the basileus

Alexius Comnenus, 'Emperor of the Romans'. Alexius was in fact the emperor of the Greeks, who proclaimed themselves the inheritors of the Roman empire. The Arabs, indeed, recognized them as such, for in the eleventh century—as in the twentieth—they designated the Greeks by the term Rūm, or 'Romans'. The domain conquered from the Greek empire by Kilij Arslan's father was even called the Sultanate of the Rūm.

Alexius was one of the most prestigious figures of the Orient at the time. Kilij Arslan was genuinely fascinated by this short-statured quinquagenarian, always decked in gold and in rich blue robes, with his carefully tended beard, elegant manners, and eyes sparkling with malice. Alexius reigned in Constantinople, fabled Byzantium, situated less than three days' march from Nicaea. This proximity aroused conflicting emotions in the mind of the young sultan. Like all nomadic warriors, he dreamed of conquest and pillage, and was not displeased to find the legendary riches of Byzantium so close at hand. At the same time he felt threatened: he knew that Alexius had never abandoned his dream of retaking Nicaea, not only because the city had always been Greek, but also and more importantly because the presence of Turkish warriors such a short distance from Constantinople represented a permanent threat to the security of the empire.

Although the Byzantine army, torn by years of internal crisis, would have been unable to undertake a war of reconquest on its own, it was no secret that Alexius could always seek the aid of foreign auxiliaries. The Byzantines had never hesitated to resort to the services of Western knights. Many Franj, from heavily armoured mercenaries to pilgrims en route to Palestine, had visited the Orient, and by 1096 they were by no means unknown to the Muslims. Some twenty years earlier—Kilij Arslan had not yet been born, but the older emirs in his army had told him the story—one of these fair-haired adventurers, a man named Roussel of Bailleul, had succeeded in founding an autonomous state in Asia Minor and had even marched on Constantinople. The panicky Byzantines had had no choice but to appeal to Kilij Arslan's father, who could hardly believe his ears when a special envoy from the basileus implored him to rush to their aid. The Turkish cavalry converged on Constantinople and managed to defeat Roussel; Süleymān received handsome compensation in the form of gold, horses, and land.

The Byzantines had been suspicious of the Franj ever since, but the imperial armies, short of experienced soldiers, had no choice but to recruit mercenaries, and not only Franj: many Turkish warriors also fought under the banners of the Christian empire. It was precisely from his congeners enrolled in the Byzantine army that Kilij Arslan learned, in July 1096, that thousands of Franj were approaching Constantinople. He was perplexed by the picture painted by his informants. These Occidentals bore scant resemblance to the mercenaries to whom the Turks were accustomed. Although their number included several hundred knights and a significant number of foot-soldiers, there were also thousands of women, children, and old people in rags. They had the air of some wretched tribe evicted from their lands by an invader. It was also reported that they all wore strips of cloth in the shape of a cross, sewn onto the backs of their garments.

The young sultan, who doubtless found it difficult to assess the danger, asked his agents to be especially vigilant and to keep him informed of the exploits of these new invaders. He had the fortifications of his capital inspected as a precaution. The walls of Nicaea, more than a *farsakh* (six thousand metres) in length, were topped by 240 turrets. South-west of the city, the placid waters of the Ascanian Lake offered excellent natural protection.

Nevertheless by early August the serious nature of the threat had become clear. Escorted by Byzantine ships, the Franj crossed the Bosporus and, despite a blazing summer sun, advanced along the coast. Wherever they passed, they were heard to proclaim that they had come to exterminate the Muslims, although they were also seen to plunder many a Greek church on their way. Their chief was said to be a hermit by the name of Peter. Informants estimated that there were several tens of thousands of them in all, but no one would hazard a guess as to where they were headed. It seemed that Basileus Alexius had decided to settle them in Civitot, a camp that had earlier been equipped for other mercenaries, less than a day's march from Nicaea.

The sultan's palace was awash with agitation. While the Turkish cavalry stood ready to mount their chargers at a moment's notice, there was a constant flow of spies and scouts, reporting the smallest movements of the Franj. It transpired that every morning hordes several thousand strong left camp to forage the surrounding

countryside: farms were plundered or set alight before the rabble returned to Civitot, where their various clans squabbled over the spoils of their raids. None of this was surprising to the sultan's soldiers, and their master saw no reason for particular concern. The routine continued for an entire month.

One day, however, toward the middle of September, there was a sudden change in the behaviour of the Franj. Probably because they were unable to squeeze anything more out of the immediate neighbourhood, they had reportedly set out in the direction of Nicaea. They passed through several villages, all of them Christian, and commandeered the harvests, which had just been gathered, mercilessly massacring those peasants who tried to resist. Young children were even said to have been burned alive.

Kilij Arslan found himself taken unawares. By the time the news of these events reached him, the attackers were already at the walls of his capital, and before sunset the citizens could see the smoke rising from the first fires. The sultan quickly dispatched a cavalry patrol to confront the Franj. Hopelessly outnumbered, the Turks were cut to pieces. A few bloodied survivors limped back into Nicaea. Sensing that his prestige was threatened, Kilij Arslan would have liked to join the battle immediately, but the emirs of his army dissuaded him. It would soon be night, and the Franj were already hastily falling back to their camp. Revenge would have to wait.

But not for long. Apparently emboldened by their success, the Occidentals decided to try again two weeks later. This time the son of Süleymān was alerted in time, and he followed their advance step by step. A Frankish company, including some knights but consisting mainly of thousands of tattered pillagers, set out apparently for Nicaea. But then, circling around the town, they turned east and took the fortress of Xerigordon by surprise.

The young sultan decided to act. At the head of his men, he rode briskly towards the small stronghold, where the drunken Franj, celebrating their victory, had no way of knowing that their fate was already sealed, for Xerigordon was a trap. As the soldiers of Kilij Arslan well knew (but the inexperienced foreigners had yet to discover), its water supplies lay outside and rather far from the walls. The Turks quickly sealed off access to the water. Now they had only to take up positions around the fortress and sit and wait. Thirst would do the fighting in their stead.

An atrocious torment began for the besieged Franj. They went so far as to drink the blood of their mounts and their own urine. They were seen looking desperately up into the sky, hoping for a few drops of rain in those early October days. In vain. At the end of the week, the leader of the expedition, a knight named Reynald, agreed to capitulate provided his life would be spared. Kilij Arslan, who had demanded that the Franj publicly renounce their religion, was somewhat taken aback when Reynald declared his readiness not only to convert to Islam but even to fight at the side of the Turks against his own companions. Several of his friends, who had acceded to the same demands, were sent in captivity to various cities of Syria or central Asia. The rest were put to the sword.

The young sultan was proud of his exploit, but he kept a cool head. After according his men a respite for the traditional sharing out of the spoils, he called them to order the following day. The Franj had admittedly lost nearly six thousand men, but six times that number still remained, and the time to dispose of them was now or never. Kilij Arslan decided to attempt a ruse. He sent two Greek spies to the Civitot camp to report that Reynald's men were in an excellent position, and that they had succeeded in taking Nicaea itself, whose riches they had no intention of sharing with their coreligionists. In the meantime, the Turkish army would lay a gigantic ambush.

As expected, the carefully propagated rumours aroused turmoil in the camp at Civitot. A mob gathered, shouting insults against Reynald and his men; it was decided to proceed without delay to share in the pillage of Nicaea. But all at once, no one really knows how, an escapee from the Xerigordon expedition arrived, divulging the truth about his companions' fate. Kilij Arslan's spies thought that they had failed in their mission, for the wisest among the Franj counselled caution. Once the first moment of consternation had passed, however, excitement soared anew. The mob bustled and shouted: they were ready to set out in a trice, no longer to join in pillage, but 'to avenge the martyrs'. Those who hesitated were dismissed as cowards. The most enraged voices carried the day, and the time of departure was set for the following morning. The sultan's spies, whose ruse had been exposed but its objective attained, had triumphed after all. They sent word to their master to prepare for battle.

At dawn on 21 October 1096 the Occidentals left their camp. Kilij Arslan, who had spent the night in the hills near Civitot, was not far away. His men were in position, well hidden. From his vantage point, he could see all along the column of Franj, who were raising great clouds of dust. Several hundred knights, most of them without their armour, marched at the head of the procession, followed by a disordered throng of foot-soldiers. They had been marching for less than an hour when the sultan heard their approaching clamour. The sun, rising at his back, shone directly into the eyes of the Franj. Holding his breath, he signalled his emirs to get ready. The fateful moment had arrived. A barely perceptible gesture, a few orders whispered here and there, and the Turkish archers were slowly bending their bows: a thousand arrows suddenly shot forth with a single protracted whistle. Most of the knights fell within the first few minutes. Then the foot-soldiers were decimated in their turn.

By the time the hand-to-hand combat was joined, the Franj were already routed. Those in the rear ran for their camp, where the non-combatants were barely awake. An aged priest was celebrating morning mass, the women were preparing food. The arrival of the fugitives, with the Turks in hot pursuit, struck terror throughout the camp. The Franj fled in all directions. Those who tried to reach the neighbouring woods were soon captured. Others, in an inspired move, barricaded themselves in an unused fortress that had the additional advantage of lying alongside the sea. Unwilling to take futile risks, the sultan decided not to lay a siege. The Byzantine fleet, rapidly alerted, sailed in to pick up the Franj. Two or three thousand men escaped in this manner. Peter the Hermit, who had been in Constantinople for several days, was also saved. But his partisans were not so lucky. The youngest women were kidnapped by the sultan's horsemen and distributed to the emirs or sold in the slave markets. Several young boys suffered a similar fate. The rest of the Franj, probably nearly twenty thousand of them, were exterminated.

Kilij Arslan was jubilant. He had annihilated the Frankish army, in spite of its formidable reputation, while suffering only insignificant losses among his own troops. Gazing upon the immense booty amassed at his feet, he basked in the most sublime triumph of his life.

And yet, rarely in history has a victory proved so costly to those who had won it.

Intoxicated by his success, Kilij Arslan pointedly ignored the information that came through the following winter about the arrival of fresh groups of Franj in Constantinople. As far as he was concerned—and even the wisest of his emirs did not dissent—there was no reason for disquiet. If other mercenaries of Alexius dared to cross the Bosporus, they would be cut to pieces like those who had come before them. The sultan felt that it was time to return to the major preoccupations of the hour—in other words, to the merciless struggle he had long been waging against the other Turkish princes, his neighbours. It was there, and nowhere else, that his fate and that of his realm would be decided. The clashes with the Rūm or with their foreign Franj auxiliaries would never be more than an interlude.

The young sultan was well placed to feel certain about this. Was it not during one of these interminable battles among chiefs that his father, Süleymān, had laid down his life in 1086? Kilij Arslan was then barely seven years old, and he was to have succeeded his father under the regency of several faithful emirs. But he had been kept from power and taken to Persia under the pretext that his life was in danger. There he was kept: adulated, smothered in respect, waited on by a small army of attentive slaves, but closely watched, and strictly prevented from visiting his realm. His hosts—in other words, his jailers—were none other than the members of his own clan, the Seljuks.

If there was one name known to everyone in the eleventh century, from the borders of China to the distant land of the Franj, it was theirs. Within a few years of their arrival in the Middle East from central Asia, the Seljuk Turks, with their thousands of nomadic horsemen sporting long braided hair, had seized control of the entire region, from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean. Since 1055 the caliph of Baghdad, successor of the Prophet and inheritor of the renowned 'Abbasid empire, had been no more than a docile puppet in their hands. From Isfahan to Damascus, from Nicaea to Jerusalem, it was their emirs who laid down the law. For the first time in three centuries, the entire Muslim East was united under the authority of a single dynasty which proclaimed its determination to

restore the past glory of Islam. The Rūm, who were crushed by the Seljuks in 1071, would never rise again. The largest of their provinces, Asia Minor, had been invaded, and their capital itself was no longer secure. Their emperors, including Alexius himself, dispatched one delegation after another to the pope in Rome, the supreme commander of the West, imploring him to declare holy war against this resurgence of Islam.

Kilij Arslan was more than a little proud to belong to such a prestigious family, but he had no illusions about the apparent unity of the Turkish empire. There was no hint of solidarity among the Seljuk cousins: to survive, you had to kill. Kilij Arslan's father had conquered Asia Minor, the vast area of Anatolia, without any help from his brothers, and when he attempted to move further south, into Syria, he was killed by one of his own cousins. While Kilij Arslan was being held forcibly in Isfahan, the paternal realm had been dismembered. In 1092, when the adolescent chief was released in the wake of a quarrel among his jailers, his authority barely extended beyond the ramparts of Nicaea. He was only thirteen years old.

The advice subsequently given him by the emirs in his army had enabled him to recover a part of his paternal heritage through war, murder, and subterfuge. He could now boast that he had spent more time in the saddle than at his palace. Nevertheless, when the Franj arrived, the game was far from over. His rivals in Asia Minor were still powerful, although fortunately for Kilij Arslan, his Seljuk cousins in Syria and Persia were absorbed in their own internecine quarrels.

To the east, along the desolate highlands of the Anatolian plateau, the ruler during these uncertain days was an elusive personality called Danishmend 'the Wise'. Unlike the other Turkish emirs, most of whom were illiterate, this adventurer of unknown origin was schooled in the most varied branches of learning. He would soon become the hero of a famous epic, appropriately entitled The Exploits of King Danishmend, which recounted the conquest of Malaṭya, an Armenian city south-east of Ankara. The authors of this tale considered the city's fall as the decisive turning-point in the Islamicization of what would some day become Turkey. The battle of Malaṭya had already been joined in the early months of 1097, when Kilij Arslan was told that a new

Frankish expedition had arrived in Constantinople. Danishmend had laid siege to Malaṭya, and the young sultan chafed at the idea that this rival of his, who had taken advantage of his father Süleymān's death to occupy north-east Anatolia, was about to score such a prestigious victory. Determined to prevent this, Kilij Arslan set out for Malaṭya at the head of his cavalry and pitched his camp close enough to Danishmend to intimidate him. Tension mounted, and there were increasingly murderous skirmishes.

By April 1097 Kilij Arslan was preparing for the decisive confrontation, which now seemed inevitable. The greater part of his army had been assembled before the walls of Malaṭya when an exhausted horseman arrived at the sultan's tent. Breathlessly, he panted out his message: the Franj were back; they had crossed the Bosporus once again, in greater numbers than the previous year. Kilij Arslan remained calm. There was no reason for such anxiety. He had already shown the Franj that he knew how to deal with them. In the end, it was only to reassure the inhabitants of Nicaea—especially his wife, the young sultana, who was about to give birth—that he sent a few cavalry detachments to reinforce the garrison of his capital. He himself would return as soon as he had finished with Danishmend.

Kilij Arslan had once again thrown himself body and soul into the battle of Malaṭya when, early in May, another messenger arrived, trembling with fear and fatigue. His words struck terror in the sultan's camp. The Franj were at the gates of Nicaea, and had begun a siege. This time, unlike the previous summer, it was not a few bands of tattered pillagers, but real armies of thousands of heavily equipped knights. And this time they were accompanied by soldiers of the basileus. Kilij Arslan sought to reassure his men, but he himself was tormented by anxiety. Should he abandon Malaṭya to his rival and return to Nicaea? Was he sure that he could still save his capital? Would he not perhaps lose on both fronts? After long consultations with his most trusted emirs, a solution began to emerge, a sort of compromise: he would go to see Danishmend, who was after all a man of honour, inform him of the attempted conquest undertaken by the Rūm and their mercenaries, which posed a threat to all the Muslims of Asia Minor, and propose a cessation of hostilities. Even before Danishmend had given his answer, the sultan dispatched part of his army to the capital.

After several days of talks, a truce was concluded and Kilij Arslan

set out westwards without delay. But the sight that awaited him as he reached the highlands near Nicaea chilled the blood in his veins. The superb city bequeathed him by his father was surrounded: a multitude of soldiers were camped there, busily erecting mobile towers, catapults, and mangonels to be used in the final assault. The emirs were categorical: there was nothing to be done. The only option was to retreat to the interior of the country before it was too late. But the young sultan could not bring himself to abandon his capital in this way. He insisted on a desperate attempt to breach the siege on the city's southern rim, where the attackers seemed less solidly entrenched. The battle was joined at dawn on 21 May. Kilij Arslan threw himself furiously into the fray, and the fighting raged until sunset. Losses were equally heavy on both sides but each maintained its position. The sultan did not persevere. He realized that nothing would enable him to loosen the vice. To persist in throwing all his forces into such an ill-prepared battle might prolong the siege for several weeks, perhaps even several months, but would threaten the very existence of the sultanate. As the scion of an essentially nomadic people, Kilij Arslan felt that the source of his power lay in the thousands of warriors under his command, and not in the possession of a city, however enchanting it might be. In any event, he would soon choose as his new capital the city of Konya much further east, which his descendants would retain until the beginning of the fourteenth century. Kilij Arslan was never to see Nicaea again.

Before his departure, he sent a farewell message to the city's defenders, informing them of his painful decision and urging them to act 'in the light of their own interests'. The meaning of these words was clear to the Turkish garrison and the Greek population alike: the city must be handed over to Alexius Comnenus and not to his Frankish auxiliaries. Negotiations were opened with the basileus, who had taken up a position to the west of Nicaea, at the head of his troops. The sultan's men tried to gain time, probably hoping that their master would somehow manage to return with reinforcements. But Alexius hurried them along. The Occidentals, he threatened, were preparing the final assault, and then there would be nothing he could do. Recalling the behaviour of the Franj in the environs of Nicaea the year before, the negotiators were terrified. In their mind's eye they saw their city pillaged, the men

massacred, the women raped. Without further hesitation, they agreed to place their fate in the hands of the basileus, who would himself establish the modalities of the surrender.

On the night of 18–19 June soldiers of the Byzantine army, most of them Turks, entered the city by means of boats that slipped silently across the Ascanian Lake; the garrison capitulated without a fight. By the first glimmerings of dawn, the blue and gold banners of the emperor were already fluttering over the city walls. The Franj called off their assault. Thus did Kilij Arslan receive some consolation in his misfortune: the dignitaries of the sultanate would be spared, and the young sultana, accompanied by her new-born son, would even be received in Constantinople with royal honours—to the great consternation of the Franj.

Kilij Arslan's young wife was the daughter of a man named Chaka, a Turkish emir and adventurer of genius, famous on the eve of the Frankish invasion. Imprisoned by the Rūm after being captured during a raid in Asia Minor, he had impressed his captors with the ease with which he learned Greek, for he spoke it perfectly within a few months. Brilliant and clever, and a magnificent speaker, he had become a regular visitor at the imperial palace, which had gone so far as to bestow a noble title upon him. But this astonishing promotion was not enough for him, for he had set his sights far higher: he aspired to become the emperor of Byzantium!

The emir Chaka had devised a coherent plan in pursuit of this goal. First he left Constantinople to settle in Smyrna, on the Aegean Sea. There, with the aid of a Greek shipbuilder, he constructed a fleet of his own, including light brigantines and galleys, dromonds, biremes, and triremes—nearly a hundred vessels in all. During the initial phase of his campaign, he occupied many islands, in particular Rhodes, Chios, and Samos, and established his authority along the entire Aegean coast. Having thus carved out a maritime empire, he proclaimed himself basileus, organizing his Smyrna palace on the pattern of the imperial court. He then launched his fleet in an assault on Constantinople. Only after enormous effort did Alexius manage to repel the attack and destroy a part of the Turkish vessels.

Far from discouraged, the father of the future sultana set to work to rebuild his warships. By then it was late 1092, just when Kilij Arslan was returning from exile, and Chaka calculated that the

young son of Süleymān would be an excellent ally against the Rūm. He thus offered him the hand of his daughter. But the calculations of the young sultan were quite different from those of his father-in-law. He saw the conquest of Constantinople as an absurd project; on the other hand, all in his entourage were aware of his intention to eliminate the Turkish emirs who were then seeking to carve out fiefdoms for themselves in Asia Minor, in particular Danishmend and the ambitious Chaka. The sultan did not hesitate: a few months after the arrival of the Franj, he invited his father-in-law to a banquet, plied him with drink, and stabbed him to death, with his own hand it appears. Chaka was succeeded by a son who possessed neither his father's intelligence nor his ambition. The sultana's brother was content to administer his maritime emirate until one day in 1097 when the Rūm fleet arrived unexpectedly off the coast of Smyrna with an equally unexpected messenger on board: his own sister.

She was slow to realize the reasons for the Byzantine emperor's solicitude towards her, but as she was being led to Smyrna, the city in which she had spent her childhood, everything suddenly became clear. She was told to explain to her brother that Alexius had taken Nicaea, that Kilij Arslan had been defeated, and that a powerful army of Rūm and Franj would soon attack Smyrna, supported by an enormous fleet. In exchange for his life, Chaka's son was invited to lead his sister to her husband, somewhere in Anatolia.

Once this proposition was accepted, the emirate of Smyrna ceased to exist. With the fall of Nicaea, the entire coast of the Aegean Sea, all the islands, and the whole of western Asia Minor now stood beyond the control of the Turks. And the Rūm, with the aid of their Frankish auxiliaries, seemed determined to press on further.

In his mountain refuge, however, Kilij Arslan did not lay down his arms.

Once he had recovered from the surprise of the first few days, the sultan began actively preparing his riposte. 'He set about recruiting troops and enrolling volunteers, and proclaimed *jihād*', notes Ibn al-Qalānisi.

The Damascene chronicler adds that Kilij Arslan 'asked all Turks to come to his aid, and many of them answered his call.'

In fact, the sultan's prime objective was to cement his alliance

with Danishmend. A mere truce was no longer enough: it was now imperative that the Turkish forces of Asia Minor unite, as if forming elements of a single army. Kilij Arslan was certain of his rival's response. A fervent Muslim as well as a realistic strategist, Danishmend felt threatened by the advance of the Rūm and their Frankish allies. He preferred to confront them on his neighbour's lands rather than on his own, and without further ado he arrived in the sultan's camp, accompanied by thousands of cavalry. There was fraternization and consultation, and plans were drafted. The sight of this multitude of warriors and horses blanketing the hills filled the commanders with fresh courage. They would attack the enemy at the first opportunity.

Kilij Arslan stalked his prey. Informers who had infiltrated the Rūm brought him precious information. The Franj openly proclaimed that they were resolved to press on beyond Nicaea, and that their real destination was Palestine. Even their route was known: they would march in a south-easterly direction towards Konya, the only important city still in the hands of the sultan. During their entire trek through this mountainous zone, the flanks of the Occidental army would be vulnerable to attack. The only problem was to select the proper site for the ambush. The emirs, who knew the region well, had no hesitation. Near the city of Dorylaeum, four days' march from Nicaea, there was a place at which the road narrowed to pass through a shallow valley. If the Turkish warriors gathered behind the hills, all they would have to do was bide their time.

By the last days of June 1097, when Kilij Arslan learned that the Occidentals had left Nicaea, accompanied by a small force of Rūm, the apparatus for the ambush was already in position. At dawn on 1 July the Franj loomed onto the horizon. Knights and foot-soldiers advanced serenely, seemingly with no idea of what was in store for them. The sultan had feared that his stratagem might be discovered by enemy scouts. Apparently, he had nothing to worry about. Another source of satisfaction for the Seljuk monarch was that the Franj seemed less numerous than had been reported. Had some of them perhaps remained behind in Nicaea? He did not know. At first sight, however, he seemed to command numerical superiority. This, combined with the element of surprise, augured well. Kilij Arslan was anxious, but confident. The wise Danishmend, with his

twenty more years of experience, felt the same.

The sun had barely risen from behind the hills when the order to attack was given. The tactics of the Turkish warriors were well practised. After all, they had assured their military supremacy in the Orient for half a century. Their army was composed almost exclusively of light cavalry who were also excellent archers. They would draw near, unleash a flood of deadly arrows on their enemy, and then retreat briskly, giving way to a new row of attackers. A few successive waves usually sufficed to bring their prey to their death agony. It was then that the final hand-to-hand combat was joined.

But on the day of the battle of Dorylaeum, the sultan, ensconced with his general staff atop a promontory, noted anxiously that the tried-and-true Turkish methods seemed to lack their usual effectiveness. Granted, the Franj lacked agility and seemed in no hurry to respond to the repeated attacks, but they were perfect masters of the art of defence. Their army's main strength lay in the heavy armour with which their knights covered their entire bodies, and sometimes those of their mounts as well. Although their advance was slow and clumsy, their men were magnificently protected against arrows. On that day, after several hours of battle, the Turkish archers had inflicted many casualties, especially among the foot-soldiers, but the bulk of the Frankish army remained intact. Should they engage the hand-to-hand combat? That seemed risky: during the many skirmishes around the field of battle, the horsemen of the steppes had come nowhere near holding their own against these virtual human fortresses. Should the phase of harassment be prolonged indefinitely? Now that the element of surprise had worn off, the initiative might well shift to the other side.

Some of the emirs were already counselling retreat when a cloud of dust appeared in the distance. A fresh Frankish army was approaching, as numerous as the first. Those against whom the Turks had been fighting all morning turned out to be only the vanguard. Now the sultan had no choice but to order a retreat. Before he could do so, however, a third Frankish army came into view behind the Turkish lines, on a hill overlooking the tent of the general staff.

This time Kilij Arslan succumbed to fear. He leapt onto his charger and headed for the mountains at full gallop, even abandoning the rich treasure he carried with him to pay his troops. Danishmend was not far behind, along with most of the emirs. Taking advantage of their one remaining trump card, speed, many horsemen managed to get away without the victors' being able to give chase. But most of the soldiers remained where they were, surrounded on all sides. As Ibn al-Qalānisi was later to write: *The Franj cut the Turkish army to pieces. They killed, pillaged, and took many prisoners, who were sold into slavery.*

During his flight, Kilij Arslan met a group of cavalry coming from Syria to fight at his side. They were too late, he told them ruefully. The Franj were too numerous and too powerful, and nothing more could be done to stop them. Joining deed to word, and determined to stand aside and let the storm pass, the defeated sultan disappeared into the immensity of the Anatolian plateau. He was to wait four years to take his revenge.

Nature alone seemed still to resist the invader. The aridity of the soil, the tiny mountain pathways, and the scorching summer heat on the shadowless roads slowed the advance of the Franj. After Dorylaeum, it took them a hundred days to cross Anatolia, whereas in normal times a month should have sufficed. In the meantime, news of the Turkish debacle spread throughout the Middle East. *When this event, so shameful for Islam, became known*, noted the Damascene chronicler, *there was real panic. Dread and anxiety swelled to enormous proportions.*

Rumours circulated constantly about the imminent arrival of redoubtable knights. At the end of July there was talk that they were approaching the village of al-Balana, in the far north of Syria. Thousands of cavalry gathered to meet them, but it was a false alarm: there was no sign of the Franj on the horizon. The most optimistic souls wondered whether the invaders had perhaps turned back. Ibn al-Qalānisi echoed that hope in one of those astrological parables of which his contemporaries were so enamoured: *That summer a comet appeared in the western sky; it ascended for twenty days, then disappeared without a trace.* But these illusions were soon dispelled. The news became increasingly detailed. From mid-September onwards, the advance of the Franj could be followed from village to village.

On 21 October 1097 shouts rang out from the peak of the citadel of Antioch, then Syria's largest city: 'They are here!' A few layabouts hurried to the ramparts to gawk, but they could see nothing

more than a vague cloud of dust far in the distance, at the end of the broad plain, near Lake Antioch. The Franj were still a day's march away, perhaps more, and there was every indication that they would want to stop to rest for a while after their long journey. Nevertheless, prudence demanded that the five heavy city gates be closed immediately.

In the souks the morning clamour was stilled, as merchants and customers alike stood immobile. Women whispered, and some prayed. The city was in the grip of fear.

2
An Accursed Maker of Armour

> When Yaghi-Siyān, the ruler of Antioch, was informed of the approach of the Franj, he feared possible sedition on the part of the Christians of the city. He therefore decided to expel them.

This event was related by the Arab historian Ibn al-Athīr, more than a century after the beginnings of the Frankish invasion, on the basis of testimony left by contemporaries:

> On the first day, Yaghi-Siyān ordered the Muslims to go out beyond the walls to clean out the trenches ringing the city. The next day, he sent only Christians on the same task. He had them work until night had fallen, and when they sought to return, he halted them, saying, 'Antioch is your city, but you must leave it in my hands until I have resolved our problem with the Franj.' They asked him, 'Who will protect our women and children?' The emir answered, 'I will take care of them for you.' He did, indeed, protect the families of those expelled, refusing to allow anyone to touch a hair of their heads.

In that October of 1097 the aged Yaghi-Siyān, for forty years an obedient servant of the Seljuk sultan, was haunted by the fear of betrayal. He was convinced that the Frankish armies gathered before Antioch would be able to enter the city only if they found accomplices within the walls. For the city could not be taken by assault, and still less starved out by a blockade. Admittedly, this white-bearded Turkish emir commanded no more than six or seven thousand soldiers, whereas the Franj had nearly thirty thousand

combatants, but Antioch was practically impregnable. Its walls were two *farsakh* long (about twelve thousand metres), and had no less than 360 turrets built on three different levels. The walls themselves, solidly constructed of stone and brick on a frame of masonry, scaled Mount Ḥabīb al-Najjar to the east and crowned its peak with an inexpugnable citadel. To the west lay the Orontes, which the Syrians called al-Assi, 'the rebel river', because it sometimes seemed to flow upstream, from the Mediterranean to the interior of the country. The river-bed ran along the walls of Antioch, forming a natural obstacle not easily crossed. In the south, the fortifications overlooked a valley so steep that it seemed an extension of the city walls. It was therefore impossible for attackers to encircle the city, and the defenders would have little trouble communicating with the outside world and bringing in supplies.

The city's food reserves were unusually abundant; the city walls enclosed not only buildings and gardens, but also wide stretches of cultivated land. Before the *Fatḥ*, or Muslim conquest, Antioch was a Roman metropolis of two hundred thousand inhabitants. By 1097 its population numbered only some forty thousand, and several formerly inhabited quarters had been turned into fields and pastures. Although it had lost its past splendour, it was still an impressive city. All travellers, even those from Baghdad or Constantinople, were dazzled by their first sight of this city extending as far as the eye could see, with its minarets, churches, and arcaded souks, its luxurious villas dug into the wooded slopes rising to the citadel.

Yaghi-Siyān was in no doubt as to the solidity of his fortifications and the security of his supplies. But all his weapons of defence might prove useless if, at some point along the interminable wall, the attackers managed to find an accomplice willing to open a gate to allow them access to a turret, as had already happened in the past. Hence his decision to expel most of his Christian subjects. In Antioch as elsewhere, the Christians of the Middle East—Greeks, Armenians, Maronites, Jacobites—suffered a double oppression with the arrival of the Franj: their Western coreligionists suspected them of sympathy for the Saracens and treated them as subjects of inferior rank, while their Muslim compatriots often saw them as natural allies of the invaders. Indeed, the boundary between religious and national affiliation was practically non-existent. The

same term, 'Rūm', was used to refer to both Byzantines and Syrians of the Greek confession, who in any event still saw themselves as subjects of the basileus. The word 'Armenian' referred to a church and a people alike, and when a Muslim spoke of 'the nation', *al-umma*, he was referring to the community of believers. In the mind of Yaghi-Siyān, the expulsion of the Christians was less an act of religious discrimination than a wartime measure against citizens of an enemy power, Constantinople, to which Antioch had long belonged and which had never renounced its intention of recovering the city.

Antioch was the last of the great cities of Arab Asia to have fallen under the domination of the Seljuk Turks: in 1084 it was still a dependency of Constantinople. Thirteen years later, when the Frankish knights laid siege to the town, Yaghi-Siyān was naturally convinced that this was part of an attempt to restore the authority of the Rūm, with the complicity of the local population, the majority of whom were Christians. Faced with this danger, the emir was not troubled by any scruples. He therefore expelled the *nazara*, the adepts of the Nazarethan (for this is what Christians were called), and then took personal charge of the rationing of grain, oil, and honey, ordering daily inspections of the fortifications and severely punishing any negligence. Would that suffice? Nothing was certain. But these measures were designed to enable the city to hold out until reinforcements arrived. When would they come? The question was asked insistently by everyone in Antioch, and Yaghi-Siyān was no more able to give an answer than was the man in the street. Back in the summer, when the Franj were still far away, he had dispatched his son to visit the various Muslim leaders of Syria to alert them to the danger stalking his town. Ibn al-Qalānisi tells us that in Damascus Yaghi-Siyān's son spoke of holy war. But in Syria in the eleventh century, *jihād* was no more than a slogan brandished by princes in distress. No emir would rush to another's aid unless he had some personal interest in doing so. Only then would he contemplate the invocation of great principles.

Now, in that autumn of 1097, the only leader who felt directly threatened by the Frankish invasion was Yaghi-Siyān himself. If the emperor's mercenaries wanted to recover Antioch, there was nothing unnatural about that, since the city had always been Byzantine. In any case, it was thought that the Rūm would go no

further. And it was not necessarily bad for his neighbours if Yaghi-Siyān was in a spot of trouble. For ten years he had toyed with them, sowing discord, arousing jealousy, overturning alliances. Now he was asking them to put their quarrels aside and rush to his aid. Why should he be surprised if they failed to come at the run?

A realistic man, Yaghi-Siyān was well aware that he would be left to languish and forced to beg for help, that he would now have to pay for his past cleverness, intrigue, and betrayal. But he never imagined that his coreligionists would go so far as to hand him over, bound hand and foot, to the mercenaries of the basileus. After all, he was merely struggling to survive in a merciless hornets' nest. Bloody conflict was relentless in the world in which he had grown up, the world of the Seljuk Turks, and the master of Antioch, like all the other emirs of the region, had no choice but to take his stand. If he wound up on the losing side, his fate would be death, or at least imprisonment and disgrace. If he was lucky enough to pick the winning side, he would savour his victory for a time, and receive several lovely female captives as a bonus, before once again finding himself embroiled in some new conflict in which his life was at stake. Survival in such a world depended above all on backing the right horse, and on not insisting on the same horse at all times. Any mistake was fatal, and rare indeed was the emir who died in bed.

At the time of the arrival of the Franj in Syria, political life was envenomed by the 'war of the two brothers', a conflict between two bizarre personalities who seemed to have stepped out of the imagination of some popular story-teller: Riḍwān, the king of Aleppo, and his younger brother Duqāq, king of Damascus. Their mutual hatred was so obstinate that nothing, not even a common threat to both of them, could induce them even to contemplate reconciliation. Riḍwān was barely more than twenty in 1097, but his personality was already shrouded in mystery, and the most terrifying legends about him were rife. Small, thin, of severe and sometimes frightening countenance, he is said (by Ibn al-Qalānisi) to have fallen under the influence of a 'physician-astrologer' who belonged to the order of Assassins, a recently formed sect that was to play an important part in political life throughout the Frankish occupation. The king of Aleppo was accused, not without reason, of making use of these fanatics to eliminate his opponents. By means of murder, impiety, and witchcraft Riḍwān aroused the distrust of

nearly everyone, but it was within his own family that he provoked the most bitter odium. When he acceded to the throne in 1095 he had two of his younger brothers strangled, fearing that they might one day contest his power. A third brother escaped with his life only by fleeing the citadel of Aleppo on the very night that the powerful hands of Riḍwān's slaves were supposed to close upon his throat. This survivor was Duqāq, who subsequently regarded his elder sibling with blind hatred. After his flight, he sought refuge in Damascus, whose garrison proclaimed him king. This impulsive young man—easily influenced, inclined to fits of anger, and of fragile health—was obsessed by the idea that his brother still sought to assassinate him. Caught between these two half-crazy princes, Yaghi-Siyān had no easy task. His closest neighbour was Riḍwān, whose capital Aleppo, one of the world's oldest cities, was less than three days' march from Antioch. Two years before the arrival of the Franj, Yaghi-Siyān had given Riḍwān his daughter in marriage. But he soon realized that his son-in-law coveted his kingdom, and he too began to fear for his life. Like Duqāq, Yaghi-Siyān was obsessed by fear of the Assassins sect. Since the common danger had naturally brought the two men closer together, it was to the king of Damascus that Yaghi-Siyān now turned as the Franj advanced on Antioch.

Duqāq, however, was hesitant. It was not that he was afraid of the Franj, he assured Yaghi-Siyān, but he had no desire to lead his army into the environs of Aleppo, thus affording his brother an opportunity to strike from behind. Knowing how difficult it would be to prod his ally into a decision, Yaghi-Siyān decided to send as emissary his son Shams al-Dawla—'Sun of the State'—a brilliant, spirited, and impassioned young man who stalked the royal palace relentlessly, harassing Duqāq and his advisers, resorting by turns to flattery and threat. But it was not until December 1097, two months after the start of the battle of Antioch, that the master of Damascus finally agreed, against his better judgement, to take his army north. Shams went along, for he knew that the full week the march would take gave Duqāq plenty of time to change his mind. And indeed, the young king grew increasingly nervous as he advanced. On 31 December, when the Damascene army had already covered two-thirds of its trajectory, they encountered a foraging Frankish troop. Despite his clear numerical advantage and the ease with which he managed to surround the enemy, Duqāq declined to issue the order

to attack. This allowed the Franj to overcome their initial disorientation, recover their poise, and slip away. At the day's end there was neither victor nor vanquished, but the Damascenes had lost more men than their adversaries. No more was needed to discourage Duqāq, who immediately ordered his men to turn back, despite the desperate entreaties of Shams.

The defection of Duqāq aroused the greatest bitterness in Antioch, but the defenders did not give way. Curiously, in these early days of 1098, it was among the besiegers that disarray prevailed. Many of Yaghi-Siyān's spies had managed to infiltrate the enemy army. Some of these informants were acting out of hatred of the Rūm, but most were local Christians who hoped to win the emir's favour. They had left their families in Antioch and were now seeking to guarantee their security. The information they sent back encouraged the population: although the defenders in the besieged city had abundant supplies, the Franj were vulnerable to starvation. Hundreds had died already, and most of their mounts had been slaughtered for food. The expedition encountered by the Damascene army had been sent out to find some sheep and goats, and to pilfer some granaries. Hunger was compounded by other calamities that were daily undermining the invaders' morale. A relentless rain was falling, justifying the light-hearted nickname the Syrians had bestowed upon Antioch: 'the pissoir'. The besiegers' camp was mired in mud. Finally, there was the earth itself, which trembled constantly. The local people of the countryside were used to it, but the Franj were terrified. The sounds of their prayers reached into the city itself, as they gathered together to plead for divine mercy, believing themselves victims of celestial punishment. It was reported that they had decided to expel all prostitutes from their camp in an effort to placate the wrath of the Almighty; they also closed down the taverns and banned dice games. There were many desertions, even among their chiefs.

News such as this naturally bolstered the combative spirit of the defenders, who organized ever more daring sorties. As Ibn al-Athīr was to say, *Yaghi-Siyān showed admirable courage, wisdom, and resolution.* Carried away by his own enthusiasm, the Arab historian added: *Most of the Franj perished. Had they remained as numerous as they had been upon their arrival, they would have occupied all the lands of Islam!* A gross exaggeration, but one that renders due

homage to the heroism of the Antioch garrison, which had to bear the brunt of the invasion alone for many long months.

For aid continued to be withheld. In January 1098, embittered by Duqāq's inertia, Yaghi-Siyān was forced to turn to Riḍwān. Once again it was Shams al-Dawla who was charged with the painful mission of presenting the most humble excuses to the king of Aleppo, of listening unflinchingly to all his sarcastic cracks, and of begging him, in the name of Islam and ties of kinship, to deign to dispatch his troops to save Antioch. Shams was well aware that his royal brother-in-law was not susceptible to this type of argument, and that he would sooner lop off his own hand than extend it to Yaghi-Siyān. But events themselves were even more compelling. The Franj, whose food situation was increasingly critical, had just raided the lands of the Seljuk king, pillaging and ravaging in the environs of Aleppo itself, and for the first time Riḍwān felt his own realm threatened. More to defend himself than to aid Antioch, he decided to send his army against the Franj. Shams was triumphant. He sent his father a message informing him of the date of the Aleppan offensive and asked him to organize a massive sortie to catch the besiegers in a pincer movement.

In Antioch, Riḍwān's intervention was so unexpected that it seemed heaven-sent. Would it be the turning-point of this battle, which had already been raging for more than a hundred days?

Early in the afternoon of 9 February 1098 look-outs posted in the citadel reported the approach of the Aleppan army. It included several thousand cavalry, whereas the Franj could muster no more than seven or eight hundred, so severely had their mounts been decimated by famine. The besieged, who had been anxiously awaiting the Aleppans for several days now, wanted the battle to be joined at once. But Riḍwān's troops had halted and begun to pitch their tents, and battle-orders were postponed to the following day. Preparations continued throughout the night. Every soldier now knew exactly where and when he had to act. Yaghi-Siyān was confident that his own men would carry out their side of the bargain.

What no one knew was that the battle was lost even before it began. Terrified by what he knew about the fighting abilities of the Franj, Riḍwān dared not take advantage of his numerical superiority. Instead of deploying his troops, he sought only to protect them. To avoid any threat of encirclement, he had confined them all

night to a narrow strip of land wedged between the Orontes River and Lake Antioch. At dawn, when the Franj attacked, the Aleppans may as well have been paralysed. The narrowness of the land denied them any mobility. Their mounts reared, and those horsemen who fell were trampled underfoot by their comrades before they could rise. Of course, there was no longer any question of applying the traditional tactics, sending successive waves of cavalry-archers against the enemy. Riḍwān's men were forced into hand-to-hand combat in which the heavily armoured knights easily gained an overwhelming advantage. It was carnage. The king and his army, now in indescribable disarray and pursued by the Franj, dreamed only of flight.

The battle unfolded differently under the walls of Antioch itself. At first light, the defenders launched a massive sortie that compelled the attackers to fall back. The fighting was intense, and the soldiers of Yaghi-Siyān were in an excellent position. Slightly before midday, they had begun to penetrate the camp of the Franj when news came in of the Aleppans' debacle. Sick at heart, the emir ordered his men to fall back to the city. Scarcely had they completed their retreat when the knights who had crushed Riḍwān returned, carrying macabre trophies from the battle. The inhabitants of Antioch soon heard great guffaws of laughter, followed by muffled whistles. Then the fearfully mutilated severed heads of the Aleppans, hurled by catapults, began to rain down. A deathly silence gripped the city.

Yaghi-Siyān offered words of encouragement to those closest to him, but for the first time he felt the vice tighten around his city. After the debacle of the two enemy brothers, he could expect nothing more from the princes of Syria. Just one recourse remained open to him: the governor of Mosul, the powerful emir Karbūqa, who had the disadvantage of being more than two weeks' march from Antioch.

Mosul, the native city of the historian Ibn al-Athīr, was the capital of Jazīra, or Mesopotamia, the fertile plain watered by the two great rivers Tigris and Euphrates. It was a political, cultural, and economic centre of prime importance. The Arabs boasted of its succulent fruit: its apples, pears, grapes, and pomegranates. The fine cloth it exported—called 'muslin', a word derived from the city's name—was known throughout the world. At the time of the

arrival of the Franj, the people of the emir Karbūqa's realm were already exploiting another natural resource, which the traveller Ibn Jubayr was to describe with amazement a few dozen years later: deposits of naphtha. This precious dark liquid, which would one day make the fortune of this part of the world, already offered travellers an unforgettable spectacle.

> We approach a locality called al-Qayyara [the place of tar], near the Tigris. To the right of the road to Mosul is a depression in the earth, black as if it lay under a cloud. It is there that God causes the sources of pitch, great and small, to spurt forth. Sometimes one of them hurls up pieces, as though it were boiling. Bowls have been constructed in which the pitch is collected. Around these deposits lies a black pool; on its surface floats a light black foam which washes up on the banks and coagulates into bitumen. The product looks like a highly viscous, smooth, shiny mud, giving off a sharp odour. Thus were we able to see with our own eyes a marvel of which we had heard tell, the description of which had seemed quite extraordinary to us. Not far away, on the banks of the Tigris, is another great source; we could see its smoke rising from afar. We were told that when they want to extract the bitumen it is set on fire. The flame consumes the liquid elements. The bitumen is then cut into pieces and transported. It is known throughout these lands as far as Syria, in Acre and in all the coastal regions. Allah creates whatever he wills. Praise be upon him!

The inhabitants of Mosul attributed curative powers to the dark liquid, and immersed themselves in it when they were ill. Bitumen produced from oil was also used in construction, to 'cement' bricks together. Because it was impermeable, it was used as a coating for the walls of public baths, where its appearance was similar to polished black marble. But as we shall see, it was in the military domain that oil was most widely employed.

Apart from these promising resources, Mosul was of vital strategic importance at the start of the Frankish invasion; its rulers had acquired the right to inspect Syrian affairs, a right the ambitious Karbūqa intended to exercise. He considered Yaghi-Siyān's call for

help a perfect opportunity to extend his own influence. He immediately promised to raise a great army. From that moment on, Antioch was on tenterhooks anticipating Karbūqa's arrival.

This providential figure was a former slave, a condition the Turkish emirs did not consider in any sense degrading. Indeed, the Seljuk princes used to appoint their most faithful and talented slaves to posts of responsibility. Army chiefs of staff and governors of cities were often ex-slaves, or *mamlūks*, and so great was their authority that it was not even necessary to manumit them. Before the Frankish occupation was complete, the entire Muslim Middle East would be ruled by Mamluk sultans. As early as 1098 the most influential men of Damascus, Cairo, and several other major cities were slaves or sons of slaves.

Karbūqa was among the most powerful of these. This authoritarian officer with the greying beard bore the Turkish title of *atabeg*, literally 'father of the prince'. Members of the ruling families suffered a staggering mortality rate in the Seljuk empire—through battles, murders, and executions—and rulers often left heirs who had not yet reached their majority. Tutors were assigned to protect the interests of these heirs, and to round out his role as adoptive father, a tutor generally married his pupil's mother. These *atabegs* naturally tended to become the real holders of power, which they often subsequently transmitted to their own sons. The legitimate prince then became no more than a puppet in the hands of the *atabeg*, sometimes even a hostage. Appearances were scrupulously respected, however. Armies were often officially 'commanded' by children of three or four years of age who had 'delegated' their power to the *atabeg*.

Just such a strange spectacle was seen in the last days of April 1098, as nearly thirty thousand men gathered to set out from Mosul. The official edict announced that the valiant fighters would be waging the *jihād* against the infidels under the orders of an obscure Seljuk scion who, presumably from the depths of his swaddling clothes, had entrusted command of the army to the *atabeg* Karbūqa.

According to the historian Ibn al-Athīr, who spent his entire life in the service of the *atabegs* of Mosul, *the Franj were seized with fear when they heard that the army of Karbūqa was on its way to Antioch, for they were vastly weakened and their supplies were slender.* The defenders, on the contrary, took heart. Once again they prepared

for a sortie to coincide with the approach of the Muslim troops. With the same tenacity as before, Yaghi-Siyān, ably seconded by his son Shams al-Dawla, checked the grain reserves, inspected the fortifications, and encouraged the troops, promising them a rapid end to the siege, 'with God's permission'.

But his public self-assurance was a mere façade. The real situation had been worsening for several weeks. The blockade of the city had been tightened, it was more difficult to get supplies, and—this was even more worrying—information from the enemy camp was increasingly scanty. The Franj, who had apparently realized that their every word and deed was being reported to Yaghi-Siyān, had decided on drastic action to deal with the problem. The emir's agents had occasion to watch them kill a man, roast him on a spit, and eat his flesh, while shouting that any spy who was discovered would suffer a similar fate. The terrified informants fled, and Yaghi-Siyān no longer had detailed information about his besiegers. As a seasoned military man, he considered the situation highly disquieting.

He was reassured only by the knowledge that Karbūqa was on the way. He was expected by the middle of May, with his tens of thousands of fighters. Everyone in Antioch impatiently awaited that moment. Rumours circulated day after day, propagated by citizens who mistook their desires for reality. There would be a spate of whispering and a dash to the ramparts, maternal old women asking questions of callow soldiers. The answer was always the same: no, the rescuing troops were not in sight, but it would not be long now.

The great Muslim army was a dazzling sight as it marched out of Mosul, with countless lances glinting in the sun and black banners (emblem of the 'Abbasids and the Seljuks) waving in a sea of white-robed cavalry. Despite the heat, the pace was brisk. The army would reach Antioch in less than two weeks if it maintained its rate of advance. But Karbūqa was troubled. Shortly before the army's departure, he had received some alarming news. A troop of Franj had taken Edessa, known to the Arabs as al-Ruhā', a large Armenian city situated north of the route leading from Mosul to Antioch. The *atabeg* could not help wondering whether the Franj of Edessa might not advance behind him as he approached the

besieged city. Was he not running the risk of being caught in a pincer movement? In the early days of May, he assembled his principal emirs to announce that he had decided to take a different route. He would first head north and settle the problem of Edessa in a few days; then he would be able to engage the besiegers of Antioch without risk. Some protested, reminding him of Yaghi-Siyān's anxious message. But Karbūqa silenced them. Once his decision was made, he was as stubborn as a mule. While his emirs grudgingly obeyed, the army headed for the mountain passes leading to Edessa.

The situation in the Armenian city was indeed worrying. The few Muslims who had been able to leave had brought news of strange events there. In February a Frankish chief by the name of Baldwin had arrived in command of hundreds of knights and more than two thousand foot-soldiers. Thoros, an old Armenian prince and ruler of the city, had appealed to him to strengthen the city garrison against repeated attacks by Turkish warriors. But Baldwin refused to act as a mere mercenary. He demanded to be formally named the legitimate successor of Thoros. The latter, aged and childless, agreed. An official ceremony was held, in accordance with Armenian custom. Thoros dressed in a loose-fitting white robe, and Baldwin, naked to the waist, slipped under his 'father's' frock and pressed their bodies together. Then it was the turn of the 'mother', the wife of Thoros, against whom Baldwin now crept, between robe and naked flesh, before the amused regard of the onlookers, who whispered that this rite, conceived for the adoption of children, seemed somewhat inappropriate when the 'son' was a great hairy knight.

The soldiers of the Muslim army laughed loud and long as they pictured the scene that had just been described to them. But the sequel of the account chilled them. A few days after the ceremony, 'father' and 'mother' were lynched by a mob urged on by the 'son', who watched impassively as they were put to death and then proceeded to proclaim himself the 'count' of Edessa. He then appointed his Frankish companions to all the important posts in the army and the administration.

Hearing his worst fears confirmed, Karbūqa decided to organize a siege of the city. His emirs again sought to dissuade him. The three

thousand Frankish soldiers in Edessa would not dare to attack the Muslim army, which numbered tens of thousands of men. On the other hand, they were quite sufficient to defend the city itself, and the siege might well drag on for months. In the meantime Yaghi-Siyān, abandoned to his fate, might give way to the pressure of the invaders. But the *atabeg* would not listen. Only after a futile three weeks under the walls of Edessa did he acknowledge his mistake and set out once more for Antioch, on a forced march.

Meanwhile, within the besieged city, the high hopes of early May had given way to utter disarray. In the palace and in the streets alike, no one could understand why the troops from Mosul were taking so long. Yaghi-Siyān was in despair.

The tension reached a paroxysm just before sunset on 2 June, when the look-outs reported that the Franj had assembled their forces and were heading north-east. The emirs and soldiers could think of only one explanation: Karbūqa was in the area, and the attackers were setting out to meet him. Within a few minutes, houses and ramparts had been alerted by word of mouth. The town breathed again. By sunrise, the *atabeg* would pry the city loose. The nightmare would finally end. It was a cool and humid evening. Long hours were spent discussing the situation on the doorsteps of darkened homes. Finally Antioch drifted off to sleep, exhausted but confident.

Then at four in the morning, from the southern rim of the city, came a dull sound of rope being dragged against stone. From the peak of a great five-sided tower a man leaned out and gestured. He had not slept all night, and his beard was dishevelled. His name was Fīrūz, *a maker of armour in charge of the defence of the towers*, Ibn al-Athīr would later report. A Muslim of Armenian origin, Fīrūz had long been part of Yaghi-Siyān's entourage, but he had lately been accused of black-market trading, and Yaghi-Siyān had slapped a heavy fine on him. Fīrūz, seeking revenge, contacted the attackers. He told them that he controlled access to a window overlooking the valley south of the city, and declared that he was prepared to escort them in. Better still, to prove that he was not leading them into a trap, he sent them his own son as hostage. For their part, the attackers promised him gold and land. Thus the plot was hatched: it would be put into action at dawn on the third day of

June. The night before, in order to mislead the garrison into relaxing its vigilance, the attackers would pretend to move away from the city.

> When agreement was reached between the Franj and this accursed maker of armour, *Ibn al-Athīr writes*, they climbed to that small window, opened it, and hauled up many men by means of ropes. When more than five hundred of them had ascended, they sounded the dawn trumpet, while the defenders were still exhausted from their long hours of wakefulness. Yaghi-Siyān awoke and asked what was happening. He was told that the sound of the trumpets was coming from the citadel, which had surely been taken.

The noise was actually coming from Two Sisters Tower. But Yaghi-Siyān did not bother to check. He thought that all was lost. Succumbing to his fear, he ordered that one of the city gates be opened and he fled, accompanied by several guards. He rode for hours, haggard and unable to recover his spirits. After two hundred days of resistance, the ruler of Antioch had finally broken down. While reproaching him for his weakness, Ibn al-Athīr evoked his death with emotion.

> He burst into tears at having abandoned his family, his sons, and the Muslims, and, in great pain, he fell unconscious from his horse. His companions tried to put him back in the saddle, but he could no longer hold himself upright. He was dying. They left him and rode off. An Armenian woodcutter who happened to be passing by recognized him. He cut off his head and brought it to the Franj in Antioch.

The city itself was a scene of blood and fire. Men, women, and children tried to flee through muddy alleyways, but the knights tracked them down easily and slaughtered them on the spot. The last survivors' cries of horror were gradually extinguished, soon to be replaced by the off-key singing of drunken Frankish plunderers. Smoke rose from the many burning houses. By midday, a veil of mourning enveloped the city.

Only one man was able to keep his head amidst the bloodthirsty

lunacy of 3 June 1098: the indefatigable Shams al-Dawla. The moment the city was invaded, the son of Yaghi-Siyān had barricaded himself in the citadel with a small group of fighters. The Franj tried to dislodge them on several occasions, but were repulsed each time, not without suffering heavy losses. The greatest of the Frankish commanders, Bohemond, a gigantic man with long blond hair, was himself wounded in one of these attacks. Having learned something from his misadventure, he sent Shams a message proposing that he abandon the citadel in exchange for a guarantee of safe conduct. But the young emir haughtily refused. Antioch was the fief he had always meant to inherit, and he intended to fight for it to his dying breath. There was no shortage of supplies or sharp arrows. Enthroned majestically at the summit of Mount Ḥabīb al-Najjar, the citadel could resist the Franj for months. They would lose thousands of men if they insisted on scaling its walls.

The determination of these last defenders eventually paid off. The knights abandoned their attack on the citadel, and instead established a security zone around it. Then, three days after the fall of Antioch, Shams and his companions saw to their delight that Karbūqa's army had appeared on the horizon. For Shams and his handful of diehards, there was something unreal about the appearance of the cavalry of Islam. They rubbed their eyes, wept, prayed and embraced one another. The soldiers' cries of *Allāhu akbar*, 'God is great!', rose to the citadel in a continuous roar. The Franj dug in behind the walls of Antioch. The besiegers had become the besieged.

Shams's joy was tinged with bitterness, however. When the first emirs from the rescue expedition joined him in his redoubt, he bombarded them with a thousand questions. Why had they come so late? Why had they given the Franj time to occupy Antioch and massacre its inhabitants? To his utter astonishment, the emirs, far from defending their army's tactics, denounced Karbūqa for all these evils: Karbūqa the arrogant, the pretentious, the inept, the coward.

This was not simply a matter of personal antipathy. It was a genuine conspiracy, and the ringleader was none other than King Duqāq of Damascus, who had joined the Mosul troops as soon as they crossed into Syrian territory. The Muslim army was decidedly not a homogeneous force, but a coalition of princes whose interests

were often contradictory. No one was unaware of the territorial ambitions of the *atabeg*, and Duqāq had little trouble convincing his colleagues that their real enemy was Karbūqa himself. If he emerged victorious from the battle against the infidels, he would set himself up as a saviour, and no Syrian city would escape his rule. On the other hand, if Karbūqa was beaten, the danger to the Syrian cities would be lifted. Compared to that threat, the Frankish peril was a lesser evil. There was nothing alarming about the Rūm's desire to retake their city of Antioch with the aid of their mercenaries, for it was inconceivable that the Franj would create states of their own in Syria. As Ibn al-Athīr put it, *the atabeg so annoyed the Muslims with his pretensions that they decided to betray him at the battle's most decisive moment.*

This superb army, then, was a colossus with feet of clay, ready to collapse at the first fillip. Shams, who was willing to forget the decision to abandon Antioch, still sought to overcome all this pettiness. He felt that it was not yet time for accounts to be settled. But his hopes were short-lived. The very day after his arrival, Karbūqa summoned Shams to inform him that he was to be deprived of his command of the citadel. Shams was indignant. Had he not fought bravely? Had he not held out against all the Frankish knights? Was he not the rightful heir of the ruler of Antioch? The *atabeg* refused to discuss the matter. He was in charge, and he demanded obedience.

The son of Yaghi-Siyān was now convinced that the Muslim army could not win the day, in spite of its imposing size. His only consolation was the knowledge that the situation in the enemy camp was scarcely any better. According to Ibn al-Athīr, *after conquering Antioch, the Franj went without food for twelve days. The nobles devoured their mounts, the poor ate carrion and leaves.* The Franj had suffered famine before during past months, but on those occasions they had always been able to gather provisions by raiding the surrounding countryside. Their new status as a besieged army, however, deprived them of this possibility. And Yaghi-Siyān's food reserves, on which they had counted, were practically exhausted. Desertions were running at an alarming rate.

Providence seemed unable to decide which of these two exhausted and demoralized armies to favour during that June of 1098. But then an extraordinary event brought about a decision. The

Occidentals cried miracle, but the account of Ibn al-Athīr contains no hint of the miraculous.

> Among the Franj was Bohemond, their commander-in-chief, but there was also an extremely wily monk who assured them that a lance of the Messiah, peace be upon him, was buried in the Kusyan, a great edifice of Antioch. He told them: 'If you find it, you will be victorious; otherwise, it means certain death.' He had earlier buried a lance in the soil of the Kusyan and erased all his tracks. He ordered the Franj to fast and to make penance for three days. On the fourth day, he had them enter the building with their valets and workers, who dug everywhere and found the lance. The monk then cried out, 'Rejoice, for victory is certain!' On the fifth day, they began exiting from the city gates in small groups of five or six. The Muslims said to Karbūqa, 'We should slip up to the gate and slaughter all who come out. It would be easy, for they are dispersed.' But he answered, 'No. Wait for all of them to leave, and we will kill them all, every last one.'

The calculation of the *atabeg* was less absurd than it may appear. With such indisciplined troops, and with his emirs waiting for the earliest excuse to desert him, he could not afford to prolong the siege. If the Franj were ready to join the battle, he did not want to frighten them with an excessively massive attack, which would threaten to drive them back into the city. What Karbūqa had failed to anticipate, however, was that his decision to temporize would be seized upon by those who sought his downfall. While the Franj continued their deployment, desertions began in the Muslim camp. There were accusations of treason and cowardice. Sensing that he was losing control of his troops and that he had probably underestimated the size of the besieged army as well, Karbūqa asked the Franj for a truce. This merely demolished the last of his prestige in the eyes of his own army and emboldened the enemy. The Franj charged without even responding to his offer, forcing Karbūqa in turn to unleash a wave of cavalry-archers upon them. But Duqāq and most of his emirs were already serenely withdrawing with their troops. Realizing his mounting isolation, the *atabeg* ordered a general retreat, which immediately degenerated into a rout.

Thus did the powerful Muslim army disintegrate 'without a stroke of sword or lance, without the firing of a single arrow'. The Mosul historian was hardly exaggerating. *The Franj themselves feared a trick*, he wrote, *for there had not yet been any battle justifying such a flight. They therefore preferred not to pursue the Muslims.* Karbūqa was thus able to return to Mosul safe and sound, with the tatters of his troops. All his great ambitions vanished for ever before the walls of Antioch, and the city he had sworn to save was now firmly in the hands of the Franj. It would remain so for many a year.

Most serious of all was that after this day of shame, there was no longer any force in Syria capable of checking the invaders' advance.

3
The Cannibals of Ma'arra

I know not whether my native land be a grazing ground for wild beasts or yet my home!

This cry of grief by an anonymous poet of Ma'arra was no mere figure of speech. Sadly, we must take his words literally, and ask with him: what monstrous thing came to pass in the Syrian city of Ma'arra late in that year of 1098?

Until the arrival of the Franj, the people of Ma'arra lived untroubled lives, shielded by their circular city walls. Their vineyards and their fields of olives and figs afforded them modest prosperity. The city's affairs were administered by worthy local notables devoid of any great ambition, under the nominal suzerainty of Ridwān of Aleppo. Ma'arra's main claim to fame was that it was the home town of one of the great figures of Arab literature, Abu'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arri, who had died in 1057. This blind poet, a free-thinker, had dared to attack the mores of his age, flouting its taboos. Indeed, it required a certain audacity to write lines like these:

The inhabitants of the earth are of two sorts:
Those with brains, but no religion,
And those with religion, but no brains.

Forty years after his death, a fanaticism come from afar descended on this city and seemed to prove this son of Ma'arra right, not only in his irreligion, but also in his legendary pessimism:

Fate smashes us as though we were made of glass,
And never are our shards put together again.

His city was to be reduced to a heap of ruins, and the poet's oft-expressed mistrust of his compatriots would find its cruellest vindication.

During the first few months of 1098 the inhabitants of Ma'arra uneasily followed the battle of Antioch, which was taking place three days' march north-west of them. After their victory, the Franj raided several neighbouring villages, and although Ma'arra was spared, several of its families decided to abandon the town for more secure residences in Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Their fears proved justified when, towards the end of November, thousands of Frankish warriors arrived and surrounded the city. Although some citizens managed to flee despite the siege, most were trapped. Ma'arra had no army, only an urban militia, which several hundred young men lacking any military experience hastily joined. For two weeks they courageously resisted the redoubtable knights, going so far as to hurl packed beehives down on the besiegers from the city walls.

> To counter such tenacity, *Ibn al-Athīr wrote*, the Franj constructed a wooden turret as high as the ramparts. Some Muslims, fearful and demoralized, felt that a more effective defence was to barricade themselves within the city's tallest buildings. They therefore abandoned the walls, leaving the positions they had been holding undefended. Others followed their example, and another point of the surrounding wall was abandoned. Soon the entire perimeter of the town was without defenders. The Franj scaled the walls with ladders, and when the Muslims saw them atop the walls, they lost heart.

It was 11 December, a pitch-dark night, and the Franj did not yet dare to penetrate the town. The notables of Ma'arra made contact with Bohemond, the new master of Antioch, who was leading the attackers. The Frankish commander promised to spare the lives of the inhabitants if they would stop fighting and withdraw from certain buildings. Desperately placing their trust in his word, the families gathered in the houses and cellars of the city and waited all night in fear.

The Franj arrived at dawn. It was carnage. *For three days they put*

people to the sword, killing more than a hundred thousand people and taking many prisoners. Ibn al-Athīr's figures are obviously fantastic, for the city's population on the eve of its fall was probably less than ten thousand. But the horror lay less in the number of victims than in the barely imaginable fate that awaited them.

In Ma'arra our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking-pots; they impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled. The inhabitants of towns and villages near Ma'arra would never read this confession by the Frankish chronicler Radulph of Caen, but they would never forget what they had seen and heard. The memory of these atrocities, preserved and transmitted by local poets and oral tradition, shaped an image of the Franj that would not easily fade. The chronicler Usāmah Ibn Munqidh, born in the neighbouring city of Shayzar three years before these events, would one day write:

> All those who were well-informed about the Franj saw them as beasts superior in courage and fighting ardour but in nothing else, just as animals are superior in strength and aggression.

This unkind assessment accurately reflects the impression made by the Franj upon their arrival in Syria: they aroused a mixture of fear and contempt, quite understandable on the part of an Arab nation which, while far superior in culture, had lost all combative spirit. The Turks would never forget the cannibalism of the Occidentals. Throughout their epic literature, the Franj are invariably described as anthropophagi.

Was this view of the Franj unjust? Did the Western invaders devour the inhabitants of the martyred city simply in order to survive? Their commanders said so in an official letter to the pope the following year: *A terrible famine racked the army in Ma'arra, and placed it in the cruel necessity of feeding itself upon the bodies of the Saracens.* But the explanation seems unconvincing, for the inhabitants of the Ma'arra region witnessed behaviour during that sinister winter that could not be accounted for by hunger. They saw, for example, fanatical Franj, the Tafurs, roam through the countryside openly proclaiming that they would chew the flesh of the Saracens and gathering around their nocturnal camp-fires to devour their prey. Were they cannibals out of necessity? Or out of

fanaticism? It all seems unreal, and yet the evidence is overwhelming, not only in the facts described, but also in the morbid atmosphere it reflects. In this respect, one sentence by the Frankish chronicler Albert of Aix, who took part in the battle of Ma'arra, remains unequalled in its horror: *Not only did our troops not shrink from eating dead Turks and Saracens; they also ate dogs!*

The ordeal of the city of Abu'l-'Alā' ended only on 13 January 1099, when hundreds of torch-bearing Franj roamed through the alleyways setting every house alight. The city walls had already been demolished stone by stone.

The Ma'arra incident was to contribute to opening a chasm between the Arabs and the Franj that would not be bridged for centuries to come. For the moment, however, the populace was paralysed by terror and ceased to resist—unless forced to do so. When the invaders resumed their southward march, leaving nothing but smoking ruins in their wake, the Syrian emirs hastened to send them emissaries laden with gifts to assure them of their goodwill, and to offer them any assistance they might require.

The first to do this was Sultan Ibn Munqidh, the uncle of the chronicler Usāmah, who ruled the small emirate of Shayzar. The Franj reached his territory very soon after their departure from Ma'arra. At their head was Raymond of Saint-Gilles, one of the commanders most frequently mentioned in the Arab chronicles. The emir dispatched an embassy to him, and an agreement was quickly concluded: not only would the sultan promise to supply the Franj with provisions, he would also authorize them to buy horses on the Shayzar market and would furnish them with guides to enable them to pass unhindered through the rest of Syria.

The entire region was now aware of the advance of the Franj; their itinerary was finally known. Did they not openly proclaim that their ultimate objective was Jerusalem, where they wanted to take possession of the tomb of Jesus? Everyone who lived along the route to the holy city sought to take precautions against the Frankish scourge. The poorest hid in neighbouring woods, haunted by big game: lions, wolves, bears, and hyenas. Those who had the means headed for the interior of the country. Others took refuge in the nearest fortress, as did the peasants of the rich plain of Bukaya during the first week of January 1099, when they were told that the Frankish troops were near. Gathering their cattle and their reserves

of oil and grain, they climbed towards Ḥiṣn al-Akrād, the 'citadel of the Kurds', which, from the summit of an almost impregnable peak, overlooked the entire plain as far as the Mediterranean. Although the fortress had long ago fallen into disuse, its walls were intact, and the peasants hoped to find shelter there. But the Franj, ever short of provisions, laid siege. On 28 January their warriors began to scale the walls of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād. Fearing that all was lost, the peasants devised a stratagem. They threw open the doors of the citadel, allowing part of their herd to escape. The Franj, forgetting the battle, hurled themselves after the animals. So great was the chaos in their ranks that the emboldened defenders made a sortie and attacked the tent of Saint-Gilles, where the Frankish commander, abandoned by his bodyguards (who wanted their share of the cattle too), barely escaped capture.

The peasants felt more than a little satisfaction at their exploit. But they knew that the attackers would return to seek revenge. The next day, when Saint-Gilles ordered his men to assault the walls once more, they did not show themselves. The assailants wondered what new trick the peasants had come up with. In fact, it was the wisest trick of all: they had taken advantage of the darkness of night to slip away noiselessly. It was at the site of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād, forty years later, that the Franj would construct one of their most formidable fortresses. The name would change but little: 'Akrād' was deformed first into 'Crat' and then into 'Crac'. The Crac des Chevaliers, with its imposing silhouette, still dominates the plain of Bukaya today.

For several days in February 1099 the citadel became the general headquarters of the Franj. A disconcerting scene unfolded there. Delegations arrived from all the neighbouring cities, and even from several villages, leading mules carrying gold, cloth, and provisions. So complete was the political fragmentation of Syria that even the smallest hamlet acted as an independent emirate. Every town knew that in defending itself and dealing with the invaders it could rely only on its own forces. No prince, no notable, no *qāḍī*, could indulge in the slightest gesture of resistance without placing his entire community in danger. Patriotic sentiments were thus held in abeyance, and the local potentates arrived, with forced smiles, to present their gifts and to pay homage. *Kiss any arm you cannot break*, a local proverb runs, *and pray to God to break it.*

It was this wisdom of resignation that dictated the conduct of the emir Janah al-Dawla, ruler of the city of Homs. This warrior, famous for his valour, had been the most faithful ally of the *atabeg* Karbūqa only a scant seven months ago. Ibn al-Athīr, in fact, notes that *Janah al-Dawla was the last to flee* at Antioch. But the time for bellicosity or religious zeal was long past, and the emir was particularly accommodating to Saint-Gilles, offering him, apart from the usual presents, a large number of horses, for as the ambassadors from Homs explained mawkishly, Janah al-Dawla had heard that the knights were short of mounts.

Of all the delegations that filed through the immense unfurnished rooms of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād, the most generous came from Tripoli. Presenting one by one the splendid precious stones cut by the city's Jewish artisans, Tripoli's ambassadors welcomed the Franj in the name of the most respected prince of the Syrian coast, the *qāḍī* Jalāl al-Mulk. He belonged to the family of the Banu 'Ammār, which had made Tripoli the jewel of the Arab East. The Banu 'Ammār were not one of those innumerable military clans that had carved out fiefdoms for themselves by sheer force of arms, but a dynasty of scholars; their founder was a magistrate, or *qāḍī*, a title the sovereigns of the city had conserved ever since.

Thanks to the wisdom of the *qāḍīs*, at the time of the Franj advance Tripoli and its environs were enjoying an age of peace and prosperity that all their neighbours envied. The pride of the citizenry was the enormous Dār al-'Ilm, or 'House of Culture', which included a library of some one hundred thousand volumes, one of the largest collections of the era. The city was ringed with fields of olives, carobs, and sugar-cane, and many kinds of fruit had been amassed in the recent abundant harvests. Its port was the scene of bustling activity.

It was this very opulence that led to the city's first problems with the invaders. In the message he sent to Ḥiṣn al-Akrād, Jalāl al-Mulk invited Saint-Gilles to send a delegation to Tripoli to negotiate an alliance. This was an unpardonable error. The Frankish emissaries were amazed at the gardens, the palace, the port, and the goldsmiths' souk—so much so that they paid no attention to the proposals of the *qāḍī*. They were already dreaming of the rich spoils that would be theirs if they took this city. And it seems that once they had returned to their chief, they did their best to arouse his

cupidity. Jalāl al-Mulk, who was naively awaiting Saint-Gilles's response to his offer of an alliance, was more than a little surprised to discover that on 14 February the Franj had laid siege to 'Arqa, second-largest city of the principality of Tripoli. Although naturally disappointed, his stronger emotion was terror, for he was convinced that this operation by the invaders was only the first step to the conquest of his capital. How could he help remembering the fate of Antioch? Jalāl al-Mulk already saw himself in the shoes of the hapless Yaghi-Siyān, hurtling shamefully toward death or oblivion. In Tripoli, provisions were being stockpiled in preparation for a long siege. The inhabitants wondered anxiously how much time the invaders would spend at 'Arqa. Every passing day was an unexpected reprieve.

February slipped by, then March and April. In that year, as every spring, Tripoli was enveloped by the scent of orchards in blossom. The city seemed especially beautiful, for the news was comforting: the Franj had still not managed to take 'Arqa, whose defenders found this no less astonishing than did the besiegers. The town's ramparts were no more solid than those of other, more important cities that the Franj had been able to seize. 'Arqa's real strength was that from the very first moment of the battle its inhabitants were convinced that if a single breach in the walls were opened, they would all be slaughtered like their brothers in Ma'arra and Antioch. They kept watch day and night, repelling attacks and preventing the slightest infiltration. The invaders finally got tired of it all. The clamour of their disputes reached into the besieged city itself. On 13 May 1099 they finally struck camp and slid away, hanging their heads. After three months of exhausting struggle, the tenacity of the resistance had been rewarded. 'Arqa rejoiced.

The Franj began their southward march anew. They passed by Tripoli at a disquietingly leisurely pace. Jalāl al-Mulk, well aware of their irritation, hastened to send them his best wishes for the continuation of their journey. He was careful to accompany his good wishes with foodstuffs, gold, a few horses, and guides who would lead them along the narrow coastal route to Beirut. The Tripolitanian scouts were joined by many Christian Maronites from Mount Lebanon who, like the Muslim emirs, offered to cooperate with the Western warriors.

Without further attacks on the possessions of the Banu 'Ammār,

such as Jubayl (ancient Byblos), the invaders reached Nahr al-Kalb, the River of the Dog.

By crossing that river, they placed themselves in a state of war with the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt.

The strong man of Cairo, the powerful and corpulent vizier al-Afḍal Shāhinshāh, had not concealed his satisfaction when, in April 1097, emissaries from Alexius Comnenus had informed him that a massive contingent of Frankish knights had arrived in Constantinople and were about to launch an offensive in Asia Minor. Al-Afḍal, 'the Best', a 35-year-old former slave who was the sole ruler of an Egyptian nation of seven million, had sent the emperor his best wishes for success and asked to be kept informed, as a friend, of the progress of the expedition.

> Some say that when the masters of Egypt saw the expansion of the Seljuk empire, they took fright and asked the Franj to march on Syria and to establish a buffer between them and the Muslims. God alone knows the truth.

Ibn al-Athīr's singular explanation of the origin of the Frankish invasion says a great deal about the deep divisions in the Islamic world between the Sunnis, whose allegiance was to the Baghdad caliphate, and the Shi'is, who recognized the Fatimid caliphate of Cairo. The schism, which dates back to a conflict within the Prophet's family during the seventh century, has always aroused bitter conflict among Muslims. Even men of state like Saladin considered the struggle against the Shi'is as at least as important as the war against the Franj. 'Heretics' were regularly blamed for all the evils besetting Islam, and it is not surprising that the Frankish invasion itself should be attributed to their intrigues. Nevertheless, although the alleged Fatimid appeal to the Franj is pure fiction, the Cairene leaders' elation at the arrival of the Western warriors was undoubtedly real. The vizier al-Afḍal warmly congratulated the basileus upon the fall of Nicaea, and three months before the invaders took Antioch, an Egyptian delegation bearing gifts visited the camp of the Franj to wish them a speedy victory and to propose an alliance with them. The ruler of Cairo, a soldier of Armenian origin, had no sympathy for the Turks, and in this his personal

sentiments squared with the interests of Egypt. Since the middle of the century, Seljuk advances had been eroding the territory of the Fatimid caliphate and the Byzantine empire alike. While the Rūm watched as Antioch and Asia Minor escaped their control, the Egyptians lost Damascus and Jerusalem, which had belonged to them for a century. A firm friendship developed between al-Afḍal and Alexius, and between Cairo and Constantinople. There were regular consultations and exchanges of information; common projects were elaborated. Shortly before the arrival of the Franj, Alexius and al-Afḍal observed with satisfaction that the Seljuk empire was being undermined by internal quarrels. In Asia Minor, as in Syria, many small rival states had been established. Had the time come to take revenge against the Turks? Would the Rūm and the Egyptians now both recover their lost possessions? Al-Afḍal dreamed of a concerted operation by the two allied powers, and when he learned that the basileus had received a large reinforcement of troops from the lands of the Franj, he felt that revenge was at hand.

The delegation he dispatched to the besiegers of Antioch made no mention of a non-aggression pact. That much was obvious, thought the vizier. What he proposed to the Franj was a formal partition: northern Syria for the Franj; southern Syria (meaning Palestine, Damascus, and the coastal cities as far north as Beirut) for him. Al-Afḍal was careful to present his offer at the earliest possible date, before the Franj were certain that they would be able to take Antioch. He was convinced that they would accept with alacrity.

Their answer had been curiously evasive, however. They asked for explanations and the clarification of details, in particular as to the future of Jerusalem. Although they treated the Egyptian diplomats amicably, even offering to show them the severed heads of three hundred Turks killed near Antioch, they refused to conclude any agreement. Al-Afḍal did not understand. Was his proposal not realistic, even generous? Could it be that the Rūm and their auxiliaries seriously intended to take Jerusalem, as his envoys suspected? Could Alexius have lied to him?

The strong man of Cairo was still uncertain what policy to adopt when, in June 1098, he received the news of the fall of Antioch, followed three weeks later by that of Karbūqa's humiliating defeat.

The vizier then decided to take immediate action in an effort to take friend and foe alike by surprise. *In July*, Ibn al-Qalānisi reports, *it was announced that the generalissimo al-Afḍal, emir of the armies, had left Egypt at the head of a powerful army and had laid siege to Jerusalem, where the emirs Sokman and Ilghazi, sons of Artuk, resided. He attacked the city and erected mangonels.* The two Turkish brothers who administered Jerusalem had just arrived from the north, where they had participated in Karbūqa's ill-fated expedition. After a forty-day siege, the city capitulated. *Al-Afḍal treated the two emirs generously, and set them and their entourage free.*

For several months, events seemed to prove the master of Cairo right. It seemed as though the Franj, now facing an accomplished fact, had given up any idea of pressing ahead. The poets of the Fatimid court outdid themselves in composing eulogies of the famous exploit of the man of state who had wrenched Palestine from the Sunni 'heretics'. But in January 1099, when the Franj relaunched their resolute march to the south, al-Afḍal became uneasy.

He dispatched one of his confidants to Constantinople to consult Alexius, who responded, in a celebrated letter, with a stunning confession: the basileus no longer exercised the slightest control over the Franj. Incredible as it might seem, these people were acting on their own account, seeking to establish their own states, refusing to hand Antioch back to the empire, contrary to their sworn promises. They seemed determined to take Jerusalem by any means. The pope had summoned them to a holy war to take possession of the tomb of Christ, and nothing could deter them from their objective. Alexius added that for his part, he disavowed their action and would strictly observe his alliance with Cairo.

Despite this latter assertion, al-Afḍal had the impression that he had been caught in a mortal trap. Being himself of Christian origin, he found it easy to understand that the Franj, whose faith was ardent and naive, might be determined to press their armed pilgrimage through to the end. He now regretted having thrown himself into this Palestinian adventure. Would it not have been better to let the Franj and the Turks fight for Jerusalem instead of having gratuitously interposed himself across the route of these knights, as courageous as they were fanatical?

Realizing that it would take him several months to raise an army capable of confronting the Franj, he wrote to Alexius, imploring him to do all he could to slow the march of the invaders. In April 1099, during the siege of 'Arqa, the basileus sent the Franj a message asking that they postpone their departure for Palestine, saying—and this was his pretext—that he would soon be arriving in person to join them. For his part, the ruler of Cairo sent the Franj fresh proposals for an agreement. In addition to the partition of Syria, he now explained his policy on the holy city: freedom of worship was to be strictly respected, pilgrims were to be granted the right to visit whenever they desired, so long, of course, as they were unarmed and travelled in small groups. The response of the Franj was scathing: 'We will go all of us to Jerusalem, in combat formation, our lances raised!'

It was a declaration of war. On 19 May 1099, matching word and deed, the invaders unhesitatingly crossed Nahr al-Kalb, the northern limit of the Fatimid domain.

But the River of the Dog was a largely fictitious border, for al-Afḍal had done no more than reinforce the garrison in Jerusalem, abandoning the Egyptian possessions of the littoral to their fate. All the coastal cities, virtually without exception, hastened to reach some accommodation with the invader.

The first was Beirut, four hours' march from Nahr al-Kalb. Its inhabitants dispatched a delegation to the knights, promising to supply them with gold, provisions, and guides, if only they would respect the harvests of the surrounding plain. The Beirutis added that they would be prepared to recognize the authority of the Franj if they succeeded in taking Jerusalem. Saida, ancient Sidon, reacted differently. Its garrison effected several daring sorties against the invaders, who took their revenge by ravaging its orchards and pillaging nearby villages. That was to be the last act of resistance. The ports of Tyre and Acre, although they would have been easy to defend, followed the example of Beirut. In Palestine most towns and villages were evacuated by their inhabitants even before the Franj arrived. At no time did the invaders encounter any serious resistance, and on the morning of 7 June 1099 the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw them in the distance, on a hill, near the mosque of the prophet Samuel. They could almost hear the sounds of their

march. By late afternoon the Franj were already camped at the walls of the city.

General Iftikhār al-Dawla, 'Pride of the State', who was commander of the Egyptian garrison, observed them with equanimity from atop the Tower of David. During the past several months he had made all the necessary arrangements to sustain a long siege. A section of the city walls damaged during al-Afḍal's attack on the Turks the previous summer had been repaired. Enormous stocks of provisions had been amassed to avert any threat of shortages while waiting for the vizier, who had promised to arrive by the end of July to lift the siege. The general had even prudently followed the example of Yaghi-Siyān and expelled the Christian inhabitants liable to collaborate with their Frankish coreligionists. During these past few days, he had poisoned water sources and wells in the environs of the city, to prevent the enemy from tapping them. Life would not be easy for those besieging the city under the June sky in this mountainous and arid landscape, with olive trees scattered here and there.

Iftikhār therefore felt that the battle would be joined in the best possible conditions. With his Arab cavalry and Sudanese archers solidly entrenched within the thick fortifications that crept up hills and dipped into ravines, he felt he would be able to hold the line. True enough, the Western knights were renowned for their bravery, but their behaviour before the walls of Jerusalem was somewhat disconcerting to an experienced officer. Iftikhār had expected that as soon as they arrived, they would begin constructing mobile towers and the various other instruments of siege, digging trenches to protect themselves against sorties by the city garrison. Far from making such arrangements, however, they had begun by organizing a procession around the walls, led by bare-headed praying and chanting priests; they then threw themselves against the walls like madmen, without carrying even a single ladder. Al-Afḍal had told the general that these Franj wanted to seize the city for religious reasons, but such blind fanaticism nevertheless astonished him. He himself was a devoted Muslim, but if he was fighting in Palestine, it was to defend the interests of Egypt, and—why deny it—to advance his own military career.

He knew that this was a city unlike any other. Iftikhār had always called it by its common name, Īliyā', but the *'ulamā'* (the doctors of

Muslim law) dubbed it al-Quds, Bait al-Maqdis, or Bait al-Muqaddas—'site of holiness'. They described it as the third holy city of Islam, after Mecca and Medina, for it was here that, one miraculous night, God led the Prophet to a meeting with Moses and Jesus, son of Mary. Since then, every Muslim had considered al-Quds the symbol of the continuity of the divine message. Many believers came to gather in al-Aqṣā mosque, under the enormous sparkling dome that dominates the squat houses of the city.

Although heaven seemed present at every street corner in this town, Iftikhār himself was quite down to earth. He believed that military techniques were always the same, whatever the city. These processions of singing Franj were irritating, but they did not worry him. It was only at the end of the second week of the siege that he began to feel uneasy, when the enemy enthusiastically set to work building two huge wooden towers. By the beginning of July they were already erect, ready to carry hundreds of fighters to the top of the ramparts. Their menacing silhouettes loomed ominously from the heart of the enemy camp.

Iftikhār had issued the strictest orders: if either of these contraptions made the slightest move toward the walls, it was to be inundated in a flood of arrows. If the tower managed to draw near nevertheless, Greek fire would be used, a mixture of oil and sulphur that was poured into jugs, set alight, and hurled at the attackers by catapult. When it spattered, the liquid caused fires that were not easily extinguished. With this formidable weapon Iftikhār's soldiers repelled several successive assaults during the second week of July, even though the besiegers, in an effort to protect themselves from the flames, had lined their mobile towers with freshly flayed animal skins soaked in vinegar. In the meantime, rumours were rife that al-Afḍal's arrival was imminent. The attackers, afraid of being trapped between the defenders and the arriving army, redoubled their efforts.

> Of the two mobile towers constructed by the Franj, *Ibn al-Athīr writes*, one was on the side of Zion, to the south, while the other was placed to the north. The Muslims managed to burn the first one, killing all those inside. But barely had they finished destroying it when a messenger arrived calling for help, for the city had been penetrated on the opposite side. In

fact, it was taken from the north, one Friday morning, seven days before the end of Sha'bān, in the year 492.

On that terrible day of July 1099, Iftikhār was ensconced in the Tower of David, an octagonal citadel whose foundations had been welded with lead. It was the strongest point of the system of defensive fortifications. He could have held out for a few more days, but he knew that the battle was lost. The Jewish quarter had been invaded, the streets were strewn with bodies, and fighting was already raging alongside the great mosque. He and his men would soon be completely surrounded. Nevertheless, he continued to fight. What else could he do? By afternoon, fighting had practically ceased in the centre of the city. The white banner of the Fatimids now waved only over the Tower of David.

Suddenly the Frankish attack was halted and a messenger approached. He was carrying an offer from Saint-Gilles, who proposed that the Egyptian general and his men be allowed to leave the city alive if they would surrender the tower to him. Iftikhār hesitated. The Franj had already broken their commitments more than once, and there was no indication that Saint-Gilles would now act in good faith. On the other hand, he was described as a white-haired sexagenarian respected by all, which suggested that his word could be trusted. In any event, Iftikhār was sure that Saint-Gilles would eventually have to negotiate with the garrison, since his wooden tower had been destroyed and all his attacks repelled. Indeed, he had been dithering on the walls since morning, while his colleagues, the other Frankish commanders, were already plundering the city and arguing about who would get which houses. Carefully weighing the pros and cons, Iftikhār finally announced that he was ready to yield, provided that Saint-Gilles would promise, on his honour, to guarantee his safety and that of all his men.

The Franj kept their word, Ibn al-Athīr notes conscientiously, *and let them depart by night for the port of Ascalon, where they camped.* And then he adds: *The population of the holy city was put to the sword, and the Franj spent a week massacring Muslims. They killed more than seventy thousand people in al-Aqṣā mosque.* Ibn al-Qalānisi, who never reported figures he could not verify, says only: *Many people were killed. The Jews had gathered in their synagogue and the Franj burned them alive. They also destroyed the monuments of saints and the tomb of Abraham, may peace be upon him!*

Among the monuments sacked by the invaders was the mosque of 'Umar, erected to the memory of the second successor of the Prophet, the caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who had taken Jerusalem from the Rūm in February 638. The Arabs would later frequently invoke this event, to highlight the difference between their conduct and that of the Franj. 'Umar had entered Jerusalem astride his famous white camel, and the Greek patriarch of the holy city came forward to meet him. The caliph first assured him that the lives and property of the city's inhabitants would be respected, and then asked the patriarch to take him to visit the Christian holy places. The time of Muslim prayer arrived while they were in the church of Qiyāma, the Holy Sepulchre, and 'Umar asked his host if he could unroll his prayer mat. The patriarch invited 'Umar to do so right where he stood but the caliph answered: 'If I do, the Muslims will want to appropriate this site, saying " 'Umar prayed here." ' Then, carrying his prayer mat, he went and knelt outside. He was right, for it was on that very spot that the mosque that bore his name was constructed. The Frankish commanders, alas, lacked 'Umar's magnanimity. They celebrated their triumph with an ineffable orgy of killing, and then savagely ravaged the city they claimed to venerate.

Not even their coreligionists were spared. One of the first measures taken by the Franj was to expel from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre all the priests of Oriental rites—Greeks, Georgians, Armenians, Copts, and Syrians—who used to officiate jointly, in accordance with an old tradition respected by all previous conquerors. Dumbfounded by this degree of fanaticism, the dignitaries of the Oriental Christian communities decided to resist. They refused to tell the occupiers where they had hidden the True Cross, on which Christ died. In the minds of these men, religious devotion to the relic was compounded by patriotic pride. Indeed, were they not fellow citizens of the Nazarene? But the invaders were not impressed. They arrested the priests who had been entrusted with custody of the Cross and tortured them to make them reveal the secret. Thus did the Franj manage to forcibly deprive the Christians of the holy city wherein lay their most precious relics.

While the Occidentals were completing the massacre of a few

hidden survivors and laying their hands on the riches of Jerusalem, the army raised by al-Afḍal was advancing slowly across Sinai. It reached Palestine twenty days after the tragedy. The vizier, who was personally in command, hesitated to march on the holy city directly. Although he had nearly thirty thousand men, he did not consider his position strong, for he lacked the matériel for a siege and was frightened by the determination shown by the Frankish knights. He therefore decided to camp with his troops in the environs of Ascalon and to dispatch an embassy to Jerusalem to sound out the enemy's intentions. When they reached the occupied city, the Egyptian emissaries were led to a knight with long hair and a blond beard, a big man who was introduced to them as Godfrey of Bouillon, the new master of Jerusalem. It was to him that they delivered the vizier's message, which accused the Franj of having abused his good faith and proposed to negotiate some arrangement with them if they would promise to leave Palestine. The Occidentals' response was to assemble their forces and set out without delay on the route to Ascalon.

So rapid was their advance that they arrived near the Muslim camp before the scouts had even reported their presence. With the very first engagement, *the Egyptian army gave way and fell back toward the port of Ascalon*, Ibn al-Qalānisi relates. *Al-Afḍal also withdrew. The sabres of the Franj triumphed over the Muslims. Neither foot-soldiers, nor volunteers, nor the people of the city were spared in the killing. About ten thousand souls perished, and the camp was sacked.*

It was probably several days after the Egyptian debacle that the group of refugees led by Abū Ṣa'ad al-Ḥarawi reached Baghdad. The *qāḍī* of Damascus was not yet aware that the Franj had just won another victory, but he knew that the invaders were now masters of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Edessa, that they had beaten Kilij Arslan and Danishmend, that they had crossed all of Syria from north to south, massacring and pillaging at will and with impunity. He felt that his people and his faith had been scorned and humiliated, and he meant to raise such a great cry that the Muslims would finally awake. He would shake his brothers out of their torpor, provoke them, scandalize them.

On Friday 19 August 1099 he led his companions into the great

mosque of Baghdad. In the afternoon, as the faithful were converging from all over the city to pray, he began eating ostentatiously, although it was Ramaḍān, the month of obligatory fasting. Within a few moments an angry crowd pressed around him, and soldiers approached to arrest him. But al-Ḥarawi then rose and calmly asked those surrounding him how it was that they could feel so indignant at the violation of the fast whereas the massacre of thousands of Muslims and the destruction of the holy places of Islam met with their complete indifference. Having thus silenced the crowd, he proceeded to describe in detail the evils that had overwhelmed Syria, *Bilād al-Sham*, and especially those that had just befallen Jerusalem. *The refugees wept, and they made others weep*, Ibn al-Athīr writes.

Leaving the street, al-Ḥarawi carried the scandal into the palaces. 'I see that the supporters of the faith are weak!' he cried out in the *dīwān* of the prince of the faithful al-Mustaẓhir Billāh, a young, 22-year-old caliph. Light-skinned, with a short beard and round face, he was a jolly and easy-going sovereign, his outbursts of anger brief and his threats rarely carried out. At a time when cruelty seemed the prime attribute of leaders, this young Arab caliph boasted that he had never wronged anyone. *He felt genuine joy when he was told that the people were content*, Ibn al-Athīr candidly noted. Sensitive, refined, and of agreeable bearing, al-Mustaẓhir had a taste for the arts. He was especially interested in architecture, and personally supervised the construction of a wall ringing the entire quarter of his residence, the Ḥārim, situated east of Baghdad. In his ample spare time, he composed love poems: *When I stretch out my hand to bid my beloved adieu, the ardour of my passion melts ice.*

Unfortunately for his subjects, *this man of good will, to whom any act of tyranny was alien* (as al-Qalānisi described him), had no real power, although he was constantly surrounded by complex ceremonies of veneration and the chroniclers evoke his name with deference. The refugees of Jerusalem, who placed their hopes in him, seem to have forgotten that his authority extended no further than the walls of his own palace and that in any case politics bored him.

Nevertheless, he was the legatee of a glorious history. From 632 to 833, across the two centuries that followed the death of the

Prophet, his predecessors the caliphs were the spiritual and temporal commanders of a vast empire which, at its apogee, stretched from the Indus River in the east to the Pyrenees in the west and even thrust towards the Rhône and Loire valleys. The 'Abbasid dynasty, to which al-Mustaẓhir belonged, had made Baghdad the fabulous city of the Thousand and One Nights. At the beginning of the ninth century, during the reign of his ancestor Hārūn al-Rashīd, the caliphate had been the world's richest and most powerful state, its capital the centre of the planet's most advanced civilization. It had a thousand physicians, an enormous free hospital, a regular postal service, several banks (some of which had branches as far afield as China), an excellent water-supply system, a comprehensive sewage system, and a paper mill. Indeed, it was in Syria that the Occidentals, who until their arrival in the Orient used only parchment, learned the art of manufacturing paper from straw.

But in that blood-stained summer of 1099, when al-Ḥarawi came to tell the *dīwān* of al-Mustaẓhir about the fall of Jerusalem, this golden age was long gone. Hārūn al-Rashīd had died in 809. A quarter of a century later, his successors had lost all real power, Baghdad was half destroyed, and the empire had disintegrated. All that remained was the myth of an era of unity, grandeur, and prosperity that would haunt the dreams of the Arabs for ever. Although the 'Abbasids were to rule in name for another four centuries, they no longer actually governed. They were no more than hostages in the hands of their Turkish or Persian soldiers, who were able to make or break sovereigns at will, often resorting to murder in the process. To escape that fate, most of the caliphs renounced any political activity. Cloistered in their harems, they devoted themselves exclusively to the pleasures of existence, becoming poets or musicians and collecting graceful perfumed female slaves.

The prince of the faithful, who had long embodied the glory of the Arabs, now became the living symbol of their decay. Al-Mustaẓhir, from whom the Jerusalem refugees expected a miracle, was the very epitome of this race of idle caliphs. Even had he wanted to, he would have been incapable of going to the aid of the holy city, for his only army was a personal guard of several hundred eunuchs, both black and white. Not that there was any lack of soldiers in Baghdad.

Thousands of them roamed the streets aimlessly, often drunk. To protect themselves against the consequent depredations, the citizens had taken to blocking access to the residential quarters every night, erecting heavy barriers of wood or iron.

Of course, this pestilence in uniform, whose systematic plunder had condemned the souks to ruin, did not obey the orders of al-Mustaẓhir. In fact, their commander barely spoke Arabic. For Baghdad, like all the cities of Muslim Asia, had fallen under the yoke of the Seljuk Turks forty years earlier. The strong man of the 'Abbasid capital, the young sultan Barkiyaruq, a cousin of Kilij Arslan, was theoretically the suzerain of all the princes of the region. In reality, however, each province of the Seljuk empire was practically independent, and the members of the ruling family were wholly absorbed in their own dynastic quarrels.

In September 1099, when al-Ḥarawi left the 'Abbasid capital, he had been unable even to meet Barkiyaruq, for the sultan was away in northern Persia, waging a campaign against his own brother Muḥammad. The struggle was going badly for Barkiyaruq, for in the middle of October Muḥammad managed to take Baghdad itself. But that did not bring this absurd conflict to an end. As the bemused Arabs watched, having given up any attempt to understand, the struggle took a decidedly burlesque turn. In January 1100 Muḥammad fled Baghdad in haste, and Barkiyaruq re-entered the city in triumph. But not for long, for in spring he lost it yet again, only to return in force in April 1101, after an absence of one year, to crush his brother. Once more his name was pronounced in the Friday sermon in the mosques of the capital, but in September the situation was again reversed. Defeated by a coalition of two of his brothers, Barkiyaruq seemed out of the battle for good. But no. Despite his defeat, he returned obstinately to Baghdad and took possession of it for several days, before being evicted once again in October. This absence, too, was brief, for in December an agreement restored the city to his authority. Control of Baghdad had changed hands eight times in thirty months: on average, the city had known a new master every hundred days. This while the Western invaders were consolidating their grip on the conquered territories.

The sultans did not agree among themselves, Ibn al-Athīr wrote in a masterpiece of understatement, *and it was for this reason that the Franj were able to seize control of the country.*

5
Turban-Clad Resistance

On Friday 17 February 1111, the *qāḍī* Ibn al-Khashāb burst into the sultan's mosque in Baghdad accompanied by a large group of Aleppans, among them a Hashemite *sharīf* (a descendant of the Prophet) and a number of Sufi ascetics, *imāms*, and merchants. Ibn al-Qalānisi describes what happened next.

> They forced the preacher to descend from the pulpit, which they smashed. They then began to cry out, to bewail the evils that had befallen Islam because of the Franj, who were killing men and enslaving women and children. Since they were preventing the faithful from saying their prayers, the officials present made various promises, in the name of the sultan, in an effort to pacify them: armies would be sent to defend Islam against the Franj and all the infidels.

But these fine words were not enough to soothe the rebels. The following Friday, they restaged their demonstration, this time in the mosque of the caliph. When guards tried to bar their way, they quickly thrust them aside, smashed the wooden *minbar*, which was adorned with carved arabesques and verses of the Koran, and hurled insults at the prince of the faithful himself. Baghdad was plunged into the greatest confusion.

> At the same moment, *relates the Damascene chronicler in a disingenuously naive tone*, the princess, sister of Sultan Muḥammad and wife of the caliph, arrived in Baghdad from Isfahan with a magnificent retinue: there were precious stones, sumptuous robes, all sorts of saddlery and beasts of burden, servants, slaves of both sexes, attendants, and many other things that would defy estimation and enumeration. Her arrival coincided with the scenes described above. The joy and security of the royal arrival were disrupted. The caliph al-Mustaẓhir Billāh manifested considerable discontent. He wanted to prosecute those responsible for the incident, and to punish them severely. But the sultan prevented him from doing so, pardoned the actions of these people, and ordered the emirs and military officers to return to their provinces to prepare a *jihād* against the infidels, the enemies of God.

If the worthy al-Mustaẓhir was thus moved to anger, it was not only because of the disagreeable effects of the turmoil on his young wife, but also because of the terrifying slogan that had been shouted so deafeningly in the streets of the capital: 'The king of the Rūm is a better Muslim than the prince of the faithful!' For he was well aware that this was no gratuitous accusation. The demonstrators, led by Ibn al-Khashāb, were alluding to a message received a few weeks earlier by the caliph's *dīwān*. It came from the emperor Alexius Comnenus and insistently called upon the Muslims to unite with the Rūm *to struggle against the Franj and expel them from our lands.*

If the powerful master of Constantinople and the humble *qāḍī* of Aleppo seemed to have made common cause in their initiatives in Baghdad, it was because they both felt that they had been humiliated by the same man: Tancred. When Byzantine ambassadors were sent to remind Tancred that the knights of the West had promised to restore Antioch to the basileus and that thirteen years after the fall of the city they had yet to do so, the 'great emir' of the Franks had insolently shown them the door. As for the Aleppans, Tancred had recently imposed a particularly discreditable treaty upon them: they were to pay him an annual tribute of twenty thousand dinars, hand over two important fortresses in the immediate vicinity of their city, and give him, as a gift and sign of allegiance, their ten finest horses. Riḍwān, fearful as ever, dared not refuse. But the streets of his capital had been seething ever since the terms of the treaty had been revealed.

It had always been the custom in Aleppo for people to gather in small groups to hold lively discussions of the dangers threatening

them at critical moments in their history. The notables would get together in the great mosque, sitting cross-legged on the red carpets, sometimes in the courtyard, in the shade of the minaret that overlooked the ochre-coloured houses of the city. The merchants would meet during the day, along the old colonnaded avenue built by the Romans, which ran across Aleppo from west to east, from the Gate of Antioch to the forbidden quarter of the citadel, where the sullen Riḍwān resided. This major artery had long been closed to wagons and processions. The roadway had been taken over by hundreds of little booths in which cloth, amber, trinkets, dates, pistachio nuts, and condiments were amassed. The avenue and its neighbouring alleyways were covered with a wooden ceiling to protect passers-by from sun and rain; at the intersections, it rose up into high stucco domes. At the corners of the alleys, especially those leading to the souks of the makers of straw mats, the blacksmiths, and the sellers of wood for heating, the Aleppans would gossip before the many low-class eating houses. Amidst a persistent odour of boiling oil, grilled meat, and spices, these places offered meals at moderate prices: chunks of grilled mutton, doughnuts, lentils. Families of modest means would buy their food ready-made in the souks; only the rich cooked at home. Not far from the food stalls, the characteristic tinkle of the *sharab* sellers could be heard; these cold drinks of concentrated fruit the Franj would later borrow from the Arabs in liquid and frozen forms, calling them 'sirops' and 'sorbets'.

In the afternoon people of all walks of life would meet in the *ḥammām*, or public bath, that special meeting place where one cleansed oneself before the sunset prayer. As night fell, the citizens would desert the centre of Aleppo to return to their own quarters, away from drunken soldiers. There too, news and rumours would circulate, passed on by men and women alike, and ideas would wend their way through the city. Anger, enthusiasm, discouragement would daily stir this hive, which had buzzed in just this way for more than three millennia.

Ibn al-Khashāb was the most respected man in the quarters of Aleppo. Born of a family of rich wood-merchants, he played a primordial role in the administration of the city. As a Shi'i *qāḍī*, he enjoyed great religious and moral authority; he was responsible for resolving disputes involving the people and property of his community, the largest in Aleppo. In addition, he was a *ra'īs*, or chief of the city, which made him simultaneously provost of the merchants, representative of the interests of the population before the king, and commandant of the urban militia.

But Ibn al-Khashāb's activities went beyond the already wide competence of his official functions. Ever since the arrival of the Franj, he had, through his numerous coterie, encouraged a patriotic and pietistic current of public opinion that demanded a firmer attitude against the invaders. He was not afraid to tell King Riḍwān what he thought of his conciliatory, even servile, policy. When Tancred obliged the Seljuk monarch to affix a cross to the minaret of the great mosque, the *qāḍī* organized a riot and had the crucifix transferred to the Sainte Helène Cathedral. Since then, Riḍwān had avoided any conflict with the irascible *qāḍī*. Entrenched in the citadel with his harem and bodyguard, with his own mosque, his own source of water, and his grassy race-course, the Turkish king preferred to spare the sensibilities of his subjects. So long as his own authority was not challenged, he tolerated public opinion.

In 1111, however, Ibn al-Khashāb turned up at the citadel to tell Riḍwān once again of the citizens' extreme discontent. The faithful, he explained, were scandalized at having to pay tribute to infidels implanted in the land of Islam, and the merchants' businesses had been in peril ever since the intolerable prince of Antioch had seized control of all the routes from Aleppo to the Mediterranean, for he was holding caravans to ransom. Since the city could no longer defend itself with its own resources, the *qāḍī* proposed that a delegation of Sunni and Shi'i notables, merchants and men of religion, be sent to Baghdad to seek the aid of Sultan Muḥammad. Riḍwān had no desire to involve his Seljuk cousin in the affairs of his kingdom. He still preferred to deal with Tancred. But in view of the futility of all missions hitherto dispatched to the 'Abbasid capital, he felt that the least risky course of action would be to accede to his subjects' request.

In this he was mistaken. Against all expectations, the Baghdad demonstrations of February 1111 produced just the effect sought by Ibn al-Khashāb. The sultan, who had just been informed of the fall of Saida and the treaty imposed on the Aleppans, felt growing unease at the ambitions of the Franj. Yielding to Ibn al-Khashāb's entreaties, he ordered the latest in the line of governors of Mosul,

the emir Mawdūd, to march without delay at the head of a powerful army and to rescue Aleppo. When Ibn al-Khashāb returned to Aleppo and informed Riḍwān of the success of his mission, the king pretended to rejoice, while praying that nothing would come of it. He even informed his cousin of his eagerness to participate in the *jihād* at his side. But in July, when he was told that the sultan's troops were actually approaching the city, he could no longer conceal his consternation. He ordered the gates of the city to be barricaded, arrested Ibn al-Khashāb and his major supporters, and imprisoned them in the citadel. The Turkish soldiers were ordered to patrol the residential quarters day and night to prevent any contact between the populace and the 'enemy'. The sequel of events was to justify Riḍwān's volte-face, at least in part. Deprived of the supplies the king was supposed to procure for them, the sultan's troops took their revenge by savagely plundering the environs of Aleppo. Then, following dissension between Mawdūd and the other emirs, the army disintegrated without fighting a single battle.

Mawdūd returned to Syria two years later, under orders from the sultan to assemble all the Muslim princes, except Riḍwān, against the Franj. Since Aleppo was off limits to him, he quite naturally established his general headquarters in Damascus, that other great city, in preparation for a large-scale offensive against the Kingdom of Jerusalem. His host, the *atabeg* Tughtigin, pretended to be thrilled by the honour that the sultan's envoy had thus bestowed upon him, but in fact he was as terrified as Riḍwān had been. He feared that Mawdūd sought only to take over his capital, and resented the emir's every deed as a threat to his own future.

On 2 October 1113, the Damascene chronicler tells us, the emir Mawdūd left his camp, situated near the Gate of Iron, one of the eight entrances to the city. He walked, as he did every day, to the Umayyad mosque, in the company of the lame *atabeg*.

> When the prayer was over and Mawdūd had performed several supplementary devotions, they both departed, Tughtigin walking ahead out of respect for the emir. They were surrounded by soldiers, guards, and militiamen bearing arms of all varieties; the slender sabres, sharp épées, scimitars, and unsheathed daggers gave an impression of thick undergrowth. All around them, crowds pressed forward to admire their arsenal and their magnificence. When they reached the courtyard of the mosque, a man emerged from the crowd and approached the emir Mawdūd as if to pray God on his behalf and to ask alms of him. Suddenly he seized the belt of his mantle and struck him twice with his dagger, just above the navel. The *atabeg* Tughtigin took a few steps backwards, and his companions quickly surrounded him. As for Mawdūd, who never lost his head, he walked as far as the north gate of the mosque and then collapsed. A surgeon was summoned and managed to suture some of the wounds, but the emir died several hours later, may God have mercy upon him!

Who killed the governor of Mosul on the very eve of his offensive against the Franj? Tughtigin lost no time in accusing Riḍwān and his friends of the Assassins sect. But most contemporaries believed that no one but the master of Damascus himself could have armed the killer. According to Ibn al-Athīr, King Baldwin was so shocked by the murder that he sent Tughtigin a particularly contemptuous message: *A nation that kills its leader in the house of its God deserves to be annihilated.* As for Sultan Muḥammad, he howled with rage when he learned of the death of his lieutenant. He considered the heinous crime a personal insult, and he decided to bring all the Syrian leaders into line once and for all, those of Aleppo as well as those of Damascus. He raised an army of several tens of thousands of soldiers commanded by the best officers of the Seljuk clan and curtly ordered all the Muslim princes to join it in its sacred duty of waging *jihād* against the Franj.

When the sultan's powerful expedition arrived in central Syria in the spring of 1115, a great surprise awaited it. Baldwin of Jerusalem and Tughtigin of Damascus stood side by side, supported not only by their own troops but also by those of Antioch, Aleppo, and Tripoli. The princes of Syria, Muslims and Franj alike, felt equally threatened by the sultan, and they had decided to join forces. Within several months, the Seljuk army was forced shamefully to withdraw. Muḥammad swore that never again would he concern himself with the Frankish problem. He kept his word.

While the Muslim princes were thus offering fresh evidence of their utter irresponsibility, two Arab cities demonstrated, in the space of a few months, that it was nevertheless still possible to resist

the foreign occupation. With the surrender of Saida in December 1110 the Franj were masters of the entire littoral, the *sāḥil*, from Sinai in the south to 'the land of the son of the Armenian', north of Antioch. With the exception, however, of two coastal enclaves: Ascalon and Tyre. Encouraged by his successive victories, Baldwin decided to settle their fate without delay. The Ascalon region was noted for the cultivation of reddish onions, called 'ascalonians', a word the Franj distorted into *échalote* (shallot). But its real importance was military, for it served as the assembly point for Egyptian troops during every attempted expedition against the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

In 1111 Baldwin paraded his army before the walls of the city. Shams al-Khalīfa ('Sun of the Caliphate'), the Fatimid governor of Ascalon—*more inclined to commerce than to war*, was Ibn al-Qalānisi's judgement of him—was terrified by the Occidentals' show of force. Without offering any resistance whatsoever, he agreed to pay them a tribute of seven thousand dinars. The Palestinian population of the city, humiliated by this unexpected capitulation, sent emissaries to Cairo to ask that the governor be removed. Upon learning this, and fearing that the vizier al-Afḍal meant to chastise him for his cowardice, Shams al-Khalīfa tried to ward off that eventuality by expelling the Egyptian functionaries and placing himself squarely under the protection of the Franj. Baldwin sent him three hundred men, who took charge of the citadel of Ascalon.

Though scandalized, the inhabitants did not lose heart. Secret meetings were held in the mosques. Plots were hatched, until one day in July 1111, as Shams al-Khalīfa was leaving the grounds of his residence on horseback, a group of conspirators attacked him, riddling his body with dagger-strokes. That was the signal for revolt. Armed citizens, joined by Berber soldiers of the governor's guard, threw themselves against the citadel. The Frankish warriors were hunted down in the towers and along the walls. None of Baldwin's three hundred men survived. The city was to escape domination by the Franj for another forty years.

Seeking revenge for his humiliation at the hands of the Ascalon rebels, Baldwin turned against Tyre, the ancient Phoenician city from which Prince Cadmus, brother of Europa (who was to give her name to the continent of the Franj), had set out to spread the

alphabet throughout the Mediterranean. The impressive walls of Tyre still recalled its glorious history. The city was surrounded on three sides by the sea, and only a narrow coastal road built by Alexander the Great linked it to the mainland. Reputed to be impregnable, in 1111 it was home to a large number of refugees from the recently occupied territories. Their role in the defence of the city was primordial, as Ibn al-Qalānisi, whose account is clearly based on first-hand testimony, reports.

> The Franj had erected a mobile tower to which they affixed a battering-ram of redoubtable force. The walls were shaken, some of the stones crumbled, and the besieged found themselves on the brink of disaster. It was then that a sailor from Tripoli, who was acquainted with metallurgy and had some experience in the affairs of war, undertook to manufacture iron grapnels designed to grip the battering-ram from the top and sides, by means of ropes held by the defenders. The latter then pulled so vigorously that the wooden tower was wrenched off balance. On several occasions, the Franj had to break their own battering-ram to prevent the tower from collapsing.

Renewing their attempts, the attackers succeeded in drawing their tower near the walls and fortifications, which they then proceeded to hammer with a new battering-ram sixty cubits long, whose head was a chunk of cast iron weighing more than twenty pounds. But the Tripolitanian sailor did not give up.

> With the aid of several skilfully installed joists, *the Damascene chronicler continues*, he had jars of excrement and rubbish raised high and poured over the Franj. Choked by the odours enveloping them, the latter could no longer handle their battering-ram properly. The sailor then had grape baskets and large straw trunks filled with oil, bitumen, firewood, resin, and the bark of reeds. After setting them on fire, he tilted them onto the Franj tower. The top of the tower burst into flames, and as the Franj hurried to extinguish the blaze with vinegar and water, the Tripolitanian quickly hurled other baskets filled with boiling oil to feed the flames. Fire now

swept through the whole upper part of the tower and spread little by little to the lower levels, feeding on the wood of which the structure was made.

Unable to bring the fire under control, the attackers finally evacuated the tower and fled. The defenders took advantage of the situation to make a sortie, seizing a large number of abandoned weapons.

When they saw this, *Ibn al-Qalānisi concludes triumphantly*, the Franj lost heart and beat a retreat, after setting fire to the barracks they had erected in their camp.

It was the twelfth of April 1112. After 132 days of siege, the population of Tyre had inflicted a stinging defeat on the Franj.

After the Baghdad riots, the Ascalon insurrection, and the resistance in Tyre, a wind of revolt began to surge through the region. A growing number of Arabs felt an equally intense hatred for the invaders and for the majority of the Muslim leaders, whom they accused of negligence or even treason. In Aleppo more than elsewhere, this attitude soon went beyond a mere change of mood. Under the leadership of the *qāḍī* Ibn al-Khashāb, the citizens decided to take their fate into their own hands. They chose their own leaders and forced them to carry out the policy they wanted.

Admittedly, many defeats, many disappointments, were yet to come. The expansion of the Franj was not over, and their arrogance knew no bounds. But from this point on, a ground swell would slowly rise, beginning in the streets of Aleppo. Little by little it would inundate the Arab East, eventually carrying to power just, courageous, and devoted men who would be capable of reconquering the lost territory.

Before that, however, Aleppo was to pass through the most erratic period of its long history. At the end of November 1113 Ibn al-Khashāb learned that Riḍwān lay seriously ill at his palace in the citadel. He gathered his friends together and told them to prepare for action. The king died on 10 December. As soon as the news was known, groups of armed militiamen fanned through the quarters of the city, occupied the major buildings, and seized many of Riḍwān's

supporters, notably the adherents of the Assassins sect, who were immediately put to death for their collaboration with the Frankish enemy.

The *qāḍī*'s aim was not to seize power himself but to make an impression on the new king, Alp Arslan, the son of Riḍwān, so as to induce him to follow a policy different from that of his father. At first this young man of sixteen, who stuttered so badly that he was nicknamed 'the Mute', seemed to endorse the militant stance of Ibn al-Khashāb. With unconcealed delight, he had all Riḍwān's collaborators arrested and beheaded forthwith. The *qāḍī* became uneasy. He urged the young monarch not to subject the city to a bloodbath but simply to punish the traitors so as to set an example. But Alp Arslan paid him no heed. He executed two of his own brothers, several officers, a few servants, and in general anyone to whom he took a dislike. Little by little, the citizenry realized the horrible truth: the king was mad! The best available source dealing with this period is the chronicle by Kamāl al-Dīn, an Aleppan author-diplomat, written a century after the events but based on the testimony of contemporaries.

One day, *he recounts*, Alp Arslan assembled some emirs and notables and took them to visit a sort of cellar dug into the citadel. Once they were inside, he asked them, 'What would you say if I had all your heads cut off right here?'

'We are slaves subject to your majesty's orders', answered one of the unfortunates, pretending to consider the threat a good joke.

And it was thus, in fact, that they escaped death.

It was not long before the demented young king was being given a wide berth. Only one man still dared to approach him, his eunuch Lu'lu', 'Pearls'. But finally he too began to fear for his life. In September 1114 he killed his sleeping master and installed another of Riḍwān's sons, aged six, on the throne.

Aleppo was sinking deeper into anarchy day by day. While uncontrollable groups of slaves and soldiers cut one another to pieces in the citadel, armed citizens patrolled the streets of the city to protect themselves against marauders. During this initial period, the Franj of Antioch did not seek to take advantage of the chaos

paralysing Aleppo. Tancred had died a year before Ridwān, and his successor Sir Roger, whom Kamāl al-Dīn calls Sirjal, lacked sufficient self-assurance to engage in action of any real scope. But the respite was of brief duration. In 1116 Roger of Antioch, now sure of his control over all the routes to Aleppo, occupied the major fortresses ringing the city one after another. In the absence of any resistance, he even managed to impose a tax on every Muslim pilgrim leaving for Mecca.

In April 1117 the eunuch Lu'lu' was assassinated. According to Kamāl al-Dīn, *the soldiers of his escort had hatched a plot against him. While he was walking east of the city one day, they suddenly drew their bows, crying, 'After the hare! After the hare!', to make him believe that they were hunting that animal. In fact, it was Lu'lu' himself who was riddled with arrows.* After his death, power passed to another slave, who, unable to assert his authority, asked Roger to come to his aid. The subsequent chaos was indescribable. While the Franj prepared to lay siege to the city, the military officers continued to fight among themselves for control of the citadel. Ibn al-Khashāb also decided to act without delay. He assembled the principal notables of the city to propose a plan of action whose consequences were to be weighty. As a border town, he explained, Aleppo ought to be in the vanguard of the *jihād* against the Franj. It should therefore offer its government to a powerful emir, perhaps even the sultan himself, and should never again allow itself to be governed by a local kinglet who placed his personal interests above those of Islam. The *qāḍī*'s proposal was approved, though not without some reluctance, for the Aleppans were jealously attached to their particularism. The major candidates were then reviewed. The sultan? He refused to have anything further to do with Syria. Tughtigin? He was the only Syrian prince with some degree of personal strength, but the Aleppans would never accept a Damascene. Ibn al-Khashāb then proposed the Turkish emir Ilghazi, governor of Mardin in Mesopotamia. True, his conduct had not always been exemplary. Two years earlier, he had supported the Islamo-Frankish alliance against the sultan, and he was known for his frequent drunkenness. *When he drank wine*, Ibn al-Qalānisi tells us, *Ilghazi would remain in a state of hebetude for days on end, not even rousing himself sufficiently to issue an order or directive.* But a long search indeed would be required to find a sober military

man. On the other hand, Ibn al-Khashāb argued, Ilghazi was a courageous fighter, his family had governed Jerusalem for quite some time, and his brother Sokman had won the victory of Ḥarrān against the Franj. A majority finally rallied to this view, and Ilghazi was invited to come to Aleppo. The *qāḍī* himself opened the city gates to him during the summer of 1118. The emir's first act was to marry the daughter of King Ridwān, a gesture that symbolized the union between the city and its new master and simultaneously asserted the latter's legitimacy. Ilghazi then called his troops to arms.

Twenty years after the beginning of the invasion, the capital of northern Syria for the first time had a commander who really wanted to fight. The result was stunning. On Saturday 28 June 1119 the army of the new ruler of Aleppo confronted the forces of Antioch on the plain of Sarmada, midway between the two cities. A *khamsīn*, a hot, dry and sand-laden wind, was blowing in the eyes of the combatants. Kamāl al-Dīn describes the scene.

> Ilghazi made his emirs swear that they would fight bravely, that they would hold their positions, that they would not retreat, and that they would give their lives for the *jihād*. The Muslims were then deployed in small waves, and managed to take up night-time positions alongside Sir Roger's troops. At daybreak the Franj suddenly saw the Muslim banners approach, surrounding them on all sides. The *qāḍī* Ibn al-Khashāb advanced astride his mare, and gestured with one hand, urging our forces into battle. Seeing him, one of the soldiers shouted contemptuously, 'Have we come all the way from our home country to follow a turban?' But the *qāḍī* marched toward the troops, moved through their ranks, and addressed them, trying to rouse their energy and lift their spirits, delivering a harangue so eloquent that men wept with emotion and felt great admiration for him. Then they charged. Arrows flew like a cloud of locusts.

The army of Antioch was decimated. Sir Roger himself was found among the bodies, his head cleaved to the nose.

> Word of the victory reached Aleppo just as the Muslims, all in rows, were coming to the end of the midday prayer in the

great mosque. A great clamour was heard from the west, but no fighter entered the city before the afternoon prayer.

Aleppo spent days celebrating its victory. There was singing and drinking, sheep were slaughtered, people wandered about looking at the crossed banners, helmets, and coats of mail brought back by the troops, or watching some poor prisoner being decapitated—the rich ones were ransomed. People listened as improvised poems in honour of Ilghazi were recited in the city squares: *After God, it is you whom we trust.* For years the Aleppans had lived in terror of Bohemond, Tancred, and then Roger of Antioch, and many had come to expect that they, like their brothers in Tripoli, would some day inevitably be forced to choose between death and exile. After the Sarmada victory, they felt as though life had begun anew. Ilghazi's exploit aroused enthusiasm throughout the Arab world. *Never in past years has such a triumph been bestowed upon Islam*, exclaimed Ibn al-Qalānisi.

These exaggerated words reflect the extremely low morale that had prevailed on the eve of Ilghazi's victory. The arrogance of the Franj had indeed come to border on the absurd. At the beginning of March 1118 King Baldwin had sought to invade Egypt with exactly 216 knights and 400 foot-soldiers. He crossed Sinai at the head of his meagre forces, occupied the city of al-Faramā′ without meeting any resistance, and went as far as the banks of the Nile, *where he bathed*, notes Ibn al-Athīr mockingly. He would have gone further had he not suddenly been taken ill. Carried back to Palestine as quickly as possible, he died en route, at al-'Arīsh in north-east Sinai. Despite Baldwin's death, al-Afḍal would never recover from this fresh humiliation. Rapidly losing control of the situation, he was assassinated three years later in a Cairo street. As for the king of the Franj, he was replaced by his cousin, Baldwin II of Edessa.

The Sarmada victory, coming so soon after the spectacular raid across Sinai, seemed like revenge, and a number of optimists thought it signalled the beginning of the reconquest. They expected Ilghazi to march on Antioch without delay, for the city now had neither prince nor army. Indeed, the Franj themselves were preparing for a siege. Their first decision was to disarm the Syrian, Armenian, and Greek Christians of the city and to forbid them to leave their homes, for the Franj feared that they would ally with the

Aleppans. Tension was running high between the Occidentals and their Oriental coreligionists, who complained that the former were contemptuous of their rites and had confined them to subordinate roles in their own city. But the precautions taken by the Franj proved unnecessary. Ilghazi did not even dream of pressing his advantage. Wallowing in drunkenness, he refused to leave the former residence of Riḍwān, where he seemed intent on celebrating his victory without end. So much fermented liquor did he consume that he was seized by a violent attack of fever. It took him twenty days to recover, just in time to be told that the army of Jerusalem, under the command of the new King Baldwin II, had that moment arrived in Antioch.

His health ruined by alcohol, Ilghazi died three years later, never having managed to exploit his success. The Aleppans were grateful to him for saving their city from the Frankish danger, but they were hardly distressed at his death, for they were already turning their attention to his successor, an exceptional man whose name was on everyone's lips: Balak. He was Ilghazi's nephew, but a man of quite another stamp. Within a few months he would become the adored hero of the Arab world, his exploits celebrated in the mosques and public squares.

In September 1122, through a brilliant manoeuvre, Balak succeeded in capturing Joscelin, who had replaced Baldwin II as count of Edessa. According to Ibn al-Athīr, *he wrapped him in a camel skin, had it sewn shut, and then, rejecting all offers of ransom, locked him in a fortress.* Following the death of Roger of Antioch, a second Frankish state had now lost its leader. The king of Jerusalem, uneasy at these developments, decided to go north himself. Some knights of Edessa led him to the place where Joscelin had been seized, a swampy area alongside the Euphrates. After a quick reconnoitre, Baldwin II ordered the tents pitched for the night. The next day he rose early to take part in his favourite sport, falconry, which he had learned from Oriental princes. Suddenly Balak and his men, who had approached noiselessly, surrounded the camp. The king of Jerusalem threw down his arms. He, in turn, was taken into captivity.

In June 1123 Balak made a triumphant entrance into Aleppo, his prestige vastly inflated as a result of all these exploits. Following in Ilghazi's footsteps, his first act was to marry the daughter of

Riḍwān. Then, without suffering a single setback, he swiftly and systematically reconquered the Frankish possessions around the city. The military skill of this forty-year-old Turkish emir, his spirit of determination, his rejection of any compromise with the Franj, his sobriety, and finally, the roll of honour of his successive victories, were in sharp contrast to the disconcerting mediocrity of the other Muslim princes.

One city in particular saw him as its providential saviour: Tyre, to which the Franj had again laid siege despite the capture of their king. The defenders' position proved far more delicate than it had been during their victorious resistance twelve years earlier, for this time the Occidentals had control of the seas. An impressive Venetian squadron comprising more than a hundred and twenty vessels had appeared off the Palestinian coast in the spring of 1123. The Egyptian fleet, lying at anchor in Ascalon, was taken by surprise and destroyed. In February 1124, after signing an agreement with Jerusalem on the division of the booty, the Venetians blockaded the port of Tyre, while the Frankish army pitched its camp to the east of the city. The outlook for the defenders was not encouraging. The Tyrians, of course, fought on obstinately. One night, for example, a group of accomplished swimmers slid up to a Venetian ship guarding the entrance to the port and managed to draw it to the city, where it was disarmed and destroyed. But despite such stunning operations, the chances of success were minimal. The debacle of the Fatimid fleet made any rescue from the sea impossible. Moreover, it was becoming difficult to supply the city with drinking water. Tyre—and this was its major weakness—had no source within its walls. In peacetime, water was brought in from outside through pipelines. In time of war, the city relied on its cisterns and on intensive provisioning by small boats. But the tight Venetian blockade made this impossible. If the vice was not loosened, the city would be forced to capitulate within a few months.

Since they expected nothing from their usual protectors the Egyptians, the defenders turned to the hero of the hour, Balak. The emir was then laying siege to a fortress called Manbij in the Aleppo region, where one of his vassals had rebelled. When the appeal from Tyre reached him, he immediately decided, according to Kamāl al-Dīn, to turn over command of the siege to one of his lieutenants and to go to Tyre's rescue himself. On 6 May 1124 he made a last

tour of inspection before setting out.

> Helmeted and with his shield on his arm, *the chronicler of Aleppo continues*, Balak approached the fortress of Manbij to choose the site for the placement of his mangonels. As he was giving his orders, an arrow shot from the ramparts struck him under the left clavicle. He wrenched the shaft out himself and, spitting in the air in contempt, murmured, 'That blow will be fatal for all the Muslims.' Then he fell dead.

Balak was right. When news of his death reached Tyre, the inhabitants lost heart. They now saw no course open to them but to negotiate the terms of their surrender. *On 7 July 1124,* Ibn al-Qalānisi relates, *they filed out of Tyre between the two ranks of soldiers, without being molested by the Franj. All soldiers and civilians left the city, in which only the infirm remained. Some of the exiles went to Damascus, while the others scattered through the countryside.*

Although a bloodbath was thereby averted, the admirable resistance of Tyre nevertheless ended in humiliation.

The people of Tyre were not alone in suffering the consequences of Balak's death. In Aleppo power fell to Timurtash, the son of Ilghazi, a young man of nineteen who, according to Ibn al-Athīr, *was interested only in having fun and was eager to leave Aleppo for his native city, Mardin, because he felt that there had been too many wars with the Franj in Syria.* Not content merely to abandon his capital, the inept Timurtash hastened to release the king of Jerusalem in exchange for a ransom of twenty thousand dinars. He presented him with robes of honour, a gold helmet, and ornamented ankle boots, and even gave him back the horse he had been riding on the day of his capture. Princely behaviour no doubt, but completely irresponsible, since several weeks after his release, Baldwin II arrived at the gates of Aleppo with the firm intention of seizing it.

The defence of the city devolved entirely upon Ibn al-Khashāb, who had only a few hundred armed men. When he saw thousands of enemy fighters deployed around his city, the *qāḍī* dispatched a messenger to Ilghazi's son. The emissary risked his life slipping through enemy lines by night. Upon his arrival in Mardin, he repaired to the emir's *dīwān* and insistently implored him not to

abandon Aleppo. But Timurtash, as impudent as he was cowardly, found the messenger's complaints annoying, and ordered him thrown into prison.

Ibn al-Khashāb then turned to another potential saviour, al-Borsoki, an old Turkish officer who had just been named governor of Mosul. Renowned not only for his rectitude and religious zeal, but also for his political skill and ambition, al-Borsoki quickly accepted the *qāḍī's* invitation and set out forthwith. His arrival at the besieged city in January 1125 surprised the Franj, who fled, abandoning their tents. Ibn al-Khashāb rushed out to meet al-Borsoki, urging him to pursue the fleeing Franj, but the emir was weary from his long ride, and more important, was impatient to visit his new possession. Like Ilghazi five years earlier, he dared not press his advantage, and thus allowed the enemy time to recover their wits. Nevertheless, his intervention assumed great significance, because the union of Aleppo and Mosul in 1125 became the nucleus of a powerful state that would soon be able to respond successfully to the arrogance of the Franj.

We now know that the astonishing perspicacity and tenacity of Ibn al-Khashāb not only saved the city from occupation, but also contributed more than anything else to preparing the way for the great leaders of the *jihād* against the invaders. But the *qāḍī* would not live to see these events. One day in the summer of 1125, as he was leaving the great mosque of Aleppo after the midday prayer, a man disguised as an ascetic leapt upon him and sunk a dagger into his chest. It was an act of revenge by the Assassins. Ibn al-Khashāb had been the sect's most intransigent opponent, had spilled buckets of its adherents' blood, and had never repented of his actions. He must have known that some day he would pay with his life. For a third of a century, no enemy of the Assassins had ever managed to elude them.

This sect, the most terrifying ever seen, had been founded in 1090 by a man of immense culture, a devotee of poetry profoundly interested in the latest advances of science. Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ was born around 1048 in the city of Rayy, close by the site where the town of Tehran would be founded a few dozen years later. Was he really, as legend claims, an inseparable companion of the young poet Omar Khayyam, himself a devotee of mathematics and astronomy? It is not known with certainty. On the other hand, the circumstances that led this brilliant man to dedicate his life to organizing his sect are known in detail.

At the time of Ḥasan's birth, the Shi'i doctrine, to which he adhered, was dominant in Muslim Asia. Syria belonged to the Fatimids of Egypt, and another Shi'i dynasty, the Buwayhids, controlled Persia and dictated orders at will to the 'Abbasid caliph in Baghdad itself. During Ḥasan's youth, however, the situation was radically reversed. The Seljuks, upholders of Sunni orthodoxy, took control of the entire region. Shi'ism, triumphant only a short time before, was now only a barely tolerated, often persecuted, doctrine.

Ḥasan, who grew up in a milieu of religious Persians, was indignant at this state of affairs. Towards 1071 he decided to settle in Egypt, the last bastion of Shi'ism. But what he discovered in the land of the Nile was hardly cause for elation. The aged Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir was even more of a puppet than his 'Abbasid rival. He no longer dared even to leave his palace without the permission of his Armenian vizier, Badr al-Jamālī, the father and predecessor of al-Afḍal. In Cairo Ḥasan met many religious fundamentalists who shared his apprehension and sought, like him, to reform the Shi'i caliphate and to take revenge on the Seljuks.

A movement soon took shape, headed by Nizār, the older son of the caliph. The Fatimid heir, as pious as he was courageous, had no intention of abandoning himself to the pleasures of the court, nor of acting as a puppet in the hands of some vizier. When his elderly father died, which could not now be long, he meant to succeed him and, with the aid of Ḥasan and his friends, to inaugurate a new golden age for the Shi'is. A detailed plan was prepared, of which Ḥasan was the principal architect. The Persian militant would return to the heart of the Seljuk empire to pave the way for the reconquest that Nizār would most assuredly undertake upon his accession to power.

Ḥasan succeeded beyond his wildest dreams, but by methods very different from those imagined by the virtuous Nizār. In 1090 he took the fortress of Alamūt by surprise. This bastion, the 'eagle's nest', was situated in a practically inaccessible region of the Albruz Mountains near the Caspian Sea. Once he commanded this inviolable sanctuary, Ḥasan set about establishing a politico-religious

organization whose effectiveness and spirit of discipline would be unequalled in all history.

All members, from novices to the grand master, were ranked according to their level of knowledge, reliability and courage. They underwent intensive courses of indoctrination as well as physical training. Ḥasan's favourite technique for sowing terror among his enemies was murder. The members of the sect were sent individually—or more rarely, in small groups of two or three—on assignments to kill some chosen personality. They generally disguised themselves as merchants or ascetics and moved around in the city where the crime was to be perpetrated, familiarizing themselves with the habits of their victims. Then, once their plan was ready, they struck. Although the preparation was always conducted in the utmost secrecy, the execution had to take place in public, indeed before the largest possible crowd. That was why the preferred site was a mosque, the favourite day Friday, generally at noon. For Ḥasan, murder was not merely a means of disposing of an enemy, but was intended primarily as a twofold lesson for the public: first, the punishment of the victim and, second, the heroic sacrifice of the executioner, who was called *fidā'ī* (plural: *fidā'īn*, or fedayeen), or 'suicide commando', because he was almost always cut down on the spot.

The serenity with which the members of the sect accepted their own death led their contemporaries to believe that they were drugged with hashish, which is why they were called *ḥashashūn*, or *ḥashīshīn*, a word that was distorted into 'Assassin' and soon incorporated into many languages as a common noun. The hypothesis is plausible, but like everything else to do with this sect, it is difficult to separate legend from reality. Did Ḥasan encourage the adherents to drug themselves so that they had a sense of being in paradise for a short time, which would thus encourage them to seek martyrdom? Or, more prosaically, was he trying to accustom them to a narcotic in order to keep them dependent on him? Was he simply urging them towards a state of euphoria so that they would not falter at the moment of the murder? Or did he instead rely on their blind faith? Whatever the answer, merely to list the hypotheses is to pay tribute to the exceptional organizer Ḥasan must have been.

Indeed, his success was stunning. The first murder, committed in 1092, two years after the sect was founded, was an epic unto itself.

The Seljuks were at the apogee of their power. The pillar of their empire, the man who over thirty years had created a state out of the lands conquered by the Turkish warriors, the architect of the renaissance of Sunni power and of the struggle against Shi'ism, was an old vizier whose name itself evoked his deeds: Niẓām al-Mulk, or 'Order of the Realm'. On 14 October 1092 one of Ḥasan's adherents killed him with a sword-stroke. *When Niẓām al-Mulk was assassinated*, Ibn al-Athīr wrote, *the state disintegrated.* Indeed, the Seljuk empire never recovered its unity. Its history would now be punctuated not by further conquests, but by interminable wars of succession. 'Mission accomplished', Ḥasan may well have told his comrades in Egypt. The road was now open to a Fatimid reconquest: it was up to Niẓār. In Cairo, however, the insurrection had run aground. Al-Afḍal, who inherited the vizierate from his father in 1094, mercilessly crushed the associates of Nizār, who was himself buried alive.

Ḥasan thus found himself in an unforeseen situation. He had not renounced his goal of reviving the Shi'i caliphate, but he knew that it would take time. He therefore modified his strategy. While continuing to undermine official Islam and its religious and political representatives, he also tried to find a place where he could establish an autonomous fiefdom. What country offered better prospects for such a project than Syria, carved up as it was into a multitude of minuscule rival states? The sect had only to establish a base, to play one city against another, one emir against his brother, and it would survive until the Fatimid caliphate emerged from its torpor.

Ḥasan sent a Persian preacher into Syria, an enigmatic 'physician-astrologer' who settled in Aleppo and managed to win the confidence of Riḍwān. Adherents began to converge on the city, to preach their doctrine, to form cells. To preserve the friendship of the Seljuk king, they agreed to do some small favours for him, in particular to assassinate some of his political opponents. Upon the death of the 'physician-astrologer' in 1103, the sect immediately sent Riḍwān a new Persian adviser, Abū Ṭāhir, a goldsmith. His influence soon became more overwhelming than that of his predecessor. Riḍwān fell completely under his spell, and according to Kamāl al-Dīn, no Aleppan could obtain the slightest favour from the monarch or settle any administrative problem without dealing

with one of the innumerable members of the sect scattered through the king's entourage.

But the Assassins were hated precisely because of their power. Ibn al-Khashāb in particular relentlessly demanded an end to their activities. He detested them not only for the way they bought and sold influence, but also and above all for their alleged sympathy for the Western invaders. However paradoxical it may seem, the accusation was justified. When the Franj arrived, the Assassins, who had barely begun to settle in Syria, were called Bāṭinis, 'those who adhere to a faith other than that which they profess in public'. The appellation suggested that the adherents were Muslims only in appearance. The Shi'is, like Ibn al-Khashāb, had no sympathy for the disciples of Ḥasan because of their break with the Fatimid caliphate, which, however weak, remained the formal protector of the Shi'is of the Arab world.

Detested and persecuted by all Muslims, the Assassins were not displeased at the arrival of a Christian army that was inflicting one defeat after another on both the Seljuks and al-Afḍal, the murderer of Nizār. There is no doubt that Riḍwān's outrageously conciliatory attitude toward the Occidentals was due in large part to the counsel of the Bāṭinis.

As far as Ibn al-Khashāb was concerned, the connivance between the Assassins and the Franj amounted to treason. He acted accordingly. During the massacres that followed Riḍwān's death at the end of 1113, the Bāṭinis were tracked down street by street and house by house. Some were lynched by mobs, others leapt to their death from the ramparts of the city walls. Nearly two hundred members of the sect perished in this manner, among them Abū Ṭāhir the goldsmith. Nevertheless, Ibn al-Qalānisi reports that *several managed to flee and sought refuge among the Franj or dispersed in the countryside.*

Even though Ibn al-Khashāb had thus deprived the Assassins of their major bastion in Syria, their astonishing career had only just begun. Drawing lessons from their failure, the sect altered its tactics. Ḥasan's new envoy to Syria, a Persian propagandist by the name of Bahram, decided to call a temporary halt to all spectacular actions and to return to careful and discreet organization and infiltration.

Bahram, *the Damascene chronicler relates*, lived in the greatest secrecy and seclusion, changing his dress and appearance so cleverly that he moved through the cities and strongholds without anyone suspecting his identity.

Within a few weeks, he had organized a network powerful enough to contemplate emerging from clandestinity. He found an excellent protector in Riḍwān's replacement.

> One day, *says Ibn al-Qalānisi*, Bahram arrived in Damascus, where the *atabeg* Tughtigin received him quite correctly, as a precaution against his misdeeds and those of his gang. He was shown great respect and assured of vigilant protection. The second-ranking personality of the Syrian metropolis, the vizier Ṭāhir al-Mazdaghāni, came to an understanding with Bahram, although he did not belong to the sect, and helped him to plant the snares of his malfeasance wherever he willed.

In fact, despite the death of Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ in his Alamūt retreat in 1124, there was a sharp recrudescence of the activity of the Assassins. The murder of Ibn al-Khashāb was not an isolated act. A year later, another 'turbaned resister' of the first importance fell under their blows. All the chroniclers relate his assassination with the utmost solemnity, for the man who, in August 1099, had led the first manifestation of popular outrage against the Frankish invasion had become one of the Muslim world's leading religious authorities. It was announced from Iraq that the *qāḍī of qāḍīs* of Baghdad, the splendour of Islam, Abū Ṣa'ad al-Ḥarawi, had been attacked by Bāṭinis in the great mosque of Hamadān. They had stabbed him to death and fled immediately, leaving no clue or trace behind them. So great was the fear they inspired that no one dared pursue them. The crime aroused great indignation in Damascus, where al-Ḥarawi had lived for many years. The activities of the Assassins were by now provoking mounting hostility, especially in religious circles. The best of the faithful were furious, but they held their tongue, because the Bāṭinis had begun killing those who resisted them and supporting those who approved their aberrations. No one dared to criticize them publicly, neither emir, nor vizier, nor sultan.

This terror was understandable. On 26 November 1126 al-

Borsoki himself, the powerful master of Aleppo and Mosul, suffered the terrible vengeance of the Assassins.

> And yet, *wrote Ibn al-Qalānisi in astonishment*, the emir had been on his guard. He wore a coat of mail that could not be penetrated by sabre or knife-blade, and he was always surrounded by soldiers armed to the teeth. But there is no escape from fate. Al-Borsoki had gone, as usual, to the great mosque of Mosul to say his Friday prayers. The scoundrels were there, dressed as Sufis, praying in a corner without arousing any suspicion. Suddenly they leapt upon him and struck him several blows, though without piercing his coat of mail. When the Bāṭinis saw that the daggers had not harmed the emir, one of them cried: 'Strike high, at his head!' They struck him in the throat and knife thrusts rained down upon him. Al-Borsoki died a martyr, and his murderers were put to death.

Never had the threat represented by the Assassins been so serious. They were no longer simply pests, but had become a plague torturing the Arab world at a time when all its energies were required to confront the Frankish occupation. Moreover, the skein of killings was not yet fully unravelled. A few months after the death of al-Borsoki, his son, who had just succeeded him, was in turn assassinated. Four rival emirs then contended for power in Aleppo, and Ibn al-Khashāb was no longer on the scene to maintain a minimum of cohesion. In autumn 1127, as the city sank into anarchy, the Franj reappeared at the walls. Antioch had a new prince, the young son of the great Bohemond, a huge blond man of eighteen who had just arrived from his homeland to take possession of the familial heritage. He bore his father's first name and also possessed his impetuous character. The Aleppans lost no time in paying tribute to him, and the most defeatist already saw him as the future conqueror of their city.

The situation in Damascus was no less tragic. The *atabeg* Tughtigin, ageing and sick, no longer exercised the slightest control over the Assassins. They had their own armed militia, the city administration was in their hands, and the vizier al-Mazdaghāni, who was devoted to them body and soul, had established close

contacts with Jerusalem. For his part, Baldwin II made no secret of his intention to crown his career by taking the Syrian metropolis. Only the presence of the aged Tughtigin seemed still to prevent the Assassins from handing the city over to the Franj. But the reprieve was to be brief. By early 1128 the *atabeg* was visibly wasting away and could no longer rise from his bed. Plots were being hatched at his bedside. He finally expired on 12 February, after designating his son Būri as his successor. The Damascenes were convinced that the fall of their city was now only a matter of time.

Discussing this critical period of Arab history a century later, Ibn al-Athīr would write with good reason:

> With the death of Tughtigin, the last man capable of confronting the Franj was gone. The latter then seemed in a position to occupy all of Syria. But God in his infinite kindness took pity on the Muslims.