

CHAPTER THREE

Jihad in the Period 493–569/1100–1174

*Among men there are those who battle, just as the Companions of the Prophet used to battle, for the hope of Paradise and not in order to satisfy a desire or win a reputation.*¹ (Usama)

Introduction: Aims and Structure of the Chapter

IN A RECENT BOOK devoted to the subject of war in the Middle East with contributions from a number of specialists, it is interesting to note that there was no chapter on the ideological aspects of warfare, namely *jihad*, Holy War in Islam.² Moreover, one of the contributors, Rustow, repeats the view generally held in the West that 'Islam is the most martial of the world's great religions'.³

The Crusades seem to be the very epitome of the phrase 'wars of religion'. The motives that propelled the Franks towards the Holy Land were of course multifarious. But Western scholarship has shown that there is no doubt that religion played a large part in the whole enterprise. There is no doubt also that the tools of religious propaganda and the symbols evoked in speeches and tracts of the Franks were those of the Christian faith – above all, the Cross, Jerusalem and Holy War.

This chapter and the next examine from the Muslim side some of the religious aspects of the conflict between the Islamic world and Christian Europe. They will focus on the evolution of the Islamic concept of *jihad* (Holy War) during the Crusading period and will highlight the role which religious propaganda – including religious architecture (plates 3.1, 3.2, 3.3–5; cf. plates 3.6 and 3.7) – played in the conflict.

Definition of *Jihad*: Its Roots in the Qur'an and the *Hadith*

Religious war is a concept deeply embedded in Islamic belief. Indeed, *jihad* has often been called the sixth pillar (*rukna*) of Islam; it denotes struggle on the part of Muslims. The Revelation itself, the Qu'ran,



Figure 3.1 Mounted warrior, stone mould, eleventh–twelfth centuries, Iran



Plate 3.1 *Great Mosque of Nur al-Din, mosaic decoration in mihrab, thirteenth century, Hims, Syria*

contains plentiful imagery of struggle and fighting, and this has formed the foundation of the theory of *jihad*. Although a number of Qur'anic chapters (*suras*) mention the concept of struggle (the Arabic root *j h d*), the most important chapter in this context is chapter 9, the *sura* of repentance (*al-Tawba*). It is incidentally the only chapter of the Qur'an which omits the opening formula 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate', the formula stressing the Creator's infinite and constant mercy to His creation. The omission



Figure 3.2 *Silver dirham of Rukn al-Din Sulayman Shah; its reverse quotes Sura 9: 33 which has jihad associations. 592/1195-6, Kayseri, Turkey*

of this formula is generally believed to have been caused by the presence within chapter 9 of fierce commandments about idolaters and the steps which should be taken against them. Verse 14, for example, enjoins the Muslims as follows: 'Fight them! Allah will chastise them at your hands, and He will lay them low and give you victory over them.' Verse 36 declares: 'Fight the polytheists totally as they fight you totally.' In verses 88-9 this chapter also promises Paradise for those that strive (j h d) in the path of God:

But the messenger and those who believe with him strive with their wealth and their lives. Such are they for whom are the good things. Such are they who are the successful. Allah hath made ready for them Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will reside. That is the supreme triumph.⁴

Plate 3.2 *Great Mosque of Nur al-Din, sanctuary showing minbar and mihrab, twelfth-thirteenth centuries, Hims, Syria*

(Creswell Photographic Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. C. 5904)



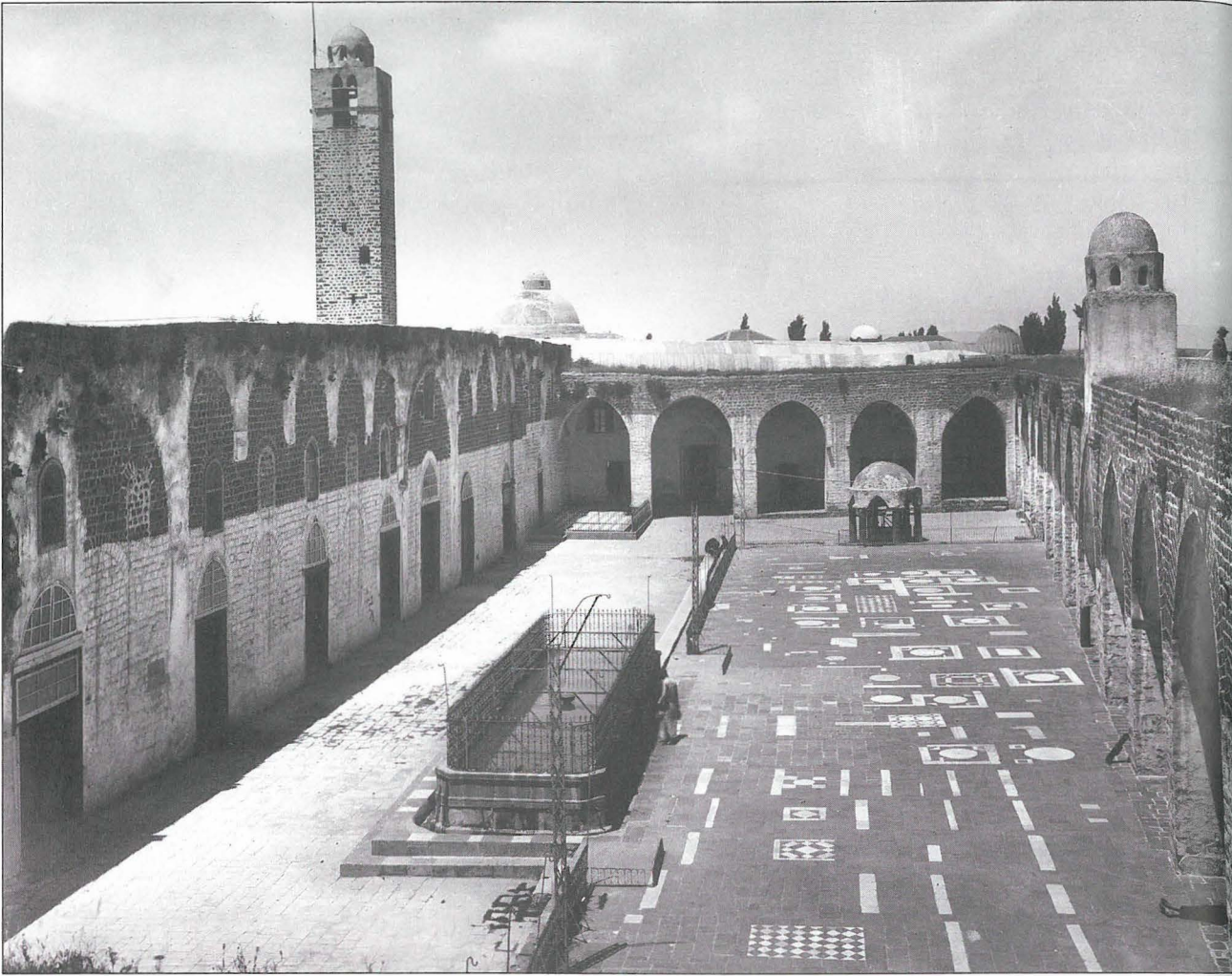


Plate 3.3 *Great Mosque of Nur al-Din, courtyard, twelfth–thirteenth centuries, Hims, Syria*

(Creswell Photographic Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. C. 5907)

The second canonical source in Islam, the *hadith*, the corpus of sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, also contains many references to *jihad*. One such *hadith* declares: 'A morning or an evening expedition in God's path is better than the world and what it contains, and for one of you to remain in the line of battle is better than his prayers for sixty years.'⁵

The *hadith* also stress repeatedly that those who fight *jihad* are given God's promise that they will enter Paradise: 'The gates of Paradise are under the shadow of the swords.'⁶

***Jihad* in the Early Islamic Period**

There is no doubt that there was a religious motivation to the early Muslim conquests of the seventh century, especially amongst the elite of the Muslim community (*umma*) who had been closest to the

Prophet and who had experienced his charismatic personality and the power of the Islamic revelation. Indeed, the religious impetus played a crucial part in the phenomenon which allowed the Arabs to establish an empire which by the beginning of the eighth century stretched from Spain in the west to northern India and Central Asia in the east.

In the eighth century the Arabs made several unsuccessful attempts by land and sea to take Constantinople. Their failure marked a watershed. Thereafter, the great surge of conquest receded in the lands which bordered Christian territory: the Byzantine empire on the one hand and the kingdoms of northern Spain on the other. The Muslim rulers opted for consolidation rather than expansion. On the Byzantine-Islamic borders, both Christians and Muslims continued to be active, and lines of defensive forts were built or rebuilt to strengthen the frontiers. It became the practice for both empires to engage in annual campaigns, described in the Islamic sources as *jihad*, but these gradually became a ritual, important for the image of the caliph and emperor, rather than being motivated by a vigorous desire to conquer new territories for their respective faiths. The boundaries between the Islamic and Christian worlds remained more or less stabilised and from the later eighth century onwards it was deemed more important to defend existing frontiers than to extend them.

Plate 3.4 Great Mosque of Nur al-Din, courtyard, twelfth-thirteenth centuries, Hims, Syria

(Creswell Photographic Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. C. 5896)





Plate 3.5 *Masjid al-Hasanayn, exterior, rebuilt after 552/1157 by Nur al-Din, Hama, Syria*

Moreover, the tenth century saw the emergence of a major ideological rival to the 'Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad – namely the Shi'ite Isma'ili Fatimid *imams* who moved from North Africa to Egypt and established a new dynamic Mediterranean state. Both Sunni and Shi'ite became locked in an internal battle for supremacy within the Islamic world and much less effort was expended on prosecuting *jihad* against the outside world of the infidel.

The Elaboration of the Classical Islamic Theory of *Jihad*

It was during the 'Abbasid period (from 750 onwards) that Islamic law was definitively formulated although its practice had been evolving since the earliest days of the Muslim empire. It is important to stress that the classical theory of *jihad* is an entirely Islamic phenomenon. It is a hermetically sealed tradition and does not appear to have been influenced by Christian notions of Holy War, although both religions use similar sets of images for fighting on God's side and stress the aspect of spiritual renewal and personal struggle in God's path. Muslim legists were motivated by a deep religious concern to provide and uphold an ideal framework within which the Islamic state might flourish, and it was in their books of Islamic law that the classical theory of *jihad* was elaborated.

The classical works of Islamic law (*Shari'a*), such as that of al-Shafi'i (d. 204/820), usually contain a chapter on *jihad*. This follows a predictable layout. First, the evidence for *jihad* in the Qur'an and the *hadith* is presented and interpreted. As we have seen, the theory of *jihad* has a sound Qur'anic basis and many verses from the Qur'an are cited in the legal books in support of *jihad*. The conventional chapter on *jihad* in the law books also draws very fully on the *hadith*. From the evidence provided by the Qur'an and the *hadith*,



Plate 3.6 *Great Mosque of Nur al-Din, minbar portal, twelfth–thirteenth centuries, Hims, Syria*

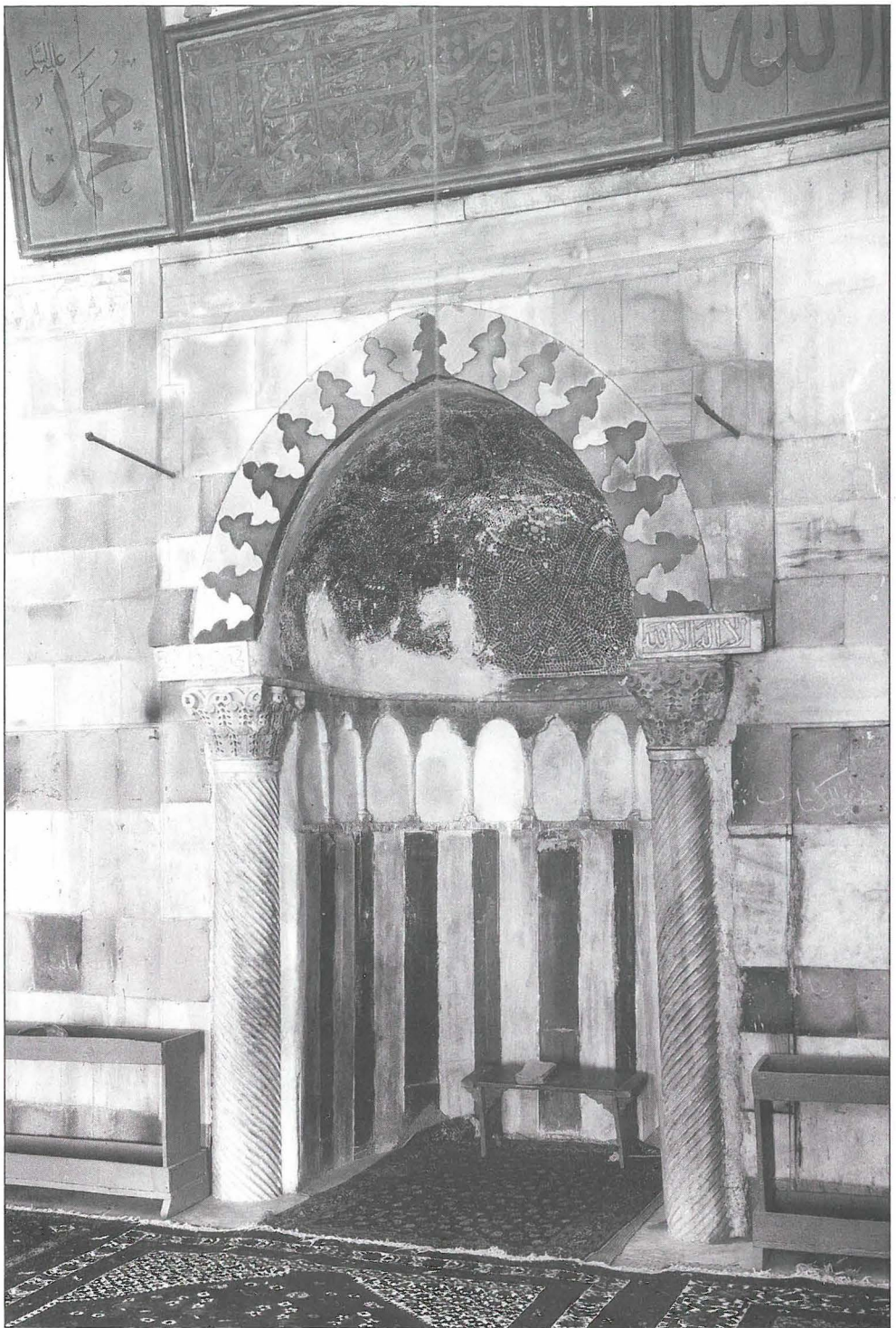


Plate 3.7 Great Mosque of
Nur al-Din, mihrab,
twelfth–thirteenth centuries,
Hims, Syria

[Creswell Photographic Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. C. 5903]

the classical expositions of the topic of *jihad* then proceed to draw up the following rules. *Jihad* is obligatory on all able-bodied Muslims, in the same way as they are required to pray, make the pilgrimage and give alms. As al-Shafi'i writes:

The *jihad*, and rising up in arms in particular, is obligatory for all able-bodied (believers), exempting no one, just as prayer, pilgrimage and (payment of) alms are performed, and no person is permitted to perform the duty for another, since performance by one will not fulfil the duty for another.⁷

Jihad is generally considered to be a collective, not individual, duty on all Muslims and it is perpetual. For those who live in territory which borders the non-Muslim world; however, *jihad* is a duty for the individual Muslim too. Muslim jurists also laid down the rules for the treatment of non-Muslims within Islamic countries. The Islamic community must protect non-Muslims within its territories, provided that they are not polytheists and that they follow one of the permitted religions (Christianity and Judaism are explicitly mentioned in this context). These non-Muslims in Islamic territory must in turn recognise their subordinate status and pay the poll-tax (*jizya*).

The system of protection for non-Muslims within the Islamic community, the 'House of Islam' (*Dar al-Islam*), as outlined by the Muslim legists, is contrasted sharply with the situation outside in the rest of the world, which is designated the 'House of War' (*Dar al-harb*). According to the classical Islamic theory, no other polity may be recognised outside the 'House of Islam'. In the fullness of time all men must accept Islam when invited to do so, or submit to Muslim government. Meanwhile it is the duty of Muslims to strive perpetually in the path of God, in other words, to wage *jihad*. According to Islamic law there is an obligatory state of hostilities between the 'House of Islam' and the 'House of War' until the conversion or subjugation of all mankind has been achieved. Legally a peace treaty between the Muslims and non-Muslims is impossible. *Jihad* may not be terminated; it can only be suspended by a truce which should not exceed ten years. The overall leadership of the *jihad* belongs to the caliph (or his representatives).

Spiritual *Jihad* (the 'Greater Jihad')

It should be emphasised that from the earliest period the notion of *jihad* (struggle) as a spiritual concept for individual Muslims was paramount. Two kinds of *jihad* were identified: the greater *jihad* (*al-jihad al-akbar*) and the lesser *jihad* (*al-jihad al-asghar*). The greater *jihad* is the struggle which man has to wage against his lower self and is, indeed, more meritorious than the military struggle conducted against infidels. The connection between the greater and lesser *jihad* will be discussed again later in this chapter.

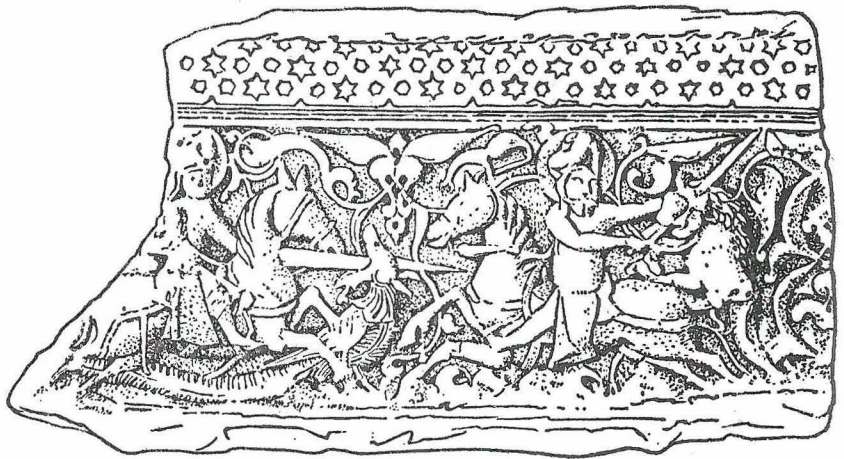


Figure 3.3 Horsemen fighting a lion and a dragon, stucco relief, c. 1220, Konya, Turkey

Modification in the Classical Theory of *jihad*

In general, there is a remarkable uniformity in the works of Islamic law from different periods of Islamic history on the topic of *jihad*. Nevertheless, a few slight shifts in the theory may be observed with the passing of time. These shifts show some recognition of political realities on the part of the legists. After the tenth century, when the political fragmentation of the 'Abbasid caliphate became all too apparent and a number of small regional dynasties established themselves, there are signs that peace rather than war became the norm. This situation is reflected in the definition of *jihad* found in the Islamic legal works of the time. Instead of the rigid dichotomy between the 'House of War' and the 'House of Islam', some scholars mention an intermediate area, the so-called 'House of Peace' (*Dar al-sulh*) or 'House of Covenant' (*Dar al-'ahd*),⁸ in which non-Muslim states may retain autonomy and be exempt from attack, provided that they recognise Muslim overlordship and they pay tribute. Moreover, someone from the land of the infidel, the 'House of War', may visit the 'House of Islam' under guaranteed safe-conduct. This legal device permitted commercial relations, for example between the Islamic world and the Christian Byzantine empire, to flourish.

Another modification in the classical theory of *jihad* was the inevitable consequence of the territorial breakup of the 'Abbasid empire and the usurpation of power by military commanders in different areas. Caliphs and other rulers neglected their duty to prosecute *jihad*, but Muslim warriors took the initiative into their own hands and gathered together on the frontiers of Islam to live in *ribats* (a combination of fortress and cloister) and engage in individual *jihad*. The legitimacy of this kind of individual *jihad*, unauthorised by the caliph, became generally recognised. Legal theory, however hallowed

it was by tradition, could be interpreted by individual religious scholars to meet the needs of a given historical situation. Their legal pronouncements (*fatwas*) related to the actual practice of the Shari'a; such *fatwas* have been preserved from the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, especially the numerous *fatwas* of the formidable Hanbalite scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Unfortunately, evidence of the *fatwas* for earlier periods of Islamic history is sparse.

Most of the Turkish military commanders of the Crusading period followed the Hanafite or Shafi'ite *madhhabs* (legal schools). This did not mean, however, that they were immune to the influence of the other two Sunni *madhhabs*, the Malikites and the Hanbalites. The Hanbalites, in particular, were strong in Damascus, especially since the prominent Palestinian family the Banu Qudama, who belonged to this *madhhab*, had settled there in the early part of the twelfth century and even established a new quarter, the Salhiyya. One member of this family, Ibn Qudama, was a close adviser of Saladin. In his legal writings Ibn Qudama perhaps reflects the exigencies of life in the Crusading period when he mentions the concept of *maslaha* ('the public interest'). This, Ibn Qudama argues, should allow flexibility in dealing with the infidel. He writes: 'The head of state has the right to conclude a truce with infidels when he considers that there is benefit in doing so.'⁹

A detailed exposition of *jihād* is given by the Ottoman Hanafite legist Ebu's Su'ud (d. 1574).¹⁰ His views show the conservative nature of the Islamic legal tradition and how little the theory of *jihād* changed over the centuries. Indeed there is very little difference in content and structure between Islamic law books composed in the tenth century and those composed in the nineteenth. According to Ebu's Su'ud, *jihād* is incumbent not on every individual but on the Muslim community as a whole. Fighting should be continual and should last until the end of time. It follows therefore that peace with the infidel is an impossibility, although a Muslim ruler or commander may make a temporary truce if it is to the benefit of the Muslim community to do so. Such a truce is not, however, legally binding.¹¹ Within the *Dar al-harb* those who live there are enemies and are not entitled to the protection of the law. However, a free non-Muslim can obtain the right to live within the *Dar al-Islam* and to be afforded legal protection. He can accept Islam or pay the poll-tax (*jizya*) and have the status of a tributary subject (*dhimmi*) in the latter case. (He is then entitled to the protection of both his life and his property.) The ruler may also give the enemy a temporary safe-conduct, providing him with the status of a protected resident (*musta'min*).¹²

The other prevalent *madhhab* amongst the Turkish and Kurdish military leaders in Syria and Palestine in the Crusading period were the Shafi'ites. This group considered *jihād* as a communal duty but in their view, when the infidels threaten a Muslim land, *jihād* becomes an individual duty, incumbent on all inhabitants of that area who are capable of bearing arms.¹³

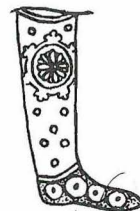


Figure 3.4 Boot, Dioscorides, De Materia Medica, 619/1222, Iraq



Figure 3.5 Leg armour, stucco relief, c. 1195, Rayy, Iran

The Realities of *Jihad* in the Pre-Crusading Period

In the early Islamic period the belief was current that there is only one God in heaven and only one ruler and one law on earth (the caliph). It is probably true to say that until the goal of taking Constantinople had been abandoned in the early eighth century there was no reason to doubt that Muslims believed that the final triumph of Islam in the whole world was imminent. However, in the ninth century, with the stabilisation of the frontiers with the world outside and the cessation of the Islamic conquests, the gulf between legal theory and political reality began to widen rapidly. Bernard Lewis argues that a relationship of mutual tolerance was established between the Muslim world and the world outside its borders, and that more or less stable and peaceful frontiers existed in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁴ This is demonstrated by those legists who argued that truces could be renewed as often as was deemed necessary and, in some legal works, by the creation, as already mentioned, of an intermediate status, the 'House of Peace'.

Despite the generally peaceful situation between the Islamic world and its neighbours, it is important to stress, however, that there were very few stages, if any at all, during the medieval period when there were not some manifestations of *jihad* on one of the many borders of the 'House of Islam'. To be sure, individual frontiers relaxed the spirit of *jihad* at certain points but elsewhere there was always another border area, dynamic and militant, keeping alive the concept of *jihad*. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, for example, the eastern Islamic frontier of Central Asia, which bordered the territory of the pagan nomadic Turks, saw the emergence of a classic example of one major kind of *jihad* movement; that which combined military activity and proselytising for Islam, the closest perhaps to the theory of the jurists. Thousands of miles away on the Islamic frontier with Byzantium, in northern Syria and what is now eastern Turkey, the small tenth-century Shi'ite Hamdanid dynasty became famous for its vigorous pursuit of *jihad* in response to what was perceived as external aggression on the part of infidels. It is worth mentioning the military activities on these two frontiers in greater detail.

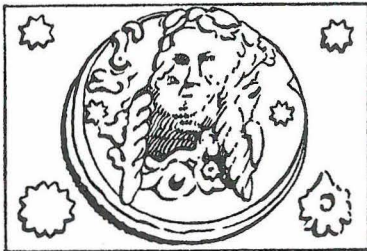
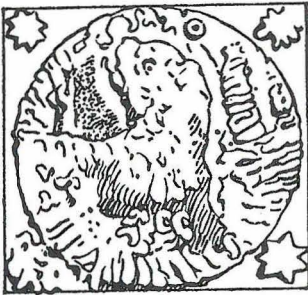


Figure 3.6 The sun and moon, stone reliefs, hospital of Kayka'us I, 614/1217-18, Sivas, Turkey

The Muslim Border with the Nomadic Turks of Central Asia

In the tenth and eleventh centuries regular campaigns were conducted against the pagan nomadic Turks. It is especially in the context of the area bordering the Central Asian steppes that the historical sources mention the term *ghazi*, the frontier warrior inspired by religious fervour who fights *jihad* in the path of God. To this frontier flocked many volunteers. Indeed, the testimony of medieval geographers, even allowing for exaggerations and idealisations, demonstrates beyond doubt the popularity of the building usually called a *ribat*. A *ribat* was a frontier fort in which *jihad* fighters lived according



Figure 3.7 Craftsman's signature on a brass ewer dated 627/1229, probably Mosul, Iraq

to strict religio-military rules and in a constant state of military readiness. It was these *jihad* fighters who made regular forays into nomadic Turkish territory and converted many of the tribesmen to Islam.

The Muslim Frontier with Byzantium

Another early blueprint for *jihad* activity, as noted above, was the tenth-century Shi'ite dynasty of the Hamdanids. Under its most famous ruler, Sayf al-Dawla (ruled 333-56/944-67) it became famous throughout the Islamic world for its annual campaigns of *jihad* against the Byzantine Christians. This was, it should be stressed, in response to renewed expansionism on the Byzantine side. The efforts of the Hamdanids became so well known that thousands of volunteer *mujahidun* or *ghazis* from far-away Central Asia travelled vast distances to join in these wars. Here proselytism was not in question. This *jihad* was waged in response to perceived external aggression on the part of the Christians.

According to the tenth-century writer al-Tarsusi, a judge (*qadi*) in Ma'arrat al-Nu'man and Kafartab who wrote a work (now lost) entitled *Ways of Life along the Frontiers* (*Siyar al-thughur*), in 290/903 the town of Tarsus on the Muslim-Byzantine border contained many houses for the lodging of Muslim warriors for the faith (*ghazis*) who had come from all parts of the Islamic world. The warriors were supported by the charitable donations of the pious and rulers.¹⁵

The propaganda for *jihad* developed by the Hamdanids showed the beginnings of a much more sophisticated approach. Dating from the Hamdanid period are the famous, if little studied, *jihad* sermons of Ibn Nubata al-Fariqi (d. 374/984-5) of Mayyafariqin in present-day Turkey. These are written in very elaborate and resonant rhymed prose. They were intended to exhort the people of Mayyafariqin and Aleppo to fight *jihad* against the Byzantines. These sermons display a careful symmetry of balanced couplets and a clever exploitation of the long-established and cherished Arab tradition of oratory. They utilise alliteration, assonance, repetition and similar devices in a manner which recalls to Western ears the Old Testament or Ciceronian prose. To their Muslim hearers the language of these sermons

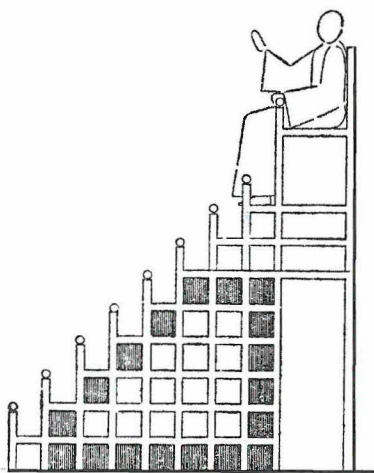


Figure 3.8 Diagram illustrating function of minbar

was impregnated with Qur'anic echoes and allusions and would have moved them to tears – and to action (cf. colour plate 2). Indeed, the elevated style of Ibn Nubata's sermons was itself part of a deliberate attempt to arouse the faithful; he is known to have preached both before military campaigns and afterwards to celebrate victory in battle. In one such sermon Ibn Nubata praises Sayf al-Dawla for taming heretics and encouraging *jihad* fighters.¹⁶ In another sermon delivered in 352/963 to *jihad* volunteers who had come from distant Khurasan to Mayyafariqin Ibn Nubata exhorts the people to rouse themselves from their comfortable beds and to fight like lions in the path of *jihad*.¹⁷ The sermon reaches its climax when Ibn Nubata explicitly mentions the victory of Islam over Christianity: 'God has graciously bestowed on us and on you His near victory and He has made the people of monotheism victorious over the servants of the Cross.'¹⁸

A particularly rousing sermon was the one delivered on the conquest of Aleppo in 351/962. Having praised God and His manifold attributes, Ibn Nubata rises to heights of eloquence:

Do you think that He will forsake you whilst you are assisting Him or do you imagine that He will desert you whilst you are steadfast in His path? Certainly not! Indeed, no tyranny is left unpunished by Him and no trivial offence escapes Him . . . So put on – may God have mercy on you – for the *jihad* the coat of mail of the faithful and equip yourselves with the armour of those who trust [in God].¹⁹

Not surprisingly, these sermons have become models of Arab oratory. They also laid the foundations for the sermons of preachers in the armies of Nur al-Din and Saladin, when fighting against the Franks.

Panegyric verse about the exploits of Sayf al-Dawla was composed by the most honoured of all classical Arabic poets, al-Mutanabbi. Such poetry was a forum for the expression of pride in the achievements of *jihad*. Al-Mutanabbi produced a famous panegyric after the conquest by Sayf al-Dawla of the border fortress, al-Hadath. The piece includes the following lines:

You were not a king routing an equal, but *monotheism routing polytheism*
 We put our hope in you and your refuge Islam,
 Why should merciful God not guard it when through you
 He cleaves the unbeliever asunder?

Popular epics echoed the *jihad* spirit of the high literature written for the Hamdanid court. The epic usually known as *Sirat Dhat al-Himma* has an alternative title, *Sirat al-mujahidin* (*The Way of the jihad*

Fighters). It mirrors the Muslim-Byzantine conflicts from the Umayyad period onwards and is full of expressions of the *jihad* spirit. At the beginning the anonymous story-teller declares: '*Jihad* is God's solid link and the *jihad* warriors occupy a high position near Him in the seventh Heaven.'²⁰

The campaigns of Sayf al-Dawla were prosecuted in a limited geographical area of the Muslim world and were not followed up by his successors. His highly effective *jihad* propaganda died with him, although, as we shall see, its lessons were not lost on those responsible for the Muslim Counter-Crusade two hundred years later. Indeed, the fusion of the life of personal asceticism of the *ghazis* of Central Asia, Spain and Anatolia with the fight against unbelievers was a paradigm for the Muslims of Syria and Palestine to remember and emulate in their war against the Franks.

The Lack of *Jihad* Spirit in Syria and Palestine

Writing in the latter half of the tenth century, the Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal, whose Spanish origins no doubt sharpened his concern, deplores the fact that *jihad* has ceased.²¹ This criticism is reiterated by the even more famous Arab writer al-Muqaddasi who, speaking about the province of Syria, complains that: 'The inhabitants have no enthusiasm for *jihad* and no energy in the struggle against the enemy'.²²

When the Crusaders approached the Holy Land in 1099 the disunited and strife-ridden Muslim world had, it seems, buried the idea of *jihad* deep into the recesses of its mind. Indeed, it was the Crusaders who possessed the ideological edge over the Muslims.

The Evolution of the Phenomenon of *Jihad* in Crusader Times

Modern knowledge of the development of the *jihad* theme in the Muslim world at the time of the Crusades was considerably enlarged with the appearance in 1968 of the very important pioneering book in French on this subject by Emmanuel Sivan: *L'Islam*. In it he analyses by very close reference to a wide range of medieval Arabic literary sources the evolution of *jihad* as an ideology and as a propaganda campaign, and its role in the Muslim response to the Crusades. Much of Sivan's argument still holds good, although inevitably scholars may wish to take issue with him on some points and indeed, as we shall see later, to stress the gulf between propaganda and political realities. As Humphreys says of *jihad*: 'The concept of *jihad* is a plastic one, which can be deployed in widely varying ways for varying ends.'²³

Sivan argues that the serious mobilisation of *jihad* as an instrument in the war against the Crusaders began in the time of Zengi (d 539/1144), and this is undoubtedly true.²⁴ It is important, however,

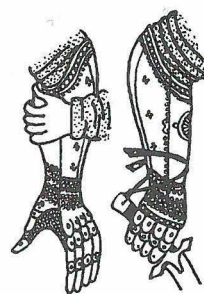


Figure 3.9 Armour for hand and arm, Firdawsi, *Shahnama* ('Book of Kings'), leaves mounted in albums, c. 1370-80, Iran

to look closely at the earliest response of the religious classes in Syria and Palestine to the incoming Crusader threat, since it would be wrong to assume that there were no stirrings of *jihad*-feelings in the period between the fall of Jerusalem in 482/1099 and the Muslim reconquest of Edessa in 539/1144. Indeed, it is probably true to say that amongst the *religious* classes feelings against the Franks and the desire to promote *jihad* always ran high; the problem was to find a way of infusing Islamic fervour into the *military* leaders of the time. The political situation in Syria and Palestine in the early decades of the twelfth century was not conducive to Muslim solidarity and overall military unity. Instead, this was a period of decentralised power in which Turkish commanders and Frankish rulers alike sought to establish themselves in the urban centres. Periodically, they would come together across the religious divide when the territories of Syria and Palestine were threatened from outside. Religious ideology played no part in these ephemeral and pragmatic alliances to defend local territorial interests.

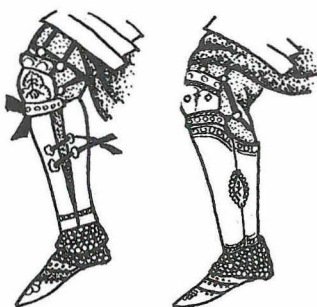


Figure 3.10 Armour for leg and foot, Firdawsi, *Shahnama* ('Book of Kings'), leaves mounted in albums, c. 1370–80, Iran

At the time of the First Crusade the first focus for any call to *jihad* was the Sunni caliph in Baghdad; it was certainly he who was expected to be involved in a *jihad* and it was he who had the legitimate right to promote *jihad* against the Franks.²⁵ This is the clear implication of the various delegations that made their way to Baghdad in the wake of the First Crusade, as we have already noted in Chapter 1. Although the Seljuq sultans restricted the caliph's movements, preferring them to be mere figureheads and not to meddle in the politics of the time, the Syrian religious leaders who went to Baghdad to summon support against the Franks seem to have believed that the caliph was their principal recourse. Despite these expectations, there were no independent military undertakings sponsored by the caliph, although the sources make it clear that some of the caliph, such as al-Mustarshid and al-Rashid, did take the field with their own armies.²⁶

So who else could promote *jihad* against the Franks? Certainly, in strict interpretation of Islamic law, the military barons who ruled Syria in the twelfth century were not bound to fight *jihad*. None of them were legitimate rulers. They had usurped power. Put simply, they could fight *jihad* but they did not have to do so.²⁷ The major emphasis of *jihad* seems to have been a personal undertaking and the personal reward which every Muslim would receive from God for his meritorious struggle.²⁸ Possibly when the sources mention terms such as *mutatawwi'a* ('volunteers'), they are referring to the kind of warriors who in previous eras frequented the *ribats* on the frontiers of Islam and who waged *jihad* against the infidel at their own personal costs. Certainly the presence of such volunteers (*mujahidun*) is mentioned at the fall of Antioch in 491/1098 when they fought 'for divine reward and seeking martyrdom'.²⁹

We have already seen that there were only a few isolated voices which spoke out in consternation at the loss of Jerusalem. Still fewer

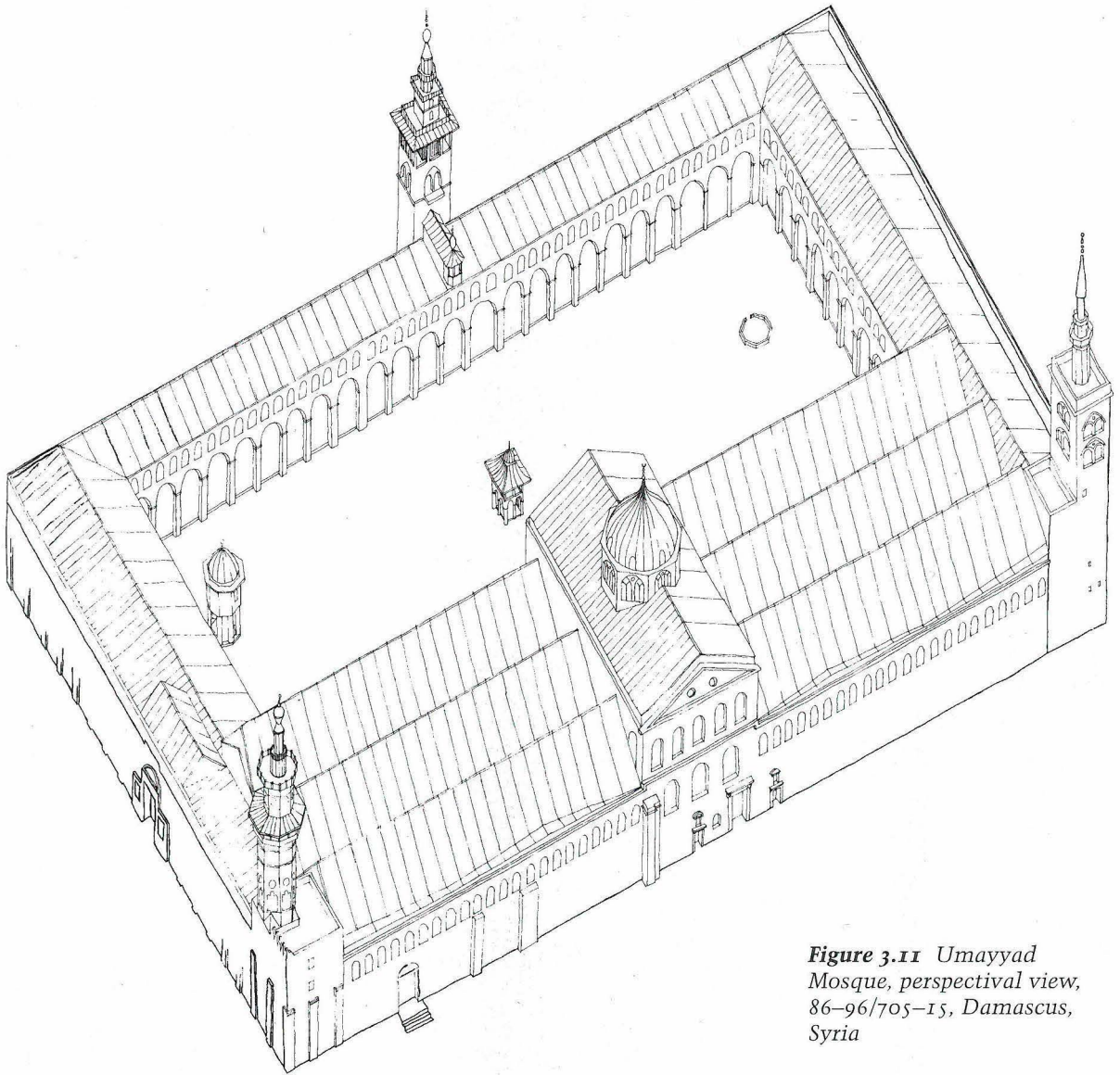


Figure 3.11 Umayyad Mosque, perspectival view, 86-96/705-15, Damascus, Syria

drew any moral lessons from this loss. The outstanding exception to this lethargy and lack of concern was the Syrian legist al-Sulami, who preached in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus in the early years after the fall of Jerusalem that Muslims should rally against their enemy, the Crusaders. Muslim defeat – argues al-Sulami – was God’s punishment for the abandoning of their religious duties and, above all, for their neglect of *jihad*.

It is important to remember that al-Sulami’s extant work is called the *Book of Holy War* (figure 3.12), and indeed the concept of *jihad*

al-Sulami

lies at the heart of all that he says. He protests strongly that it is the Muslims' indifference to the Frankish presence and their neglect of the religious duty of *jihād* that have caused the Crusaders to triumph. According to al-Sulami, the neglect of *jihād* which he so deplors is not a phenomenon peculiar to his own time nor just to Syria. It has existed since the caliphs first began to neglect their religious duty to conduct at least one campaign a year into infidel territory. In his view this forms part of a wider religious and moral decline amongst Muslims, which, he argues, has resulted in the fragmentation of Islam and has encouraged the enemies of Islam to take the offensive and seize Muslim territories.

Al-Sulami's solution to this dire predicament lies first in moral rearmament to end this process of Muslim spiritual decline. The Crusader attacks are a punishment as well as a Divine warning to Muslims to return to the 'right path'. According to al-Sulami, conducting *jihād* against the infidel is a hollow sham if it is not preceded by the greater *jihād* (*al-jihād al-akbar*) over one's baser self and he stresses that the latter must be accomplished if the former is to be successful. And he calls on Muslim rulers to lead the way. Thus, personal spiritual struggle is an absolute requirement before conducting war against the Franks.³⁰

Plate 3.8 Great Mosque, minbar, detail, 548/1153, 'Amadiyya, Iraq



Al-Sulami's words proclaimed in the mosque from the *minbar* (cf. plate 3.8) and preserved in his *Book of Holy War* do not seem to have had a widespread effect on his fellow Muslims at large, nor did they strike a chord with Muslim rulers and commanders at the time of maximum Crusader expansionism in the early twelfth century. The concept of *jihad* remained alive within the circles frequented by religious scholars, but it had yet to be harnessed to full-scale military activity under vigorous Muslim leadership: the alliance between the religious classes and the military had yet to be forged.

It may well be that al-Sulami's challenge did not go completely unheeded and that after him other preachers continued to shout vociferously from the pulpits. The sources are unhelpful on developments within the period 1100–1130, but even if there was a strong local reaction amongst some of the religious classes it was not backed up by the *political* or military will to act in concerted fashion on the part of the leaders of the time. Even if the circles of the religious scholars in the time of al-Sulami propagated the essential idea of *jihad* it does not mean necessarily that their words and writings were heeded by the military leaders of the period. Nor did rousing poems in the cause of *jihad* written after the shock of the First Crusade necessarily imply that those to whom they were addressed rose up and obeyed the eloquent calls made by the poets. For *jihad* propaganda to be a really effective weapon a tight and meaningful alliance was necessary between the religious classes and the army leaders. This did not prove viable until later in the twelfth century.

It is not appropriate to give the title *jihad* to the series of campaigns (as, for example, those of Mawdud of Mosul during the years 503–7/1110–13) launched from the Seljuq east under Turkish commanders into Syria in the first two decades of the twelfth century, nor were these pan-Islamic activities. They were ill-assorted, heterogeneous, ephemeral alliances of rival princelings and military barons – not true coalition forces – and as such destined, on the whole, to fail and disperse. Freeing Jerusalem had no significance to such rulers in this period.

The First Tentative Steps towards the Revival of *Jihad*

As already mentioned, Sivan believes that the turning point in Muslim attitudes came with the fall of Edessa in 539/1144. But the tide was probably beginning to turn in the preceding decades. Indeed, the process of the reawakening of *jihad* must have been slow and gradual and in some part at least it must have come as a direct response to Crusader fanaticism, witnessed first-hand.

There are isolated signs of this early Muslim reawakening and the battle of Balat might be seen as a tentative turning-point. An early model for the active participation of the religious classes in the fight against the Franks seems to have been the *qadi* Abu'l Fadl b. al-Khashshab of Aleppo. Not content to sit back in the mosque or

Edessa Falls

madrasa and to preach and teach *jihād*, Ibn al-Khashshab was also closely involved in the running of affairs in Aleppo at a time when the city was extremely vulnerable to external attacks. Indeed, in the early twelfth century the Aleppan notables had sought military support from Baghdad against the Franks, before turning in desperation to the Turcoman ruler of Mardin, Il-Ghazi. In these negotiations Ibn al-Khashshab was prominent. According to the town chronicler of Aleppo, Ibn al-'Adim, Ibn al-Khashshab was responsible for the defence of the city and for taking care of its interests. In difficult and anarchical times it is noteworthy that prominent religious figures were ready to shoulder administrative duties and assume civic leadership.³¹

There is no evidence that al-Sulami had personally involved himself in actual fighting, although he was well known as a preacher. Ibn al-Khashshab (d. 528/1133-4), on the other hand, is known to have been present amongst the troops just before the battle of Balat in 513/1119, preaching to them. At this stage, however, his presence was obviously not welcome to everybody. As Ibn al-'Adim writes:

The qadi Abu'l Fadl b. al-Khashshab came, spurring the people on to fight, riding on a mare and with a spear in his hand. One of the troops saw him and belittled him saying: '[So] we have come from our lands only to follow this man in a turban!' He [Ibn al-Khashshab] went up to the people and amongst the ranks preached them an eloquent sermon in which he awakened their resolutions and sharpened their resolves. He made the people weep and there was agony in their eyes.³²

Thus we see a man of religion, clearly identifiable by his turban, standing out by his choice of riding-animal, and flourishing both a lance and the weapons of his rhetoric. He clearly swayed the emotions and won the day.

Just as on the Byzantine frontier Ibn Nubata had preached *jihād* in an earlier period, so too here we see an example, albeit an isolated one, of the potential of *jihād* as a stimulus before battle and of the emotional impact which the presence of the religious classes had in the midst of the soldiers themselves. The author of this account, Ibn al-'Adim, may well be viewing this battle through the eyes of thirteenth-century Syria, when people were long-used to *jihād* against the Franks, but he does not write in this way about any of the other military encounters between Muslims and Crusaders in the early twelfth century. We can reasonably believe, therefore, that this episode was rather unusual for its time. Ibn al-'Adim does not labour his point; but it is of course significant that this battle, the battle of the Field of Blood, was a major victory for the Muslims under the Artuqid military leader Il-Ghazi, a battle, moreover, in which a major Crusader leader, Roger of Antioch, was slain. Il-Ghazi emerges from the sources as an erratic, uncoordinated adventurer who was unable



Figure 3.13 Mounted archer, silk and linen textile, second half of the eleventh century, Egypt

to follow up this victory because of his prolonged alcoholic celebration of it, which lasted a week. He was not a man with staying power or political vision. As a Turcoman nomad, his attitude to Islam was probably pragmatic too. Whilst he too may well have been swayed by the eloquence of Ibn al-Khashshab, he did not have the personality around which other Muslim military commanders could congregate under the banner of *jihad*. So his victory at Balat remained an isolated one. But Ibn al-Khashshab had shown the way.³³

Another legal activist was the Hanbalite preacher 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Shirazi who was sent with a group of merchants to Baghdad to beg for help in 523/1129, after the Franks had appeared outside the very gate of Damascus. The delegation was on the point of breaking the *minbar* when the people in Baghdad promised to get in touch with the sultan about sending the Syrians help against the Franks.³⁴

Il-Ghazi's nephew, Balak, is also worthy of mention in a *jihad* context. He became a much-feared opponent of the Crusaders, displaying tremendous vigour in a number of small-scale encounters against them. He was killed outside Manbij in 518/1124 and buried in a tomb at Aleppo. The inscription on his tomb is a key piece of evidence in any discussion of the evolution of the concept of *jihad* in Syria in the early Crusading period. It is worth setting the scene a little here. Within the period 482-541/1099-1146, right across the Muslim world from Spain to Central Asia, there are *no* surviving inscriptions which mention *jihad* except those in Syria. Even in Spain, the other theatre of war with the Crusaders, none have survived. This makes the few examples in Syria stand out all the more; indeed, it suggests that they may have had something to do with the proximity of the Crusaders and their invasion of the Muslim heartlands.³⁵

In his funerary inscription Balak is called 'sword of those who fight the Holy War, leader of the armies of the Muslims, vanquisher of the infidels and the polytheists'.³⁶ We find here, then, a whole sequence of resonant titles reflecting a clear concern with *jihad* against the Crusaders, and Balak is extolled as a Muslim champion in the wars against the unbelievers. In addition he is also called 'martyr' (*shahid*). There are also two very telling Qur'anic quotations on Balak's tomb. The first is chapter 3, verse 169: 'Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision.' The second, chapter 9, verse 21, says: 'Their Lord giveth them good tidings of mercy from Him, and acceptance, and Gardens where enduring pleasure will be theirs.'

Both these Qur'anic verses show Balak clearly as a *jihad* warrior who has been martyred in the way of God and for whom Paradise is the reward.³⁷ Had he lived, Balak might have inspired a Muslim response to the Franks much earlier.

Zengi's victory at Edessa in 539/1144 singles him out as the first major player in the Muslim recovery against the Franks. However, he was a warrior with sprawling ambitions that straddled both the arena of Crusader activity in Syria and Palestine and also Seljuq power



Figure 3.14 Horseman and foot soldier, stone tympanum, twelfth century, Daghestan, eastern Caucasus

politics further east in Baghdad and Mosul. But clearly his capture of Edessa was a key turning-point for the Muslims; indeed, it prompted the Second Crusade. He too is described in contemporary inscriptions in terms of *jihad*, even before his victory at Edessa. For example, in an inscription at Aleppo dated Muharram 537/August 1142 he is called 'tamer of the infidels and the polytheists, leader of those who fight the Holy War, helper of the armies, protector of the territory of the Muslims'.³⁸

Why the emphasis here on these Islamic monumental inscriptions? Their value lies in their very contemporaneity: they are dated to the period of early Crusader presence in the Near East and show that, unlike elsewhere in the Islamic world at this time, monuments in the area right next to the Franks were proclaiming the virtues of those who fought *jihad*. This is surely not a coincidence, but rather the beginning of a stirring of *jihad* spirit amongst at least some of the lacklustre and disunited Muslim leaders of Syria. The timing of the first appearance of *jihad* titles on public buildings coincides with the first modest military victories of the Muslims against the Crusaders. The evidence of these inscriptions shows that the Muslims were beginning at last to interpret these victories in the light of *jihad*. It was the Muslim jurists who preached and wrote about *jihad* and it was also they who probably composed the wording of inscriptions, who were the leaders of public opinion in the mosque and the market place and who provided the bridge between the common people and their military overlords. The modest beginning of an alliance between the Turkish commanders and princes and the religious classes can be seen in these monumental records of Muslim victories in the period before the fall of Edessa.

inscriptions
of Zanki
even earlier
1142

But the Muslim world still lacked a really charismatic leader who could unite the conflicting factions and realise the full potential of the weapon of *jihad* propaganda in the task of unifying the lands bordering the Franks.

Zengi and the Fall of Edessa

The fall of Edessa marked a significant turning-point in Muslim fortunes. Edessa was the first of the Crusader states to be regained for Islam, and although the Second Crusade was launched shortly afterwards as a direct consequence of Zengi's victory, this new initiative from Europe achieved little. Was 'Imad al-Din Zengi the long-needed Muslim leader, the *jihad* fighter who could unite the Islamic world and rid it of the Frankish presence? Certainly, Ibn al-Athir, the court chronicler of the Zengid dynasty in the thirteenth century, was in no doubt that the good fortune of the Muslim world in its struggle against the Franks began with the achievements of Zengi.³⁹ Deploring the great weakness of the Islamic lands and the vast extent of Frankish power before the coming of Zengi, Ibn al-Athir launches into a panegyrical passage about Zengi's achievements in revivifying Islam:

When Almighty God saw the princes of the Islamic lands and the commanders of the Hanafite creed and how unable they were to support the [true] religion and their inability to defend those who believe in the One God and He saw their subjugation by their enemy and the severity of their despotism . . . He then wished to set over the Franks someone who could requite the evil of their deeds and to send to the devils of the crosses stones from Him to destroy and annihilate them [the crosses]. He looked at the roster of valiants among His helpers and of those possessed of judgement, support and sagacity amongst His friends and He did not see in it (the roster) anyone more capable of that command, more solid as regards inclination, stronger of purpose and more penetrating than the lord, the martyr (*al-shahid*) 'Imad al-Din.⁴⁰

Such inflated claims in respect of Zengi by Ibn al-Athir are hard to reconcile with the detailed facts of his career as an opportunistic and ruthless military commander who ruled his territories with a rod of iron.

Zengi was in a different class from the Muslim military leaders of the early twelfth century – such as Il-Ghazi or Tughtegin – who had preceded him and had fought the Franks in rather desultory fashion. Zengi's death in 1146 – so soon after his famous conquest of Edessa two years earlier – prevents us from assessing whether he would have been presented in the Islamic sources as a true fighter of *jihad*. But brilliant leadership qualities he certainly did have. He is shown in the majority of the sources as a despot of chillingly ruthless