

[HISTORICAL ANALYSIS ON IMAD AL-DIN ZENGI (1085 - 1146 AD)
AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ZENGID DYNASTY]

ANALISIS SEJARAH IMAD AL-DIN ZENGI (1085–1146 MASIHI)
DAN PENUBUHAN DINASTI ZENGID

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Abstract

Imad al-Din Zengi, a military leader of the Seljuk Sultanate, actively resisted the Crusader incursions in the Bilad al-Sham territories during the 12th century AD. Some historians consider Imad al-Din's achievement in reclaiming the city of Edessa from the Crusaders' army as a forerunner to the fight for the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis. The Zengid Dynasty's administrative hub was situated in Mosul, with Aleppo serving as a strategic stronghold for its military operations. Nevertheless, the initial stages of the Zengid Dynasty's establishment have been mostly overlooked and insufficiently examined. This article provides a comprehensive account of the leadership, accomplishments, and historical development of the Zengid Dynasty in Bilad al-Sham. This study utilizes a qualitative methodology with content analysis on multiple historical texts that were produced during the same period as the Crusader era or the Middle Ages. Through content analysis, the study aims to identify the key themes, narratives, and discourses that shaped the perception of the Zengid Dynasty and its contributions to the revival of the Muslim community in resisting Crusader occupation. The study's findings suggest that Imad al-Din was among the key figures who contributed actively to the revival of the Muslim community by opposing the Crusader occupation of Islamic lands. Additionally, the presence of the Zengid Dynasty played a crucial role in setting the stage for the liberation of Bayt al-Maqdis

Keywords: *Imad al-Din, Zengid, Seljuk, jihad, crusader*

Abstrak

Imad al-Din Zengi, seorang pemimpin tentera Kesultanan Seljuk, aktif menentang pencerobohan Tentera Salib di wilayah Bilad al-Sham pada abad ke-12 Masihi. Sebilangan ahli sejarah menganggap kejayaan Imad al-Din dalam menawan semula kota Edessa daripada tentera Salib sebagai pendahulu kepada perjuangan pembebasan Bayt al-Maqdis. Pusat pentadbiran Dinasti Zengid terletak di Mosul, manakala Aleppo berfungsi sebagai kubu strategik untuk operasi ketenteraannya. Walau bagaimanapun, peringkat awal penubuhan Dinasti Zengid sering diabaikan dan kurang diteliti. Artikel ini menyediakan penjelasan menyeluruh mengenai kepimpinan, pencapaian, dan perkembangan sejarah Dinasti Zengid di Bilad al-Sham. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan analisis kandungan terhadap pelbagai teks sejarah yang dihasilkan pada era yang sama dengan zaman Tentera Salib atau Zaman Pertengahan. Melalui analisis kandungan, kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti tema utama, naratif, dan wacana yang membentuk persepsi terhadap Dinasti Zengid serta sumbangannya dalam kebangkitan masyarakat Islam dalam menentang penjajahan Tentera Salib. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Imad al-Din merupakan salah satu tokoh penting yang secara aktif menyumbang

kepada kebangkitan masyarakat Islam dengan menentang penjajahan Tentera Salib di tanah Islam. Selain itu, kehadiran Dinasti Zengid memainkan peranan penting dalam membuka jalan bagi pembebasan Bayt al-Maqdis.

Kata kunci: Imad al-Din, Zengid, Seljuk, jihad, tentera Salib

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INTRODUCTION

The commencement of the First Crusade took place in 489/1096 CE, precisely one year after Pope Urban II's renowned address at Clermont, France. Urban conceived of this Crusade as a militarized religious journey with the objective of recapturing Jerusalem from Muslim dominion, securing secure pathways for Christian pilgrims in the future, and expanding the borders of Western Christendom towards the East (Othman, 2018). The First Crusade had a duration of three years and reached its climax with the conquest of Jerusalem in 492/1099 CE. By 502/1109 CE, the Crusader army, under the leadership of French nobility, had successfully created four "Latin States" in Edessa, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Tripoli (Krey, 1921). These republics experienced a period of growth and exerted their influence over the region for fifty years after the Muslim troops' unsuccessful attempts to recapture any of the Crusader strongholds. During the subsequent 50 years, these Crusader powers experienced significant growth in influence and territorial expansion.

The inability of the Muslims to retake territories conquered by the Crusaders changed, however, in 539/1144 when Imad al-Din Zengi (d. 541/1146) successfully recaptured the city of Edessa from the Crusaders. The fall of Edessa led to further bloodshed and conflict between the Franks and Muslims in the Second Crusade (539-543/1145-1149), which also led to the consolidation of Muslim forces under the leadership of Nur al-Din (d. 570/1174), and his jihad against the Crusaders. Islamic territory expanded under Nur al-Din and continued through the rule of his successor Saladin (d. 589/1193), who successfully recaptured Jerusalem in the Third Crusade (583-587/1188-1192) (Hillenbrand, 1999).

Although Nur al-Din and Saladin successfully opposed the Crusader forces, their successes outweighed the achievements of other figures who were pioneers in the reconquest of Islamic territories that fell into the hands of the Crusaders. Coverage of Imad al-Din Zengi b. Aqsunqur (477-541/1085-1146), the Muslim fighters responsible for the recapture of Edessa, is an example of the pioneers of that significant event.

Zengi exploited the decentralized political system of the Seljuk Empire to pursue his own interests and achieve his own political independence. He effectively manipulated his contacts with other political figures to accomplish his objectives. In the latter part of his career, particularly when he regained control of Edessa, Zengi employed religious dogma to rally support for his objectives, although having no intention of instigating a war to protect Islamic territories from the Crusaders (Izant, 2010).

Zengi prioritized the main endeavor of attaining autonomy inside the Seljuk political structure. Upon his demise in 541/1146, Zengi accomplished this feat by skillfully maneuvering inside the Seljuk political system, deftly using his ties with members of the political structure, and effectively employing religious ideology to attract Muslim forces to support his cause (Belotto, 2014).

Zengi needed to establish his position of autonomy within the larger Seljuk Empire to advance his personal agenda. The political structure of the Seljuks allowed local rulers like Zengi opportunities to rapidly and effectively consolidate power.

The Seljuks operated under a decentralized royal system, where power was dispersed among various governors, family members, and political appointees such as atabegs, amirs, and *shihnas*. The lack of a defined hierarchy in the Seljuk political arena created a porous political system that provided opportunities for figures like Zengi to advance their personal power claims and support their own political and military agendas (Belotto, 2014).

Throughout the governance crises of Sultan Tughril Beg, Alp Arslan, and Malik Shah, the absence of an established hierarchy also led to increased levels of domestic politics playing out on a regional stage. As conflicts continued to plague the Seljuk sultanate, the sultans began to rely on amirs and atabegs for support. These figures initially held less power than the sultan, but as the sultan's power and authority waned, the influence of these figures grew. The current literature and research on Zengi's career lack a conclusive analysis of his ascension to power and the establishment of his own kingdom. Hence, this paper examines the historical context of Imad al-Din Zengi's life and his endeavors in creating his sovereign realm, which played a pivotal role in paving the way for the eventual liberation of *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem).

IMAD AL-DIN ZENGI'S (1085 – 1146 AD) LIFE

Imad al-Din Zengi, also known as Imad al-Din Zengi bin Aq Sunqur, was born in the year 477 Hijrah. His father, Aq Sunqur, served as a high-ranking officer to Sultan Seljuk, specifically Sultan Malik Shah I, and held the prestigious title of Qasim Al-Daulah. The expansive Seljuk Empire needed the aid of numerous officials to collectively administer and supervise the lands falling within Seljuk's authority. Consequently, Sultan Malik Shah I designated Aq Sunqur as the governor of Aleppo in the year 479 H, precisely two years after the birth of Imad al-Din. As a result, Aleppo served as the location where Imad al-Din was raised and lived his entire life. Aq Sunqur's rule over Aleppo lasted for around eight years, representing a significant period in the region's history characterized by numerous transformative developments (Khalil, 1982). Prior to Aq Sunqur's appointment as the envoy of the Seljuk Kingdom, the climate in Aleppo was characterized by disorder and instability, primarily stemming from rivalries and conflicts for authority among fellow Muslims. Al-Salabi identified three specific circumstances that posed a risk to the stability of Aleppo city, namely (Al-Salabi, 2010):

1. Arab Bedouin tribes, especially from the Bani Kilab, Bani Uqail, and Bani Murdas, sought to regain influence and power in the Bilad al-Sham region.
2. Turkmen-descended military forces often launched attacks on the region.
3. The Byzantine Empire attempted to capitalize on internal turmoil to regain its lost influence and power in the Bilad al-Sham region.

Aleppo is experiencing political instability because of rivalry between states seeking to increase their own powers, which has an impact on the economy, social dynamics, and security, among other things. Nonetheless, the region has seen beneficial adjustments after Aq Sunqur took over as Aleppo's new head (Al-Salabi, 2010). Under Aq Sunqur's leadership, he introduced Sharia law to combat concerns of banditry, robbery, and theft.

This was done to make sure that the mayhem and disturbance that local criminal organizations were causing could be quickly resolved. In addition, Aq Sunqur imposed the idea of "shared responsibility" on his subjects, who were responsible for protecting caravans or traders who were plundered by thieves while passing through their villages. The people would work to guarantee the safety of each caravan or trader that came through their village areas in this manner. They would be responsible for covering the entire number of losses suffered by the traders or caravans if they didn't comply (Taqushi, 2010).

As a result of the policy introduced by Aq Sunqur, security assurances for any merchants and caravans indirectly stimulated economic activities in Aleppo. This success was also mentioned by Ibn Qalanisi in *Dzail Tarikh Dimasyq*, who argued that “Aq Sunqur had a good reputation among his family, established justice among his people, protected and safeguarded travelers passing through, upheld the authority of the state, remained objective and listened to the needs of his people, and punished bribers. He succeeded in eliminating them, suppressing criminals, and exiling them, thus earning reputation and prestige for his policies... with these policies, travelers increasingly chose to stay overnight in his domain, the state's income sources expanded, and goods from various regions flooded the market” (Ibn al-Qalanisi, 1908). According to Alptekin, when Imad al-Din became the governor of Aleppo, the respect bestowed upon him by the inhabitants of Aleppo mirrored precisely what his father, Aq Sunqur, had received (Alptekin, 1972).

Taj al-Daulah Tutush, who was also the brother of Sultan Malik Shah at the same time, attempted to control the Bilad al-Sham region. The opportunity to realize his desire to expand his territorial dominion seemed wide open when Sultan Malik Shah died in 485/1092, and Tutush planned to succeed him. To achieve this goal, he moved to Aleppo and coerced Aq Sunqur to join him. However, Aq Sunqur's loyalty lay with Mahmud, Malik Shah's younger son. Nevertheless, when Aq Sunqur became aware of Tutush's ambitions and learned about the turmoil for the sultanate among Malik Shah's children, this forced Aq-Sunqur to temporarily acknowledge Tutush. For the same reason, Bozan and Yaghi Siyan also joined Tutush on his journey to Khurasan (Taqushi, 2010).

The expedition launched by Tutush to capture Khurasan and oppose Sultan Barkyaruq, however, was surprised by the actions of Aq Sunqur and Bozan, who left him and joined Barkyaruq's forces in the city of Ar-Rai. This indirectly bolstered Barkyaruq's forces to oppose Tutush once again (Taqushi, 2010). Al-Salabi argues that the actions taken by Aq Sunqur were due to Tutush himself being his primary rival, and he believed that his power and loyalty were only limited to the sons of his master, namely Malik Shah (Al-Salabi, 2010). Angered by Aq Sunqur's betrayal, Tutush swiftly devised a strategy to attack Aq Sunqur and Bozan. The launched assault resulted in the capture and killing of Aq Sunqur (Ibn Al-Athir, 1963).

On the other hand, Zengi, who was born seven years before Malik Shah passed away, had direct experience with the problems of succession and its effects. Barkyaruq was favoured over Tutush by Aq Sunqur, one of Malik Shah's atabegs, who Malik Shah nominated to rule Mosul in 480/1187-1188. Unfortunately, at the age of ten, Zengi was left orphaned after Tutush assassinated Aq Sunqur and captured him. Following Aq Sunqur's demise, Zengi was taken in by Kerbogha, the Mosul amir, and was given care by other members of Aq Sunqur's “military entourage”. This turned out to be a pivotal moment in Zengi's life and illustrates the impact of the family ties that existed throughout the Seljuk era (Mohamadi, 2022).

Based on the implicit evidence found in the texts, it may be inferred that Kerbogha established a Turkmen principality centered around Zengi. In a rare display of honesty, he summoned the commanders under Aq Sunqur who served him in Mosul and instructed them to comply with Zengi, a departure from the typical behavior observed among Turkmen tribes. According to Ibn al-Athir, Zengi did not part ways with Kerbogha and most likely received his initial military education under him during Sultan Barkyaruq's internal conflict against Sultan Muhammad in 1100 at Rayy, Iran. Furthermore, Zengi participated in the military blockade of the Artuqids of Amid conducted by the Mosul army (Ibn Al-Athir, 1963).

Imad al-Din's personality was shaped during his childhood under the tutelage of his own father for nearly 10 years. According to Al-Salabi, Aq Sunqur taught Imad al-Din administrative affairs such as governmental duties and military skills including horseback riding and archery (Al-Salabi, 2010). Imad al-Din successfully demonstrated his prowess in opposing enemies during the Thabariyyah assault and defeating the Crusader forces. This indirectly indicates that Imad al-Din inherited the character and remarkable strategic military acumen of his father, Aq Sunqur, when confronting adversaries

THE BEGINNING OF IMAD AL-DIN ZENGI'S (1085 – 1146 AD) CAREER AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ZENGID DYNASTY

The internal conflict that arose during the succession to the Sultanate in the years following Malik Shah's reign resulted in a decrease in the influence and authority of the Sultanate. The Atabegs, who were individuals in positions of authority over a specific territory, sought to consolidate their influence in the lands granted to them by the sultans. In return for this land, they were entrusted with the responsibility of raising, educating, and supervising a prince, who was the son of the sultan. The emergence of these individuals contributed to the fragmentation of the Seljuks' governing capacity (Mecit, 2010). The Atabegs utilized the princes under their control to advance their own political ambitions, resulting in a gradual decline of the centralized Seljuk authority. The lack of cohesiveness within the Seljuk political structure provided an opening for ambitious rulers like Zengi to exploit and strengthen their power, with the aim of establishing their own dynasty within the Seljuk territory (Belotto, 2014).

Following the reign of Malik Shah, the atabegs emerged as influential figures, attaining significant authority and thereby weakening the Sultanate. In an endeavor to exert control over broader areas of the Seljuk Empire, the Seljuk government bestowed the title of atabeg upon military allies. These individuals were allotted a specific political zone to administer, in return for their services in educating and mentoring a son of the sultan. In the prince's early years, the atabeg had complete control over all the areas assigned to the prince, to prevent any rebellion by the son against his father. One hundred and fifty-three Upon assuming the position of atabeg, these individuals acquired the required means to strengthen their personal authority within the assigned regions. Due to the absence of mechanisms to prevent unfairness or oppressive rule, numerous uprisings were initiated against the governing body with the aim of consolidating personal possessions in the Seljuk territories (Belotto, 2014). The absence of a clearly established hierarchy resulted in an informal system of governance that relied on personal pledges and patronage to determine successors, thereby granting them greater significance. As a result, atabegs were granted the essential autonomy to establish subordinate ruling families within the larger Seljuk Empire, provided they were able to effectively negotiate the political structure.

In 1101, Kerbogha passed away, and the governance of Mosul was given to Shams al-Daula Jekirmish, a Turkmen Mamluk who was the ruler of Jazirat b. Umar in the northern region of Iraq. Jekirmish served as the guardian of young Zengi in Mosul for over six years, until his demise in 1107, due to the high-ranking status held by Zengi's late father in the principality. Arguably, under Jekirmish's leadership and authority, Zengi acquired a deep understanding of the sacred conflict against the Crusaders, who had recently arrived in the Eastern territory. In 1104, Jekirmish, in collaboration with the Artuqids of Mardin, successfully defeated the Crusaders, specifically Bohemond, Joscelin, Tancred, and Baldwin of Edessa, in a major battle near Harran in the Jazira region. The Crusaders suffered a significant and humiliating defeat. Zengi, a young adult of twenty years, presumably served under Jekirmish and made his first appearance in combat against the Crusaders in Harran. The Crusaders endured severe repercussions due to this fight (Mohamadi, 2022). Joscelin and Baldwin were apprehended, so enabling the soldiers in Aleppo to launch an unhindered offensive against the principality of Antioch. Throughout this period, Zengi got firsthand knowledge of the Franks and developed efficient ways to confront them. According to Alptekin, after assuming power in Mosul in 1127, Zengi bestowed an *iqta'* (a grant of land in Islamic tradition) to Jekirmish's son as a token of appreciation for the care he had gotten from Jekirmish (Alptekin, 1972).

Following the demise of Jekirmish, Jawali Saqawi assumed leadership of Mosul and successfully fostered positive relations with Zengi. Nevertheless, Jawali's act of defying Sultan Muhammad led Zengi to distance himself from Jawali's authority. Sultan Muhammad appointed Amir Maudud Tuntekin as a replacement for Jawali from 1109 CE until 1114 CE. Zengi engaged in multiple campaigns against the Crusader army under Maudud's reign.

Sultan Muhammad was very impressed by Zengi's intellect and courage, prompting him to expand Zengi's *iqta'* and regard him as a potential candidate for esteemed positions in Mosul (Al-Salabi, 2010). It is believed that Imad al-Din Zengi always accompanied Maudud Tuntekin till he was assassinated in the year 507 H / 1114 CE by adherents of the Ismaili Shi'a sect in the Great Mosque of Damascus (Ibn Al-Athir, 1963). Following the conclusion of the campaign, Zengi collaborated with Aq Sunqur Al-Bursuqi in multiple offensives targeting the Crusader armies stationed at Edessa, Samisath, and Suruj. After the completion of these military operations, Zengi went back to Mosul, where he continued to work under the Sultan's son, Malik Mas'ud, and his military commander, Juyush Bek (Ibn Al-Athir, 1979).

After the death of Sultan Muhammad in 1118 CE, Juyush Bek took advantage of his position as the guardian of Mas'ud, Sultan Muhammad's son, to promote him as the ruler of the Seljuk Dynasty in Iraq. The purpose of this action was to establish direct authority over several matters of the Seljuk Dynasty on behalf of the newly appointed Sultan. As a result, the soldiers led by Juyush and Mas'ud commenced their journey from Mosul to Baghdad accompanied by a substantial military contingent. Nevertheless, Sultan Mahmud, who was also a descendant of Sultan Muhammad, effectively protected his authority. Zengi backed Juyush's initial endeavor to promote Mas'ud. After a span of three years, Juyush made another endeavor to overthrow Sultan Mahmud. However, Zengi declined to endorse this course of action and counselled the rebels to maintain obedience towards the Sultan (Abu Shamah, 1997). By 515/1121-1122, al-Bursuqi was granted control over Mosul by Sultan Mahmud as a token of appreciation for his aid in battle against his brother. The following year, 516/1122-1123, al-Bursuqi was also granted authority over the city of Wasit by the sultan. Al-Bursuqi entrusted the management of his territories to Zengi, a decision to which Zengi agreed (Ibn Al-Athir, 1963). Zengi had already established a favorable reputation, particularly in the eyes of al-Bursuqi, which led to his appointment to Wasit. Until this juncture, there is no evidence indicating that Zengi held any significant positions within the Seljuk Empire, making this his inaugural official appointment (Belotto, 2014).

Zengi successfully ascended through the hierarchy of al-Bursuqi's military, which led to his appointment as the governor of Wasit and Basra. Zengi participated in a conflict between the caliph al-Mustarshid and Dubays in the year 516/1123-1124. Zengi engaged in combat once more. Al-Bursuqi, who backed the caliph during the battle, was granted control over Basra. He then appointed Zengi to manage the region (Taef El-Azhari, 2016). Zengi's association with al-Bursuqi, established through Zengi's earlier involvements with and his faithfulness to al-Bursuqi, enabled Zengi to further his personal interests within the Seljuk Empire. Two hundred twenty-eight Over time, Zengi started to change his loyalties as he realized that he possessed greater authority and sway than al-Bursuqi. Consequently, he began to consolidate his power in the regions under his control (Khalil, 1982). Nicholas's assessment of Zengi's career indicates that he had built a strong reputation through his previous military endeavors, which gave him the self-assurance to take on administrative responsibilities. Zengi was certain that he had gained enough backing to secure his own official positions from the Seljuks, enabling him to manage his territories according to his own preferences. Due to the heightened power and self-assurance, Zengi became independent from al-Bursuqi and declined his request for help to establish his own influential position (Belotto, 2014).

In 523/1128-1129, Zengi obtained official authorization from Sultan Mamhud to administer Mosul, thereby legitimizing his authority in the region. Zengi was aware that the sultan was contemplating appointing Dubays to the position. However, Zengi took advantage of the sultan's journey to Baghdad and offered him a sum of 100,000 dinars to secure his own position. Zengi's success in removing al-Bursuqi is seen in the sultan's authorization for him to administer Mosul. Based on his remarks in Wasit, Zengi successfully persuaded the residents of Mosul to grant him authority over their city, instead of al-Bursuqi, with whom he had a prior political association (Belotto, 2014).

Zengi persistently consolidated his power by acquiring several territories in the region, strategically aligning them with his overarching objectives. Zengi seized control of Nisibis, a city situated in present-day Turkey, from Husam al-Din Timurtash, an Artuqid amir. The significance of Zengi's connections with the Artuqids became evident in his later career, although these individuals did not have a prominent role during this period. It is important to emphasize that once Zengi became a significant political figure, he promptly started to strengthen his possessions, increase his influence in the regions near Mosul, and form alliances with individuals of comparable authority (Ibn Al-Athir, 1963).

Once Zengi had firmly secured his stronghold in Mosul, he redirected his focus into bolstering and preserving his authority. Zengi dedicated the following seven years, from 522 to 530/1128 to 1136, to consolidating his authority and further expanding his territories. Zengi captured the city of Aleppo in 522/1128. Prior to Zengi's capture of the city, the inhabitants of Aleppo descended into disorder upon the demise of Mas'ud b. al-Bursuqi, who had assumed control of the city after his father's passing. After Mas'ud's death, the amir Qutlugh-Aba tried to seize control and originally achieved his goal. The people of Aleppo became aware of Qutlugh-Aba's oppressive and immoral behavior, which led to riots and ultimately resulted in the removal of the amir. Due to the internal conflict within the city, Frankish troops in the vicinity tried to capture the city. Although the Aleppans were engaged in defending the city, they still faced the persistent issue of rulership (Alghadanfary, 2021). Upon learning about his expedition to Mosul, the inhabitants of Aleppo contacted Zengi, who subsequently travelled to the city. Upon his arrival, the residents of Aleppo eagerly greeted him and expressed great joy at his presence. Zengi subsequently captured the city and proceeded to efficiently manage its administration. Although the exact reason for Zengi's decision to shift his focus towards aiding Aleppo remains unknown, capturing the city provided him with an additional source of strength and a strategically advantageous position that furthered his objectives (Ibn Al-Athir, 2007).

During the same period when Zengi captured Aleppo, he engaged with various leaders in Damascus, an area of significance to him. In 524/1129-1130, Zengi approached Taj al-Muluk Buri, the ruler of Damascus, seeking assistance in jihad, marking his initial call for "holy war", according to Ibn al-Qalanisi. Buri consented and dispatched men, including his son Savinj, to aid Zengi. Shortly after their arrival, Zengi arrested Savinj and the remaining forces of Taj al-Muluk. Subsequently, Zengi conquered Hama and Homs, situated between Damascus and Aleppo (Ibn Al-Qalanisi, 1932).

To justify the political legitimacy of the Zengid dynasty over their subjects in Syria, it is important to investigate the nature of the diplomatic relations formed between the Zengid government and the Seljuk government, and if possible, with the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. According to Burhan Che Daud, there are several examples recorded in the original sources regarding this matter. For example, Ibn al-Athir describes the initial appointment of Zengi over Mosul and Bilad al-Jazirah where the negotiation process was fully arranged by three important figures: al-Qadi Baha' al-Din 'Ali ibn al-Shahrazuri, Salah al-Din Muhammad al-Yaghisiyani, and Nasir al-Din Jaqar. Negotiations between them on behalf of Zengi with the vizier of Sultan Mahmud, Anusharawan ibn Khalid, resulted in the Sultan's approval to empower Zengi as the legitimate governor of Mosul and Bilad al-Jazirah. In this case, Ibn al-Athir mentions that the appointment was made through a manshur (public decree) sent to the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. It seems that the prevailing convention was that the Seljuk sultan had the right to grant power and authority to any major commander under him, without requiring formal approval from the caliph (Daud, 2020).

Zengi eventually established his own dynasty encompassing the northern regions of Syria, which included Aleppo as his military base, and the Mesopotamian area with Mosul as its main city. Both cities served as centers of governance for his two sons, Nur al-Din in Aleppo and Saif al-Din Ghazi in Mosul after his death in 1146 AD. The Zengid Dynasty's legacy of rule endured for nearly a century, with Nur al-Din Zengi emerging as one of its most prominent rulers. Nur al-Din drew inspiration from his father to continue the struggle to unite Islamic territories as a foundation for resisting the Crusader forces.

During the reign of Nur al-Din (1146-1174), Damascus, Tripoli, Yemen, and the Hejaz were successfully unified under the rule of the Zengid Dynasty. Moreover, Egypt was also conquered through the efforts of Asad al-Din Shirkuh, who was also the paternal uncle of Saladin, after three attempts to overthrow the Fatimid rule (Mecit, 2010). Saladin was appointed as vizier by the last Fatimid caliph, al-Adid, in 1169, succeeding Shirkuh. Al-Adid passed away in 1171, and Saladin seized the opportunity of this power vacuum by taking control of the country and shifting Egypt's allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate based in Baghdad, which followed Sunni Islam, unlike the traditional Fatimid Shia practice as before. As Nur al-Din prepared to attack the Latin Kingdom in Jerusalem, he suddenly passed away in 1174. His young son and successor, As-Salih Ismail al-Malik, had to flee to Aleppo and ruled there until 1181 before succumbing to illness and being replaced by his cousin, Imad al-Din Zengi II.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE RULE OF IMAD AL-DIN ZENGI

Zengi utilized political connections extensively throughout his career to accomplish his own objectives. His actions resulted in the creation of a strong foundation that caused the Sultanate to view Zengi as a potential danger. Zengi utilized political and military ties to strengthen his power and served as an Islamic hero who united Muslims against Crusader invasions in Islamic lands. Zengi is renowned for effectively utilizing different capabilities by focusing on two key objectives, establishing a powerful Islamic army and initiating offensives against Crusader troops.

The Reunification of Islamic Territories in Bilad al-Sham

The existence of distinct Islamic administrations caused Islamic regions, especially in Bilad al-Sham, to be divided prior to the entrance of the Crusader troops. During the First Crusade, the disunity made it simple for the Crusader soldiers to extend their victories into Islamic lands. As a result, the Latin Kingdoms of Jerusalem, Tripoli, Antioch, and Edessa were founded, successfully establishing four Crusader governments. In addition to endangering nearby Islamic lands, the creation of these Frankish kingdoms helped the Fatimid Caliphate and the Emirate of Damascus exploit vulnerabilities in Islamic administrations to keep control of Bilad al-Sham. One of the major cities in the Bilad al-Sham region, Aleppo was threatened by the Crusader armies and attempted to be taken over (Al-Salabi, 2010).

When Imad al-Din became Mosul's governor in 1127 CE, he did not engage in any military campaigns to take on the Crusader army right away. Rather, Imad al-Din concentrated on fortifying the military and economic facets and uniting the dispersed minor administrations surrounding him. This was to protect his travels in Bilad al-Sham and Al-Jazirah. Imad al-Din signed a ceasefire with Joscelin I, the ruler of Edessa, to make sure the enemy would not thwart his efforts. The peace lasted for over two years. He made use of it at this time to bring the Islamic lands surrounding Bilad al-Sham together. Ibn al-Athir records information regarding the deal between Imad al-Din and Joscelin I in "al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh". However, Muhammad Suhail believes that this cease-fire allowed Imad al-Din to focus on incorporating Aleppo into his sphere of influence and making it a military bastion in the al-Sham region (Taqushi, 2010).

In 1129 CE, Antioch lost its ruler when Bohemond II was killed in battle with the Seljuk Sultanate in Asia Minor. His wife, Alice, who was also the daughter of Baldwin (the King of the Kingdom of Jerusalem), assumed the role to replace her husband. This situation presented an opportunity for Imad al-Din Zengi to regain control of the territory.

However, this opportunity was not utilized to its fullest by Imad al-Din Zengi, thereby indirectly losing the chance to seize control of this important northern territory in al-Sham (Küçükspahioğlu, 2015). Following the breakdown of the peace between Imad al-Din Zengi and Joscelin II, military campaigns were initiated by Zengi against Crusader areas, particularly those that posed a threat to Aleppo and surrounded it, such as the castle of al-Atsarib. The Crusader armies repeatedly assaulted Muslim residents in the area, causing disruption to the farmers' economy. The Muslims became victorious after engaging in intense fights with the opposing side. Numerous Crusader warriors perished in battle, and a considerable amount were captured. Zengi successfully seized the citadel of al-Atsarib (Ibn Al-Athir, 2007).

Historians have assessed Zengi's conduct as contentious and brutal, characterized by using treacherous techniques against his enemies. Al-Imad Al-Isfahani (Al-Isfahani, 1900) and Al-Zahabi (Al-Zahabi, 1985) have associated Imad al-Din's personality with tyrannical behavior. Usama bin Munqidh, in *Al-I'tibar*, similarly notes Imad al-Din's tolerance of the abuses suffered by his officials (Al-Salabi, 2010). Carole Hillenbrand, in her writings, also expresses skepticism regarding Ibn Athir's excessive praise of Imad al-Din upon his successful recapture of the city of Edessa. However, Carole Hillenbrand rebukes such praises by asserting that the bombastic statements about Zengi presented by Ibn al-Athir are difficult to reconcile with the detailed facts about his career as an opportunistic and ruthless military commander who ruled his territories with an iron fist (Hillenbrand, 1999).

Indeed, sometimes the intention to carry out harsh actions is preceded by seeking fatwas from the jurists (*fuqaha*) regarding the matter. Imad al-Din Zengi once consulted the jurists about waging war against the leaders of regions that weakened the unity of the Muslim community, considering it crucial to expedite. He implemented this when he successfully took control of Ar-Raqqah in 529 H / 1135 CE. As for the death sentences imposed on a number of regional leaders in Baalbek, it occurred after gaining control of the area through intense battles in 534 H / 1139 CE. These sentences were a consequence of their disregard for some agreed-upon conditions before they left the fortress (Khalil, 1982).

Imad al-Din Khalil responded to this issue by suggesting that Zengi's attitude towards the leaders of regions in Syria reflected an intensive effort to gain sufficient time to unite as many cities with independent kingdoms there as possible. This was crucial to expedite the formation of a united Islamic army to confront the threat posed by the Crusader forces. Zengi realized that it was impossible to achieve absolute victory over them when the Muslim community in the Syrian region was divided into several small kingdoms that constantly clashed with each other. Therefore, they resorted to deception through power, especially in such chaotic circumstances among the Muslim community, which led to much bloodshed and fierce struggles (Khalil, 1982).

The Conquest of Edessa

Edessa, also known as Ar-Ruha in Arabic, was one of the successful Crusader states established in Islamic territories during the First Crusade in 1097 AD. The first Crusader governor in Edessa was Baldwin I until 1100 AD before he was appointed as the ruler of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, succeeding Geoffrey who had passed away. In terms of location, Edessa was seen as unique and strategically important compared to other Crusader states because it was situated in the Euphrates River area and served as a major defense stronghold for the Crusader forces in Bilad al-Sham (Fulton, 2017). According to Sa'id Asyur, although Edessa was not part of the Holy Land in Palestine, the Crusader forces considered it the most sacred city after Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople. The wealth possessed by the rulers of Edessa greatly assisted in the expedition to expand the Crusader army's territorial power (Asyur, 1976).

The Crusaders' dominion over Edessa constituted a substantial danger to Islamic territory, both in terms of road connections and communication between large cities like Aleppo, Mosul, Baghdad, and various smaller Seljuk regions. Furthermore, the Crusaders' occupation of Edessa influenced the process of uniting Islamic areas between Al-Sham and Al-Jazirah. According to Taef El-Azhari, it is necessary to analyze the reasons behind the selection of Edessa as a target, as opposed to any other cities belonging to the Crusaders. Zengi's assault on Antioch, launched from his stronghold in Aleppo, would be hindered by the strategic positioning of Edessa, rendering him unable to advance towards Jerusalem without first conquering Damascus. Edessa, located in the central region of Jazira, was a very desirable objective, particularly because Zengi had informed Sultan Mas'ud in 1138 of the Franks' proximity to his territories in Iraq (Taef El-Azhari, 2012).

The weak governance situation under the leadership of Joscelin II prompted Zengi to capitalize on this phase to recapture the city of Edessa. Several scholars evaluate the internal weaknesses within Joscelin II's administration as the basis for Edessa's fall, in addition to poor relations with the Antioch Crusader kingdom. In the autumn season, Zengi moved towards the Qara Arslan region, the Artuqid government of Hisn Kayfa, and camped in open hill areas without attacking the city. Joscelin perceived this action as a common Islamic domestic affair, possibly assuming Zengi was spending time on Kurdish or Turkmen excursions. Thus, Joscelin decided to leave Edessa for Tel Bashir west of the Euphrates River. He still believed that his territory would be safe in the upcoming season. After Joscelin's departure, spies informed Zengi of the situation. Consequently, Zengi began to move towards Edessa, rallying all Muslims in nearby regions to participate in jihad.

Joscelin was encamped at his town, Tell Bashir, west of the Euphrates, watching the situation helplessly while Zengi was aiming his mangonels at the city's defenses. He requested immediate assistance from Jerusalem and Antioch. Constable Manasses and Philip of Nablus led an army sent by Queen Melisende, while his old opponent Raymond of Antioch was pleased to see his competitor in pain. Runciman thought he would be able to cut off any reinforcements coming into Zengi from Aleppo because of Joscelin's position at Tell Bashir (Taef El-Azhari, 2016). This viewpoint is challenged by the fact that, despite having a sizable army, Zengi chose not to deploy his Aleppan men to defend Aleppo from the neighboring threat posed by Antioch. Though ill-versed in military strategy, Hugh II, the principality's Latin Archbishop, was tasked with defending Edessa and had the backing of the local populace as well as the bishops of Armenia and Jacobite (Taef El-Azhari, 2012).

Zengi's initial strategy involved offering security guarantees to the inhabitants of Edessa while requesting that the city gates be opened. The reluctance of the city's residents to accept Zengi's offer compelled him to destroy the city's fortifications. Zengi instructed engineers from Aleppo and Khurasan (located in the eastern part of Iran) to excavate tunnels beneath the base of the city walls from the northern direction. The Muslim engineers successfully dug several tunnels and filled them with specific kinds of wood and naphtha. Upon ignition, these substances caused massive explosions that led to the destruction of the fortifications. Despite facing a significantly larger Muslim army with limited resources, the locals in the city displayed brave resistance.

As signs of weakness began to emerge, Zengi resorted to diplomacy once more. He sent a message to the besieged, urging them to surrender since they had little chance of retaining the city (Küçükspahioğlu, 2015). To demonstrate his goodwill, he proposed offering two Muslim hostages to the Crusaders in exchange for two individuals from within the city who would inspect the tunnels beneath the foundations firsthand and recognize the strategic advantage the Muslims held in capturing the city. Zengi was eager to offer them peace and avert an inevitable downfall for Edessa.

When no definitive response was received to his proposal, Zengi made a final visit to the tunnels and ordered them to be ignited. Immediately thereafter, the walls crumbled, allowing the Muslims to breach the city on Saturday, 24 December 1144. For three days, Edessa was plundered by the Turkmen forces, authorized by Zengi to act in this manner. Many were slain by the sword, while thousands of women and children were enslaved. Additionally, numerous individuals were injured or killed as they were trampled underfoot by those seeking refuge in the city's citadel, which had been sealed off to them (Küçüksipahioğlu, 2015).

After successfully conquering Edessa, Zengi directed his army to cease all forms of killing, captivity, looting and ordered the return of all prisoners and plunder that had been taken. Moreover, post-war efforts witnessed the rapid renovation and reconstruction of Edessa by Zengi. According to Amin Maalouf, the conquest of Edessa by the Muslims became a crucial point in fostering the spirit of Jihad among Muslims, especially in the mission to liberate *Bayt al-Maqdis* for future generations, such as Nur al-Din (Maalof, 1989). The impact of this event also reinvigorated the propaganda of holy war among European Christians, leading to the Second Crusade.

CONCLUSION

During the period after Malik Shah's succession, there was a notable rise in the influence of the amirs and atabegs. As the reigns of Malik Shah's successors unfolded, these individuals continued to amass even more power. Atabegs and amirs took steps to consolidate their authority in the territories granted to them by the sultan, contributing to the gradual decentralization of the Seljuk Empire. Zengi's ascent occurred amidst this shifting political landscape following Malik Shah's demise. He observed and followed the strategies employed by his predecessors, seizing opportunities as they arose.

The turmoil ensuing Malik Shah's death provided Zengi with the chance to garner support and cultivate a formidable following necessary for establishing a dynasty in the Islamic domains. Zengi adeptly navigated the complexities of the Seljuk political framework. Despite engaging in various political alliances with different figures in both the Seljuk Empire and the Abbasid caliphate, Zengi prioritized his own objectives and worked towards establishing his autonomy within the Seljuk realm.

The establishment of the Zengid Dynasty opened a new chapter in the resurgence of Sunni influence during the medieval period, producing several figures who fought for the liberation of *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem). Zengi successfully laid the foundation for his successors to unite the Islamic world to confront various threats, particularly from the Crusader forces. Nur al-Din, who inherited his father's realm, took the responsibility of maintaining Islamic control in the *Bilad al-Sham* region against adversaries.

The Zengid dynasty acquired political legitimacy through two related ways; directly from the caliph himself, and indirectly through the Seljuk sultans. Therefore, recognition from the caliphate institution could be considered an official decree for the Zengids to administer the state in the name of the 'Abbasids. Furthermore, their initiatives in the form of Jihad and resistance against the Crusades politically aligned with the caliph's agenda. As a result, being recognized by the Muslims, they garnered significant support in the form of military assistance.

The groundwork laid by Imad al-Din Zengi in the struggle to liberate *Bayt al-Maqdis* was realized during the era of Saladin. Saladin's endeavors not only solidified the efforts initiated by Zengi but also elevated the cause of reclaiming Jerusalem to a new level of prominence within the Islamic world. Through astute political maneuvering and military prowess, Saladin achieved significant victories against the Crusaders, ultimately culminating in the recapture of Jerusalem in 1187.

The Zengid Dynasty's legacy in fostering a renewed sense of Sunni resurgence and its contributions to the broader Islamic struggle against external threats, particularly the Crusader forces, cannot be overstated. Their efforts laid the groundwork for subsequent leaders like Saladin to continue the fight for the liberation of *Bayt al-Maqdis* and the preservation of Islamic territories in the Levant. This historical narrative underscores the interconnectedness of political leadership, military strategy, and religious fervor in shaping the course of events in the medieval Islamic world, particularly in the context of the Crusades.

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