

Heroism or Capitulation? A Reassessment of Salah al-Din, the Battle of Arsuf (1191 CE) and the al-Ramla Treaty (1192 CE)

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Abstract

The Treaty of al-Ramla, signed on 2 September 1192, formally brought the Third Crusade (1189-1192) to a close. Spearheaded by prominent European monarchs -most notably Richard I of England- the Crusade was waged against Sultan Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (1137-1193), the preeminent Muslim ruler and strategic commander of the era. While the swords of both figures illuminated during the years of that Crusade, the treaty itself was executed not by their own pens, but through their appointed representatives. This accord represents a pivotal juncture in the annals of Crusading history, distinguished not only by its terms but also by the protracted diplomatic engagements between Crusader and Muslim envoys that preceded it. Despite Salah al-Din's considerable military and political exertions -especially his pivotal liberation of Jerusalem in 1187 and the campaigns that followed until the al-Ramla treaty- a recent polemical opinion by Egyptian writer Dr Yusuf Zaidan casts the Sultan as "one of the most despicable figures in human history." Zaidan's opinion starkly contrasts with prevailing historical narratives. He attributes al-Ramla treaty to Salah al-Din's alleged weakness and negligence claiming it was just the climax of his setbacks and a clear indication of his weakness in front of King Richard. He contends that, notwithstanding the retaining of sovereignty over Jerusalem, the concessions made to the Crusaders across other regions of Palestine and Bilad al-Sham epitomise a capitulation rather than a strategic triumph. This study undertakes a comprehensive examination of the al-Ramla Peace Treaty, interrogating the underlying strategic rationales which compelled both parties to deem peace the only tenable option at that juncture. It further scrutinises the implications of the Battle of Arsuf (1191) alongside internal Crusader discord, to evaluate whether the treaty constitutes the pinnacle of Salah al-Din's victories or, conversely, as Zaidan claims, the end of his setbacks.

Keywords: al-Ramla Treaty, Battle of Arsuf, Conrad of Montferrat, Yusuf Zaidan, King Richard I

Introduction

The Treaty of al-Ramla, concluded on 2 September 1192 between Muslim and Crusader forces, marked the formal cessation of the Third Crusade, inaugurating a peace that endured for approximately thirty-nine months.¹ Far from a hasty compromise, the treaty emerged from a multifaceted and prolonged process of negotiation, deeply influenced by political necessities, economic considerations, religious imperatives, and military realities. It represented a cautious yet uneven resolution for both Sultan Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and King Richard I of England, each seeking to consolidate strategic advantage while curtailing further loss.

Although the treaty permitted Salah al-Din to retain the majority of territorial gains following his decisive victory at the Battle of Hittin (Hattin) in 1187,² it simultaneously thwarted the principal objective of the Crusade -namely, the recapture of Jerusalem- pursued by some of Europe's most eminent monarchs, including Frederick Barbarossa, King of Germany (1152-1190); Richard the Lionheart, King of England (1189-1199); and Philip Augustus, King of France (1180-1223).³ Notably, through strategic diplomacy, Salah al-Din adroitly extricated Jerusalem from the key negotiations and likewise neutralise the contentious issue of the strategic coastal city of 'Asqalan (Ascalon), whose status had long impeded the peace process.⁴

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¹ Jonathan Phillips, *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades* (Vintage Books, 2010), 162-163. Muhammad Mu'nis 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH* ('Ain Lildirasat wa al-Buhuth al-Insaniyya wa al-Ijtima'iyya, 1997), 42.

² Raphael Y. Lewis, "Crusader Battlefields Environmental and Archaeological Perspectives," in *The Crusader World*, ed. by Adrian J. Boas (Routledge-Taylor & Frances, 2016), 463.

³ Qasim Abdo Qasim, *Mahiat al-Hurub al-Salibiyya* (al-Majlis al-Watani Lilthaqafa wa al-Funun wa al-Adab, 1990), 119.

⁴ 'Arab Da'kur, *al-Dawlah al-Ayyubiyya :Tarikhuha al-Siyasi wa al-Hadari* (Dar al-Mawasim Liltiba'a wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 2006), 163.

Despite these notable achievements -recognised even by his adversaries before his own supporters⁵- Salah al-Din's legacy has come under scrutiny by the Egyptian writer, Dr Yusuf Zaidan. He has advanced a markedly controversial critique, denouncing Salah al-Din as a coward, and portraying the Treaty of al-Ramla as the epitome of his failings, weakness and indecisiveness. According to Zaidan, the continued Muslim possession of Jerusalem did not offset the territorial concessions made to the Crusaders along the coastlines of Palestine and the Bilad al-Sham. He further contends that Salah al-Din's military reputation has been excessively romanticised and exaggerated, and that the al-Ramla treaty was principally sought to avert renewed conflict with King Richard, particularly in the wake of the Muslim defeat at the Battle of Arsuf.⁶

This study undertakes a critical analysis of al-Ramla Peace Treaty and the circumstances that compelled both parties to the negotiating table. Focusing on the broader motivations and justifications which compelled both leaders to realise peace as the most pragmatic course. It further explores whether the al-Ramla Treaty should be interpreted as the pinnacle of Salah al-Din's accomplishments or, conversely, as a manifestation of retreat and capitulation, as posited by Zaidan.

Between Hittin and Acre ('Akka): Victory and Defeat

Salah al-Din, acutely aware of the strategic consequences of his triumph over the Crusader forces at the Battle of Hittin on 4 July 1187 and his subsequent recovery of Bayt al-Maqdis on 2 October that year, foresaw a forceful response from Christian Europe. He correctly anticipated that such developments would galvanise European monarchs and ecclesiastical leaders would seek vengeance and revive efforts to reoccupy the Holy City. The defeat at Hittin reverberated throughout Europe, reportedly so distressing that Pope Urban III died upon receiving the news.⁷ In the wake of this, Europe's religious and political elite -led by the newly elected Pope Gregory VIII- expressed profound grief and issued impassioned calls for an unprecedented Crusade to restore Christian control of Jerusalem.⁸

Despite the brevity of his pontificate -merely two months- Pope Gregory VIII was remarkably proactive. He issued the papal bull *Audita tremendi*, exhorting the Christian world to remember the fall of Edessa (*al-Ruha*)⁹ in 1144 to 'Imad al-Din Zinki,¹⁰ framing it as a warning that had gone unheeded. To promote mass mobilisation, he promised complete remission of sins for those who joined the Crusade. His decree articulated a single, unwavering objective: the recapture of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Pope Gregory VIII mandated fasting every Friday and abstention from meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays for five years, seeking divine favour for the campaign.¹¹ Though he died on 17 December 1187, he had already instructed Clement III to continue preparations for the Crusade.¹²

The reaction from Europe's rulers was swift and resolute. Initial momentum came from Crusaders in the East, led by King of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem Guy of Lusignan,¹³ recently released from Muslim captivity, who began the siege of Acre ('Akka) on 28 August 1189.¹⁴ Pope Clement III's call

⁵ Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, with a new introduction by David Nicolle (Greenhill Books & Stackpole Books, 2002), 247-248.

⁶ Yusuf Zaidan, "Al-Katib al-Misri al-Shahir Dr. Yusuf Zaidan: Salah al-Din Al-Ayyubi Ahqar Shakhshiyya fi Tarikh al-Insaniyya". "The famous Egyptian writer Dr. Yusuf Zaidan: Salah al-Din Al-Ayyubi is one of the most Despicable Figures in Human History", TV Programme "Kul Yawm" broadcasted on "ON E Satellite Channel", accessed September 7 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC7e0Vg3lKg&t=95s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFoZ5ac9O7A>.

⁷ Helen Birkett, "News in the Middle Ages: News, Communications, and the Launch of the Third Crusade in 1187-1188," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018): 41. Jonathan Phillips, "The changing reputation of Saladin in the Latin West, c. 1170 to c. 1220," *Crusades* 23, no. 1 (2024): 92. Malcolm Barber, *The Crusaders States* (Yale University Press, 2012), 324. Mahmoud Sa'id 'Umran, *Tarikh al-Hurub al-Salibiyya 1095-1291* (Dar al-Ma'rifa al-Jami'iyya, 2000), 147.

⁸ Thomas W. Smith, "Audita Tremendi and the Call for the Third Crusade Reconsidered, 1187-1188," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 49 No. 3 (2018): 63. Katrine Funding Højgaard, "What more can we say?": emotional reactions to the loss of Jerusalem, 1187 - c. 1220," *Crusades* 23, no. 1 (2024): 61.

⁹ Jean Richard, *The Crusades c.1071-c.1291*, translated by Jean Birrell (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 217. Emil Saleem Shehadeh, *The Crusades: Motives Methods and Moments* (Candor Publishing, 2020), 38.

¹⁰ 'Umran, *Tarikh al-Hurub al-Salibiyya 1095-1291*, 67.

¹¹ Qasim, *Mahiyat al-Hurub al-Salibiyya*, 119.

¹² Qasim, *Mahiyat al-Hurub al-Salibiyya*, 119.

¹³ Guy of Lusignan was the king of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, but he was taken prisoner by Salah al-Din at the Battle of Hittin. Salah al-Din released him in 1188 after Guy pledged not to participate in any Crusader campaigns against the Muslims. However, he broke his promise because he was unable to regain his position as king of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, as the ruler of Tyre, Conrad of Montferrat, refused to receive him in the city and clearly declared to him that he was no longer king.

¹⁴ David Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The mighty Crusader* (Phoenix, 2005), 45. See also Nu'man Jubran and Muhammad al-'Amadi, *Dirasat fi Tarikh al-Ayyubiyyin wa al-Mamalik* (Mu'assasat Hamada Lidirasat al-Jami'iyya wa al-Nashr, 2000), 109. See also David Nicolle, *The Third Crusade 1191: Richard the Lionheart, Saladin and the Struggle for Jerusalem* (Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2005), 46.

to arms resonated widely, ultimately drawing the involvement of the era's most formidable monarchs: Frederick Barbarossa of Germany, Philip Augustus of France, and Richard the Lionheart of England.

It is notable that although the Treaty of al-Ramla was concluded in September 1192, early signs of diplomatic overture of a potential peace settlement emerged upon Richard's arrival at Acre.¹⁵ Despite joining the Crusader forces in the siege for only a brief period, -approximately thirty-five days- yet this proved sufficient for him to deduce that a negotiated settlement might achieve the aims of the Crusade in securing Jerusalem more effectively than protracted military engagement.¹⁶

On the Muslim side, however, the fall of Acre to the Crusaders on 12 July 1191 was a profound setback for Salah al-Din. The city had endured an exhausting two-year siege, beginning with its encirclement by Guy of Lusignan on 28 August 1189.¹⁷ Despite relentless efforts by Salah al-Din to break the siege, these proved unsuccessful. The Crusaders, supported by a powerful naval fleet, sealed off Acre by both land and sea, thwarting all attempts by the Muslim navy to relieve the besieged city.¹⁸ Repeated ground offensives launched by Salah al-Din likewise failed against the superior numbers and strategic advantages of the Crusader forces. As provisions dwindled and morale faded, few anticipated that the city would ultimately capitulate by surrendering its keys directly to King Richard by its own inhabitants.¹⁹

The Battle of Arsuf and the Aftermath of Victory

King Richard's swift triumph at Acre served as a decisive incentive to advance his campaign for the recapture of Jerusalem. For Salah al-Din, although his forces retained cohesion and resilience, the fall of Acre signalled a stark warning: he now faced a resolute adversary with a singular and unwavering goal and objective. In response, Salah al-Din sought to contain the strategic fallout, prevent further territorial loss, and avoid a repetition of Acre's tragedy. Richard, buoyed by momentum, set his sights on 'Asqalan, recognising that control of this vital coastal stronghold would offer direct access to Jerusalem. Anticipating this manoeuvre, Salah al-Din responded with tactical acumen, shadowing the Crusader advance and deploying parallel marches to obstruct its advance. Although the Crusaders captured Haifa²⁰ with relative ease, Salah al-Din deliberately refrained from mounting a counteroffensive, focusing instead on halting Richard's approach towards 'Asqalan and, ultimately, Jerusalem.²¹

It was during this critical juncture, on 5 September 1191, that preliminary peace negotiations were attempted.²² Their breakdown, however, underscored the growing inevitability of military confrontation. Both sides pursued to gain leverage over the other, hoping to force concessions during future negotiations. According to Abu-Shama, when al-'Adil -Salah al-Din's brother and principal negotiator- pressed Richard for his conditions of peace, the English king responded: "*Relief comes only by the return of lands...*"²³ Ibn Shaddad likewise recorded Richard's uncompromising demand: "*The fundamental condition is that all the lands return to us, and you must withdraw to your own territories.*"²⁴ This amounted to a call for the restoration of all territories lost by the Crusaders since Hittin in 1187. Al-'Adil, unsurprisingly, rejected these terms in their entirety, and the negotiations collapsed.²⁵

¹⁵ Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, edited by Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal (Maktabat al-Khanji, 1994), 243. Hadiya Dajani-Shakeel, *Al-Qadi al-Fadil Abd al-Rahim al-Baysani al-Asqalani (526-596 AH/1131-1191 CE): His Planning Role in Salah al-Din's State and Conquests* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), 307.

¹⁶ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 246-247.

¹⁷ Peter W Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade* (Ashgate, 2007), 167.

¹⁸ 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Ismail Abu-Shama, *Mulakhas Kitab al-Rawdatiyn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn: al-Nuwriyya wa al-Salahiyya*. Smmarised and annotated by Muhammad bin Hassan Musa (Dar al-Andalus al-Khadra, 1997), 338.

¹⁹ Roger Crowley, *Accursed Tower: The Crusaders' Last Battle for the Holy Land* (Yale University Press, 2019), 5. See also Da'kur, *al-Dawlah al-Ayyubiyya: Tarikhuha al-Siyasi wa al-Hadari*, 151.

²⁰ 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 10.

²¹ Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The mighty Crusader*, 84-85.

²² 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 15.

²³ Abu-Shama, *Mulakhas Kitab al-Rawdatiyn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn: Al-Nuwriyya wa al-Salahiyya*, 284.

²⁴ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 274.

²⁵ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 274.

With diplomacy exhausted, war was inevitable. On 7 September 1191, the opposing forces clashed at Arsuf, in what became known as the Battle of Arsuf.²⁶ While Salah al-Din's army was defeated, the outcome was neither as definitive nor as strategically transformative as Zaidan claimed. Zaidan portrays Arsuf as a crushing Crusader triumph and a devastating setback for Salah al-Din.²⁷ Yet, this interpretation is contested; 'Awad argues that Richard's victory, though tangible, was a limited success, as it did not dismantle Muslim forces nor undermine Ayyubid leadership.²⁸ Smail views it as a striking but transient tactical success.²⁹ While, Lewis contends that the battle inflicted no more than a moral setback on Muslim morale.³⁰

Several factors contributed to the Muslim defeat. As 'Awad notes, prolonged campaigns from Hittin to Arsuf had strained his troops, rendering them fatigued and depleted.³¹ Moreover, the Muslim navy failed to offer logistical reinforcement or disrupt the Crusader fleet,³² which advanced synchronously with land forces. Crucially, the presence of Crusader commanders and clergy alongside King Richard, boosted morale, reinforcing the conviction that Jerusalem's recovery was imminent. The Crusaders remained invigorated by their recent success at Acre.³³

Despite tactical defeat at Arsuf, Salah al-Din's broader strategic aims were ultimately realised. His principal objective was not to secure battlefield victories *per se*, but to prevent Richard from advancing on 'Asqalan, in this he succeeded entirely. Although victorious, Richard halted his advance and entrenched at Jaffa, declining further direct engagement with Salah al-Din's forces.³⁴ This hesitation suggests that Richard, despite success at Acre and Arsuf, recognised the diminishing prospects of sustained victories and now viewed negotiation as a more fruitful avenue. Salah al-Din, too, discerned a shift. His turn to diplomacy reflected not surrender but strategic adaptation. His decision was not a retreat from Jihad or military confrontation but rather a pragmatic response to evolving circumstances.³⁵ He understood that peace, forged under his own terms, could represent the most advantageous resolution at this juncture. It was a choice rooted not in military weakness but in pragmatic statecraft.

Salah al-Din and the Crusaders' Internal Conflict

A critical dimension of the Third Crusade often overlooked in historical analysis concerns the character of the Eastern Crusaders towards both King Richard and the prospect of peace with Salah al-Din. Although Richard had initiated peace overtures towards the Sultan -initially proposing uncompromising terms during the early phases of negotiation-,³⁶ some members of the Eastern Crusader leadership considered that a separate accord with Salah al-Din might better serve their interests. Their rationale hinged on geographical durability: unlike Richard, whose eventual return to England was inevitable, their presence in the region was continuous and strategic. Conrad of Montferrat, lord of Tyre, emerged as the foremost proponent of an independent settlement.³⁷ His diplomatic efforts prioritised Eastern Crusader autonomy over the ambitions of the newly arrived European Crusaders.³⁸ While Salah al-Din remained engaged in negotiations with Richard, Conrad discreetly dispatched Reginald -former lord of Sidon prior to its takeover by Salah al-Din- to present peace terms to the Sultan. Known for his astuteness and guile, Reginald conveyed Conrad's proposal, which included:

²⁶ 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 20.

²⁷ Zaidan, "Al-Katib al-Misri al-Shahir Dr. Yusuf Zaidan: Salah al-Din Al-Ayyubi Ahqar Shakhsiyya fi Tarikh al-Insaniyya." "The famous Egyptian writer Dr. Yusuf Zaidan: Salah al-Din Al-Ayyubi is one of the most Despicable Figures in Human History," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC7e0Vg3IKg&t=95s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFoZ5ac907A>

²⁸ 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 44.

²⁹ R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 165.

³⁰ Lewis, "Crusader Battlefields Environmental and Archaeological Perspectives," 479.

³¹ 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 37

³² 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 37.

³³ 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 36.

³⁴ Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*, 79.

³⁵ 'Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, edited by Hassan al-Karmi (Bayt al-Afkar al-Duwaliyya, 2001), vol. 2, 2198-2199.

³⁶ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, p. 274.

³⁷ Hasan Habashi (Trans.), *al-Harb al-Salibiyya al-Thalitha (Salah al-Din and Richard) Itinerarum Peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi* (al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Ama lil Kitab), vol. 2, 160-161. Rhoda Power, *Richard the Lionheart and the Third Crusade* (Putnam, 1931), 107.

³⁸ William S. Murrell, "Interpreters in Franco-Muslim Negotiations," *Crusades* 20, no. 1 (2021):134. Michael A. Kohler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East*, translated by Peter M. Holt, Revised, edited and introduced by Konrad Hirschler (Brill, 2013), 263.

- A willingness to ally with Salah al-Din against the broader Crusader cause;
- Military support in retaking Acre, contingent upon Salah al-Din restoring Sidon and Beirut to Conrad.³⁹

Conrad's proposal was driven principally by his longstanding dispute with Richard, who aspired to control Tyre, Conrad's stronghold and seat of power. In addition, Conrad harboured designs on the throne of Jerusalem but feared Richard's unequivocal endorsement of Guy of Lusignan, the former king, whose reinstatement would undermine Conrad's ambitions.⁴⁰ Guy himself remained determined to reclaim sovereignty, and Conrad suspected that Richard viewed him as a vehicle for English influence in the region.⁴¹ In response, Conrad severed ties with Richard and fortified himself over Tyre.⁴²

Salah al-Din, discerning Conrad's strategic intent and duplicity, and being fully aware of Conrad's longstanding feud with Richard, approached the proposal with caution and political finesse. While he conditionally accepted the alliance, he stipulated that Conrad must first declare overt hostility towards the Crusader leadership; Launch a siege against Acre; Release Muslim captives detained in Acre and Tyre. Only upon satisfying these terms would control of Sidon and Beirut be granted. Reginald requested time to relay these conditions to Conrad.⁴³

Internally, Salah al-Din consulted his leading emirs and military commanders to evaluate which Crusader faction presented the most viable partner for negotiations.⁴⁴ His brother al-'Adil, along with other emirs, advocated engaging King Richard.⁴⁵ They argued that a treaty brokered with Richard would carry greater legitimacy and foster a more comprehensive cessation of hostilities, particularly given Richard's impending departure from the region, whereas Conrad intended to remain and establish his rule in the region.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the advisory council saw merit in prolonging talks with Conrad, recognising the potential to deepen the schism between Eastern and Western Crusader forces.

Salah al-Din took deliberate steps to keep his negotiations with Conrad confidential. Yet Richard, ever perceptive, uncovered the clandestine talks and summoned Conrad to Acre to broker a reconciliation.⁴⁷ Although a temporary resolution was achieved, it proved short-lived. By February 1192, tensions resurfaced when Conrad refused Richard's request to assist with fortifying 'Asqalan.⁴⁸ This defiance likely reinforced Richard's conviction that a treaty with Salah al-Din had become the only viable solution.

Salah al-Din demonstrated diplomatic acumen by exploiting the fracturing Crusader coalition. He subtly indicated to Richard that failure to conclude a treaty might compel him to pursue peace with rival factions, thereby leveraging the internal discord to his advantage. Historical records reveal that during internal consultations, Salah al-Din appeared inclined towards Conrad, whose presence in Tyre and commitment to establishing dominion in the East suggested long-term strategic benefit. In Salah al-Din's estimation, cultivating an alliance with the Eastern Crusaders would exacerbate existing fault lines with newly arrived Crusader forces from Western Europe, weakening the Crusader position overall.⁴⁹

Richard, increasingly frustrated, attempted to dissuade Conrad from pursuing independent diplomacy with Salah al-Din. One of Richard's most intriguing tactics was a proposed marriage alliance between his sister Joanne and al-Adil, Salah al-Din's brother.⁵⁰ Framed as a diplomatic bridge, the marriage

³⁹ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 285. Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*, 89. Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 224.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*, 89.

⁴¹ Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 226.

⁴² Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 98.

⁴³ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 275.

⁴⁴ David Nicolle, *The Third Crusade 1191: Richard the Lionheart, Saladin and the Struggle for Jerusalem*, 84. See also William S. Murrell, "Interpreters in Franco-Muslim Negotiations," *Crusades* 20, no. 1 (2021):134.

⁴⁵ Habashi (Trans.), *al-Harb al-Salibiyya al-Thalitha (Salah al-Din and Richard) Itinerarum Peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi*, vol. 2, 160-161.

⁴⁶ Nicolle, *The Third Crusade 1191: Richard the Lionheart, Saladin and the Struggle for Jerusalem*, 84.

⁴⁷ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 287.

⁴⁸ Habashi (Trans.), *al-Harb al-Salibiyya al-Thalitha (Salah al-Din and Richard) Itinerarum Peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi*, vol. 2, 142. 'Umran, *Tarikh al-Hurub al-Salibiyya 1095-1291*, 169.

⁴⁹ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 310.

⁵⁰ Kohler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East*, 263-264. Murrell, "Interpreters in Franco-Muslim Negotiations," 134.

would symbolise a joint rulership with Jerusalem as the capital.⁵¹ The proposed arrangement entailed Salah al-Din's withdrawal to Egypt, Richard's return to England, and the establishment of lasting peace.⁵²

In a remarkable display of political prudence, Salah al-Din accepted the proposal, fully aware it was a deceptive ploy.⁵³ His suspicions were validated when Richard withdrew the offer, claiming Joanne would not marry a Muslim unless he converted to Christianity.⁵⁴ Not only did this undermine the sincerity of Richard's diplomacy, but it also raised questions about the plausibility of the entire scheme. Why, having devised the plan, did Richard overlook his sister never accepting to marry a Muslim man?⁵⁵ Moreover, why did he request a three-month delay to seek papal approval from Rome when he had already declared her refusal?⁵⁶

Ultimately, the question of Conrad's fate casts a shadow over this episode. On 27 April 1192, Conrad was assassinated by al-Hashashin (the Assassins).⁵⁷ The precise instigator remains disputed by historians. Given the intensity of Richard and Conrad's rivalry, the theory that Richard orchestrated the assassination remains plausible, as Richard benefitted the most from his absence.⁵⁸ While some historians attribute the assassination to Salah al-Din,⁵⁹ the logic favours Richard, as Salah al-Din had every incentive to preserve Conrad's role in perpetuating Crusader discord. Richard, by contrast, stood to gain from his elimination.⁶⁰

Conclusion

This study has critically assessed the major events of the Third Crusade -most notably the Battle of Arsuf, the internal dissensions among Crusader factions, and the negotiations culminating in the Treaty of al-Ramla- in direct response to the polemical assertions advanced by Dr Yusuf Zaidan concerning Sultan Salah al-Din. The allegations of Zaidan -accusing the Sultan of cowardice and designating him "one of the most despicable figures in human history," while interpreting the Treaty of al-Ramla as the pinnacle of his failures- are shown to lack both historical substance and scholarly rigour.

Conversely, this study demonstrates that Salah al-Din embodied strategic foresight, diplomatic sophistication, and military acumen; qualities of a brave commander in both war and peace. His defeat at Arsuf did not precipitate a turn to peace out of weakness; rather, it formed part of a larger calculus aimed at forestalling further Crusader advances. Although Richard emerged victorious on the battlefield, he was consistently unable to impose his original terms, all of which Salah al-Din had staunchly resisted -before and after the military engagement.⁶¹ Moreover, Salah al-Din's skilful exploitation of intra-Crusader rivalries -particularly the rift between King Richard and Conrad of Montferrat- substantially reinforced his negotiating leverage.

His insistence on maintaining key conditions during peace negotiations, especially in relation to Jerusalem and 'Asqalan, marked a triumph of strategic diplomacy over military capitulation. Ultimately, Salah al-Din's political and military competence compelled King Richard to abandon his principal objectives,⁶² settling instead for nominal control over a small village (*Khirba*) in Palestine as the price

⁵¹ Thomas Asbridge, "Talking to the Enemy: the role and purpose of negotiations between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart during the Third Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 3 (2013): 282; Adnan A. Husain, Margaret Aziza Pappano, "The One Kingdom Solution?: Diplomacy, Marriage, and Sovereignty in the Third Crusade," in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, eds, John M. Ganim and Shayne A. Legassie (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 122.

⁵² Abu-Shama, *Mulakhas Kitab al-Rawdatiyn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn: Al-Nuwriyya wa al-Salahiyya*, 350. See also 'Ali 'Attia, *Tarikh al-Hurub al-Salibiyya* (al-Sharika al-'Arabiyya al-Mutahida Liltasweq wa al-Tawridat, 2010), 220-221. See also Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*, 88.

⁵³ 'Attia, *Tarikh al-Hurub al-Salibiyya*, 221.

⁵⁴ Asbridge, "Talking to the Enemy," 290.

⁵⁵ Rhoda Power, *Richard the Lionheart and the Third Crusade* (Putnam, 1931), 114.

⁵⁶ Asbridge, "Talking to the Enemy," 290.

⁵⁷ Abu-Shama, *Mulakhas Kitab al-Rawdatiyn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn: Al-Nuwriyya wa al-Salahiyya*, 352.

⁵⁸ Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*, 104-105. William S. Murrell, "Interpreters in Franco-Muslim Negotiations," *Crusades* 20, no. 1 (2021):147.

⁵⁹ Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 2, 2196. See also Ashraf Salih Sayyid, "Fan al-Tafawd al-Auyybi wa Dublumasiyyat al-Salibiyyin Khilal al-Hamla al-Salibiyya al-Thalitha ala al-Sharq," *Majalat 'Ulum al-Insan wa al-Mujtama'* 2, no.2 (2013):26-28.

⁶⁰ Miller, *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*, 104-105.

⁶¹ 'Awad, *Fi al-Sira' al-Islami al-Salibi: M'rakatu Arsuf 1191 CE/578 AH*, 34-35.

⁶² Ayumi Yanagiya, "Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad and al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya", in *Arabic Textual Sources for the Crusades*, ed, Alexander Mallet (Brill, 2024), 223; Da'kur, *al-Dawlah al-Ayyubiyya :Tarikhuha al-Siyasi wa al-Hadari*, 163. Kohler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East*, 264.

of peace with the Muslims.⁶³ The terms of the final agreement granted Christian pilgrims secure access to Jerusalem's sacred sites freely and safely, but it preserved Muslim sovereignty over the holy city in its entirety.⁶⁴ In sum, far from representing weakness or retreat, Salah al-Din's actions throughout this period exemplify resilient leadership and judicious pragmatism in the face of adversity. His enduring legacy stands not in contradiction to the events examined, but in informed continuity with them.

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⁶³ Ibn Shaddad, *Al-Nawadir al- Sultaniyya wa al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya: Sirat Salah al-Din*, 325-326; Khalid El-Awaisi, "The Continuation of The Colonialist Project From The Crusades to Zionism," *SDE Akademi*, 1, no. 3 (2021): 187.

⁶⁴ Abu-Shama, *Mulakhas Kitab al-Rawdatiyn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn: Al-Nuwriyya wa al-Salahiyya*, 360. Murrell, "Interpreters in Franco-Muslim Negotiations," 147.

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