

USAMA IBN
MUNQIDH

The Book of Contemplation
Islam and the Crusades

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
PAUL M. COBB

PENGUIN BOOKS

FOR LHM Concordiam in populo

PENGUIN CLASSICS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
(a division of Pearson Penguin Ireland Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (New Zealand), 100 Raffles Place, Singapore 048571
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa
Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
www.penguin.com

First published in Penguin Classics 2008

Copyright © Paul M. Cobb, 2008
All rights reserved

The moral right of the translator and editor has been asserted

Set in 10.25/12.25 pt Postscript Adobe Sabon
Typeset by Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

ISBN: 978-0-140-45513-7

www.greenpenguin.co.uk

Penguin Books is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. The book in your hands is made from paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.



pursuit. The Kurd was running right in front of him, howling and screaming at the top of his lungs. So I intercepted the Frank, who turned away from that Kurdish horseman and darted off my path, heading for some horsemen in a group of our men positioned beyond us along the river. I went in hot pursuit, struggling to make my charger catch up with him so I might thrust my spear into him. But I could not catch up. That Frank did not look back at me until he reached our horsemen, although I pursued him, his only desire being those assembled horsemen. My companions now attacked his charger and pinned him down with their spear-thrusts, but his comrades followed after him and they outnumbered us. So now the Frankish knight turned back, his charger on its last legs, and met his comrades and ordered them all to withdraw. And so he went back, accompanied by his comrades. That knight was none other than the son of Bohemond, the lord of Antioch. Being still a boy, his heart had become filled with terror. If he had just left his comrades behind, they would have routed us and chased us all the way back to town.

§ *Deeds of Women: Burayka, the Witch of Shayzar*

As all this was transpiring, an old female servant called Burayka, owned by one of our Kurdish comrades called 'Alī ibn Mahbub, was standing there in the midst of our horsemen on the bank of the river with a jar in her hand, filling it with water and giving it to our men to drink. Most of our comrades who were on that elevated spot, once they saw the Franks advancing in such numbers, rushed back towards the city. But that she-devil just stood there, unafraid of the fearsome events taking place.

I will now mention something concerning this Burayka, even though it's not the place for it, but conversation drifts from one topic to another. [123] Her master, 'Alī, was a pious man and never drank wine. One day he said to my father, 'By God, amīr, I do not consider it licit to subsist on an official stipend. I will not subsist on anything other than what Burayka brings in.'

So this idiot thinks that that illicit profit was more lawful than the stipend by which he was employed!²²¹

This servant-woman had a son named Nasr, an older man, and he, along with another man called Baqiya ibn al-Usayfir, used to act as the supervisor of some lands that belonged to my father (may God have mercy upon him). This Baqiya related the following to me:

One night, I went into town on my way to my house on some errand I had to do. As I approached the town, I could see between the tombstones some sort of shape by the light of the moon, a shape neither human nor beast. So I stopped and stood a way off, in fright. But then I said to myself, 'I'm Baqiya, am I not? Should I be afraid of some solitary thing?' So I put down my sword,²²² leather shield and javelin and crept ahead, inch by inch. As I did so, I could hear a voice coming from that shape and some vulgar singing. Once I had got close to it, I pounced on top of it, holding my dagger in my hand. I grabbed on to it and what should it be but Burayka, head uncovered, hair all wild, sitting astride a reed, neighing and traipsing about the tombs. 'Shame on you!' I said. 'What are you getting up to at this hour in such a place?' 'I am practising black magic,' she replied. And so I said to her, 'May God abominate you and your magic, and out of all the crafts, may He abominate this craft of yours!'

§ *The Bravery of Usama's Aunt*

The strength of that bitch's spirit reminds me of the events that happened in connection with our women during the battle between us and the Isma'ilis, even though Burayka and our women were hardly of the same sort.

[124] On that day, the leader of the group of Isma'ilis, 'Alwan ibn Harrar, and my cousin Shabib (may God have mercy upon him) encountered one another in the citadel. Shabib was the same age as me and we were born on the very same day, Sunday, 27 Jumada al-Akhira in the year 488 (4 July 1095), though he had not seen battle prior to that day, whereas I had become a master of it.

'Alwan wanted to put Shabib under his obligation, so he said

to him, 'Go back to your home, carry off whatever you can and get out of here. You won't be killed. We've already taken the castle.'

So Shabib returned to his house and said, 'If anyone has any valuable things, give them to me.' He said this to his aunt and his uncle's women. Every one of them gave him something.

As he was doing this, a figure suddenly entered the house wearing a mail hauberk and a helmet, with a sword and shield. When Shabib saw this figure, he felt certain of death. The figure threw off its helmet and behold! It was his aunt, the mother of his cousin Layth al-Dawla Yahya (may God have mercy upon him).

'What is it you are intending to do?' she asked him.

'I'm taking whatever I can carry and then I'll climb down from the castle on a rope and go and make my way in the world,' he replied.

'What a wicked thing you are doing! You would leave the daughters of your uncle and the rest of your household in the hands of these cotton-carders²²³ and just take off? What sort of life would you be living, brought to shame in the eyes of your family and fleeing from them? Get out there and fight for your family until you are killed in their midst! And may God do something with you, and do it again!' ²²⁴

And so she (may God have mercy upon her) prevented him from fleeing. After that, Shabib became one of our most noted horsemen.

§ *Women's Courage for the Sake of Honour:*

Usama's Mother

On that same day, my mother (may God have mercy upon her) distributed my swords and *kazaghand*-armour. She came to a sister of mine, an older woman, and said, 'Put on your shoes and covering.'

And so she got dressed and my mother took her to a balcony in my house that looked out over the river valley to the east, and made her sit [125] there while she took a seat at the entrance to the balcony.

God – glory be to Him – granted us victory over the enemy.

But when I came to my house in search of some of my weapons, I found nothing except the scabbards of the swords and the sacks for the *kazaghands*. So I asked, 'Mother, where are my weapons?'

'My son,' she replied, 'I gave the weapons to whoever would use them to fight for us. I didn't know if you were safe or not.'

I replied, 'And my sister? What is she doing here?'

'My son,' my mother replied, 'I made her sit here on the balcony while I took my seat just outside. That way, if I should see that the Barinis had reached us, I could push her off, throwing her down to the valley. For I would rather see her dead than see her a prisoner of peasants and wool-carders.'

I thanked her for that, and so did my sister, who prayed that God would reward my mother on her behalf. Their courage for the sake of honour is more intense than such courage among men.

§ *Women's Disdain for Danger*

On the same day, an old woman named Funun, who had been a servant-girl of my grandfather Sadid al-Mulk 'Ali (may God have mercy upon him), covered herself with her veil, took up a sword and went out into battle. And she kept at it until we were able to climb up and overpower the enemy. So no one can deny that noble women possess disdain for danger, courage for the sake of honour and sound judgment.

§ *The Wisdom of Women: Usama's Grandmother and the Lion*

At some other time, I went out on the hunt with my father (may God have mercy upon him). Now, my father was really passionate about hunting, and he had a collection of goshawks, peregrines, sakers, cheetahs and *zagharaya*-hounds²²⁵ unlike anything anyone else had. He used to ride out at the head of forty horsemen who included his sons and his *mamluks*, each one of them experienced in the hunt, knowledgeable about the chase. He had at Shayzar two preferred hunting-grounds: one day he might ride to the marshes and streams to the west of town to hunt francolin, waterfowl, hare, gazelle, and to kill

wild boar. On another day, he might ride to the hill south of town to hunt partridge and hare.

One day, when we were on the hill, the time came for the afternoon prayers. My father dismounted, so we all dismounted and prayed, each of us on our own. Suddenly, an attendant came galloping up and said, [126] 'There's a lion!' I therefore finished my prayers before my father (may God have mercy upon him), so that he couldn't prevent me from killing the lion. I mounted my horse with my spear by my side and charged at the lion. The lion faced me and let out a roar. My horse reared and my spear, because of its weight, fell out of my hand. The lion chased me for a good stretch, then turned back to the foot of the hill and stood there. It was one of the biggest lions I had ever seen, like the arch of a bridge, and ravenous. Every time we approached it, it would come down from the hill and chase after the horses, then return to its place. It never made a descent without leaving its mark on our comrades.

I saw it leap onto the haunches of the horse belonging to an attendant of my uncle called Bastakin Gharza, tearing the man's clothing and leggings with its claws. Then it returned to the hill. There was thus no way of getting at the lion until I climbed above it on the slope of the hill and then rushed my horse down upon it and thrust my spear at it, piercing it. I left the spear sticking in its side. The lion then rolled over onto the slope of the hill with the spear still in it. The lion died and the spear was broken. My father (may God have mercy upon him) was just standing there watching us; with him were the sons of his brother Sultan, who were keeping an eye on what happened, and they were just boys.

We carried off the lion and entered the town as night approached. In the dark of night, my grandmother on my father's side (may God have mercy upon them both) came to me, carrying a candle before her. She was a prodigiously old woman, nearly one hundred years of age. I had no doubt that she had come to congratulate me on my safety and to inform me of her joy at what I had done.

And so I met her and kissed her hand, but she said to me with annoyance and anger, 'My boy, what in the world brings

you to face these trials where you risk your life and your horse, you break your weapons and you simply add to the bad feelings and ill-will towards you in your uncle's heart?

'My lady,' I replied, 'I have only endangered myself today and on similar occasions to bring me closer to my uncle's heart.'

'No!' she said. 'By God, this does not bring you closer to him, but rather increases his estrangement from you and encourages his bad feelings and ill-will towards you.'

I learned then that she (may God have mercy upon her) was giving me wise counsel with these words and speaking the truth. By my life, these are indeed the mothers of men!

And, moreover, this old woman (may God have mercy upon her) was one of the most upright Muslims in her immaculate approach to religion, her piety, fasting and prayer. Once, I was present on the night of [127] Nisf Sha'ban²²⁶ while she prayed in the home of my father. My father (may God have mercy upon him) was one of the finest chanters of the Book of God (may He be exalted), and he led his mother in prayer. My father was concerned for her and said, 'Mother, if you take a seat, you can still pray from a seated position.'

'My son,' she replied, 'are there enough days left in my life for me to live to see another night like this one? No, by God, I will not sit.' By then my father had reached seventy years of age while she had approached one hundred (may God have mercy upon her).

§ A Courageous Woman Kills her Bandit Husband

I was a witness to one marvellous example of the courage that women have for the sake of honour. There was a man among the companions of Ibn Mula'ib called 'Ali 'Abd ibn Abi al-Rayda', whom God (may He be exalted) had endowed with eyesight like that of Zargā' al-Yamama.²²⁷ He used to go on raids with Ibn Mula'ib and could spot a caravan coming a full day's distance away.

A fellow member of his gang, called Salim al-'Ijazi, passed into the service of my father after Ibn Mula'ib was killed.²²⁸ He told me:

One day we went out on a raid and sent out 'Ali 'Abd ibn Abi al-Rayda' early in the morning to act as a lookout for us. He came back to us and said, 'Cheer up, everyone, for soon we'll have some plunder! There's a long caravan headed this way.' We looked, but we couldn't see a thing. So we said, 'We don't see a caravan or anything else.' 'By God,' he replied, 'I'm telling you I see a caravan! At the front there are two horses with black spots on their foreheads, shaking their manes.' We stayed hidden in our ambush until late afternoon. Then a caravan appeared with two horses at the front, with black spots on their foreheads. So we rushed out and captured the caravan.

Salim al-'Ijazi also told me the following tale:

One day we went out on a raid and 'Ali 'Abd ibn Abi al-Rayda' went up to act as a lookout for us. But he fell asleep, and before he knew it, a Turk from a detachment [128] of Turks took him captive. They asked him, 'What's your business?' 'I am a poor beggar,' he said, 'and I have rented my camel to a merchant in a caravan. Give me your hand in promise that you will return my camel to me and I will lead you to the caravan.' So the leader of the Turks gave him his hand. 'Ali walked along in front of them and led them to where we were, lying in ambush. So we rushed out at them and took them captive. As for 'Ali, he latched on to the Turk that was in front of him and took his horse and his gear. We carried off some nice plunder from them.

When Ibn Mula'ib was killed, that 'Ali 'Abd ibn Abi al-Rayda' passed into the service of Theophilos the Frank, lord of Kafartab. He used to go out on raids with the Franks against the Muslims and plunder them. He did as much harm to the Muslims as he could, seizing their wealth and shedding their blood, to the point of making the roads unsafe for travellers.

He had a wife at Kafartab, in the hands of the Franks, who objected to what he did and tried to forbid him from doing so, but he didn't stop. In the end, she sent for a relative of hers from some village – her brother, I think – to come to her and

she hid him in the house until nightfall. Then they ganged up on her husband 'Ali and killed him and ran off with all his belongings. In the morning, she was with us at Shayzar. She said, 'On behalf of the Muslims, I was angry because of what this infidel was doing to them.' Thus, she gave the people a respite from that devil. We took special consideration for her, given what she did. She stayed with us and was treated with great generosity and respect.

§ *A Frankish Woman Fights Back*

There was an amir in Egypt named Nada al-Sulayh,²²⁹ who had two scars on his face. One went from his right eyebrow up to his hairline, the other from his left eyebrow up to his hairline. I asked him about them and he told me:

When I was young, I used to go out on raids from Ascalon on foot. One day, I was on a raid on the road to Jerusalem hoping maybe to knock off some Frankish pilgrims. We came across a group of them. I encountered one of them, a man carrying a spear, with his woman behind him holding a small rough-ware jar with water in it. The man gave me this first spear-wound, at which point I hit him [129] and killed him. Then his wife advanced on me and struck me with that rough-ware jar in my face and made this other scar. Both of them left their mark on my face.

§ *Intrepid Women: A Shayzari Woman Captures Frankish Pilgrims*

Here is an example of the intrepid spirit of women. A group of Frankish pilgrims went on pilgrimage and, on their return, they passed through Rafaniya, which belonged to them at the time.²³⁰ They then left it, making for Apamea. But during the night they got lost and wound up at Shayzar, which at that time did not have any town-walls. So they entered the town, and they were about seven, maybe eight hundred people including men, women and children. But the army of Shayzar had already left town in the company of my uncles Sulṭan and Fakhr al-Din Shaif' (may God have mercy upon them both) to meet

two brides whom my uncles had married. They were sisters of the Banu Sufi family, originally of Aleppo. However, my father (may God have mercy upon him) was in the citadel. It happened that a man went outside the city on an errand during the night and came across a Frank there. So he came back, grabbed his sword and went out and killed him. Then he raised the alarm throughout the town. The populace rushed out and attacked the Franks, seizing what they could of their women, children, silver and beasts of burden.

In Shayzar, there was a woman called Nadra bint Buzurnat, the wife of one of our comrades. She went out with the rest of the populace and took a Frank captive and brought him back to her house. Then she went out and captured another one and brought him back to her house, then went and captured another. So three Frankish captives were collected at her house. After taking what suited her from their possessions, she went out and called for a group of her neighbours, who came and killed them.

During the night, my two uncles and the troops arrived. Now, some of the Franks had taken flight and so some of the men from Shayzar had pursued and killed them in the hinterland of the town. The horses of my uncles' army, [130] in the dark of the night, started stumbling over the dead bodies without knowing what they were stumbling over, until one of them dismounted and noticed the corpses in the darkness. That terrified our men, who thought that the town had been taken by surprise.

§ Franks do not Mix: From Queen-Mother to Shoemaker's Wife

That was a source of plunder that God (the Glorious, the Almighty) bestowed upon our people. A number of serving-girls were taken from the ranks of these prisoners and passed on to the house of my father (may God have mercy upon him). But the Franks (God curse them) are an accursed race that will not become accustomed to anyone not of their own race. My father spotted among them a lovely young serving-girl, so he said to the manager of his household,²³¹ 'Bring this one into the baths,

repair her clothes and get her ready for a journey.' And so she was prepared. My father then handed her over to a servant of his and packed her off to the amir Malik ibn Salim, the lord of Qal'at Ja'bar, who was a friend of his.

My father wrote a message to him, explaining, 'We have captured some plunder from the Franks. I send you a share of it herewith.' Malik found the girl very agreeable, and he was pleased with her, and took her for his very own. In time she bore him a son, named Badran. Malik made him his heir apparent, and then he came of age and his father died. Badran then took control of the town and its populace, though his mother was the real power. She hatched a plot with a group of people and let herself down from the castle by a rope. The group of people took her to Saruj,²³² which belonged at that time to the Franks. So: she married a Frankish shoemaker, while her son was the lord of Qal'at Ja'bar!

§ A Frank Converts to Islam, Temporarily

Among those Frankish captives who passed into my father's household was an old woman accompanied by her daughter – a young woman, beautifully formed – and a son who had come of age. The son converted to Islam and was quite a good Muslim, judging from what one saw of his praying and fasting. He learned the craft of working with marble from a stonecutter who used to [131] cut stone for my father's house. After staying for a long time in my father's household, my father gave him as wife a woman from a pious family and paid all the expenses required for his wedding and home. His wife bore him two sons and they grew well and their father was pleased with them.

When the boys were six or seven years old, their father, the attendant Ra'ul, took them and their mother and everything he had in his house and, the next day, joined the Franks at Apamea. There, he and his sons became Christian again after having been Muslim, despite all their praying and fasting. May God (may He be exalted) purify the world of these people!

§ *The 'Wonders' of the Frankish Race*²³

[132] Glory be to the Creator, the Maker! Indeed, when a person relates matters concerning the Franks, he *should* give glory to God and sanctify Him! For he will see them to be mere beasts possessing no other virtues but courage and fighting, just as beasts have only the virtues of strength and the ability to carry loads. I shall now relate something of their ways and the wonders of their intelligence.

§ *The Franks' Lack of Intelligence:* *An Invitation to Visit Europe*

In the army of King Fulk, son of Fulk, there was a respected Frankish knight who had come from their country just to go on pilgrimage and then return home. He grew to like my company and he became my constant companion, calling me 'my brother'. Between us there were ties of amity and sociability. When he resolved to take to the sea back to his country, he said to me:

'My brother, I am leaving for my country. I want you to send your son (my son, who was with me, was fourteen years old) with me to my country, where he can observe the knights and acquire reason and chivalry. When he returns, he will be like a truly rational man.'

And so there fell upon my ears words that would never come from a truly rational head! For even if my son were taken captive, his captivity would not be as long as any voyage he might take to the land of the Franks.

So I said, 'By your life, I was hoping for this very thing. But the only thing that has prevented me from doing so is the fact that his grandmother adores him and almost did not allow him to come here with me until she had exacted an oath from me that I would return him to her.'

'Your mother,' he asked, 'she is still alive?'

'Yes,' I replied.

'Then do not disobey her,' he said.

§ *The Marvels of Frankish Medicine*

Here is an example of the marvellous nature of their medicine. The lord of al-Munaytira²³⁴ wrote to my uncle to request that he send him a physician to treat some of his companions who were ill. So my uncle sent him a native Christian physician called [133] Thabit. He was barely gone ten days when he returned to Shayzar. So we said to him, 'My, you healed your patients so quickly!' He explained:

They brought before me a knight in whose leg an abscess had formed and a woman who was stricken with a dryness of humours.²³⁵ So I made a small poultice for the knight and the abscess opened up and he was healed. For the woman, I prescribed a special diet and increased the wetness of her humours. Then a Frankish physician came to them and said, 'This fellow don't know how to treat them.' He then said to the knight, 'Which would you like better: living with one leg or dying with both?' 'Living with one leg,' replied the knight. The physician then said, 'Bring me a strong knight and a sharp axe.' A knight appeared with an axe – indeed, I was just there – and the physician laid the leg of the patient on a block of wood and said to the knight with the axe, 'Strike his leg with the axe and cut it off with one blow.' So he struck him – I'm telling you I watched him do it – with one blow, but it didn't chop the leg all the way off. So he struck him a second time, but the marrow flowed out of the leg and he died instantly.

He then examined the woman and said, 'This woman, there is a demon inside her head that has possessed her. Shave off her hair.' So they shaved her head. The woman then returned to eating their usual diet – garlic and mustard. As a result, her dryness of humours increased. So the physician said, 'That demon has entered further into her head.' So he took a razor and made a cut in her head in the shape of a cross. He then peeled back the skin so that the skull was exposed and rubbed it with salt. The woman died instantaneously. So I asked them, 'Do you need anything else from me?' 'No,' they said. And so I left, having

learned about their medicine things I had never known before.

Now, I have observed in their medicine a case exactly the opposite of this. Their king²³⁶ named as treasurer one of their knights, called Bernard (may God curse him), one of the most accused and filthy Franks around. A horse kicked him in his leg and his lower leg started to fester and open up in fourteen different places. Every time these wounds [134] would close in one place, another would open somewhere else. I prayed that he would just perish. But then a Frankish physician came and removed all the ointments that were on him and had him washed with strong vinegar. The wounds closed up and he was well and up again, like the very devil.

Here is another wondrous example of their medicine. We had at Shayzar an artisan called Abu al-Fath, who had a son on whose neck scrofula sores had formed. Every time one would close in one place, another would open up in another place. Once Abu al-Fath went to Antioch on an errand and his son accompanied him. A Frankish man noticed him and asked him about the boy. 'He is my son,' Abu al-Fath said.

The Frank said to him, 'Do you swear to me by your religion that, if I prescribe for you some medicine that will cure your boy, you will not charge money from anyone else whom you yourself treat with it?'

Our man swore to that effect. The Frank then said, 'Take him some uncrushed leaves of glasswort, burn them, then soak the ashes in olive oil and strong vinegar. Treat him with this until it eats up the pustules in the affected area. Then take some fire-softened lead and soak it in butter. Then treat the boy with this and he will get well.'

So our man treated the boy as he was told and the boy got well. The wounds closed up and he returned to his previous state of health. I have myself treated people afflicted by this ailment with this remedy, and it was beneficial and removed all of their complaints.

§ *Newly Arrived Franks are the Roughest*

Anyone who is recently arrived from the Frankish lands is rougher in character than those who have become acclimated and have frequented the company of Muslims. Here is an instance of their rough character (may God abominate them!):

Whenever I went to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem, I would go in and make my way up to the al-Aqsa Mosque,²³⁷ beside which stood a small mosque that the Franks had converted into a church. When I went into the al-Aqsa Mosque – where the Templars, who are my friends, were – [135] they would clear out that little mosque so that I could pray in it. One day, I went into the little mosque, recited the opening formula 'God is great' and stood up in prayer. At this, one of the Franks rushed at me and grabbed me and turned my face towards the east, saying, 'Pray like this!'

A group of Templars hurried towards him, took hold of the Frank and took him away from me. I then returned to my prayers. The Frank, that very same one, took advantage of their inattention and returned, rushing upon me and turning my face to the east, saying, 'Pray like this!'

So the Templars came in again, grabbed him and threw him out. They apologized to me, saying, 'This man is a stranger, just arrived from the Frankish lands sometime in the past few days. He has never before seen anyone who did not pray towards the east.'

'I think I've prayed quite enough,' I said and left. I used to marvel at that devil, the change of his expression, the way he trembled and what he must have made of seeing someone praying towards Mecca.²³⁸

§ *When God was Young*

I saw one of the Franks come up to the amir Mu'in al-Din (may God have mercy upon him) while he was in the Dome of the Rock,²³⁹ and say, 'Would you like to see God when He was young?'

'Why yes,' Mu'in al-Din replied.

So this Frank walked in front of us until he brought us to an

icon of Mary and the Messiah (Peace be upon him) when he was a child, sitting in her lap. 'This is God when He was young,' he said.

May God be exalted far beyond what the infidels say!²⁴⁰

§ *Franks have no Honour or Propriety*

The Franks possess nothing in the way of regard for honour or propriety.²⁴¹ One of them might be walking along with his wife and run into another man. This other man might then take his wife to one side and chat with her, while the husband just stands there waiting for her to finish her conversation. And if she takes too long, he'll just leave her alone with her conversation partner and walk away!

[136] Here is an example that I myself witnessed. Whenever I went to Nablus, I used to stay at the home of a man called Mu'izz, whose home was the lodging-house for Muslims. The house had windows that opened onto the road and, across from it on the other side of the road, there was a house belonging to a Frankish man who sold wine for the merchants. He would take some wine in a bottle and go around advertising it, saying, 'So-and-So the merchant has just opened a cask of this wine. Whoever wishes to buy some can find it at such-and-such a place.' And the fee he charged for making that announcement was the wine in the bottle. So one day, he came back home and discovered a man in bed with his wife. The Frank said to the man, 'What business brings you here to my wife?'

'I got tired,' the man replied, 'so I came in to rest.'

'But how did you get into my bed?' asked the Frank.

'I found a bed that was all made up, so I went to sleep in it,' he replied.

'While my wife was sleeping there with you?' the Frank pursued.

'Well, it's her bed,' the man offered. 'Who am I to keep her out of it?'

'By the truth of my religion,' the Frank said, 'if you do this again, we'll have an argument, you and I!'

And that was all the disapproval he would muster and the extent of his sense of propriety!²⁴²

Here is another example. We had with us a bath-keeper called Salim, who was originally an inhabitant of Ma'arra,²⁴³ and who served in the bath-house of my father (may God have mercy upon him). He told me:

I once opened a bath-house in Ma'arra to earn my living. Once, one of their knights came in. Now, they don't take to people wearing a towel about their waist in the bath, so this knight stretched out his hand, pulled off my towel from my waist and threw it down. He looked at me – I had recently shaved my pubic hair – and said, 'Salim!' Then he moved in closer to me. He then stretched his hand over my groin, saying, 'Salim! Good! By the truth of my religion, do that to me too!'

He then lay down on his back: he had it thick as a beard down in that place! So I shaved him and he passed his hand over it and, finding it smooth to the touch, said, 'Salim, by the truth of your religion, do it to Madame!' – *madame* in their language means 'the lady',²⁴⁴ meaning his wife. He then told one of his attendants, 'Tell Madame to come here.'

The attendant went and brought her and showed her in. She lay down on her back and the knight said, 'Do her like you did me! So I shaved her [137] hair there as her husband stood watching me. He then thanked me and paid me my due for the service.'

Now, consider this great contradiction! They have no sense of propriety or honour, yet they have immense courage. Yet what is courage but a product of honour and disdain for ill repute?

Here is an example close to that one. I once went to the baths in the city of Tyre²⁴⁵ and took a seat in a secluded room there. While I was there, one of my attendants in the bath said to me, 'There are women here with us!' When I went outside, I sat down on the benches and, sure enough, the woman who was in the bath had come out and was standing with her father directly across from me, having put her garments on again. But I couldn't be sure if she was a woman. So I said to one of my companions, 'By God, go have a look at this one – is she a

woman?' What I meant was for him to go and ask about her. But instead he went – as I watched – and lifted her hem and pulled it up. At this, her father turned to me and explained, 'This is my daughter. Her mother died, and so she has no one who will wash her hair. I brought her into the bath with me so that I might wash her hair.'

'That's a kind thing you're doing,' I assured him. 'This will bring you heavenly reward.'

§ *Another Example of their Medicine*

Another example of their wondrous medicine was related to us by William de Bures,²⁴⁶ lord of Tiberias and a man with some standing among the Franks. It happened that he travelled with the amir Mu'in al-Din (may God have mercy upon him) from Acre to Tiberias, and I accompanied him. On the way, he related to us the following story:

In our land there was a highly esteemed knight who took ill and was on the point of death. We went to one of our notable priests and asked him, 'Will you come with us and have a look at Sir So-and-So?' 'Yes,' he replied and walked back with us. We were certain now that if only he would lay his hands upon him, he would recover. When the priest saw the knight he said, 'Bring me some wax.' So we brought him a bit of wax, which he softened and shaped like a knuckle-bone. Then he inserted one in each nostril and the knight died. [138] 'He's dead!' we remarked. 'Yes,' the priest replied. 'He was in great pain, so I closed up his nose so that he could die and find relief.'

§ *Two Old Women Race*

*Let this go and bring the conversation back to Harim.*²⁴⁷

And let us stop discussing their medical practices and move on to something else.²⁴⁸

I was present in Tiberias during one of their feast-days. The knights had gone out to practise fighting with spears, and two deceitful old women went out with them. They positioned the two women at one end of the practice-field and at the other

end they left a pig, which they had roasted and laid on a rock. They then made the two old women race one another, each one accompanied by a detachment of horsemen who cheered her on. At every step, the old women would fall down but then get up again as the audience laughed, until one of them overtook the other and took away the pig as her prize.

§ *Examples of Frankish Jurisprudence*

I was an eyewitness one day in Nablus when two men came forward to fight a duel. The reason behind it was that some Muslim bandits took one of the villages of Nablus by surprise, and one of the peasants there was accused of complicity. They said, 'He guided the bandits to the village!' So he fled.

But the king sent men to arrest the peasant's sons, so the man came back before the king and said, 'Grant me justice. I challenge to a duel the man who said that I guided the bandits to the village.'

The king said to the lord of the village, its fief-holder, 'Bring before me the man whom he has challenged.'

So the lord went off to his village, where a blacksmith lived, and took him, telling him, 'You will fight in a duel.' This was the fief-holder's way of making sure that none of his peasants [139] would be killed and his farming ruined as a result.

I saw that blacksmith. He was a strong young man, but lacking resolve: he would walk a bit, then sit down and order something to drink. Whereas the other man, who had demanded the duel, was an old man but strong-willed: he would shout taunts as if he had no fears about the duel. Then the *vicomte*²⁴⁹ came – he is the governor of the town – and gave each one of the duellists a staff and a shield and arranged the people around them in a circle.

The two men met. The old man would press the blacksmith back until he pushed him away as far as the circle of people, then he would return to the centre. They continued exchanging blows until the two of them stood there looking like pillars spattered with blood. The whole affair was going on too long and the *vicomte* began to urge them to hurry, saying, 'Be quick about it!'

The blacksmith benefited from the fact that he was used to swinging a hammer, but the old man was worn out. The blacksmith hit him and he collapsed, his staff falling underneath his back. The blacksmith then crouched on top of him and tried to stick his fingers in the old man's eyes, but couldn't do it because of all the blood. So he stood up and beat the man's head in with his staff until he had killed him. In a flash, they tied a rope round the old man's neck, dragged him off and strung him up. The blacksmith's lord now came and bestowed his own mantle upon him, let him mount behind him on his horse and rode away with him.

And that was but a taste of their jurisprudence and their legal procedure, may God curse them!

On one occasion, I went with the amir Mu'in al-Din (may God have mercy upon him) to Jerusalem, and we stopped at Nablus. While there, a blind man – a young man wearing fine clothes, a Muslim – came out to the amir with some fruit and asked him for permission to be admitted into his service in Damascus. The amir did so. I asked about him and I was told that his mother had been married to a Frank, whom she had killed. Her son used to attempt various ruses on their pilgrims, and he and his mother used to work together to kill them. They finally brought charges against him for that and made him subject to the legal procedure of the Franks, to wit:

They set up a huge cask and filled it with water and stretched a plank of wood across it. Then they bound the arms of the accused, tied a rope around his shoulders and threw him into the cask. If he were innocent, then he would sink in the water and they would then pull him up by that rope so he wouldn't die in the water; if he were guilty, then he would not sink in the water. That man tried [raʿ] eagerly to sink into the water when they threw him in, but he couldn't do it. So he had to submit to their judgment – may God curse them – and they did some work on his eyes.²⁵⁰

The man later arrived in Damascus, so the amir Mu'in al-Din (may God have mercy upon him) assigned him a stipend to meet all his needs and said to one of his attendants, 'Take him to Burhan al-Din ibn al-Balkhi'²⁵¹ (may God have mercy upon

him) and tell him to order someone to teach the Qur'an and some jurisprudence to this man.'

At this the blind man said, 'Victory and mastery be yours! This wasn't what I was thinking!'

'Then what were you thinking I would do?' asked the amir.

'That you would give me a horse, a mule and weapons, and make a horseman out of me!' the man answered.

The amir then said, 'I never thought that a blind man would join the ranks of our cavalry.'

§ Franks that are Acclimatized are Better

Among the Franks there are some who have become acclimatized and frequent the company of Muslims. They are much better than those recently arrived from their lands, but they are the exception and should not be considered representative.

Here is an example. I sent one of my men to Antioch on an errand. At the time, Chief Tadrus ibn al-Saff²⁵² was there, and his word had great influence in Antioch; there was a mutual bond of friendship between us. One day he said to my man, 'A Frankish friend of mine has invited me to his home. You should come along so you can observe their ways.' My man told me:

I went along with him and we came to the home of one of the old knights who came out in one of the first expeditions of the Franks. He was since removed from the stipend-registry and dismissed from service, but he had some property in Antioch off which he lived. He presented a very fine table, with food that was extremely clean and delicious. But seeing me holding back from eating, he said, 'Eat and be of good cheer! For I don't eat Frankish food: I have Egyptian cooking-women and never eat anything except what they cook. And pork never enters my house.' So I ate, though guardedly, and we left.

After passing through the market, a Frankish woman suddenly hung onto me while babbling at me in their language – I didn't understand what she was saying. Then a group of Franks began to gather around me and I was certain that I was going to perish. But suddenly, who

should turn up but that knight, who saw me and approached. He came and said to that woman, [141] 'What's the matter with you and this Muslim?'

'This man killed my brother 'Urs.²²³ This 'Urs was a knight in Apamea whom someone from the army of Hama had killed.

The knight shouted at her and said, 'This man is a *bourgeois*²³⁴ (i.e., a merchant), who neither fights nor attends battle.' And he yelled at the assembled crowd and they dispersed. He then took me by the hand and went away. Thus, the effect of that meal was my deliverance from death.

§ *Brave Men may Hold Unusual Fears*

[142] One of the wonders of the human heart is that a man may face certain death and embark upon every danger without his heart quailing from it, and yet he may take fright from something that even boys and women do not fear.

I have seen my uncle, Sultan (may God have mercy upon him) – who was one of the most courageous members of his household, having taken famous stands in battle and struck renowned spear-thrusts – suddenly, upon seeing a mouse, change the expression on his face, become overcome by shudders at the mere sight of it, and take himself away from the place where he saw it.

Among his attendants was a courageous fellow whose name was Sunduq, known for his bravery and audacity. He was so afraid of snakes that he would practically lose his mind. My father (may God have mercy upon him) said to him as he was standing before my uncle, 'Sunduq, you're a good man, known for your bravery. Aren't you ashamed to be so afraid of snakes?'

'My lord,' he replied, 'what's so surprising about that? In Homs there is a brave man, a hero's hero, who is scared to death of mice,' meaning his master.²⁵⁵

And so my uncle (may God have mercy upon him) cursed at him, 'May God abominate you, you dirty so-and-so!'

I also knew a *manluk* belonging to my father (may God have mercy upon him), called Lu'lu'.²⁵⁶ A good man, stalwart fellow.

One night I went out from Shayzar, taking with me a large number of mules and other beasts, which I hoped to use to carry some wood that I had cut up in the mountains for a water-wheel that belonged to me. We left the lands surrounding Shayzar, thinking that daybreak was approaching, but we arrived at a village called Dubays before even passing half the night.

So I said, 'Let's set up camp. We shouldn't go into the mountains at night.'

[143] Once we had dismounted and settled in, we heard the neighing of horses.

'The Franks!' we said. So we mounted up in the dark, and I told myself that I would put my spear through one of them and take his horse while they were trying to rustle the animals and capture the men who were tending them.

I said to Lu'lu' and three of the attendants, 'Go ahead and find out what all that neighing is about.'

They went on ahead at full gallop and met some others, lots of people in quite a crowd. Lu'lu' was the first to reach them and said, 'Let's hear it! Or else I'll kill you one and all' – he being an excellent archer.

But they recognized his voice and said, 'Chamberlain Lu'lu'?

'Yes,' he replied. And what do you know, but they were the army of Hamal! They were under the command of the amir Sayf al-Din Sawar²⁵⁷ (may God have mercy upon him), and had made a raid on the lands of the Franks and were on their way back home. Such was this man's audacity against that crowd. Yet if he should see a snake in his house, he would run out fleeing, saying to his wife, 'The snake's all yours!' And she would have to get up and kill it.

§ *The Devil is in the Details*

The warrior, even if he is lion-hearted, can be ruined and reduced to impotence by the most trifling impediment, as happened to me before Homs. I rode out, but my horse was killed and I was struck by fifty swords – all through the execution of the divine will and, on top of it, through the sloppiness of my groom in arranging the reins of my bridle. He attached the reins