

AN
ARAB-SYRIAN GENTLEMAN
AND WARRIOR

IN
THE PERIOD OF THE CRUSADES

MEMOIRS OF USĀMAH IBN-MUNQIDH
(KITĀB AL-I'TIBĀR)

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

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men and two hundred Turcoples,⁴² the latter the archers of the Franks. As soon as they saw our companions, they mounted their horses, charged our troops at full speed, routed them and pursued them for a long distance. A mameluke belonging to my father, Yāqūt al-Tawīl⁴³ by name, swerved and turned back on his pursuers — as my father and uncle (may Allah's mercy rest upon their souls!) were looking at him — and smote with his lance a horseman of theirs, who together with another horseman by his side were pursuing our comrades. Both horsemen and both horses fell down. This slave was one addicted to appropriating money for himself illicitly and to committing other wrong deeds, for one of which my father was going to discipline him. But every time my father proposed to discipline him, my uncle would say, "O my brother, by thy life, grant me his guilt, and forget not that lance thrust!" My father would then pardon him because of the intercession of his brother.

This aforementioned Ḥamadāt was a most interesting conversationalist. My father (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) related to me the following story:

One early morning as we were journeying on the way to Iṣpahān, I said to Ḥamadāt, "O Amīr Ḥamadāt, hast thou eaten anything today?" He replied, "Yes, amīr. I have eaten a sop."⁴⁴ I said to him, "We have been riding through the night, we did neither [31] alight nor strike a fire. How didst thou then get that sop?" "O amīr," he replied, "I have made it in my mouth. I would mix up the bread in my mouth with the water which I would drink on top of it and that would result in something like a sop."

Usāmah's father: A warrior. — My father (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) was greatly addicted to warfare. His body bore scars of terrible wounds. And withal he died on his own bed. One day he took part in a battle in full armor, wearing on his head a Moslem helmet with a nasal. Someone (in that period their

⁴² *turkubālī*, diacritical points lacking in the manuscript. The word is defined by Usāmah as "the archers of the Franks." So these must have been native mercenaries in the service of the Franks. Evidently they were the children of Turkish or Arab fathers and Greek mothers. See Prutz, *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 1883), pp. 186, 539. 'Imād-al-Dīn, *al-Fath al-Qussī*, ed. Landberg (Leyden, 1888), p. 425; du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores medivae et infimae Latinitatis* (Paris, 1736), vol. VI, col. 1349.

⁴³ "Yāqūt the tall."

⁴⁴ *tharidāh*, a piece of bread soaked in broth.

combats were generally with the Arabs) launched a javelin at him, which struck the nasal of the helmet. The nasal bent and made my father's nose bleed, but it caused him no harm. But if Allah (praise be to his name!) had decreed that the javelin should deviate from the helmet's nasal, then it would have killed him.

On another occasion he was hit with an arrow in his leg. In his slipper he had a dagger. The arrow struck the dagger and was broken on it, without even wounding him — thanks to the excellent protection of Allah (exalted is he!).

He (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) took part in a fight on Sunday, the twenty-ninth of Shawwāl, in the year 497,⁴⁵ against Sayf-al-Dawlah Khalaf ibn-Mulā'ib al-Ashhabī,⁴⁶ the lord of Afāmiyah, in the territory of Kafarṭāb. He put on his byrnie, but the attendant in his haste neglected to fasten its hook on the side. A pike hit him right in the place which the attendant had failed to cover up, just above his left breast, and issued from above his right breast. The causes of his safety were due to what Providence had seen fit to execute in the way of marvels, just as the infliction of the wound was in accordance with what Allah (worthy of admiration is he!) had decreed in the way of marvels.

On that same day my father (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) smote a cavalier with his lance, made his own horse shy a little to one side, bent his arm while holding the lance and withdrew the lance from the victim. Relating this story to me, he said:

I felt something biting my forearm. I took it to be caused by the heat from the vambrace of the byrnie. But my lance fell from my hand. I turned my arm to see, and all of a sudden realized that I had been pierced with a lance in my forearm, which weakened because of the cutting off of some of the nerves.

I was present with him (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) when Zayd the surgeon was dressing his wound and an attendant was standing behind his head. My father said, "O Zayd, extract this pebble from the wound." The surgeon made no reply. He repeated and said, "Seest thou not this pebble? Wilt thou not remove it from the wound?" Annoyed by his insistence, the surgeon said, "Where is the pebble? This is the end of a nerve that

⁴⁵ July 25, 1104

⁴⁶ Mentioned many times by ibn-Taghri-Birdi, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah*, ed. Popper (University of California Press, 1909-12), vol. II, pt. II, pp. 284, 287.

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has been cut off." In reality it was white as though it were one of the pebbles of the Euphrates.

My father received on that day another lance thrust. But Allah spared him until he died on his own bed (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) on Monday, the twelfth of Ramaḍān, in the year 531.⁴⁷

A Koran copier. — My father wrote a magnificent hand, which that lance thrust did not affect. But he used to copy nothing except the Koran. One day I asked him, "O my lord, how many full copies of the Koran hast thou made?" To this he replied, "Before long ye shall know." When he was on the point of death, he said, "In that box are different copies, each one of which contains the Koran in full. Place them [32] (referring to the copies) under my cheek in the grave." We counted them and they turned out to be forty-three copies, each containing the full text. One of the copies was a huge one which he wrote in gold and in which he included all the sciences of the Koran — its different readings, its obscure terms, its Arabic style and grammar, its abrogating and abrogated passages, its commentary, reasons for its revelation, and its jurisprudence. This copy, which he styled *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* [the great commentary], was written in black ink alternating with red and blue. Another copy he transcribed with letters of gold, but this had no commentary. The rest of the copies were written in black ink with the following in gold: the first words of the tenth and fifth parts of the book, the number of verses, the first word of the sūrahs, the titles of the sūrahs and the headings of the sections.⁴⁸

My book does not require the mention of this fact. But I did mention it in order to appeal to those who read my book to solicit Allah's mercy upon my father.

I shall now return to the subject which I was treating before.

An exemplary attendant of Usāmah's uncle. — In the course of that day,⁴⁹ an attendant who belonged to my paternal uncle, 'Izz-al-Dawlah abu-al-Murhaf Naṣr (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!), and whose name was Muwaffaq-al-Dawlah Sham'un, received a terrific blow from a lance to which he exposed himself

⁴⁷ May 30, 1137.

⁴⁸ The Koran is divided into 114 sūrahs and thirty sections, called *ajza'*, singular *juz'*. Three sections constitute one tenth and six sections one fifth of the book.

⁴⁹ July 25, 1104.