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Review: Ayyubid Jerusalem: The Holy City in Context, 1187–1250

Ayyubid Jerusalem: The Holy City in Context, 1187–1250 by Robert Hillenbrand; Sylvia Auld

Review by: Mick Dumper

Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Winter 2012), pp. 124-125

Published by: [University of California Press](http://www.ucpress.edu) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](http://www.instituteforpalstudies.org)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2012.XLI.2.124>

Accessed: 02/05/2012 15:24

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lie in the construction work of the Ayyubids, as one of the contributors to *Ayyubid Jerusalem*, Mahmoud Hawari, concludes, but it was also a period in which the centrality of Jerusalem in Islam was reestablished. The Kurdish general and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, Salah-ed Din, while basing himself in Egypt, made the liberation of Jerusalem a pious duty and the prime goal of his life's work. Reference to the contemporary revival of *jibadi* rhetoric around Jerusalem may be stretching too far the parallels that are suggested by this period, but it nevertheless provides a rich context for understanding the power of the city in the imaginations of believers, as a range of Muslim leaders from the Hashemites to Shaykh Ra'ed Salah of Umm al-Fahm will attest. As interesting as this dimension is, we should not overlook the solid postliberation work undertaken by Salah ed-Din and his successors to consolidate the Muslim presence in the city through building works, endowments (*waqfs*), and incentives for migration. Both geography and the competing claims of other faiths appear to make this a never-ending task in Jerusalem.

Ayyubid Jerusalem is the third in the impressive series of works on Jerusalem associated with Alistair Duncan at the World of Islam Festival Trust and its successor organization, the ALTajir Trust. The first two volumes, *Mamluk Jerusalem* and *Ottoman Jerusalem*, set high standards of research, exposition, and comprehensiveness, a standard which this volume has easily matched. Indeed, *Ayyubid Jerusalem* is under the direction of the same editorial team as *Ottoman Jerusalem*, Robert Hillenbrand and Sylvia Auld. In contrast to the first two books, which covered several centuries each, the Ayyubid period is brief and its legacy not so obviously evident. The editors addressed this challenge by going beyond the focus on architecture and monumental building, which was the chief characteristic of the previous books, to examine a wide range of artifacts. In addition, because of the paucity of material evidence, extrapolations are made through the study of the Bilad ash-Sham region and Egypt. For example, there are specific chapters on metalwork (Auld), wooden artifacts

UNCOVERING JERUSALEM

Ayyubid Jerusalem: The Holy City in Context, 1187–1250, edited by Robert Hillenbrand and Sylvia Auld. London: Altajir Trust, 2009. xiii +208 pages. Notes to p. 208. Bibliography to p. 226. Index to p. 230.

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The short sixty-three years of Ayyubid rule in Jerusalem between 1187 and 1250 left few architectural and monumental traces, yet its impact on the city has been quite remarkable. Not only did the foundations of Mamluk Jerusalem

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(Auld twice and Bloom), illustrated manuscripts, calligraphy, and inscriptions (Blair, Contadini, James), architecture (Burgoyne, Flood, Hawari, Jarrah, Korn, O'Kane), and pottery and mosaics (Korn, Milwright). Other chapters cover historiography, economics, science, religion, and Christian art.

The comprehensiveness of this approach leads inevitably to a degree of incoherence and duplication. The encyclopedic feel could have been overcome with greater cross-referencing and a stronger introductory section. The first two chapters—one on the historical background by Carol Hillenbrand and the other on the art of the Ayyubids by Robert Hillenbrand—lay out the context very well, but they do not bring the whole volume together sufficiently. A general introduction discussing the significance of the material of each of the contributions and relating it to the historical, social, and political context and to the urban developments of the city would have provided a useful and important overview. Some may also criticize the work for its overemphasis on relating the Ayyubid period to the preceding Crusader period and its primary focus on Islamic Jerusalem, neglecting the role of the Christian and Jewish communities in the city. The latter point is undoubtedly true, whereas the former needs to take into account the predominance of textual evidence from the Crusader period and the role this necessarily plays in reconstructing gaps in evidence of the Ayyubid period. Nevertheless, these caveats pale in the face of the wealth of scholarship the contributors offer. *Ayyubid Jerusalem* is a formidable piece of work and an invaluable resource for future scholars of this period.

As a scholar primarily of the contemporary period, I was particularly interested in Carole Hillenbrand's description of the Treaty of Jaffa in 1229. This was an agreement signed between Salah ed-Din's nephew, al-Kamil, and Frederic II of the Fifth Crusade. The details of the agreement are incomplete and inconsistent in the historical record. However, the main thrust of the treaty is discernible. Having already razed the walls of Jerusalem so that it had no military value, al-Kamil offered the city to

Frederic, with certain conditions, in exchange for the Crusaders limiting their acquisitions in Palestine to the city only and possibly (the record varies) a corridor to the coast. The conditions are significant: the Crusaders would not be allowed to rebuild the walls (some accounts also refer to a prohibition on any rebuilding of destroyed houses), all the surrounding area would be under a Muslim governor, the Haram ash-Sharif would remain in the hands of al-Kamil, and Muslims would be able to practice their rites unimpeded, including the Friday prayer.

It is clear that through this treaty, Frederic II achieved a bloodless conquest, and despite his apologists, al-Kamil was widely reviled in the Muslim world for surrendering the city. Nevertheless, he had secured his powerbase in Egypt and a defenceless city was easily reoccupied when the military and political situation were more propitious. Again, parallels with the current period should not be too quickly drawn, but one can see how with regard to Jerusalem, piety and pragmatism are not always antithetical but have often a more complex and intertwined relationship.