

TRAVELS THROUGH TIME

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Saladin (1187)

[Intro music]

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Peter Moore: Hello, you're listening to *Travels Through Time*, the podcast where we explore one year in history with an expert guest in three pivotal scenes. My name is Peter Moore and after a few episodes rooted in the 20th century, we're now making a bigger leap back into the past. Today, we're going to be talking about the Crusades, about the Holy City of Jerusalem and about the legendary Battle of Hattin. The year is 1187 and most of all, we're going to be talking about one of the most enduring heroes of the medieval era. He's a man that's revered both in the Muslim and Christian worlds right to this day and his name is Sultan Saladin. Our guest today, or guide if you like, will be telling us why that is the case. Jonathan Phillips has, perhaps, one of the liveliest job titles in the U.K. He's a professor of crusading history at Royal Holloway University, just outside London. He's written widely on all aspects of crusading history and this month, his new biography of Saladin is published. Dan Jones, writing in *The Sunday Times*, has called it 'vivid and judicious, punctuated by set pieces that charge along like battle scenes from Game of Thrones.' I met up with Jonathan in London just the other day and I started by asking him to explain what this crusading era was all about.

Welcome to *Travels Through Time*, Jonathan. Thanks for talking to us today about the Crusades.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Pleasure.

Peter Moore: A little bit about the crusading era to begin with. We're in the High Middle Ages and there are all sorts going on but I just think it would be interesting for us if we talked broadly about what's happening in the Near East at this time and why is it happening?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: The Muslim Near East at the end of the 11th century is an incredibly complicated region. You've got Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and various splinter groups of Shia Muslims. It's a very fractured landscape and there's no single power that's dominating the area. Mid-11th century, there have been a couple of big power groups. The Seljuk Turks had been driven westwards by climate change to take over what we'd say now was Iraq and Syria. The Fatimid Shia dynasty is there in Egypt. By the end of the 11th century, it's quite fragmented and very complicated indeed. It's a very polyglot population. You've got a lot of Eastern Christians living there. You've got a Jewish population as well and so it's a real melting pot.

Peter Moore: I suppose this is an area that people know in a way, in a hologram form perhaps, and the crusaders, in particular, are these incredibly iconic characters in the historical story. Why were they over there? What were they doing? What were they trying to achieve?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: The First Crusade was called by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in November 1095 and he, as the head of the Catholic Church, was trying to get the Western knights to stop fighting amongst themselves, to stop perpetrating violence in Western

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Europe and to go and do something that, as he saw it, was morally right which would be to regain Jerusalem, Christ's city, from the hands of the Muslims. He offered them a spiritual deal and said, 'If you go and carry on fighting, which you're patently rather good at, but you're doing it for this good cause, then you will receive a spiritual reward. You will avoid, therefore, the torments of hell that undoubtedly await you for your sinful lives.' He makes this appeal and tens of thousands of people respond to it. They're not all driven by religion or wholly by religion. Knights are also driven by a sense of honour and wanting to show off and achieve great deeds. A small number are looking for land, although most people came home afterwards. Some of them are going to go because the boss tells them to go, so you have to go along with your lord and master. I think it's always a variety of reasons why people go on crusade but religion and regaining Jerusalem, Christendom's Holy City, is the driving force.

Peter Moore: That's right at the heart of it. It's interesting how you talk about this confluence of factors and this idea of a common enemy which is maybe going to bind together the Western Europeans, in a way. Interesting to me, you mention climate change which is something people don't readily associate with this period of history but has there been some work going on about this recently that you're aware of?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes, there's an Israeli scholar called Ronnie Ellenblum. He was looking at narratives of the 11th century and he noticed that there was an awful lot of mentions of terrible winters and it's clear that the Turkic peoples in Central Asia were being driven westwards because their animals simply couldn't survive on the steppe. You've got these nomadic groups moving westward. They're ferocious warriors and they really will take over anybody in their path. This is all adding to the sense of flux and change in the Near East, from both sides, as it were.

Peter Moore: Okay, some chronological nuts and bolts. The First Crusade is in the 1090s.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: July 1099 is the conquest of Jerusalem by the First Crusade.

Peter Moore: That's the big moment when Jerusalem falls to the crusaders. We have the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which is established at this point, which some people will have heard about. This is really the contextual backstory to the time travel we're going to be doing today because throughout the 1100s, you have Jerusalem in the hands of the Christians. It's an incredibly iconic city, as you described it, and important in all sorts of ways in religious history, cultural history too and as a centre geographically. This is the time that the character you write about is born and is brought up into the world. Can you tell us who that is, please?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Saladin was a Kurd. He's born in Tikrit, which is up in modern-Iraq now on the Tigris river. He was born around 1137/38. His Kurdish family are warriors. They're great horsemen and great fighters and they're employed by the Syrian/Turkic warlords to do a lot of fighting for them. It's in the service of one of these great Syrian warlords, a man called Nur al-Din, that Saladin's family makes its advance up the ranks if you like. Nur al-Din is a man who is very important to Saladin's story and I think this, in some ways, is the great unsung hero of the counter-crusade of the Jihad. The Muslim world had not really responded effectively to the First Crusade. The idea of the Jihad had rather fallen into abeyance but under Nur al-Din, he initiates a programme of spiritual renewal. He is a very, very pious man and he builds a lot of madrasas. He dispenses justice in its proper form and gives the counter-crusade an intellectual and a military drive. When Saladin and his family move towards Damascus in the 1150s and '60s, that's the environment in which he's growing up in; a very powerful drive against the Westerners and the idea of throwing the Franks out of Jerusalem.

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Peter Moore: Jihad is a word that we're familiar with today because, of course, it's often in the news. You write about it really being two things because it's the personal aspect about you trying to fight the battles with yourself to be a better Muslim but then there's the external aspect as well, which is I think the thing that you're talking about, which is growing at this particular moment. Maybe it's crystallised in Jerusalem itself.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes, there is the greater Jihad which is, as you say, fighting against your inner demons for the good of your soul but the lesser Jihad, the Jihad in the world, under Nur al-Din, starts becoming focused on Jerusalem, the third most important city in Islam, the place where the prophet ascends to heaven on his night journey and many other important spiritual events and references connected with that city. So there is a focus on the need to recover that for Islam.

Peter Moore: He was a Kurd, which is interesting, but then you talk about him having Damascus as his central base and so there's obviously a bit of movement going on in his early life.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes, it's a very fluid society. His family are employed by Nur al-Din as these warriors and administrators. There is some time in Aleppo. Damascus, certainly, I think is the place that Saladin liked the most, almost certainly somewhere he regards as home in his later career and constantly tries to go back to and it's where he's buried as well. There is a lot of fluidity and another place that he ends up going to, in the 1160s, is to Egypt. That really where his story starts taking off because Egypt is a place of struggle between the Franks in Jerusalem and the Syrian Muslims and they're both out to take over this incredibly wealthy land that's ruled by a rather failing dynasty. Saladin is sent in with his uncle to try to conquer Egypt for the Syrian Muslims and this is something that they manage to achieve in early 1169.

Peter Moore: Brilliant. One last thing I think we should just dwell on for a moment before we dive in are the Franks. What are they? Where do they come from?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: The armies of the First Crusade came from all across Western Europe. So many regions were represented and all drawn to the idea of trying to recover Jerusalem for Christendom. In a sense, there's a sort of heritage of the Frankish empires of Charlemagne back in the 9th century and so there is a sort of sense of Frankish identity, that's very difficult to define, that they do share rather than listing a great range of regions that people came from. This word comes to be a catch-all to represent them. When they are in the Near East, it's a word that the Muslims and the people in the Near East pick up upon and they say the 'Farang'. Franks is a word that works for both sides as a catch-all.

Peter Moore: Now let's go for the heart of the matter and this is your year, which is one of the iconic ones in the Middle Ages surely, 1187. We're going to go through this year in three different scenes and you're going to tell us why it's important. Let's start off on the evening of 2nd July 1187. Where are we?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: We're in Galilee and we're in a tent with the king of Jerusalem, King Guy of Lusignan, the ruler of Jerusalem. He is deciding what he's going to do because his lands have been invaded by Saladin.

Peter Moore: At this point, Saladin is much more powerful. How old is he at this point?

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Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Saladin is around 50 years old at this time and what he's been doing over the last 12 or 13 years is drawing together a fragile coalition of the Muslim Near East to defeat the crusaders. At the same time, he's very obviously building his own dynastic empire. This is the great tension with Saladin. What motivates him? Is he a holy warrior out to recover Jerusalem for Islam or is he just a self-serving dynastic, ambitious man? The answer is, of course, both because they're not mutually exclusive at all. While he certainly usurps the dynasty of his former patron, Nur al-Din, and is pretty relentless in doing so, he's doing it under the banner of saying, 'I am the best man to lead Sunni Islam back into Jerusalem'. He's really wrapping it around himself and his family. After he's spent these 13 years pulling together a fragile coalition of the Muslim Near East on these terms, he has to deliver. You can't just keep saying, 'I'm the best man for it and you've got to come with me or I'll bully or pressure you into it,' you've got to deliver. While he's fought the Franks from time to time, been badly beaten by them once or twice, he really is in a position where he has to bring them to battle and deliver on his promises.

Peter Moore: So we're at this tent of the Franks and they know that Saladin's army has been growing and is close by. This is really a moment when they've got to make a decision of whether they're going to engage or not and the numbers involved are massive, aren't they?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: The Frankish army is about 20,000 and Saladin's is probably about 30-35,000 but the tension is, for the Franks, if they bring him to battle, of course, that's a risk. Battles are inherently dangerous *[laughter]* and it's a sort of all or nothing situation. What they did a few years in the past, when Saladin invaded, was to just shadow his army. You've got to watch your lands being devastated, your crops being burnt and your animals led away but you just stay out of reach of the punch. In the end, Saladin's army will just have to go home and harvest its own lands and it will break down. In a sense, if you could keep doing that again and again, the pressure that he's under to deliver and the challenge that he has to keep his fragile coalition together will, sooner or later, break him but you've got this tension. You are not being a good ruler for your people, in one way, if your lands are being trashed by the enemy.

Peter Moore: This king of Jerusalem, Guy, is in this tent and presumably, because the crusaders have been controlling this territory for 88 years at this point, they're in the position of power. I suppose they can back off as well, as much as they're aggravated by Saladin and his forces, but what happens on this day that makes it so interesting to you that you'd like to go back there to see it?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Guy summons his council and senior warriors and they know that Saladin has taken a castle called Tiberias. The lady of the castle is there and so there's a chivalric element to rescue the lady in distress and a pressure to save her as well. But his council of nobles, including her husband, it has to be said, decide that it really is the best thing not to engage Saladin. They're going to stay put; not least because where this tent is there are some great springs, the Springs of Sepphoria, and the army is well watered. We're in July and in peak summer in the Near East.

Peter Moore: Even with climate change and cold winters, this is still extremely hot, isn't it?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It is and so that is a big, big part of it. It's a big army of 20,000 men and lots of water where they are. They say, 'We can just shadow him and he'll have to go away in the end.' They make a decision and, as far as everybody is concerned, that's it and they all go off to bed. Very late at night, there is another knock at the tent and a man called Gérard de Ridefort, the Master of the Knights Templar, comes in and he says to the king, 'I'd like a word with you about that decision and I profoundly disagree with it.' This is a man who is a master of one of

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the great military orders; men dedicated to the defence of the Holy Land and sworn to defeat Islam. It's their job, if you like. It's their vocation and they're warrior monks. Gérard is a very, very bellicose man who has led a couple of other failed military engagements before and he's smarting over those a bit. He has one or two personal grudges that are part of the thing but he also says to Guy, 'Look, you've been king a few years. You were regent before that. Once, when you were regent, you didn't fight Saladin. You stayed out of reach and we all said it was a good thing and then you got deposed. You were thrown out of the regency. It's the same people telling you the same thing again. How stupid are you? Are you going to fall for this again?' All these things start pressurising Guy into thinking, 'Yeah, maybe I should fight Saladin.' Gérard is very clever and obviously presses a lot of buttons with him about his own worth as king and it works. Guy goes to bed with that decision. They wake up the following morning and the heralds announce, 'We're going to march'. People are astounded and they question what's going on and they just say, 'This is the king's decision.'

Peter Moore: So a massive logistical operation begins. I suppose if you were there, the scene would be, in itself, really quite impressive.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: I think so. If you think of 20,000 people on the Frankish side and over 30,000 on Saladin's side, the armies stretch out for miles, literally. You've got this sort of slow-moving train heading eastwards towards Tiberias and over this parched landscape. You've then got Saladin's men who are lightly armoured horsemen and much more mobile than the Franks, who have got heavy cavalry but a lot of footmen too. Saladin's men quickly swoop around to be on both sides of the Franks and their way of fighting really is to charge up on these light horses, fire arrows and wheel away back to safety.

Peter Moore: So they're picking away at the edges. I can't imagine crusading gear, in terms of clothing, is massively appropriate for that landscape either.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Perhaps when we think of crusading knights, we think of knights in shining armour. A lot of the Frankish army are going to be not very well trained, which is also part of the issue. They're people who have been dragged out of town to make up the numbers. With regard to their equipment, there may be some chainmail or a chainmail helmet or hat. You've got to keep it on if there are arrows pouring in at you the whole time and it's just going to be extremely draining moving across that landscape.

Peter Moore: If we were sat on a hill watching this procession go out, fateful as it turns out to be, the thing that I'd be looking out for, from your description, is the True Cross which I believe is being carried along by the Franks at the same time. Would you tell us a bit about the True Cross because it's such an interesting idea for me [*laughter*].

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Part of the great talisman for the Franks is the True Cross. After the crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, they discovered what they believed to be part of the cross upon which Christ was crucified, so a relic of inestimable value to the Christian faith. They mounted this piece of wood in a great, silver housing and it has its own shrine in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. When they're going to fight battles, they take it out and it's their talisman. They've taken it out a couple of dozen times by this point.

Peter Moore: It seems to work.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It always works, yes. Victory or at least not defeat. It's then processed back into Jerusalem with prayers of thanks afterwards. They have their great talisman with them

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and so as the army moves across, I suppose you also have to imagine this silver cross processing fairly near the middle of it, I'd have thought, for safety reasons.

Peter Moore: Let's whip through because I think people listening to this might have a bit of an idea about what's going to happen but what did happen over the next few days?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Over the two days of the Battle of Hattin, the Muslim troops picked away at the slow-moving Frankish army and wore them down. There are constant drums and trumpets as well and that's another part of the psychological warfare. They're making this very aggressive noise all the time, just to put their opponents on edge. We have the use of loud, bad music in modern warfare as a way of deterring opponents, irritating them or putting stress on them. After the first day, the Franks have to basically camp out on the plateau overnight and then, very cleverly, the Muslims set fire to some of the dried grass. The wind is blowing in the correct direction and so you have smoke blowing into the parched mouths and lungs of the Franks which makes it even more difficult for them. All the time, the Muslims have got lots of water coming up on camel back from the Sea of Galilee. They're really well-supplied and they even pour water out in front of the Franks just to show how much they've got.

Peter Moore: Wow!

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: You get to the second day and the Franks have still got a way to go. The pressure continues with the drums, the trumpets and the endless attacks and morale has really wilted by this point. They see this geological formation known as Horns of Hattin, which is an old volcano with the rim broken which makes the two horns. The remains of the army struggle up to this volcanic cup, I suppose, and there they decide to make their last stand. Some of the horsemen have disappeared and a group of them charge the Muslims who, very wisely, just parted and let them fly through. They're not going to turn around and come back again, so that was a clever way of taking the sting out of some of the Frank's best troops. In the end, they struggle up to the Horns of Hattin and there, there are a couple of big charges down the hill. They try and pick off Saladin himself, which is a good idea, but in the end, the king's tent falls and Saladin has won.

Peter Moore: It just sounds to me like an absolute tactical masterclass. The further they march, the more stupid the crusaders must really look.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes, the fact that their army is not very well trained, morale must have disintegrated pretty quickly. You're talking the mid to high 30s in terms of temperature and that's by late morning. You can just see the Muslims around you obviously looking excited, energetic and realising that victory is theirs. It was a fairly slow and painful death, if you see what I mean, for that army.

Peter Moore: Even in the Middle Ages or the High Middle Ages, does the Battle of Hattin really rank as one of the most significant?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It is one of the most significant battles of the Middle Ages, not least because the scale of the defeat is such that Saladin is then able to, over the next few months, run through the Frankish settlements and pick off the vast majority of towns, cities and castles because all the defenders were at the Battle of Hattin. There's almost nobody left to defend anywhere after that and so he really does absolutely remove the knighthood of the crusader states.

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Peter Moore: What happens to Guy?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: There is a very famous scene after the end of the battle. Saladin sets his own tent up and he has brought before him Guy of Lucignan and a man called Raynald of Châtillon, who is the walk-on baddie of the crusader states. He's a very unpleasant and aggressive man, who is deeply unpleasant to Christians as well as Muslims. He really was a nasty piece of work. He's a man who has upset Saladin greatly in the past by launching a raid that threatened Medina and that is a real challenge to Saladin. These two leading Franks are brought before Saladin and to Guy he hands a cup of iced julep, a sign of hospitality. Guy, of course, is incredibly thirsty and drinks most of it and then hands it to Raynald. Saladin interrupts and says, 'I did not give the cup to Raynald. I did not show him that hospitality.' He then decides what he's going to do with Raynald and almost ratcheting up the tension, he goes for a ride. He leaves the two Franks for a little bit and goes to have a think about what he's going to do next. He then comes back to Raynald and says, 'You could convert to Islam,' which, of course, he's not going to. Raynald declines and then Saladin, or his bodyguards, strike Raynald and kill him on the spot.

Peter Moore: Wow! This is high drama and I think brings to an end this first scene that we've been looking over which starts a few days earlier with the crusaders in a position of immense strength, you might say. If not immense strength, at least parity, I suppose in some ways. There's a quote here I love that you've got which is 'they were tormented by the heat of war and tortured by thirst. Not even an ant among them could have advanced nor could have escaped to safety. The arrows struck in them and transformed those who would seem like lions into hedgehogs.' I'm not quite sure who wrote that.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: That's one of Saladin's entourage, who are men of great learning. They're poets and they're his secretaries and administrators. One of the reasons I think he's so successful is that he surrounds himself with really high-quality people. He doesn't necessarily care about their background. 'If you're good, you come and work for me.' These men write incredibly ornate verse, and sometimes it has to be said rather overly ornate verse, but they certainly enjoy using words. They're very much part of Saladin's identity, also generating propaganda for him and are concerned with his image.

Peter Moore: This really enables him to go on to his main aim and us to go to our second scene. This is the Siege of Jerusalem in September. Saladin had had his heart set on Jerusalem for a long time, hadn't he?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes, after the Battle of Hattin, Saladin is able to defeat the Franks in many of their towns, castles and cities and move towards his real focus, the focus of Nur al-Din, his former patron, and his own Jihad; the idea of liberating Jerusalem for Islam. He assembles a very, very large army and he's got a lot of religious men with him as well, of course, anticipating the recovery of Jerusalem for the faith.

Peter Moore: With regard to Jerusalem, Simon Sebag Montefiore says that 'it's the house of one God, the capital of two peoples, the temple of three religions and the only city to exist twice - in heaven and on earth: the peerless grace of the terrestrial is as nothing to the glories of the celestial.' Nice quote and I couldn't avoid using it here but what was it like at this time? In a way, Jerusalem seems timeless, doesn't it? What were the major sites? What did it look like? How big was it?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It is timeless and at the walled city of Jerusalem, as Saladin was looking around, he wondered how to get into it. He went up on the Mount of Olives, which you

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can still do today. The sun rises behind the Mount of Olives and there's the wonderful sunlit panorama of the Old City, which still stands there. You can see skyscrapers in the background outside it but the heart of the Old City is there with the sacred Esplanade, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and with the Dome of the Rock. These incredibly important sites for Islam are there in front of you on that side of the city. It's also then a really dense warren of medieval streets. In the crusader era, there were a lot of churches and some of them were Catholic Latin churches and an awful lot of Eastern Christian churches too, like Greek Orthodox, Syriacs, Nestorians and Armenians. It was a very polyglot population of Christians, if you like, within the Old City. Still, you walk through there now and it's so atmospheric with the narrow streets, the buildings and many churches. It's a very intense place.

Peter Moore: When the crusaders took Jerusalem in 1099, it was an incredibly brutal event, wasn't it? There was all sorts of slaughter. There's a particular story about people standing in blood up to their ankles or calves. Is that correct from 1099?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It's a story that's put out after the First Crusade, which is writing back to Western Europe and in a sense, showing the level of success they've achieved. They've purified that city of Muslims and achieved this great victory on behalf of Christendom. That is, in a sense, literally a hype. It's not a literal fact that they were wading in blood up to their knees and it's a phrase that's used on all sorts of sides in different situations but it's a very, very powerful image of Christian slaughter. In 1099, there was, undoubtedly, a slaughter of the Muslim and the Jewish defenders who are in the city at the time.

Peter Moore: I mention that mostly because the Christians inside might expect some kind of hostile retribution from Saladin because they're really unprotected, aren't they? They haven't got any army which is going to come and save them at this point. If we're sat up there with Saladin on the Mount of Olives, which is a nice image I'll just cherish for a moment, he can do really what he likes, can't he? Is it difficult to take the city at this point?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Jerusalem has strong walls and the Citadel, the Tower of David, is quite a difficult place to get into and he moves away from that, quite quickly, down to the northeast corner. In some ways, he has got the opportunity to decide what to do with the defenders. He could put it to the sack, undoubtedly, and maybe some of his predecessors would have done that. I also suspect there is some pressure from some of his holy men to perhaps enact that as perhaps retribution or revenge for what happened in 1099 but there's a wider consideration in how he should deal with Jerusalem.

Peter Moore: Who's left in control of Jerusalem at this point? Who is the figurehead?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: The main figure is a man called Balian of Ibelin, who is a nobleman and he is the man who goes out to negotiate with Saladin. Fairly quickly, it's obvious Jerusalem is going to fall and so they enter into negotiations, which is what happens when medieval cities are about to fall. Balian, obviously, has a rather thin hand to play, shall we say. Saladin is suggesting that if the Christians don't surrender, then there will be a massacre and says, 'I will massacre the men and enslave the women.' Balian said, 'Okay, if you're going to play hard, so will I. Unless you give us good terms, this is what's going to happen. I do have several thousand Muslim prisoners and they will all be killed. The Dome of the Rock, which I know is important to you, will be shattered. We will break up your religious sites and because we know we're going to be killed, we're going to fight so hard that a lot of you are going to die in the process.' Saladin and his group take that thought away and realise that it's not a good thing to do. Do they want to be responsible, in some ways, for the death of a lot of Muslims, of their own people? Do many of

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them want to die? They certainly don't want the destruction of their holy places and so they agree to ransom the Christians inside the Holy City. In doing so, they're also, in effect, showing mercy because they could have massacred the Christians in there. Mercy is a form of power and this is something that Saladin is well aware of. Not always but he is frequently merciful because he's aware that it saves the struggle of the Muslims trying to get into the city in the first place. It is a sign of power and generosity that you can deliver people's lives and he's also aware that it is good reputationally. He's always keen to polish his reputation. So for a big range of reasons, he's happy to agree to this. One really quick signal of the effect of Saladin's mercy at Jerusalem, in 1187, was in 1204 when the armies of the Fourth Crusade captured and sacked the great Christian city of Constantinople. A Greek writer said, 'Look at you lot, Christians. You've massacred Christians in a Christian city. A couple of decades ago, Saladin, a Muslim, spared the Christian defenders. Shame on you.'

Peter Moore: I suppose this is the kind of stuff he would have been turning over in his head up on the Mount of Olives. You mention the religious significance of the Dome of the Rock. It might just be worth pointing that out now. Why was this such an important site for Muslims?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: The Dome of the Rock has, within it, a rock upon which the prophet began his ascent to heaven. There is the last footprint and it's housed in this gorgeous structure. You often see it on television today with the big gold dome. It's where TV correspondents tend to do their piece with that in the background, almost as a symbol of Jerusalem.

Peter Moore: Had this survived for the period of Frankish control?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes, it had. They turned it into a church and so it's got a lot of Frankish decoration in parts of it.

Peter Moore: The other thing you mention is the great cross. Is it on top of the Dome of the Rock that they had a great cross up there?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: There was a great cross on top of the Dome of the Rock. Often, when places fall, there is a symbolic moment, like the end of the Berlin Wall and perhaps that statue of Saddam Hussein toppling. When the Muslims get into Jerusalem, the great cross on top of the Dome of the Rock is toppled.

Peter Moore: Wow!

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: That really is the end of the Christian hold of Jerusalem.

Peter Moore: I think if we're on the Mount of Olives for your second scene, your third has to be a few days later when the cross comes tumbling down. This is the interesting thing here because it maybe takes some people by surprise as to the magnanimity which is shown and that's really the overriding - what shall we say? - quality of those days, isn't it?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Yes. When Saladin chooses to ransom the defenders, and he's going to get a lot of money to reward his own people, he decides he's not going to destroy the Holy Sepulchre, incidentally, which is another thing that was open to him. Again, he respects that and he realises that it's going to be counterproductive. Again, when Muslims took over the city back in the 7th century, that hadn't happened and so he looks back towards that for the precedent. He is very much aware of what he's doing.

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Peter Moore: Let's go to your third scene. The negotiations have taken place and the surrender has been agreed. There's generally a policy of magnanimity there in place and we get to 2nd October 1187 and were we there on that date, this really is the crowning moment of Saladin's career, isn't it? What's going on?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It is absolutely the moment that's going to put his name in history forever. This is the day that he formally enters Jerusalem. The negotiations, as you say, have completed and it's in Muslim hands, effectively. This is his formal entry into the city and it is carefully timed to coincide with the anniversary of the prophet's night journey. This is the sort of thing that gives his entry into the city an extra religious significance by making that date coincide. Saladin is very aware of the religious symbolism and he wants to be seen as having achieved this great victory for Islam. He's got divine approval for what he's done and it's very important to him to send that message out, not least because he has taken a bit of criticism over the previous 10-15 years for being out to build his own dynastic empire. While he has done that, he's been consistent in saying he's doing it for Islam and now he's got Jerusalem back, he can say, 'There you are. I have divine approval. You can't argue with this.' There are the first Friday prayers that are going to be held in the Al-Aqsa Mosque for 88 years and there's a competition as to who should deliver the sermon and again, that's wrapped up in a great sense of ceremony. Effectively, it has to be done as an open-air sermon because so many people want to listen to it. It really is a moment of triumph for him. His group around him, with their great writing skills, are churning out these missives across the Muslim Near East and telling people that their man has done it.

Peter Moore: This is hugely symbolic. In a way, we do have a very strong picture of him through these scenes and he comes across as an incredibly able leader, as the person who, first of all, is very good tactically, like drawing his opponents out into dangerous situations and dealing with them very vigorously there. You also get the sense of the negotiator which has all sorts of different aspects to it, like showing mercy, showing power, realising when you've got a strong hand and realising when a precedent should be respected. Finally, there's this sense of the leader having to show his own prestige. That's for sure. The big story we're telling today is how this one man changed notions of chivalry and leadership and I think that's really the heart of this story.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: In a sense, for Saladin's later reputation, particularly in the West, it's interesting that the moment he recovers Jerusalem, in one way, he's dealt Christianity the most savage blow possible. The pope is supposed to have died of a heart attack when he heard the news. Yet, in sparing the Christians in 1187, in contrast to what the Christians did to the Muslims in 1099, he's laid a real foundation stone for his reputation and for his esteem in Western Europe forever. I think the knights of Western Europe were always assimilating that and, in a sense, contrasting it with their own behaviour. The fall of Jerusalem will trigger the Third Crusade. He knows the moment he goes in there that the West will respond. Very few of them meet Saladin. Richard and Saladin never met. A lot of the dealings are with Saladin's brother, who we call Safadin. I sometimes wonder if the Western image is a bit of a blend of Saladin and Safadin together but they're certainly sharing the attributes of generosity, courtesy, almost competitive gift-giving. 'My gift is finer than yours.' 'No, mine is better than that.' They share a love of music, poetry and courtesy towards women, particularly female prisoners. Western Europe sees this behaviour and it's everything that it likes about its own knights. Knights want to act like that and so they see something that, rather than being this terrible enemy, is something that they can respect very, very quickly.

Peter Moore: You've got another quote here which says 'the king must be inclined to mercy in his rule for he has the power to do whatever he wishes. No one earns fame and good repute in the world for injustice and evil but rather for right conduct and mercy. He who is dominated by

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anger is like the demons but he who is merciful and shows forbearance resembles the prophets.' This is a completely contemporary quote at the time of the taking of Jerusalem. It suggests to me that it had an impact which was very quickly absorbed into the culture that was around then at the time. I suppose if we were talking about this as the sack of Jerusalem in 1187, it would be a very different story that we're talking about today, wouldn't it? The consequences probably may have been similar in some ways. There would still have been another crusade...

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Absolutely.

Peter Moore: ...to recapture what had happened but you do get, at the same time, the sense that something changed at that moment. Is that right?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Had Saladin massacred the defenders of Jerusalem in 1187, undoubtedly, his perception in the West would have been very, very different. In sparing the Christians in the Holy City, he laid a foundation stone that really could not be shaken. It's something that the knights of Western Europe will forever admire; that he had it in his power to kill those Christians and he showed mercy. In doing so, he's following some of the advice books that are around in the 11th and 12th century Near East but basically, mercy is a form of power and defined as such since classical times. Saladin is aware of the power of mercy, the propaganda value of mercy, the reputational value of mercy and the practical value of mercy because he saved himself a lot of trouble by making those decisions. But if he'd massacred the defenders in 1187, his reputation in the West, however he came across in the course of the Third Crusade, would nowhere near have the standing that it does.

Peter Moore: This moment here that we're talking about is October 2nd 1187. This is the highpoint for him, isn't it? This is Saladin at his best in a moment of glory.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It is his great achievement for his faith. He could do nothing more for it, in a sense, other than actually defend it because he will, inevitably, face the Third Crusade. I suppose having recovered Jerusalem [*laughter*], his next task is then to hold onto it because having triggered something that will be an enormous response from the West, he's going to then spend the remaining six years of his life, first of all, in a slightly waiting for the bomb to drop phase and knowing that Western Europe will come at him and then two or three years of incredibly tough, arduous fighting and holding onto his position in the Near East. I think it's fair to say, while the Third Crusade makes some holdings for the Christians on the coast, that in the end, they go away. If you're looking at Saladin just in the last few months of his life, he'd say, 'Okay, they've got some places on the coast back but I still have Jerusalem.'

Peter Moore: I think that's a really good place to leave the time travels because we've sat by the Sea of Galilee and watched the army assemble. We've sat on the Mount of Olives and watched the negotiations take place and so I think that is a pretty epic story. It's a really intriguing character at the heart of it. We now have a few supplementary questions which I'm going to spring on you first of all. I don't know if you've been warned about this but I'm going to ask you if you could bring one object back from this moment in history to today, is there anything particular you'd like to bring back in our time machine with you?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: I suppose I could say the True Cross but that's probably a bit above my pay station and so maybe I shouldn't say that.

Peter Moore: You could. You could have it in your office in Royal Holloway.

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Prof. Jonathan Phillips: I could.

Peter Moore: It might be a useful bargaining tool.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Is that going to fall into the changing history thing? What would I like? Let me think. If I could bring something back with me, it might be one or two of Saladin's poetry collections. I'd be intrigued to learn what he had in his possession and it would be interesting for me to be able to understand what it was that he had around him in terms of his entourage and the people near him. If it was a bit more selfish, he could give me one of his wonderful robes of honour because he's always dishing out robes of honour to people and these are wonderful silken objects. More selfishly, perhaps, I'd like one of them.

Peter Moore: That would do you good for the book tour, I suppose.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It will.

Peter Moore: You can tell us a bit more about the book now. *The Life and Legend of the Sultan Saladin* is your book and it's going to be published very, very soon. What have you tried to do in this book and why is it and how is it different, should I say, to the other books about Saladin that are already out there?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: What I tried to do is to describe Saladin's life to understand how he achieved what he achieved but also I wanted to follow his afterlife. I was in Damascus in 2009, just walking down the street and I saw an advert for *Saladin*, the ballet. Who can resist? I went in and watched it and it was a major event in the downtown Opera House in Damascus. It was a celebration of his achievements and it got me thinking, 'This is 2009. What a powerful memory that still is,' but I wanted to see how that memory had survived down the centuries. What twists and turns had it taken?

Peter Moore: How was the *Saladin* dance performance in Damascus? Would it be recommended?

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: It was a very interesting cultural event. I'm not sure I'm a convert to dance musicals or ballets but it really was a powerful, dynamic performance.

Peter Moore: There we go. I think he obviously, as a historical character, was incredibly influential and, as you say, retaking Jerusalem is one of these key events in the history of the Middle Ages. If anyone wants to explore this idea much more thoroughly, I'd recommend your book which is out right now and is full of interesting things; not just the history but, as we said, the legend as well. Thank you very much for talking to us today, Jonathan.

Prof. Jonathan Phillips: Thank you very much indeed.

Peter Moore: That was me talking with Jonathan Phillips about 1187, the Holy City of Jerusalem and most of all, Sultan Saladin, just the other day. Thank you for listening and I hope you enjoyed our conversation. If you do want to explore, in much more details, things that we were talking about like the battles, the personalities, the effect and this cult of personality has had on the Middle East in the thousand years or so since, I'd really recommend Jonathan's book. It's a wonderful one to explore and I really enjoyed reading it. If you've enjoyed the show, of course, we'd like you to subscribe so you get the first news of the next episode as soon as it becomes available. Our next episode is going to be out in a fortnight, as ever, and it's going to be with the

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literary historian Lucasta Miller, who's taking us back to the scene of a 19th-century murder or a bit of a literary cover-up she's exposed. That's really, really worth listening out for but from me and for now, that's it. Thank you very much again for listening and goodbye.

Paul Lay: Hello, I'm Paul Lay, the editor of *History Today*. On our website, you'll find articles, written by experts, relating the Jonathan's Phillips' travels. You can read Norman Housley on Saladin's triumph at the Battle of Hattin. Robert Irwin looks at how Islam saw the Christian invaders. While Jonathan Phillips himself offers a complete history of the Crusades. Links to all of these pieces can be found at www.historytoday.com/travels and there are many more articles on every aspect of the past in our monthly publication *History Today*, the world's leading serious history magazine.

[Sound of ticking clock]

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