A trip down the Red Sea with Reynald of Châtillon

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In the pages of the Islamic chronicles which tell of the deeds of the crusaders, one figure stands apart. A man who not only is said to have attacked pilgrim caravans in a time of truce and insulted Muhammad himself, but who also, it is reported, had the audacity, temerity, and insanity (or possible genius) to threaten the very heart of the Islamic world – the cities of Mecca and Medina, and the 'Islamic' Red Sea. This man was Reynald of Châtillon, lord of Oultrejourdain, erstwhile Prince of Antioch, and he is described, amongst other things, as "one of the most devilish of the Franks, and one of the most demonic, and he had the strongest hostility to the Muslims".[1] The raid on the Red Sea and purported attempts to attack Mecca and Medina are believed to be one of the main reasons why Reynald is so despised in the Arabic chronicles.[2] The intention of this article, therefore, is to examine the raid anew, using the Arabic material available, in order to try to contribute to an understanding of the raid, and to establish whether, indeed, Reynald even did try to attack the holy cities of Islam, and whether the criticism of him is justified.

Scholarly Approaches to the Raid

The Frankish raid into the Red Sea is one of the most extraordinary episodes in the history of the Crusades, and yet one of the most overlooked. In the last sixty years, there have been only three articles devoted to it[3] and a number of passages in more general works on the Crusades,[4] each of which has helped in the understanding of the event. However, in view of the significance of the raid, the amount of work that has been carried out is decidedly small, and this needs to be reversed.

Ideas about the raid itself have not deviated far from what is stated in the Arabic chronicles. The main suggestion is that at some point before the raid, Reynald developed a scheme

[1]Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi-l Tarikh,* ed. U. A. Tadmuri (Beirut, 2006), vol. IX, p. 452.

[2]C. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 344–345.

[3]See D. Newbold, 'The Crusaders in the Red Sea', in *Sudan Notes and Records* 26 (1945), pp. 13–27; G. Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid in the Red Sea in 578/1182-3', *The Journal of the American Research Center in Cairo*, 14 (1977), pp. 87–100; W. Facey, 'Crusaders in the Red Sea: Renaud de Chatillon's Raids of AD 1182–3', *People of the Red Sea: Proceedings of the Red Sea Project II*, (BAR International Series no. 1395, 2005), pp. 87–98.

[4]See, among others, B. Hamilton, 'The Elephant of Christ: Reynald of Chatillon', *Studies in Church History 15: Religious Motivation*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1978), pp. 97–108; C. Hillenbrand, 'The Imprisonment of Reynald of Chatillon', in *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic studies in honour of D.S. Richards*, ed. C.F. Robinson (Leiden, 2003), pp. 79–102; M.C. Lyons & D.E.P Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 157–158; and B. Hamilton, *The Leper King and his Heirs* (Cambridge, 2000), especially pp. 159–185.

JRAS, *Series 3*, 18, 2 (2008), pp. 141–153
doi:10.1017/S1356186307008024

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Printed in the United Kingdom

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186307008024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to attack the Islamic world's very heart – the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and more widely the Red Sea – caused by the bellicose personality he was believed to have possessed.[5] Hence the purpose of this article is to examine the episode further, particularly the aim of the raid, in order to gain an appreciation of the expedition itself, as well as the personality and motivation of Reynald.

The Personality of Reynald

In contrast to ideas about the raid itself, scholarly interpretations about Reynald have undergone a marked shift over the last hundred years. In the first biography of him, Schlumberger painted a "rather romanticized description", as Leiser puts it,[6] with little historical analysis to back up his view. This soon changed, and the opinion that Reynald was, at heart, little more than a buccaneer, trying to gain as much money and booty as possible, became accepted. Scholars such as Mayer and Runciman[7] regarded him as a real troublemaker for the Franks, and if this idea is taken to its logical conclusion, his actions may have even caused the loss of Jerusalem itself. This assessment is mostly based on the testimony of William of Tyre and his old French continuators, who were said to have had much to gain by criticising Reynald.[8] It held for several decades, but there has recently been a re-interpretation of Reynald's actions, and the assertion has been put forward that Reynald was a much more intelligent individual than had previously been thought.[9] According to this argument, his actions were designed not only as raids for booty, but also as strikes against military and economic targets that were designed to disrupt his enemies' power, possibly as part of a wider crusader strategy against Saladin. It is posited that this behaviour started after his release from the citadel of Aleppo in 1176. It is hoped that this article will help to test this theory about Reynald, as well as clarifying details about the raid itself.

Chronology of the Raid

I shall not attempt a detailed history of the passage of the raid, both because the sources do not lend themselves to a definitive narrative, and because other historians have given their opinions on how the raid may have proceeded.[10] Suffice it to say that sometime in January 1183, Reynald transported at least five warships in kit-form across the Negev desert from his territory of Oultrejourdain to the Red Sea, whereupon he assembled them and launched them onto the water. Two of these ships immediately began the successful siege of the fort

[5]Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 88, and M.W. Baldwin, *Raymond III of Tripoli and the Fall of Jerusalem, 1140–1187* (Princeton, 1936), pp. 61–62.

[6]Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 98, n. 3.

[7]H. E. Mayer, *The Crusades (Second Edition)*, tr. J. Gillingham (Oxford, 1972), pp. 114–115, and S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Hammondsworth, 1965), vol. II, pp. 436–437.

[8]P. W. Edbury and J.G. Rowe, *William of Tyre: Historian of the Latin East* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 17–18.

[9]See Hamilton, 'The Elephant of Christ', pp. 97–108; Hillenbrand, 'The Imprisonment of Reynald of Chatillon', pp. 79–102; and Hamilton, *The Leper King and his Heirs*, especially pp. 159–185.

[10]See, among others, Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', pp. 94–96; Facey, 'Crusaders in the Red Sea', pp. 92–94; and Hamilton, *The Leper King*, pp. 182–184.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186307008024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Ayla (modern Eilat),[11] which had been the possession of the crusaders until 1171, before besieging the nearby Isle de Graye. The others set sail down the Red Sea, plundering and pillaging as they went.[12] For around forty-five days they went unchallenged, gaining booty not only from pilgrim and merchant shipping, but also from attacks on coastal towns such as Aydhab.[13] They were eventually found by a Muslim naval response under the command of Husam al-Din Lu'lu', either at sea near land or on land at Rabigh, a traditional stopping point for travellers to Medina. Some of the Franks were captured with their boats, while others were taken on land, either trying to escape or heading for Medina to attack that city.[14] These men were said to have been captured when they were on the brink of entering it.[15] All were publicly executed in cities around the Islamic world at the orders of Saladin, who was determined to show a strong hand against such a threat.[16]

Pre-raid Preparations

Hillenbrand has recently suggested that Reynald's sixteen-year incarceration in Aleppo may have been the catalyst for an intense hatred for the Muslims, as it was they who had caused him great suffering,[17] and so the idea for this attack could have coalesced at this time. This is, however, not verifiable, as the information regarding his imprisonment is non-existent and based on supposition, as the author admits.[18] During his time in prison, Reynald may well have been planning a campaign of revenge against the Muslims, but he would not have known where he would be geographically located in the Latin East, even supposing he was to be released. Thus, the first time that an attack into the Red Sea could have presented itself in any meaningful way to Reynald was in 1176, when, by his marriage to Stephanie de Milly, he gained possession of the territory surrounding Kerak and Shawbak on the frontier with Syria and Egypt. Material preparations for the sea-borne attack took two years,[19] meaning that the idea must have first crystallised sometime before 1181 – in the four years between his possession of Oultrejourdain and this year.

The first mention of an attack into the Arabian Peninsula was, however, in 1181, when Reynald is reported to have attacked the town of Tayma, which is two hundred kilometres outside the limits of his territory[20] – six hundred and eighty kilometres south-east of Damascus – on the pilgrim and caravan route from Syria to Medina. There are several

[11]For a discussion of this fortress, see D. Pringle, 'The Castles of Ayla (Al-Aqaba) in the Crusader, Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods', in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras* IV, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 140, ed. U. Vermeulen and J. van Steenbergen (Leuven, 2005), pp. 333–353.

[12]Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'at al-Zaman*, ed. unidentified (Hyderabad, 1951), vol. VIII, part I, p. 369, Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi-l Tarikh,* p. 468, and Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, quoted in Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 89.

[13]Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. and tr. R. Broadhurst (London, 1952), p. 52; Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'at al-Zaman*, p. 369; and Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, quoted in Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 89.

[14]See the letter of the qadi al-Fadil to the Caliph, quoted in *ibid*., p. 90; Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'at al-Zaman*, p. 369; and Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi-l Tarikh,* p. 468.

[15]Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'at al-Zaman*, p. 369.

[16]Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, p. 52, claims to have been an eyewitness to the executions in Cairo.

[17]Hillenbrand, 'The Imprisonment of Reynald of Chatillon', pp. 95–101.

[18]*Ibid*., p. 95.

[19]Lyons and Jackson highlight the letter from al-Fadil to Saladin that reports that the preparations took two years, see Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, p. 185.

[20]Although Tayma is around two hundred kilometres from what is generally regarded as Reynald's territory, it is over four hundred and fifty kilometres from his fortress at Kerak.

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possible reasons for this action. Ibn al-Athir states that the final target of the raid was Medina itself, and that Tayma was simply a staging post on the way, but that Reynald's intentions were prevented by the intervention of Farrukhshah with the Damascene army.[21] Leiser takes this account on face value, and suggests that it was this experience which led Reynald to embark on a greater expedition down the Red Sea.[22] Facey has recently suggested that the raid on Tayma was part of a plundering expedition which would pay the considerable cost of the Red Sea raid, and that it may not have been directed against Tayma itself, but on a caravan travelling along the caravan route between the town and Syria, possibly not very far from Reynald's territory.[23] There are, however, problems with both of these assumptions. If, as Ibn al-Athir and Leiser suggest, Reynald was aiming to go to Medina in 1181, then why did he not? Although Farrukhshah was pursuing his forces, this would not mean that they would have to turn back from their target of Medina. It may even have made them more anxious to go on, as to turn back would be to engage in a potentially dangerous defeat. Ibn al-Athir was writing from hindsight, possibly taking the belief, current at the time that he was writing and transferring it back in time to this raid, that the Red Sea raid was designed to capture the body of Muhammad. Furthermore, the evidence demands that the Tayma raid was carried out after the Red Sea raid of 1183 had been planned, so cannot have been the reason for it.[24] Facey's argument that the raid was directed simply against a caravan is also problematic, as the chronicle of Ibn al-Athir states that it was an attack on the town itself. This could be a simple mistake by the Arab writer, and that it was indeed against a caravan, but elsewhere the chronicler does state that Reynald attacked caravans, and the idea that Ibn al-Athir was wrong here while correct elsewhere is unlikely. Instead, if Ibn al-Athir is correct, as he seems to be on other occasions, it was a raid which did penetrate as far as, or very close to, Tayma. Furthermore, if it was just a raid on a caravan, it would not have brought out the army from Damascus to stop it. Whatever the reason, the raid was important enough for an army to be sent out. This does make it more likely to have been the town of Tayma itself and the pilgrim routes rather than just a caravan.

In contrast to these ideas, the chronicle of Michael the Syrian[25] states that Reynald attacked a part of Arabia in order to distract Saladin from his aim of uniting Damascus and Aleppo,[26] which Hamilton links to Abu Shama's account of an attack on Tayma.[27] Had Saladin captured Aleppo, the Christians would have been faced with a single enemy all along their border. It was, therefore, vital for them to prevent this happening. Michael the Syrian even implies that it was a deliberate ploy designed by the Frankish hierarchy, and therefore not even Reynald's own idea. While this explanation is absent from William of Tyre, it is

[21] Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi-l Tarikh,* p. 452.
[22] Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 88.
[23] Facey, 'Crusaders in the Red Sea', p. 91.
[24] See above.
[25] Michael the Syrian was Patriarch of Antioch from 1165 until his death in 1199, and his chronicle relates events up until the death of Saladin in 1193, suggesting that, by the time of Reynald's raid, his writing was dealing with near-contemporary events. See M. Moosa, 'The Crusades: An Eastern Perspective, with Emphasis on Syriac Sources', *Muslim World* 93:2 (2003), pp. 249–289. The chronicle is found in Michael the Syrian, *The Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, 4 vols., ed. and tr. J.B. Chabot (Paris, 1899–1924).
[26] *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 366.
[27] Hamilton, 'The Elephant of Christ', p. 102.

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certainly plausible. What the Syrian chronicler describes is a very clever piece of military strategy intended to disrupt Saladin, which does square with the idea of Reynald as having a clear idea of how to fight the enemy, rather than just being a raider.

Thus, it was a plundering raid, but one with a purpose – to prevent Saladin from being able to carry out his Syrian schemes, for a time at least. It is, however, linked to the Red Sea raid, as it was carried out after the idea for this raid had occurred and before it happened; in other words, the Tayma raid happened in the middle of preparations for the Red Sea raid. The significance of this will be examined later.

Reynald's Military Activity

Both before and after the incursion into the Red Sea, Reynald was engaged in a number of raids against Muslim caravans and other Islamic targets. A number of reasons for these expeditions have been suggested. The most obvious of these is to gain booty, as this is the main reason given by a number of modern scholars.[28] Thus, they are interpreted as an extension of his previous raids against both Muslim and Christian targets when he was Prince of Antioch.[29]

Yet Hillenbrand's suggestion is that Reynald's imprisonment means that his operations could have been caused by simple revenge.[30] This is, unfortunately, impossible to test, as there were only Muslims in the territory surrounding his own; had he received his former territory of Antioch, this theory could be tested by examining Reynald's attitudes after his release to the Greeks and Armenians surrounding his land, to see if it differed markedly from those towards the Muslims. As it is, it remains a theory, with no information from the sources to either confirm or disprove it. It does, however, remain possible, and is suggested to be one of the main causes for the Red Sea raid.[31]

Finally, as has been noted above, one source seems to suggest at least one of Reynald's raids, possibly the Tayma attack, was part of a wider strategy to disrupt Saladin's economic and military strength. Michael the Syrian's chronicle states that a raid by Reynald into Saladin's territory was sanctioned by the Frankish leadership and was carried out for the specific purpose of preventing Saladin from gaining control over Aleppo, thereby uniting the whole of Syria against the crusaders.[32] This seems to have been part of a more general strategy to disrupt Muslim trade, and therefore economic power, and to humiliate Saladin. Although there is little other evidence in the sources for this, common sense dictates that this would have been a sensible policy, and Reynald's other raids could certainly have been caused by this policy. The threat to trade would have caused great financial deprivations to Syria and Egypt, leaving Saladin unable to raise as much money for his military operations, while as the military leader of the Muslim community in those areas, it was Saladin's personal obligation

[28]Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. II, pp. 436–437, and Baldwin, *Raymond III of Tripoli,* pp. 61–62.

[29]Reynald attacked the island of Cyprus, which was in Byzantine hands in the year 1156, and he raided Muslim territory in 1160 in a rather foolhardy action which led to his capture and sixteen-year imprisonment. See William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Brepols, 1986), vol. II, pp. 823–825 and 283–284; John Kinnamos, *The Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, ed. and tr. C. M. Brand (New York, 1976), p. 136; and *Armenia and the Crusades: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, ed. and tr. A. Doustorian (London, 1993), p. 272.

[30]Hillenbrand, 'The Imprisonment of Reynald of Chatillon', pp. 79–102.

[31]*Ibid.*, pp. 98–100.

[32]Michael the Syrian, *The Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, vol. III, p. 366.

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to protect fellow citizens of the *umma*, especially the pilgrims on the routes that ran close to Reynald's territory. The results can be seen by Saladin's reaction, as he had to arm caravans travelling through Reynald's territory:[33] the emir's failure to protect them fully must have been a blow to his personal prestige, especially during the early years of his reign when his authority was still not unchallenged.[34] Saladin's own biographer, Baha al-Din, who was either an eyewitness to the events that he described or very close, being the *qadi* of the sultan's army,[35] wrote that the reason given by Saladin for the death of Reynald after the battle of Hattin was purely his attack on a caravan earlier in the same year (1187).[36] While Baha al-Din claimed that his death came about because Reynald had broken a treaty by attacking a caravan, it has been shown that Reynald himself may have already believed the treaty was broken by the caravan being armed, so the argument for breaking the truce cannot have been the real reason, particularly as Saladin was responsible for ensuring his subjects obeyed the treaty. The biographer's reason for writing was to glorify Saladin's achievements, and the explanation for Reynald's execution – the legality of which in Islamic law is very tenuous – sits much better with the tone of the biography than simple revenge for humiliation. Logically, however, the humiliation that Saladin suffered must have been the main cause for his fury, as it undermined his power and authority.[37]

All these three theories do have some truth in them, as they are not mutually exclusive. The tactics of Reynald both before and after the Red Sea raid do seem to have been attempts to cause disruption to Muslim trade and military movement and so undermine Saladin's reputation, while this may well have been caused by his hatred of the Muslims from his imprisonment. Although Reynald did use the same tactics as he always had done in his Red Sea raid, this is surely simply down to his inability to change his ways after such a long time spent buccaneering before his incarceration.

The Purpose of the Raid

With this in mind, the exact purpose of the raid needs to be examined. The tendency of historians in the past has been to take the accounts in the Muslim sources at face value. These state that the sole purpose of the incursion was to attack Medina and possibly Mecca,[38] and some add that the crusaders wanted to dig up and remove Muhammad's body.[39] This article now evaluates the explanation posited in the Arabic chronicles, to gain an insight into the real reason for the attack.

[33] See Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi-l Tarikh,* p. 18, and Hamilton, 'The Elephant of Christ', pp. 106–107.

[34] For a general account of the early problems of Saladin, see Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, especially pp. 71–200.

[35] To illustrate how close Baha al-Din was to Saladin, he writes in *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, ed. and tr. D.S. Richards (Ashgate, 2002), p. 81, that "I joined him [Saladin] in obedience to his command, and when I was with him, he expressed his delight at my arrival and behaved very hospitably". Richards himself writes that Baha al-Din "was his [Saladin's] intimate and close confidant, being seldom absent for any length of time", p. 2.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[37] See M. Barber, 'Frontier Warfare in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: The Campaigns of Jacob's Ford, 1178–1179', in *The Crusades and their Sources: Essays Presented to B. Hamilton*, ed. J. France and W. Zajac (Ashgate, 1998), pp. 20–21.

[38] Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi-l Tarikh,* p. 468, and Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'at al-Zaman*, p. 369.

[39] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, p. 52.

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There are a number of reasons why the explanation suggested in the Arabic chronicles could be accurate. Firstly, it is the kind of operation that Reynald would have carried out. He had never been beyond breaking diplomatic conventions or causing chaos through his actions, especially before his imprisonment, best revealed by his raid on Cyprus in 1156, which caused great diplomatic problems for his overlord, the king of Jerusalem, and great rage to his other lord, the Byzantine emperor.[40] He would surely have regarded an attack on the twin cities as a possibility given their holy status within Islam. Furthermore, if Hillenbrand's thesis is correct, it was in fact precisely this reason that would have encouraged Reynald to go further than he had ever gone before, and to violate the ideological boundaries around Mecca and Medina.

Secondly, the assertion by Ibn Jubayr that the Franks wished to remove the body of Muhammad from Medina is also given as a reason why Reynald wanted to attack Medina.[41] Reaction to this assertion has been one of general acceptance amongst those historians who have commented on it. Leiser believes that this was one of the main aims of the raid and expresses surprise that it has not been commented on by others.[42] Facey asserts that the raid was directed primarily against Medina, and that the removal of the remains was "the main aim of the expedition".[43] Explanations for why Reynald would have wanted to remove Muhammad's body are threefold. Either it was that which is reported in the Arabic chronicles, that he wanted to remove the body of Muhammad and charge Muslims to view it at Kerak:[44] or it was an act of revenge for his incarceration, as Hillenbrand has suggested, carried out on one of the ultimate symbols of Islam; or it was to be removed as a bargaining chip that the crusaders could use in diplomatic missions with the Muslims.[45]

The final reason why Medina and possibly Mecca are believed to have been the targets is because of the humiliation that this would have caused to the Islamic leadership, especially Saladin himself. This is not mentioned in the Arabic sources, possibly because the target was not reached, and they wished to focus on the positive side of the episode – that the leadership had succeeded in their responsibility to protect the cities – and push the initial failure into the background. However, the embarrassment that would have been caused to Saladin would have been enormous, as he would have failed to protect the most important places on earth, and placed the precious remains inside at risk, thus undermining his own position.

There are, however, a number of problems with each of these arguments, and further issues that are not easily explained if the aim of the raid was Medina and Mecca. Firstly, the argument that the raid was typical of Reynald does not necessarily mean that it was what he actually set out to do. An attack on the Hijaz is plausible as something which Reynald would do; however, a general plundering raid on the Red Sea is even more likely, as it follows the general pattern of raiding against economic targets both before and after the 1182–3 raid. A direct attack on Mecca and Medina had no precedent or antecedent by Reynald, and the

[40] William of Tyre, *Chronicon*,, vol. II, pp. 823–825; John Kinnamos, *The Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, ed. and tr. C. M. Brand (New York, 1976), p. 136; J. Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades* (London, 2003), pp. 105–106.
[41] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, p. 52.
[42] Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 97.
[43] Facey, 'Crusaders in the Red Sea', p. 93.
[44] al-Maqrizi, *kitab al-mawa'idh wa'l i'tibar bi-dhikr al-khitat wa'l-athar*, (Bulaq, 1853), vol. II, pp. 85–86.
[45] Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 97.

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question has to be asked why not? The answer surely is simply that he did not contemplate such an attack himself.

Secondly, the argument that Reynald wanted to remove the body of Muhammad is not sound. It does not appear in the letters which al-Fadil (secretary and confidant of Saladin[46]) sent to the Caliph, nor in the writings of Imad al-Din, the two writers whose work provides the basis for all the other accounts. It does appear in the near-contemporary account of Ibn Jubayr, but its reliability can be questioned; it could be explained as the result of rumour and hearsay – a group of crusaders, captured near Medina; what else could they be doing except attempting to remove the body of Muhammad? The lack of first-hand information pointing to the deliberate attack is intensified by Reynald's own actions. As has been noted above, it seems that Reynald himself did not join the expedition, but stayed at Ayla. It is unlikely that a man such as Reynald would have risked losing the glory that would have been his – if he had captured Muhammad's body – to one of his knights.

Thirdly, while the argument for the humiliation of Saladin is correct, it does not mean that Reynald would have had to go to Medina and Mecca in order to inflict it. The Red Sea had been an Islamic sea, and the Muslims who lived around it felt safe there – as Leiser points out, no Europeans had infiltrated it in numbers since a Roman expedition in the first century B.C.[47] A raid by a group of troops from the anti-Islamic crusade would, in itself, be a great embarrassment for Saladin, by disrupting trade, threatening pilgrims, and proving a huge psychological blow for the entire Muslim world. While the humiliation of Saladin is certainly one of the reasons for the raid, it does not, therefore, have to have been effected by the relatively difficult attack on the holy cities themselves. Instead, a simple raiding expedition on the Red Sea more generally would have had much the same effect, admittedly to a lesser extent, to the disgrace suffered by Saladin.

There are also a number of other issues that are hard to reconcile with the position traditionally taken by historians. Firstly, what is surely the greatest problem is the dichotomy between the idea that Medina was the main target of the raid, and the fact that the crusaders spent around forty-five days in general plundering before finishing up on the shore near the city. This is even seen in the views of recent historians; Facey has written that he believes Medina to have been the main target of the crusaders,[48] yet he also does not deny that the crusaders went first to Aydhab, and plundered the port there and the shipping that they encountered on the way.[49] Aydhab itself is on the opposite side of the Red Sea from Medina, and slightly further south, so the crusader fleet moved past the ports of the Hijaz along the opposite coast, attacked Aydhab, then crossed the Red Sea, returned north and were found near Rabigh. These are not the actions of an operation whose chief objective was to capture Muhammad's body from Medina, and the possible explanation of the route as being caused by the difficult winds and currents in the Red Sea does not add up – it would not have been possible for the crusaders to go south down the African coast and not south down the Arabian, as the attack on Medina would have required. Furthermore, if the crusaders had

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 88, See also Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, pp. 56–57.
[47] Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 87.
[48] Facey, 'Crusaders in the Red Sea', p. 93.
[49] *Ibid.* He even posits that the crusaders landed at or near Yanbu, even further north of Medina, thus stretching the idea even further.

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managed to get into Medina and dig up Muhammad's body, there would have still been the more difficult task of getting the body back to crusader territory. This would have been close to impossible, as they would have had to evade or defeat the entire Red Sea fleet which would have been hunting them, so important was the body.

Thus, the idea that Reynald's plan was to go to Medina and dig up Muhammad's remains does not seem plausible. The ideas for the veracity of the argument do not stand up to examination, while there are several other arguments for why the initial aim cannot have been the Hijaz. As a consequence of this, the idea that the raid was just a plundering expedition must also be examined.

There are a number of reasons why the idea that the raid was plundering is plausible. As has been demonstrated above, raiding of this kind was typical of Reynald. Not only had he carried out the raid on Cyprus in 1156, Reynald also pillaged Muslim territory which led to his capture in 1160, and since his release he had been raiding Muslim caravans on a regular basis, a trend that continued after the Red Sea expedition. Furthermore, there does not seem to be a real strategy to these attacks in the sources, even though they did damage the interests of his enemies. It would also have caused great humiliation for Saladin, threatening as it did previously safe areas of the Islamic world.

With this argument, there are again several problems. The main one is that the sources for the raid all state that the cities of the Hijaz were its target and that it was more intelligent a raid than mere piracy. However, this can be explained by examining the nature of the sources themselves. As Leiser has pointed out, the main sources for the raid are Imad al-Din's writing, and letters written to the Caliph in Baghdad by the *qadi* al-Fadil.[50] Other sources that tell of the raid are all based on these first two writings, with slight variations. The original source for the raid for both Imad al-Din and al-Fadil was, however, the man who led the Muslim force against the crusaders, Husam al-Din Lu'lu'. This could be the explanation for why the Islamic sources are mistaken in their belief that the crusaders were intent on attacking Mecca and Medina; the source who gave them their information was a man who had plenty to gain by claiming that he was the one who prevented the Franks from desecrating the holy places. The likely veracity of this can be seen in how he is regarded in the writings of the times; in biographies and histories, he is praised highly for his actions – he gained much from saying that he prevented the crusaders attacking Medina and Mecca. That is not to assume, however, that the crusaders were nowhere near Medina when they were captured; it is reasonable to assume that they were. But the idea that it was part of Reynald's initial plan to attack Medina may not be correct. Instead, it may be that the crusaders merely happened to be near Medina at the time when they were caught by the Muslims, as it is reported they were,[51] and they fled onto land to escape, not knowing that they were near such an important site. From the Muslim perspective, why else would the crusaders have disembarked at that point, other than to attack the sacred site at Medina? In the final analysis, it comes down to believing a commander who could have gained great fame by his actions and thus so exaggerated what happened, or believing that the Muslims were simply mistaken,

[50]Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 88.
[51]Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'at al-Zaman*, p. 369.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186307008024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or that the crusaders actually did set off to attack the holy cities, despite the evidence to the contrary as detailed above.

Secondly, the capture of Ayla was an important part of the raid, and needs to be explained as part of the overall attack. In the circumstances, it is in fact clear why Reynald attacked Ayla. Firstly, it was a tactical encirclement to prevent word of the main attack getting to the Islamic leadership.[52] Secondly, it was on the strategically vital land route between Egypt and Syria – Reynald was causing enough trouble to Saladin with his possessions to the north of the Sinai; the addition of a base in the south would have caused greater problems, splitting Saladin's lands, especially as Reynald would have controlled the water supply.[53] Thirdly, it was also a conscious effort by Reynald to gain possession of a town that he may well have regarded as part of his inheritance. Reynald had, in the past, shown great reluctance to give up any territory that he regarded as his own,[54] and, as Ayla had been part of the territory he held until 1171, Reynald would certainly have regarded it as part of his rightful inheritance. Had the raid been a simple plundering expedition, Ayla would not have received the attention it did, so the raid must have been more than piracy.

Finally, the lack of evidence for a military strategy in the sources does not mean there was not one. The sources for the raid are all Islamic, and so do not comment on the reasons for the Franks' behaviour.[55] If there was a strategy, the sources do not know or care what it was. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that there was a strategy to limit Saladin's strength,[56] so it was much more than just plundering. There is no reason why he should change from his strategic attacks this one time to simple plundering and then return to them afterwards.

The final option is that the raid started off as a general pillaging raid, but at some point the leaders of the raid decided to attack Medina. This option does have plenty of credence to it. It would explain why the crusaders did not go immediately to Medina, but went to attack other places first; thereby it fits in with the general pattern of raiding before and after the raid, and allows Ayla to be captured as the main target. It would also explain why the Muslims believed that it was the target and why the crusaders were captured on the Hijazi coast, and it would have humiliated Saladin, whatever the outcome. It is this theory that is the most plausible.

Reynald's Role in the Raid

The role of Reynald in the raid is one that has been difficult to establish firmly. The nature of the problem is summed up by comparing two sentences in the account of al-Fadil. The first of these states that "the prince . . . embarked with his ships into the Red Sea leaving two ships below the fortress [Ayla],"[57] while the second states that "all of the ships of the enemy

[52]Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 95. It is difficult to provide definite proof of this due to the lack of evidence in the sources, but it does appear to be a cogent argument.

[53]Hamilton, *The Leper King*, pp. 180–181.

[54]In 1157, Reynald single-handedly ruined the chances of the crusaders to capture Shaizar. This was because he believed it was part of his sphere of influence, while the ruler-in-waiting, Thierry of Flanders, refused to pay him homage. Reynald refused to carry on his part in the siege unless his overlordship was recognised, and caused it to be abandoned. See William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, vol. II, p. 837.

[55]Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, pp. 9–10 and 32.

[56]See above.

[57]al-Fadil, quoted in Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 90.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186307008024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were taken and most of the fighters were killed. Some barely escaped by reaching land and hiding in the ravines, never to return".[58] The first of these makes it clear that Reynald was on one of the ships that were launched, therefore he led the raid into the Red Sea personally, while the second suggests that all the raiders were killed. These statements together imply that Reynald himself must have been among the dead. This, however, was demonstrably not the case, as Reynald lived for another four years and was killed after the battle of Hattin by Saladin himself. This leaves a number of possibilities, each of which will now be examined.

The first is that Reynald was in the vanguard of the raid throughout, and was part of the force which landed at Rabigh. This agrees with the assertion that Reynald did lead the raid, but the problem with it is that no-one is said to have escaped. For this option to have happened, it would mean that Reynald would have escaped from the Muslim forces without detection, before making his own way, either totally alone or with a small group of followers, back to his territory. This is, needless to say, highly unlikely. Although both Reynald's personality and the ability to speak Arabic that he is believed by some to have possessed[59] would have made it possible, for a group, or even an individual, to have made the two hundred-mile return trip north undetected, such an undertaking would have been difficult in the extreme. Of the three options, this does seem the least probable.

The second option is that Reynald simply stayed in one of his fortresses, while others led the raid. This, however, is unlikely in the extreme. All the sources do state that Reynald led the raid, and place the blame on him for the aggressive attack. If he had not personally led the raid, he surely would not have been blamed and subjected to such vitriol as he was. As well as this, it would be almost impossible for a man like Reynald to have sent out such an important raid without leading it himself – there is no evidence that he had ever done so before, and there is no evidence that he did so on this occasion. Furthermore, Reynald, who is one of the major figures in the history of William of Tyre at this time, disappears completely from the narrative from a few months after April 1182 until around the middle of 1183.[60] This means that in this period Reynald was most definitely out of the political scene of the crusader kingdoms, and thus his attention was elsewhere – southward, towards Ayla and the Red Sea.

The final option is that Reynald went with his men as far as Ayla, but was there just to oversee the recapture of that town. This idea fits with the blame that Reynald receives in the chronicles for carrying out the attack; had someone else led the attack, it would not have made sense for Reynald to have been blamed for the assault. It also explains the absence of Reynald from William of Tyre's chronicle, and is a continuation of the personal involvement in raids both before and after this one. It also explains how Reynald was able to escape the Muslim response; it would have been far easier for him to return to his strongholds from Ayla than from Medina, as it was now, all part of his territory. The main problem is that

[58]al-Fadil, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 91.

[59]R. Irwin, 'Islam and the Crusades, 1096–1699', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. J. Riley-Smith (Oxford, 1995), p. 235.

[60]Due to the lack of exact datings in William of Tyre's work, it is a matter of uncertainty as to the precise time Reynald was absent, but he is definitely absent for the period when the raid is said to have taken place.

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the letter of al-Fadil states that Reynald himself led the raid, leaving two ships behind.[61] The explanation for this may again come from the origin of the information that al-Fadil received; he seems to have got it from Husam al-Din Lu'lu', the man who led the counter-attack,[62] and it is very possible that this Muslim admiral wished to exaggerate the scale of his achievements by claiming that he defeated a raid led by the great Reynald himself, rather than by one of his underlings.

Therefore, although not provable beyond doubt, it is almost certain that Reynald did lead the expedition down to the port of Ayla. He did not, however, go any further, and instead stayed at Ayla and Isle de Graye while he sent the rest of the troops on into the Red Sea. The reason why the Arabic sources state that no-one escaped, both from Ayla and around Medina, is likely to have been a propaganda exercise to show the power of Saladin, especially as the information has come to us through the man who stopped the raid, and Saladin's own men Imad al-Din and al-Fadil.

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the sources. Firstly, the evidence for a deliberate attempt by Reynald to attack the holy cities of Islam is very tenuous. Although this claim occurs in all the Arabic sources, each of them received their information from one man, Husam al-Din Lu'lu', the same person who carried out the response to the crusaders' attack. His report that the crusaders tried to attack Medina and Mecca earned him much praise throughout the Islamic world, and so this may have been an attempt at self-promotion by the admiral, to some degree at least. While accepting the crusaders were somewhere in the vicinity of Medina, it does not follow that they were necessarily attempting to capture the city. The other actions of the crusaders during the raid – capturing Ayla, carrying out a general pillage, and not having Reynald himself as the leader of the operation – shows that their priority was not the Hijaz. It is possible that they decided, in the middle of the raid, to attack Medina, but it is almost certain that it was not one of the targets that Reynald himself originally wished to attack. Having spent sixteen years in a Muslim prison, he was also surely aware of the problems that such an attack would have brought on the crusader states had it been successful – the whole of the Islamic world would have been in outrage and most likely would have devoted all its energy to destroying the crusader states. He may have known, therefore, that it was not in his own interests to attack Medina, as it would have been likely to have brought about the destruction of that which he wished to defend.

Instead, this raid was part of a wider campaign against the Muslims in the Red Sea and its Arabian and African coasts that the crusaders had started, with Reynald as leader. The attack on Tayma in 1181 was a deliberate attempt to prevent Saladin from joining Aleppo to his territory, one which worked to an extent by delaying the event, and caravan raids were part of the same strategy. The crusaders were trying to create a diplomatically and militarily

[61] al-Fadil, quoted in Leiser, 'The Crusader Raid', p. 90.

[62] Although the sources do not confirm this, common sense suggests that this is where the information came from, as he was the most senior official who was an eyewitness, and had to report back to his superiors in Cairo, one of whom would have been al-Fadil.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186307008024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

uncomfortable environment for Saladin, in order to make it as difficult as possible for him to prosecute the *jihad* against them.

This means, therefore, that the idea of Reynald as nothing more than a selfish pirate has to be rejected. By taking part in a concerted campaign of this sort, and being the head of operations in the south of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, he not only showed great intelligence, but also proved that he could and did work with all the Frankish leaders, despite what has been assumed by historians in the past. Reynald had the interests of the Latin East foremost in his thinking, and a full re-evaluation of his life is necessary, to gain a full appreciation of this most fascinating individual.

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