



Saladin

Abdul Rahman Azzam

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Like Alexander or Caesar, the name of Saladin – the greatest figure of Islamic history – has a timeless quality. As famous today as he was when he drove the Crusaders out of Jerusalem, the real Saladin has dissolved into legend with each generation's retelling of his story. Through the ages he has made many numerous appearances in both classic and popular culture: Dante placed him in the first circle of Hell with the heroes of Troy and Rome while Rex Harrison played him as a cad in the film *King Richard and the Crusaders*. In Youssef Chahine's epic film *Saladin*, he emerged as a hero of Arab socialism, and he has even made an appearance in an episode of *Dr Who*. Even today, Saladin's historical influence continues with Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and Colonel Gaddafi all claiming to be his military and spiritual heir.

To understand the real Saladin, however, A. R. Azzam argues that we must place him within his historical setting amidst the 10th century Sunni Revival - the powerful and sweeping intellectual renaissance which would ultimately transform every field of Islamic thought. Making a compelling case against accepted orthodoxy, this ground-breaking biography contends that Saladin was not the brilliant military commander of popular imagination but that, in fact, his true greatness lay in his spiritual vision. An honest and guileless leader, Saladin baffled his enemies by refusing to play their political games and succeeded in uniting an army from all parts of the Muslim world without bloodshed. Yet despite being one of the most powerful men in Islam, Saladin died a pauper in 1193 without even enough money for straw to line his coffin.

The first major biography of Saladin for twenty years, and the first by a Muslim historian to appear in English, A. R. Azzam's timely and fascinating account is essential reading for anyone interested in the medieval Crusades, Islamic history and the origins of the modern Middle East.

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