

Nour-ud-Din Zangi :Rightful King and Courageous Mujahid

The glorious history of Islam is a great contribution to the human civilization. The righteous predecessors illuminated the world after a long period of darkness. They raised an insurmountable civilization and glory. They became the real bearers of the banner of Islam. They saved the Muslims from deviation and bewilderment, as they exerted all their effort to follow Almighty Allah's teachings. The earth was adorned with their light, and the heavens were embellished with the nobility of the martyrs among them, who were great examples of devotion and sincerity.

Allah is He Who raised the minaret of this true religion and exalted its rank by the hands of the righteous people and true believers. Such people were as sublime as the stars in the heaven and the moon on a dark night. Nour-ud-Din Mahmoud Zangi was one of those ever-shining stars.

Under his rule, a new great phase of jihad started in the Levant. He had one goal: uniting Muslims and liberating their occupied lands. To this end, he initiated an Islamic renaissance that stressed the need for an "Islamic life."

He restored the affairs of Muslims to the right track by means of his justice, diligence, and staidness. He succeeded in bringing the light of Islam into many territories and left no stone unturned for the sake of uniting Muslims. He elevated them in all aspects of life within an integrated Islamic pattern to regain the Islamic glory and expel the unjust occupation of the Crusaders.

Birth and Origin

Nour-ud-Din Mahmoud Zangi was born in AH 511 (1118 CE). His grandfather Aq Sunqur Al-Hajib ruled Aleppo and other places in the Levant; his father, Zangi, who was brought up in Iraq, ruled Mosul and the Levant. He conquered Edessa, Al-Ma` arrah, Kafr Tab, and many other cities to deliver them from the hands of disbelievers.

When Zangi passed away, Nour-ud-Din succeeded him as king in AH 541 (1146 CE). Nour-ud-Din Mahmoud Zangi (also known as Ibn Al-Qasim) was born 20 years after the fall of Jerusalem in the hands of the Crusaders. He was tall, good-looking, and dark-skinned and had a light beard.

His Piety and Morals

He was a good calligrapher, a scholar of religion, and a follower of the Prophet's [Sunnah](#). He was persistent in performing congregational Prayers, excellent in reciting the Glorious Qur'an, incorruptible, and keen on doing [good deeds](#). At nightfall, he would perform `Isha' Prayer and sleep for a while. Then, he would get up in the middle of the night, perform ablution, and pray until dawn.

A provident king, he used to seek lawful means for food and clothes. He never wore any unlawful garment, like silk, or put any [gold](#) jewelry. He was never heard uttering obscenities, whether he was satisfied or angry. He was keen on hearing any word uttered for the sake of Almighty Allah or any advice compatible with the pure Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

In spite of the vastness of his kingdom and treasury, he never ate or drank from what he owned from his share of the booty or the money appointed for the public good of Muslims until he brought the jurists and asked for their religious advice and acted accordingly. He never touched the gifts he received from the kings of other nations. Rather, he would send them to the House of Treasury for the reconstruction of old mosques.

He was famous for his sound, erudite knowledge. He was well-versed in the Hanafi school of fiqh and was licensed to relate the Prophet's hadiths. He wrote a book on the concept of jihad. Though lenient and merciful, this sedate person, Nour-ud-Din, was also gifted with a great deal of charisma and an awe-inspiring personality.

Full of humbleness, he forbade the preachers from making du`aa' for him during their sermons, using his great titles. He used to bring honest men from every place and ask them about the needy among their people. He enjoined service for all regardless of social status.

Prince Baha'-ud-Din `Ali ibn As-Sukkari, one of the closest friends of Nour-ud-Din, narrated, "One day, I was with him [Nour-ud-Din] in the battlefield in Edessa. The sun was behind us; whenever we marched forward, our shadows appeared in front of us, and when we came back, our shadows were behind us; then he raced his horse while looking back and said to me, 'Do you know why I am racing my horse and looking back?' I said, 'No.' He replied, 'This situation is like our worldly life: It escapes from those who seek it and seeks those who escape from it.'"

He was so ascetic that his expenses were not different from those of the poorest and neediest of his subordinates. When his wife complained of the hardships of life, he called her in and gave her three shops that he owned in Homs and told her, "That is all what I have. Do not expect me to lay a finger on the money of the Muslims I am entrusted with; I fear the wrath of Allah."

Courageous Mujahid

His courage and wisdom were incomparable. At times of war, he was the most courageous and steadfast. Moreover, his tactics were unique, and he was exceptionally keen to enquire about the affairs of his troops. In a word, he was a role model in this field.

He conquered Aleppo and many other cities, including the Egyptian cities that were about to be completely invaded by the Franks. He captured some Frankish princes and defeated the forces of the Romans and the Franks in a place called Harim (a fortress in Aleppo). Furthermore, he managed to control many villages in Antioch (modern-day Antakya, Turkey).

Ibn Al-Athir, the Arab historian, said:

I have heard many people say that they had never seen a horseman better than him. He was the best polo player of his time; he had the ability to hit the ball, make his horse run, pick up the ball, and throw it again to the farthest point of the playground.

He would say, “If we leave the horses in their stalls, they will not be able to race, turn smoothly, or obey the horsemen in the battlefield. I swear to Allah, that is what made me play polo.”

It is rare to find a person who plays games for the sake of Allah. This is a clear indication that he did not do anything aimlessly; this, indeed, is the merit of great rulers.

Ibn Al-Athir added:

Even his enemies used to say, “Ibn Al-Qasim [Nour-ud-Din] is close to Allah. He did not win the battles because of the huge numbers of soldiers and warriors but because of his supplication and Prayer at night. He used to pray at night and raise his hands high supplicating Allah. Thus, Allah answers him and gives him whatever he asks.”

Nour-ud-Din was a strategist who used his skill and military tactics, particularly to defeat the Franks and conquer most of their lands. He also built a lot of watchtowers in the territories bordering the lands of the Franks. To protect the Muslims as much as he could, he sent efficient soldiers with carrier pigeons that would carry warnings to the homeland if the soldiers saw the enemy. This would give the people a chance to take defensive action.

He dealt with his soldiers in an exemplary manner. The property of a dead soldier was given to his son. If the son was mature enough, he would be allowed to take it over. Yet, if the son was still too young to take proper care of the property, Nour-ud-Din would appoint a wise man to be responsible for the property until the son grew mature and wise enough to take it over. This encouraged the soldiers and motivated them to fight steadfastly, for they were sure that the lands were theirs and would be their sons' afterward.

Defender of Sharia and Sunnah

Nour-ud-Din built an institute for teaching Hadith in Damascus and allotted much money to it and to those who worked there. To the best of our knowledge, he was the first ruler to build an institute for Hadith.

In Aleppo, he supported all the attempts to apply the Prophetic sunnah concerning the [Adhan](#) (call to Prayer) and devoured the evil plots and discord of the dissenters. He established schools and charities and spread justice. In Egypt, he revived the Sunnah of the Prophet and stopped all bid`ah (deviations) in the religious life.

He was an extraordinary example in adhering to the teachings of Islam. He would never let anyone tamper with the authentic principles of religion. If anyone dared to commit any illegal act concerning religion, Nour-ud-Din would justly punish him or her. He was decisive in this respect. He used to say, "We keep the roads safe from the thieves and robbers, who are less harmful, so will we not preserve the religion and secure it? It is most worthy of safeguarding."

He built many mosques and set an endowment apart for the scholars and reciters of Qur'an. Indeed, this act was unprecedented. He allocated a great fortune for the endowments.

Nour-ud-Din banned drinking and selling of wine all over the Islamic state. He was quoted to have said, “Allah, Glory be to Him, created people, and He knows what is best for them; He enacted a law that is for their benefit. People’s welfare can be perfectly achieved by adopting this Islamic law. If there were more benefit in something other than the Islamic law, Allah would have prescribed it. Therefore, we are in no need of any other law.”

His most favored company was restricted to religious scholars whom he used to hold in a lofty position. Even the princes used to envy those scholars. If one of the attendants criticized any of the scholars, he would reproach him or her, saying, “And who is infallible? I think that the perfect person is the one whose sins can be counted.”

His Justice

Nour-ud-Din was the first ruler to build a court of justice. He used to attend its sessions four or five days a week to investigate the people’s problems and sort them out. He used to bring only scholars and jurists with him. He did not bring guards so that any person — weak or strong, poor or rich — could reach him at any time. He would speak mildly to all of them.

Unlike those of other kings, his court would only abound with scientific and religious talk as well as consultation on jihad. It was free from debauchery, offensiveness, backbite, defamation, or slander.

Nour-ud-Din’s justice was manifest in glorifying the acts compatible with pure Shari`ah. He used to say, “We are created and employed for the sake of it [Shari`ah] and are required to fulfill its commandments.”

Another evidence of his justice was that he never punished anyone depending on mere accusation. Rather, he used to summon witnesses and incessantly search for evidence. But once the evidence was found, the defendant would be punished, without delay, according to the penalty prescribed by Shari`ah. The rule of law was equally imposed on the king's soldiers and friends.

In other places of the world, excessive punishment and prosecution against people on the grounds of mere suspicion were prevalent at that time. But Nour-ud-Din, who was dubbed the just king, eschewed such tortuous means of governance, which gave rise to security and prosperity in his kingdom despite its vastness. Justice and application of Shari`ah contributed to a great decline in crime rate.

He exempted the inhabitants of the Levant, Arabian Peninsula, Mosul, and Egyptian cities from paying taxes. He used to help the oppressed regardless of their social status, for all people were deemed equal before him. He would listen to the complaints of the oppressed and investigate them himself.

One day, he entered the House of Treasury and noticed an amount of money. Inquiring about it, he was told that Judge Kamal-ud-Din had sent it and that it had been collected from such and such a place. To this, his reply was, "This money is not ours; we do not have any money in the places you mentioned." Then, he ordered that the money be sent back.

Civil Achievements

He was always concerned with the public interest and the living conditions of his people. His thoughts were directed toward serving Islam and establishing the infrastructure of an Islamic state by building schools, mosques, and other institutions.

He established many projects aimed at benefiting the Muslims and protecting them and their territories. He built walls and established castles in all territories of the Levant, such as Aleppo, Hamah, Homs, Damascus, Shiraz, and Manbij. He spent large amounts of money on these projects.

Also, he established Shafi`i and Hanafi schools in Aleppo, Hamah, Damascus, and other cities. He built mosques throughout the Muslim lands. His mosque in Mosul was an architectural masterpiece. Furthermore, he built one of the most beautiful mosques in Hamah at Al-`Asi (Orontes) River. He dedicated an endowment for the sick, the calligraphers, and the teachers of Qur'an, as well as the inhabitants of Makkah and Madinah.

He also built a lot of hospitals, among which the one in Damascus was the greatest. Nour-ud-Din made it an endowment for all Muslims, rich and poor.

He built guesthouses along the roadsides to save the lives and property of travelers and provide them with warm and comfortable places in winter. He also built many orphanages and spent a lot of money on the orphans and those who cared for them.

This thoughtful ruler granted the Arab princes of his time large areas of land so that they would not increase the taxes imposed on the pilgrims. Furthermore, he ordered his men to build a wall around Madinah and to dig a well at Mount [Uhud](#). He also built bridges and dug many canals.

His Death

Nour-ud-Din adhered to Allah's commands and asked his followers to do the same. Undoubtedly, the one who sets a good example will have his reward and additional rewards equal to those gained by those who follow him until the Day of Judgment.

Ibn Al-Athir said:

I read about the pre-Islamic period and the history of Islam until our modern times, but I have never known a ruler nobler than the Just King Nour-ud-Din, except for the Rightly Guided Caliphs and `Umar ibn `Abdul `Aziz.

Nour-ud-Din was a great warrior and skilled archer who would march at the front line with his fellow warriors in the battlefield, asking Almighty Allah for martyrdom. He wished to be resurrected on the Day of Judgment from the stomachs of beasts or the craws of birds. He used to say:

I fought in many battles and wished to be a [martyr](#), but I have not attained my wish.

On hearing him saying this, Imam Qutb-ud-Din An-Naysaburi told him, “I adjure you by the name of Allah not to risk your life, Islam, and the Muslims, for you are their backbone. If you were to be killed in a battle, the Muslims would be murdered and their lands would be invaded.” Nour-ud-Din replied, “What is this all about? Who am I to be considered so important? There is One Who saved Islam and its lands before me: Allah, than Whom there is no other god.”

Before his death, Nour-ud-Din prepared for restoring Jerusalem and built the pulpit upon which the first Friday sermon would be addressed upon regaining the city. However, before realizing his lofty goal, he passed away in Shawwal AH 569 (1173 CE). He was buried in the Castle of Damascus, and his body was later taken to his dome at his school near `al-Khayyarin`. May Allah have mercy on his soul.

Almighty Allah says, (As for that Abode of the hereafter, We assign it unto those who seek neither high-handedness nor mischief in the earth, and the [best] sequel is for the righteous.)(Al-Qasas 28:83)

By Imam Abu Shamah Al-Maqdisi

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