

The Crusade of Frederick II

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the singer:

Many years ago, during the Middle Ages, throughout two hundred years and seven long wars, Christian and Muslim armies fought fiercely to conquer Jerusalem. Many thousand died on each side, but the strangest fact was that everyone fought in the name of the same God and fought to defend the 'true Faith'.

These wars are known as the "Crusades", and were conducted by nowadays legendary figures: the Barbarossa, Richard the Lionheart, the French Louis IX the Saint and then Sal-ed-Din, sultan of Egypt and Syria. I am indeed talk about very remote things. Now we are entering into a new millennium and we aren't capable to imagine such an hatred (or can we, perhaps?).

Between the summer of 1228 and the winter of 1229 also Frederick II, king of Sicily and emperor of Europe, led a crusade. The crusade of Frederick was the strangest of the Crusades. Before the departure, the emperor was excommunicated by pope Gregory IX, that accused him to delay too much his departure. Frederick sailed from Brindisi as a corsair, with only few Pisan ships and few troops from Germany and Sicily.

In the Holy Land, Malik-al-Kamil, the Sultan, has got under his command an army twenty times larger than Frederick's troops. Just after the arrival, the camp of Frederick suffered hunger, because a storm made impossible to receive supplies by sea from Acri. Meanwhile some Franciscan monks, sent by the pope, encouraged the crusaders to leave the fields. The Templars monks betrayed Frederick, revealing to Al-Kamil the moves of the emperor.

The Crusade of Frederick went on only few months; during this period no battle took place, no one was killed, or was injured. Without starting his campaign, Frederick II dealt a peace with Al-Kamil through the witty emir Fahr-ed-Din. During the short days and the cold winter nights Fahr-ed-Din and Frederick discussed about Law, Grammar, Philosophy, Logic, Mathematics, Falconry, Architecture, Art, and Theology.

At the very end they signed a peace treaty. Under the terms of the pact Frederick would have reigned over Jerusalem, protecting the holy places, ensuring a durable peace, and permitting the Jews, Muslims and Christians to do their own pilgrimages.

Frederick entered in Jerusalem on Saturday, march 17th 1229.

On Sunday, march 18th 1229, into the cathedral of the Holy Sepulchre, Frederick crowned himself as king of Jerusalem, against the will of the Christian Patriarch.

The Pope misunderstood Frederick. He took more than a year to forgive the emperor for conquering Jerusalem without killing any "infidel".

This story of fiction takes place in Jerusalem, on the eve of march 17th 1229.

Frederick:

"I am touched, noble Rabi, for the welcome that I received by the city of Jerusalem. Countless carpets paved the streets at my passage."

Rabi:

"Glory to Thee, king of Jerusalem, new king David. On this holy Saturday the Almighty prepared your triumph before your enemies. I pray you, enter into my home: your friend, the emir Fahr-ed-Din is waiting you in the garden".

Frederick:

"Greetings, Fahr-ed-Din, my knight. Let me introduce to you the generals Salza, Gherardesca and Filangieri".

Fahr-ed-Din:

"Peace to Thee, Frederick".

"And peace to you, Grand Master, Admiral and Ambassador"

Herman Von Salza:

"I am honored to meet You. I know you by fame as a fair man, and gladly I welcome You into the ranks of the Teutonic Knights. When you will want admire the majesty of the sacred Thuringian woods, I shall have the pleasure to repay your hospitality."

Fahr-ed-Din:

"Thank You, good Salza, is my intention to visit all the kingdoms of Frederick".

"I have seen with wonder the ships of the Pisan fleet, Gherardesca, they are strong and impressive. Voices say that these vessels were the only that reached Jaffa".

Gherardesca:

"Great and fair emir Fahr-ed-Din, know that the Pisan ships are the best thing that cross the sea. Will be my privilege to have you as my guest on the main vessel of the warfleet, If you'd like, I will bring you to Pisa, the city in which each man is a trained sailor.

And mainly a skilled builder. Our greatest and most beautiful work doesn't sail the sea, but rests into the city, moored by the Ozieri bridge. We'll cross the gate that is watched by a lion, and from there You shall see it, immense, anchored amongst a grass field. The planking and the centerings are made of white and gray striped marble. Its stem faces westward, its dome is sailing before the wind."

"The mainmast – although fixed around by stony stays and shrouds - yet framed, bowed under a lucky and bold southern wind!"

Fahr-ed-Din:

"I'll pay the due homage to the skill of your architects, if – as you say – your cathedral outstands the Cordoba Mosque in beauty".

"But tomorrow, after the crowning, leave me the honor to escort the royal parade in visit to the perfect octagon of the Al-Aqsa Mosque."

Filangieri:

"Noble Fahr-ed-Din I have a question: I have yet heard the bells of the Holy Sepulchre ringing for the Vespers, but I don't hear the Muezzin voice."

"Why he is not chanting this evening from the high hill of Haran?"

Fahr-ed-Din:

"I ordered him to stay silent and don't disturb the emperor of Christians"

Frederick:

"Fahr-ed-Din, please, I am asking you to revoke the command, I will pleased too to hear the Coranic verses: the Muezzin' song at sunset remember me my eyes in the sweet Palermo..."

Fahr-ed-Din:

"It will done, as you ask".

"Your words make me glad, Frederick. I know well that in the kingdom of Sicily is permitted any faith, any idiom is spoken, and that your laws are written in Latin, Arabic, and Greek, to be understood by all your subjects. Your tolerance is a sign of wisdom."

Frederick:

"*Tolerance*"! It sounds as a bad word. I don't think to *tolerate* my subjects. I consider them for their loyalty, even if not all are following the same creed. My religion, Fahr-ed-Din, is coming from God: His message was brought by Christ. But I *respect* your faith: its message shouldn't be less glorious if it was brought – as the tradition speaks - by the archangel Gabriel to Muhammad, the Prophet".

"And what about our host Rabi, that prays our same God, covering his head, while – for the same reason – I uncover mine?"

"Was not the faith revealed to the Jews by God himself, who appeared to Abram and Moshe, wasn't it?"

Fahr-ed-Din:

"You speak well, Frederick. I ever thought that our differences are diverse gifts bestowed by God to each of us."

Frederick:

"I am bewildered, Fahr-ed-Din. Often I'm questioning myself, and don't find the answer: my people and yours are killing themselves in the name of the same God.and do you say that such a terrible thing is a divine gift?"

Fahr-ed-Din:

"Why God, in His justice, would confuse men, cursing them by announcing a false creed? And who of us will be saved, and who lost eternally in damnation?"

"No, Frederick, you know that war is of men and not a divine gift. What I see is that God wanted us different each from other. Not someone in Truth and the rest in Untruth, just different. Simply this: I believe. That's God's aim. Listen, I proclaim myself *Muslim*, that in my idiom means "true believer". I shall not change my creed with yours, and I suppose that shall be the same for You. Yet, such a difference *is* a gift. In the "book" of Jews and Christians, but not in the Koran, there's the beautiful tale of the tower erected in the place called Babel."

Rabi:

"Yes: the curse of Babel, the confusion of languages..."

Fahr-ed-Din:

"Why do you say that Babel was a curse? I read and read that piece of the Scriptures and I cannot find a punishment in that; I argue that the Babel tale means that: God saw that humanity desired to evolve, discover, raise... and gifted us our differences! He gave us the treasure of our discording opinions, the taste and the joy to debate and learn. If only we can have the humility to appreciate in another man, even different and stranger, the shade of God's grace."

Frederick:

"Your argument is plain and gentle. Indeed the art of expression is the best gift that God bestowed on your people! But now I am more doubtful than before. I don't understand. Which instrument God would have given to us in order to understand anyone that is different in thinking and lifestyle?"

Fahr-ed-Din:

"The means is the word. Have I to remember you the "book" of Christians? At the beginning the Word was by God. Then it was given to us. Not only to my people, as you observed for joke, but to the whole humanity. It was given to us to be used."

"In these months, Frederick, we both agreed upon many questions. We haven't in common not the eyes' color, not the skin, not the features, not the shape of our thoughts. Yet, with different words, we talked about each thing made by God and by the human wit. And we understood each other!"

"We reached a deal, that's good for your and mine people, and that will be good for the humanity. After many years of war we gave peace to the city of Jerusalem. These are the marvels of the word."

Rabi:

"This is a great miracle. Cannot be any peace in the world if Jerusalem isn't in peace. Centuries ago, king David erected his palace in a little town, amidst the North and South tribes, who were fighting themselves. And he called the town *Jerusalem*, in our tongue "City of peace".

"Since then, its name is also its destiny: a single people cannot have Jerusalem only for himself. Indeed anyone who would push by arms the others out of the city, shall almost have only its stones, but he destroys the symbol for which he fight..."

Frederick:

"Blessed be the word, and any means that let me meet with a new brother."

Fahr-ed-Din:

"Blessed be Jerusalem, of which we all proclaimed you king, and in which – tomorrow and forever – any believer shall found himself as at home."

the singer:

"...and also Palermo, Pisa, Damascus and Alexandria. And any place of Earth, that shall be claimed "city of Shalom", because it sings any language and embraces any religion... and even the faith of who is not a 'believer'."

The End