CHAPTER 17

Paradise and Hell in the *Kitāb al-Jihād* of ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 500/1106)

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1 Introduction

In the years 498 and 499 (1105) according to the Islamic calendar, in the Mosque of Bayt Liḥyā in the Ghūṭa, the rural area surrounding Damascus, a Muslim religious scholar named ʿAlī b. Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 500/1106) publicly composed a text entitled *Kitāb al-Jihād* (*The Book of the Jihād*). Al-Sulamī composed his text in response to the invasion of portions of the Levantine region by crusaders from Europe, who had taken a number of cities including Jerusalem. In his work he exhorted his listeners, and the wider Muslim community, to take up arms against the European invaders, fighting in the military *jihād* in return for earthly benefits and, more importantly, the promise of divine approval and eternal life in paradise.

The information available about al-Sulamī himself is, sadly, very limited, consisting only of brief entries in four biographical dictionaries. From these we learn that although he initially composed his work at Bayt Liḥyā, al-Sulamī himself was first and foremost a teacher of Arabic at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, where he had a circle of students. He was also recognized as being a *thiqa*, a reliable transmitter of *ḥadīth*. It is evident from the *Kitāb al-Jihād* itself that he was also something of a polymath, for his work is a multi-genre text that, while primarily intended as a discussion of and call to the *jihād*, also includes features of *faḍāʾil* works (books on the merits of a particular place, in this case the Bilād al-Shām, Greater Syria, with a particular emphasis on Jerusalem and Damascus), judicial and theological texts, and grammar treatises, as well as collecting poetry relevant to his arguments. Thus al-Sulamī presents the historian with an engaging but rather elusive figure. The surviving manuscript of al-Sulamī’s work is in many ways as disjointed as his biography; it comprises only four, though mostly complete, parts of what was at least a twelve-part work (Parts 2, 8, 9, and 12), plus an additional fragment of the treatise bound at the end of Part 8. However, even though incomplete, this manuscript presents us with a text that is vital to crusade studies, representing a unique insight into a contemporary Muslim’s reaction to the arrival of the First...
Crusade. In the process it presents a detailed discussion of *jihād*, its conduct and, most importantly for the wider topic under discussion in this volume, al-Sulamī’s views on the rewards of paradise, the torments of hell, and how to gain the former and avoid the latter.\(^1\)

Al-Sulamī’s work seems to have had limited immediate influence, even though Part 2, the section of it that calls most explicitly for a Muslim response to the crusaders, was dictated in public again once before and once after his death, with the latter reading taking place in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. In each case the audience was in the first instance a small circle of religious scholars, themselves unable to mobilize armies against the Franks; however, it is clear that al-Sulamī wanted his call to reach beyond his immediate listeners and particularly to the political authorities of the region, who are singled out for special criticism for their lack of opposition to the crusaders, and it does seem likely that al-Sulamī’s ideas, along with the ideas of other preachers of the time, influenced the later preaching of the *jihād* against the crusaders. This *jihād* eventually saw its fruition in the conquests of Frankish territory by ‘Imād al-Dīn Zangī (d. 541/1146), Nūr al-Dīn (d. 569/1174), and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin, d. 589/1193). However, he himself never saw his preaching have significant effect, dying only a year after he assembled his work.\(^2\)

It is helpful to summarize briefly the numerous techniques al-Sulamī employs in his attempts to motivate his listeners. In an attempt to shame his listeners into action, he criticizes Muslim rulers and their subjects for their neglect of regular military expeditions against non-Muslims on the frontiers, something that he sees as particularly worthy of censure due to the fact that these rulers have instead pursued politically-motivated wars against other Muslims; he threatens his listeners with both eternal damnation in the next life and subjugation by the Franks in this one if they do not desist from their misbehavior; and he promises his listeners both earthly and heavenly rewards for their efforts, including the shares of the spoils to which they will be entitled, the opportunity to take part in the fulfillment of eschatological prophecies about armies of Muslims fated to conquer their enemies until the day of judgment, the opportunity to earn divine favor instead of the anger that

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\(^1\) Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb*. This manuscript has recently been the subject of two critical editions, one by Suhayl Zakkār in 2007 and a second, also including a translation and introductory study, by Niall Christie, published in 2015; see Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* and Christie, *Book*. On al-Sulamī and his work see, in addition to the preceding, Sivan, *Génèse* 197–224; Hillenbrand, *Crusades* 105–8.