



Saladin: Noble Prince of Islam

By Diane Stanley

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Forty years before the boy was born, a horde of bloodthirsty barbarians thundered out of the west and conquered his native land. They had succeeded because his people, ever at war with one another, had not fought together to defend their cities. In time the boy was destined to become the very leader that was needed, a man with the courage and vision to unite his people and face the most fearsome and brilliant warrior of the age.

The time was the twelfth century; the barbarian horde was the armies of the First Crusade; the great warrior was Richard the Lionhearted; and the leader was Saladin. This is more than the other side of a familiar Western story, the Crusades. It is the tale of an extraordinary man, remarkable for his generous and chivalrous ways, a warrior who longed for peace. Courageous in battle and merciful in victory, he would be revered even by his enemies as the "marvel of his time."

In her vibrant narrative and magnificently detailed illustrations inspired by the Islamic art of the time, Diane Stanley presents a hero whose compassion, piety, tolerance, and wisdom made him a model for his time -- and for ours.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Meeting the high standards set by her previous picture-book biographies, Stanley (Michelangelo; Joan of Arc) here focuses on the 12th-century ruler known as "the Muslim saint-king" who was "praised even by his enemies as 'the marvel of his time' " and crystallizes many of the issues still at the root of conflicts today. Stanley begins with a concise overview of the First Crusade, then hypothesizes about the impact of the Franks' murderous conquest of Jerusalem on the young Saladin, a devout Muslim (after listing Jerusalem's importance to the "three great religions," the boy poses a question: "Couldn't everyone just share it?"). The author outlines religious practices, the political history of the Middle East and of Western Europe, and the vexed military campaigns for Jerusalem, once again demonstrating her trademark ability to research and then distill complex topics in terms accessible to middle-graders. She painstakingly builds readers' sense of Saladin's integrity and skilled leadership. For example, when his army was poised for certain victory over the Christians holding Jerusalem, he wrote to a knight proposing generous conditions for their surrender: "I believe that Jerusalem is the House of God, as you also believe. And I will not willingly lay siege to the House of God or put it to the assault." Stanley's precise, detailed artwork pays homage to period architecture. She evokes the colors of Persian miniatures (and medieval stained glass) as her paintings incorporate the complex patterning associated with Islamic art. Portraits of Saladin at home, sitting in front of gorgeously tiled walls with his family, arrayed in sumptuous robes, are particularly effective in conveying the richness of the subject's world. Readers are certain to be intrigued. Ages 8-12.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 3-7-Attentive readers of this book-those who can wrest their eyes from the illustrations-will learn some history, some geography, and quite a lot about Islam, as well as about the life of Salah al-Din. (One interesting fact is that he was neither an Arab nor a Turk, but a Kurd.) Even more important, however, may be the chance to put oneself in the shoes of "the enemy," an exercise that is as useful today as it would have been in 1099. Anyone who still harbors romantic ideas about the Crusades will be disabused of them here. The harsh glare of history scours secular and religious leaders alike. Even Richard the Lionhearted appears as both a brilliant commander and "an obnoxious bully," and in light of his slaughter of 3000 hostages at Acre, who could disagree? Saladin is not depicted as flawless, and the attitude of Islam toward women is noted. Yet, on the whole, the great and generous Muslim leader is portrayed as being far nobler than any competitor. Each full page of text is a mini-chapter, a self-contained part of the overall narrative, so that readers can pause and linger over the opposing full-page illustration. These pictures, enlivened by saturated, jewel-like blues, reds, and greens, combine Western realism with pattern and composition recalling Turkish miniatures. Countless details of dress, armor, domestic interiors, and landscape evoke the period and setting. The beauty and sophistication of Islamic culture shine through Stanley's glorious pictures. A timely and splendid addition to the author's earlier biographical profiles.

Patricia D. Lothrop, St. George's School, Newport, RI

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Gr. 5-8. Stanley adds to her long list of successful picture biographies this timely book about an Islamic warrior noted for his civility. Beginning with the birth of the boy who comes to be called Saladin, she recounts the first words he (and all Muslim children) hear: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet." Stanley sets the stage for the panoramic story by studding it with details of time and place. As a boy, Saladin hears the story of how the Christians conquered Jerusalem, leaving dead bodies

of all religions in their wake. Vowing to somehow rectify this situation, Saladin first becomes a soldier, uniting his people, then a leader, taking on the Christians. The story of Saladin battling his way back to Jerusalem is complicated and filled with blood and intrigue, and Stanley tells it vigorously. But more interesting is the parallel journey she recounts as Saladin tries to maintain his honor and chivalry in the midst of horrendous fighting. Trying to cover a personal story and history in 48 pages is a challenge. Sometimes details are glossed over. For instance, readers might be left with the impression that relics, such as a fragment of the "true" cross, were legitimate. Events occasionally seem compressed. But the generally strong telling is more than matched by glorious paintings that mirror Islamic artwork of the times. Alive with pattern and brilliant with streaks of illumination, the art is some of Stanley's finest--and that speaks volumes. *Ilene*

Cooper

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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