Commemorations of Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn) and Nation Formation in Palestine/Zion

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Palestinian and Jewish/Zionist/Israeli academic and popular narratives about Saladin reveal a rich repertoire of remembering and forgetting. My paper analyzes his role in Palestinian and Zionist nation formation, based on an inquiry of the development of myths about the twelfth-century sultan, and his commemoration in texts and rituals. Six themes are explored. On the Palestinian side: the celebration of Saladin's Hattin victory of 1187 as an anti-colonial struggle marking the salvation of Muslim and Christian Palestinians from foreign rule; the attribution of popular annual shrine-visitation (mawāsim) to Saladin's strategy; and Saladin's prominence in Palestinian toponyms and dating devices. On the Jewish side: Saladin's era as a golden age for Jews in medieval and modern historiography; Saladin as enabling Jewish resettlement and presence in in the Land of Israel; and Saladin as a paragon of interfaith tolerance. Finally, the paper shows that the interweaving of "Saladin narratives" that establish territorial attachment to the ancestral homeland and its sacred sites was performed by the two national movements, which have been found to mirror each other in many other ways.

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