

- S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt (Eds.), *The Crusades: A Reader*, Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2014, xv+433 pp.

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The Crusades is one of the most read and interesting topics of the medieval era, for its great impact upon that world is still felt today. They are perhaps the only events from that time that have become inextricably linked to present-day political and religious debates, for the rhetoric associated with it resurfaces so often that it has attained a special status among many writers and analysts. Although many works are already available on the subject, the increasing interest is perhaps due to the modern political, religious, and academic dissent between the East and the West. While one side tends to avoid this word and any linkage of it with the modern conflict prevalent in the Muslim world, the other side is bent on convincing readers that the modern West's ongoing interference in Muslim lands is nothing but a neo-Crusade that began in the 17th century via imperialistic and colonialist European forces. This essay examines one recent book to explore how this rhetoric is treated from the modern perspective, owing to its overarching impact on medieval and modern times.

The Crusades: A Reader is, in fact, a "new [second] edition [that] does not intend to promote any political or moral stance" on the Crusades; rather, its introduction and ten chapters endeavour to provide documents that "facilitate a broad range of discussion and debate on crusading topics" (p. xii). In addition, a new chapter explores the history of modern perceptions of these military campaigns. Some chapters contain some sparse additions and omissions. As an example of the latter, the editors apologised for removing some key sources.

In the introduction, the reader is briefly introduced to the book's contents and format. The editors note that one of the important points about the beginning and end of these military assaults is that they were neither born in a vacuum in 1095 nor ended with the loss of the Crusader states in the thirteenth century. Contrary to popular conceptions, this book argues that the Crusades were the result of the changes occurring in Europe. The Crusades also had a great impact on both Western and Eastern societies, where even today we encounter their legacy (pp. xv-xvi). The extent and intensity with which these campaigns are currently discussed and debated in academic circles reflects this reality. However, what this war-ridden world really needs today is for us to highlight and propound views upon the reconciliatory and friendly aspects of Crusader culture, which scholarly works have largely ignored. The editors have attempted to address and explore these reconciliatory measures, though not to the full extent.

The book's beauty lies in its documentation of relevant and important primary sources from both Christian as well as Muslim sources. Moreover, after documenting the sources it neither judges nor analyses; rather, at the end of almost each document it encourages readers to engage more with it and poses some important questions, such as why, what, how, and when.

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The first chapter, "Background and Origins," attributes the build-up of the Crusades to Jerusalem's importance to both Christians and Muslims and the concept of warfare, as in holy war and jihad, respectively. It documents the ideological support that each group drew from their religious texts; however, this is questionable in Christianity, as it was developed later and formulated by Papacy on their own. Here it should be made clear that these two concepts are not comparable, as jihad is one of Islam's principal doctrines and connotes various meanings, which is most certainly not the case with holy war.

The second chapter, "The First Crusades," narrates the story from the preaching of Pope Urban, who in 1099 called upon Christians to capture Jerusalem. The resulting success was an illustrious victory for the Crusaders and a disastrous blow to the Muslims. The third chapter, "The Crusader States," records the state of affairs in these four new Levantine states. The cited documents reveal the relationships between the locals and the newcomers, along with evidence of various aspects of mutual understanding as well as different perceptions and misconceptions.

The fourth chapter, "The Second and Third Crusades," records Edessa's fall in 1144 to the Muslims under Nur al-Din Zangi, which triggered the preaching of the Second Crusade. In addition, the Crusaders' disastrous defeat at the Battle of Hittin in 1187 by Salah al-Din compelled some greatest European monarchs such as Frederick I Barbarossa of Germany, Philip II Augustus of France and Richard I the Lionheart of England, to launch and, for the first time, to actually lead the Third Crusade. Chapters 5 through 7 recount the subsequent Crusades, of which the fourth one was directed against Greek Orthodox Constantinople in 1204. From that point onward, these military enterprises began to lose the true sense of their earlier purpose as military campaigns against Europe's non-Catholic Christians and other pagans were legitimized.

The eighth chapter, "Conflict and Coexistence in Spain," points out the simultaneous realities of cultural exchange and warfare between Iberia's Christians and Muslims. This illustrates that the Crusades in the East were, in fact, a continued legacy of the 8th century Crusades of Iberia, supported by the papacy. Here it gives weight to the assertion that these campaigns actually started long before 1095. The subject of the ninth chapter is the end of the eastern Christian empire with the fall of Acre in 1291 to the Mamluks and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottomans. Thus the book moves beyond the general view that the Crusades in the East ceased in 1291.

If there is a more praiseworthy part of the book, it is none other than the tenth chapter, "Modern Perceptions of the Crusades," an account of scholarly perceptions from the eighteenth century onward, ranging from the Enlightenment (David Hume and Edward Gibbon [negative]) to Romanticism (William Wordsworth and J. F. Michaud) to Imperialistic (William Hillary and the British), projecting the Crusades as heroic events. Muslim scholars also raised the general awareness about modern European interests in the East. Among the first to do so was Sayyid 'Ali Hariri's *Book of the Splendid Stories of the Crusades* (Cairo: 1899), the first Arabic-language study of the Crusades, to Syed Qutb's use of "Crusaderism" (p. 407) to describe European imperialism as a cultural and religious offensive against Islam. Nonetheless, recent times have witnessed some dramatic changes in the Christian perception, most notably the concession and regret expressed by Pope John Paul II for the "faults of the past" (p. 411) that the Crusades had committed against humanity.

Allen and Amt aptly delve into the Crusader rhetoric that has gained such momentum after the events of 9/11. The respective views of the Crusades are often argued as the basic cause of East-West polarization. Muslims link it to modern imperialism, and the West attributes these military campaigns and other related events to a moral right. Moreover, what is important to note here is that over the last couple of decades the Crusades, according to the editors, have acquired a more positive acceptance as a recognized chapter of Islamic history (pp. 416-418).

The conclusion, "Umej Bhatia's Analysis of the Crusades and Modern Muslim Memory," attempts to discover reconciliatory measures for the persistent East-West conflict. Bhatia recognizes a number of steps, primarily to lower the "geopolitical temperature," in which the media plays a large role, and to "identify and to develop effective means of practical and functional cooperation to isolate, expose, and debunk extremism in all its forms" (p. 423). He suggests that it is incumbent upon the Muslim world's historians and opinion makers to find "[i]n the clash over historical perspectives...concrete examples of positive cooperation instead of merely highlighting instances of conflict" (p. 425). While it is true that ways to create a peaceful atmosphere are needed, one has to realize that the Muslim side is not the only one that employs this rhetoric. This section fails to look into the West's long-term and continuing interference in Middle Eastern affairs and the extent to which it will go to safeguard its interests.

That said, the book overall is an excellent, simple in presentation, timely and balanced contribution to the crusade literature. It is a helpful guide for the general readers.