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# THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF THE CRUSADES AND WHY IT MATTERS: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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## **The Islamic View of the Crusades and Why It Matters: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**

### **Synopsis:**

In July 1096 rumors of an approaching army unsettled the inhabitants of Asia Minor. Spies brought news of a motley horde of knights and foot-soldiers accompanied by thousands of raggedy woman and children all wearing on their backs crosses made from strips of cloth. This paper will address the developing Islamic perception of what became known as “the Crusades” from the beginning through the Third Crusade. Contemporary perspectives and Islamic sensitivity to the term “Crusades” in today’s political climate will also be examined. This paper will suggest that perhaps more than any of the ideological determinants, the Crusaders themselves impacted Islamic consciousness, and as history has shown -- Islamic memory.

# **The Islamic View of the Crusades and Why It Matters: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**

**By Barbara B. Pemberton**

## **ABSTRACT**

In July 1096 rumors of an approaching army unsettled the inhabitants of Asia Minor. Spies brought news of a motley horde of knights and foot-soldiers accompanied by thousands of raggedy woman and children all wearing on their backs crosses made from strips of cloth. The marching multitude looked more like a wandering tribe of refugees than Byzantine mercenaries to whom the native peoples had become quite accustomed. The Islamic world did not call this influx of Occidentals “the Crusades,” but rather the “Frankish wars” or the “Frankish invasions.” More accurately, the land was plagued by a steady stream of invaders eager to engage “Saracens,” not to evangelize, but displace from the Holy Land of the Christians. Scholars offer varying opinions of the medieval Muslim perception of the Frankish invasions. Many historians believe that most local populations had no real information about the invasions, or that what little information the populace had left them disinterested, an opinion drawn from the fact that the Arabic term later employed to designate the Crusades was not coined until a later period. Other writers suggest a lack of general impact due to the localized efforts of the Franks in only “incompletely Islamized” areas. Therefore, what Europeans proudly heralded as great “Crusades,” many inhabitants of the Islamic world saw as a nuisance, not a serious threat. There are, however, scholars who do credit the contemporary Muslims with more awareness of their adversaries’ goals and motivation. Any military invasion would suggest a political cause. War and brutality were not new; but, the relentless nature of the invasions warranted an explanation. Concurrently, no Muslim could escape an understanding of the sovereignty of God, their identity and responsibilities as the community of faith, and their beliefs concerning other faiths—especially Christianity. As they became aware of the religious motivation of the Crusades, the Muslims’ own understanding of Holy War, *jihad*, would influence their comprehension of a “Holy War” by those of another religion. Evidence of a developing perception can be grouped into three categories: surviving works of chroniclers of the period, the ideological campaign that launched the Islamic Counter-Crusade, and other eye-witness accounts such as those from letters and poetry. This paper will address the developing Islamic perception of the Crusades and the Crusaders, and the accompanying responses from the beginning through the Third Crusade, as well as the belief embraced by some Muslims that the Crusades have continued even into the present day. Islamic sensitivity to the term “Crusades” in today’s political climate will also be examined. This paper will suggest that perhaps more than any of the ideological determinants, the Crusaders themselves, individually and collectively, impacted Islamic consciousness, and as history has shown -- Islamic memory.

## INTRODUCTION

In July 1096 rumors of an approaching army unsettled the inhabitants of Asia Minor. Spies brought news of a motley horde of knights and foot-soldiers accompanied by thousands of raggedy women and children all wearing on their backs crosses made from strips of cloth. The marching multitude looked more like “some wretched tribe” of refugees than Byzantine mercenaries to whom the native peoples had become quite accustomed. These *Franj* claimed to have traveled a long distance to exterminate Muslims. The Islamic world did not call this influx of Occidentals “the Crusades,” but rather the “Frankish wars” or the “Frankish invasions.”<sup>1</sup> More accurately, the land was plagued by a steady stream of invaders eager to engage the Saracens, not to evangelize, but conquer and displace from the Holy Land of the Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars offer varying opinions of the medieval Muslim perception of the Frankish invasions. Many historians believe that most local populations had no real information about the invasions, or that what little information the populace had left them uninterested.<sup>3</sup> What Europeans proudly heralded as great “Crusades,” the Islamic world saw as a “nuisance rather than a serious menace.”<sup>4</sup>

Other scholars do credit the contemporary Muslims with more awareness of their adversaries’ goals. As they became aware of the religious motivation of the Crusades, the Muslims’ own understanding of Holy War, *jihad*, would influence their comprehension of a “Holy War” by those of another religion. But, perhaps more than any of the ideological

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<sup>1</sup> Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 3-5, xi. *Franj* is colloquial Arabic used to refer to Westerners. The “wars of the cross” has been used since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan, 1940), 636.

<sup>3</sup> Historians supporting some form of this view include Bernard Lewis, Fransesco Gabrieli, J.J. Saunders, and Claude Cahen. Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, “A Reassessment of Some Medieval and Modern Perceptions of the Counter-Crusade,” in *The Jihad and Its Times*, ed. Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Ronald A. Messier (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1991), 41.

<sup>4</sup> J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 161.

determinants, the Crusaders themselves, individually and collectively, would impact Arab consciousness, and as history has proved, Arab memory.

Within the period of time from the first encounter with the *Franj* through the “Third Crusade,” 1096-1191, evidence suggests a developing perception of the invasions as they were being experienced. The initial encounter was understood by the majority of Muslims as a military campaign: as invaders retaking lost territory, as they often do. The response was a defensive *jihad*. During the rise of the Islamic military response, or Counter-Crusade, the Frankish wars were cast in a more religious light and *jihad* became offensive. As the invasions reached farther into the Arab world, and continued for an extended period of time, awareness spread. By the time of the Third Crusade perceptions and *jihad* gave way to diplomacy.

### **EARLY ISLAM**

The birth of Islam not only brought about religious unification, but also dramatic social and political change. Within its first hundred years Islam conquered some of the “richest and most populous parts of the Christian Roman Empire,” stopped finally in the west at Tours in 732 by Charles Martel.<sup>5</sup> Arab historian Philip Hitti suggests that after “conquering itself” Arabia turned its newly unified tribal energies on the world. Initially seeking riches, not dominion, the Muslims found their rapid success reaped an empire they had not necessarily set out to create. The options given to those conquered underscores this economic view: neither Islam nor the sword, but from those of tolerated religions, tribute would suffice.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Brown, “The Crusades: Time for Another?” *National Review*, 9 August 1985, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Hitti, 142-145.

The competing theological “providential interpretation” of Islamic scholars views the entire episode as a religious movement carried out by zealous adherents of the faith for whom martyrdom meant immediate entrance into paradise.<sup>7</sup>

After the initial period of expansion, Islamic lands flourished for centuries under the rule of Caliphs without serious attack from beyond its borders. This *Pax Islamica* fostered rapid advances in art, science, and medicine. International commerce was stimulated unlike any period since the height of the Roman Empire. This sense of security from external threat began to break down around 1050 with attacks by nomads and was then shattered by the continual invasions of the *Franj*.<sup>8</sup> Islam faced a newly inspired, newly ambitious Christendom.

### **EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE *FRANJ***

In 1096 the first wave of Crusaders arrived to disrupt the Islamic world. Peter the Hermit led this “lawless mob” in its raid into Seljuk territory and to its consequent annihilation by Kiliç Arslan, the not yet seventeen-year-old Turkish sultan of Nicaea.<sup>9</sup> More *Franj* would soon arrive. Although these invaders declared their intent to eradicate the Muslims, they pillaged local Christian villages along the way, mercilessly massacring any who resisted. This time Arslan was taken by surprise, outnumbered, and soundly defeated. Two weeks later the sultan redeemed his reputation by routing his new enemy. Preoccupied by conflicts with other Turkish princes, Arslan failed to concern himself with reports that yet more *Franj* were on their way.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>8</sup> Saunders, 189.

<sup>9</sup> P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London: Longman, 1986), 19. Other important cities include Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo. Jerusalem, or *al-Quds* (site of holiness), is said to be where one night God took Muhammad to meet Moses and Jesus. This became a “symbol of the continuity of the divine message.” Maalouf, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5-8.

Arslan lost his kingdom the very next year as more invaders flooded Syria. Edessa fell in 1098, becoming the first Crusader state.<sup>11</sup> On first encounter the *Franj* were mistaken for Byzantines. It would seem only reasonable that the Byzantines would seek to regain the territories the Seljuks had taken from them only fifteen years earlier. However, in a short time Syrians were differentiating between the *Rum* (Byzantines) and *Ifranj* (Franks or invaders).<sup>12</sup> In his account of the First Crusade, chronicler al-Azimi linked the initial invasions to an earlier Muslim disruption of a Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He wrote that these pilgrims went home and incited hostilities toward Muslims. Although some historians continue to argue that Muslims thought all Crusaders were Byzantine, al-Azimi differentiated between *Franj* and *Rum*.<sup>13</sup> Of course, making this distinction does not necessarily indicate any deeper understanding of the invasions, the religious goal and motivation in particular. For those not directly affected, these initial encounters were but “remote frontier incidents.” Even the Caliph in Baghdad showed no concern.<sup>14</sup>

## THE FALL OF ANTIOCH

When word reached Antioch that the *Franj* were coming, Yaghi-Siyan, ruler of the city, expelled the native Christian population in fear of sedition. The Antiochans, anticipating reinforcements from Aleppo, engaged the invaders beside the city walls. Heavy fighting ensued. When news came that the *Franj* had taken Aleppo, the disheartened citizens of Antioch

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<sup>11</sup> Syed Rashid Naim, “The Radical Tradition in Islam and the Islamist Tendency in Contemporary Egypt” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1990), 162-163.

<sup>12</sup> Nikita Elisseeff, “The Reaction of the Syrian Muslims After the Foundation of the First Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem,” in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 163.

<sup>13</sup> Dajani-Shakeel, 48.

<sup>14</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), 81. During the First Crusade two Seljuk brothers struggled for control in Baghdad. Leadership changed hands eight times in thirty months, keeping them too preoccupied to consider the predicament of Syria. Naim, 165.

withdrew into the city. It was not long before the people heard “great guffaws of laughter”; then, “the fearfully mutilated severed heads of the Aleppans hurled by catapults began to rain down. A deathly silence gripped the city.”<sup>15</sup> The *Franj* surged into Antioch, indiscriminately slaying women and children. Survivors recounted the “off-key singing of drunken Frankish plunderers” celebrating their latest victory. A small contingent of Muslims fled to the citadel where they could theoretically hold out indefinitely. The great Muslim army of Mosul came to the rescue, surrounding the city, making the “besiegers the besieged.” The *Franj*, needing a miracle to overcome their hunger and disheartened condition, got just that when a monk discovered the “lance of the Messiah,” a sign of divine favor.<sup>16</sup> However, as Ibn al-Athir recalled events, the monk buried the lance himself as a plot to encourage the failing and starving troops. His plan worked so well that when the Franks emerged invigorated, the Muslim army fled without so much as shooting a single arrow.<sup>17</sup> Following this “day of shame” at Antioch no defenders remained to protect Syria from the continuing onslaught of the Franks.<sup>18</sup>

## THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The *Franj* never hid the fact that they sought the reclamation of Jerusalem, in particular “Christ’s tomb.”<sup>19</sup> Muslims all along the invasion route fled to the woods in spite of lions, bears, hyenas, and other big game.<sup>20</sup> Native Christians, however, welcomed the “soldiers of Christ”

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<sup>15</sup> Maalouf, 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-35.

<sup>17</sup> Izz ad-Din Ibn al-Athir, *Kamil at-Tawatikh (The Perfect History, or The Collection of Histories)*, vol. 10, in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. from the Arabic by Francissco Gabrieli; trans. from the Italian by E.J. Costello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 8-9. Ibn al-Athir authored a thorough history of the Arab world from pre-Muhammadan times until 1231. He was an eye-witness to the career of Saladin.

<sup>18</sup> Maalouf, 36.

<sup>19</sup> John France, “The Destruction of Jerusalem and the First Crusade,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47 (January 1996): 2.

<sup>20</sup> Maalouf, 40.



with “tears of joy,” banquets, and processions.<sup>21</sup> When the invaders finally reached Jerusalem in June 1099, they first marched around the walls behind their priests. Following this procession the soldiers leaped against the walls “like madmen.” While the Muslims had heard of the religious intent of the *Franj*, this display of “blind fanaticism” surprised even them.<sup>22</sup> One account of what transpired is told by chronicler Ibn al-Athir:

In fact Jerusalem was taken from the north on the morning of Friday 22 July 1099. The population was put to the sword by the Franks, who pillaged the area for a week . . . In the Masjid al-Aqsa the Franks slaughtered more than 70,000 people, among them a large number of Imams and Muslims scholars, devout and ascetic men who had left their homelands to live lives of pious seclusion in the Holy Place.<sup>23</sup>

The Muslims were shocked at the savage slaughter, and the plundering and sacking by the Franks of the city they professed to venerate. Ibn al-Qalanisi recorded atrocities: “The Jews assembled in the synagogue, and the Franks burned it over their heads.”<sup>24</sup> The loss of Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam, with its Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock, was the greatest loss in Muslim history.

## THE LATIN STATES

However, not even the fall of Jerusalem roused the sleeping Islamic world. While some few sought to understand the calamity from a religio-political perspective, and some worked to adapt to the new cultural situation, many merely fought to survive.<sup>25</sup> Rather than forming one united realm, the Frankish conquerors established four Latin kingdoms, centered at Antioch, Edessa, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. The invasions won for the *Franj* control of the entire coastal

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<sup>21</sup> Zoe Oldenbourg, *Les Croisades* (Gallimard, 1965), 150.

<sup>22</sup> Maalouf, 47-48.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-Athir, 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Abu Yala Hamza ibn Asad at-Tamimi (Ibn al-Qalanisi), *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Luzac, 1932), 48. Ibn al-Qalanisi is the earliest Arab historian of the Crusades, an eye-witness to the First and Second Crusades.

<sup>25</sup> Maalouf, xvi.

region. Relations between the Muslim rulers and the newly founded Frankish states were cautious, but not totally hostile, as compromise and alliance became normal policy.<sup>26</sup> To the Muslims' surprise, the *Franj* did not assimilate into the community as had other invaders, but set out to control it. Muslims were charged a poll tax and a land tax, and were forced to construct public buildings. The Franks took over the highest level of administration, but left community and village leadership in local hands. The elitism of the Franks distanced them from most of the Muslim population as well as the other Christian groups, especially the Eastern Christians. The Franks established a Latin ecclesiastical hierarchy and commandeered churches for their own use. Constantly harassed, Eastern Christians eventually chose to become allies of the Muslim leaders.<sup>27</sup>

Culturally lagging behind the Arabs, the Franks had little to contribute to their new society except military architecture; the Crusaders were typically warriors and not intellectuals. Language also presented a barrier.<sup>28</sup> Muslims, even the local Christian community, thought the Frankish "judicial duels" and torturously primitive medical practices unbelievably crude.<sup>29</sup> Usamah Ibn-Munqidh noted Muslim shock at the apparent sexual looseness and "lack of jealousy" among the Franks.<sup>30</sup> Muslims found little to admire about even friendly Franks except for their bravery and tenacity in battle.

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<sup>26</sup> Holt, 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> George Tate, *The Crusaders: Warriors of God* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 66-70.

<sup>28</sup> Sami K. Hamarneh, "The Islamic Civilization and the European Crusades: Why and How?" *Hamdard Islamicus* 17 (Spring 1994): 14.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 265. While having little to contribute, the Franks gained much during their occupation including perfumes, spices, sugar (until this time Europeans had used honey for sweetening), rugs, fabrics, mirrors, etc. Hitti, 667-669. Muslims took justice seriously and found the Frankish "judgment of God" through ordeals such as duels, fire, or water a "macabre farce." Maalouf, 131.

<sup>30</sup> Usamah Ibn-Munqidh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usamah Ibn-Munqidh*, trans. Philip K. Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 164-165. Usamah is considered the epitome of Arab culture of the time: a warrior, gentleman, and poet.

Eventually, after years of relentless struggle with the *Franj*, the Arabs, especially those of threatened areas, had had enough. *Jihad*, which had been reduced to a “slogan to enliven official speeches,” resurfaced in preaching, literature, and in the marketplace.<sup>31</sup> A groundswell of public opinion against both the invaders and ineffective Muslim leaders soon developed. The people accused the leaders of “negligence or even treason.” Eventually public sentiments reached new leaders who could and would avenge the Faith.<sup>32</sup> In particular, three warriors, considered almost an “apostolic succession” of liberators, would take up a true *jihad* to honor God and unite the Islamic people: Zangi, Nur-al-Din, and perhaps the most celebrated, Salah-al-Din (or Saladin).<sup>33</sup>

### THE ISLAMIC COUNTER-CRUSADE

God relented and gave the people the Ata-beg Zangi, according to Ibn al-Athir. He wrote: “Now in this year (1128), by God’s decree . . . God in His mercy to the Muslims was pleased to raise to power ‘Imad ad-Din (Zangi).”<sup>34</sup> It was under his leadership that Islam moved toward final victory over the Franks. This resurgence can be called the “Counter-Crusade” because it was the “perfect counterfoil and equal peer” to the Crusades, except for outcome. Even the use of religious propaganda had parallels.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Maalouf, 81.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>33</sup> Holt, 38.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-Athir, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Aziz S. Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 130-131.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROPAGANDA

The Counter-Crusade was supported by an ideological campaign waged from the intellectual *jihad* centers in Damascus, Alexandria, and Cairo.<sup>36</sup>

The propaganda produced by the radical jurists called for action against the heretical invaders, suppressions of the Order of Assassins, and strict personal adherence to Islamic values and practices.<sup>37</sup> While some scholars believe there was no pan-Islamic “major ideological impact” during this period, most agree that the “ancient themes of *jihad* were rediscovered” with an added emphasis on “devotion to the holy places of Jerusalem.”<sup>38</sup> The word *jihad* means “determined effort.” In its religious usage, *jihad* refers to anything done to promote Islam, with the connotation of the effort including some struggle and or confrontation. *Jihad* is undertaken on three “fronts”: 1) an external enemy, 2) Satan, and 3) “one’s own baser self.”<sup>39</sup> It was this third *jihad*, that of the soul, that the illustrious Islamic philosopher of this period, al-Ghazali, espoused because of what he considered the “spiritual laxness” of the Muslim people.<sup>40</sup>

The military interpretation of *jihad* developed from the principle of the universality of Islam: the world ought to be Islamic – by force if necessary. Although the Qur’an instructs that peace under Islamic law is the ultimate goal, warfare is legitimate to eliminate a greater evil: unbelief. The doctrine of *jihad* was historically interpreted and shaped to fit the circumstances; however, it was never parallel to the Crusader concept of war in defense of “oppressed co-religionists.”<sup>41</sup> *Jihad* was determined at this time to be a collective obligation to be undertaken

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<sup>36</sup> Dajani-Shakeel, “A Reassessment of Some Medieval and Modern Perceptions of the Counter-Crusade,” 56.

<sup>37</sup> Naim, 176.

<sup>38</sup> Encyclopedia of Islam (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), s.v. “Crusades,” by Claude Cahen, 12.

<sup>39</sup> Mustansir Mir, “*Jihad* in Islam,” in *The Jihad and Its Times*, ed. Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Ronald A. Messier (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 113-114.

<sup>40</sup> Elisseff, 164.

<sup>41</sup> *Encyclopedia of Islam*, “Crusades,” 64.

by enough Muslims to ensure success.<sup>42</sup> The Damascene jurist Ali Ibn Tahir al-Sulami (d. 1106) composed a treatise on *jihad* in which he described the Frankish invasions as one of the worst disasters the Islamic world had known. He preached that God was using the invasions as a warning to Muslims to return to Islam as originally given, including the obligation of *jihad*. If obedient, God would come to their aid against the invaders.

The Frankish wars renewed an emphasis on Islamic “self-awareness,” as well as “anti-Christian” sentiments. The medieval jurists described Christianity as *kufur*, or unbelief, and as paganism and polytheism. Most Muslims did not study Christianity because it was considered a dangerous corruption of God’s truth. The jurists, however, were fascinated by other religions, and their propaganda reflected the intense rivalry between these two world religions claiming to be the “universally true monotheism.” Much information, while not always totally accurate, was available from the local Christian communities and especially from Christian converts to Islam. Jurists were even aware of the controversies considered by the ecumenical councils. In light of the egalitarian nature of Islam, jurists failed to see the legitimacy of the Christian priesthood. In particular, the jurists denounced priests for “selling absolutions,” sexual misconduct, and the “self-serving use of excommunication,” among other transgressions. Their Sunni orthodox rationalistic methodology also made the Eucharist problematic.<sup>43</sup>

The image of the cross, especially to the extent it was displayed during the Crusades, was most offensive to the Muslim. Whereas the incarnation and trinity were repudiated as blasphemous, the ultimate scandal was the addition of the cross: “God died.”<sup>44</sup> Within Islam, the

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<sup>42</sup> *Encyclopedica of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), s.v. “*Djihad*,” by E. Tyan.

<sup>43</sup> Hava Lavarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (January 1996): 67-79.

<sup>44</sup> Mark N. Swanson, “The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies,” in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jorgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 117.

Jesus of the Qur'an is a deeply loved and respected prophet to the Jews, not the divine Son. God assures his prophets victory, including protection from any degrading death such as crucifixion. Muslims argue it only appeared that Jesus was crucified, for God loved him too much to allow "so odious a torture."<sup>45</sup> Frankish devotion to the cross, e.g., prostration and kissing the cross, was to the Muslims, reminiscent of pagan idolatry and reprehensible.<sup>46</sup>

### NUR-AL-DIN

Zangi's second son, Nur al-Din (Light of Religion), followed in his father's footsteps in many ways; however, his originality arose in his appropriation of the "moral rearmament movement" begun by the radical jurists with their appeal to *jihad*.<sup>47</sup> These elements, combined with the virtue of his own personal life, formed a "formidable political weapon." Nur-al-Din employed hundreds of jurists in a propaganda campaign that included the commissioning of books, letters, etc., the supervision of which he handled personally.<sup>48</sup>

Nur al-Din focused on four objectives: 1) *jihad*, 2) liberation of Jerusalem, 3) political unity within Islam, and 4) "diffusion of Muslim ideology." The "classical ideology" of *jihad* was renewed at this time, along with the reglorification of martyrdom. The "*jihad* movement" gave prominence to the spiritual rearmament emphasis of the radical jurists and helped it develop into a people's movement. Two new slogans, "Reconquest" and "Unity" saturated the propaganda, as did the call to restore Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Maalouf, 192. The most common explanation is the substitutionist theory: God miraculously saved Jesus and someone else was crucified. Zengi protected native Christians arguing *jihad* was against the Franks and not Christianity as a whole. Jones and Eira, 103.

<sup>46</sup> Swanson, 116-117.

<sup>47</sup> Elisseeff, 171.

<sup>48</sup> Maalouf, 143-144.

<sup>49</sup> Elisseeff, 167-169.

## SALADIN

Yusuf (Joseph – rectitude of the faith) was born in 1138 to a prominent Kurdish family. It was said that he dedicated himself to two passions.<sup>50</sup> First, Saladin sought Muslims’ unity under orthodox Islamic practices. Even as Sultan he led a “conspicuously orthodox and Spartan existence.”<sup>51</sup> Saladin’s second passion was *jihad* – specifically the elimination of the detestable Franks, and especially from Jerusalem. Saladin considered the Franks dishonorable, for they “broke their oaths at will,” and their presence among the Arab people was an “affront to the Caliph.”<sup>52</sup>

On October 2, 1187, Saladin crushed the Crusaders in the battle of Hattin, striking the blow that would mean the ultimate defeat of the *Franj*.<sup>53</sup> As Saladin’s army swept through Palestine, each Frankish stronghold surrendered after only a brief encounter, except in Jaffa, where the resistance, while strong, did not prevail. The time had come to regain Jerusalem for Islam.

The siege of Jerusalem lasted a mere six days. Saladin demanded ransom to purchase the freedom of each “infidel,” but the ever generous Saladin allowed the poor, elderly, children, and prisoners to leave freely. A crushing defeat for the Franks, Imad ad-Din described the loss as “the glow of Patriarchal pride . . . extinguished.”<sup>54</sup> As it happened, Saladin marched triumphantly into Jerusalem on Friday, October 2, 1187, the very day the Islamic world celebrates Muhammad’s “nocturnal journey” to the Holy City. The Sultan kept strict control of his troops,

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<sup>50</sup> Philip K. Hitti, *Makers of Arab History* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1968), 117-18, 123.

<sup>51</sup> Norman Housley, “Saladin’s Triumph Over the Crusader States: The Battle of Hattin, 1187,” *History Today* 37 (July 1987): 1819.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Payne, *The Holy Sword: The Story of Islam from Muhammed to the Present* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 222.

<sup>53</sup> Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 648.

<sup>54</sup> Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, *al-Fath al-qussi fi l-fath al-qudsi (Ciceronian Eloquence on the Conquest of the Holy City)*, in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. from the Arabic by Francesco Gabrieli; trans. from the Italian by E.J.Costello (Berkeley: University Press, 1969), 147.

with orders that Christians, both Frankish and local, and their churches, were to be unharmed. Saladin himself went from one mosque to another “weeping, praying, and prostrating himself.” Chronicler Imad al-Din al-Ashani questioned the Sultan as to his reason for allowing the *Franj* to leave with all their personal possessions and even the wealth from their churches, to which Saladin replied that “Christians everywhere will remember the kindness we have bestowed on them.”<sup>55</sup> Honorific titles given Saladin show how highly he was regarded by his contemporary Muslims; they also are another indication of what Muslims thought of the Crusades. His titles included the following: Uprooter of the Atheists, Slayer of the Infidels and Polytheists, Uprooter of the Worshippers of the Crosses, The Defender of God’s Sanctuaries, The Just King, The Spiritual Knower, The Ascetic, and the Resurrector of Justice in the World.<sup>56</sup>

### **THE THIRD CRUSADE**

The period of the “Third Crusade,” 1189-1192, has been described as a time of “diplomacy, negotiations, and flexibility.”<sup>57</sup> The Franks sought to stop Islamic reconquest; the Muslims wanted to keep the territories they had regained, especially Jerusalem. The loss of the Holy City prompted the response of the Third Crusade and with it the leadership of “Richard the Lionheart” of England. These two great leaders, Richard and Saladin, were immortalized in legends of the time; and a true mutual admiration, if not respect, developed between them. By this time both sides were weary of war and many among the troops, both Frankish and Muslim,

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<sup>55</sup> Maalouf, 198-200. An Islamic historian records: “Seldom in history has anyone wrought revenge at once nobler and more humiliating than this response to cruelty by self-restraint.” Byng, 182.

<sup>56</sup> Dajani-Shakeel, “A Reassessment of Some Medieval and Modern Perceptions of the Counter-Crusade,” 68.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.



had lost all zeal for their cause. Fighting did not cease, and *Franj* did not stop arriving from the west; however, the battles became more limited and localized.<sup>58</sup>

After another series of military encounters and long months of negotiations, in 1192 a five-year peace was arranged with Richard in which the Franks retained control of the coast, but Saladin retained control of the rest of the land. While Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands, the Franks were promised safe passage into the Holy City. In actuality, the agreement meant that the Frankish holdings were narrowed to towns instead of states; the Franks would never be a threat to Arab control of the Islamic world again.<sup>59</sup>

Saladin, having never sought to exterminate Christians, had accomplished his goal of eliminating the Frankish political power and now saw negotiation as the way to “preserve the empire he had conquered.”<sup>60</sup> To prove his sincere desire to maintain freedom of religion in Jerusalem, Saladin hosted many of the Frankish leaders who wanted to visit the tomb of Christ. Richard refused to enter Jerusalem as Saladin’s guest because of the humiliation of having failed in his own oath to retake the city. Richard returned to England having never met Saladin, or even seen Christ’s tomb.

Saladin’s health declined soon after concluding the negotiations. Although only fifty-five years old, he succumbed to a premature old age. At his death the empire was divided among his sons and his younger brother who, by 1202, had taken over as ruler of the Ayyubid empire. Al-Adil was an administrator, not a warrior, and his rule was characterized by peace and tolerance. With Jerusalem in Islamic control, the symbol of the unity and continuity of Islam – the three cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem – was safe in Muslim hands. Al-Adil broke off any

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>59</sup> Maalouf, 208-215.

<sup>60</sup> John L. Lamonte, “Crusade and Jihad,” in *The Arab Heritage*, ed. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton University Press, 1946), 181.

further *jihad* against the Franks and worked to develop commercial exchange with them in a climate of cooperation.<sup>61</sup>

### CONTINUING INFLUENCE

Arabs knew war. That the Byzantines might want to retake territory they had recently lost was understandable, almost commendable. The day-to-day reality of the Crusades for the Islamic world, however isolated the events, was relentless, wearisome war, loss of life, loss of economic productivity, and loss of personal security. The invasions carried on like a persistent, growing infestation. While familiar, the Crusades were also something new—religious, but not exactly like the *jihad* of remembrance. These invaders had not come to promote their faith, but to kill and conquer. While religion was tolerated to a great extent, especially for the times, this flagrant display of the cross—this abhorrent heresy—was an inexcusable offense to God as well as to Muslim sensibilities. Were these crude and ignorant barbarians a true representation of the religion they claimed to defend? Most intolerable was the very notion of heretics ruling believers, a situation that is “blasphemous and unnatural” leading to societal corruption.<sup>62</sup> Better to flee and live as a refugee than under alien domination. Eventually, when the infestation had been removed, having had enough, the Arab world closed its veil to outsiders.

Scholars disagree as to what lasting impact, if any, was made by the Crusades. Historian Steven Runciman sums up the entire enterprise as a “vast fiasco.”<sup>63</sup> For the Arab people the invasions forced some political unification.<sup>64</sup> It was also a period of growth and consolidation for

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<sup>61</sup> Maalouf, 215-216.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 3, *The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades* (Cambridge: University Press, 1954), 469.

<sup>64</sup> Some writers disagree and assert the Crusades did not unify the Arab world. Lamonte adds that this should not be a surprise: the Crusades were much more important to western history and they did not unify Christianity. Lamonte, 163.

Sunnism. During the ideological campaigns, the heterodox was associated with the *Franj* and thought to be a cause of the punishment the Islamic world was experiencing from God.<sup>65</sup> Europe gained the wealth the Arab culture had been collecting for centuries, including an introduction to the largesse of China, India, and Africa.<sup>66</sup>

The taking of Jerusalem by the Franks still fosters animosity as Muslims remember the dishonorable way in which their Holy City was treated. Arab historian Philip Hitti recalls Saladin's entry into Jerusalem: "At the conquest of the city associated with the ministry of Christ, a follower of Muhammad behaved in a more Christian manner than Christ's followers had in 1099 – when – to borrow the words of their own historians – they waded in blood to their ankles."<sup>67</sup> However, Crusade scholar Jonathan Riley-Smith notes that, concerning atrocities committed, both sides scored about even, and such was the nature of medieval warfare.<sup>68</sup> Sociologist Rodney Stark adds that "it is utterly unreasonable to impose modern notions about proper military conduct on medieval warfare; both Christians and Muslims observed quite different rules of war."<sup>69</sup>

The Arab world still alludes to the Crusades – still remembers Saladin and the loss and restoration of Jerusalem, labeling Israel a new "Crusader State."<sup>70</sup> Other Crusade terminology has currency today; *Franj* survives to denote all western enemies of Islam including the United States.<sup>71</sup> For some students of history, especially Arabs studying western accounts, the Crusades were but the first steps in European colonization. Akbar Ahmed, chair of Islamic Studies at the

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<sup>65</sup> *Encyclopedia of Islam*, "Crusades," 64.

<sup>66</sup> J. H. Kramers, "Islamic Geography and Commerce," *The Islamic World and the West: 622-1492 A.D.*, ed. Archibald Lewis (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), 76.

<sup>67</sup> Hitti, *Makers of Arab History*, 135.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Reinterpreting the Crusades," *The Economist*, 23 December 1995 and 5 January 1996, 63.

<sup>69</sup> Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (NY: HarperOne, 2009), 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>71</sup> Anton La Guardia, "Where the Crusades Live on," *The Spectator*, 30 December 1995, 15.

American University in Washington, D.C., argues that “the Crusades created a historical memory which is with us today—the memory of a long European onslaught.”<sup>72</sup> Some western scholars agree, including Karen Armstrong, who has said the Crusades created “our first colonies” and are “one of the direct causes of the conflict in the Middle East today.”<sup>73</sup> Col. Qadhafi of Libya labeled the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798 the “Ninth Crusade,” and the founding the State of Israel the “Tenth Crusade.”<sup>74</sup>

The animosity persists. Osama Bin Laden issued a fatwa in August of 1996, in which “Zionist-Crusaders” and their collaborators - the “iniquitous crusaders movement” - were said to be responsible for contemporary “aggression, iniquity and injustice” including blood spilt in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon.<sup>75</sup> In 1999 *The New York Times* compared the Crusades with Hitler’s atrocities.<sup>76</sup> Even former President Bill Clinton blamed the events of 9/11 on the Christian attack on Jerusalem in 1099.<sup>77</sup> Saudi Arabian journalists picked up on the rhetoric, calling President George W. Bush the leader of the “new crusaders.” Saudi *Arab News* reporter Phillip Knightly wrote concerning the “new crusaders” plans to impose a “regime change” in Iraq that “a new cycle of anger, frustration and bloodshed will begin because 800 years after the crusades there will still be foreigners occupying Arab lands.”<sup>78</sup> In March, 2005, the highest

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<sup>72</sup> Stark, 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 and 245.

<sup>74</sup> Watt, 82.

<sup>75</sup> Osama Bin Laden, “Bin Laden’s Fatwa,” PBS Newshour News Desk, August 23, 1996. <http://pbsnewshour.com/newsdesk/bin-ladens-fatwa>.

<sup>76</sup> Stark, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Steve Weidenkopf, “ISIS Flogs the Crusades Myth,” *Catholic Answers* (San Diego, CA). November 18, 2015. <http://catholicanswers.com/blog/steve-weidenkopf/isis-flogs-the-crusades-myth>. In a speech delivered at Georgetown University.

<sup>78</sup> Philip Knightly, “Iraq: Why the West Needs a History Lesson,” *Arab News*, 8 August 2002, sec. Features, p. 8.

authority of *Al-Azhar* University in Cairo demanded an official apology for the Crusades from Pope John Paul II.<sup>79</sup>

Currently ISIS uses Crusader terminology online and in videos to recruit young Muslims. The group posted a statement in November, 2015, justifying their attacks in Paris saying “‘soldiers of the Caliphate’ had targeted the ‘lead carrier of the cross in Europe’ and ‘cast terror into the hearts of the crusaders in their very own homeland.’”<sup>80</sup>

But has the “prevailing wisdom” that “*during the Crusades, an expansionist, imperialist Christendom brutalized, looted, and colonized a tolerant and peaceful Islam*” actually persisted since the twelfth century?<sup>81</sup> Stark argues that the notion that bitter memories of the Crusaders’ brutality have continued since that time “could not be farther from the truth.”<sup>82</sup> According to his research, Muslims showed little interest in the Crusades until the end of the nineteenth century, considering them invasions by “a primitive, unlearned, impoverished, and un-Muslim people, about whom Muslim rulers and scholars knew and cared little.”<sup>83</sup> In addition, any concern would have soon shifted to the Mongol Invasions and then to the rise of the Ottoman Empire, both events receiving much more attention in the historical records than the Crusades.<sup>84</sup>

Stark traces the probable source of what he labels the false image that “all Crusaders were Western imperialists seeking land and treasure” back to a view first espoused by the

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<sup>79</sup>“Muslims demand papal apology for crusades,” WND. March, 19, 2005.  
<http://www.wnd.com/2005/03/29425/>

<sup>80</sup>Weidenkopf.

<sup>81</sup>Stark, 8, italics his. Stark has concluded that the Crusades were not unprovoked, but were the European response to centuries of Islamic aggression carried out by crusaders who “sincerely believed that they served in God’s battalions.” Ibid. 248. Historian Thomas Madden agrees, contending the Crusades “were in every way defensive war. . . . They were the West’s belated response to the Muslim conquest of fully two-thirds of the Christian world.” Ibid. Muslims view the Islamic territorial expansion of the seventh and eighth centuries as the peaceful spread of the prophet’s message. Edward Peters, “The *Franj* Are Coming – Again.” *Orbis* (Winter): 13.

<sup>82</sup>Stark, 245-6.

<sup>83</sup>Peters, 6.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 7. In Western cultures the use of the term “crusade” has gone from a term designating a specific military engagement in the Holy Land to a secularized label for any moral struggle in a noble cause. George Bush’s unfortunate misuse of the term falls into this secular category. Peters, 4.

German Lutheran church historian Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1693-1755). After von Mosheim's work, interest in the crusades was not renewed until the nineteenth century when Christian Arabs introduced the term "Crusades" while translating French histories into Arabic.<sup>85</sup> The first Muslim supposed to have used the term "European Crusades" (probably to explain the decline of the powerful Ottoman Empire) was the last Ottoman sultan, Abdülhamîd II (r. 1876-1909), as documented by historian Sayyid Ali al-Hariri in 1899.<sup>86</sup>

Throughout Europe and the United States the "romance" of the Crusades and Crusaders themselves became linked to the "'British imperial impulse' . . . to such an extent that, by World War One, war campaigns and war heroes were regularly lauded as crusaders in the popular press, from the pulpit, and in the official propaganda of the British war machine."<sup>87</sup> It did not take long for this romanticized image, along with European politico-religious criticism of the Crusades, to make its way from Europe into the Middle East. This means that current Arab animosity over the Crusades, though rooted in nineteenth century ideas, "both honorific and pejorative," actually began in the twentieth century, prompted by British and French imperialism and the eventual creation of the State of Israel.<sup>88</sup> Islamic nationalists continued to employ crusader terminology to foster pan-Islamic movements, and through time the "image of the brutal, colonizing crusader proved to have such polemical power that it drowned out nearly everything else in the ideological lexicon of Muslim antagonism toward the West . . ." <sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Stark, 6, 246.

<sup>86</sup>Weidenkopf.

<sup>87</sup>Adam Knobler "Holy Wars, Empires, and the Portability of the Past: The Modern Uses of the Medieval Crusade." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48:310.

<sup>88</sup>Peters, 7. Since the Enlightenment historians saw the Crusades as attempts to gain wealth and land, their views often influenced by anti-papal sentiments.

<sup>89</sup>Stark, 247-8. The terms "crusades" and "crusaders" have been "hardwired" into the vocabulary of the Middle East as contemptuous; regrettably the associated animosity is being cultivated in some circles by using the terms in children's textbooks. Peters, 16.

## CONCLUSION

Allusions to the Crusades still invoke bitterness on the part of an Arab world that “puts great faith in a mysterious process they call ‘the forces of history.’”<sup>90</sup> However, since the Franks were forever removed as a political power in 1291, the Arabs were at least the historical victors of the Crusades.<sup>91</sup>

The West lost the war, but Runciman suggests the Islamic world lost much more. First, had the Muslim world not had the “incessant irritation” and distraction of the Frankish invasions, perhaps the Turks could have assimilated into the society making positive contributions rather than disunity. Second, without the Frankish wars, the Muslims might have had the strength and resources to handle the Mongol invasion. Third, the Islamic state, designed with a religio-political Caliphate in charge, was invaded when the Caliphate was not in a position to respond. By necessity, the heroes were warriors, not Caliphs, and the crack between the political and religious unity of the state, which had begun before the Crusades, became a rift that remains even today.<sup>92</sup>

Another loss may be worse. Prior to the Crusades, Christians, in spite of their status as *dhimmi*s, were treated with an unusual amount of respect and were able to participate in the Arab society in places of high regard, especially in the intellectual circles. Information and skills were shared between Arabs and Byzantine Christians. However, the invasions ended this growing cooperation and the “savage intolerance” of the Franks incited a “growing intolerance” among Muslims.<sup>93</sup> After having been the “intellectual and material repository of the planet’s most advanced civilization,” the Arab world turned inward and became defensive and intolerant, and

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<sup>90</sup>James Reston, Jr., “To the Arabs, This Crusade Too Will Fail,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 23, 2003. <http://losangelestimes.com/blog/james-reston-jr/to-the-arabs-this-crusade-too-will-fail>.

<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Holy Violence Then and Now,” *Christian History* 12 (December 1993): 45.

<sup>92</sup> Runciman, 472-3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 473-4.

the center of civilization moved west. This medieval turn away from the future and modernism haunts some Arab thinkers today, especially in light of the knowledge that the “barbaric and defeated” *Franj* turned around to control the world.<sup>94</sup> Anthropologist Raphael Patai sees in modern Arab bitterness a “classical example of group hatred intensified by the historical reversal of a power relationship.” Patai asserts that people by nature develop more animosity toward those who, having been their inferiors, eventually outdistance them, than toward those who are perceived as superior at first contact. Arabs first defeated the barbarous Christians and protected them as *dhimmi*s. Times changed, and, as Christian Europe began to infringe on Arab lands, “the haughty disdain” felt toward Christendom “transformed into impotent rage, and ultimately into fierce hate.” No other cultures in history have faced so dramatic a role reversal.<sup>95</sup>

Muslims were required to take Islam into the rest of the world. The Crusaders, on the other hand, traveled great distances to “defend coreligionists and retake the Holy Land,” not to convert Muslims. The Crusades are remembered by Muslims as an act of unwarranted aggression – rape.<sup>96</sup> Runciman concludes: “There was so much courage and so little honor, so much devotion and so little understanding . . . the Holy War was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Maaloouf, 261-5.

<sup>95</sup> Raphael, Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 302-3.

<sup>96</sup> Maalouf, 266.

<sup>97</sup> Runciman, 480.



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