

‘Consequences Essay’

The Crusades to the Holy Land: the Essential Reference Guide,
Alan Murray (Santa Barbara, 2015)

ed.

The consequences of the crusades to the Holy Land and Egypt are many and varied. Increasingly historians are recognising that they played a central role in the development of medieval western Europe. It should be noted, however, that it is not always easy to discern the extent of the changes wrought by the crusades within evolving institutions, practices, and ideas. At the same time, there is little doubt that the crusades impact on inter-faith relations was largely negative. Contact, often aggressive, existed between Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and indeed Orthodox Christians long before the First Crusade (1095-99). But the crusades increased the number and severity of the violent interactions between the different faiths, and the supposed memory of that violence is now used partly to justify bloodshed in the modern world.

The Church's support of sacral violence long predated preaching for the First Crusade. But the papacy did much more than merely offer their support for Christian Holy War in 1095 and indeed throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By overtly associating warfare with the defence of the Church and Christendom, the papacy gave war a moral dimension that had been largely missing before the eleventh century, and it also accentuated the clergies association with violence. This may lie behind the quasi-veneration of warfare witnessed in later centuries, although the increasing identification of war as a product of God's will probably helped create the ethical ideals of knightly combat. The interaction between crusading and chivalry was always likely given that both shared core values, modes of thought, and behaviour. Crusading became viewed as a knightly service conducted for God, the ultimate overlord. This notion can of course be witnessed in the monastic orders, but it was also prominent in the proliferation of late medieval chivalric orders that had strong crusading affiliations. The impact of crusading in other areas of military life was not so significant. European castle design is now seen as a product of experiment and experience rather than the wholesale borrowing of Levantine architectural designs. Very few vital lessons learnt fighting in the Near East could be usefully employed against familiar western enemies.

Historians once maintained that crusading reinforced the papacy's spiritual power and political authority. This now seems less likely: the Church had begun to centralise before 1095; the laity formed its own ideas about crusading; the papacy was not as influential in the lay world as was once thought; and the crusades were a massive drain on the papacy's time and resources. Efficient papal systems of taxation, created to finance crusades, seem to have benefitted the local secular rulers for whom the money was actually raised rather than directly enriching the papacy. On the other hand, the creation of efficient, centralised governmental systems expedited the curia's control over the Church.

Crusades were also a substantial burden for secular governments, although again they seem to have contributed to the centralisation and legitimisation of monarchical authority. Kings advanced the means of gaining central control, supply, and finance in the pursuit of crusading, which in turn increased their spiritual and political authority. This should not be overstated: monarchs tended to build on existing governmental foundations and kings often sought to legitimise their position through pious acts such as defending the Church and papacy. King Louis IX of France, however, ushered in far-reaching and radical governmental reforms in direct response to the failure of his first crusade (1248-52).

It was once thought the crusades 'opened up' the eastern markets and trade links to the Italian maritime powers. Italian activity undoubtedly increased in the eastern Mediterranean as a result of the crusades. Venice's prosperity in the thirteenth century was largely a product of acquiring Byzantine trading posts in the wake of the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1198-1204). But Italians were already trading with Constantinople and Alexandria before 1095. The conquered Syrian port cities failed to attract major investment until the latter half of the twelfth century. Even then they could rarely compete with Constantinople's and Alexandria's volume of trade. Interestingly though, the need for crusaders to raise cash might have influenced the evolution of Italian credit systems, and this may have in turn added to the liquidity of an increasingly active

market. The Italian mercantile and banking companies were certainly central to the transfer of bullion and credit raised to finance crusades through papal taxes in the 1270s.

Equally certain is the crusades impact on interfaith relations. Jews were the first victims of crusading zeal. The killing and robbing of European Jews was largely, although not entirely, an unintended product of the preaching for the first three numbered crusades. At different times the Jews were identified as legitimate targets to finance expeditions, and preachers augmented the crusaders' personal identification with Christ's suffering on the cross. Consequently, crusaders targeted Jews as a means of obtaining ready cash and in pursuit of vendetta against the perceived killers of Christ. The Jewish communities' ability to recover quickly is perhaps a reflection of their experiences at the hands of many Christians throughout the middle ages. Unfortunate as they were, the attacks in 1096, 1146, and 1190 were part of a pattern anti-Semitic behaviour. That said, historians largely agree that the preaching for the crusades was an important factor contributing to the inauspicious position of many Jews in medieval society.

The crusades also had a detrimental affect on the relationship between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Byzantine theologians maligned Catholics even before 1095, and the contemporaneous geopolitical ambitions of the Normans in the Mediterranean exacerbated the negative perceptions of the Latin West. Armies on the first three numbered crusades suffered in numerous ways in Thrace and Anatolia, and treacherous Byzantines were usually blamed for the crusaders' privations. Crusade historians now see the diversion to and subsequent sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1204) as the result of a series of 'accidental' occurrences. Nonetheless, the sacking is still viewed as a watershed that brought Catholic/Orthodox relations to a new low. The relations were outwardly healed by the reunion of the churches at the Council of Florence in 1439. By that time, however, the empire was on the verge of extinction; a powerful Byzantium would hardly have accepted the doctrine of papal primacy over the Orthodox Church.

Supposedly a legacy of folk memory, the crusades still loom large in the consciousness of much of the Muslim world. By the mid-twelfth century, the crusades in the Levant had led to the revival

of *jihād* in the region. The Mamluk military oligarchy finally extinguished the last bastion of *Outrémer* (or the Crusader States in the East) in 1261, although crusades were then directed against the Anatolian Turkish emirates and their expansionist Ottoman successors. Crusade preaching sustained a negative image of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad throughout, although increased contact did lead to instances of mutual appreciation of the religious other. Muslims suffered greatly at the hands of crusaders, but the crusades were not anti-Islamic *per se*. Muslims became the targets of crusades because they occupied and/or threatened Jerusalem, the perceived seat of Christ's patrimony, the most sacred city in Christendom and the penitential pilgrimage centre *par excellence*, and, perhaps just as importantly, the focus of Christendom's eschatological goals. Most crusaders knew little of Islam and cared even less.

Similarly, having expelled the Christians settlers from the Levant in 1291 and then being subsumed into a powerful Ottoman Empire that conquered considerably more territory than the crusaders, the Muslims of the Near East seem to have lost interest in the crusades and forgotten the violence of the Christians. Folk stories of legendary heroes of resistance such as the thirteenth-century sultan Baybars continued to be told but the tradition was hardly widespread. Very few eastern writers did more than just mention the crusades in passing right up until the 1860s. Faced with revolt and imperial disintegration in the Balkans at the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman sultan, Abdülhamit II, turned to pan-Islamism. To foster Muslim unity, he publicised his conviction that his contemporary European imperialists had embarked on new crusades. Late nineteenth-century Muslim thinkers took note and looked westwards to learn more about the crusade movement. By this time, the campaigns had become a 'civilising' source of imperial pride for many contemporary Europeans. Nineteenth-century imperialists began borrowing crusading rhetoric and imagery to describe non-pious, imperialist ventures. The idea of the crusade as an instrument of imperialism continued to be expressed; witness the popular imagery of returning, triumphant crusaders that accompanied reports of the British and French entries into Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon during the First World War. Arab Nationalists writing in the years immediately

following the war rejected the pan-Islamic ideas of the now defunct Ottoman Empire. But looking at the West's contemporary depiction of the crusades, they likewise suggested to their audience that Europe, having lost the first war in the Near East, was now embarking on another crusade movement. By the 1920s, the historiography of the movement had moved on and now the crusades were popularly seen in the West as an instrument of colonialism. Consequently, many Arab Nationalists presented their struggle from the English and French mandates in the East as a riposte to 'imperialist' crusades. By the 1970s, militant pan-Islamism had successfully challenged Arab Nationalism and in doing so effectively globalised the Nationalist interpretation of crusade history. Unfortunately, Muslim scholars still tend to neglect the crusade movement, although its historiography changed radically after the 1970s. Crusade historians now stress the pre-eminence of religious beliefs and values in explaining the origins and popularity of the crusades. However, in pursuit of a global Sunni caliphate, Islamic fundamentalists seemingly take little interest in modern crusade scholarship. They routinely refer to western powers as crusaders and al-Qaeda's call for *jihad* against imperialist "crusaders" in 1998 has been repeated many times since.

It is tempting to draw conclusions derived from geographical congruity or superficial political similarity, but as any student of the crusade movement is aware, modern geopolitical conflicts in the Near East or anywhere else for that matter are not a legacy of the crusades. The idea of crusaders as imperialists is a modern construct, as is the supposed collective, Near Eastern Muslim memory of the crusades. Stories of the Christians' violence in the Holy Land and Egypt were not repeated throughout the ages: it seems to have been of little consequence after 1291. This was not the case in the West where the crusades were central to the continuing development of medieval Europe. They contributed to the Church's militarisation and facilitated the curia's control over that institution. They probably influenced warfare's idealised ethics and helped legitimise monarchical rule. At the same time, the crusades expedited the centralising tendencies of medieval governments and increased the Mediterranean trade and commerce of Italian maritime cities. Conversely, their impact on interfaith relations was entirely negative. Anti-Semitism was a feature of medieval Catholic

society, but the preaching for the crusades gave impetus to anti-Jewish hostility. 900 years after the first crusaders attacked Jewish communities, a number of Jews still seek apologies from the papacy and indeed from the Catholic world for the crusades. The relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches were stretched before 1095. Subsequent contact exacerbated matters and the events of 1204 still resonate amongst a small population of Greek Orthodox Christians. 800 years after the Fourth Crusade, Pope John Paul II felt compelled to apologise for the sacking of Constantinople. Nonetheless, the most apparent and certainly the most destructive consequence of the crusades derives from a tenuous, Islamic fundamentalist interpretation of the 'imperialist' crusade movement. Acquisitive and violent most certainly, but more than anything else the movement was an expression of belief and devotion, incredulous as that often sounds to the popular reader.

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