**Sources & Historiography – The Crusades**

For those with a broader interest in the background of the Crusades *The Song of Roland* (*La Chanson de Roland*) is interesting: 4,000 line epic poem – a “Chanson de Geste” (epic celebration of legendary deeds), a genre which flourished in later Medieval Europe (C11th-15th); another example of the type is the Spanish *Poem of El Cid*.

*The Song of Roland* (written roughly b/ween 1040-1115) is also notable as the earliest surviving piece of French Literature. It tells of a Frankish warrior in the service of the Emperor Charlemagne, and the great Frankish victory over Muslim invaders from Iberia at The Battle of Roncevaux Pass, 778. It is, of course, heroically propagandistic, but does serve as a reminder of an historical reality; that Europeans had been fighting off Muslim invasions of *their* lands some centuries before the era of the Crusades. Its dating is obviously significant because it coincides with the period before, and immediately after, the First Crusade. Initially, its writing *may* have reflected the idea of *Holy War* then generating in parts of Medieval Christendom. Final drafts were probably produced after the estab of “Outremer”, and *might*, therefore, have been an implicit form of retrospective rationalisation of the First Crusade (which it is not, of course, about!) – a tale of the deeds of earlier Christian warriors who’d fought against Muslim invaders of *their* lands. Whatever the truth, it *may* provide insights into the mind-set of some early “crusaders”.

It is crucial to remember that the written sources for the Crusading era (Muslim & Christian) are all less than objective and *never* wholly reliable. Many are partial (in both senses!), and often it is hard to find corroborative evidence. Contradictions, incongruities, and improbabilities are commonplace, and most have hidden agendas, not least – and typically – the promotion of the reputations and interests of the “great lords”, or organisations, whom most authors served. Most are also prone to cultural prejudices, selectivity, and “confirmation bias” to a degree which would make most modern writers (excepting the obvious – “tabloids”, “bloggers” et al) wince in embarrassment.

Second, we need to be mindful that our own “labels” and preconceptions can be misleading, causing us to misread the primary sources. For example, the word “Franks” (from the Arabic *Franj*) was a generic label for all European invaders of Muslim territory in the Nr East (who included many English, Germans, Flemings, Scandinavians, Hungarians, Italians, Normans, Scots et al), and did not simply mean “French”. Nor should we be blind to the reality that political & personal rivalries, esp “back in Europe”, but also within Outremer, often meant that the “Franks” were a less than cohesive group who often feared, mistrusted, and even loathed, one another more than many of their Muslim “enemies”. The written sources may or may not reflect this.

Similarly, with “Muslims”, there were numerous different sub-groups whose interests did not always coincide. 3 distinct strands of Islam were involved: Sunni, Shi’ah, & Ismaili, and often there was greater antagonism between these than b/ween “Muslim” & “Christian” per se. Politically, it is important to remember that as well as petty infighting & power plays b/ween relatively minor Muslim principalities in the Near East, by the later Crusading period two major rival Muslim power blocs had emerged based on Damascus & Cairo.

It was not unusual for Muslim and Christian sub-groups to have some shared interests, and cooperation/ collaboration was not, therefore, unknown. For example, “The Assassins” (an Ismaili militant sect, closely connected to the Shi’ah, & allies of the Egyptian Fatimids, whose base was the remote Castle of Masyaf, in the Syrian mntns; ldr ‘Sinan’, aka “The Old Man of the Mountains”) hated Saladin as a despoiler of Shi’ah Egypt, and were not at all averse to taking on “commissions” from the Franks. The Templars, far from being the Muslim hating fanatics portrayed in films such as  *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), were, in fact, usually very respectful towards Muslims, and had a proclivity for adopting/ adapting local cultural habits in Outremer; a trait common to many other “Franks” too, esp those born/ raised in the Crusader States. Such matters often caused tensions b/ween different Frankish/ Crusader groups.

Finally, but not least, we should remember that nearly all of the primary sources give us the perspective of the social elite; of the “lower orders”, we know very little. It is very hard meaningfully to discern how exactly the common folk may have thought and felt about things, and most of what we think we know is based largely on inference, or what the elite generated written sources tell us.

For all these problems, however, we can read a fair range of sources which were written either by direct participants in the events described, or by authors who lived through the era of the Crusades, and were “well-connected”, and probably quite well-informed. For example, one of our major Byzantine sources is the *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena:

* Daughter of Alexius I Comnenus, and v much an apologist for her father, who was – in the opinion of many – a devious/ ruthless man, albeit out of hard necessity.
* Written 30 yrs after the events described, and therefore prob. often distorted by 20/20, retrospective, “hindsight” vision.
* Anna was quite bitter towards those whom she felt had misled/ betrayed or, in her opinion, wilfully misunderstood her father.
* Nevertheless, the *Alexiad* provides invaluable insights into the early Crusades from the perspective of the Byzantine ruling elite, revealing, in particular:

1. Byzantine mistrust of, & anxiety about, the barbarous, deceitful Westerners.
2. The Westerners’ own disunities/ mutual mistrust.
3. The frequent misunderstandings/ mutual incomprehension prevalent b/ween Western & Eastern Christians.
4. The Byzantines’ interests/ agenda re what came to be known as “The Crusades”, and their role in generating the whole movement in the first place: often rather overlooked by Western historians.
5. NB Peter Frankopan’s recent work on the First Crusade (2012) draws heavily on the *Alexiad*, and radically reinterprets the genesis of the whole crusading movement placing Alexius and the Byzantines right at the centre of events.

**Invaluable Muslim sources include:**

Ali ibn al-Athir

* Major multi-volume history, written about 1231 CE/ AD (628 AH).
* Ibn al-Athir was a trusted member of Saladin’s personal household.
* Very informative on Muslim reactions to the arrival of the Crusaders, and runs thro’ to the time of Zengi, Nur ad-Din, & Saladin himself.

Imad ad-Din (al-Isfahani), lived 1125-1201

* Persian scholar, poet, historian.
* An intellectual who served both Zengid & Ayyubid dynasties.
* Worked personally for Nur ad-Din, and Saladin.
* Also served in the Royal Guard, so clearly v trusted.
* Eventually became Saladin’s Chancellor and personal confidant.
* Present at Battles of Marj Uran & Horns of Hattin, and Siege of Jerusalem, 1187.
* Wrote a biography of Saladin – most of which was lost/ only fragments survive, but most historians think that this work was a key source used by both ibn al-Athir and Baha ad-Din.

Baha ad-Din, born Mosul 1145/ died Aleppo 1234 (aka “Yusuf ibn Rafi ibn Shaddad”)

* Kurdish jurist & scholar/ an “insider” – part of Saladin’s “inner circle”.
* Close personal friend/ adviser of Saladin.
* Ran Saladin’s military legal service, and was present at Siege of Acre & Battle of Arsuf.
* Wrote a v lively account of the 3rd Crusade from the Muslim perspective.
* Most importantly, however, he wrote Saladin’s biography, generally now called *Life of Saladin*.

**Important Frankish/ Crusader sources include:**

Fulcher of Chartres – who participated in the First Crusade, and later wrote a graphic eye-witness account.

Raymond d’Aguilers – *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem* (transl JH & EE Hill, Philadelphia, 1968). Chaplain to Raymond IV of Toulouse. Chronicle of First Crusade.

*Gesta Francorum* – anon. author clearly connected with Bohemund I of Antioch. “The Deeds of the Franks” is a chronicle of the First Crusade.

William of Tyre – a Churchman who was born Jerusalem, c1130/ lived in Outremer; European educ; became Archbish Tyre, & wrote a chronicle of the events of C12th when the Crusader States were at their height. Very informative on many matters, esp politics & religion in the Crusader States of the period. Died, 1186.

Odo de Deuil – *The Journey of Louis VII to the East* (transl, NY, 1948)

Ambroise (of Normandy) – Chronicle of Third Crusade, which he accompanied & then wrote about 6 yrs later; aka *The Crusade of Richard the Lionheart*. Very pro Richard!

Geoffrey de Villehardouin (*The Conquest of Constantinople*) & Jean (John) de Joinville (*The Life of St Louis*) – aka *Joinville & Villehardouin – Chronicles of the Crusades* (Penguin ed 2008, transl Caroline Smith) – the Fourth Crusade

Robert de Claris – poor knight/ “rank & file” view (with caveats – a “poor knight” was still a knight; socially on another planet from the common folk!) of 4th Crusade.

***Useful document compilations/ commentaries incl’d:***

Brundage, J, *The Crusades: a documentary survey* (Milwaukee, 1976)

Hallam, E, (general editor), *Chronicles of the Crusades* (Guildford, 1996)

Krey, A.C., *The First Crusade – Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants* (orig Princeton, 1921; new paperback ed Arx Pub, 2012): a chronological compilation of primary sources, maps, commentary creating an intelligible narrative account of First Crusade. (Incld’s substantial extracts from the *Alexiad* .)

Maloof, A., *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (London, 1984)

Remember: eyewitness/ participant accounts are almost invariably biased, but nevertheless these provide the backbone for any understanding of what happened during the Crusades. If treated with due caution & read critically, they are invaluable.

**Historiography of the Crusades**

Once the Crusading era ended (final collapse of Crusader States, 1291, but not forgetting that “crusading” contd. in Iberia, E Europe/ Baltic well into the C14/15th – Moorish Granada fell, 1492), most appear to have given them relatively little consideration other than expressing gratitude that it was all over – eg C14th Abu’l-Fida wrote that “God willing” the Franks wld never again set foot in Muslim lands. Muslim writers made reference to the “wars against the Franks”, and memories of “crusading” lived on in W European popular culture (eg the “gestes”; ideals of “chivalry”; Chaucer’s “perfect gentle knight” in C 14th *The Canterbury Tales* had been on crusades, albeit in Europe rather than the Holy Land), but “The Crusades” were probably not a matter of great contemporary importance to most.

Certainly, late Medieval/ Early Modern Catholic rulers often used the language & symbolism of “crusades” to support their agendas, but spreading Catholicism in, for example, the Americas was not primarily about Christianity V Islam, and the “crusades” against Protestant England were about dealing with Christian “heretics”. Similarly, the “Spanish Inquisition” certainly targeted “Moors”, but equally Jews & Christian “heretics”. There was also on-going warfare against the Ottoman Turks, which often resulted in Europeans adducing the language & symbolism of “crusading” as a motivational tool, but essentially Europe was on the defensive against “The Turk”, a situation persisting well into the Early Modern Era.

In the immediate aftermath of the Crusades, the Muslim Near/ Middle East had bigger problems to contend with – the clear & present Mongol threat from the East. The subsequent rise of the Ottoman Turks [whose empire eventually subsumed the entire Turkish, Byzantine & Arab worlds - Constantinople fell to them, 1453] meant that by the Early Modern Era (C 15/16th) one of the greatest (possibly THE greatest!) powers of the time was Muslim. Relatively distant wars over control of “The Holy Land” were, therefore, of limited significance to most Muslims, whose mighty “Sultans” (eg Suleiman the Magnificent, “Shadow of God on Earth”, 1522-66) now “called the shots” from Constantinople/ Istanbul, and were able to threaten Europe with their powerful armies (eg Ottoman Army besieged Vienna, 1529), and dominate the Mediterranean with their fleets; a dominance not seriously challenged until the Battle of Lepanto, 1571.

Similarly, later Medieval/ Early Modern Europeans had other concerns & interests: plague & famine, brutal dynastic wars, followed by “Renaissance”, & “Reformation”, and the consequent bloodily destructive wars b/ween Catholics and Protestants which tore much of Europe apart. Then gradual geographical expansion & trade, “Enlightenment”, revolutions (political, & scientific/ technological), industrialisation, imperialism, and eventual dominance of a global stage.

For example, the so-called “Voyages of Discovery” – eg Christofio Columbo’s first Atlantic voyage, 1492. It was no coincidence that this was sponsored by the Christian rulers of Spain who’d just expelled the Moors from their last Iberian stronghold in Granada (Jan 1492) and were seeking maritime “westward” trade routes to the East (India & China esp) to by-pass the Muslim controlled sections of trad. land trade routes (“The Silk Road”) to the Far East. The focus of Europeans was increasingly on developing/ expanding trade networks wherever they could, and eventually, to that end, establishing trading bases (“factories”), & eventually colonies in the Americas, Asia, & Africa. The Portuguese led the way with the first “global seaborne empire”. This eventually evolved into full-blown “empire building” (imperialism) largely driven by the rapacious demands of Western Europe’s developing mercantile/ “capitalist”/ industrial societies (C18th onwards).

During the “Enlightenment” of the C18th many European writers (notably ‘Voltaire’, & Edmund Gibbon – *Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire,* 6 volumes, 1776-88, and *The Crusades*) loathed the Middle Ages as a barbaric interlude b/ween the “glories” of the Classical Ancient World and the “Reason” of their own time. The Crusades were held in contempt as prime examples of the worst excesses of barbarous medievalism.

Edmund Gibbon wrote and spoke about this “triumph of religion and barbarism”, giving full vent to his loathing of Medieval Christendom, which he felt had sought to deny and destroy any pre-Christian (or chronologically parallel) achievements in spirituality, thought, culture, and society & government which did not comply with its primitive and superstitious world view. Gibbon may have had a sneaking regard for Islam (certainly he admired the achievements of Muslim culture), famously writing that he could envisage a future when “Imams preached from the pulpits of Oxford” - although he may just have done this to tease his critics. In Gibbon’s opinion, crusaders should have stayed at home and concentrated their time and energy on managing their estates properly and promoting good government. Objectively, his view may be valid, but it’s the value judgement of an C18th intellectual taking no account of the culture, mind-set, beliefs & values of those living in the C11-13th.

C19th “Romanticism”, however, saw a revival of interest in the culture and art of the Middle Ages which were regarded by some as more authentic/ emotionally engaging than the cool rationalism of “The Age of Reason”. The Medieval period was very fashionable, and there was a surge of interest in all things “Gothic”; hugely influential in art, architecture, and literature. To many people, urban industrial life was dehumanising, and “Romanticism” reflected the desire to “recreate” an imagined halcyon past drawing on aspects of Medieval culture. All largely a delusion of wealthier elements of the emerging middle classes, but their fantasies were stoked by the historical romances of writers such as Walter Scott, who wrote 4 “Crusader novels” (eg *The Talisman*, 1825), and did much to generate an idealised, highly “romantic”, perception of the Crusades.

Many of Scott’s “crusaders” are brutal & ignorant bigots (particularly The Templars, who are portrayed as evil, cunning sadists), whilst most Muslims (esp the leading “players”) on his romantic stage are presented as sophisticated, brave and honourable. This superficial “balance” rather, however, distorts the historical realities, viewing complex, nuanced, past events through an elitist lens whereby “great men” (esp Richard I & Saladin) deal honourably with each other, and a few good people try to ameliorate the worst excesses of their “inferiors”. It’s grossly distorted and simplistic, but this romanticised narrative fed directly into the aspirational idealism and social snobbery of the Victorian middle classes, and became the widely accepted popular Western view of the Crusades, reflected in many school textbooks well into the C20th. It persists in areas of popular culture, as evidenced by Ridley Scott’s film, *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005):

“…absolute balls. It’s rubbish. It’s not historically accurate at all. It draws on *The Talisman*, which depicts the Muslims as sophisticated and civilised and the crusaders are all brutes and barbarians…. The fanaticism of most of the Christians in the film and their hatred of Islam is what the Islamists want to believe. At a time of inter-faith tension, nonsense like this will only reinforce existing myths.” Professor J Riley-Smith

Romanticism also fed into one of the other great “isms” of the C19th, Nationalism, in that it fuelled the developing notion of distinct national (often more explicitly “racial”) “cultures”, a concomitant of which was the idea of hierarchies of culture; used with increasing frequency to rationalise European imperialism as a “civilising mission” to spread the benefits of the West to the “uncivilised” world. C19th French historians were particularly egregious offenders in this regard, most notably the very popular Joseph Michaud (*History of the Crusades*, 1812) who promoted the idea of the Crusades as an early (prototypical?) example of European colonialism, in which “the French” (not an identity to which most crusaders would’ve much related!), in particular, had brought law, enlightenment and other ‘civilising’ benefits to the peoples of the East. None of which would necessarily have mattered much, but for the fact that as the Ottoman hegemony declined, European imperial powers (esp Britain & France) started to move in on Muslim lands (eg Britain occupied Egypt, 1882), prompting some Arabs to revisit the era of the Crusades.

The Michaud narrative, in particular, was adduced as evidence of a continuum from Crusades to contemporary colonialism; a Western agenda to control Muslim lands, and possibly destroy Islam. The undoubted betrayal of Arab aspirations at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), and subsequent parcelling out of former Ottoman territories as largely British & French controlled “mandates” further fuelled this developing narrative of a war against Islam.

Emerging groups such as “The Muslim Brotherhood” (founded in Egypt, 1928) certainly conflated the developing Arab nationalist cause with the idea that there was an on-going war between Christianity and Islam stretching back to the era of the Crusades. In truth, the still dominant Western powers of the inter-war period were interested in the Near/ Middle East for rather more secular reasons: oil, and the fact that many predominantly Muslim lands lay in strategically sensitive areas. There was no war on Islam. Indeed, many Westerners (from Napoleon onwards) had been captivated by the “Mysterious East”, steeping themselves in “Orientalism”, an element of which was usually a high regard for Islam. Certainly, such “Orientalism” was often patronising, and replete with crude cultural assumptions (tinged by degrees of racism – “crafty Orientals” etc) [see the work of the Palestinian-American academic, Edward Said], but was hardly indicative of a desire to destroy Islam.

Immediately after WW2, however, the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel (1948), first supported by a British government (Balfour Declaration, 1917), and later advocated by many (esp in the USA & France) further enraged many Muslim sensibilities. The fact that Israel pretty well matched the boundaries of the Crusader States, and that its increasingly vocal ( frequently non-Jewish) supporters in the USA tended often to be from political groups aligned with “fundamentalist” Christian interests, did not help to dampen growing paranoia that the “Christian West” was hell bent on attacking Islam and “stealing Muslim lands”. The USA’s undoubted “special relationship” with Israel (clearly evidenced by massive economic, military, & intelligence, as well as personal, ties) feeds directly into today’s “Islamist” narrative that Muslims face continuing attack from “crusaders”, whose agents are the Israelis. This sense of grievance had been building, & becoming increasingly acute, ever since Israel’s complete takeover of Jerusalem during the “Six Day War”, 1967.

One of Osama bin Laden’s key aims in setting up *Al Qaeda* was to engender *jihad* against “Global Crusaders”, who are, according to this narrative, led and coordinated by modern “crusader states” (esp USA, Britain, France) and financial/ corporate networks run (of course!) by Jews. Basically, Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda, and so-called “Islamic State”, want to re-establish their idea of the “Caliphate” of old. Ironically, in their paranoid stew of self-mythologisation, delusion, ignorance, & psychopathy, they fail to realise that key parts of the Medieval Muslim Caliphate (eg Moorish Cordoba) were in many ways the most “progressive” and tolerant societies of their day whose members had no desire to live according to the social mores and precepts of the desert dwelling Arabs of the Prophet’s time. The *Salafism* embraced by today’s “Islamists” is a puritanical and regressive strain of Islam, not adhered to by most modern Muslims.

Sadly, there are, however, equally paranoid and deluded elements in sectors of many Western societies (eg Anders Breivik: 2011 killing spree of over 70 fellow young Norwegians whom he regarded as “traitors”) who do regard themselves as latter-day “crusaders” defending the West from Muslim attack. This highlights the importance of a proper understanding of the Medieval Crusades – in *their* terms and *historical context*.

It is important to appreciate that serious historical research (evidence based, “scientific”) really only became established in Western universities during the C19th, and did not attain full acceptance as a distinct academic discipline of real worth until the early C20th. Prior to this “historians” tended to be either lawyers & administrators (who saw “history” as a sequence of “case studies” in government, war making, & empire building), or creative writers such as Walter Scott, who saw the past as a rich tapestry of entertaining narratives and colourful characters which could be adapted to weave a good yarn about “times gone by”. Those (eg Gibbon) who did try to produce something more serious had relatively limited access to archival material, and usually had agendas of their own, such as promoting the idea of immutable “progress” - aka “Whig history”. They were often very gifted, but they were gifted amateurs who had a limited appreciation of the vital necessity of judging the past only on the basis of hard evidence, and in its own terms. It was not really until the early C20th that serious academic historians started to do precisely this – eg D Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 1919, which emphasised the virtual impossibility of truly understanding “the Medieval mind”.

In 1907, British historian RC Stevenson published *The Crusaders in the East*; in many ways, the “breakout” text of modern Crusade scholarship. The 1911 edition of *Encyclopedia Brittanica* contained an article on the Crusades by Ernest Barker, which was for many years regarded as a “masterly” (Prof. HE Mayer) introduction to the subject.

Another early practitioner of serious Crusade scholarship was AC Krey (in the USA) whose work presented the general reader with a coherent narrative of the events of the First Crusade using primary sources accompanied by maps and commentary. Krey’s work (*The First Crusade – Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, 1921, Princeton Univ.) is still in print – Arx paperback ed, 2012.

From the late 1950s until the end of the C20th, the great doyen of Crusade scholarship was Sir Steven Runciman (1903-2000) whose 3 volume *A History of the Crusades* (1951-4) is a monumental piece of scholarship which still has major importance today. It is hard to overstate the profound influence of Runciman on generations of scholars in the field – he really was “the man” who inspired the growth of the Crusades specialism in modern universities.

Runciman was, however, primarily a “Byzantinist” (despite his lack of a large beard!); a flamboyant figure who admired almost unconditionally the life & culture of Constantinople & the Empire. He is broadly negative in his appraisal of the Crusaders. To Runciman, the “clash of cultures” was not b/ween Muslim & Christian, but b/ween Europeans & Byzantines: the Crusaders intruded upon a sophisticated world they were incapable of understanding, and did it great harm, notably, of course, during the Fourth Crusade when Constantinople itself was attacked and occupied.

In some ways, the “torchbearer” of the Runciman view may be Peter Frankopan (b 1971): a “Byzantinist” (again, clean shaven!) with familial ties to the Balkans. Frankopan’s *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (2012) is a revisionist interpretation of the First Crusade drawing heavily on Byzantine sources, notably *The Alexiad.* Alexius I is placed at the heart of the genesis of the whole crusading movement. In Frankopan’s view, Alexius was under unimaginable pressure ruling a fragmenting empire, and took the bold step of appealing to the Pope/ W Christians for help. The Byzantine Emperor was far more central to the whole crusading movement than has previously been appreciated, but in the process of aligning his interests with those of the Papacy, Alexius may inadvertently have paved the way for an outward “expansion” of Europe into the wider world, which ultimately was at the expense of his empire.

In the USA, KM Setton (General Editor) compiled the *History of the Crusades*, 1975 (Princeton/ Univ. Wisconsin) – a showcase of the best American & European Crusade scholarship to that date, which remains a valuable text. Non-specialist opinion of the Crusades has tended, however, to promulgate the Gibbonesque/ “Whiggish” view of the Crusades as regressive and wholly negative events, often committing the cardinal historians’ sin of judging past events wholly in *our* rather than *their own* terms.

French Medievalist Jacques Le Goff (*Western European Medieval Civilisation*, 1965, Paris), perhaps overcompensating for the “legacy of Michaud”, asserted that the only “fruit” of the entire crusading movement was the apricot! (p98). Such self-lacerating, guilt tinged, judgements have not been exclusively French, and many British “liberals” remain convinced that the Crusades were nothing more than wholly destructive events; European barbarism on the rampage – eg N Davies , *Europe*, 1996, pp 358-9. A more balanced French perspective may be found in the work of Regine Pernoud, *Les Croisades,* 1960, Julliard pub (Engl transl as *The Crusaders*, 1963, Lond.).

More generally, French historians (esp of the *Annales School*, which aims to produce “total history” by drawing on the insights of other disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, economics, sociology, psychology, art & literary criticism etc) have been very influential in broadening the “evidence base” & methodologies of Crusader scholarship: most notably in pioneering the use of computer “data crunching” in historical research, and encouraging interdisciplinary and “cross-cultural” team approaches. This has proved helpful in developing understanding of such topics as crusader castles, artwork, and the roles of women.

Interestingly, but perhaps unfortunately, Israeli historians (eg Joshua Prawer, *Histoire du royanne Latin de Jerusalem*, 1969-71 [2 volumes], Paris, and *Crusader Institutions*, 1980, Oxf; B. Kedar (Ed.), *Outremer – Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 1982) have tended to sustain the view of the Crusader states as forerunners of later European colonial expansion. In fairness, however, they do not present this in terms of a European ‘civilising mission’, and certainly never as a clash of faiths/ cultures in which Christian Crusaders made war on all Muslims.

Israeli Crusade specialists tend to advocate the “Messy Mixture” model of pragmatic social organisation in the Latin Kingdoms, and if they do have any “hidden agenda” (which personally, I doubt!) it is to imply that such an approach might be a helpful “way forward” in modern Israel. Nearly all Israeli Crusade historians (incl Prof Ronnie Ellenblum, *Crusader Castles and Modern History*, 2007) are based at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a famously “liberal”, inclusive, and all-embracing institution which strives rigorously and relentlessly to maintain the very best traditions of Jewish scholarship in the arts and sciences: there is no Arab hating, nor “Islamophobia”, despite what “Islamists” (and certain Western “liberal” Israel bashers!) like to believe.

Jonathan Riley-Smith (1938-2016) was a hugely influential Crusade scholar – in some ways as significant as Runciman. He undertook fundamentally important work on the highly complex origins of the Crusades and the motives of participants, notably using “charter” evidence to break fresh ground in this tricky area. Riley-Smith also did innovative work identifying & analysing “networks” of ‘Crusading families’ in Medieval Europe. Riley-Smith was a prolific author of books & scholarly articles, and a hugely influential university teacher, who taught/ supervised most of the current younger generation of Crusade scholars. Some readily available and highly readable books by Riley-Smith include:

* *What Were the Crusades?* (1977)
* *The Crusades:* *Idea & Reality* (1981)
* *The Crusades: A Short History* (1987)

In the opinion of many, Prof J Riley-Smith was **“…quite simply the leading historian of the Crusades anywhere in the world.”** (J Riley-Smith, Obituary, *Cambridge University*, 9:10, August 2017)

The German scholar HE Mayer (*The Crusades*, 1965/ 1972 Engl transl/ 1988 2nd ed; *Kings and Lords in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 1994) is also worth reading: no nonsense, precise, solid “German scholarship” in the best sense. Mayer is particularly strong on the politics of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, but also provides a clear overview of the range of motives underpinning crusading. He does not entirely agree with some of Riley-Smith’s conclusions drawn from charter evidence, asserting that “popular will” (in today’s terms – “public opinion”), simple faith, and other baser motives, were probably at least as important as Papal Bulls, preaching, indulgences, and the example of “great men”, in motivating many to “take the Cross”. Anything else aside, Mayer’s *The Crusades* remains one of the best general introductions to the subject: thorough, clear and concise.

Another prolific British Crusade scholar is Christopher Tyerman, a “Medievalist” of great range (eg has also written about Medieval France, and the history of British education) who explores crusading from many perspectives – cultural, social, religious, political. See…

* *The Invention of the Crusades* (1998)
* *The Crusades* (2005)
* *God’s War: A New History of the Crusades* (2006)
* *The Debate on the Crusades, 1099-2010* (2011)

Thomas Asbridge (eg *The First Crusade: A New History*, 2004; *The Crusades: The War for the Holy Land*, 2010) emphasises how multiple, complex, often largely political & personal, motives drove *both* sides during the Crusades, which were not really a monolithic clash of faith, but more a result of “realpolitik” and personal ambition. The Crusades came about because the “Holy Land” lay on the strategically and culturally important intersection of Europe, Asia, & Africa; a sensitive and volatile nexus of Byzantine Empire, Western Christendom, and the expanding Seljuk Turkish empire.

Crusading had, in Asbridge’s view, as much to do with the rejuvenation of Medieval Christendom, and the developing assertion of Papal power, as anything else. The putative “threat” from Islam did not really exist for Europeans of the time, but the stunning success of the First Crusade started a movement that lasted 200 years because it provided so many great opportunities. The same pertained on the Muslim side, with the emergence of forceful men such as Nur ad-Din & Saladin: “great men” of driving personal ambition. It’s notable, Asbridge points out, how few Muslims at the time called the conflict anything other than the “Frankish Wars”; only much later (C19th) were they seen as explicitly religious confrontations.

Jonathan Phillips (eg *Holy Warriors*, 2010; *The Crusades: A Complete History*, 2015) has done interesting work on the crucial involvement of the Genoese and other Italians in the Crusades, highlighting the extent to which economic motives usually operated alongside religious and other interests. He has also developed Riley-Smith’s work on the important “networks” of crusaders among European families which helped generate and sustain crusading traditions across generations of certain “kin-groups”.

The American historian Thomas F. Madden (b 1960) is also worth looking at, particularly re the Fourth Crusade. Madden’s *The New Concise History of the Crusades*, and *Enrico Dandalo and the Rise of Venice* are very highly acclaimed “best sellers”, and Madden is also the author (with D Queller) of the well regarded *The Fourth Crusade: the Conquest of Constantinople*, 1997, and *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, 2010. Madden is a regular presenter of TV documentaries on the Crusades and related topics, and is well known for his utter contempt for the notion that today’s “Islamists” have any legitimate claim to be heirs of men like Nur ad-Din and Saladin (see *The Washington Post*, Dec 4th 2015): a view shared by the likes of Asbridge, Phillips, Frankopan, and just about any serious scholar (Western or Muslim) working in the field today. Madden has been called “…one of the most important medievalists in America at present.” (*Medieval Review*, 2007).

The historiography of the Crusades is vast. Numerous sub-specialism studies can be found (eg Crusader warfare – notably RC Smail), with particular “growth areas” in topics such as women and the Crusades. The above is not a definitive description of what’s available, but simply a brief overview of some of the notable work readily obtainable today. (CRH, 2017)