**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 notable: 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 the annihilation of the Emperor Charlemagne’s rear-guard (at the hands of mainly Basque guerrilla forces) at the Roncevaux Pass, 778, as the Frankish army withdrew from campaigning in Moorish Iberia (Spain & Portugal) – *Al-Andalus*. It is, of course, heroically propagandistic, but does serve as a reminder of an historical reality: that Europeans had been fighting against Muslim invaders of Christian 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 establishment 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 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 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. Templars also had a proclivity for adopting local cultural habits in Outremer; a trait shared by many other “Franks”, esp those born & raised in the Crusader States. Such matters often caused tensions b/ween different Frankish/ Crusader groups.

Finally, 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 hard meaningfully to discern how exactly the common folk may have thought and felt about things: most of what we think we know is based largely on inference, or what the elite generated written sources tell us. The “Female Voice” is also limited because, with a few exceptions (eg Anna Comnena, Queen Melisende), the world of The Crusades was extremely patriarchal, & women’s agency was usually concealed.

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” – member 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* – 2nd Crusade (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, & later crusades.

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)

Gabrieli, F, (ed/ transl) *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (London/ Uni Calif, 1969/ Routledge, 1984)

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

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

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

Helen Nicholson, *The Crusades* (2004) – excellent general introduction/ commentary on sources etc.

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 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 probably 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 Roads”) to the Far East. The focus of Europeans was increasingly on developing 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’, & Edward 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.

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 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. 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 a C18th intellectual taking no account of the culture, mind-set, beliefs & values of those living in the C11-13th.

C19th “Romanticism” promoted a revival of interest in the culture and art of the Middle Ages, which were regarded by some as more authentic and 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” 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 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, *The Times*, 5/5/05.

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, 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 was adduced as evidence of a continuum from Crusades to contemporary colonialism; a Western agenda to control “Muslim lands” & 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 hardly indicative of a desire to destroy Islam.

Immediately after WW2, 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 Arab sensibilities. The fact that Israel pretty well matched the geographical “footprint” of the Crusader “Kingdom of Jerusalem”, and that its increasingly vocal (frequently non-Jewish) supporters in the USA were often 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 was reinforced, & became increasingly acute, after 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, 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 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 equally paranoid and deluded elements in some 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 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 to be adapted to weave stirring tales about “times gone by”. Those (eg Gibbon) who did produce something more serious had relatively limited access to archives, 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 with limited appreciation of the importance of judging the past on the basis of hard evidence, and *in its own terms*. It was not really until the early C20th that 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 studies was Sir Steven Runciman (1903-2000) whose 3 volume *A History of the Crusades* (1951-4) is a monumental scholarly work 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” - 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” 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 “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 perspective may be found in the work of French Medievalist Regine Pernoud, *Les Croisades,* 1960, Julliard pub (Engl transl as *The Crusaders*, 1963, Lond.).

French historians (esp of the *Annales School*, which aims to produce “total history” by adopting a multidisciplinary approach) have been influential in broadening the “evidence base” & methodologies of Crusade scholarship: most notably in the use of IT “data crunching” in historical research, and promoting 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, Oxford, and B.Kedar (Ed.), *Outremer – Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 1982) have tended to view the Crusader states as forerunners of later European colonialism. In fairness, they do not present this as a European “civilising mission”, nor as a clash of faith & culture in which Christians made war on all Muslims. Crusaders were dominating colonial masters, but also pragmatists who accepted the presence of Muslims as *their subjects*.

More recent Israeli Crusade specialists tend to advocate the “Messy Mixture” model of pragmatic social organisation in the Latin Kingdoms, and if they do have a “hidden agenda”, it is to imply that such an approach might be helpful in modern Israel. Many Israeli Crusade historians (eg Prof Ronnie Ellenblum, *Crusader Castles and Modern History*, 2007) are based at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a famously “liberal” institution: there is no Arab hating, nor “Islamophobia”, despite what “Islamists” (and certain Western Israel bashers) like to believe. Indeed, Ellenblum, primarily an historical geographer, does much of his work collaboratively with Palestinian scholars at al-Quds University.

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 an inspiring university teacher, who mentored most of the current younger generation of Crusade scholars. Some 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, An Appreciation”, *Cambridge History*, 9:10, August 2017)

One of the “biggest names” in current Crusade scholarship is Prof Helen Nicholson of Cardiff Univ, a leading authority on the Military Orders who has also written about women of the Crusading era:

* *The Knights Templar* (2001), and *The Knights Hospitaller* (2001)
* *The Crusades* (2004) – really good introduction.
* *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages* (2006) – Ed. With Anthony Luttrell

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 scholarship”. 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”. 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 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 “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 Empire.

In Asbridge’s view, “crusading” had at least as much to do with the personal ambitions of key players, and economic, social & political motives, as with the rejuvenation of Medieval Christendom and the assertion of Papal power. 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 developed Riley-Smith’s work on “crusader networks” among European families which generated and sustained crusading traditions across generations of certain “kin-groups”.

American historian Thomas F. Madden is 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 acclaimed “best sellers”, and Madden also wrote (with D Queller) *The Fourth Crusade: the Conquest of Constantinople*, 1997, and *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, 2010. Madden is a regular presenter of documentaries on the Crusades, and is well known for his contempt for Islamists’ claims to be heirs of Nur ad-Din and Saladin (see *The Washington Post*, Dec 4th 2015): a view shared by just about any serious scholar 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, 1956), with particular “growth areas” in topics such as Crusader women –eg Bernard Hamilton, *Women in the Crusader States*, 1978, and more recently Helen Nicholson (Ed. With A Luttrell), *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, 2006.

Rodney Stark (*God’s Battalions; The Case for the* Crusades, 2009) is a “stimulating” read, but Stark is a sociologist of religion rather than an historian. Stark makes basic errors (eg writing of ‘friars’ preaching the First Crusade - Orders of Friars did not exist until the C13th), which somewhat undermine his credibility, and many of his bolder assertions (notably about Muslim culture, and military matters) are certainly contestable.

Rather like FC Woodhouse (1827-1905), whose *The Religious Military Orders of the Middle Ages*, 1879, reveals more about the preconceptions and values of a Victorian Oxbridge don than the likely realities of Medieval Military Orders, Stark’s work clearly has an agenda rooted in his own time and place (C21st America), and especially in the “world view” of certain “think tanks” with which he has been associated. To be fair to Stark, he acknowledges his debt to Crusade scholars, but then states that specialist historians lack the “insights” of social scientists such as himself: a dubious assertion, to say the least. Dan Jones’ *Crusaders*, 2019, is a better “popular” history of The Crusades. Jones (taught by Prof Riley-Smith) is an adept synthesiser of sound scholarship who writes very well.

All historians work in a “matrix” of their own time and place, which influences how they interpret the past. Personal interests, preferences, and, yes, “agendas”, will always be significant: why would anyone bother researching and writing history (a laborious process!) unless they feel they have something to say? As EH Carr (*What Is History?*, 1961) famously noted, ‘History means interpretation’: if we really want to understand an historical account, we should first look at the historian who wrote it.

Runciman and Frankopan admire the Byzantine Empire. Riley-Smith’s Catholicism was a big “driver” of his prolific output; HE Mayer’s interests (primarily Governance of the Kingdom of Jerusalem) reflect a very “German” ‘Scientific History’ based on exhaustive scrutiny of archival material. Helen Nicholson has a keen interest in uncovering the hitherto relatively under-researched subject of female agency in aspects of the Crusades. Phillips is interested in financial, trade, and other “networks”; Smail’s focus is warfare; Tyerman’s socio-cultural & religious. Asbridge is “into” the bigger strategic picture, but also the “politics of personality”. There is, however, a huge difference between historians (who first read thoroughly all previous work on their areas of interest, and then undertake their own examination of the evidence extant, perhaps uncovering new sources, to reach judgements based on evidence driven analysis and interpretation) and writers like Stark, who choose selectively from the research of others to support pre-existing “world views”. It is vital to appreciate that a great deal of ideologically motivated nonsense is written about “The Crusades”, by no means all of it by “Islamists”. As with so much else, the worst offenders often inhabit the “On-Line” world, so great care is necessary.

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, 2019)