



2010.11.04

Jonathan Phillips, *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*. New York: Random House, 2009. Pp. xxv, 434. ISBN 978-1-4000-6580-6.

Review by David Stewart Bachrach, The University of New Hampshire (bachrach@cisunix.unh.edu).

Students of the European crusading movement have benefitted over the past sixty years from a long tradition of overarching narratives.<sup>1</sup> The eminent crusade historian Jonathan Phillips (Univ. of London) enters this already dense mix with *Holy Warriors*, which seeks to connect medieval concepts of crusading and holy war to modern notions of crusade and jihad. Phillips conventionally begins his study with Pope Urban II's preaching of the crusade in 1095 and concludes in the present with a brief discussion of the implications of the film *Kingdom of Heaven*.<sup>2</sup> The geographical scope of the study includes not only the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, but also crusading ventures in the Iberian Peninsula, the Baltic, North Africa, Asia Minor, and the Balkans.

*Holy Warriors* is organized largely chronologically in twelve chapters, with a brief introduction and conclusion. Chapters 1, 4, 6, and 7 recount the first four major crusade campaigns. In the first chapter, Phillips takes the reader from Urban's sermon at Clermont in November 1095 up to the capture and sack of Jerusalem in July 1099. In chapter 4, he discusses the crusading efforts authorized by Pope Eugenius following the fall of the crusader state Edessa to the Muslim ruler Zengi in 1144. Until recently, the Second Crusade has received comparatively little attention from historians, and this chapter provides a good synthesis of recent scholarship.

The campaigns of 1147–48 took place in three widely divergent theaters. Phillips first describes the origins of the expedition of German crusaders against the West Pomeranian seaport city of Stettin on the Baltic, a farcical undertaking since its inhabitants had long since converted to Christianity. Turning to Asia Minor and the Levant, he highlights the role of the Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, who preached the crusade in Germany. The campaign to aid the Latin principalities along the Levantine coast was led by King Conrad III of Germany and Louis VII of France, the latter accompanied by his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Phillips provides a lively description of the struggles endured by both royal armies and the ultimate failure of the crusaders' siege of Damascus in 1148. The Iberian theater of the Second Crusade receives the most thorough treatment, with close attention to the capture of Lisbon and the concurrent efforts of Genoese, Catalan, and Castilian crusaders to take Almeria and Tortosa. The discussion of this latter campaign is particularly welcome given its general neglect in most broad surveys of the Crusades.

Chapter 6 focuses on Saladin and King Richard I of England, whose achievements and personalities have dominated both popular and scholarly accounts of the Third Crusade. As in most earlier discussions of this conflict, the participation of Emperor Frederick I's large German army gets comparatively little notice. Phillips also relegates King Philip II of France to a minor role during the first months of the campaign. The bulk of the chapter concerns Richard's two-year campaign against Saladin, which culminated in a negotiated truce rather than the capture of Jerusalem by the English king.

Chapter 7 concentrates on the misadventures that culminated in the sack of Constantinople by a crusading army in 1204 and the subsequent establishment of the Latin Empire of Byzantium. Phillips absolves any individual of a premeditated plan to impose western rule over the Greek empire. Rather, he argues that the unrealistic results of negotiations between the northern French barons and their Venetian counterparts

---

1. Including Steven Runciman's three-volume *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: CUP, 1951–54), Hans Eberhard Mayer's *The Crusades*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1988), and the more recent surveys by Jonathan Riley-Smith *The Crusades: A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale U Pr, 2005), Thomas Madden, *The New Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), and Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Pr, 2006).

2. Dir. Ridley Scott (Twentieth Century Fox, 2005)—see *Internet Movie Database* <[www.miwsr.com/rd/1040.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1040.htm)>.

left the French barons having to pay off an enormous debt when only a third of the envisioned crusaders appeared at Venice for transport to the East. Phillips then sketches the choices made by the leaders of the crusade that led, fatefully, to their siege of Constantinople.

Chapters 2, 3, and 5 treat the Latin states in the East and their Muslim opponents. Phillips draws on Christian and Muslim sources to present illuminating portraits of crucial players in the development, expansion, and finally reduction of the Latin principalities: the Sunni legal scholar al-Sulami of Damascus and the Muslim courtier Usama Ibn Munqidh in chapter 2, Queen Melisende of Jerusalem in chapter 3, and the couplet of Saladin and King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem in chapter 5.

Chapters 8–10 take up various crusades over the course of the thirteenth century. Chapter 8 deals with: the Albigensian Crusade, directed against heretics in southern France; the introduction of the Inquisition as a tool to root out heresy; the myths and realities of the children's crusade of 1212; crusading in the Baltic region; and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and its summons to a renewed crusade. In chapter 9, Phillips intertwines narratives of the Fifth Crusade (1218–21), directed toward Egypt, and the first decades of the reign of Frederick II, who ultimately regained control of Jerusalem for Christendom through a settlement negotiated with the sultan al-Kamil. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the barons' crusade (1239–41). Chapter 10 examines the crusading efforts of King Louis IX of France, especially his expedition to Damietta (1248–54) and subsequent invasion of North Africa (1270). Phillips pairs King Louis with the mam-luke Baibars, who rose from a slave soldier in Egypt to dominate the Levant by his death in 1277.

Chapters 11 and 12 investigate the persistence of crusading into the early modern period and its echoes in the modern era. In chapter 11, Phillips details the suppression of the Templar order by King Philip IV of France, the evolution of crusading into a "chivalric" exercise during the late fourteenth century, the rise of Ottoman Turkey as the dominant Muslim power in the eastern Mediterranean and Balkans, and the implications of crusading thought for European conquests in the New World. The twelfth and final chapter, aptly entitled "New Crusaders: From Sir Walter Scott to Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush," moves from the disrepute of crusading during the Enlightenment to its renewal during the European conquests in the Middle East in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The work features a substantial, but not overwhelming, scholarly apparatus of endnotes, bibliography, and index, as well as several useful maps and images. Given the volume's primary concentration on major campaigns and leaders of the crusading era, the bibliography is heavily weighted toward political history. English and French language scholarship predominates; works in Spanish, Italian, or German are less in evidence.

Especially welcome in the book is the vivid portrait of the strong-willed, powerful, yet enigmatic Queen Melisende. On the whole, Phillips rarely takes sides in the many scholarly controversies over particular crusading episodes. An exception is his treatment of the Fourth Crusade, where he relieves the Venetians of responsibility for the sack of Constantinople. In general, however, little in the book will seem controversial or novel to crusade historians.

A couple relatively minor points require correction. Phillips accepts the propagandistic claim of Latin writers that the crusaders' horses died en masse during the march through Anatolia in 1097, and that they rode oxen, while dogs pulled baggage carts (18). This yields a picturesque but wildly misleading impression of the campaign against the forces of Kilij Arslan, ruler of the sultanate of Rum. Another recurrent distraction is Phillips's translation of *miles* as "knight." The Latin word actually denotes professional fighting men equipped with warhorses, body armor, shields, and swords. Only a small minority of them were of the juridical class sometimes denoted by knighthood; most did not even own their horses or equipment. Finally, military historians will balk at Phillips's claim, in discussing King Guy of Jerusalem's decision to fight the battle at Hattin in 1187, that honor demanded his aggressive action (121). In fact, strongly influenced by the fifth-century Roman author Flavius Vegetius's military handbook (*Epitoma rei militaris*), military doctrine of the crusading era saw battles and battle-seeking strategies as last resorts. The author himself makes this very point when discussing Richard Lionheart's tactics and strategy during the Third Crusade (139).

In sum, this highly readable account of the crusading movement provides a useful introduction to the main campaigns and some of their more colorful participants. It will be a solid textbook for undergraduate courses on the crusades or general surveys of the Middle Ages.