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Niall Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders: Christianity's Wars in the Middle East, 1095-1382, from the Islamic Sources*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Pp. xl, 186. ISBN 978-1-138-02274-4.

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Accounts of the Crusades from the Muslim perspective remain rare, but the gap is closing. Before Carole Hillenbrand's seminal *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*<sup>1</sup> appeared in 1999, Anglophone readers had only translations of the French and Italian originals of, respectively Amin Maalouf's *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*<sup>2</sup> and Francesco Gabrielli's compilation of Arabic primary source extracts.<sup>3</sup> Maalouf's pioneering work was an eye-opener for scholars in the 1980s and is still assigned in college classes on the Crusades. These days, however, it is something of a historiographical antique, produced by a journalist who "sought to write, from a hitherto neglected view, what might be called the true-life novel of the Crusades,"<sup>4</sup> somewhat in the manner of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.<sup>5</sup>

Now Niall Christie (Langara College), a specialist in Arabic language and Islamic history during the Crusader era, tries to strike a balance between Hillenbrand's dense, carefully researched scholarly work and the more popular, novelistic book by Maalouf. *Muslims and Crusaders* is an entry in a series of textbooks meant for undergraduates, and Christie makes this remit clear from the outset (2-3). More specifically, he aims to provide "a supplemental and counterbalancing" book to set against the torrent of material presented from a European perspective (1). The result is a modest, succinct work that will appeal both to students and general readers without either insulting their intelligence or assuming too much prior knowledge.

The short, synthetic text proper comprises nine chapters arranged, for the most part, chronologically. There follows a section, "Documents," containing twenty-one extracts from (mostly) contemporary Muslim historians, poets, and raconteurs. The narrative chapters may be read without bothering with the documents (which, in any case, Christie carefully explains in his main text) or the documents may be consulted without the narrative. A few of the extracts are drawn from standard translations, but most have been freshly rendered by the author.

Despite its concision, the book covers a lot of ground and remarkably well. The first two chapters provide important background by sketching the history of Islam and the Levant before the Crusades. Christie discusses the differences between and development of the Sunni and Shi'ite branches of Islam and the theological/doctrinal subdivisions within both. The following chapters serve as a Muslim analogue of the many general western-perspective histories of the Crusades. The period from the First Crusade through the Third and Saladin's death in 1193 occupies more space here than the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as it does in most western accounts. This may be due, as well, to Christie's particular scholarly expertise in the earlier Crusades.

The author is commendably even-handed throughout, pointing out that neither western nor Islamic writers of the period tell us all we want to know. He judiciously assesses the Muslim source material, identifying both strengths and weaknesses. Muslim writers, like their Christian counterparts, were often religious or religiously-trained, but unlike western writers, they rarely made crusade activity the center of their narratives (4, 21, 58). Christie acknowledges that Muslim leaders who either stopped western encroachment or took back territory, like Nur-a-Din or Saladin, frequently mixed piety and jihad with personal and political

1. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U Pr, 1999 (orig. 1959); rpt. NY: Routledge, 2000.

2. Trans. Jon Rothschild (1984; rpt. NY: Schocken Books, 1985).

3. *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. E.J. Costello (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1969 [orig. 1959]). Some few primary materials from the Crusade era had been translated into English prior to Gabrielli's sourcebook.

4. Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, xi.

5. Subtitle: *An Indian History of the American West* (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971; often rpt'd.).

agendas absent from the sources (28, 50, 12). In other words, he treats Muslim writers and their subjects as real people with human motives, achievements, and failings.

A persistent theme of *Muslims and Crusaders* is that, perhaps less known to modern westerners, the impact of the Crusades in the Levantine Middle East was less momentous than it is today represented in popular culture or the nightly news. Muslims of the era were more preoccupied with internecine wars and political struggles than with the Crusades or westerners in general. People living in, say, Baghdad, were not much concerned with faraway conflicts that had little or no impact on their own daily lives (113).

Christie admits that, in a short book surveying several hundred years of intense military and diplomatic activity, much has inevitably to be omitted or unelaborated. For one thing, he concentrates only on the Levant or eastern Mediterranean during the Crusades, ignoring Christian-Muslim encounters elsewhere, for example, in the Iberian Peninsula (3). He also acknowledges sometimes relying on a surprisingly small evidentiary base. Thus he draws very heavily on Usamah Ibn-Munqidh for Muslim social, legal and medical perceptions of westerners in chapter 6, “War and Peace in the Twelfth-Century Levant.” Most people working in the field of “Crusader studies” are already well aware of this famous source, available in translation since the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> But, given the paucity of other sources for Muslim opinions of westerners, Christie, like other historians, has had to rely excessively on Ibn-Munqidh and on the best of modern secondary literature, including the work of Hillenbrand (2–3, 59, 77).

The book offers a useful corrective by exposing a disconnect between the western and Muslim historiographical traditions: western historians typically leave the impression that the Latin states in the Levant held on only by a thread after 1187 (buttressed a bit by Richard Lionheart), but remained a serious military threat owing to their naval supremacy and control of much of the Levantine coast. On this view, the Mamelukes (ca. 1250–1517) conquered the western-held ports by 1291 because of the continued danger they posed. Christie successfully challenges this interpretation, arguing that westerners did not constitute a genuine menace in the Levant after 1254 (the end of Louis IX’s First Crusade), though they certainly did in Muslim North Africa after 1267. The “clear and present danger” to Islamic hegemony was posed by the Mongols, not the Latin states (108). The Franks were a concern only as potential (however unlikely) allies of the Mongols. The Mamelukes’ ejection of westerners from their coastal possessions was thus more a “collateral result” than a “major goal” of the Mameluke state (110).

In a brief concluding chapter, Christie discusses the place of the Crusades in the modern historical consciousness. He contends that they were a major, if “highly localized,” threat not altogether forgotten in the Muslim world, as the current scholarly consensus suggests. After all, many extant Frankish fortifications, churches, and other buildings serve as a constant, visible reminder of those bygone days. Then, of course, the Crusades took center stage in Muslim memory with the 9/11 attacks.

Reflecting on the possibility of neighbors of different religions peacefully coexisting in the twenty-first century, Christie reminds us that Franks and Muslims often lived side by side in relative harmony even during times of supposed religious warfare, belying any idea of a clash of civilizations or bone-deep hatreds (118–19). Extremists in the present-day Islamic world who invoke “Crusade” to justify terrorism do not reflect views of the vast majority of Muslims.

*Muslims and Crusaders* cannot, nor is it meant to, replace general accounts written from the western perspective. Niall Christie has, however, produced a substantial, user-friendly,<sup>7</sup> counterbalancing presentation of the Crusades for use in university courses. Specialists, too, will value the book for its judicious emphasis on, and documentation of, the Muslim side of the story.

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6. Usamah Ibn-Munqidh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades*, trans. Philip K. Hitti (NY: Columbia U Pr, 1929); see also *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, trans. Paul M. Cobb (NY: Penguin, 2008).

7. Besides its four maps, three genealogical charts, and nine plates, the book includes a helpful “Who’s Who” and a glossary of terms *before* rather than after the main text. Bibliographical references appear as parenthetical, in-text citations, as well as in the guide for further reading at the end of each chapter, and as entries in the general bibliography.