The crusades from a historical perspective: Communication, culture, and religion

The Crusades have attracted scholarly attention ever since Pope Urban II first called for the recovery of the Holy Land at the Council of Clermont (27 December 1095). The loss of the Crusader Kingdom almost two hundred years later simply heralded the end of the first stage of this undertaking. This would be followed by many plans to reclaim the Holy Land, some of which were carried out in other areas of the world*.* Beyond the military and political dimensions, the Crusades left their mark in the form of a rich tradition of myths, symbols, and terminology, which became integral elements in both Western and Eastern cultures down the centuries. To mention a few examples from the recent past, Crusader symbols and values resonated through General Dwight D. Eisenhower’ Second World War memoirs, *Crusade in Europe*. Decades later, the idea of a civilizational clash between East and West—a new Crusade—replete with Crusader images and symbols, colored the Gulf War propaganda of both Saddam Hussein and the White House. The Crusades were a moment of such historical magnitude that they remain deeply embedded in our language to this day.

The enduring interest in the Crusades prompted the extensive publication of original sources throughout the nineteenth century, creating a solid base for the *Recueil des historiens des croisades,* published between 1841 and 1906, and the *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani,* edited by Reinhold Röhricht in 1893, the latter digitized in recent years (<http://crusades-regesta.com>). This widespread publication of original material made possible the pioneering studies of August-Arthur Beugnot, Emmanuel G. Rey, Hans Prutz, Gaston Dodu, René Gousset, John La Monte, and Sir Steven Runciman, among others.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, Jean Richard, Joshua Prawer, and Jonathan Riley Smith founded the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East. Boasting more than 300 members worldwide, the society publishes an annual journal, *Crusades*. This collection of studies thus forms part of a rich historiographical tradition, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the early stages of the Crusades.

**2. An Overview of Published Articles**

This volume opens with the essence of the Crusades and their implementation––papal propaganda and the communication challenges faced by Crusaders in Christendom and the Latin East. Sophia Menache [1] analyses different aspects of communications from the Holy See concerning the Crusades and their reception by contemporary audiences. The many communication challenges that bedeviled the Crusades justify the conclusion that, notwithstanding the First Crusade’s many achievements, in the long term, papal policy not only proved to be a propaganda fiasco but even suffered from periods of complete blackouts of communication.

With preaching serving as one of the Crusades’ main channels of communication, William Chester Jordan [2] analyzes two memorial sermons delivered by the papal legate, Eudes of Châteauroux, after the failure of King Louis IX’s Crusade. The traditional explanation of *peccatis nostris exigentibus* (because of our sins) was invoked once againto explain God’s mysterious designs in bringing about the defeat of the Christian army. On this particular occasion, those sins referred not only to the Crusaders’ many vices but also— perhaps mainly—to the vices of the supporters of Friedrich II. However, by conveying a biblical message, Eudes was able to declare his faith in the Crusaders’ eventual victory over their adversaries.

The holy wars in the context of the Iberian Peninsula are an important complementary chapter in the general history of the Crusades. Paula Pinto Costa and Joana Lencart [3] analyze the concept of the Crusade in the Kingdom of Portugal. The conquests of Lisbon (1147), Silves (1189), and Alcácer do Sal (1217) were all distinguished by the active participation of Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land. These conquests provide the basis for examining the emergence in Portugal of the terms Crusade and Crusader, the influence of the Holy War on that land, and the commitment of both the Portuguese Crown and the Holy See to reclaiming Christendom.

The defeats of the Crusaders on the battlefield undoubtedly posed a considerable challenge to papal propaganda efforts, although, in the long term, these setbacks provided the defenders of Christianity with invaluable insights into their enemy. Zeynep Kocabrytkoglu Cecen [4] examines the more positive perceptions of the Ottoman Turks after their decisive victory at Nicopolis (1396). Philippe de Mézières’s *Une Epistre lamentable* (1397) and Honorat Bovet’s *L’Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun* (1398) praise the Turks’ military organization and discipline compared to the Crusaders’ complete disarray. Similar conclusions appear once again six decades later, in Bertrandon de la Broquière’s *Le Voyage d’Outremer* (1452–1453), thus hinting at a more unbiased and perhaps more objective approach to the enemies of the cross.

The Crusaders’ difficulties in coping with new geographical environments posed yet another obstacle among the many challenges faced by papal propaganda. Svetlana Luchitskaya [5] examines the Crusaders’ impressions of the physical and psychological landscape when traveling across the Balkans. The portrayals of the wild and treacherous terrain align with biased accounts of the Balkan people, their brutish customs, and “barbarous” language. The Crusaders’ negative responses to the unknown reflect one aspect of the clash between the feudal society they left behind and the many hardships they encountered in their pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In contrast, familiar geographical areas in the Italian Peninsula and Sicily were used for political purposes, their conquest justified as a preliminary stage in the conquest (or reconquest depending on one’s point of view) of the Holy Land. Marco Giardini [6] sheds light on the close connection between the recovery of the Holy Land and the unification of the *orbis christianus* under one universal ruler. Benzo of Alba’s *Ad Heinricum imperatorem* in the early eleventh century, Charles I of Anjou’s Sicilian projects in the thirteenth century, and Charles VIII’s Italian expedition in 1494 were all different manifestations of the manipulation of Crusader ideals and symbols for short-term political purposes.

The Military Orders also manipulated the mythos of the Crusades after the fall of Crusader Acre to justify their very existence in a changing Christendom. Maria Bonet Donato [7] examines the approach of Catalan, Aragonese, and Navarrese Hospitallers to their Crusader past in the Latin East as a justification for their functional and administrative activities in Rhodes. Reports of their military actions from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries thus reflected an historiographical perspective extolling the Hospitallers’ mission and identifying them with symbolic places and figures without forgetting their caring and religious roles.

Indeed, the Crusades and their memory undoubtedly influenced the lexicon of myths, symbols, and goals of medieval Christendom. The Kingdom of Navarre presents an historiographical challenge in this regard, as it holds so few traces of narrative references to the Crusades in either the political, military, or ideological spheres. This absence is the most surprising since two of its monarchs, the Counts of Champagne Theobald I and II, actively participated in the Crusader campaigns during 1239–1241 and 1270, respectively. Julia Pavón Benito [8] analyses key texts and their divergent perspectives on the impact of the Crusades in other areas of Christendom.

The last section is devoted to the interactions between Christians and Muslims in the Crusader Period, with special emphasis on Muslim attitudes to the Crusaders, their achievements, and their failures. Sebastian Garnier [9] studies Saint Louis’s Crusade against Tunis (1270) and its threat to the Hafsid regime, as viewed by the contemporaries. The acolytes of the Hafsid sultans tended to downplay the impotence of their ineffectual sovereigns, while others, especially the Mamluks, did not spare the regime harsh criticism. The courtiers, on the other hand, resorted to poetry, satirizing “*al-Franṣīṣ*” following their setback in the Seventh Crusade (1248–1254), and mocking Louis IX in famous epigrams. At the same time, the Literati of the Restoration (ca 1370–1488) strove to portray al-Mustanṣir as a model king in a long series of sovereigns of the First Golden Age (until 1277) that extended over more than two centuries.

Although the militant *jihād* remains one of the most popular topics in modern Islamic studies, most of the works focus on ideologies and actions, omitting the popular perception of this phenomenon. Oleg Sokolov [10] examines Arabic folk epics inspired by the Crusades and shows that the protagonists were presented as *mujāhidūn—*holy warriors. These warriors were bolstered by an unshakeable faith in the divine sanction of their cause, demonstrated over and over again in their relentless resistance to the infidel incursion, and by their readiness to embrace martyrdom in the course of *jihad*. The frequent references to *jihād* in the epics, along with their anti-Frankish rhetoric, render them a valuable source for the study of the memory of the Crusades in Medieval Arab culture.

Nicholas Coureas [11] scrutinizes another aspect of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the Latin East, mainly in the form of the exchange of gifts—between the Lusignan kings of Cyprus and the sultans of Mamluk Egypt and Syria, the Lusignan kings and the Turkish emirs of Anatolia, and the Venetian rulers of Cyprus and the Mamluk sultans. This diplomatic device of gift-giving offers important insights into the dialogue between the belligerent sides. These exchanges took place during different times during war, sometimes as a prelude to hostilities, and sometimes immediately after their cessation or within a diplomatic setting, and were often complemented with written or oral messages expressing touching personal or affectionate sentiments.

The various articles in this collection thus complement our knowledge of the Crusades from the diverse perspectives provided by communication, culture, and religion. From the very core of the Crusades—the papal curia and its legates—to the peripheral areas of Christendom—the Iberian Peninsula and the Balkans—the Crusades, and their many myths, values, and symbols provide the basis for these stimulating articles.

Finally, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the many readers who guided us through the publication process and offered insightful remarks that enhanced the overall quality of the contributions. I offer special thanks to the editorial board of *Religions* for their invaluable assistance and, most especially, to Miss Coraline Chen, for her continuous support and encouragement, which turned our long-distant cooperation into a most pleasant experience.

Sophia Menache

**List of Contributions**

1. Sophia Menache, Communication Challenges in the Crusade Period: A Survey.
2. [William Chester Jordan](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2930439?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name), Sustaining Crusader Ardor: Eudes of Châteauroux’s Memorial Sermons for Count Robert of Artois.
3. [Paula Pinto Costa](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2657791?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name)and [Joana Lencart](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2657808?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name), : The Arising of a Concept Based on Portuguese Written Records of Three Military Campaigns (1147–1217).
4. [Zeynep Kocabıyıkoğlu Çecen](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2984940?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name), Communicating the Turkish Military Strength and Organisation after the Crusader Defeat at Nicopolis: Comparing Philippe de Mézières’s *Une Epistre lamentable*, Honorat Bovet’s *L’Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun* and Bertrandon de la Broquière’s *Le Voyage d’Outremer.*
5. [Svetlana Luchitskaya](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2962822?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name), ‘*Loca Deserta’, ‘Silvae Condensae’* and ‘*Abrupta Montium’*: How Crusaders Viewed Nature in the Balkans.
6. [Marco Giardini](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/3008404?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name), Sicily, Constantinople, and Jerusalem: A Geographical Pattern in Crusading Expectations along the Centuries.

# Maria Bonet Donato, The CrusadeCrusades and the Latin East in the Memories of the Hispanic Hospitallers (14th Century).

1. Julia Pavón Benito, Communicating the Crusading Activity of the Kings of Navarre in the 14th and 15th Centuries.
2. [Sébastien Garnier](https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2997202?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name), Did the Virtuosity of the Pen Compensate for the Shortfall of the Sword? Remembering the Eighth Crusade against Tunis (1270).
3. Oleg Sokolov, Vanquishers of the Crusaders: Mujāhidūn Characters in Arabic Folk Epics.
4. Nicholas Coureas, The Exchange of Gifts between Christians and Muslims on Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus 1192–1517.