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

Since Pope Urban II called for the recovery of the Holy Land at the Council of Clermont (27 December 1095), the Crusades had attracted much attention. The loss of the Crusader Kingdom almost two hundred years later, just heralded the end of a first stage, to be followed by many plans for the recovery of the Holy Land, some of which materialized in other areas of the world*.* Beyond the military and political levels, the Crusades left their mark on a rich spectrum of myths, symbols, and terminology, which became part and parcel of both Western and Eastern cultures throughout the centuries. To mention some few examples of the recent past, crusader symbols and values accompanied Eisenhower’s memories of the Second World War as well as Saddam Hussein’s and the White House’s images and emblems during the Gulf War. Crusader terminology thus became an integral element of contemporary communication.

The long-range interest on the Crusades further promoted the extensive publication of original sources throughout the nineteenth century, thus 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 and digitized in recent years (<http://crusades-regesta.com>). The large-scale publication of original sources 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 led to the foundation of the *Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East,* with more than 300 members worldwide and the publication of an annual journal, *Crusades*. This collection of studies thus integrated into a rich historiographical tradition, the beginning of which can be traced to the early stages of the Crusades.

**2. An Overview of Published Articles**

The volume begins with the core of the Crusades and their implementation, i.e., papal propaganda and the communication challenges that faced the crusaders in Christendom and the Latin East. Sophia Menache [1] analyses the different aspects of the apostolic message and its reception by contemporary audiences. The many communication challenges inherent in the development of the crusades, however, justify the conclusion that notwithstanding the many achievements of the First Crusade, papal policy to the long range encapsulated not only a propaganda fiasco but possibly also a communication blackout.

Being preaching was one of the main communication channels of the Crusades, 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 enlisted once againto explain God’s mysterious designs that brought about the defeat of the Christian army; at this particular occasion, not only the crusaders’ many vices but also and perhaps mainly of those supporting Friedrich II. The biblical message, however, allows Eudes to herald faith on the crusaders’ eventual victory over their adversaries.

The Crusades in and from the Iberian Peninsula present an important, complementing chapter in the history of the Crusades. Paula Pinto Costa and Joana Lencart [3] analyze the raise of the concept of Crusade in the Kingdom of Portugal. The conquests of Lisbon (1147), Silves (1189), and Alcácer do Sal (1217) – all characterized by the active participation of crusaders in their way to the Holy Land – provide the basis to examine the emergence of the terms Crusade/crusader, the influence of the Holy War in Portugal, and the commitment of either the crown and the Holy See in the process.

The defeats of the crusaders in the battlefield undoubtedly presented a main challenge to papal propaganda, while encouraging to the long-range new insights of the enemy. Zeynep Kocabrytkoglu Cecen [4] examines the more positive perceptions of the Ottoman Turks after their crushing victory at Nicopolis (1396). Philippe de Mézières’s *Une Epistre lamentable* (1397) and Honorat Bovet’s *L’Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun* (1398) reflect praise of their military organization and discipline vis-à-vis the crusaders’ complete lack of control. 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 also more objective approach to the enemies of the cross.

The crusaders’ difficulties while dealing in new geographical environments, became an additional obstacle to the many challenges faced by papal propaganda. Svetlana Luchitskaya [5] examines the crusaders’ physical and psychological impressions when travelling across the Balkans. The portrayals of the wild and treacherous environment align biased accounts of the Balkan people, their brutish customs, “barbarous” language, and way of life. The crusaders’ negative spectrum of emotions vis-à-vis the unknown, thus reflects one aspect of the clash between the feudal society they left behind and the many challenges they found in their pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

On the other hand, well-known geographical areas in the Italian Peninsula and Sicily were used for political purposes, to justify their conquest as a preliminary stage in the conquest and/or reconquest of the Holy Land. Marco Giardini [6] sheds light on the tight interconnection 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* at the early eleventh century, Charles I of Anjou’s Sicilian projects at the thirteenth century, and Charles VIII’s Italian expedition (1494), were all different manifestations of the manipulation of crusader ideals and symbols for political, short-term purposes.

The Military Orders, as well, manipulated the mythical image 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 stood in a historiographical tour that extolled the Hospitallers’ mission and identified them with symbolic places and people without forgetting their caring and religious roles.

Indeed, the Crusades and their memory undoubtedly influenced the thesaurus of myths, symbols, and goals of medieval Christendom. The Kingdom of Navarre presents in this regard an historiographical challenge since there were scarcely any traces of narrative references to the Crusades, either in the political, military, and/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 perspective to the welcoming 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 the Muslim approach to the Crusaders, their achievements and failures. Sebastian Garnier [9] studies Saint Louis’s Crusade against Tunis (1270) and its threat to the Hafsid regime, as viewed by the contemporaries. Thus, the Hafsid thurifers tended to minimize the sultan’s impotency, while others, e.g., the Mamluks, sometimes harshly criticized it. The courtiers, on the other hand, resorted to poetry and satirized “al-Franṣīṣ” for their setback in the Seventh Crusade (1248–1254). They further mocked Louis IX in famous epigrams, while the Literati of the Restoration (ca 1370–1488) strove to portray al-Mustanṣir as a model king for the First Golden Age (until 1277) in a long series of sovereigns that stretched 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, leaving out 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 holy warriors, i.e., *mujāhidūn*. As such, their key attributes were their faith strength, revealed once and again in their unlimited fight against the infidels, as well as their readiness for martyrdom on the path of jihād and, the well-deserved divine support. The epics’ widespread jihād and their anti-Frankish rhetoric turns them into a valuable source for the study of the Crusades memory in Medieval Arab culture.

Nicholas Coureas [11] scrutinizes another aspect of the relationship between Christian and Muslims in the Latin East, mainly, the exchange of gifts. Either 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, the gifts’ exchange reveals important facets of the dialogue between the belligerent sides. The very fact that many of these exchanges took place during times of war, sometimes during the prelude to hostilities and sometimes immediately after their end, and/or within a diplomatic setting, hints at the need to complement written and/or oral messages with a more personal, touching gesture.

The various articles of this collection thus compliment our knowledge of the Crusades from the different, wide 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 -- either in the Iberian Peninsula and/or the Balkans -- the Crusades, their many myths, values and symbols provided the basis for these stimulating articles.

Last but not least, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the many readers who accompanied the publication while contributing their important remarks. Special thanks to the editorial board of *Religions* for their proficient assistance and most especially, to Miss Coraline Chen, for her continuous support and encouragement, which had 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), Crusade: 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 Crusades 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.