

A HISTORY RE-INVENTED:
THE MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE CRUSADES IN
THE MIDDLE EAST

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The distrust and resentment in the Middle East towards the West has caused several international incidents and has exacerbated regional tensions in recent history. This resentment is in many ways based on a recreated and reinvented history. The relationship between Islam and the West today is highly complex, ranging from issues such as terrorism, immigration, Turkish attempts to join the EU, the revolutions sweeping the Middle East and the relationship between oil and support for autocratic regimes. This relationship begins in the 630's when the armies of Medina and Constantinople fought over the control of Syria-Palestine.

At first there was the aggressive expansion of Muslim territories at the expense of Christendom, then began the long series of defeats and perceived humiliations of the Arab World which is the primary root cause of this resentment and distrust. The Crusades, which have been used as examples of Western aggression in the modern Middle East, did not enjoy the same importance in the past. They were largely neglected in the medieval Middle East. The effect of the Crusades have been amplified in the modern era to place the current tensions between the Islamic world and the West in a context that is easier for the Arab world to understand, and absolves them of any fault, as this view makes them the victims of an unprovoked Western aggression; first they were victims of the Crusades, then they were victims of imperialism, and lastly they are victims of a renewed Crusade in our day. Yet in the reinterpretation of the Crusades, Arab historical revisionists neglect the fact that the Crusader period was marked by conquests and violence from both sides, that they were launched to re-capture lands that were previously in Christian hands, and that it involved trades and alliances, animosities

and even friendships. It is depicted only as an unprovoked assault on Islam by the West. I will in this paper attempt to use the Crusades as the linchpin in the modern Islamic view of the West. My argument is that history has been manipulated and over simplified by both sides; political and religious leaders can use this to gain favor among and to unify their populations. I will also attempt to bring to light a forgotten history, to put into context this conflict between Islam and the West. Through this look at history, I will attempt to connect the threads that connect the re-invented history of the Crusades to European imperialism, and finally to the current conflict with Israel.

2) Introduction to Jihad

Islamic theology is too broad of a topic to be fully discussed in this paper, but a brief understanding of it is necessary for a comprehensive view of this conflict.

Unlike Catholicism, Islam has no central authority; instead, the Quran is interpreted by jurists known as the *Ulema*. The open-ended interpretation of the Quran creates complications when it comes to defining the will of God.

In Islamic tradition, verses in the Quran can supersede those that came before it if there are contradictions between them, but again, this is up to interpretation. The verses of the Quran are divided into two periods: the Mecca and Medina verses. The verses revealed during the Medina period are often more bellicose and aggressive than the verses revealed in the Mecca period. Some have interpreted the more violent rhetoric of the Quran revealed in the Medina period, to abrogate the previous peaceful verses of the

Quran revealed in the Meccan period. Thus the more militant Muslims have argued that the following verses supersede the more peaceful ones:

And when the sacred months are over, slay the polytheists wherever you may find them, and take them captive, and besiege them and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place
(Quran 9:5)

Fight against those who do not believe in god nor in the day of judgment, and do not consider forbidden that which god and his messenger have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth, until they pay the Jizya with willing hand, and have been subdued
(Quran 9:29)

These verses are interpreted by some to invalidate previous peaceful verses such as:

and fight them on until there is no chaos and religion is only for god, but if they cease, let there be no hostility except for those who practice oppression
(Quran 2:193)

And if they incline towards peace, incline you towards it, and trust in god. Indeed he alone is all hearing and all knowing
(Quran 8:61)

This means that the Quran can be interpreted to support largely divergent views, it can be taken to support both a militaristic and a peaceful world view.

In Islamic theology there are two forms of *Jihad* (struggle), a 'greater *jihad*' and a 'lesser *jihad*'. The 'greater *jihad*' is aimed at one's self, a constant struggle for self improvement. While the 'lesser *jihad*', is the one that is well known in our contemporary world; a struggle to spread the supremacy of Islam around the world and to fight the 'infidels' either defensively or offensively. Out of the 35 times *jihad* is used in the

Quran, only 10 are in reference to war.¹ There are passages in the Quran that orders Muslims to conduct a greater *jihad* against non believers through preaching while other passages in the Quran exhort Muslims to fight the ‘infidels’ defensively and others to take the fight to the ‘infidels’. Unfortunately, *Jihad* has been taken over by the more militant Muslims, and has been associated with war and violence since the 9th century.² For the purposes of this paper, the term *Jihad* will come to mean the armed struggle, or Lesser *Jihad*, rather than the greater Jihad.

The modern view of *jihad* was developed during the generation after the prophet’s death, this was a time of rapid expansion and militant Muslims were searching for passages in the Quran to justify their claims. The *Surrahs* (verses) revealed in Medina were more bellicose, this was when Mohammed was waging conflicts against pagan and Jewish tribes on the Arabian peninsula, it was these verses that have been used to justify *Jihad*³. During the great conquests, the idea of subjugating the entire world under the authority of Islam became more appealing and jihad became primarily offensive. Later on, during the devastating Islamic civil wars, *Jihad* came to mean a defensive conflict, it was not seen as an obligation but was seen as meritorious. The way *Jihad* is viewed will continuously change with the times.

The conquests of the Christian rulers in the Iberian Peninsula and in the ‘Frankish East’ revived the concept of *Jihad*. Though it has existed and had been used previously by the

¹ John Tolan, Henry Laurens, and Gilles Veinstein, *Europe and the Islamic World: a History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 28. (Henceforth: Tolan et al, .)

² Qamar-ul Huda, ed., *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010), 39. (Henceforth: Qamar-ul, .)

³ *Ibid*, 42-44.

Emirs in Spain to wage regular campaigns into Christian territory; occupation or raids. The Ottomans also used it to gain recruits for their conquests, including the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Many Muslim leaders also used the jihadist rhetoric against their rival Muslim leaders who were portrayed as unorthodox. This shows that the concept of *Jihad* can be interpreted in different ways depending on the situation⁴.

It was Nur Al-Din Zangi, Emir of Mosul, who began to unite the concepts of the two *Jihads*. Nur al din understood the power of propaganda and the concept of *Jihad*. He hired hundreds of religious figures to travel around the Islamic world preaching *Jihad* and the importance of *Al-Quds*, (Jerusalem) to Islam. Nur Al-Din's aim was to fight the Crusaders, hoping that the pressure from the population will force the petty *Emirs* to send him aid in his fight. As one *Emir* who was requested to join him put it:

If I do not rush to Nur Al-Din's aid, he will strip me of my domain, for he has already written to the devotees and ascetics to request the aid of their prayers and to encourage them to incite the Muslims to Jihad. At this very moment, each of these men sits with his disciples and companions reading Nur Al-Din's letters, weeping and cursing me. If I am to avoid anathema, I must accede to his request.⁵

His successor Saladin continued the use of Nur Al-Din's rhetoric to unify and solidify his power in Syria over his Muslim rivals between 1174 and 1186, claiming the need to unify Muslims before attacking the enemy to liberate Muslim lands. After Reynald of Chatillon attacks a caravan, breaking the truce with Saladin, Saladin claims it is time to

⁴ Tolan et al, 44-45.

⁵ Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken, 1989), 144. (Henceforth: Maalouf, .)

attack the Christian kingdom. After his success, he is given the title of *Mujahid*, receiving praise from all over the Muslim world⁶.

3) Introduction to the Conflict

What most people seem to forget is that the conflict between East and West or Islam and Christianity did not begin with the Crusades and an assault by the West on Arab civilization as many seem to believe. It began with an aggressively expansionist religion which encroached on Western and Christian territories for hundreds of years. From the birth of Islam in the seventh century until the Crusades, Christianity was on the defensive, protecting its territories from Islamic conquest. Even Jerusalem itself, a source of contention in the past and present between the three Abrahamic religions, was once under Byzantine Christian rule, it was only conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century. In essence the Crusades weren't seen by Christians as an assault on Islam per se but as a re-conquest of lost territories.

The idea of re-conquest, of taking back what was violently taken by the Muslims, seems to have not only been used in the re-conquest of Spain but also of Jerusalem and other territories. At times, the idea of re-conquest was also given the same value as the Crusades. Pope Gregory IX extended 'indulgence', which was usually reserved for those fighting to reclaim the holy land, to King James I of Aragon during his re-conquest in and around the Iberian Peninsula⁷. Though the Crusades may be seen as a negative episode in Christian history, none the less, historically Jerusalem was a Jewish then a Christian and lastly a Muslim Community.

⁶ Tolan et al, 45-46.

⁷ Tolan et al, 43.

a) Initial Islamic Success

Islam was fortunate with the timing of its birth. The religion was born during the time of waning power of both the Byzantine and the Persian empires. This left a power vacuum in the area allowing Islam to grow and establish itself as a power in the region. Islam took advantage of the void and quickly began expanding and appropriating foreign knowledge and culture. The Arabs absorbed Greco-Roman philosophy and science, adding to the Persian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Hindu works that they inherited as well. They also added to them their own advances in knowledge. This allowed the Arab world to advance significantly in a short period of time. This knowledge was later taken to the West through trade, Islamic conquests and the Crusaders.

An example of the breadth of Arabic knowledge at the time, is the fact that that when Ibn Al -Nadim wrote his "*Fihrist*", which was a catalogue of Arabic texts, he mentions 430 books written on medicine, of these 430 books, only 174 were translated into Arabic from other languages, mainly Greek⁸.

At the time when the Islamic world was experiencing an intellectual renaissance with the study and development of mathematics, medicine and astronomy etc. the Western world was facing the dark ages.

b) View from Europe

At the time of Islamic expansion, the view of the Muslims varied from one area to

⁸ Tolan et al, 88.

another, many saw them as the equivalent of barbaric tribes moving from the east, such as the Germanic tribes and the Avars, Slavs etc. The Chronicles of Fredegar in Gaul depicts them in semi-apocalyptic terms. For Bede, a monk in Northumbria, the Saracens were nothing more than a vague threat; he mentions their defeat in Gaul but only in terms that they were punished by god for religious error rather than for attacking Christendom.⁹ Among the many invaders of Europe, the Saracens were seen as one of many punishments sent by god.

From Constantinople, where there was more contact with the Islamic world, Theophanes in his chronicle seems to understand that the Muslims were here to stay. He provides a brief biography on Muhammad, describing his marriage to Khadija, his epileptic fits ‘disguised’ as revelations, and his promises of reward for warriors of god.¹⁰

It seems that Europeans knew very little of Muslims, referring to them at times as Persians. The chronicler Petrus Tudebodus attributes an oath to Muslims: "by Machomet and by the name of all the gods."¹¹ thus they were often erroneously viewed as pagans. Pope urban II himself, declared at Claremont, that Jerusalem has been reduced to “paganism.”¹²

Fulcher of Chartres also claims that Muslims have placed an idol of Muhammad in the Dome of the Rock, to which they prayed. Another chronicler of the First Crusade has Muhammad dying by being eaten by flatulent pigs as a punishment.¹³

⁹ Tolan et al, 32-33.

¹⁰ Ibid. 33-34.

¹¹ Ibid 36

¹² Edward Peters, ed., *The First Crusade: the Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 30. (Henceforth: Peters, 1998, .)

¹³ Tolan et al, 37.

According to many Christian views at the time, Muhammad was inspired by the devil in the guise of the archangel Gabriel. This reinforced their belief that if Islam was led by the Devil, then Christianity was led by Christ.

4) Introduction to the Crusades

There are several reasons behind the launching of the Crusades at the end of the eleventh century.

Since the founding of Christianity, pious Christian pilgrims would travel to Jerusalem to visit their holy sites. The journey was long, arduous and dangerous as many of these pilgrims would fall victim to Bedouin raiders.

By the tenth century, the Seljuk Turks embraced Islam and began gaining power. They continued expanding their territories by taking lands away from the Arab dynasties which were too busy fighting among themselves rather than uniting to protect their domains. In 1070, the Seljuk Turks captured Jerusalem, and there were reports of Christian pilgrims being hindered from visiting their holy sites. Eastern Christians were also depicted by pope Urban II to be exposed to extreme violence and persecution by the Muslims, which had no basis in reality.¹⁴ The protection of the Pilgrims and of Eastern Christians was one of the reasons given to convince the people of the necessity of the Crusades.

Also in 1009, the ‘Mad’ Fatimid Caliph, Al-Hakim Bi Amr Allah had ordered the

¹⁴ Thomas Asbridge, *The Crusades: the War for the Holy Land [paperback]* (London: Simon & Schuster Ltd. 2012), 36. (Henceforth: Asbridge, .)

destruction the church of the Holy Sepulcher, which was seen as a barbaric and hostile act which was used to justify the Crusades in order to protect the Christian shrines.¹⁵

The Seljuk Turks also captured a lot of territories belonging to the Byzantine empire. Most of Asia Minor was already in the hands of the Turks by mid eleventh century.¹⁶ With the Byzantine Empire slowly being eroded by the Muslims, and Constantinople repeatedly threatened with invasion, Western Europe began to fear its collapse, which if occurs, would leave no buffer or barrier between the Muslim Turks and Christian Europe. The Byzantine Emperor, Alexius I Comnenus, sent a delegation in 1095 requesting aid to repel the Muslim invaders.¹⁷

Pope Urban II responded to the pleas of help from the Byzantine Empire by convening the council of Clermont in France in 1095 in which he exhorted all Christians to take up arms against the Muslims and reclaim the holy land in the name of Christ. Pope Urban said during his speech, according to Baldric, the Archbishop of Dol:

... we have heard, most beloved brethren, and you have heard what we cannot recount without deep sorrow- how, with great hurt and dire sufferings our Christians brothers, members in Christ, are scourged, oppressed and injured in Jerusalem...the churches in which divine mysteries were celebrated in olden times are now, to our sorrow, used as stables for the animals of these people!... base and bastard Turks hold sway over our brothers... whatever Christians still remain in hiding there are sought out with unheard of tortures... under Jesus Christ, our leader, may you struggle for your Jerusalem, in Christian battle-line...that you may assail and drive out the Turks... and may you deem it a beautiful thing to die for Christ in that city which He died for us ...¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid, 29.

¹⁶ Asbridge, 27.

¹⁷ Ibid, 34.

¹⁸ Peters, 317.

After Pope Urban II's call for a Crusade at Claremont, hundreds and thousands of people, including professional soldiers, peasants and even women and children, aristocrat and peasant, joined this 'armed pilgrimage' and began converging onto Constantinople in order to cross over into Asia Minor and to make their way to Jerusalem.¹⁹

By 1096, news started arriving of a large Frankish army moving towards the Orient. This was not the first contact the Muslims had with Frankish visitors, many pilgrims and soldiers travelled to the Holy Land before, but never in such large numbers. After their entry into Asia Minor, their goal became clear, Jerusalem. Ibn al Qalanisi relates,

In this year (1096) there began to arrive a succession of reports that the armies of the franks had appeared from the direction of the sea of Constantinople with forces not to be reckoned for multitude. As these reports followed one upon the other, and spread from mouth to mouth far and wide, the people grew anxious and disturbed in mind.²⁰

At first it seemed that that the Fatimids in Cairo and the Seljuk Turks thought that the Crusaders were mercenaries hired by the Byzantines to counter attack and capture cities which were previously held by the Byzantines, such as Antioch.²¹ Soon after, they realised that these were a different kind of Christians to the ones Muslims have encountered in the East so far. They did not view them with a religious hostility at that point, at least not yet. They soon realised that they were motivated by religion and soon descriptions of profanity committed against mosques and Muslim populations began to spread, such as the events at Ma'ara:

¹⁹ Asbridge, 42.

²⁰ H. A. R. Gibb, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades: Extracted and Translated from the Chronicle of Ibn Al-Qalanisi* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2011), 41. (Henceforth: Al-Qalanisi, .)

²¹ Asbridge, 113.

According to the chronicler Radulph of Caen “in Ma'ara our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots; they impaled the children on spits and devoured them grilled”²²

In a letter sent to the pope by a commander of the army that besieged Ma'ara, he states “a terrible famine racked the army in Ma'ara, and placed it in the cruel necessity of feeding itself upon the dead bodies of the Saracens.”²³ Not only did this act horrify the Muslims, but, according to a Latin witness, it also “disgusted as many Crusaders as it did strangers.”²⁴

Eventually incidents such as the one that occurred in Aleppo in 1127, when the Muslims of the city attacked churches belonging to Christian residents, became more widespread. Despite the fact that the local Christians were not allied with the Crusaders, religious hatred was starting to grow.²⁵

Jerusalem was captured on Friday, 15 July, 1099, after a siege that lasted 40 days.

The capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders led to the massacre of the inhabitants of the city. According to one Crusader, “one could see marvellous works. Some of the pagans were mercifully beheaded, others pierced by arrows plunged from towers, and yet others, tortured for a long time, were burned to death in searing flames.”²⁶

²² Maalouf, 39.

²³ Ibid, 39.

²⁴ Asbridge, 84.

²⁵ Tolan et al, 49.

²⁶ Asbridge, 101.

It is said that by the end of a weeklong blood bath, the city had lost its entire Muslim population. The survivors were forced to dump the dead bodies into a pit and set them on fire before being killed themselves²⁷.

The Jews of the city took refuge in their main synagogue, and as the Crusaders burned it down, they danced around it singing Te Deum, a Christian hymn in praise of God²⁸.

After this long awaited triumph, The victory of the Crusaders saw the establishment of the four independent Christian principalities of Tripoli, Edessa, Antioch and the Kingdom of Jerusalem.²⁹ The lords of the 3 principalities were however vassals of the King of Jerusalem.

The Crusades were launched with a defensive context, yet the re-conquest of Jerusalem was carried out nearly 400 years after it was originally captured by the Muslims, and the Islamic conquests of the 7th century in North Africa, the Levant and in the Iberian Peninsula were largely ended. Also, the claim of abuse of Eastern Christians by the Muslims was largely unfounded, even the Holy Sepulcher which was destroyed by the ‘mad Caliph’ was later largely rebuilt with Muslim aid. Yet the Crusades were imbued with a sense of re-conquest and a protection of Christianity, its people and its holy sites.

a) Crusader Success

There are several reasons to explain why the Crusaders were so successful during the

²⁷ Maalouf, xiv.

²⁸ ²⁸ James Reston Jr., *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (New York: Anchor, 2002), 79-81. (Henceforth: Reston Jr., .)

²⁹ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: a Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 90. (Henceforth: Lewis, .)

early phases of the Crusades. The timing of the Crusades was as if by divine guidance, at the time, the Arab World was marred by internal and external attacks and disorganization. Several different dynasties were fighting over absolute power in the Middle East. The Fatimids in Cairo were no longer as vibrant as they used to be, and the Caliphs in Cairo were mere puppets in the hands of their *Viziers*. The Abbasids in Baghdad were constantly losing more control over their empire and authority as the Seljuk Turks and the Persians were competing with each other over the control of the Abbasid Caliphate.³⁰ At the time, the Fatimid Caliphs, like their Abbasid counterparts, were nothing more than puppets in the hands of their protectors.³¹

As a result of this, when the Crusades began, there was no effort to attempt a coalition of Muslim Kingdoms in the region to unite and expel the Crusaders. An example of this fragmentation was in the year 1115, when the sultan Muhammad of Baghdad sent a large army consisting of tens of thousands of soldiers in order to fight the Crusaders. Upon his arrival, he was surprised to find the Crusaders and the Muslim Emirs of Syria waiting for him in a coalition, as both feared the Sultan more than each other.

Instead of the Syrian princes unifying their power against the Crusaders, they were so fragmented that they knew no coalition could be formed, instead they sent emissaries bearing gifts and promising free conduct through their territories in order to gain favour with them and avoid their wrath.³² Ridwan, Emir of Aleppo sent a delegation to Tancred lord of Antioch who had been ravaging the environs of Aleppo. Ridwan begged to be left

³⁰ Lewis, 80-81.

³¹ Ibid, 146-149.

³² Maalouf, 42.

unharmd, Tancred demanded that a large cross be placed over the great mosque of Aleppo in return for protection, and Ridwan carried this cowardly act through.³³

The passivity and terror of the Syrian Emirs was best exemplified by the actions of the *Qadi* of Tripoli. The Franks laid siege to the city of 'Arqa, which belonged to the scholarly dynasty of the Banu Ammar in Tripoli. The *Qadi* feared that their main target was Tripoli. After a three month siege at 'Arqa, the Franks fell back and continued on their journey south passing by the environs of Tripoli, the *Qadi* didn't lose any time in sending delegations to the Franks wishing them well and sending them gifts.³⁴ The Syrian Emirs feared their rivals more than the Crusaders, they would betray one another's plans to the Crusaders for fear that a rival Syrian Emir would gain too much power.

Another reason for Crusader success was the superiority of Crusader military equipment and technology. The Muslims had light manoeuvrable Turkish cavalry that was used to harass the enemy by firings arrows at them and then retreating, making way for the next wave of attackers. This was done to decimate the enemy before engaging in hand-to-hand combat.³⁵ The Crusaders on the other hand had the advantage in hand-to-hand combat. They had heavy armour that coved most of their bodies as well as their horses, which were larger than the Arabian horses, making their cavalry charge almost unstoppable. Their armour also prevented most of the arrows from piercing through. The Crusaders also used longer spears which were used for thrusting rather than throwing. They also made use of heavy double-edged swords used for bludgeoning, as opposed to the

³³ Maalouf, 68.

³⁴ Ibid, 43.

³⁵ Al-Qalanisi, 33.

scimitars used by the Arabs which were best utilised for cutting and slicing.³⁶ In order to make up for their small numbers, the Crusaders also built a formidable line of fortifications across their territories.³⁷ Later on the Muslims would adopt some of the Crusader equipment, such as heavy armour and the use of longer spears by lashing two together.

Thus the Crusaders were able to advance expand until Saladin appears in the mid eleventh century to unite the Muslims and to lead a campaign against the Crusaders culminating in the fall of Jerusalem back into Muslim hands in the year 1187.

b) The rise of Saladin and the Islamic Reconquest

*"Regard the Franj! Behold with what obstinacy they fight for their religion, while we, the Muslims, show no enthusiasm for waging holy war"*³⁸

- Saladin

In order to understand the rise of Saladin and his ability to unify the Middle East under his authority, which eventually led to the defeat of the Crusaders, one has to begin with Imad Al-Din Zangi.

Imad Al-Din Zangi, one of the most important men in the fight against the Crusaders, was a Turkish Emir, who upon putting down a rebellion led by the Caliph in Baghdad

³⁶ Asbridge, 42n.

³⁷ Reston Jr., 10.

³⁸ Maalouf, 1.

Mustarshid Billah, is recompensed by the Turkish sultan Mahmud by receiving the government of Mosul and Aleppo.³⁹

After Imad Al-Din Zangi's assassination, his second son, Nur Al-Din Zangi who "was thoroughly devoted to the jihad against the enemies of Islam"⁴⁰ acquired Aleppo, and left Mosul to his brother. Focusing on Syrian affairs, he abandoned the squabbles and fights between the many Emirs in Iraq and Syria. He arrived in Aleppo with his close aid, Shirku, Saladin's uncle, in 1146.⁴¹

In 1154, Nur Al- Din arrived at Damascus with his army, and as the population was sympathetic to his cause, they did not resist. With his acquisition of Damascus, all of Muslim Syria was now unified under one king.

Intrigue at the Fatimid court in Cairo, and the attempted invasion of Egypt by Amalric, the King of Jerusalem, led Nur Al-Din to send an expeditionary force under Saladin's uncle, Shirkuh.⁴² Shirkuh insisted that Saladin join him on this Egyptian expedition.

After a long campaign, Shirkuh was able to conquer Egypt and have himself installed as *Vizier*. After his death, as told by Ibn Al-Athir, "Upon the death of Shirkuh, the advisers of the caliph Al-Adid suggested that he name Yusuf (Saladin) the new vizier, because he

³⁹ Maaloud, 113.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 143.

⁴¹ Asbridge, 229-230.

⁴² Ibid, 269-270.

was the youngest, and seemingly the most inexperienced and weakest, of the Emirs of the army."⁴³

In 1171, Nur Al-Din ordered that the heretical Fatimid dynasty be abolished, reluctantly, Saladin obliged him and announced the end of the dynasty. By a stroke of luck, Saladin found himself the master of Egypt and the inheritor of immense amounts of wealth that was accumulated by the now abolished dynasty.⁴⁴ He soon began to distance himself from Nur Al-Din. Sensing that betrayal might be at hand, Nur Al-Din began organizing an expedition to Egypt in order to put Saladin in his place. Before he was able to set out for Egypt, in may 1174, Nur Al-Din fell ill and died.⁴⁵ he was succeeded by his 11 year old son Al-Salih.

Saladin took advantage of the chaos that occurred after Nur Al-Din's death as many members of his family attempted to seize control for themselves. During a lightning campaign he captured most of the cities of Syria without a fight, as his supporters were numerous. He only refrained from attacking Aleppo, where the young King had taken refuge, as he was unwilling, out of either prudence or respect, to place himself in direct conflict with his former master's son. It was only after the death of Al-Salih, possibly by poisoning in 1181, that Saladin entered Aleppo.⁴⁶

⁴³ Maalouf, 170.

⁴⁴ Asbridge, 276-279.

⁴⁵ Maalouf, 175.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 183.

Relations between Saladin and the Crusaders were not exactly peaceful, but stable. In 1180 an agreement was reached to allow the free circulation of people and goods between Jerusalem and Damascus.⁴⁷ Reynald of Chatillon broke the truce when he led a raid in 1186 against Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca. When Guy, King of Jerusalem refused to punish his vassal, Saladin declared the truce, which would have remained in effect for another two years, to be broken.⁴⁸

By June, Saladin had assembled all his troops half way between Damascus and the Crusader city of Tiberias, the trap that would lead Saladin to his greatest victory, the battle of Hittin, was set. He shouted out the order to his soldiers, "*victory over god's enemy!*"⁴⁹, and his troops laid siege to the citadel of Tiberias, which he could have captured immediately if he wanted, but was waiting for the Crusaders to respond to this threat against them and fall in his trap.

The Crusader army set out on the 3 July, Saladin's cavalry would harass them from all directions with a barrage of arrows all along the way. It would take them all day to reach Tiberias in the sweltering summer heat, and there were no water sources along the way, they would have to wait until they reach lake Tiberias. That is where they would find the Sultan waiting for them with his army; between them and the lake.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Asbridge, 316.

⁴⁸ Maalouf, 187.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 189.

⁵⁰ Asbridge, 346-349.

The Crusading army decided to wait through the night before launching their attack on Saladin in an attempt to reach the lake, as the Sultan also sent some of his emirs to cut off any possibility of retreat by the Crusaders. Ibn Al-Athir relates that the Muslims had set fire to the dry grass, “*and the wind carried the heat and smoke down on to the enemy. They had to endure thirst, the summer’s heat, the blazing fire and smoke and the fury of battle.*”⁵¹

After his victory, Saladin went on a campaign, capturing one Crusader city after another, first Acre fell without putting up any resistance, then Saida, Beirut, Jubayl and many others before finally encircling the city of Jerusalem on 20th September.⁵²

On October 2nd 1187, Saladin solemnly entered the holy city, after almost 100 years of Crusader rule.⁵³ Only the cities of Tyre, Tripoli, Antioch and three fortresses remained in Crusader hands.⁵⁴

The immediate effect that the Crusades had, was to bring about the unification of the Middle East under Nur Al-Din, then under Saladin, and eventually led to the rise of the Mamluks, who were more hostile and aggressive towards the Crusaders and the West.⁵⁵

The Ayyubid dynasty, which was founded by Saladin, lasted until 1250, when the Sultan Turan Shah was killed by his elite guard, the Mamluks. The Mamluks then took power of

⁵¹ Francesco Gabrieli, ed., *Arab Historians of the Crusades (Islamic World Series)* (Lanham: University of California Press, 1984), 122.

⁵² Reston Jr., 73.

⁵³ Ibid, 142.

⁵⁴ Maalouf, 205.

⁵⁵ Asbridge, , 665.

Egypt and put an end to the Ayyubid dynasty, and then began the reign of the Mamluks in Egypt for more than 500 years until Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798.⁵⁶

The Mamluks, unlike their predecessors, were more aggressive towards the Crusaders. They had from the start begun using the concept of *Jihad*, first against the invading Mongols, and later against the Crusader kingdoms in East.⁵⁷ They had no concept of a peace with the Crusaders, and when they began the re-conquest, there was no hint of the civility or the honour that was shown by Saladin.⁵⁸ With the fall of Acre to the Mamluks in 1292, the Crusaders lost their last stronghold on the mainland of the Levant.

The eventual defeat of the Crusaders was majorly due to the division among the kings in Europe, as a result they failed to offer protection or send aid to the Christians who were established in the East. The loss of support from the Western authorities led to the capture of the Christian kingdoms by the Arabs in the mid thirteenth century. The final periods into the collapse of the Christian territory in the East were marred by disorganization that saw even Crusaders fighting each amongst other. The Crusades however continued in other places throughout the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries.⁵⁹

5. Relation between Islam and the West:

a) Alliances and Trade

From the Iberian Peninsula to Palestine, Christians and Muslims regularly formed alliances. Such as the alliance between count Eudes of Aquitaine and a Berber chief,

⁵⁶ Lewis, 104-105.

⁵⁷ Asbridge, 630.

⁵⁸ Tolan et al, 46.

⁵⁹ Asbridge, 239-249.

Munuza, in the Pyrenees, in the eighth century. Eudes feared Charles Martel as much as he feared the Islamic governors of the peninsula, and Munuza feared the same in reverse, which led to them to form an alliance with each other.

There were also many exchanges of gifts between the Abbasids and the Carolingians because the Umayyads in Spain were the enemies of both.⁶⁰

When the incursions into southern Italy began, Pope John VIII called for unity against the infidel Muslims, this was possibly done to extend his influence to southern Italy, and as a result, Naples and Amalfi allied themselves with the Aghlabids of Tunisia and Sicily.⁶¹ It seems that geopolitical interests were more important than fighting the ‘infidels’.

Trade appears to have been extensive between the Islamic world and Europe, including Andalusia, evidenced by coins found in Poland, England, and Scandinavia etc. This might have been either through trade or gifts, such as the elephant sent to the court of Charlemagne named Abu Al-Abbas.⁶²

During the eleventh century, Fatimid Cairo became a major centre for trading. Egypt at the time functioned as a conduit between India in the east and Europe in the west. Items purchased in India would be unloaded on one of the Red Sea ports, transported by caravan to Cairo, and then taken down the Nile by ships to one of the major ports of

⁶⁰ Tolan et al, 31.

⁶¹ Ibid, 35.

⁶² Ibid, 72.

Damietta or Alexandria etc. From there the products could be transported over the Red Sea to many destinations, including Constantinople.⁶³

Despite good trade relations, there were times fraught with uncertainty. Despite Amalfi, being a major trade partner of Fatimid Egypt, relations were not always perfect.

According to records, in 996, there were rumours that Constantinople was planning an invasion of Egypt with the aid of the Amalfi merchants in Egypt. In anger and panic, the Egyptian population massacred around 100 Amalfi merchants. The caliph later compensated them for their material losses.⁶⁴

Many Muslim princes gave preferential custom taxes to maritime Italian cities such as Genoa, Amalfi, Pisa and Venice. They did this because they recognised the importance of trade with these Italian cities and concluded several trade and peace treaties. This was done despite the fact that these very same cities provided aid to the crusader states in return for preferential trade at the conquered cities.⁶⁵

The constant trade between the Islamic world served more than just the exchange of materials such as oranges bananas, pepper, sugar and rice for Europeans, and raw materials such as wood or iron for the Arabs. Also many slaves were used in both Christian and Muslim armies who brought with them information on military technology, navigation and even silk weaving. This became such a problem that Pope Adrian I, placed a ban on the selling of slaves to Muslims, a ban that would not stop the lucrative

⁶³ Tolan et al, 73.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 75.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 77.

business.⁶⁶ It also resulted in exchange of ideas and traditions. Trade also involved the selling of materiel to either side, both sides attempted to place bans on the selling of military equipment to the 'infidel', but this probably did not have a strong effect on the merchants who cared more for profits.⁶⁷

Paper was also a major trade item that influenced both the East and West. The Arabs learned the manufacturing of paper from the Chinese who have had the technology from antiquity. This technology was taken with the Arabs to the West during their conquests. In Xativa (south of Valencia), there was a major paper manufacturing facility, when King James I of Aragon conquered it, he took over the facility and turned It into a state monopoly, slowly spreading the technology to Northern Europe.⁶⁸

Trade was of such an importance that by the end of the twelfth centuries, some Europeans began minting coins known as "*millares*" with the Islamic inscription of "god is great", "Muhammad is his messenger"⁶⁹ for use in trade with North African countries, this enraged Pope Clement IV. This shows that the Islamic world and Europe enjoyed relations beyond that of war and conflict.

There were also times when Muslim and Christians seemed to be allies against polytheism. A Franciscan friar, William of Rubruck travelled to several Mongol territories in an effort to convert them to Christianity. In one such instance, he recounts how he scored a victory for monotheism over polytheism to the applause of the Muslims.

⁶⁶ Tolan et al, 82- 83.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 85.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 83.

Between 1253 and 1255, he travelled to Karakorum to participate in a religious debate in front of Mongke Khan. The debate included representatives of different religions including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Uygur paganism. After declaring that there is only one god, he continued by asking what the Buddhist believed, who replied saying there are many gods. On further questioning, he asks the Buddhist if there is a god who is all powerful, to which the Buddhist replies saying 'no'. "then all the Saracens erupted in a great burst of laughter."⁷⁰

b) Views of the Crusaders

Muslim views of the Crusaders at times seem mixed, yet the overall impression is that of irrelevance and insignificance.

The Arabs had a very low view of Frankish intelligence, an Arab Christian doctor relates a story where he was sent to treat an injured Frankish knight,

“in whose leg an abscess had formed...so I made a small poultice for the knight and the abscess opened up and he was healed...then a Frankish physician came to them... the physician said, 'bring me a strong knight and a sharp axe.'... the physician laid the leg of the patient on a block of wood and said to the knight 'strike his leg with an axe and cut it off with one blow.' So he struck him... but it didn't chop the leg all the way off. So he struck him a second time, but the marrow flowed out of the leg and he died instantly.”

⁷⁰ Tolan et al, 104.

Though he also does show respect for certain physicians who were talented and whose methods he has used, “I have myself treated people afflicted by this ailment with this remedy (learned from a Crusader physician), and it was beneficial and removed all of their complaints,”⁷¹

Ibn Munqidh also relates a story about Frankish jurisprudence in which a peasant who was accused of leading Muslim bandits into a village was ordered to fight a dual (trial by ordeal) in order to prove his innocence. The peasant was ordered to fight against a black smith. After being beaten,

the blacksmith then crouched on top of him and tried to stick his fingers in the old man’s eyes, but couldn’t do it because of all the blood. So he stood up and beat the man’s head in with his staff until he had killed him, in a flash they strung him up... and that was but a taste of their jurisprudence and their legal procedure, may God curse them!⁷²

Ibn Munqidh does differentiate between the Franks who have settled in the orient, and those who have recently arrived. “anyone who is recently arrived from Frankish lands is rougher in character than those who have become acclimated and have frequented the company of Muslims.”⁷³

“Among the Franks are some who have become acclimatized and frequent the company of Muslims. They are much better than those recently arrived from their lands, but they are the exception and should not be considered representative.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Usama ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades* (penguin Classics) (Oxford: Penguin Classics, 2008), 146. (Henceforth: Ibn Munqidh, .)

⁷² Ibn Munqidh, 152.

⁷³ Ibid, 147.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 153.

He also mentions certain good relations enjoyed between the Crusaders and the local Muslims. An incident related by Ibn Munqidh has it that while Joscelin, lord of Tall Bashir was carrying out raids “taking prisoners and rustling many animals.” The Emir Malik Ibn Salim crossed the Euphrates with three or four of his men, after he was brought to Joscelin, who had between them an “old bonds of acquaintance”, Joscelin returned all that he had taken and given in back to Malik.⁷⁵

Ibn Al-Qalanisi also relates certain amicable gestures. He relates a story in which after a peace agreement is concluded between Damascus and local Franks. Local Turkmens raided the area and pillaged Frankish property. In response “when the news reached those in authority in Damascus they were displeased at such an action as this, in view of the agreement made for an armistice and peaceful relations, and sent out against them a detachment of the *‘askar* (Military unit) of Damascus...and recovered the booty.”⁷⁶

Despite the fact that many Muslims of the time saw the Franks as barbaric, they still appreciated some of their finer aspects, Ibn Jubayr related during his travels that,

Upon leaving Tibnin, we passed though an unbroken skein of farms and villages whose lands were efficiently cultivated. The inhabitants were all Muslims, but they live in comfort with the *Franj* – may God preserve us from temptation! Their dwellings belong to them and all their property is unmolested. All the regions controlled by the *Franj* in Syria are subject to this same system: the landed domains, villages, and farms have remained in the hands of the Muslims. Now, doubt invests the heart of a great number of these men when they compare their lot to that of their brothers living in Muslim territory. Indeed, the latter suffer from the injustice of their coreligionists, whereas the *Franj* act with equity.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibn Munqidh, 103.

⁷⁶ Al Qalanisi, 50.

⁷⁷ Maalouf, 263.

It seems that the Islamic World and Europe enjoyed periods of good relations, and as we have seen, even the Crusaders shared good relations with their Muslim neighbours at times. It is a part of the reinvention of the history of the Crusades that make it appear as a constant struggle. Ignoring periods of peace, trade and friendships.

6. Original views of the Crusades and the Importance of Jerusalem

Although the Crusades might not have received a large reaction from fellow Muslim people and governments at the time, it has been used in the modern age as a propaganda tool to inflame the Muslims with the sense of a Crusade against them and their religion for a thousand years and up until the present.

Originally, Jerusalem seems to have been of such little importance to the Ayyubid dynasty that it was later even ceded to Emperor Fredrick II in a gesture of good will and compromise. There are even records that indicate that Fredrick kept the Sultan Turan Shah of Egypt well informed about the intentions of the French King Louis IX's invasion plans of Egypt. In 1229, Saladin's successor, Al-Kamel negotiated the treaty of Jaffa by which emperor Frederick was given over Jerusalem in the condition that religious freedom be observed. After Al-Kamil's death, his nephew Al-Nasir retook the city in 1239. But then in 1243, in order to form an alliance with the Crusaders against the Khwarezmians, he handed Jerusalem over to them again. It seemed that Jerusalem was nothing more than a bargaining chip in the hands of rulers.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Tolan et al, 46.

Yet the idea to modern Muslims that Jerusalem can simply be handed back to Christian kings is impossible, it seems Jerusalem has gained importance only in the modern world and used by regimes as a unifier to galvanize the Muslim population against the West and Israel in order for the regimes to remain in power and gain absolution for their own domestic failures. As Israeli historian and former diplomat has said, “Jerusalem acquired its contemporary weight in the Arab mind precisely as a reaction to the ambition of Jews to return to it ...”⁷⁹

Jihad also seems to have been relegated to the background of Muslim society before the Crusades. As Hillenbrand says of *Jihad*, “when the Crusaders approached the Holy Land in 1099 the disunited and strife ridden Muslim world had, it seems, buried the idea of *Jihad* deep into the recesses of its mind.”⁸⁰ *Jihad* only begins to gain prominence after the fall of Jerusalem because of the lack of interest in most Islamic regions with the Crusades, it was used to bring the Muslims out of lethargy and apathy.

After the recapture of Jerusalem, *Jihad* seems to have faded into the background again, as the Holy Land appeared safe while the Ottomans took the fight to European soil. *Jihad* would again be reawakened with European domination of the Middle East and the loss of Jerusalem.

In the aftermath of the Crusades, Arabs seem to have viewed the Crusades as a past conflict, where the aggressors were defeated and Islam emerged triumphant. Saladin

⁷⁹ Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: the Israeli-Arab Tragedy* (New York City: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007), 257.

⁸⁰ Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 103. (Henceforth: Hillenbrand, .)

was largely ignored, and it was his predecessor, Nur Al-Din who was admired and highly praised for his piety. But a re-invented history would later glorify Saladin in the Arab's struggle against the 'new crusade' of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁸¹

Many chroniclers, including Ibn Al-Qalanisi and Ibn Munqidh, barely make any mention of the intentions of the Crusaders, or frame the conflict in religious terms. They only mention the Crusaders by listing the cities they conquered or were expelled from, and their kings and leaders who have died or who have recently arrived from the West. The only other mention that they make of the Crusaders, as we have seen earlier, was of their strange personal habits. The only ones to show passion against the Crusaders were the ones who were recently expelled from their homes or dispossessed of their property resulting from the Crusader invasion. Appeals in Baghdad were largely ignored as the problem was seen to be a provincial Syrian problem. This further points to the fact that the Crusades were not as important at the time as they are in our time. Even when it came to the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders and the massacre that ensued, Ibn Al-Qalanisi mildly states that "a great host were killed",⁸² today the most common references made in the Middle East regarding the fall of Jerusalem is that of Frankish accounts of bloodbath and merciless slaughter.

7. Ottoman Collapse and Imperial Encroachment

By the seventeenth century, there were three large Islamic empires that functioned as counterweights to European expansion into the Islamic world, the Ottoman Empire, the

⁸¹ Asbridge, 671.

⁸² Al Qalanisi, 48.

Persian Empire and the Mogul Empire in India. Thus, until the point when these empires collapsed, Muslims were still self-governing, even though they fell under foreign governments, those governments were still Islamic. The biggest problem for these Islamic empires was that they could not unite. Persia and the Ottomans were in conflict because of the Shiite-Sunni divide, while India was geographically distant and attempting to hold back British advances.

After the treaty of 1774, the Ottoman Empire appeared to be condemned to destruction; it was now being referred to as the sick man of Europe. Its eventual dismemberment was predicted. Tsar Nicolas I wrote in a letter to the British ambassador in Saint Petersburg in 1853 stating that "Turkey is completely disorganised... Look, we have a sick man, gravely I'll man on our hands. Let me tell you frankly that it would be a great misfortune if he were to slip away from us one of these days, especially before all the necessary measures are taken."⁸³ 'the necessary measures' being the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and its division among European powers.

Despite this fact, some countries such as France wanted the rehabilitation of the Ottoman Empire, not to serve as an ally against Austria any more, but to block the advance of Russia towards the Black Sea and Central Asia. Also, the geographical distance between the two countries meant that France did not have much to fear from Istanbul. In the eighteenth century, the French foreign minister, who also served as an ambassador in Constantinople, Charles Vergennes, sent missions in an attempt to help the Ottomans catch up with Europe technologically and militarily. This was well received by

⁸³ Tolan et al, 301.

Ottoman government circles. Also in the 1790's, the Ottomans began establishing permanent embassies in European cities, to keep an eye on the tumultuous politics of the time, but also to learn of new economic and technological advances. The problem with this kind of reform was that it was limited to the military sphere. Modern ideas and methods that helped the west achieve supremacy were never truly adopted on a large scale.⁸⁴

There was opposition to this modernisation in the Ottoman provinces for three main reasons. 1.) The provincial leaders feared a recentralisation towards Istanbul after they had gained a certain degree of autonomy because of the declining power of Istanbul. 2.) There were also fears among the Janissaries, who were wary of the creation of new military units that would compete with them. 3.) And finally there was a large segment of the population that refused anything European as *fitna* (something that causes division and turmoil).

As Amin Maalouf said,

assaulted from all quarters, the Muslim world turned in on itself. It became over-sensitive, defensive, intolerant, sterile – attitudes that grew steadily worse as world-wide evolution, a process from which the Muslim world felt excluded, continued. Henceforth progress was the embodiment of ‘the other’, modernism became alien.⁸⁵

What has to be remembered is that modernisation has come to the Middle East with foreign armies and subjugation to Western power. Until today, This view of modernity, as being tantamount to Western domination, is in some ways still prevalent. Also many Muslims believed that their decline was due to the fact that they were diverging from the

⁸⁴ Ibid, 269.

⁸⁵ Maalouf, 265.

true path of Islam, and that the only way to recover their greatness was to go back to a purer Islam, not to adopt new, foreign, and even heretical ideas.

With Napoleons campaign in Egypt, geopolitical Islam began to change. The majority of the Egyptian population only saw a foreign domination of Christian origin, neglecting the atheism that marked the French revolutionary government. Local leaders began to realise the importance of European powers and the weakness of the Ottomans, and began aligning themselves accordingly, the age of dependence on European nations began at that point. local leaders like Ahmed Pasha Al-Jazzar made common cause with the British at the siege of acre against Napoleon. The British also aided the Mamluke's attempts at overthrowing Ottoman power in Egypt.⁸⁶

By the middle of the 19th century, France had begun its colonisation of Algiers with a very heavy hand. The British were instigating rebellions in modern day Syria, Palestine and Lebanon, encouraging and aiding rebels to rise against the newly established Egyptian authority over them.

Europeans began competing over Middle Eastern territories of the fragmenting Ottoman Empire. In 1849, Tocqueville, addressing the chamber of deputies, reflected European sentiment at the time, saying,

The Europe of our time is not approaching Asia only from one corner, as Europe did in the time of the crusades: it is attacking it in the north, the centre, the east, the west, from every side; it is piercing it, enveloping it, subduing it." Finally adding "do you believe, therefore, that any nation that wants to remain great can witness such a spectacle without participating in it? Do you believe that we

⁸⁶ Paul Strathern, *Napoleon in Egypt*, (London: Random House, 2007), 332.

should let two European people's seize that vast inheritance with impunity? and rather than suffer it, I will say to my country, with energy and conviction: let us rather have war!⁸⁷

The French Renan went so far as to say that "a region that is so important to the rest of the world cannot belong to itself; it is neutralised for the benefit of humanity"⁸⁸

European powers also became the guarantors of the protections given to minorities through the 'capitulation system', and gave themselves the right of intervention in the case that it was not followed through. Capitulations gave authority to the European powers over Ottoman internal affairs, which included most of the Middle East. These capitulations were at first a pledge by the Sultan to grant trade privileges to foreigners living within his domain. But with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, these capitulations began to be extended. At first, the European powers inserted passages in the capitulation agreements that would grant immunity to all foreigners, then it was granted to religious minorities; France received immunity for Catholics, Britain received immunity for Protestants and Russia for the Orthodox Christians. Eventually the capitulations also covered missionaries from these respective countries.⁸⁹

The power given to Europeans because of the capitulations meant those foreign subjects were exempt from local laws, taxes and tariffs. The capitulations also meant that police would be unable to arrest foreign subjects without prior permission by the subject's

⁸⁷ Tolan et al, 290.

⁸⁸ Tolan et al, 327.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 216.

consulate, which meant that they were granted immunity.⁹⁰ Consulates also began abusing the capitulation system by extending immunity to locals, mostly Christians, through certificates of protection known as *Berats*.⁹¹ This made the Muslims feel that European powers were emancipating the Jews and Christians in Islamic territories while subjugating the Muslim majority.

With the continued decline in Arab and Islamic power, European powers began intervening in the internal politics of Islamic countries. In Morocco they demanded the protection of Jewish traders, which would have put them outside the authority of the Sultan and his tax system. When the Sultan refused, the British and French bombarded Moroccan ports and forced him to submit to their demands. In Lebanon, they were also considering the establishment of an Independent state for the Christian population.⁹²

Tunisia also found itself facing western intervention. After the execution of a Jew in Tunis in 1857, the countries of France and Britain, through a naval demonstration, forced reforms on Tunisia. After the state found itself bankrupt in 1867, the nations of Italy, France and Britain imposed a foreign financial commission to regulate the country's resources.⁹³

In Madrid in 1880, the sultan was able to get concessions to be able to tax protected people, "but, by the very fact that a conference was held, the Moroccan question became

⁹⁰ Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers: the Invention of the Modern Middle East* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 22. (Henceforth: Meyer & Brysac , .)

⁹¹ Lewis, , 292.

⁹² Tolan et al, 303.

⁹³ Ibid, 304.

internationalised."⁹⁴ Muslim countries no longer enjoyed sovereignty over their internal issues.

In Egypt, The British and the French, because of the large amounts of debt accumulated by the Egyptian Khedive, established the dual control system of the Egyptian economy in 1876. This was tantamount to foreign control of Egypt, its economy and military, as the British and French decided on the cuts in spending that were necessary. Many of the spending cuts were applied to the army. In 1874, the Egyptian army consisted of over 120,000 soldiers, by 1879 however, the number was reduced to 36,000, with plans to reduce it further to 12,000-16,000. This led many Egyptians to believe that the country's army was kept intentionally small in order to keep Egypt subservient to the West.⁹⁵

In the early 1880's the army in Egypt began challenging the authority of the Khedive and European influence in the country, with the slogan "Egypt for Egyptians"⁹⁶ and threw its support behind the idea of constitutionalism. There was a fear in Europe that Egypt didn't have a national party and that the illusion of revolution and constitutionalism was merely fanaticism in the name of 'Pan-Islamism', the term which came into being in 1881.

Britain intervened and occupied Egypt in 1883 declaring that it was provisional; Britain would only carry out reforms and to strengthen the Khedive's authority. This provisional authority over Egypt would last for several decades.⁹⁷ The Sentiment that Arabs are not

⁹⁴ Ibid, 308.

⁹⁵ M. W. Daly, ed., *Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 219-220.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 218.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 239-241.

ready for democratic self-rule is extremely similar to Western attitudes during the revolutions of the Middle East in 2011.

Also at issue was the fact that when regions within the Ottoman empires vied for autonomy, if they were Christian, they were granted Independence (Balkans), while if the region was predominantly Muslim, their quest for autonomy ended in occupation. Also, at the end of World War One and the partitioning of Ottoman provinces into mandates to be divided among the European powers led to further resentment.

In the Arab congress of Paris in 1913, its president appealed for European support to Arab secessionist movements which were theoretically still provinces of the Ottoman Empire, "those in Europe who prevent us from raising our voices are wrong. They have only themselves to blame for having taught us freedom! If any of you judge our success impossible or improbable, remember what the west was before becoming what it is"⁹⁸ This emotional appeal echoes modern Middle Eastern sentiment at the time of the 'Arab Spring' regarding the cynicism in the West about democratic rule in the Middle East.

These interventions, plus the missionaries who were granted protections because of European pressure, gave Muslims the idea that Christian Europe was conspiring to destroy Islam from within. The Arabs needed to place this kind of assault on the lands into context, and the reinvention of the Crusades fit perfectly into that context.

8. Reinvented history

⁹⁸ Tolan et al, 359.

During the nineteenth century, even Europe re-appropriated the memory of the Crusades to suit the environment. They were seen as the first attempts at colonization and the attempts to bring civilization to Asia and the Middle East. It was in this time that Richard the Lion Heart was immortalized by an equestrian statue in front of the Houses of Parliament in London.⁹⁹

There was also the incident when the French General Henri Gouraud, after reaching Damascus in 1930, supposedly stopped at Saladin's tomb exclaiming "awake Saladin! We have returned! My presence here consecrates the victory of the cross over the crescent"¹⁰⁰ and also the alleged statement by General Edmund Allenby was said to have claimed, "Today the wars of the Crusades are ended"¹⁰¹ when he entered Jerusalem in 1917

Despite the fact that the validity of these statements are in doubt, they were none the less seen by many Arabs as undeniable proof that the modern Western encroachment on the Middle East was indeed a new Crusade, and that the European powers were attempting to reclaim the lands that have been lost at the time of the original Crusades. But this time, the 'new crusade' would be on a much larger scale and encompass much larger territories.

Also, people like Sayyid Qutb, a radical Muslim leader who has influenced the Muslim Brotherhood as well as other radical Islamic groups gained influence. Qutb's statement regarding imperialism reflects modern Arab thought, "the truth of the matter is that the

⁹⁹ Asbridge, 672.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer & Brysac, 359.

¹⁰¹ Asbridge, 673.

latter-day imperialism is nothing but the Crusading spirit since it is not possible for it to appear in its true form, as was possible in the middle ages.”¹⁰²

Arab nationalism and Islamic radicalism needed a historical reference point to explain the current relationship between the Middle East and the West. They used the concept of the Crusades, as it involved the use of a national or religious hero (Saladin) who defeated enemies who were beforehand gaining victory, and who attacked the Arab world ‘unprovoked’. That is why the beginning aggression of Islamic power is rarely ever mentioned in the Middle East, some authors have even contradicted themselves by writing statements such as “the Arabs seized Syria from the Byzantine empire which was occupying that Arab land.”¹⁰³ To claim that the Byzantines were occupying an Arab land long before the Arabs had conquered it is highly irregular to say the least. It also involved the collapse of an invented golden age that supposedly came to an end with the invention of the Crusades. The fact of the matter was that the Islamic powers were already in a steady decline by the time the Crusades were launched. But such is the reinvention of history.

The fact of the matter is that the Arab historians and chroniclers of the time never referred to the Crusaders as ‘Crusaders’, but rather as *Franj*. From the mid nineteenth century, the Crusades in the Middle East became known as *al-hurub al salibiya*, wars of the cross. Before hand they were collectively known as the wars of the *Franj*.¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰² Kull, 26.

¹⁰³ Hamidah, *Al-Hurub Al-Salibiyah*, 1:25. As quoted by John Chamberlin, “Imagining Defeat: An Arabic Historiography of the Crusades” (PhD diss., Naval PostGraduate School, 2007), 49.

¹⁰⁴ Asbridge, 667.

Chroniclers who were contemporaries of the Crusades did not see the conflict as a religious matter, but more of an invasion and a war, elements that were so common at the time.

In one of the earliest Arabic writings that begin to refer to the Franks as Crusaders was in 1899, when Sayyid Ali Hariri published a book named *kitab al-akhbar al-saniya fi al-hurub al-salibiya* (*book of splendid stories of the crusades*). Al Hariri makes what he sees as a distinct similarity between the Crusaders and the era of European imperialism clear when he states in his introduction, “it is given that the kings of Europe are now colluding against our country (may god protect it) such that it resembles what those gone by had done.”¹⁰⁵ This was written at the time of the de facto British occupation of Egypt.

a) Israel, Arab Nationalism and the Crusades

After the creation of the state of Israel, the parallelism between the Crusades of the tenth century and the perceived ‘new Crusade’, gained steam. Many began a re-examination of the Crusades to give them insight into the previous conflict to guide them through the conflict they themselves were going through against Israel and Zionism. It was easier to view Israel as a Crusader entity because that would mean, like the Crusader states, it too would eventually be destroyed. It also negated the Arab failure at meeting the Zionist threat and at building up their own societies, as their failure could be blamed on a conspiracy of European colonialism rather than Arab failure.

¹⁰⁵ Sayyid Ali Hariri, “*Kitab Al-Akhbar Al-Saniya fi Al-Hurub Al-Salibiya*”, 2-3. As quoted by John Chamberlin, “Imagining Defeat: An Arabic Historiography of the Crusades” (PhD diss., Naval PostGraduate School, 2007), 29.

The Arabs saw many similarities between Israel and the Crusader states. 1.) They occupied roughly the same territory. 2.) Both were composed mainly of European immigrants. 3.) Both received support from the west. 4.) Both were based on religious claims. The historical parallelism extends through the fact that the Arab world was fragmented and leaderless at the time of the Crusades as well as at the time of imperialism and the creation of the State of Israel.

After the creation of Israel, many began to alter history further, believing that the Jews instigated the Crusades.

Islamists like Sayd Qutb believed that the Jews instigated the Crusades, when he said “no one has ever worked against Islam during any period of its history, including the Crusades and all forms of colonialism, without having had some help and encouragement from the Jews.”¹⁰⁶

Through this reinterpretation of the Crusades to accommodate the Arab view of a ‘new Crusade’, many Arab leaders attempted to make themselves appear as great leaders of a bygone era. Saddam Hussein, during the first gulf war, attempted to associate himself with Saladin by making the point that he was born in the same town in Kurdistan. He also had himself depicted along with Saladin on Iraqi banknotes. Syria’s Hafez Al-Assad, in 1992 erected a large statue of Saladin in Damascus.¹⁰⁷ And Yasser Arafat was labelled as the “Palestinian Saladin” because of his uncompromising stance during the peace talks in 2000. Egypt’s Abdul-Nasser also claimed that Israel was a “substitute for the

¹⁰⁶ Sayyid Qutb, as quoted by Hillenbrand, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Asbridge, ,679

Crusades.” Nasser also styled himself as the ‘New Saladin’¹⁰⁸ The use of the Crusades continued to gain prominence in Arab rhetoric regarding The West and especially Israel.

b) Contemporary Views from the Middle East

During recent years Muslims seem to find “evidence” of the Crusading West in the rhetoric and behaviour of western countries. At the start of the ‘War on Terror’, The Bush administration referred to the conflict as a "Crusade", even though the Bush did not intend to use the word in a historical context, many Muslims saw it as evidence of a continuing Crusade. The administration also initially named the invasion of Afghanistan as "operation infinite justice" which was an affront to Muslims who believe that only god can give justice to the level of infinity. This has reinforced the idea that “the war on terror” was actually a war on Islam.

Other than the view that Israel is a modern Crusader state that wishes to expand it’s territories, a view enhanced by the unchecked expansion in settlement construction in the occupied territories, the presence of U.S. military bases in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are seen as launching pads for further Western encroachment.¹⁰⁹

The following exchange during a focus group in 2008 in Egypt shows the view that many Muslims hold regarding the modern day Crusading West:

¹⁰⁸ Reston Jr. 2001. xix

¹⁰⁹ Steven Kull, *Feeling Betrayed: the Roots of Muslim Anger at America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 42. (Henceforth: Kull, .)

Respondent 1: There is the hostile tone that appears in the president’s speech as he addresses the Arabs or Muslims. This was obvious in his speeches after September 11, when he declared war on Muslims. He declared war between Christianity and Islam.

Moderator: Could you be more specific about what he said that made you think that?

Respondent 1: He stated this literally after September 11. He said that they have to declare a Crusade against Islam...

Moderator: This gentleman said the United States after 9/11 declared war on Islam. How many agree with that? (People nod) what does that mean?

Respondent 2: This war has been there for a long time. But he declared this was after 9/11. It became very clear. Bush declared it openly.

Moderator: What does it mean?

Respondent 1: Bush said it’s going to be a Crusade.

Moderator: But what does it mean?

Respondent 1: It’s a religious war.

Moderator: So, the goal of that war is what?

Respondent 1: The same as those of the Crusades, which we encountered throughout previous centuries.

Moderator: Which are?

Respondent 2: To destroy, to eliminate the religion of Islam.”¹¹⁰

To put things in perspective, President Bush never said there was “a Crusade against Islam”, the actual unfortunate phrase that was used goes as follows: “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to wake a while”¹¹¹, despite the fact that the phrase used was a mistake, and not intended in a religious sense, most focus groups have cited that speech as an example and proof of the new Crusade.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Kull, 75.

¹¹¹ “White House Archives,” White House, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html> (accessed May 11, 2013).

¹¹² Kull, 196.

9. Conclusion

Animosity toward the West continued to rise as victories of the West over Islamic armies continued: The capture of Jerusalem by Crusaders and the retaking of Spain and southern Italy by Christian armies and finally the age of European domination in the Middle East and the creation of the state of Israel. All this has contributed to the sense of a humiliation of the Arab and Islamic peoples, and attempts at dominating them.

Through this perspective, it is easy to understand how the Crusades still affect the Arab view of the West, and how the past, through illusion, is used to create distrust and fear of the West in order to justify extremism and unify the people under the banners of political and religious leaders.

As a result of the Crusades, the Arab community viewed the West as intruders who brought destruction upon the Arab lands. Similar to the views held about imperialism and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which are used as examples to ‘prove’ the continuation of the Crusades. This view of the Crusades is more prevalent now than it was in the past. It seems that the Arabs have reinterpreted the Crusades to provide context to the current situation that they find themselves in, and this is one of the main reasons that there is so much distrust towards most things that the West does.

The Arab and Muslim people must stop viewing Western politics through the prism of the Crusades and must look back at history to understand that the relationship between the Islamic world and the West involved more than a Western assault on Islam. The West can also do its part by attempting to limit its military foot-print in the region as much as

strategically possible, without negatively affecting its political and economic interest. As the presence of Western militaries in the Middle East is seen as further evidence of a 'new Crusade'.

Among the many steps that might and should be taken by both sides, -which are too many to be listed in this paper- the ones mentioned might be a stepping stone to rehabilitate a relationship that has been dominated by historical revisionists who have framed the relationship in terms of an unending 'Clash of Civilizations'.

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