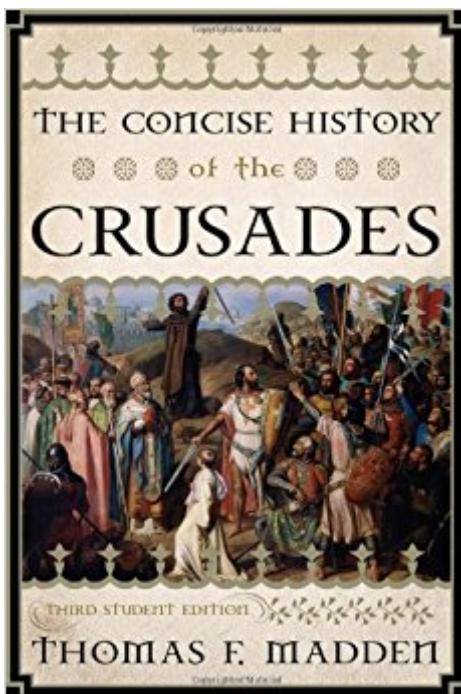


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The Concise History Of The Crusades (Critical Issues In World And International History)



Synopsis

What is the relationship between the medieval crusades and the problems of the modern Middle East? Were the crusades the Christian equivalent of Muslim jihad? In this sweeping yet crisp history, Thomas F. Madden offers a brilliant and compelling narrative of the crusades and their contemporary relevance. Placing all of the major crusades within their medieval social, economic, religious, and intellectual environments, Madden explores the uniquely medieval world that led untold thousands to leave their homes, families, and friends to march in Christ's name to distant lands. From Palestine and Europe's farthest reaches, each crusade is recounted in a clear, concise narrative. The author gives special attention as well to the crusades' effects on the Islamic world and the Christian Byzantine East.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Madden's clear text invites readers at all levels of knowledge into this commentary on how the crusades shaped our modern world. [He] convincingly shows how the crusades prove useful in understanding the political, cultural, and religious wars waged in today's society. True to the book's title, Madden manages to deftly discuss his research while maintaining a clear, approachable style that makes this text accessible to all levels of readers. . . . His ability to set the scene breathes life into the history. . . . The extent of Thomas Madden's research is evident, and his ability to describe history in an interesting and clear manner will appeal to all readers who enjoy reading about the past, especially where it is examined within a modern context.

(Foreword Reviews) Madden writes that the term and concept of the Crusades had been protean and exploited from the inception of the modern era. . . . For him, the historical understanding and popular perception of these campaigns have led to their condemnation. Yet he still defends them as an act of piety (i.e., bravery coupled with faith) and rejects the dominant perception that they are in any way responsible for modern tensions between the Middle East and the West. (American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences) It is well written and well organized...[and is] designed primarily as a textbook. . . . This is a good book. It is very clear and also both interesting and enjoyable to read. (Speculum)

Thomas F. Madden is professor of history and director of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Saint Louis University. A widely recognized expert on the Crusades and Christian-Muslim relations, he is the author of numerous books, including *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople*, *Enrico Dandolo and the Rise of Venice*, and *Venice: A New History*. Awards for his scholarship include the Haskins Medal (Medieval Academy of America) and the Otto GrÃ¶ndler Prize (Medieval Institute). He resides in St. Louis, Missouri.

Book is aptly titled. It covers a lot of ground addressing the better known 1st through 3rd crusades between Christianity and Islam in the Levant but also referencing Christian vs. Christian conflicts with the Byzantine Empire and crusades against non-Islamic non-Christians in Eastern Europe. The strength of this book as is accurately implied by the title is the ability to clearly communicate interesting information on a wide breadth of history without dragging on for hundreds and hundreds of pages. I highly recommend this as a mid-level introduction for anyone interested in the subject. Reading this as one with only a cursory knowledge of the period among the many things I found interesting were the personal / political conflict within both the Christian and Islamic camps that seriously hindered the ability to effectively fight the other side, the Christian vs. Christian conflicts around Constantinople, the balancing act the Christian kings had to perform between crusading and events back at home, how some of the inducements to motivate people to crusade contributed to later abuses by the Church and subsequent Reformation, the origin of the Templars and Hospitallers, the Children's Crusade, etc. For those who care about such things I would characterize the point of view of the author as objective. Happily you do not get the "Christians as savage invaders vs. Saladin as a Medieval champion of 21st Century multiculturalism and diversity" seen in pieces such as Ridley Scott's film *Kingdom of Heaven*. That's not to say this book says nothing bad about the Christians involved or that it has nothing good to say about Saladin's leadership skills, I'm

just saying I perceived the tone as even-handed.

I realized just how much I enjoyed reading this book when I finally got to the end and felt a twinge of disappointment that I finished the book. I also remember telling my wife to leave me alone just so I can finish a chapter of this fascinating account of the crusades. I'm no historian... calling me even a history buff might be too big an exaggeration. However, with the brouhaha that President Obama's crusades comment caused, I thought I would do some reading just so I can get acquainted with this historical period. First, something must be said about Thomas Madden's writing. I've read some complaints about his writing... calling it boring and hard to keep track of all the people. I beg to differ. I thoroughly enjoyed Mr. Madden's writing. The writing kept me turning pages just to see how history would play out. This isn't your average dry history textbook, but an well-written narrative of a fascinating period in history. Some have also complained about Mr. Madden's bias toward the Christian West and against Islam. Whether that is correct or not, I found the narrative to be surprisingly even-handed. Mr. Madden does not gloss over the atrocities committed during the crusades, nor does he paint Islam as the benevolent religion of peace cruelly attacked by Christianity. Throughout the book, I see a clash between two different cultures, both capable of great atrocities. However, going beyond this, Mr. Madden tries to point out the reasons for why things happened the way they did. As a result, the image of blood-thirsty crusaders out for blood, power, wealth and empire disappears because you begin to see the real motivations behind these excursions. Anyone complaining that Mr. Madden is biased just because he tries to point out the motivations of the crusaders and place them within their cultural context is clearly biased in the other direction. I can say that I really enjoyed this book and feel like I know a little bit more than I did about the crusades. Mr. Madden's writing is easy to follow and keeps you turning the page. I can also say that I have no negatives to bring up. I'm not a history expert so I wouldn't know whether Mr. Madden's relating of the facts is completely untrue or not, but I did enjoy reading the book and defer to Mr. Madden in these matters as he is far more the expert than I am. Furthermore, I would encourage the potential reader to pay close attention to the title and realize that this really is a CONCISE history. If you want deeper treatment about any one of the various crusades, look elsewhere. This is simply a general history, albeit and extremely well-written one.

Dr. Madden is a highly respected Medieval Historian who writes concisely about this period of history. His overall interpretation of this period and the events surrounding the Crusades is correct because it is based on the sources. Unfortunately present day popular historians tend to write with

an agenda that ends up warping the real story by plastering it with present day biases and values. Madden does not do this. In fact he critiques the present day historical warping of this period. He is honest about both sides of the Crusades. As such, his treatment is balanced and valid. The reality of the Crusades is complicated filled with personality virtues and vices, with motivations that are difficult for us in the 21st Century to comprehend, and colored by a culture that one must understand and feel in order to really fathom what happened.

This book surprised me, in a positive way. I knew very little about the Crusades but got interested recently. The book read like a thriller ... I had to force myself to put it down at times and just positively enjoyed reading it. Among other things, it really shows the critical importance of leadership in any large scale venture. If you get lucky, and have a leader like Richard II or Saladin, things work out pretty well. If you get a dolt like King Guy, not so much. The lessons of leadership apply today just as much as they did then.

Finally - let the truth be known! My great hope for this work is that it become a family project for all parents with teens. What you find within empowers you to bring into view a clear picture of history from the perspective of those who lived it, from primary sources. Well researched! This is real history.

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