



**The Theater of War: Crusade, Colonialism, and Chivalry in the Middle Ages**  
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Thank you to Gresham College for the invitation to give this talk. What I present to you relates to research carried out during the academic year 2020-2021, when I was fortunate enough to be a Fulbright Scholar in the department of History at the University of Birmingham. The arrival of COVID in the UK in Spring 2021 meant that I was unable to give my talk at that time, and I'm grateful for this opportunity to present it now.

My lecture this evening concerns the European Christian religious wars that we know as the 'Crusades' and the eastern Mediterranean world that was shaped by these conflicts. What were the crusades? Well, there can be different ways of answering that question, but the many historians today would generally agree that the crusades were wars fought under the authority of the pope against those identified as enemies of the church and in which participants undertook onerous obligations in the belief that they would earn spiritual rewards. What kinds of spiritual rewards? Well, specifically, relief from punishment they believed was due to them for their sins.

These conflicts began with the expedition we know as the First Crusade, first announced by Pope Urban II at a church council in Clermont on 28 November 1095, and that expedition resulted in the conquest of significant territories held by the Byzantine empire, the ruling dynasties of Lesser Armenia, the Seljuk Turkish empire who were followers of the Sunni Muslim Caliph at Baghdad and the Fatimid Shi'a kingdom of Egypt. The conquered lands were a culturally and devotionally diverse population, including many different communities of eastern Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Druze, and the crusaders made from these lands a network of principalities, governed by a French-speaking aristocracy: The Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Counties of Edessa and Tripoli, and the Principality of Antioch, in what are today Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey. A century after the initial crusading conquests, by which time significant parts of these territories including Jerusalem had been conquered by Ayyubid empire of the Sultan Saladin, further expeditions that we call the Third and Fourth Crusades added to these territories the island of Cyprus, the city of Constantinople, and much of mainland Greece and the Pelopponesus. Collectively, these territories are sometimes known as the "Crusader States", and sometimes as the "Latin East" but are also sometimes known by the terms used to describe them in the Middle Ages: to their subjects and neighbours in the region, they were known as the lands of the Phrangos or al-Ifranj ("the Franks") and to in Europe they were known as *la terre d'Outremer*- the lands across the sea. Crusading was not limited to this eastern Mediterranean theatre, closely allied with the processes of Latin Christian conquest and conversion of the Baltic region, the subjugation of an independent Languedoc region to the kingdom of France, and the so-called *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula. The bloody history of the crusades is therefore central to the history of eastern and western Europe, European states, institutions, and identities, and the making of Europe itself. In the eastern Mediterranean region, however, often seen as the core area of medieval crusades operations and the

heart of crusade imaginary and ideology, the early crusader conquests proved ephemeral. Despite repeated attempts to safeguard or restore them through the mechanism of large-scale military campaigns (that is, further crusades), the creation of military monastic orders like the Templars and Hospitallers to guard their borders, and the spending of vast sums of money building castles and fortifications like the famous Krak des Chevaliers outside Homs in Syria, all of these territories were eventually lost to Latin European control. The last strongholds on the Palestinian mainland fell to the Mamluks of Egypt in 1291, and despite continuing military efforts led by the papacy, the Frankish lordships in Greece were finally retaken by the Byzantine empire in the fifteenth century, and Cyprus was conquered by Ottoman forces in 1570. Nearly five centuries of conflict in the eastern Mediterranean, arguably the most central theatre of crusading warfare, produced no lasting territorial conquests and resulted in countless deaths and enormous expenditure. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that one of the defining questions that has been asked for centuries about the crusades is expressed as a question of value: what was it worth? What attracted so many individuals, communities, and institutions, over such a sustained period of time, to involve themselves in these costly, dangerous, and frustrating endeavours?

As early as 1640, the frontispiece to the *History of the Holy Warre* by the English cleric Thomas Fuller depicted a tableau of the crusades, represented as groups of European Christians setting out on the left hand side on their journey from the church of “Eu-Rope” to the church of the Holy Sepulchre, the tomb where Jesus Christ’s body had lain. As the illustration shows, however, on the right-hand side: that way for the pilgrims lies death, loss, captivity, and confusion. Europe is flanked by two purses, one reading “We went out full” and the other “But return empty”. A plinth on the bottom left, bearing the Jerusalem cross reads “We hope a gaining” and one on the right, bearing the crescent moon reads “We hope a wanting”. Fuller explained the scene in a poem: “Those that escap’d come home as full of grief/ As the poor purse is emptie of relief.” Above the map are portrayed two men who Fuller identified as heroes of this history, the crusader and first ruler of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem Godfrey of Bouillon and the Sultan Saladin, who conquered the kingdom’s capital at Jerusalem in the year 1187. The heroism, and indeed chivalry, of both men, which is something that is fully explained in the text of Fuller’s book, is clearly associated in the picture with their disregard for precious things: Godfrey is ringed by the words “No Crown of Gold Where Christ Was Crowned with Thorns” (a reference to his refusal to adopt a royal title during his reign) while we are told that “this black shirt” is all that the Sultan Saladin, conqueror of the Near East, took with him to his grave.

Gain and want, full and empty, gold and thorns, empires and rags. For the Protestant cleric Fuller and his readers, the tragic story of the crusades was closely associated with these notions of value and its acquisition. A little over a century later, the French enlightenment encyclopaedist Diderot d’Alembert offered a searing condemnation of the crusades:

*“...it might have been difficult to believe that there would ever come a time of such great darkness and of such great obsession, on the part of the people and their sovereigns (acting in their interest), that they would lead a part of their people into an **unhappy little region** ultimately to slit the throats of its inhabitants and seize a **rocky outcrop worth not one drop of blood** and that they might have venerated in the spirit from afar just as well as nearby and the possession of which was alien to the honour of their religion.”*

What was it worth? These writers of the Reformation and the Enlightenment were rather clear on that point. But with this opinion did not hold for long. With the advent of a second wave of overseas European colonial empires in the nineteenth century, popular attitudes toward the crusades began to change.

### Romanticism/Colonialism

In the nineteenth century, romantic nationalism, which found Europeans looking to the medieval past for a new sense of collective identity, together with colonial conquests in North Africa and the Middle East led to a surge in interest in the story of the crusades. As early as 1824, readers of the popular novelist Walter Scott were imploring him to include more content related to the crusades in his novels of romantic chivalry, leading to the release of his best-seller *The Talisman*. And readers wanted to be a part of this crusading world. Those that fancied themselves members of old families shopped for literature that would confirm their ancestral involvement in crusading ventures, like James Cruikshank Dansey's *English Crusaders* (1850). In France, the association between the new French nation of the Second Republic and the crusades was built into the very fabric of the Palace of Versailles with the installation of the *Crusade Rooms* (Salles des Croisades). Those who believed their ancestors had been crusaders searched for documents to prove it, supporting a widespread program of forgery to prove fanciful crusading ancestry (these forged documents are still fooling medievalists to this day.)

The conflation of medieval crusading with the modern colonial experience exercised a powerful influence over the academic study of the crusades. As European powers established their new empires in North Africa and the Middle East, their medieval philologists, Orientalists, and archaeologists conducted surveys to triumphantly reclaim the knowledge of the crusading past. In 1909, while still an undergraduate at Oxford, the young T.E. Lawrence (the future Lawrence of Arabia) his head teeming with European romantic medievalism, travelled to Syria and Palestine to sketch and study crusader castles. From this triumphalist, colonialist position, the value of the crusades was almost self-evident in the value of the overseas colonial project itself: part national destiny, part romantic fantasy, and a powerful source of legitimation for white European global domination.

### Postcolonial

Even as robust critiques of colonialism emerged in Europe and European colonial empires began to break apart, the colonialist interpretation of the crusades carried through the later twentieth century, with critics of European colonialism and opponents of the establishment of the modern state of Israel eager to invoke a backward, brutal, medieval intolerance as the origin point of the modern overseas ventures. Jamil Baroudy, a Lebanese born diplomat who represented Saudi Arabia at the United Nations, was famed for his contrast between what he saw as western and Zionist imperialism and the medieval colonialism of the crusades, which, he said "concealed undeniable economic and political ambitions under the cloak of religion." Anticolonial invocations of the crusades are still common in contemporary political discourse today, co-existing with the rising adoption of the crusades among white nationalists around the world: a founding mythos for a supposedly ongoing clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam, and legitimizing, in the eyes of white supremacists, horrific violence against non-white, non-Christian peoples.

Discerning the nature and the operation of conquest and settlement at the medieval crusading frontiers and its relationship to later patterns of European colonization is a daunting task, made more difficult by the fact that the very fields of history and archaeology in question were fundamentally shaped and facilitated by colonization and European imperialism. Certainly, our sources suggest some intriguing parallels between the crusading east and later European colonial settlement: economic exploitation of the local population; increasingly intensive agricultural exploitation of the land in favour of high value cash crops like cotton and sugar the existence (as across the Mediterranean at that time) of chattel slavery, and harsh punishments for miscegenation between Christians and Muslims. The role of the Roman church, which seized the opportunity to extend its dominion over eastern bishoprics, displacing in many cases the existing eastern Christian patriarchs, is certainly a case of what my Fordham colleague George Demacopoulos has called "colonizing Christianity".

Yet the Latin East also resists comparison with familiar colonial patterns. The Latin states were not established by, nor were they beholden to, any particular colonial power. The Italian trading republics, most notably Genoa and Venice, but also Pisa, Lucca, and Amalfi, clearly benefited through their commercial partnerships with the crusader kingdoms, signing lucrative agreements with the princes who relied upon them for naval power, and occupying their own quarters in the major towns of the coast. Their profit from these conquests must clearly be related to the larger story of commerce and colonization that later emerged in the western Mediterranean, Africa, and the Atlantic world, but in this case, they were not the principal conquerors nor the rulers of the land. Never more than a small minority, the Italian traders and French-speaking lords never convinced waves of European settlers to come and join them what one observer actually called "holy Christendom's new colony". The apparent failure of a materialist explanation has led historians in the past decades to turn away from an emphasis on material benefit that was central to much of the colonialist interpretation, to one that instead focused on the religious principles, and in particular the concept of penitence, at the heart of crusading. In this formulation, the very lack of any prospect of material gain is critical to the demonstration that crusading was overwhelmingly a devotional exercise. Taking the cross as a crusader demonstrated the individual's desire to suffer as Jesus of Nazareth did, potentially on the very ground where his feet once stood and where, in the apocalyptic fulfilment of scripture, they will ultimately stand once again. It has recently been suggested, by my Fulbright host at Birmingham William Purkis, that the devotional use of the holy places of Jerusalem by pilgrims and particularly the acquisition of sacred relics from the sacred sites was itself a kind of extraction of wealth from the territories in question. In other words, scholars are beginning to find new ways to imagine this frontier, in terms that, while they may not have been familiar to previous generations of modern historians, are more in concert with the culture of the crusaders themselves.

### Cultural Capital

There may yet be other ways to imagine the value of this frontier, and to see how that value was extracted. To do so, we need to remember that the group primarily implicated in the establishment and sustenance of the crusading project, more so than the church, more so than Venice or Genoa, was the European landed aristocracy. At first glance, it may seem difficult to credit a collective enterprise to such a disparate group. After all, they had mostly no direct communications with one another, came from different regions and political contexts and spoke different languages. Importantly, however, in precisely the period beginning shortly before the First Crusade, these aristocrats began to develop a shared culture which, over the course of the first century of crusading, went from a loose sense of shared ideals to a codified set of behaviour and expectations.

We associate the medieval European aristocracy with a number of powerful cultural forms, including 'courtliness', 'courtly love', and 'chivalry', but all of these were really components of a larger revolution, the widespread adoption of the shared concept of nobility. Europe had always been ruled by elites of various kinds, but nobility was a distinctive hereditary social class, theoretically determined by birth but always demonstrated or enhanced by behaviour. Nobility was expressed in manners— gesture, clothing, speech, in specialized knowledge, for instance about hunting practices or the new mythology of heroes of the romances of King Arthur. For men, principally, it was also expressed in new expectations surrounding military conduct and the specialized skills associated with equestrian combat. The nobility rapidly developed an arcane, visual language of identity (heraldry), their own rituals like dubbing to knighthood and their own forms of literature, including both imaginative fiction, manuals of aristocratic conduct, and (as in this manuscript) songs of love and devotion.

As we have seen was the case with Thomas Fuller in the seventeenth century and the romantics writers and artists of the nineteenth century, the link between crusading and the aristocratic culture of chivalry has long been acknowledged – in fact, crusade and knighthood are so firmly bound that it is sometimes difficult to separate them. This was certainly the case for Geoffrey Chaucer, whose portrait of the Knight at the beginning of the *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1380) lists, as evidence of his inherent qualities, his participation in crusading conflicts in Egypt, Asia Minor, Spain, Algeria, Prussia, and Lithuania, and mentions that he had only just returned from his most recent *viage*.

Fundamental, then, to finding the answer to our original question (what was crusading worth?) is understanding what value crusading might have provided within the economy of noble status. Enhancing or even just sustaining noble status required tremendous investment: continuous maintenance in the form of public displays of wealth, taste, wisdom, loyalty and (again, principally for men) prowess– the proven ability to perform well in combat. The public, personal, embodied nature of noble status is everywhere we look in the political culture of medieval Europe, from the construction of great halls for gathering, entertaining, and feasting and elaborate parks and landscapes for hunting. When medieval aristocrats could not be around to embody their power in person, they left behind images of themselves on their personal seals performing actions like fighting, hunting, and sitting in judgment. In death, they were no less concerned to leave behind an image of their performance of lordly status. What all of this performance yielded them was not material wealth, but what the French theorist Pierre Bourdieu called "cultural capital"- marked out by the material culture around them and embodied within them.

Perhaps the most important place for the performance of noble virtues and the acquisition of cultural capital was the tournament. The high medieval tournament took place over multiple days in border areas, for instance in the space between two towns, and involved large numbers of people. Essentially it was an elaborately staged spectacle– for competitors a site for the enactment not only of martial prowess but no less for them and for their audiences and patrons a place for the display of courtly manners. By the thirteenth century, tournaments were assigned imaginary settings, such as famous scenes from Arthurian literature, and filled with heraldry and other markers of identity. The context, as one historian has written, was increasingly artificial and controlled, and as much social as martial. Tournaments were condemned, from their very inception, by the church, who repeatedly anathematized those that took part in or organized them. By the early thirteenth century, in England, not only the tourneyers, but anyone who gave them lodging or sold food and drink were threatened with excommunication. Yet the medieval aristocracy, the same group who piously responded to calls for penitential crusading wars, paid these threats no heed. On the contrary, as the ideal stages for the demonstration of prowess, tournaments grew in size, frequency, and sophistication.

### Crusade as Tournament?

One of the chief reasons stated for the prohibition on tournaments was that they interfered with the aristocracy's obligation to undertake crusades. But not only did the nobility disagree that crusading was incompatible with tournaments, repeatedly across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we find nobles, and those that wrote for them, describing crusading as a tournament. In fact, the earliest crusade recruitment song written in a vernacular language, *Chevalier mult estes guariz* referred to upcoming expedition as a tournament "between Heaven and Hell" set up by God and to which his friends were invited.



In 1203, while encamped outside Constantinople with the armies of the Fourth Crusade, Count Hugh IV of St. Pol wrote a letter to his friend, Duke Henry I of Brabant, encouraging him to come and join the expedition. He closed the letter saying,

*“You should also know that we have accepted a tournament against the Sultan of Babylon [Egypt] in front of Alexandria. If, therefore, anyone wishes to serve God (to serve Him is to rule) and wishes to bear the distinguished and shining title of “knight”, let him take up the cross and follow the Lord, and let him come to the Lord’s tournament, to which he is invited by the Lord himself.”*

Once again, in Hugh's letter, the crusade is a tournament established by God. Once again, God invites his friends to participate. This time, we find the striking claim that only crusaders, answering this call to can truly be knights, and we find this same sentiment, that the eastern Mediterranean frontier represented the pre-eminent stage for the acquisition of honour and virtue, ringing down through the centuries in treatises of noble conduct and chivalry. Another type of evidence also speaks to the desire to see crusading as an opportunity for aristocratic performance. From the time of the Second Crusade forward, popes and papal legates put in place strict rules governing what could be brought on the expedition— it was not the place for fancy clothing, and birds of prey used for hunting were explicitly banned. Like the prohibitions on tournaments, these rules do not seem to have been effective. No less a figure than King Philip Augustus of France arrived at the siege camp of Acre in 1191 with his white hunting falcon. His fellow crusader, King Richard I of England made gifts of sumptuous clothing and carried with him not a simple soldier's blade, but a sword that was believed to be Excalibur. We know from the pommels of swords captured from crusaders in Egypt that these too were special weapons, adorned with their personal heraldic devices. That crusading represented an opportunity for elaborate public display is also what the potential crusaders were promised in imaginative literature. Epic poems about the First Crusade like the massive song cycles cantered on the climactic Siege of Antioch imagined its protagonists protected by the finest armour that bore their heraldic arms, some carrying golden tents that had been made in Nubia for Alexander the Great, and weapons and hunting horns belonging to ancient heroes. Attired and appointed precisely as ideal knights, the crusaders of these epics can be clearly seen engaged in closely matched combat, scoring great blows with their weapons, bravely enduring repeated trials, giving sage advice to their allies and leaders, and demonstrating their Christian devotion.

The experiences reported by those who participated in crusading conflict, however, suggest that the major expeditions that we name (and number) as crusades, were not ideal contexts for the kinds of noble performances that they may have imagined. The ultimate goal of nearly all major crusade campaigns was the conquest of large, heavily defended, fortresses and cities. Participation in these campaigns therefore implied siege warfare. This was the warfare of specialist technicians, engineers, giant siege engines, crossbowmen, and increasingly professional bodies of men and arms and sergeants. We find a crusader like John, lord of Joinville, the seneschal of Champagne bewildered when he is asked to spend a night on campaign in Egypt in winter 1250 guarding the wooden siege engines from attacks with incendiary missiles.<sup>1</sup> When open battle at last came for John, outside the Egyptian town of Mansourah, he led his knights in one attempted charge against a group of enemies who were loading equipment. While he managed to lance one man, killing him, he quickly found himself surrounded and pulled down from his horse, unable to draw his sword. Forced to take shelter in an abandoned house, he held the reins of the horses while his household knights did the actual, desperate, hand to hand fighting.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joinville, *Life of Saint Louis*, pp. 195-6.

<sup>2</sup> 200-201

It was not impossible, under these conditions, for knights to win renown for themselves, but it was extraordinarily difficult, and John of Joinville illustrates the tension that existed between the desire to perform as a noble and to exhibit prowess and the strategic military aims of the campaign. He tells the story of another knight from Champagne, Walter, lord of Autrêches, who on the same campaign 'had himself armed at all point in his pavilion. When he had armed mounted his horse, a shield at his neck and a helmet on his head, he had the pavilion flaps lifted and spurred on to charge at the Turks. As he left his pavilion, all alone, all the members of his household cried *Châtillon* at the top of their voices. But it so happened that he fell before reaching the Turks and his horse galloped over his body.' Walter died, and the next day King Louis IX of France, the leader of the expedition, was heard to say that 'he would not wish to have a thousand of such men, since they would not want to follow his orders.'

The story of Walter of Autrêches raises a third point about the problem of crusading as a source of prowess for European knights: death. Joining large scale crusade expeditions like the one led by Louis IX of France in Egypt in 1250 was an incredibly dangerous enterprise. Some estimates put the mortality rate at about 40%, although it could be much higher in some cases. A knight like Walter was fortunate, in fact, to even have made it to the battlefield. Many other crusaders would already have died of disease in the crowded crusader camps in southern European ports, or in the siege camps surrounding cities they had assaulted or lost at sea in the hellish conditions of an overcrowded galley, with rancid, black water and inedible bread, crammed in among soldiers and warhorses and only one storm away from the bottom of the sea. The body of the eager Walter of Autrêche was at least recovered- the same could not be said for the bodies of countless knights that John of Joinville described floating in the Nile following the battle, unidentifiable because their faces had been eaten off by burbot fish. The body of the king's own brother, Robert of Artois, who died in another foolhardy cavalry charge, was never recovered at all.

These fates may seem unpleasant enough to us today, but within the noble regime of lordship, where, remember, the body of the lord, and certainly the knowledge about the lord's fate, was essential to its basic operation, these cases of death, captivity, or disappearance at great distance, when bodies or information could not be returned, was disastrous. We find noble lords rapidly endeavouring to develop mechanisms for dealing with this problem, from the use of signet rings (as here from the life of St. Elisabeth of Thuringia) to embalming and boiling bodies to facilitate the transportation of noble remains. Despite these attempts, local lordships and even principalities were thrown into disarray when a crusader's fate could not be confirmed or, worse, when crusading lords (or imposters claiming to be them) returned home suddenly after five, ten, or even thirty years in some cases.

Major crusade expeditions, like the ones we've described here, were quite infrequent and frequently disastrous. Fantastically expensive, slow moving affairs, they required their participants to subject themselves to command structures involving higher lords or even crowned heads, who might be alien to the feudal networks from which the crusaders came. Unsurprisingly, they were bedevilled by political tensions and personal rivalries, like those that led to the failure of the Second Crusade at Damascus, the vengeful imprisonment of Richard I by his rival the duke of Austria following the Third Crusade, the defection of large numbers of crusaders from the main army during the Fourth Crusade, and the dispute over spoils and leadership that ended the Fifth Crusade. They also invariably resulted in strained relations between the crusaders and the rulers and populations of the Latin eastern states they were in theory defending.

If this was the normal experience of crusading, then we would have to conclude that beyond the spiritual value of suffering in the lord's service, crusading did not represent, as our aristocratic sources so often claim, an ideal stage for the demonstration of noble virtue and the acquisition of honour and status.

That is why it is critically important for our understanding of the value of crusading and especially for the value of the crusading frontier to medieval Europeans that we recognize that this was not, in fact, the typical experience of crusading.

### Crusading as a Continuous Phenomenon

Crusading, in fact, was a continuous phenomenon. Throughout the long periods in between the large-scale campaigns, members of the aristocracy were departing for the eastern crusading frontier, some almost alone, some in small groups, and some traveling together in larger parties. A UK colleague Dr. James Doherty and I have begun to compile a database of all European arms bearers departing for the eastern Mediterranean in between the numbered expeditions. While a comprehensive list is probably impossible, just the examples that can be identified amongst the territorial princes before 1187 give a sense of the frequency of these journeys. Again, these are just the territorial princes- our database reveals participation in these journeys from a much wider social group, ranging from humble knights to the highest aristocrats. What our work to date does demonstrate, however, is that we are dealing with a substantial list of individuals drawn from a considerable swath of Latin Europe, that the phenomenon was essentially continuous, that it often reflected a local initiative, and that it was not uncommon for individuals to undertake multiple such journeys in their lifetimes. One further point arising from that last one is that these journeys seem on the whole to have been much safer for their participants than the canonical 'crusades.'

These expeditions have long been overlooked because they are generally classified as having a range of explicit purposes (a pilgrimage, an embassy, an intelligence gathering mission, etc.) but when we look closely at them (especially the documents that mark their departure) they do not describe their own journeys any differently than they would crusades. In order to learn about this phenomenon, we have to look closely at these departure documents, letters, and wills that the crusaders created while in the East, and the Greek, Arabic, Armenian, French, and Latin and Old Norse sources that describe their sojourns. Some new sources, like these one describing the crusading adventures of a knight from the southern Low Countries that I spent last year reading and preparing for publication, are essentially unknown to historians of the crusades.

In addition to these, what we might think of as 'historical' sources, are works of imaginative fiction composed in the French and German vernaculars. It is a critical and overlooked fact that among all of the imaginative literature concerning the historical phenomenon of crusading, the majority of works that were composed describe *this* phenomenon, the small private expedition, rather than the large-scale campaigns.

### The Noble Sojourn - The Visit

What did the aristocratic participants in these noble sojourns do during their journeys? The first element of the journey is the visit to whatever Holy Sites were then available to pilgrims at the time of their visit. As high-ranking visitors, our travellers were specially received by the clergy who managed these shrines, and in addition to adoring the holy places, the guests would make special gifts, sometimes including precious objects brought with them for this purpose. The importance of the spiritual component of these journeys cannot be overstated, but neither can the emphasis on the performance of lavish, aristocratic displays of generosity and piety.

Once the pilgrimage was complete, the visitors would be received at the courts of Frankish aristocratic cousins (I mean that figuratively, although of course, sometimes they were literally cousins). Some of the most famous portraits of the eastern Frankish aristocracy were painted by European clerics, who



decried their lascivious lifestyles, their dedication to the pleasures of the flesh, their cavorting with prostitutes, and ambivalence about religion. But the image cultivated by the eastern aristocracy themselves is quite different: they produced a staggering volume of writing in their *Outremer* dialect of Old French dedicated to the correct ways to plead (to request judicial rulings) before one's aristocratic peers at the noble courts of Jerusalem and Cyprus. They also wrote treatises of proper noble conduct and chronicles about their kingdom (again in French) that were read and copied widely in Europe. Visiting westerners participated in the discussions that led to the composition of these works and were cited for their wise opinions on matters of feudal custom and their deeds in defence of the kingdom. Some visitors like the knight Robert de Boron seem to have carried away with them new literary forms and traditions, such as the legend of the Holy Grail. It was the Latin eastern noble society that inspired the very first formal guide to becoming a knight, the *Ordene de chevalerie*, which imagined the Frankish lord of Tiberias instructing the Sultan Saladin (here seated wearing a crown) in the knighting ritual.

The interiors of the eastern palaces can now only be surmised by archaeological remains of isolated castles and in one particularly detailed rendering of the architecture of Jerusalem. But one visitor to the Latin Kingdom in 1211, Wilibrand of Oldenbourg did leave us with a description of the palace of the powerful Ibelin family at Beirut, recently constructed, he said, by Syrians, Saracens, and Greeks. It had a "delicate marble pavement simulating water agitated by a light breeze" walls covered in marble panels, a vault the colour of the sky, and a pool with a fountain shaped like a dragon that provides air conditioning and a relaxing sound. Wilbrand wrote that the water "lulls to sleep by agreeable murmurings its lords who sit nearby. I would willingly sit by it for all my days."

Noble visitors to the Latin East were not just passive consumers of the architecture that they encountered. Many of the most monumental structures, from the church of the Holy Sepulchre dedicated in 1159, to the new royal palace constructed a few years later or the formidable fortresses of the military orders had been supported precisely by gifts made in the west by powerful aristocratic patrons. They travelled, then, through a landscape they had helped to build. Over time, visiting aristocrats had yet more active engagements with towns and fortifications of the east, as construction of new castles, walls, and towers, became one possible component of the journey. Krak de Chevaliers, for instance, was directly funded by King Andrew II of Hungary in 1219 after he was received there as a guest. The castles of Safad and Athlit were constructed by Benoit d'Alignan, bishop of Marseilles and Walter, lord of Avesnes, during their respective sojourns. The phenomenon continued on the mainland through at least 1287, when Alice, daughter of John I of Brittany and widowed countess of Blois expended enormous sums to construct a major tower at Acre during her own noble sojourn in the city. Accounts written after the fall of Acre to the Mamluk Sultan alAshraf Khalil in 1291 still remembered the tower as "The Tower of the Countess of Blois."

Wilbrand's description also noted the landscape surrounding the Ibelin palace, writing that "meadows, orchard, and the most delightful places" were visible from its windows. What he is describing is not of course just nature, but the built landscape, aristocratic space set aside to enhance the architecture of power and also for outdoor pursuits. Works describing the construction of two of the most formidable thirteenth-century castles, those at Saphet and Athlit make specific mention of the game available for hunting in the lands around them.

Hunting was a central element in the way aristocracies both in Europe and the in Near East, articulated their status. Participation in royal hunts allowed aristocrats to show their closeness to the ruler, and individual hunts were a chance to bring down high-status animals, trophies, that reinforced or even elevated the status of those that chased and killed them. In establishing their feudal principalities in the Levant, the Franks came to occupy a land whence their own royal hunting practices had first emerged millennia earlier, and where hunting remained a critical component of political culture. In the kingdom

of Jerusalem, a royal hunt, in which the king was joined by his court (including prominent visitors) was underway by at least 1143, when King Fulk died while hunting hares during his royal itinerary. Fulk's son, Baldwin III, participated in hunts together with the Byzantine emperor Manuel Komnenos in 1159.<sup>2</sup> But the fact of a royal or princely hunt, which after all, was common in Europe, was probably less significant to western visitors than the methods of hunting and the objects of the chase.

The Near East was home to a wide variety of megafauna unfamiliar to Europeans. Some of these animals, such as lions, leopards, oryxes, gazelle, and the large numbers of bird species that crossed through the region in migration, were prey.<sup>3</sup> Others, such as cheetah and caracal, were caught and trained as hunting animals in the same way that Europeans traditionally used hunting dogs. A richly illustrated copy of Oppian of Apamea's *Cynegetica* made in Constantinople in 1054 reveals the wealth of opportunities in the form of animals and different hunting practices available to hunters in the regions of Syria and eastern Anatolia.<sup>4</sup>

The most important eyewitness observer of the hunting culture of the crusader states was the aristocrat and avid hunter Usama ibn Munqidh, whose family were the lords of Shayzar in northern Syria. The castle of Shayzar was located just beyond the territory of the princes of Antioch, and in his later career as a courtier and diplomat, Usama moved between the world of the Muslim princes of Damascus and Egypt and the kingdom of the Franks. Usama recalled numerous interactions with Franks, both the local aristocracy and visitors from the Europe, in contexts related to hunting. Usama's stories point to a thriving market in hunting birds and mammals – and to a strong desire on the part of Europeans to hunt large and (to their eyes) exotic megafauna. He recalled the story of the unfortunate Frankish lord Adam of Hunak who asked Usama's help in locating a leopard to hunt; the animal ultimately killed him. The combination of enthusiasm and naivete that Usama ascribes to Europeans with regard to hunting big cats is confirmed by an account of the journey of Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony to Jerusalem in 1173. While visiting the Sultan Kilij Arslan II in Asia Minor, Duke Henry was given two big cats as a gift. The chronicler who recorded Henry's journey called them "leopards" but given that he says that they were "trained to sit on the backs of horses" they closely match Usama ibn Munqidh's description of hunting cheetahs.<sup>6</sup>

Nothing attracted the attention of visiting crusading lords, however, like the opportunity to hunt lions. The English chronicler Matthew Paris included a detailed and illustrated anecdote in the *Chronica Maiora* describing how "among other marks of the virtue and boldness of [the English knight Hugh de Neville], he killed a lion in the Holy Land. Having first been shot in the chest with an arrow and then afterwards transfixed in the chest with a sword, the lion died with blood pouring forth."<sup>5</sup> In 1251 near Caesarea in Palestine the crusader John of Joinville encountered a recently arrived small crusading expedition led by Elnart of Selninghen, who immediately took up hunting lions, and caught several. Hunts for lions and other types of game like unicorns also proliferated in the romance traditions concerning visitors to the Latin East, and they also cultivated the legend of the grateful lion who befriends a crusader and tries to follow them home. The story, as depicted in this fourteenth-century Italian bestiary, does not end well for the lion, who drowns when sailors refuse to let him board the ship with its friend.

<sup>2</sup> William of Tyre, *Chronique*, ed. Robert Huygens (Corpus Christianorum, Brepols, 1986), 18, 27, 32-34.

<sup>3</sup> Paul M. Cobb, *Usama ibn Munqidh: Warrior Poet in the Age of the Crusades* (London: Oneworld, 2005), pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Venice, Bibliotheca Marciana, Cod gr. Z. 479 (=881) <sup>6</sup> Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> "Inter caetera suae probitatis et audaciae insignia in Terra Sancta leonem interfecit. Leo prius sagittatus in pectore postea gladio transverberatus, eliquato sanguine expiravit." Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, ed. Henry Richard Luard (7 vols., London: Rolls Series, 1872-1880) iii, 71.

## Fighting

It would be fair to ask at this point if, in the midst of all of this courtly visiting, site seeing, and hunting, the noble visitors who I'm also calling crusaders, ever did any fighting. The nobles who undertook these journeys certainly came prepared to fight, but the types of violence that they encountered, traveling apart from the major crusading expeditions, were qualitatively different from what we usually associate with crusading warfare. In between periods of heightened conflict the kingdom of Jerusalem and its neighbours experienced long periods of relative peace, alliances, and even "con-dominium" (the joint rule of specified lands between Jerusalem and Damascus, for example).

In their respective journeys undertaken in 1157 and 1177 for instance, father and son crusaders counts Thierry and Philip of Flanders both undertook a limited type of fighting in the same region of northern Syria around the castle of Harim outside of Aleppo. Both raided the area and engaged in skirmishes with the lord of Harim's forces. Philip's fighting at Harim is particularly noteworthy because he undertook it *while a major battle was taking place in the kingdom of Jerusalem against Saladin, who had invaded*. Philip deliberately avoided this larger engagement to participate in the smaller, more limited, and doubtless safer one.

Compared either to the increasingly high stakes military conflict that was taking place in Europe, as monarchs called upon the knights and lords to help centralize and strengthen their claims against one another, and certainly as compared to the brutal scenarios that unfolded in the course of major crusade campaigns, these small scale raids and border actions would likely have constituted a more appealing way for knights carry out the socially and clerically sanctioned violence associated with crusading, and to show produce memorable and visible evidence that they had done so. The accounts of the visitor Manasses of Hierges also notably claim that he would ride across the borders, making raids into enemy territory: "he went beyond the border of the kingdom of Jerusalem, traversing the neighbouring lands of Egypt, Damascus, and Antioch."<sup>6</sup> "Frequently" another text relates, "with swords bared he displayed the banner before the Damascenes and Egyptians and carried it back, happily stained with the enemy's blood".<sup>7</sup>

## Tournaments

I began this discussion of the European nobility and their quest for distinction by pointing to the popularity of tournaments, the great stages of aristocratic performance where nobles would go to see and be seen, and therefore to re-affirm or enhance their social status. It's important to point out, then, that the Latin East was also the site of a number of famous tournaments. Tournaments are first attested in the principality of Antioch at the remarkably early date of 1159, when they were witnessed by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Komnenos. The emperor was so keen on this form of sport that he wanted to import it to Byzantium. An anonymous contemporary document records the lavish clothing that he later wore in jousts, affirming that he understood their importance as a courtly political performance as much as a military game. In 1223, a tournament was staged in Cyprus at which participants dressed as members of the Round Table, and this is in fact the earliest attestation for the type of tournament that would later find great popularity in Europe. The popularity and frequency of tournaments in the Latin East is also suggested by the fact that the Old French customary treatises include language

<sup>6</sup> Namur, Bibliothèque du Séminaire, MS 80 f. 35v: "iheroslimitani regni lim[i]tes egressus x babilonie x damasci x antiochie finitima peragraret".

<sup>7</sup> Namur, Bibliothèque du Séminaire, MS 57 f. 131v: "Frequenter babiloniis et damascenis vexilla deplicans gladios nudabat, et iocundam ex inimici sanguine maculam reportabat".

warning knights that if their horses start to go lame thanks to too many tournaments, they have only themselves to blame. I realize that the image that I'm showing you right now may be a bit confusing: it's actually an image of Hercules and Theseus jousting with the sisters of the amazon Antiope, a scene from an Old French collection of stories from antiquity, but particularly fitting since this image was painted by artists in the Latin East at the famous manuscript atelier in the city of Acre.

Lavish tournaments continued to be held in Greece, at Corinth, and in Cyprus, long after the last outposts of the Latin States on the eastern European mainland had been conquered by Mamluk armies from Egypt. The descriptions of later medieval travellers and texts from Frankish Greece show, however, that visitors were still coming to these courts, to participate in tournaments, to hunt, and to fight. The aristocratic visit to the crusading frontier had been adopted and perfected by the crusading order of the Teutonic knights, who organized their *Reysen* to Lithuania along the lines of what historians have described as "package holidays" for the nobility, complete with a Table of Honour, heralds to compose songs about their feats, and special certificates or badges of participation. At the European princely, for instance at Burgundy, the past and future of crusading had become a central component of court pageants and performances, beginning a tradition of the theatrical enactment of crusading that can be witnessed in much later and radically different contexts, such as Spanish-occupied Tlaxcala and Mexico City in 1539.

The later medieval pageants and *Reysa* are often seen as perversions of crusade, turning away from the more serious geo-strategic military endeavours of an earlier era. But as we have seen, there is in fact a bright thread of this performative, theatrical element to crusading that runs right through the many centuries of crusading history. And this type of activity was one that continued to yield value in the maintenance of European aristocratic power and status.

### Conclusions

I began this lecture with this image from the Protestant Thomas Fuller's *Holy Warre*, the frontispiece that suggested the great expenses and terrible slaughter of the crusades amounted to a moral lesson for Christian Europeans: they went out full, they came back empty. But the question of the value of the crusading expeditions of the Middle Ages to the European communities and institutions that undertook them has, I think, been muddied somewhat by imprecision about precisely which communities we are talking about, about the full extent of the crusading experience, and about the role of the Latin States in that experience. What I hope to have shown is that for the aristocracy, the principalities of the Latin East indeed provided a rich resource for the kinds of cultural capital that was the very stuff of their social class and status at home. The aristocracy of the Latin East presented their lands as an idealized world of noble customs and behaviour, an origin point in the mythic past of chivalry. The value of the principalities was embedded not only in the people, but in the architecture—constructed with the assistance of European noble endowments—, and in the landscape itself. This extraordinary map created in the middle of the thirteenth century and wonderfully restored by our students at Fordham University, demonstrates much of what we've seen was important about the landscape of the Latin East: access and an itinerary to the Holy Places; the presence of the frontier with non-Christian opponents, the presence of lions for hunting and the mythical home of hunting birds on top of Mt. Gilboa.

And this image of European aristocrats traveling to lands of overseas conquest to learn and to demonstrate their virtues is one that has obvious resonances with later periods, particularly with the Grand Tour of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the expeditions and safaris of period of European overseas empire, and with more modern tourism. My hope is that by modifying our understandings of the range of crusading experiences, and by focusing on the value of those experiences for distinct social groups, we come closer to contextualizing the entire history of the

crusades and especially the existence of the ephemeral Crusader States, within the larger story of European colonialism and global history. The value in comparing elite practices of the central Middle Ages to later periods, however, is not to help us join the dots on a flattened historical landscape. Contrary to the desires of modern European colonial elites, steeped in medievalism, the crusades were no practice-run for later European empires. Contextualizing the violent history of the crusades within the social and culture of the Middle Ages is also a helpful rejoinder to those who would search for past justifications for modern injustices.

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