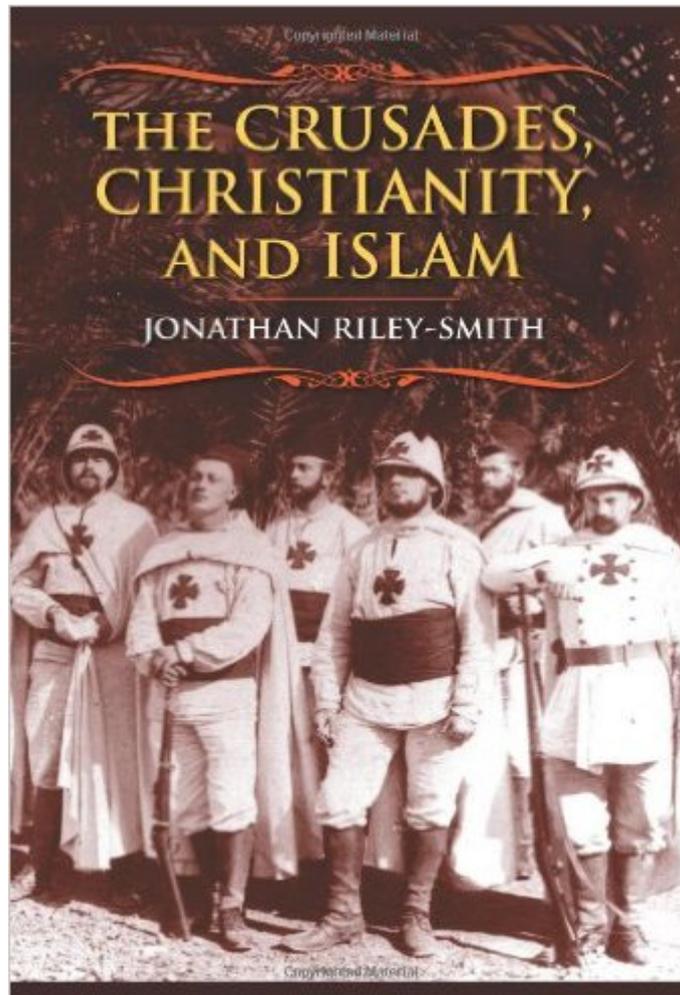


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The Crusades, Christianity, And Islam (Bampton Lectures In America)



Synopsis

The Crusades were penitential war-pilgrimages fought in the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean, as well as in North Africa, Spain, Portugal, Poland, the Baltic region, Hungary, the Balkans, and Western Europe. Beginning in the eleventh century and ending as late as the eighteenth, these holy wars were waged against Muslims and other enemies of the Church, enlisting generations of laymen and laywomen to fight for the sake of Christendom. Crusading features prominently in today's religio-political hostilities, yet the perceptions of these wars held by Arab nationalists, pan-Islamists, and many in the West have been deeply distorted by the language and imagery of nineteenth-century European imperialism. With this book, Jonathan Riley-Smith returns to the actual story of the Crusades, explaining why and where they were fought and how deeply their narratives and symbolism became embedded in popular Catholic thought and devotional life. From this history, Riley-Smith traces the legacy of the Crusades into modern times, specifically within the attitudes of European imperialists and colonialists and within the beliefs of twentieth-century Muslims. Europeans fashioned an interpretation of the Crusades from the writings of Walter Scott and a French contemporary, Joseph-François Michaud. Scott portrayed Islamic societies as forward-thinking, while casting Christian crusaders as culturally backward and often morally corrupt. Michaud, in contrast, glorified crusading, and his followers used its imagery to illuminate imperial adventures. These depictions have had a profound influence on contemporary Western opinion, as well as on Muslim attitudes toward their past and present. Whether regarded as a valid expression of Christianity's divine enterprise or condemned as a weapon of empire, crusading has been a powerful rhetorical tool for centuries. In order to understand the preoccupations of Islamist jihadis and the character of Western discourse on the Middle East, Riley-Smith argues, we must understand how images of crusading were formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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Customer Reviews

In *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam*, Jonathan Riley-Smith has provided a succinct, powerful work that helps us understand the historical memory of the Crusades in both the Western and Islamic worlds. Given the sensitivities over the Crusading era with both Christians and Muslims, the author does a remarkable job at correcting common misperceptions in both groups. The author begins with the misperceived uniqueness of the Crusades, that is, the sanctioning of holy war was not an aberration in the history of Christianity. Instead, Riley-Smith demonstrates that Christian leaders had struggled with the use of violence through the first millennium of Christianity's existence, as men such as St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) sought to reconcile the conflicting peaceful and violent overtones throughout Scripture. Augustine eventually conceived of "holy war" where men could take up arms given a certain set of circumstances. The Crusades used the same logic to sanction violence, but with the added features of military orders such as the Templars, the taking of vows, and "collective acts of penance, repayments through self-punishment of debts owed to God for sin" (pp. 28, 33). The most fascinating aspects of the first two chapters are the methods the popes and Church leaders used to recruit participants of the Crusades. Traveling from city to city and coordinating their arrivals with local feasts, Church leaders came through with great pomp and show, giving fiery messages about the need to liberate the Holy Land. As the Crusades continued, preachers added drama through music, public vows, and elaborate props (p. 38).

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