

The outcomes of the third crusade history essay



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The Third Crusade has a unique place in historiography as one of the most divisive unresolved conflicts of the Middle Ages. The Third Crusade remains an unparalleled chapter in medieval European history, for the unprecedented involvement of royalty, and in the ancient history of relations between the East and West.[1] Though played out on a vastly smaller human scale than the First or Second Crusades, the clash between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin has become legendary, creating new cults of personality around both commanders.

From 1187 to 1192, tens of thousands of people sailed and marched over 2,000 miles to 're-conquer' a city and land many of them had only ever heard of. Suffering through terrible starvation, raging thirst and brutal combat, thousands died, never to return home to their native lands. Yet, the historiographical importance of the Third Crusade lies not in the human tragedy of the expedition to the Holy Land, but in the tactical, strategic and political outcomes of the war and the failure to re-establish Latin Christian control over large areas of the Levant and the consequences of their actions for the Crusader States.

From 1187, Pope Gregory VIII, following the Papal tradition of proclamation, decreed the duty of Christians to free the holy city of Jerusalem from the hands of the Muslims who had occupied it in 1187, making Jerusalem the primary goal of the Third Crusade.[2] Many royals and nobles of royal blood took the Cross and journeyed to the Holy Land so much so, in later years it was called the King's Crusade.[3] Inspired with a religious zeal, England and France negotiated a truce, allowing Richard I of England and Philip II of France to jointly lead this new Crusade. The 70-year-old Holy Roman

Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa was also invigorated by this new Papal call to arms. Leading a huge army across modern day Turkey, he unfortunately drowned in the Saleph River before reaching the Levant, leaving his army largely leaderless. Discouraged by their heroic commanders' death, many returned to their native lands, but some continued on under the command of Leopold V of Austria.

After a few notable military successes, infighting among the Christian commanders rose to a climax and frustrated with Richard's refusal to consider a different strategy or alternate methods of command and worried about the security of their lands back west, Leopold and Philip departed the Holy Land in August of 1191. Ultimately, Richard realised after the battles at Arsuf and Jaffa that Egypt had to be taken before the march on Jerusalem could begin.[4] Thus, in the primary Papally sanctioned task - the recapture of Jerusalem - the Crusaders failed and this has led to many historians, both Arab and Western, dismissing the Crusade. However, the Treaty of Ramla finalised on September 2, 1192 allowed unarmed pilgrims to visit the Holy Sepulchre free from persecution and allowed Richard to leave for England on October 9 that year.

While the Crusade was ultimately a failure, it illustrated a number of very important points and safeguarded the future of the Crusader states in the years to come. The small territorial gains and victories in battle showed the Muslims were not invincible to defeat and slowed Muslim expansion in the Holy Land.

The focus of this historiographical essay will be to understand how and why historians, both contemporary and modern, have interpreted the outcomes of the Third Crusade and the influence this has had on modern popular perception of the Crusade. Within the historiography, I will focus primarily on the political and military (both tactical and strategic) ramifications apparent in the Holy Land after 1192. For the sake of balance and space, there will be equal numbers of historians from both Western and Arabic historiography whose works are considered seminal to the historiography of the Crusade.

There has always been a contrasting and controversial duality in historiography over the Third Crusades primarily because the word 'crusade' invokes radically conflicting sets of connections in Western and Arabic contemporary histories - the Crusades as a courageous religious struggle against barbarism or as a catechism for merciless aggression and violence. Despite modern Western historiography reassessment of the Crusades in the light of secularism, with many vocal critics of the Crusades, generally the images of the outcomes of Third Crusade have remained polarised with Richard portrayed as the saviour of the Crusader states and Saladin as the chivalrous general who nevertheless squandered multiple chances to defeat the Crusaders in open battle.[5]

Whereas contemporary Arabic historians have usually thought the opposite to be true, the Crusades remained largely forgotten in both Arabic academic and popular thought until the late 1800's. It was only in 1899 that the first modern Arabic and Islamic history of the Crusades was published. Prior to the growth of Arab nationalism in the 20th century, the Crusades were virtually unknown in the Islamic world.[6]Modern Arabic histories have, to a

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large extent, borrowed from Western historiography, for within the framework of Pan-Islamism and decolonialism, have risen theories of the beginnings of imperialism and proto-colonialism. In this context, the figure and personality cult of Saladin has been reinvented within the context of the modern world to be the leader who successfully resisted the Western onslaught and thus is a figurehead for modern resistance to the encroachment of the West.

In historiography, the Third Crusade as a separate and disparate event remains largely forgotten, with modern historical thought focused specifically on the lives of Richard and Saladin with no great monograph of the Third Crusade to speak of. Thus, the gap between historical understanding and popular perception remains great in this gulf of ignorance. With the aftermath of 9/11 and the ongoing War on Terror, the debate between academic truth and popular perception tempered with nationalism on both sides, will grow ever more urgent as long as popular perception turns to the Crusades to understand the current situation.

In terms of contemporary Arabic historiography, there are really only two informative scholars on the Third Crusade, both of whom followed Saladin during the campaign. The first, Imad ad-din al-Isfahani was born in the city of Isfahan in modern day Iran in the year 1125.[7]A scientist, scholar, poet and historian, after a successful career as Chancellor and deputy to the vizier of Egypt, Al-Qadi al-Fadl, he became Saladin's personal scribe and advisor, accompanying him on campaign from the Battle of Hattin and beyond the Siege of Acre in 1191 through to Saladin's death.[8]Often vocally critical of Saladin, he is perhaps one of the most objective contemporary historians of

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the Third Crusade, but as much of his surviving work was written after Saladin's death in 1193, it could be argued it is often apocryphal and thus, his overly stylised personal views of Saladin's victories are often not accepted by modern scholars.[9]

The second Persian historian is Bahā' ad-Dīn Yusuf ibn Rafi ibn Shaddād, a Muslim jurist, scholar and historian who was born in Mosul, on the 7th of March in 1145. He is most famous for writing a surviving biography of Saladin, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, from personal observations as his close friend, advisor and judge. He was an eyewitness to the Third Crusade and survived Saladin to become judge of Aleppo. Many other works, such as Ibn al-Athir's, are based in part on these seminal works. Ibn Shaddād offers the most concise view of Saladin in Arabic contemporary historiography. He writes of Saladin "...put his whole faith and confidence in God and turned to Him." Saladin's justice, generosity, and courage, are also mentioned but he heavily emphasized Saladin's aspiration for war.[10]

Christian contemporary history of the Third Crusade is sparse at best. Many of the accounts are second or even third-hand, with little or no surviving original manuscripts. The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre dealing with the Third Crusade is one of the Crusades is one of the few contemporary documents that is both accurate and informative over the outcome of the Third Crusade. Possibly written by Ernoul, a squire of Balian of Ibelin, the man who surrendered Jerusalem, Ernoul's writing's may make up only a small part of the chronicle according to Peter Edbury.[11]Of the Battle of Hattin, Ernoul has this to say: " The count and his division charged at a large

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squadron of Saracens. The Saracens parted and made a way through and let them pass; then, when they were in the middle of them, they surrounded them." In this quote he demonstrates the superior tactics of the Arabs against the frontal assault of the Crusaders.

The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, is a compilation by Richard, canon of the Holy Trinity, London, of two different narratives, the Old French Continuation of William of Tyre and the narrative poem of Ambroise, a contemporary chronicler of the Third Crusade, in the *L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*. It is surprisingly accurate and informative over the last few months of the Crusade and its eventual outcomes through the Treaty of Ramla. Other contemporary western Christian sources of the Third Crusade are too few and too apocryphal to be considered seminal works. On Richard's strategy, the *Gesta* has this to say on the capture of Jaffa: " The army proceeded from Arsuf to Jaffa, which the Crusaders took and fortified strongly. Jaffa, they hoped, would be the base of operations in a drive to reconquer Jerusalem itself." [12] Thus, Richard's strategy was largely defensive. He knew to get drawn into a fight would result in his army's destruction. Furthermore, the only way in which he could keep his army supplied would be by capturing the vital supply points from Acre to Jerusalem. This was a sound military strategy, as long as reinforcements kept coming. Politically, the *Gesta* is more ambivalent over Richard, showing him to be uncommitted to the fight and more worried about matters at home. However, it does also say Jerusalem could not be taken without more men, so in essence Richard was right to leave: " The departure of Richard the Lionheart from the Holy Land in October 1192 ended the third major Western

invasion of the East. On this expedition three great armies had toiled to conquer Jerusalem and the whole of Palestine for the West. But, in 1192, Jerusalem was still in Saladin's hands and the deliverance of the East from the Moslems was still a pious hope. The positive achievement of this Crusade was modest: it had re-established a tiny Latin Kingdom on the Palestinian coast. The major task of the Crusade, however, was left undone." [13]

There is a vast array of modern historical sources on the Third Crusade. However, these are mainly geared towards famous battles or the biographies of Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in Western and Arabic historiographies respectively. The seminal works of Crusading historians have been intensively analysed. David Hillman's book, *Richard the Lionheart and the Third Crusade*, is an excellent example of the atypical Western historiography of the Third Crusade. He lauds the conduct of Richard the Lionheart in the Holy Land: "The Battle of Jaffa proved to Richard's last military exploit in the Holy Land. It had been a dazzling display of determination, skill and courage; outstanding in a lifetime of incessant warfare." [14]

Amin Maalouf's *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* posits exactly the same picture but for Saladin. Written in the light of burgeoning Arab nationalism of the 1980's, to generalise, his work is atypical of the image of Saladin, the cult of personality that has been constructed around him in the Arab world.

In conclusion, the historiography of the conduct of the Third Crusade and its eventual winner is bound by a number of flaws. Primarily, both among Arab and Western historians, the overriding images are ones of victory, military

prowess and chivalry. Each side claims their own as the victor, from contemporary history to the modern day. Despite this not unexpected observation, the most astonishing thing in the historiography of the Third Crusade is the way in which the images of these two men have been distorted through the years, creating the cults of personality that now exist around them.

Because of this, the reality of the victor of the Third Crusade is a double edged sword in history. One cannot name an individual for criticism and counter-claims inevitably follow. In reality, however, the most like realistic scenario is Richard the Lionheart won the tactical victory, re-gaining lost territory and shoring up support for the Crusader states. Saladin on the other, through his scorched earth policies after defeats at Arsuf and Jaffa, won the strategic victory. His strategy to keep control of Jerusalem worked, largely, although he did fail to destroy the remaining Crusader states, which would always have been a campaign aim. In the end, considering both their images in popular and historical culture and the fact that the Fourth Crusade didn't materialise and Saladin's dynasty fell after his death, fragmenting his empire, it must a draw, for neither gained a crushing victory but neither lost one.