

Reader's Guide

The term “crusade” is commonly used today to refer to a dedicated, enthusiastic effort. It usually means a total, all-out attempt to correct a problem, such as combating drunk driving or saving an endangered species from extinction. When people use the word “crusade,” though, they may not recognize its distinctly religious meaning and history, even though they might embark on their crusade with religious enthusiasm.

The “Crusades” (with a capital “C”) were a series of military campaigns launched by the Christian countries of western Europe in the late eleventh century. During these battles tens of thousands of people went to war in the Middle East. Their goal was to recapture the Holy Land, or Palestine, from the Muslims and restore it to Christian control. The focus of the Crusaders was the holy city of Jerusalem, now part of the Jewish nation of Israel on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and still a holy site to three religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. But the impact of the Crusades was felt throughout that region of the world and in Europe.

The First Crusade was launched in late 1095 and ended with the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. The last

Crusade took place in the late 1200s. Historians identify seven separate Crusades, although there were two other highly irregular Crusades that are not generally numbered. The exact number is not important, for the Crusades were a single extended conflict that was fought over the course of two centuries. As the military and diplomatic situation in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas changed, successive waves of European troops flowed into the region to capture a key city or to expel an opposing army that had recaptured the same city. Each of these waves represented one of the Crusades. After each Crusade, particularly the early ones, some of the European invaders remained in the Middle East to rule over Christian kingdoms they had established. Many others returned to their homelands. During the periods between each Crusade, there was relative peace between the warring parties, although tensions simmered beneath the surface.

The Muslim world was slow to respond to the Crusaders. For many decades Muslims were too busy fighting among themselves for power and influence in the Middle East and lands beyond to recognize the threat that the Crusaders posed. Only after they mounted organized resistance were they able to drive the Crusaders out of the Middle East. Hundreds of years later, many Muslims continue to regard westerners as “crusaders” bent on occupying their holy territory.

Historians continue to debate whether, from a European Christian perspective, the Crusades were a success. While the first ended successfully with the capture of Jerusalem, some of the later Crusades were military and political disasters, at least from the point of view of the Europeans. All historians agree, though, that the Crusades would have a profound effect on the development of European civilization. They opened trade routes and promoted commerce, they led to never-before-seen exploration and cultural contact, and they provided inspiration for poets and novelists. They also laid the groundwork for conflict and religious strife that continues in the twenty-first century.

Features and Format

The Crusades: Biographies presents the biographies of twenty-five men and women who lived at the time of the Crusades and experienced the battles or the effects of these

wars. Profiled are famous figures, such as King Richard the Lionheart of England; the Muslim warrior Saladin, and Saint Francis of Assisi. Lesser-known people are also featured, among them, the sultana of Egypt Shajarat al-Durr, the Byzantine emperors Alexius I and Alexius IV, and the Arab soldier and writer Usamah ibn Munqidh. There are numerous sidebars that highlight interesting information related to the people who lived at the time of the Crusades. More than forty black-and-white images enliven the text. The volume includes a glossary, a timeline, words to know, sources for further reading, and a subject index.

The Crusades Reference Library

The Crusades: Biographies is only one component of a three-part U•X•L Crusades Reference Library. The set also includes one almanac volume and one volume of primary source documents:

- *The Crusades: Almanac* covers the Crusades in thirteen thematic chapters, each examining an element of the two-hundred-year time period. The volume takes the reader through many aspects of this lengthy conflict. Included are chapters on the origins, history, and aftermath of the Crusades and on the holy city of Jerusalem and the land of Palestine as the focal site of three faiths. There are also profiles of the various groups of Muslims and Christians involved in the fight and descriptions of knights and the conduct of warfare.
- *The Crusades: Primary Sources* offers twenty-four full or excerpted documents, speeches, and literary works from the Crusades era. Included are “political” statements, such as Pope Urban II’s speech calling for the First Crusade. There are also accounts of battles and sieges as well as other events, such as the slaughter of Jews in Europe by Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land. Included are samplings from literature, among them, excerpts from the epic poem *The Song of Roland* and a chapter of the Koran. The Arabic view of the times are featured in such writings as a Muslim historian’s view of the Mongol invasions. The Byzantine perspective is seen, for example, in portions of *The Alexiad*, a biography of the emperor Alexius I Comnenus by his daughter.

- A cumulative index of all three titles in The Crusades Reference Library is also available.

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About the Editors

Marcia Merryman Means and Neil Schlager are managing editor and president, respectively, of Schlager Group Inc., an editorial services company with offices in Florida and Vermont. Schlager Group publications have won numerous honors, including four RUSA awards from the American Library Association, two Reference Books Bulletin/Booklist Editors' Choice awards, two New York Public Library Outstanding Reference awards, and two *CHOICE* awards.

Comments and Suggestions

We welcome your comments on *The Crusades: Biographies* and suggestions for other topics in history to consider. Please write to Editors, *The Crusades: Biographies*, U•X•L, 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48331-3535; call toll-free 800-877-4253; send faxes to 248-699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.galegroup.com>.

Words to Know

A

Abbasid: A Muslim religious dynasty that could trace its origins back to the uncle of Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam. The Abbasids ruled in Baghdad from 749 to 1258 and were the spiritual heart of Sunni Islam, the orthodox, or mainstream, branch of the faith.

Abbey: A society of monks or nuns governed by an abbot or an abbess, respectively; also refers to the buildings where these monks and nuns resided.

Alhomads: A sect, or subgroup, of Islam from North Africa that conquered Cordova, Spain, in the twelfth century.

Allah: The name of the Muslim god.

Asia Minor: The peninsula between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea that holds most of present-day Turkey; also sometimes referred to as Anatolia.

Assassins: An extremist group of Muslim Shiites organized in the late eleventh century to fight their opponents by