The Crusades have attracted scholarly attention ever since Pope Urban II called for the recovery of the Holy Land at the Council of Clermont (27 December 1095). The loss of the Crusader Kingdom almost two hundred years later merely heralded the end of the first stage of the Holy War. The Christian enterprise would indeed be followed by many plans De Recuperatione Terrae Sanctae, some of which were carried out, albeit in other areas of the world.

Beyond the military and political dimensions, the Crusades left their mark in a rich tradition of myths, symbols, and terminology, which became integral components in Western and Eastern cultures through the centuries. To mention a few examples from the recent past, Crusader symbols and values resonated through General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Second World War memoirs, Crusade in Europe. Decades later, the idea of a civilizational clash between East and West, presented as a new Crusade replete with Crusader images and symbols, which colored the Gulf War propaganda of both Saddam Hussein and the White House. Indeed, the Crusades were an event of such historical magnitude that they remain deeply embedded in our language to this day.

The enduring interest in the Crusades had prompted the extensive publication of original sources throughout the nineteenth century, creating a solid base for the Recueil des historiens des croisades, published between 1841 and 1906, and the Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani, edited by Reinhold Röhricht in 1893 and recently digitized (http://crusades-regesta.com, accessed on 27 November 2023). The widespread publication of original material made possible the pioneering studies of August-Arthur Beugnot, Emmanuel G. Rey, Hans Prutz, Gaston Dodu, René Gousset, John La Monte, and Sir Steven Runciman, among others. Toward the end of the twentieth century, Jean Richard, Joshua Prawer, and Jonathan Riley Smith founded the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East. Boasting more than 300 members worldwide, the Society publishes an annual journal, Crusades.

This collection of studies thus forms part of a rich historiographical tradition, the origins of which can be traced back to the early stages of the Crusades.

This Special Issue opens with an analysis of an essential aspect of the Crusades and their implementation—papal propaganda and the communication challenges faced by the Crusaders in Christendom and the Latin East. Sophia Menache (2022) analyzes different aspects of communications concerning papal propaganda and its reception by contemporary audiences. The many communication challenges that plagued the Crusades substantiate her conclusion that notwithstanding the many achievements of the First Crusade, papal policy in the long term proved to be not only a propaganda fiasco but possibly also a communication failure.

With preaching serving as one of the Crusades’ main channels of communication, William Chester Jordan (2023) analyzes two memorial sermons delivered by the papal legate, Eudes of Châteauroux, after the failure of King Louis IX’s Crusade. The traditional explanation of peccatis nostris exigentibus (because of our sins) was invoked once again to shed light on God’s mysterious designs in bringing about the Christian army’s defeat. Those sins, according to Eudes, referred at the time not only to the Crusaders’ many vices but also—perhaps mainly—to the corruption of those supporting Emperor Friedrich II.
However, by conveying a biblical message, Eudes was able to declare his faith in the Crusaders’ eventual victory over their adversaries.

The Holy War in the Iberian Peninsula provides an important additional chapter in the history of the Crusades. Paula Pinto Costa and Joana Lencart (2023) analyze the concept of Crusade and its emergence in the Kingdom of Portugal. The conquests of Lisbon (1147), Silves (1189), and Alcácer do Sal (1217) were all distinguished by the active participation of Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land. These conquests provide the basis for examining the emergence of the terms Crusade and Crusader in Portugal, the influence of the Holy War, and the commitment of both the Portuguese Crown and the Holy See in the Reconquista.

The defeats of the Crusaders in the battlefield undoubtedly posed a considerable challenge to the papal propaganda efforts, but in the long term they also brought about the need for new insights into the enemy. Zeynep Kocabrytkoglu Cecen (2023) examines the more positive perceptions of the Ottoman Turks after their decisive victory at Nicopolis (1396). Philippe de Mézières’s L’Apparicion du Maistre Jehan de Meun (1398) thus praise the military organization and discipline of the Infidel compared to the Crusaders’ complete disarray. Similar conclusions appear once again six decades later, in Bertrand de la Broquière’s Le Voyage d’Outremer (1452–1453), thus hinting at a more unbiased and perhaps also a more objective approach to the enemies of the cross.

The Crusaders’ difficulties in coping with new geographical environments posed yet another obstacle among the many challenges faced by papal propaganda. Svetlana Luchitskaya (2023) examines the Crusaders’ impressions of the physical and psychological landscape when traveling across the Balkans. The portrayals of the wild and treacherous terrain align with biased accounts of the Balkan people, their brutish customs, and “barbarous” language. The Crusaders’ negative responses to the unknown thus reflect one aspect of the clash between the feudal society they left behind and the many hardships they encountered throughout their pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In contrast, familiar geographical areas in the Italian Peninsula and Sicily were used for political, utilitarian purposes, their conquest justified as a preliminary stage in the conquest or reconquest of the Holy Land. Marco Giardini (2023) sheds light on the close connection between the recovery of the Holy Land and the unification of the orbis christianus under one universal ruler. Benzo of Alba’s Ad Heinricum imperatorem in the early eleventh century, as well as Charles I of Anjou’s Sicilian projects in the thirteenth century and Charles VIII’s Italian expedition at the end of the fifteenth century, were all different manifestations of the manipulation of Crusader ideals and symbols for short- or long-term political purposes.

The Military Orders also manipulated the Crusader myth after the fall of Acre to justify their very existence in a changing Christendom. Maria Bonet Donato (2023) examines the approach of the Catalan, Aragonese, and Navarrese Hospitallers to their Crusader past in the Latin East as a justification for their functional and administrative activities in Rhodes. Reports of their military actions from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries thus reflected a historiographical perspective extolling the Hospitallers’ mission and identifying them with symbolic places and figures in the Holy Land, without forgetting their caring and religious roles.

Indeed, the Crusades and their memory undoubtedly influenced the lexicon of the myths, symbols, and goals of medieval Christendom. The Kingdom of Navarre presents a historiographical challenge in this regard as it holds so few traces of narrative references to the Crusades in either the political, military, or ideological spheres. This absence is the most surprising since two of the monarchs, the Counts of Champagne Theobald I and II, actively participated in the Crusader campaigns during 1239–1241 and 1270, respectively. Julia Pavón Benito (2023) analyses key texts and their divergent perspectives regarding the impact of the Crusades in other areas of Christendom.

The last section is devoted to the interactions between Christians and Muslims in the Crusade Period, with special emphasis on Muslim attitudes to the Crusaders, their
achievements, and failures. Sebastian Garnier (2023) studies Saint Louis’s Crusade against Tunis (1270) and its threat to the Hafsid regime, as viewed by contemporaries. The acolytes of the Hafsid sultans thus tended to downplay the impotence of their ineffectual sovereigns, while others, especially the Mamluks, did not spare the regime harsh criticism. The courtiers, on the other hand, resorted to poetry, satirizing “al-Fransîs” following their setback in the Seventh Crusade and mocking Louis IX in famous epigrams. At the same time, the Literati of the Restoration (ca 1370–1488) strove to portray al-Mustansîr as a model king in a long series of sovereigns of the First Golden Age (until 1277) that extended over more than two centuries.

Although the militant \textit{jihâd} remains one of the most popular topics in modern Islamic studies, most of them focus on ideologies and actions while neglecting the popular perception of this phenomenon. Oleg Sokolov (2023) examines Arabic folk epics inspired by the Crusades and shows that the protagonists were presented as \textit{mujâhidûn}—holy warriors. These warriors were bolstered by an unshakeable faith in the divine sanction of their cause, demonstrated over and over again in their relentless resistance to the Christian incursion and by their readiness to embrace martyrdom. The frequent references to \textit{jihâd} in the epics, along with their anti-Frankish rhetoric, render them a valuable source for the study of how the Crusades were remembered in Medieval Arab culture.

Nicholas Coureas (2023) scrutinizes another aspect of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the Latin East, mainly in the exchange of gifts between the Lusignan Kings of Cyprus and the Sultans of Mamluk Egypt and Syria, the Lusignan Kings and the Turkish Emirs of Anatolia, and the Venetian rulers of Cyprus and the Mamluk Sultans. This diplomatic device of gift-giving offers important insights into the dialogue between the belligerents, whether during times of war, as a prelude to hostilities and/or immediately after their cessation, or within a diplomatic setting. Furthermore, they were often complemented with written or oral messages, expressing touching personal or affectionate sentiments.

The various articles in this collection thus enhance our knowledge of the Crusades from the diverse perspectives provided by communication, culture, and religion. From the very core of the Crusades—the papal curia and its legates—to the peripheral areas of Christendom—the Iberian Peninsula and the Balkans—the Crusades and their many myths, values, and symbols, each and every one of them have provided a rich basis for these stimulating articles.

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