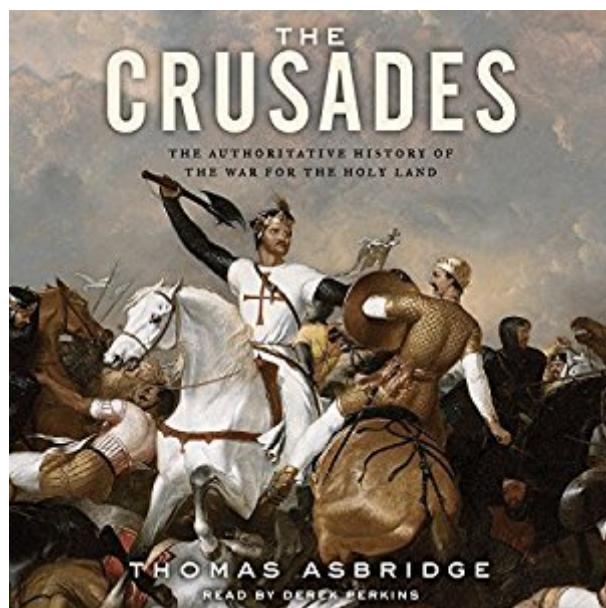


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The Crusades: The Authoritative History Of The War For The Holy Land



Synopsis

The Crusades is an authoritative, accessible single-volume history of the brutal struggle for the Holy Land in the Middle Ages. Thomas Asbridge - a renowned historian who writes with "maximum vividness" (Joan Acocella, *The New Yorker*) - covers the years 1095 to 1291 in this big, ambitious, listenable account of one of the most fascinating periods in history. From Richard the Lionheart to the mighty Saladin, from the emperors of Byzantium to the Knights Templar, Asbridge's book is a magnificent epic of holy war between the Christian and Islamic worlds, full of adventure, intrigue, and sweeping grandeur.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A good, readable history of The Crusades has escaped me to this point, for whatever reason. I was very excited when Tynerman's *God's War* was released a few years ago, and quickly became disenchanted when I tried slogging through it and realized what a boringly-written brick it was. Couldn't finish it. Runciman's classic volumes, which have been the definitive essential reading for half a century now, are still valid, entertaining reads but have been long since over-taken by newer evidence and much fresher, more-encompassing interpretations. As a read, they're still great fun. As good history, they're quite biased and lacking today. So, when I saw a shiny new tome promising a complete revisiting of long-held assumptions, I couldn't resist. Asbridge's chronology is straightforward; starting with a quick survey of Islam's rise and subsequent takeover of the Christian Holy Land, he moves to Europe to set the scene of the medieval papacy and nascent western

kingships that would bring about the concept of Crusading. In a nice touch, he continues to revisit the contemporary meanings, definitions and assumptions behind crusading as it developed from an event without even a name ("crusading" was a later appellation) to the currently-understood form. From these basics, he moves us through each of the main five Crusades, deftly describing the expected peoples, places, and battles. He strikes a good balance between talking about the most important figures and key battles versus the less-glamorous but as-important topics such as trade and societal makeup that, while harder to make exciting, are very important when trying to gain a full understanding of the events. Very crucially, he spends as much time covering the Arab viewpoint as he does the Christian. He also properly gives notice to the fact that, while western sources are fairly voluminous by the standards of the era, the Crusades just didn't have a major impact on the Muslim world at the time, and therefore sources from the Muslim POV are much less available. That said, he does an admirable job of situating the reader as best he can in the Muslim frame of mind during each crusade, giving admirable detail on outside pressures that might've existed, any internal dynastic or civil events that had bearing on their interactions with the Crusaders... other histories I've read of this era often fall flat in this particular regard. He closes with an excellent overview of how the Crusades have themselves been viewed throughout history, both in the West and in the Muslim World; this may have been my favorite part of the book as it's not a topic I've ever seen covered before, much less so well. The writing style is nice and lively as well. It reads almost like a strong historical fiction narrative, a testament not only to the author's skill but to the inherent drama of the period. **BOTTOM LINE:** This will be my only answer for anyone asking for a recommendation on the period for probably years to come.

This book was exactly what I was looking for. It gives you a taste of the crusades from both the Christian and Muslim perspectives. I learned so much from this book. If only the history books in school were written like this, I may have enjoyed learning back then.

Asbridge was able to draw parallels to current events in Mideast without belaboring point.

I'm only a few chapters in at this point. I purchased this book to build my knowledge base on both the history of Christianity and Islamic faiths. I was tired of constantly being spoon fed what I am "supposed" to believe by both mainstream and social media. This is one of several books that are helping me along in that quest. So far this book has been very fair with respect to the history of both religions leading up to the Crusades. Exactly what I wanted in a book. Fair and balanced. I highly

recommend this book for anyone that wants to further their own knowledge base on religious history.

I highly recommend this book. I picked it up because I wanted to know more about the Crusades and I ended up finding a thorough treatment of a very tumultuous period of world history! The author does a great job of explaining the thought processes behind many of the actions committed by both Europeans and Muslims. Asbridge also had some very astute observations to make about policies and practices that began during the crusades that had a lasting impact upon the European landscape in the years that followed.

This is a popular introduction to the Crusades that strikes a perfect balance between academic rigor and the expectations of a lay audience. It offers solid narrative and some analysis, while avoiding excessive proofs and obscure controversies. Best of all, it is simply fun to read and never unacceptably heavy. The Crusades began as a kind of idealistic call to arms. When you look at it, the entire enterprise looks insanely impossible: a bunch of aristocrats, knights and their support infantries decide to travel to nearly the end of the world, to dislodge the far more numerous Muslims from Christian holy sites (Jerusalem, etc.) Against all odds, the first Crusade essentially lives up to its ideals, conquering a huge swath of territories and establishing independent kingdoms and Duchies in the mid east (largely in the territories of modern Syria and Israel). It is simply amazing that, virtually without supply support and lacking coherent leadership, they charged into battle with little plans and won. Many said it was God's will. In a way it was colonial, but the author is at pains to prove that it was their ideals that drove them. He demonstrates the changes in theology required, including "just war" by Christians, but also promises of salvation from sin to varying degrees and under more or less clarified obligations. The twists of logic and the hypocrisy of land-hungry princes, I was convinced, were outweighed by their religious purpose. After all, what they wanted to do was far too ambitious, though to be fair they lacked clear and practical knowledge about the areas they were attacking; besides, God and the talisman of the "true cross" supported them. Their faith offered them an inarguable rationale to plunge head first into hopeless battle for glory and to fulfill their vows. For a short time, they were triumphant. The second Crusade was a catastrophic bust: exhausted from the logistics of arriving in the mid east, it imploded upon arrival in spite of the presence of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Of course, the muslim side had begun a decline that has proceeded more or less until the present day. They were not unified when the first crusade arrived and so were easy to divide and pick off kingdoms one by one. After being beaten, they did begin a

long process of unification, eating away at Christian gains, but the process took more than a century. A series of great leaders did emerge, most notably Saladin, who strove to appear just and equitable, but had an instinct for amassing political power through military conquest. Nonetheless, the original dynamism of Islam was never regained. His duel with Richard Coeur de Lion is the centerpiece of the book: their portraits are wonderfully informative and psychologically deep. Both come off well, though Richard ultimately fails - Richard exerted extraordinary leadership, but it slipped from his grasp as over-zealous knights squandered the gains he had so painstakingly put together over a decade away from home and constantly worried about the machinations of his rivals back in Europe. The fourth Crusade never gets beyond the shameful sack of Constantinople and the remaining ones blur together as desperate attempts to reclaim lost territories with the aid of enhanced theological clarity, i.e. what knightly vows consisted of and what precisely had to be done for salvation to be achieved. At this point, the Mamluks - Turkic slave warriors who took over Egypt and then the entire mid east - took over Saladin's empire and eventually triumphed over the Christian forces decisively. Europe then abandoned the enterprise without much thought and the Renaissance blossomed. The entire process covered a span of approximately 200 years, a daunting tableau to paint. I often regret getting big fat history books because the degenerate into the driest of academic exercises. This one never does. Recommended with enthusiasm.

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