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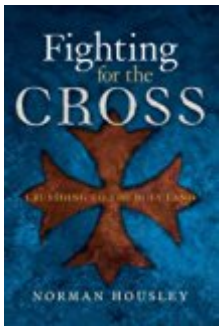
Norman Housley. *Fighting for the Cross: Crusading to the Holy Land.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. xiv + 357 pp. Ilustrations $38.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-11888-9.



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Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

"A cross on this bard's

Breast, on his back

A palm-branch: peacefully

We pace the hillside"[1]

With these words Earl Rognvald Kali Kolsson, Earl of Orkney, approached Jerusalem in 1152. He had already bathed in the River Jordan and he and the men who had gone "Jerusalem-faring" with him were beginning to think of the long journey home. The journey to the Holy Land had been eventful: a siege in Spain, piracy on the high seas, courtly flirtations with Ermengarde, Countess of Narbonne. Several of those who had sailed with the earl would not return to Orkney, killed in battle or victims of disease. For the moment, though, a rather reflective mood prevailed.

Earl Rognvald's exploits do not find their way into Norman Housley's book but in many respects they fit the story that he tells. Housley, a distinguished historian of crusading in the years after 1300--whose earliest publications were devoted to the use of crusades against Christian opponents of papal policies in thirteenth-century Italy--has now turned his attention to what one might call the "traditional" crusading field. This subject matter is comprised of the series of major expeditions to the Eastern Mediterranean region which began with Pope Urban II's sermon at Clermont in the Auvergne in 1095 and effectively ended with the death of King Louis IX of France at the gates of Tunis 1270, with the fall of the last stronghold of the crusader states in 1291 as a kind of coda. The subtitle of Housley's book requires some qualification. While Holy Land crusading obviously looms large in the book, a certain amount of activity in the Iberian peninsula undertaken by expeditions supposedly en route to the Holy Land is included. Housley also covers the Fourth Crusade in its assault on Christian Constantinople and, by virtue of his chosen approach to the topic, campaigning in Egypt also takes up significant space in his coverage of the thirteenth century. Interestingly, he notes that the growing strategic focus on attacking the seat of Ayyubid power in Egypt led to an increased foregrounding of Egyptian episodes in the

Bible by contemporary crusading chroniclers: Egypt itself became something of a surrogate Holy Land worth fighting for in its own right.

This work, however, is not a conventional history of the Crusades from 1095 to 1291. It is framed quite explicitly as a study of crusading as a lived experience, which is not the same thing at all. It is, for instance, quite consciously and deliberately "Eurocentric" in its approach, focusing on those who, like Earl Rognvald, went on crusade with every intention of returning to their homes once they had fulfilled their vows. Housley stresses that, except at moments of extreme stress and exaltation, very few crusade participants consciously sought death, even though the view that those who died on crusade were by virtue of that fact martyrs for the faith appears to have been imposed on an initially reluctant church establishment "from below" by lay crusaders. For the vast majority of crusaders, taking the cross was a temporary episode in their lives, not a permanent lifestyle choice, like entering a religious order. Few had any intention of settling permanently in the Holy Land (though Housley rather underplays recent research, which suggests that more western Europeans did in fact settle in the crusader states than had previously been recognized).

Housley's approach therefore largely excludes the day-to-day history of the crusader states, a factor that plays a large role in most histories of crusading. His preferred sources are men like Jean de Joinville and the much less well-known but almost equally fascinating Oliver of Paderborn, who participated in crusading but were in a sense outsiders as far as the crusader states were concerned. Some writers could move from outsider to insider status (Fulbert of Chartres, a participant in the First Crusade who became the chronicler and apologist for Kings Baldwin I and II of Jerusalem, or Jacques de Vitry, who became bishop of Acre in the 1210s) and Housley makes use of the perceptive and often surprisingly sympathetic comments of Saladin's councilor and panegyrist Baha'al-Din on his crusading opponents, but their presence does not seriously challenge his chosen approach.

This displacement of focus underlines the extent to which most academic and popular histories of crusading tend to become histories of the crusader states after their establishment and, almost unconsciously, view the whole crusading experience from a Jerusalem- or Acre-centered perspective. Housley's work provides a welcome corrective, though it is a pity that he does not explore the often vexed issue of relations between crusaders and the local "Frankish" elites from the crusader perspective, particularly given the negative influence on the policies of the crusader states attributed to the former in some modern historiography. This absence is all the more striking because crusader views of their "Saracen" enemies are given a full chapter and their views of the Byzantine Empire, and even of the Eastern Christian populations and the Mongols, are covered. Given the prevalence of the argument that the elites of the crusading states held a different, implicitly more "tolerant" (or at least "realistic") view of Islam than western crusaders, the rather predictable chapter on views of the "Saracen" (potentially admirable as an individual but damned in the mass) would have benefited in particular from a fuller examination of this aspect.

One effect of Housley's approach is that certain episodes gain in importance while others fall into the background. The Fifth Crusade takes on a more important role in his study than it often does in other scholarship (thanks not least to the writings of Oliver of Paderborn, crusade preacher and siege engineer): stretching over several campaigning seasons, it posed in increasingly acute terms the question of how long a crusade vow lasted and raised acute issues of leadership. Frederick Barbarossa's expedition in 1189-90 also gains in salience. This episode emerges as a notably well-planned and well-led venture whose ultimate failure served as final proof that trying to

march an army by the overland route was no longer practical, for even before Frederick's death, his forces had suffered such severe attrition that their effectivity in the Holy Land would have been doubtful. By contrast, the Second Crusade loses out somewhat, in part because its failure was so traumatic that participants had real difficulty in bringing themselves to write in detail about what had happened. Similarly, Frederick II's Sixth Crusade barely figures in the analysis at all. It emerges as a piece of gesture politics whose "recovery" of Jerusalem by negotiation was a hollow triumph, one unsustainable against any serious military challenge. Housley also points out areas that remain seriously underresearched, such as the experiences of returning crusaders below princely (or at least the highest aristocratic) rank.

The book is broadly structured around the stages that individual crusaders went through in fulfilling their vows. It starts with crusade preaching (intriguingly Earl Rognvald is portrayed as deciding to go to the Holy Land in response to the gibes of a former member of the Byzantine emperor's Varangian Guard and is nowhere explicitly depicted as having "taken the cross" in the approved way), moves on to preparations for departure (Earl Rognvald devoted two years to his preparations, not unusual for one of his rank) and then the journey east. Housley then covers the experience of warfare, in terms of fighting, logistics, and its religious dimensions, before examining crusaders' attitudes to the enemy and to the wider world of the East. He closes with the return home and the creation of crusader memory (when Earl Rognvald eventually returned to his earldom, he found it plunged into disorder and strife, but his journey to Jerusalem was remembered as one of the highlights of his reign).

On the whole, this approach works well. Source constraints mean that the focus falls very much on the major expeditions that have traditionally been numbered by historians; small-scale expeditions like that of Earl Rognvald, let alone those who fulfilled their crusade vows on an individual basis, are rather marginalized. One might quibble over the attempt to separate fighting from logistical considerations in the chapters on crusading warfare, though Housley's points about the role of plunder are well made; he is surely right to suggest that the main role of plunder (apart, possibly, from obtaining saints' relics) was to provide resources to sustain operations rather than to serve personal enrichment. At times, he seems a little unsure of recent scholarship on medieval warfare: his suggestion that codes of behavior in warfare were underdeveloped in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe is, to say the least, an overstatement (significantly, none of John Gillingham's writings on the "civilizing" of warfare in this period, at least for elites, figure in the bibliography, and the author makes no examination of possible links between the Truce and Peace of God movements and the launch of the First Crusade). His stress on the effective cooperation between mounted knights and infantry (especially archers), while not entirely new, is an important qualification to overly negative views of the sophistication and discipline found in medieval armies, even if crusading warfare was by its nature rather different from campaigning back in western Europe.

Housley's central contention is that crusading warfare can only ultimately be understood in a religious context. Crusades were pilgrimages of a rather special kind and never lost that aspect, even when it had dysfunctional military consequences (for instance, when Saladin was prepared to facilitate visits to the Holy Sepulcher by participants in the Third Crusade as a way of enabling them to return home with honor rather than continuing the war). Though proclaimed by the church and ultimately under its control, crusades were always sites of negotiation between clerical elites and lay crusaders over their meaning and day-to-day conduct (as the tangled tale of the Holy Lance of Antioch on the First Crusade illustrates all too clearly). As pilgrimages they po-

tentially attracted large numbers of noncombatants to their ranks, although Housley's laudable desire to avoid simply echoing the prurient comments on female participation in crusading armies of some of his sources also leads him to underplay the central role of so-called camp followers in providing the logistical support without which no medieval army could ever have functioned. As pilgrimages, their participants' primary focus was on their own spiritual well-being, which could be obtained without meeting a single Saracen in battle (Earl Rognvald may have caused havoc in Spain and burned Muslim shipping on the Mediterranean, but he does not appear to have struck a single blow in defense of the Kingdom of Jerusalem). In consequence, they were a thoroughly inefficient way of sustaining the crusading states. After reading Housley's book one is left amazed, not that the crusading enterprise failed, but that it was able to sustain the crusader states as long as it did-- although Christian dominance at sea probably did more to extend this survival than sporadic expeditions from the West.

The book reads like the lightly edited verbatim transcript of a series of lectures. Some readers may find Housley's consciously "colloquial" style slightly off-putting. Not all of his contemporary analogies work particularly well, and some of the illustrations have at best tenuous links with the Crusades. These matters notwithstanding, the book is an interesting and stimulating reexamination of what might appear a somewhat hackneyed subject and should be welcomed.

Note

[1]. Anonymous, *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney*, ed. and trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 179.

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