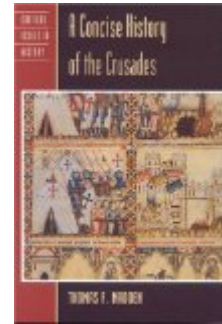


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Thomas F. Madden. *A Concise History of the Crusades*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. xi + 249 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-9429-7.

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Crusades to the East...in brief

One way to deal with the plethora of problems in defining the extent (geographical, chronological and thematic) of the Crusades is to carve out a small niche from your opening page. This is precisely what Thomas Madden does in his *Concise History*. This survey retreats from a recent emphasis on the Crusading periphery, particularly Spain and the Northern Crusades, to concentrate on the core (the Holy Land). Madden's core focuses on the Crusades to the East between 1095 and 1291. In providing a brief overview of these events Madden's work succeeds.

It is a tribute to the scholarship in this work that it should find a ready place on most academic bookshelves. Students of the Crusades already have access to other good, brief texts. Two come to mind immediately, Jonathan Riley-Smith *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and Bernard Hamilton/Asa Briggs (editors) *The Crusades* (London: Sutton Publishing Company, 1998). Madden's work succeeds by providing a focused update on the Crusades that is a bit more substantial than the works noted, yet more readable than the multi-volume studies of the Crusades.

The opening chapter is a thorough and useful overview of the terminology of crusading, providing an excellent integration of the most recent ideas about Crusader motivations. Madden does a particularly fine job in examining the notion that many went on the Crusades in search of wealth. He emphasizes that equipment and travel expenses would have impoverished most families long before the Crusader would have even a slight pos-

sibility of gathering wealth in the Holy Land. For the author it is clear that, A..most noblemen who joined the crusade did so from a simple and sincere love of God. As is still true, people gladly march off to horrible wars if they believe that the cause for which they fight is noble, true, and greater than themselves (p. 13).

The pace of the volume slows in the second chapter where Madden provides a comprehensive narrative of the First Crusade. Military events and strategy are put in context and given their due without taking over the text. Subsequent chapters serve the reader well, the author should be praised for the clarity of his writing. He is particularly judicious in his choice of a few primary source quotes. A more experienced reader may note a dearth of references to more recent studies of the Crusades in favor of somewhat dated material that focuses on the great men of the crusades. Jonathan Riley-Smith, in *The First Crusaders, 1095-1131* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and other recent authors have done excellent work on the social history of the Crusades. Madden would provide a greater service to his readers if he exposed them to a wider array of current works on the subject.

The chapter on "Crusading at home" does an excellent job of describing the great difficulty of converting Crusader zeal to domestic problems, particularly the Albigensian Crusade. The discussion of the Baltic Crusades is limited to two paragraphs. The Spanish Reconquista is only mentioned as a passing comparison to the Crusades in the East. On the other hand this book does a good

service by examining the later Crusades and the end of the Crusading movements in as much detail as the earlier Crusades.

The author reminds us that in the sixteenth century Pope Leo X “was so involved in preserving Christendom from the dire threat to the east that he failed to recognize the greater danger from within” (p. 209). In his concluding chapters Madden gets more provocative, he tells us that “the Turkish threat allowed the Protestants to flourish” (p. 209). It is fitting to end by reminding us how much the Holy Land and fear of Muslim expansion remained on the minds of Europeans in the sixteenth century. The failure of the later Crusades did not necessarily curtail Europeans fascination and concern with the Holy Land.

The Afterward reminds us how little has changed, not only in the Middle East, but in our attitude towards war:

“If, from the safety of our desks, we are quick to condemn the medieval crusader, we should be mindful that he would be just as quick to condemn us. Our infinitely more destructive wars waged for the sake of political and social ideologies would, in his opinion, be lamentable wastes of human life. In both societies, the medieval and the modern, people fight for what is most dear to them. That is a fact of human nature that is not so changeable” (p. 213).

A brief, helpful glossary of terms is provided. The select bibliography includes editorial comments that provide a solid guide to a novice in the field. This bibliography does a great service to any reader trying to wade through the vast array of scholarship produced every year on the Crusades. The volume includes a good number of excellent maps that will help students to identify their surroundings.

This *Concise History* will prove an excellent, economical addition to most libraries. Some caution should be made about suggesting it to undergraduates in isolation. Read alongside some of the titles reviewed in the critical bibliography this text would be a solid start. Attention should particularly be paid to reading something extra on the Reconquista in Spain and one of the more recent works on the social history of the Crusades. Without a little extra reading, it would be difficult to follow current discussions on the Crusades unless one understood something about Madden’s “periphery.”

Much praise is due to the author for giving us such a clear, concise picture of an ever-changing area of scholarship.

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