

THE PROBLEMS OF THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE CRUSADES

OS PROBLEMAS DO ESTUDO DA HISTÓRIA DAS CRUZADAS

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Muhammed Mu'nis Awad*

*Sharjah University, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0945-4183>

mawad@sharjah.ac.ae

Hani Munis Awad**

**Northern Border University, Arar city, Saudi Arabia

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5661-3920>

hani.mounes@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper does Spotlights on Several Problems of Studying history of the crusades, such as animosity between the muslims and the crusaders, and its reflections in contemporary historical writings, the problem of Charisma and the absence of Women's role. So, it is very important to study these problems to form objective vision when we Study that vital epoch in history of relations between east and West in In the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Crusades, Relations Between East And West, Historical Writings, Problems.

Resumo

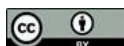
Este artigo destaca alguns problemas no estudo da história das cruzadas, como a animosidade entre muçulmanos e cruzados e seus reflexos em escritos históricos contemporâneos, o problema do carisma e a ausência do papel da mulher. Portanto, é muito importante estudar esses problemas para formar uma visão objetiva ao estudarmos essa época vital na história das relações entre o Oriente e o Ocidente na Idade Média.

Palavras-chave: Cruzadas. Relações entre Oriente e Ocidente. Escritos históricos. Problemas.

1 INTRODUCTION

This research paper examines a vital topic as regards several problems in studying the history of the Crusades over the two centuries 12-13th A.D / 6-7th A.H. It is of paramount importance to recognize the necessity of studying that era, the era of the Crusades, with its successive events and the conflict between East and West that occurred during it, as well as the highly diverse mix of nations, races, peoples and differing interests and goals that dominate it.

We should study it in its own various forms—through the nature of its own problems, as this will help us understand the events of Crusades' era in a more objective way.



Indeed, among the problems of studying the era of the Crusades is what can be highlighted in the form of the mutual hostility of the two warring parties, namely the Muslims and the Crusaders, then contemporary historians and the problem of charisma, the official nature of historical narratives, the absence of the popular role in events, then the sectarian conflict and its effect on historical writing, as well as the absence of the role of women in historical sources, the monopoly of the major cultural centers on historical writing at the expense of the peripheries, in addition to the problem of Eurocentrism in modern historical writing. I will proceed to address each of these problems separately.

First: perceiving the hostile nature of the historical sources of both Muslims and Crusaders

Through examining the historical texts of each side's sources, we find that the writings of contemporary historians, such as those of Ibn al-Qalanisi (d. 1160 A.D./ 555 A.H) in his book, "Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq" (Ambedroz, 1908), and William of Tyre (d. 1185 A.D.) and his book, "Historia Rerum" (William of Tyre, 1943), and many others, are overflowing with mutual hostility. The history that has reached us from that era can be described as having been written with the ink of mutual enmity and hatred. It is possible—objectively—to portray the matter as the Crusaders, with the massacres they committed—especially during the first decade of the history of their settlement in the Levant, they contributed to creating a psychological rift between themselves and the Muslims.

resulting mass exodus from the regions afflicted by the Crusader invasion to the Islamic cities that did not suffer that tragic fate.

Thus, the contemporary historian, and consequently those who transmitted his work to us, presented a history that was primarily hostile.

Nor should we overlook the fact that each of the two warring parties, Muslims and Crusaders, was ignorant of several aspects of the other's composition - at least during the early years of the invaders' settlement in the region and their achievement of unprecedented successes in a short period of time by many standards. Thus, we arrive at the idea that it is extremely difficult to write the history of that period, which witnessed the global conflict, between East and West on the land of the Levant, without neglecting the vast geographical scope of that historical phenomenon from Andalusia in the west to the Levant in the east - through Crusader sources of studying the Muslims or vice versa, i.e., dealing with Arab sources to address the history of the

Crusaders, as both parties did have the ability to provide a specific description of historical truth only. This cannot be compensated for - partially - except by dealing with opposing historical sources, and all of this without neglecting the elements of mutual hostility and the lack of information on both sides, not to mention the tendency to exaggerate the human losses and spoils achieved by one side against the other in the battles, which erupted from time to time.

I would like to state here that one of the most difficult periods of the Islamic-Crusader conflict for historical writing is the first decade of the Crusaders' settlement in the region. The hostile nature of the historical sources on both sides was at its highest level of antagonism and mutual hatred, posing a real problem for the modern historian who wants to contribute to that thorny timeframe, given its historical nature and the nature of its sources themselves.

Another aspect should not be overlooked: every stage that was bloody in the history of Islamic-Crusader relations in the Levant and other regions represents a stage that is extremely difficult to address with modern historical writing, given the more hostile nature of the sources that have reached us from that era, not to mention the rules of historical research methodology itself and its applications.

Second: the problem of charisma (Salama, 1990). We observe that we rely most heavily on the writings of historians contemporary to historical events, and who were close to the centers of political decision-making in that era, whether among Muslims or Crusaders. Here we see the writings of a group of Muslim historians such as Ibn al-Qalanisi (d.1160 A.D.),al-Imad al-Isfahani (d.1201 A.D.),Baha' al-Din ibn Shaddad (d.1224 A.D.),Ibn al-Atheer (1231 A.D.),Ibn al-'Adim (1261 A.D.),Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir (1293 A.D.),Abu al-Fida' (1332 A.D.) ,Baybars al-Dawadari (1325 A.D.),and others, as well as a group of Crusader historian such as Fulcher of Chartres , the anonymous historian of the Gesta ,Robert the Monk,Peter Tudebode , Raymond d'Aguilers , William of Tyre and many others (Awad, 2023).

It is noteworthy that the element of "contemporaneity" afforded them a major advantage in their writings through their access to the inner workings of affairs, their study of official state documents, and their contact with the prominent politicians who, along with their people, shaped the history of that turbulent historical period. However, despite its advantages—especially for eyewitnesses—contemporaneity also had its negative aspects in the form of being influenced, and sometimes even dazzled, by those

leaders who possessed charisma, popularity, or a profound influence on others. In an era that witnessed the phenomenon of the single leader or hero during the events of the confrontation between the followers of two religions clashing due to the escalating and imminent Crusader threat that befell the Muslims on their land, it is perfectly natural and logical that those historians would fall within the realm of the historical leader's charisma. A clear example of this is found in Sultan Saladin, whose personality captivated almost all those who came into contact with him. This applies equally to Baha' al-Din ibn Shaddad, al-Imad al-Isfahani, al-Qadi al-Fadil, and others. The degree of their influence varied from one historian to another depending on the extent of their connection to that historical leader of the Muslims, as well as their personal capabilities naturally. This is not meant to imply any deficiency or shortcoming on the part of those historians, for shortcomings are an integral part of human nature. However, we recognize that the charismatic personality of the Ayyubid sultan captivated historians, and it was certainly difficult to escape its spell. Even the Crusaders themselves fell under its spell. It is no wonder, then, that a legend was woven around him, one that persisted in the collective European consciousness after the expulsion of the Crusaders from the Levant at the end of the 13th century A.D. This even led to the emergence, in the 14th century A.D., of a long poem known as "Saladin", in which the earlier ancient legends were reformulated. In it, we find Saladin portrayed as a Christian with noble character. It was written in that poem that his mother is the Countess of Ponthieu, whose ship was wrecked on the Egyptian coast (Rodinson, 1998) (Hiltebrand, 1989).

In fact, Saladin's charisma found an exception among some contemporary Muslims whose writings have reached us, whether historians or literary figures, such as the historian Ibn al-Atheer or the poet Ibn Onayn (Ibn Onayn, 1946). However, in general, the personality of that Ayyubid sultan has its own influence even for the modern historian, despite the passage of nine centuries since his era and the multitude of his men, leaders, and heroes.

Third: the official nature of the historical narratives and the changing role of the Crusaders that have reached us from that era are indeed described as official sources written by historians—mostly, biographers—who were associated with the political authority, some of whom were its propagandists. In general, they expressed the official viewpoint on events. Thus, we can say that we, as modern historians, are repeating the same thing and writing—

unintentionally, of course—with the same viewpoint that were delivered to us by those official historians!!!

Some might argue that there are other sources not described as official, such as the writings of Muslim and European geographers and travelers. Examples of the former include al-Idrisi (d. 1160 A.D.), Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1228 A.D.), al-Qazwini (d. 1283 A.D.), Izz al-Din Ibn Shaddad (d. 1285 A.D.), Abu al-Fida (d. 1332 A.D.), and Ibn Jubayr (d. c. 1217 A.D.) (Awad, 1995). Examples of the latter include Saewulf, Daniel, Fetellus, John of Wurzburg, Euphrosine, Benjamin of Tudela, Theodorich, Petachia de Ratisbon, Joannes Phocas and many others. (Saewulf, 1896) (Daniel, 1895) (Fetellus, 1897) (Awad, 1992)

Although those geographers and travelers, whether Muslim or Crusader, provided us with an informal account of the reality of the Levant during the period of the Islamic-Crusader conflict, we note that their writings often accomplished after a short stay in the regions they covered. Therefore, we find that experience and historical reality were sometimes lacking in some of them. It is also noticeable that the authorship quantity that has reached us from that era, particularly the official aspect, has the highest degree of influence. Indeed, it is difficult to overlook The official sources of each side when writing about those momentous events in the history of the confrontation between East and West in the Middle Ages.

On the other hand, the angle of official historical sources had its repercussions, as the historians who were associated with the courts of politicians, and who wrote their works to reflect only their efforts, were accompanied by the absence of "the popular dimension" (Qasimiya, 2000). On this basis, their writings did not contain sufficient references to the peasantry, small-scale artisans and merchants, whom some of these historians despised and scorned, and sometimes described as "the rabble" and "the vagabonds". Thus, we find that the volume of references to those broad segments of the population does not correspond at all with the volume of what those historians reported about the kings and rulers who originally directed them to classify their historical writings to preserve their history from disappearing into the abyss of oblivion. This was the view of those historians on the matter, and thus it is true to say that the people make history, and historians usually attribute it to the rulers.

The certain matter is that the history of the Islamic-Crusader conflict was shaped by the masses, i.e. the human crowds on both sides without exception. The massive

crowds in Western Europe were the fuel of the Crusades, skillfully manipulated by the Papacy through emotional and impassioned piety to ensure the success of this new scheme. Despite the obscurity surrounding the effectiveness of the popular dimension, we sometimes glimpse its manifestations in the form of the popular campaign (d'Aix, 1879) (Youssef, 1983) or the peasant campaign, which suffered a devastating failure during the events of the First Crusade in 1096 A.D., for which thousands of impoverished peasants paid a heavy price. On the Islamic side, there was the popular anger at the Treaty of Jaffa which was made between Sultan al-Kamil al-Ayyubi and Emperor Frederick II of Germany in 1229 A.D.¹ (Ibn Wasil, N/D) (Ibn al-Adim, 1968) (al-Hamawi, 1982) (Saadawi, 1961) (Cleve 1969) (Abdel Hamid, 1998) (Awad, 2000). This anger stemmed from the feeling among the masses that the Ayyubid leadership had betrayed them, handing Jerusalem over to the Crusaders on a silver platter and squandering decades of sacrifices made to recapture it from Crusader control in 1187 A.D. With the exception of such those prominent events, we find a history of kings, sultans and emperors, but often not an actual history of the masses. It is not easy to underestimate this troubling problem, especially since the absence of the pulse of the masses in the movement of history deprives that movement of its active spirit.

It is fair to say that those popular sectors did indeed shape the history of those events, whether among Muslims or Crusaders, and stood to form the home front that supported the fighting forces. Despite this, historians paid them little attention. Thus, we, often, possess a history of individual leaders, and do not have a history of the peoples who produced them, except in rare cases.

Fourth : the problem of sectarian conflict and its impact on the direction of historical writing in that era. The era of the Crusades was characterized as an era of conflict between doctrines and religions and their very followers, whether among Muslims, Crusaders, or even the factions of each of the warring sides.

It is noticeable that the historical writings that have reached us from that era belonged to sectarian political entities that eliminated other entities that opposed and were hostile to them. This undoubtedly had an impact on historical writing itself. Thus, we no longer possess the alternative viewpoint that was available to the political entities that

¹ **On the supporters of the aforementioned agreement**, see the contribution of my late professor, Dr. Raafat Abdel Hamid, "Qadaya Min Tarikh al-Horob al-Salibiyya", Cairo, 1998, pp.191 -201.

On the opponents, see: Muhammad Mu'nis Awad, *al-Horob al-Salibiyya*. al-Elaqat Bayn al-Sharq wa al-Gharb, pp. 293-300.

were eliminated, except in rare cases. The matter was exacerbated by the deliberate obliteration of the traces and records of the warring states in order to preserve the viewpoint of the victorious side and destroy the viewpoint of the defeated side. This is an influential aspect that sometimes pushes us towards a singular vision and its dangers to the required historical objectivity.

The picture becomes clearer to us through our understanding of the example of the Fatimid state, an Ismailia Shiite state, which fell at the hands of the Ayyubids in 1171 A.D. The Fatimid heritage was deliberately dissipated, including the Fatimid palace library, which contained hundreds of thousands of precious books. Thus, the Fatimid viewpoint was eliminated, especially with the emergence of great historians of the Ayyubid era who successfully highlighted the Ayyubid viewpoint, and the Fatimid vision faded away for no other reason than that the Fatimids were then politically defeated. We say this despite our full awareness of the Fatimids' failure to deal with the Crusader threat, and the efficiency of the Ayyubid state, especially during the reign of its founder, in confronting that imminent danger.

As an extension of the previous point, it is noteworthy that, on the Islamic level, we possess only the Sunni historical perspective, and we do not possess the Shiite one, with the exception of rare cases such as the writings of the historian Ibn Abi Tayy (d. 12th Century A.D.)² (Sa'dawi, 1962) (al-Arini, 1962) (Ashmawi, 2000), a Shiite historian from Aleppo whose works have been lost, and which were transmitted by other Sunni historians in the form of excerpts, as we find in the works of the historian Abu Shama al-Maqdisi (d. 1268 A.D.) in his book "al-Rawdatayn fi Tarikh al-Dawlatayn al-Nuriyya wa al-Salahiyya", and Ibn al-Furat (d. 1404 A.D.) in his book "Tarikh al-Duwal wa al-Muluk", and others. Nevertheless;

It is not possible to overlook here the unfortunate stances taken by elements of the Nizari Ismailis towards the leaders of the Islamic Jihad movement of that era in their bitter struggle against the Crusader invaders. Moreover, with regard to Western Europe, we find that anti-papal movements such as the Waldensians and Cathars in southern France, who resisted papal authority, and were subjected to what became known as "The Albigensian

² Among the works of Ibn Abi Tayy: Maaden al-Zahab wa al-Gowhar Fi Tarikh al-Molok wa al-Kholafaa Wa Zawi al-Rotab . Kanz al-Muwahhedeem Fi Seerat Salah al-Deen . Okood al-Jwahir Fi Seerat al-Malek al-Zaher (al-Ghazi). Hawadeth al-Zaman Ala Horoof al-Mu'jam . al-Zayl Ala Maaden al-Zahab . Mukhtar Tarikh al-Maghrib . Tarikh Misr . Seerat Molook Halab . Rasael Sannafaha al-Arab Fi al-Jahiliyya Wa An al-Nabiyy Salla Allah Alayhe Wa Sallam . Tarajem al-Odabaa wa al-Shoaraa. Asmma Rowat al-Sheeah wa al-Musannifeen . Eshteqaq Asmaa al-Buldan.

Campaign" (Evans, 1969) by Pope Innocent III (1198-1216 A.D.). It is noteworthy here that we know the papal perspective, and there is no one to defend the opposing group's, against whom this fierce war was waged. In this context, we find that the sources expressing the papal viewpoint described Waldensians and Cathars as heretics who deviated from the true Christian faith, accusations for which many have paid a heavy price.

Fifth: the ignoring of the role of women in contemporary historical writings.

It is observed that historians of that era were men who wrote histories and biographies of the era's men too, and neglected the presence and history of women except in rare cases, and this is something we find in both Arab and Crusader writings alike, with the exception of prominent female leaders such as the Muslim figures : Dayfa Khatun (Al-Hanbali, 1996) (Al-Ghazzi, 1345) (Al-Azhari, 1998) (Awad, 2023), daughter of Al-Adil Al-Ayyubi (d. 1242 A.D.), Sitt Al-Sham, sister of Saladin (d.1219 A.D.) (al-Hamawi, 1982) (Awad, 2023) , Shajar Al-Durr (Ibn Wasil, 1953) (Ibn Taghribirdi, N/D) (al-Tuhami, 1997), wife of Al-Salih Najm Al-Din Ayyub, (d. 1258 A.D.), as well as Melisende (William of Tyre, 1972) (Philips, 1995) (Awad, 2023), mother of Baldwin III, and Eleanor (Odo of Deull, 1948) (William of Tyre, 1972) (Brooke, 1983) (Painter, 1954) (Ashour, 1981), wife of Louis IX, and others among the Crusader side.

This situation led to the historical writing about that era revolving for the most part around men, their battles, and their conflicts. And the presence of a role for women is rare in the historical material that has reached us from that era.

Some might comment that there are references in biographical dictionaries, books of biographies, and obituaries on the Islamic side to female jurists and scholars. Similarly, Crusader chronicles contain scattered references here and there to the roles of the queens of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, or even manifestations of deviance and decadence attributed to Crusader women (Al-Imad al-Isfahani, N/D) (Jacques de Vitry, 1896) (Brundage, 1985) (Brauer, 1981). However, all of this is completely inconsistent with the actual extent to which women played a role in that era. The researcher has no doubt that this role was so effective that it reflected its historical significance, despite the deliberate ignorance of male historians regarding it. This ignorance stemmed from the nature of the era, the conservative character of Islamic societies on the one hand, and the Church's view of women in Western Europe, on the other hand. It is a view not devoid of an inherent, natural hostility, in which the Popes themselves participated, and which became a part of

the mechanisms of Western European heritage in the Middle Ages in general, as well as the collective mind there.

Sixth: The issue of major cultural centers monopolizing historical writing at the expense of the peripheries. It is noteworthy that the era of the Crusades witnessed great interest in the major cultural centers in the Levant, Egypt, and Iraq, such as Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, Antioch, Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta, Edessa, Mosul, and others. Other peripheral regions did not receive the same level of attention. Therefore, the contents of the historical heritage that has reached us from that era are described as expressing political centralism. Thus, the rural areas far from those cities were mentioned rarely by contemporary historians, which naturally passed on to later sources.

That previously -mentioned situation led to the marginalization of the countryside in those regions in contrast to the growing phenomenon of historical writing about the major cities. Undoubtedly, the fair-minded historian realizes when dealing with that era that he suffers from what is described as "a source gap" regarding the rural sector, which only shows interest in rare cases, such as the occurrence of unrest and security disturbances harmful to the interests of the state, for instance. Thus, it can be said, rightly, that the historical material that has reached us from that era is not distributed fairly across the Levantine geographical regions.

One could argue that rural areas did not lack sources of information, particularly from geographers and travelers who explored the landscapes, viewing travel as a crucial aspect of geography. This sentiment is reflected in the accounts of the renowned Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr (Ibn Jubair, 1984) regarding the rural areas of Muslims and Crusaders, as well as in al-Idrisi's descriptions of similar regions in the Levant (al idreesi, 1989). However, these travelers and geographers only briefly mentioned rural areas in their broader works, which primarily focused on major cities. It is important to note that these individuals spent only a few days in these regions, as previously mentioned, and their descriptions were often brief and concise, lacking the depth needed by historical researchers seeking to understand the vital role of rural areas in supporting the cities of the warring Islamic and Crusader factions.

Seventh: the problem of Eurocentrism and its impact on the writing of the history of the

Modern historical writing about the conflict between East and West during that period emerged primarily in Western Europe, particularly in France, England, Germany,

and later in the United States of America. Western historians interpreted these events through their religious and political affiliations, shaping their perspectives. Some even defended the historical role of The Crusaders in the Levant during the Middle Ages, particularly in the 12th and 13th centuries. European and American views on the history of the Crusades differed from those of modern Arab and Muslim historians, who emphasized the aspects related to jihad in resisting the invaders.

It is worth mentioning here that a pioneering Arab historian in the field of studying the Crusades, namely the late Professor Dr .Muhammad Mustafa Ziyada realized that gap in treatment between the two groups. He mentioned, in connection with Louis IX's campaign against Egypt and his defeat in 1250 A.D., the following: "The modern French historian, for example, cannot see in the campaign of King Louis IX and his defeat in Mansoura what the Egyptian Arab historian sees: the former is an aggressor and the latter is the victim, and the two do not agree, knowing that the Egyptian Arab side here is the one worthy of appreciation and consideration" (Zyada, 1961).

The example mentioned by our esteemed historian is just a small part of the many angles that can be interpreted differently by Western historians and modern Muslim historians. This highlights the differences in perceptions between the two groups when dealing with the same historical experience. It is important to exercise caution when considering European and American perspectives on this experience, as they are influenced by Orientalist contributions to Western writing about the East. Each group writes from its own perceptions, which are shaped by their ideological and political affiliations.

It is noticeable that in the West we find a growing interest in the Crusades experience in the form of scholarly investigation, publication of source texts, and writing in modern studies, without a similar level of interest in the West compared to what the East has to offer in our current era, which has reinforced Eurocentrism. I imagine that the matter requires creating and establishing an Eastern centrism that reflects a special vision and perception that is not linked to subservience to the West, because everyone has his own perceptions and orientations. Without that, the Western will continue to write our history about that period of the Crusades, coloring it with their own orientations, and consequently we would "import" those writings and will be influenced by them near or far. This should not be understood as a clash with Western trends in historical writing

about the active and influential period in relations between East and West. However, what can be objected to is subservience without awareness.

Here, it is sufficient to demonstrate the difference between the trends of modern Muslim researchers and European historians, as seen in the writings of one of the prominent French Orientalists who mocked the former. He explained the following: "With the exception of some rare cases, the Orientals did nothing but use Western research in their studies after changing its symbols so that victories become defeats and vice versa."³ (Cahen, 1995) (Hanafi, 1995). Despite the biting sarcasm in such a statement, it does not align with scientific objectivity and academic criticism of the writings authored by those historians whom he described as Orientals. It also provides clear evidence of European arrogance that deludes a segment of historians into thinking that they alone are capable of writing our history as long as we are not their intellectual and technological equals. While we are aware of the intellectual and technological gap that exists between us and them, this should not deprive us of our right to write our history, which stems from our identity and our Islamic and Arab centrality. One historian describes the situation, saying: "Despite the saying of the English poet Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,' we see that the possibility of civilizational encounter exists and should continue, if the West changes its behavior and abandons the theory of civilizational superiority, racism, and economic blackmail "(Jabran, N/D). This is something that will naturally restore the desired outcome."

Whatever the case may be, some may imagine that such problems, as mentioned above, have parallels in many historical periods—ancient, medieval, and modern. However, it is important here to observe the matter through the lens of historical specificity, an angle that leads us to a varied outcome. We must not overlook the dialectical and dynamic nature of the era of the Crusades.

This nature clearly reveals that the historical movement of that era is characterized by entanglement and complexity, due to the differences among the peoples, nations, and races that participated in its making, as well as the disparity of their civilizational levels,

³ I would like to point out here that the Egyptian thinker Dr. Hassan Hanafi called for what is described as Occidentalism in response to Orientalism .He demanded that we study the West from our own perspective and that its people not be the sole ones studying us in pursuit of well-known political and economic goals. This is despite the improvement that has occurred in the trends of sectors of European Orientalism, such as German Orientalism in particular.

the conflicts of interests, ambitions, and passions, and the multiplicity of political alliances and counter-alliances. Likewise, it does not overlook the differences in viewpoints of the sons of the Islamic and Christian sides, and the reflection of all those angles on the historians themselves, who are the products of their times and wrote works that represented the historical heritage through which we gained knowledge of that era.

2 CONCLUSIONS

The research reached the following conclusions, which we summarize as follows:

First: several problems confront researchers in the field of Crusades history, such as the animosity between the two sides and its reflection in contemporary historical writing, the problem of charisma and the official nature of historical sources, the near-total absence of women's roles on both sides of the conflict, the monopoly of historical writing by major cultural centers, and the problem of Eurocentrism.

Second: studying these problems underscores the vital importance of studying this pivotal period in the history of relations between East and West during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Third: we are certain that studying the Crusades through the lens of these problems will deepen our understanding of this period, while acknowledging that history has not yet delivered its final verdict.

This was a presentation of a number of problems in studying the history of the Crusades during the 12th and 13th centuries A.D.

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All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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