



The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction

Christopher Tyerman

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With flair and originality, Christopher Tyerman presents a clear and lively discussion of the Crusades, bringing together issues of colonialism, cultural exchange, economic exploitation, and the relationship between past and present. He considers the effects of the Crusades on ordinary life in Western Europe, and the parts played by ordinary men and women in the conflict, and explores the term "Crusade" for contemporary political ends. Whether the Crusades are regarded as the most romantic of Christian expeditions, or the last of the barbarian invasions, they have fascinated generations ever since, and their legacy of ideas and imagery has resonated through the centuries, inspiring Hollywood movies and great works of literature. In this book, Tyerman skillfully weaves together one of the most extraordinary and vivid episodes in world history.

The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction Details

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From Reader Review The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction for online ebook

Rachel says

I love history, and have to read a lot of history books for school, but this one was not my cup of tea. I think I agree with another reviewer, who said this was more of a commentary on other Crusades historians. But it was such a "short introduction" that the meat of the story was left out. Even reading the intro and conclusion has left me confused over what the book is actually about. The author thinks the Crusaders were screwed up, because they were confusing acts of faith with being able to fight in battle or occasionally, massacre those they'd defeated. Which is true. But then he'll turn around and say we shouldn't judge the Crusaders for it, and go off on a tangent about all the string-pulling needed to get people from Europe to the Holy Lands.

If your history teacher assigns this, take a deep breath and remember it's short. I'm just glad I didn't have to write a paper on it. But if you want to know more about the Crusades, what caused them and why people were convinced that fighting and killing would allow them into heaven... find another book on the Crusades. This won't help you understand them at all.

Holly says

Something bothered me about this book from the moment I started reading it, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was until I watched an episode of *Yes, Prime Minister*. Then it hit me: the author writes the way Sir Humphrey Appleby talks.

The author seems to believe that you should never use a two-syllable word where a five-syllable one will do, never use a common five-syllable word where an obscure five-syllable word is available, never write a short sentence where you could write a paragraph, and never speak plainly where you could obfuscate.

Here's an example:

"This cultural intimacy, a feature of the whole of the early Middle Ages, took on greater significance in the development of holy war as the apparatus of civil authority devolved downwards nearer to the human and material resources on which all power depended as public authority was usurped by private lordships." (p 74)

Or:

"The ideology of crusading may thus appear casuistic in its interpretation of Scripture, if not downright mendacious." (p 66)

Remarkably, the author does still manage to say something about the Crusades. Of course, actually finding out what he's trying to say does require reading the book as if it's come from Humphrey Appleby, but ironically, that actually made it clearer to me.

Stylistic problems aside, this book is not an introduction to the Crusades. (Unless you think several chapters of dates followed by slightly peevish academic commentary on existing theories - theories that are not explained in the book - counts as an introduction to a topic. If you do, please don't become a teacher.) If you

don't know much about the Crusades and want to learn more, this is NOT the book for you. I only wish I could recommend a better one.

Matthew Griffiths says

An enjoyable and succinct summary of the crusades as a phenomena in world history by one of the worlds leading scholars in the field. The book offered a summary of the main 5 crusades and proceeded to explain that alongside these in reality there were many other smaller crusades which are not generally counted. The book also does a great deal to explain the religious philosophies that went into informing and justifying such massive uses of violence.

Another section of the book I found particularly engaging while not totally convincing was the discussion of crusader motives. I agree with the general argument offered that religion inevitably played the most important part in informing peoples decisions to join a crusade. The above being true I feel to base the conclusion on the lack of significant evidence to the contrary is a step too far, presumably in a world where religion was such an important part of peoples life then the impetus would be on the individual to keep their more materialistic reasons for joining a crusade to themselves.

Overall, while I did not agree with all arguments offered here, if a brief summary is what you are looking for then you can't go far wrong with this particular book.

Jeremy says

This book would more properly be titled A Very Short Commentary. I suppose this blurb from the New York Times Book Review printed on the back of the book should have been a clue: "Shrewd and forceful...This vigorous argument is an important corrective for anyone who would argue for the long-term inevitability of conflict between Christianity and Islam".

That reviewer was obviously looking for confirmation of their own personal opinions, because Tyerman spends most of the book disagreeing with previously published scholarship on the Crusades rather than arguing about ideological conflicts. At the end he makes some oblique references to how misunderstandings of the crusades infect current relationships in the Middle East.

I was disappointed that out of 144 pages, a little more than 10 actually describe the Crusades to the holy land. Nine others describe crusading in Spain, the Baltic, and elsewhere. The rest of the book is the author's opinions on how crusades came to be and what influence they have had, mostly disagreeing with someone else's opinion.

I liked portions of his descriptions of how the Crusades were developed and maintained, as well as remarks on the importance of the idea of a holy land. This was because in making his arguments, he had to describe the history. It's too bad that was a secondary concern, instead of primary.

I'm no scholar of Crusade history and this book was not an introduction to it. It was a commentary on Crusade scholarship. Since I have no background in this subject, I can't judge the author's arguments. This also means I can't appreciate them. The shortness of the book precludes a development of his arguments or

annotation of his sources. He merely states his opinion and moves on.

So far, the Very Short Introduction series hasn't lived up to its name. The two history books I've read have been either a short summary or short commentary, each more appropriate for an audience that is already familiar with the subject. The Economics book was pretty good; I'm hopeful that Quantum Theory will be a better example of the title.

Dave Miller says

Boring

Jack says

Paragraphs that are over a page long!?

The author opines on subjects such as representatives of institutions/organisations apologising for the institution's/organisation's past actions. I don't care what his glib opinion is.

The only reference he makes to other historians is to dismiss their work; I wanted an objective overview of the historiography of the crusades.

Having listed these complaints, the book is informative and sections of it are well written.

Matthew B. says

I suppose it is inevitable that any overview of the crusades written in the last fifty years will take up a lot of space discussing later conflicts between European and Middle-Eastern states and how these conflicts are always likened to crusades and sometimes (Christopher Tyerman would firmly say *erroneously*) supposed to be distant after-effects of the crusades. But aiming for contemporary relevance will make anything quickly seem dated, and I didn't have to check the copyright page and see that *The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction* was published in 2004 to know that it was written in the early days of the Iraq War. Not that it is bad as a general introduction to the history of the crusades (though discussion of the political situation was a little skimpy, as compared with discussion of cultural background), but it was clearly addressed to readers in a political/historical situation which has transformed considerably even in the fourteen years since the book was written.

Anya says

For someone with no previous knowledge of the crusades I found this book incredibly difficult to get into and I feel I learnt very little about it. The author spends a majority of his time listing dates and naming historical battles in long-gone cities to actually give anything like a decent explanation to this phenomenon. It's very dry and I really would not recommend it as an introduction to the subject: best left for the history

buffs!

Ed Callahan says

It's become fashionable (if we could even use the word to describe it) to find analogies between the modern unsettled situations in the Middle East and the Crusades. Those who read Tyerman's book, and who cling to such analogies, are bound to find Tyerman's analysis a very sharp rebuttal. His argument is rational and sensible. We need to see the Crusades on their own terms, not ours.

Other reviewers have commented that Tyerman's work is more opinion and brief analysis than a probative examination of the intricacies of the Crusades. Perhaps. But but its title, the book is a "Very Short Introduction." Tyerman, who has spent his lifetime studying the Crusades, is very much aware of the wealth of scholarship available on the Crusades, and is to these additional resources that he points us.

For individuals seeking a brief introduction to the Crusades, Tyerman's work will serve very well. His observation that the terms "crusade" and "crusader" have no real origin within the actual events, and his charting out of the actual terminology used for the participants, is particularly helpful, as much of the vocabulary contains hints of other concerns than simply "liberation." As Tyerman develops his presentation on holy war within Christianity, he situates it within the wider political developments concurrent with the Crusades.

It's probably the case that the Crusades will always hold a romantic place within the heart and consciousness of Western Civilization. That's inevitable. But the delving into the actual history, cutting the Gordian Knot of accrued mythology, reveals its own tale which is no less fascinating, and "romantic," and decidedly less vulnerable to creative spin, than the received mythos.

Christopher Litsinger says

This may have been too short of an introduction- it made me appreciate the balance struck with "a short history of world war one". It read more like a study guide or cliffs notes than a book. During the section where he covers the events, he avoided any commentary; there was no narrative to grab on to to understand the events. When he gets to the commentary, it was hard to connect with the now forgotten events. Probably the restrictions of the book format rather than the authors fault, but I feel like I need to find another book about the crusades so I can actually learn something.

Alex Linschoten says

A summary of the Crusades, debates among historians and some of its contemporary inheritance Tyerman contends that the crusades were 'complex' in their motivation on the side of the Franks. He doesn't offer much room for contemporary effects, dismissing attempts to make links to present-day conflicts. Tyerman does a good job not getting *too* bogged down in the details of what happened when and where. A certain amount of that needs to happen in any book of its kind. For 140+ pages, though, this is a good overview of debates, main milestones and consequences of the Crusades.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions #140), Christopher Tyerman
?????: ?????? ??????

With flair and originality, Christopher Tyerman presents a clear and lively discussion of the Crusades, bringing together issues of colonialism, cultural exchange, economic exploitation, and the relationship between past and present.

Kimberly says

Tyerman's short introduction to the crusades provides a brief overview of the events and major theatres of the crusade, at the same time he relates detailed specifics and anecdotal stories. I enjoyed reading his book, and found it to be a good balance of detail with general broad definitions. One of Tyerman's reasons for writing the book is to correct many of the images that people have in their minds of the "crusader." He debunks the Romantic views, armoured knights were not riding around on horses defeating every foe they came across. He also dispels the lust for plunder; younger sons were not running off to the Holy Land to make their fortunes. Most people who 'took the Cross' invested huge sums of money and resources to be able to make the trip. Crusading was not a get rich quick operation. He is very careful to stress that religious devotion and penitential aspects were the main motivations for Europeans to go on crusade, either in the Middle East, Spain or the Baltic.

Tyerman gave a nice brief outline of what happened in each of the major Crusades, categorizing them by geographic locations. The timeline and subject jumps around a bit, but isn't that hard to follow. I'd recommend this book to anyone who wants to get a basic understanding of what happened in the Crusades. Tyerman did a good job of making the Crusades understandable and he did a good job of undoing some negative but persistent stereotypes that have existed for a while. I've read a couple of books in the A Very Short Introduction series and these books seem to be relatively short, easily accessible, yet detailed and specific enough to give the reader a general understanding of the topic. They aren't so vague that you come away without learning anything; but they aren't extremely dense and detailed that you get lost. They are meant to be read by anyone.

Daniel Wright says

The blurb on this book claims that it avoids lazy stereotypes, but it would seem that the author, consciously avoiding - in his brief account of the history of the reception of the Crusades - the 'Crusaders were heroic' stereotype, blithely plunges head-first into the liberal 'Crusaders were evil' stereotype.

In spite of this, Tyerman is reasonably informative, if somewhat dry and dense. There are probably better introductions to the subject out there.

Taylor Church says

This book is a little tricky to love. The crusades were so long and complex on so many different levels that a brief overview of the events seems impossible. It's like reading a small book about the history of Asia. One sort of has to have some prior knowledge going into it, but still it's a lot of information to take in when you feel like further explanation is required. With that being said I did learn some things, and though the book is extremely academic, it is well written. I just wouldn't suggest it for someone who doesn't have at least a basic knowledge of Islam, Christianity, Medieval history, Catholicism, the Papacy, and much more.
