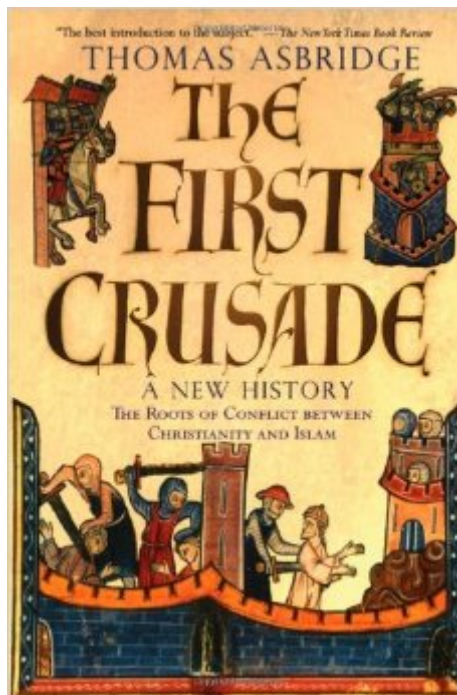


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The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots Of Conflict Between Christianity And Islam



Synopsis

In *The First Crusade*, Thomas Asbridge offers a gripping account of a titanic three-year adventure filled with miraculous victories, greedy princes, and barbarity on a vast scale. Beginning with the electrifying speech delivered by Pope Urban II on the last Tuesday of November in the year 1095, readers will follow the more than 100,000 men who took up the call from their mobilization in Europe (where great waves of anti-Semitism resulted in the deaths of thousands of Jews), to their arrival in Constantinople, an exotic, opulent city--ten times the size of any city in Europe--that bedazzled the Europeans. Featured in vivid detail are the siege of Nicaea and the pivotal battle for Antioch, the single most important military engagement of the entire expedition, where the crusaders, in desperate straits, routed a larger and better equipped Muslim army. Through all this, the crusaders were driven on by intense religious devotion, convinced that their struggle would earn them the reward of eternal paradise in Heaven. But when a hardened core finally reached Jerusalem in 1099 they unleashed an unholy wave of brutality, slaughtering thousands of Muslims--men, women, and children--all in the name of Christianity. The First Crusade marked a watershed in relations between Islam and the West, a conflict that set these two world religions on a course toward deep-seated animosity and enduring enmity. The chilling reverberations of this earth-shattering clash still echo in the world today.

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Customer Reviews

Thomas Asbridge's excellent "new history," "*The First Crusade*," accomplishes the complex task of demonstrating both the truth and the lie of the (currently popular) statement, "the Crusades were

when Christians attacked Muslims for money." By combining both serious scholarship (considerable critical attention is paid to original sources, with long passages quoted) with a hefty dose of common sense (Asbridge does not accept anything from the original sources blindly) and a gift for clear concise writing, Asbridge has produced a work that is sure to become a standard for the study of the First Crusade. For the first time, I feel I have read a balanced account of the Christian campaign to retake Jerusalem in the late 11th century. Asbridge probably hits his highest marks when he analyzes the complex motives of the Crusaders. It's not always easy to explain a complex situation, and the Crusades, Asbridge reminds us, were incredibly complex undertakings. He starts with an excellent exposition of the political and religious events that brought Pope Urban II to the papacy, which goes a long way towards demonstrating Urban's motives for initiating the Crusade. But Urban was no warrior-pope -- he had to inspire others to take up the quest, and the disparate, competitive leaders of the Crusades each had their own agendas. Sure, there was some demonization of the Muslims and there was a considerable amount of religious fervor involved (Asbridge makes a convincing case that a sinful knight would eagerly look at the spiritual salvation offered by the Crusades), but there were also several folks who went along on the Crusades for less noble purposes.

The problem is with the sub-title: "The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam." Unfortunately far too many writers, teachers, students and even scholars share this misconception today. The Crusades were not the beginning of a millennia long antagonism between Christianity and Islam. Nor were the Crusades the cause of that hostility. To find the roots of the conflict one must go back another 461 years to the Islamic conquest of Christian Palestine and Syria (beginning in 634 CE). By the time Pope Urban II called upon the nobility of Europe (in 1095 CE) to undertake a Crusade for the liberation of the Holy Land from Muslim domination, Christendom had been continuously on the defensive against Islamic Jihadists for well over four centuries. All the ancient sites of early Christianity from Antioch to Jerusalem to Alexandria had been conquered. All the Christian peoples of the Levant and North Africa as far west as the Iberian Peninsula had been subjugated and reduced to Dhimmitude - a third class status closely resembling the condition of the Jews in Germany during the 1930s. The Sassanian Persian Empire had likewise been overthrown and the ancient Zoroastrian religion all but eradicated. Later the Indian subcontinent would be conquered and the Hindu peoples subjugated and reduced to Dhimmitude. Buddhism was virtually wiped out in India by its Muslim conquerors. It survives today only in Tibet, China, Japan and Southeast Asia. The simple fact is that Islam was by no means a peaceful or tolerant religion. On the

contrary, as far as non Muslims were concerned, it was a militant, imperialist and tyrannical faith. The Crusades were the first attempt on the part of Christian Europe since the Battle of Tours in 732 to push back the frontiers of Islamic conquest.

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