

The Crusades

There were or are considered that at least 8 major crusades were undertaken in the 11th to 13th century. Of course we know that there were other forms of warfare that could be spoken of in other centuries since then but I will not delve on that topic this evening.

Since the time of Constantine, Christians had gone on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Even though the Moslems had ruled Jerusalem since 638, Christians were allowed to visit the city. By 11th century the situation had changed. Just as the number and frequency of pilgrimages to Jerusalem was at new peaks, the Seljuk Turks took over control of Jerusalem and prevented pilgrimages. This then brings us to the Crusades we shall talk about this evening.

THE FIRST CRUSADE 1095 - 1099

Pope Urban II was responsible for assisting Emperor Alexus of Constantinople in launching the first crusade. He made one of the most influential speeches in the middle ages, calling on Christian princes in Europe to go on a crusade to rescue the Holy Land from the Turks. In the speech given at the Council of Clermont in France, on November 27, 1095, he combined the ideas of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with that of waging a holy war against infidels. Some of that text, “ God himself will lead them, for they will be doing his work. There will be remission and absolution of sins for all who die in the service of Christ. Here they are poor and miserable sinners: there they will be rich and happy. Let none hesitate: they must march next summer. God wills it.” God wills it became the battle cry of the crusaders.

The first crusade was the most successful from a military point of view and the Christians captured Jerusalem by benefiting from the disunity of the Muslims. The fighting was ferrous and furious and we will only say that much was done to men and animals. At Solomon’s Temple it is reported that men rode in blood up to their knees and bridles.

This was the start of Hospitallers, Templars and Teutonic Knights. Their stated purpose was to protect pilgrims and the holy sites.

THE SECOND CRUSADE 1147 - 1149

Was headed by King Louis VII who was enlisted by Bernard of Clairvaux, was a disastrous failure, including the loss of one of the four Latin Kingdoms, the Duchy of Edessa.

THE THIRD CRUSADE 1188 - 1192

Proclaimed by pope Gregory VIII in the wake of the catastrophe of the second crusade, which was by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, King Phillip Augustus of France and King Richard “Coeur-de-Lion” of England.

THE FOURTH CRUSADE 1202 - 1204

This is the time when Constantinople was sacked. The crusade was to be directed at Egypt because the crusaders believed that conquering it would be the key to regaining Jerusalem. The conquering of the great Christian city in 1204 ended the fourth crusade and had significant religious and political consequences.

THE FIFTH CRUSADE 1217 - 1221

This crusade resulted in the conquest of Demietta. This occurred more from a fluke of nature that saw a great storm bring some 1500 ships to the coast and so astounded the natives that the area was taken almost without a fight. The Saracens fled rather than stay and fight.

THE SIXTH CRUSADE 1228 - 1229

There was not much fighting in this crusade as most of the time Frederick spent in diplomacy and worked with the Sultan of Egypt, Malek-el-Khamil who was at war with the prince of Damascus and finally concluded a treaty that restored Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth to the Christians.

THE SEVENTH CRUSADE 1249 - 1252

This was another mostly diplomatic war in that St Louis on reaching the island of Cyprus received a friendly embassy from the great Khan (who had been elected in 1246 as head of the Mongols) and spent his time and talent in working on better relations with the Mongols.

THE EIGHTH CRUSADE 1270

St. Louis continued to work diplomatically and continued his journey, arriving at Tunis he hoped to convert the prince to Christianity but the plague was rampant at that time and St. Louis was carried off by the scourge.

Viewed in the light of their original purpose, the crusades were a failure. They made no permanent conquests of the Holy Land. They did not retard the advance of Islam. Far from aiding the Eastern Empire, they hastened its disintegration. They fostered a harsh intolerance between Muslims and Christians where before there had been a measure of mutual respect.

THE NINTH CRUSADE

Now I would like to finish by whetting your appetite by stating we are now in the 9th crusade. Moreover, some Muslim radical groups believe that the crusades have not ended and the Christians powers of the west remain determined to destroy Islam. The attack on John Paul II was an attempt to kill the supreme commander of the crusades

The year 1998 saw the rise of Islamic groups led by Usama bin Laden as “The World Islamic Front for Crusade against Jews and Christians”.

Saladin is probably now the most famous Kurd of all time. Despite his Kurdish origins, he is the ideal aspired to by all modern mujahidin, After all, it is he who recaptured Jerusalem in 1187. Small wonder that Arab leaders vie to become the Second Saladin. A notable example is Saddam Husayn, who like Saladin hails from Tikrit.