

The impact of the first crusade (488-492A.H/1095-1099A.D) on shaping the image of Islam and Muslims in the European West during the middel ages

AISSA DAIFALLAH *, University of Yahia Fares Médéa, Faculty of Humanities and social sciences, department of humanities, Médéa Algeria.

daiffallah.aissa@univ-medea.dz



<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9337-7020>

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the impact of the first crusade(488-492A.H/1095-1099A.D) expedition on shaping the image of Islam and Muslims in Western Europe during the Middle Ages .

Through what the Western European Crusaders' early contemporary historians have written and accompanying its events during that period of time Those who created a comprehensive and wide image of Islam and Muslims, whose writings on the events and of the First Crusade expedition came as eyewitnesses, provided accurate details that contributed to the image of Islam and Muslims during that period And this damaged image made was spread widely in Europe during that time to embed in their heads for coming decades.

Thus, this conducted study thrives to notice the difference if found, of how western Europe saw Islam Muslims before and after this first crusade took place.

Keywords: the first crusade expedition; image of Islam and Muslims; Western European; Crusades; the Middle Ages.

Introduction: The relationships between nations have always significantly influenced the future and destiny of peoples, their cultures, and civilizations. They contribute to the continuity or even the demise of a culture or civilization. International relations have played a crucial role in the intellectual growth of societies towards each other. The Crusades represent a pivotal part of the history of relations between the East and the West, constituting a significant and critical phase of the long-standing conflict between the Islamic East and the Christian West. They also epitomize the peak of human interaction between the two sides in the Middle Ages.

One of the reasons for this conflict lies in the inherited misconceptions and stereotypes from the past, deeply rooted in each party's perception of the other. Despite numerous modern studies addressing various aspects of the Crusades era, they have predominantly focused on the political dimension of these wars. Moreover, most writings discussing the impact of the Crusades on Western Europe revolve around a single axis, which is the political, economic, and cultural repercussions. There is a scarcity of comprehensive studies exploring the historical dimensions that contributed to shaping the image of Islam and Muslims in Western Europe during that period.

Hence, this study aims to contribute to this subject, focusing on the impact of the first of the Crusades campaigns on shaping the perception of Islam and Muslims in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. The First Crusade, which targeted the Levant, arguably holds a prominent position among all that has been written about these wars.

In light of the foregoing, this article addresses a fundamental problem: To what extent did the events and developments of the First Crusade influence the shaping of the image of Islam and Muslims in Medieval Western Europe?

1. The Concept and Motives of the Crusades

A- Definition of the Crusades:

There is no movement with such diverse definitions as the Crusades. This diversity in definitions indicates that it is a movement that sparked significant debate among historians and researchers, consuming much ink and still stirring controversy to this day. This is attributed to the perspective from which historians viewed it, each according to their ethnic affiliations and intellectual ideologies. One of the earliest definitions of the Crusades is by Count Riant, who defined them as: "Purely religious wars, motivated by religious reasons, undertaken directly or indirectly to reclaim the Christian holy places in Palestine (Jerusalem) from the hands of Muslims"¹. Of course, this statement reflects the view of the old French school, which sees the religious motive as the primary motive for these wars. Hence, the Crusade movement, in their view, is a purely religious movement. Some have seen it as part of the history of relations between the East

and the West in the Middle Ages², one of the episodes of the long-standing conflict between the East and the West. The conflict of Western Europe with Muslims is nothing but an extension of a historical phenomenon in ancient times, that traditional conflict that emerged between the Persians and the Greeks, and then between the Persians and the Roman and Byzantine Empires³. This conflict can be interpreted and linked to the civilizational factor as a conflict between two different civilizations, not to religious factors, as this conflict took place at a time when both the East and the West adhered to pagan religions. This conflict reached its peak at the end of the 11th century AD/ the end of the 5th century AH. Then it found a new outlet in the Crusades, and its intensity increased due to the presence of a new and strong cause for disagreement between the East and the West, namely the religious dispute between Christianity and Islam⁴.

Additionally, some argue that the Crusades, which began with the call of Pope Urban II in 488 A.H/1095 A.D, are nothing but a continuation of the collective pilgrimage to Jerusalem, albeit with a shift in approach from peaceful pilgrimage to militaristic conflict⁵. Israeli historian Prawer suggests that the Crusades are merely the European colonial movement in the Middle Ages⁶.

Based on the aforementioned views and others, we can present a precise definition of the nature of the Crusades as follows: a major movement originating from Christian Western Europe in the Middle Ages, believed in by certain peoples and taking the form of a colonial settlement attack on Muslim lands, especially in the Levant, with the intention of possessing them⁷. This movement arose from the religious, intellectual, social, economic, and political conditions prevailing in Western Europe in the late 11th century, using religion as a veil to achieve its objectives⁸.

Motives:

As previously mentioned, the Crusades are a significant historical movement unique in the history of relations between the East and the West in the Middle Ages, leaving multifaceted impacts on all levels and dimensions. Therefore, they must be studied through the motives that drove them, which we will discuss in the following points :

Religious Motive

The primary motive touted by Western historians, claiming it to be the sole and fundamental impetus for these wars, disregards the other underlying factors such as political, economic, social, and intellectual ones⁹. This motive is associated with the phenomenon of pilgrimage. Proponents of this school argue that the Crusades aimed to reclaim the holy places (Jerusalem) from the Muslims and place them under the sovereignty of Christian Rome, citing persecution of Eastern Christians and Christian pilgrims to justify these

campaigns¹⁰. However, this claim is inaccurate and lacks historical support, as pilgrimage was ongoing regularly until the advent of the Crusades.

Economic Motive

Numerous modern studies have demonstrated the strength and importance of economic factors in driving significant migrations and wars in history. Regarding the Crusades, the economic motive had a significant impact on this movement, given the poor economic conditions in Western Europe, particularly France, in the late 11th century¹¹. France, in particular, suffered from crop failures and soaring prices, leading to a crisis in bread production and subsequently famine¹². This explains the high participation of the French in the First Crusade compared to immigrants from other Western European countries¹³. Additionally, Italian maritime cities (Venice, Genoa, Pisa) sought to exploit the Crusade movement in line with their commercial interests and their pursuit of acquiring new ports on the eastern Mediterranean coast, controlling trade between the East and the West, and eliminating Muslims as middlemen in this region. They encouraged and supported these campaigns, actively participating in them¹⁴. In reality, the Crusade movement was a concerted effort to plunder the wealth of the East and eliminate Muslim control over global trade at that time.

Social Motive:

Studying the feudal systems in Western Europe during the Middle Ages allows for an understanding of the social conditions of European societies at that time, closely related to the Crusades¹⁵. European society then consisted of three classes (the clergy, the warrior class of nobles and knights, and the peasant class of serfs and landless peasants), with the first two classes being the minority while the peasant class represented the majority, subjected to miserable lives under this oppressive system¹⁶. Most of these peasants were slaves or serfs and were hereditarily tied to the land they worked on, living deprived of basic principles of personal freedom, as everything they amassed belonged to their feudal lord, as even personal ownership was denied to the serf¹⁷.

This impoverished class of peasants found the only way out of their crisis and harsh lives by engaging in these wars, fleeing the hellish life under the feudal system. If they survived, they would gain the riches of the East, changing their lives and social conditions. If they died, their lives were closer to death, besides winning paradise and its pleasures in the afterlife as promised by the papacy¹⁸. It becomes clear from this that the Crusades were a product of the growth of the feudal system in European society in the Middle Ages.

Political Motive:

As we clarified earlier, it was humiliation, deprivation, disgrace, and dire circumstances that prompted the vast majority of Europeans to welcome this new call and participate in the Crusade movement in search of a better life. However,

it was not devoid of political inclination and the ambitions of the papacy, kings, and princes. Many of them set out towards the lands of the East not out of love for Jerusalem and its liberation from the infidels, as they claim, but rather out of political ambitions they couldn't fulfill in their own countries, as well as to maintain their thrones¹⁹. All of this was under pressure from the papacy, which threatened these kings and princes with usurping their rule, aiming to seize the lands of the East, its wealth, and increase the influence of the Church of Rome²⁰.

The truth is that the Crusades are not the result of a single factor but rather the outcome of the interaction of these factors collectively. They played a role in directing and controlling these wars. These Crusades drove thousands of Christians to bear the cross and adorn their clothes and horses with it, which was a clear indication of their successful religious indoctrination, considering the religious factor as a unifying ideology among various factions of European Christian society.

2. Historical Overview of the First Crusade (488-492 AH / 1095-1099 AD):

The starting point of the First Crusade was the call of Pope Urban II during an impassioned sermon delivered at the Council of Clermont in 488 AH (1095 CE). In this sermon, he called upon Western Europe to embark on a holy campaign in the name of the Lord, with the aim of liberating the Holy Land (Palestine) from the Muslims and freeing the Eastern Christians from persecution and Muslim domination. His call resonated perfectly with the conditions of the time²¹. The European masses moved from their homelands to the East at a time when the Islamic world was weakened due to political fragmentation and sectarian discord. This campaign was divided into two parts: the People's Crusade and the Princes' Crusade. The vanguard of the People's Crusade reached Constantinople in 490 AH (1096 CE), crossed into Asia Minor, and encountered the Seljuk Turks, who inflicted a crushing defeat upon them, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Crusaders at the Battle of Iconium²². As for the Princes' Crusade, they managed to defeat the Seljuks at Nicaea and the Battle of Dorylaeum in 491 AH (1097 CE). This victory marked the beginning of the Crusaders' expansion at the expense of the Muslims, leading to the establishment of the Principality of Antioch and the siege and fall of Antioch. Finally, they seized Jerusalem in 492 AH (1099 CE) after committing atrocious massacres, culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem²³.

3 .Image of Islam and Muslims Before the Crusades:

Since its emergence in the in the 7th century AD/ the first century AH until today, Islam has posed the greatest challenge to the European world to the extent that it has been difficult to deal with. Europeans attempted to find explanations for it within the framework of human history, whether in terms of causality or divine will. Following the successful Islamic conquests that began in the 1st

century AH /7th century AD and extended to territories in Europe, Asia Minor, and the Balkans inhabited by Christians, it was necessary for the European Christian people to form a clear idea about Islam and Muslims²⁴. The image of Islam and Muslims that spread in Western Europe before the Crusades came through two main channels: the Byzantine Empire (the Romans) and through Al-Andalus.

As a result of the Islamic conquests that reached the territories of the Byzantine Empire and the ongoing military confrontation between the two sides, stories and legends reflecting the Byzantines' perceptions of Islam and Muslims spread. These stories, transmitted and promoted by Byzantine sources, were filled with hatred and animosity due to deep ignorance about Islam and a lack of understanding of its truth, teachings, and stance towards other religions. Islam was considered a new divine religion that did not acknowledge what preceded it in Judaism and Christianity. It revealed a savage enmity towards Muslims²⁵. All these myths revolve around one central idea: that Islam is a derivative and a schism from Christianity; that it is a Christian heresy and a satanic religion; and that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was not a true prophet, but rather either an apostate from Christianity or a false and fabricated prophet who established a new religion with the help of the monk Bahira. They claim that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was initially a disciple of this monk who prophesied about our noble Messenger²⁶.

John of Damascus, who worked in the Umayyad court, was the first to attempt to root this religious and intellectual trend opposing Islam and Muslims and casting doubt on the message of their Prophet. He was one of the earliest Christians who lived through early Islam and wrote about it²⁷. His opinions are recorded in his book "De Haeresibus," where he dedicated a chapter to discussing Islam and its Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) under the title "The Hundred Heresies." He focused on proving that the prophecy of Muhammad (peace be upon him) was nothing but falsehood and fabrication and that the Quran was a forged book. He referred to Muslims as "Ismailis" and "Hagarenes," associating them with Ishmael, son of Abraham, and Hagar. These are more racial connotations than religious ones. He accused Muslims outright of idol worship, stating that they were polytheists who worshipped idols, including the Black Stone as the head of that idol. Thus, John explicitly accuses Muslims of idolatry and polytheism²⁸. He described Islam as heresy and claimed that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) founded this heresy, assuming prophethood after accidentally coming across the Old and New Testaments and after dialoguing with an Arian monk. He publicly declared this after gaining popularity among people by feigning piety. John saw Islam as nothing but a deviant heresy from Christianity²⁹.

Through these myths and absurdities mentioned by John of Damascus and his hostile opinions and direction towards Islam and Muslims, the Christian view of Islam, Muslims, and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was formed in Eastern Christian theological studies, especially³⁰. These perceptions were then transmitted to Western Latin Europe in the early Middle Ages and formed the basis for their views of Islam and Muslims at the time. Western Christians added other images filled with hatred and animosity. They considered Islam a heresy that emerged from Christianity, with its founder being the greatest apostate from Christianity, referring to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the monk Bahira, who prophesied about our noble Messenger³¹.

In truth, John of Damascus's opinions and ideas about Islam and Muslims reflect deep ignorance and a lack of understanding of Islam and its message. It is clear from his writings that he had no historical knowledge of the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his mission in spreading Islam. He also reveals a ferocious hostility towards Islam and Muslims, stemming from ignorance of the other.

This intellectual stance was transferred to the men of the Catholic Church in Western Europe, and its echoes continued in subsequent writings, shaping a hostile and oppressive image of Islam and Muslims in the minds of Europeans. The reasons for this hostility were not fundamentally religious; they were primarily political and military, with religion serving as a cover and justification. The Christian Europe's ignorance of the reality of Islam and its lack of clarity to the Byzantines were among the main reasons for that hostility³².

As for the second channel through which Europeans conveyed their ideas about Islam and Muslims, it was through Al-Andalus, which the Muslims conquered at the beginning of the 8th century AD / the end of the first century AH, weakening the Christian presence there and confining it to a small area in northern Spain³³. The remaining Christians lived under Islamic rule, enjoying all their religious and cultural freedoms due to the policy of tolerance adopted by Muslims towards Christians after the conquest of Al-Andalus. During the Muslim rule in Al-Andalus, Muslims treated Christians according to the principles outlined in the Holy Quran and the noble Prophetic tradition (Sunna). They often demonstrated a tolerant attitude towards Christians³⁴. Muslims granted Christians the freedom to practice their religious rituals, such as ringing bells inside and outside churches. They allowed them to maintain their churches and monasteries, where churches continued to perform their religious and social functions like conducting marriages, baptizing newborns, choosing names, recording agreements, and contracts among Christians freely. Christians in Al-Andalus enjoyed complete freedom in managing their religious and worldly affairs, and they had all their rights³⁵.

During the first century of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus, most of its inhabitants retained their old religion. Later, we observe a significant number of Christians converting to Islam due to the Muslim policy in Al-Andalus and Christians' understanding of Islam and Muslims. This contributed to the spread of Islam and the Arabic language among the people of Al-Andalus, and their acceptance of Islam and Muslims³⁶. Consequently, there were many points of cultural and social convergence between Muslims and Christians, manifested in relationships, customs, traditions, religious celebrations, as well as mutual social influences in clothing, arts, architecture, and more. This had a clear impact on human coexistence between them³⁷.

At the same time, they were influenced by aspects of Arab civilization, leading to the emergence of thinkers who directly attacked Islam³⁸. Some Christian writers linked the emergence of Islam with the imminent appearance of the Antichrist and the coming of the Hour, seeing it only as a threat to be resisted by all means and considering Muslims enemies of the Christian faith³⁹.

Here, it must be noted that those who wrote about the European Christian perspective were mostly monks and churchmen whose considerations were governed by religious beliefs rather than historical facts.

These were some of the misconceptions, filled with ignorance, hatred, and animosity towards Islam and Muslims, which were later transmitted to Western Europe, influencing the perceptions of Western thinkers about Islam. They spread widely in Europe and became entrenched in the European mindset during the 11th century AD / the 5th century AH on the eve of the First Crusade, serving as a propagandistic backdrop and incitement tool upon which Pope Urban II relied in his call for this campaign.

4 .The Impact of the First Crusade (488-492 AH / 1095-1099 AD) on Shaping the Image of Islam and Muslims in Medieval Western Europe

As we have seen earlier, the distorted image and misconceptions prevalent in Europe about Islam and Muslims, propagated by the Western Church and portraying Muslims as invaders of holy places and persecutors of Eastern Christians, played a significant role in the onset of the First Crusade. The Crusaders arrived in the East filled with hateful and distorted ideas about Islam and Muslims, which explains the aggressive manner in which they initially dealt with Muslims, demonstrating the Western Christians' animosity towards Islam and Muslims, which was starkly evident in the massacre of Jerusalem in 492 AH / 1099 AD. With the beginning of the campaign, relations between Western Christian world and the Eastern Islamic world dramatically and suddenly deteriorated, and the success of the Crusaders in establishing the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other three Crusader states (Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli) heightened feelings of triumph and disdain among Western Christians towards

Muslims⁴⁰. This led to the consolidation of a negative image of Islam in the first half of the 12th century AD / the 6th century AH due to the direct interaction between Muslims and Crusaders, whether on the battlefield or during times of peace. This distorted image quickly spread throughout Europe, fueled by the tales of returning Crusaders thirsty for news of Western Crusaders' exploits in the East, exaggerated far from reality. Consequently, the first direct encounters between Western Christians and Muslims in the East sparked interest in studying the Islamic religion. However, feelings of hatred, animosity, and disdain continued to dominate this perception⁴¹.

Through what the Crusaders wrote about this campaign under the main title of pilgrimage or the journey of pilgrims, it becomes clear that they considered the First Crusade a sacred pilgrimage to absolve their sins and liberate holy places from the hands of the infidel Muslims. These writings became a model in the art of historical writing and significantly entrenched the image of Muslims in the minds of European Christians for centuries⁴². Additionally, the Crusaders' victory over the Muslims in this campaign provided an opportunity for Western Europeans to settle in the Levant and interact and deal with Muslims closely and on a daily basis, revealing Christians' ignorance of Islam, its doctrines, the nature of Muslims, and their ethics. This campaign had a significant impact on shaping the concepts of Latin Europe about Islam and Muslims.

5 .An Overview of the Image of Muslims During the First Crusade in Western Europe

The image of Islam and Muslims during the First Crusade was articulated by its contemporary Western Crusader historians, who were clergy, knights, and companions of the campaign and eyewitnesses to it. One of the most prominent among them was the priest Fulcher of Chartres in his book "A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem," translated into Arabic as "تاريخ الحملة إلى القدس -1095", 1127 which is considered a primary source for studying this campaign as he was an eyewitness to it. Fulcher is regarded as one of the best historians of the First Crusade, highly learned and credible.

Fulcher considered the First Crusade a pilgrimage to the holy places, with its participants considered pilgrims. He believed that those who died in it met martyrdom, and anyone who abandoned it was deemed a coward. He described Muslims as enemies of Christ, infidels, idolaters, and barbaric butchers devoid of mercy, followers of demons⁴³. This description was echoed by the Crusader knight Raymond de Agills, who was also an eyewitness to the campaign, adding that Muslims practiced sorcery and astrology⁴⁴. Similarly, the unknown contemporary historian of the First Crusade, author of "Gesta," a knight who participated in and witnessed the events, admired the bravery and skill of Muslim Turks. He acknowledged that if they embraced Christianity, no one could match

their courage or skill, thus expressing a newfound admiration that was previously absent.⁴⁵

All these descriptions and epithets attributed to Muslims by Western Crusader historians during the early stages of the campaign illustrate deliberate ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam by Western Christians. They carry political, military, religious, and even social implications. The term "enemies" carries a political connotation of difference, hostility, hatred, conflict, and rivalry. Calling Muslims "idolaters" was intended to distinguish them from Christianity, proclaiming its superiority and denigrating Islam and Muslims, thus having clear religious implications. In their eyes, pagans are those who do not embrace Christianity and oppose it, hence they considered the Muslim religion as pagan and their state transient, to be replaced by the Christian state⁴⁶. Moreover, their admiration for the prowess and bravery of Muslim Turks was a new perception that was previously absent, but in reality, it was merely a glorification of the victories achieved by the Crusaders in this campaign against Muslims, attributing their success to divine intervention in what they considered a holy campaign.

We are not here to review all Western sources of the First Crusade and their complete description of Islam and Muslims in this campaign, which requires independent study. Our aim is to highlight some differences, if any, in the Western Latin perception of Islam and Muslims before and after the First Crusade and its impact on Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims. It is evident that all sources of this campaign are characterized by profound ignorance and extreme bias towards Islam and Muslims. These feelings were inherited from an early period of the emergence and spread of Islam but deepened in terms of hatred, animosity, and bias. The image of Muslims in the European mindset shifted from reasoned hostility to hysterical animosity at the beginning of this campaign. Moreover, the Crusaders' ignorance of the origins, races, countries of Muslims, clearly evident in all Western sources of the First Crusade. The aggressive Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims that were shaped and transmitted to Europe portrayed a hostile image, which spread among Europeans. This hostile perception was articulated by historians of the First Crusade before they actually encountered any Muslims in reality, proving their ignorance or deliberate ignorance of the other. These perceptions were fueled by Crusader propaganda serving colonialist tendencies with a clear goal of seizing Muslim lands and properties in the East. They expressed deep-seated animosity towards Islam and Muslims. However, these same writers began to get acquainted with actual Muslims during military conflicts and coexistence on Islamic lands, where they witnessed Muslim progress and cultural superiority. Their view of Muslims changed, and some realistic aspects of the Islamic character began to seep into their writings, improving their historical, geographical, and religious knowledge about Muslims⁴⁷. Nevertheless,

their initial perceptions and concepts about Muslims remained enveloped in hatred, religious bigotry, deliberate ignorance of Islam, and disdain for Muslims⁴⁸.

Conclusion

several important results have emerged from this study:

The image of Islam and Muslims portrayed in Western sources of the First Crusade did not differ significantly from the widespread image that existed in Europe before the onset of this campaign. Muslims were depicted as pagans, infidels, idolaters, enemies of Christ, persecutors of Eastern Christians, and desecrators of holy places. These misconceptions and distorted perceptions of Islam and Muslims, prevalent in Europe on the eve of the First Crusade, significantly contributed to inciting Christian masses against Muslims in the East. The Church perceived Muslims as invaders of holy places.

Throughout the First Crusade and its events, the distorted image of Islam and Muslims among Western Europeans was formed as a result of the military confrontation between the two faiths, as well as the close interaction and dealings between the two sides. This erroneous and distant image of Islam and Muslims was transmitted to Western Europe under the influence of the hatred engendered by the conditions of war and conflict. This distorted image found fertile ground for growth because the West was ignorant of the East and its heritage, and because it aligned with its previous notions and ideas about Muslims and their faith. The image disseminated by the early Crusaders, due to the events of this campaign, became the most widespread and influential in shaping public perceptions and guiding the thinking of European intellectuals, passing from one generation to another up to the present day.

The image conveyed by the early Crusader historians of the First Crusade regarding Islam and Muslims led to intellectual attempts to interpret and study Islam. These studies later became evident in Europe and laid the groundwork for what is known as Orientalism and Oriental studies. The roots of the Western image of Islam, which grew and flourished during the Crusades era, continue to manifest in Western studies of Islam, even in their most objective forms.

In summary, the distorted image of Islam and Muslims perpetuated by the early Crusaders played a significant role in shaping Western perceptions of Islam, influencing intellectual endeavors to understand Islam, and leaving a lasting impact on Western studies of Islam .

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