

Original Article

THE CRUSADES

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Abstract:

The Crusades were a series of prolonged conflicts between the Islamic world and Christianity that took place from the late eleventh century to the late thirteenth century. These events were not solely triggered by religious factors but were also influenced by political, economic, and social interests from both sides. This article aims to examine the background of the Crusades, their main periods (the First, Second, and Third Crusades), and their impacts on the Islamic world, Europe, and global civilization in general. The research employs a historical method with a qualitative approach through library research. The findings indicate that the Crusades had complex consequences, ranging from military and social losses in the Islamic world to economic, political, and intellectual advancements in Europe. Moreover, the Crusades became a significant turning point in the process of cultural and scientific exchange between the East and the West, which has continued to influence the modern world.

Keywords: Crusades, Islam, Christianity, medieval conflict, civilizational impact.

Introduction

The Crusades represent one of the most significant events in world history, involving two major civilizations, namely Islam and Christianity. These conflicts lasted for an extended period and were driven by various factors, including religious, political, and economic motivations. The term “Crusades” originated from the use of the cross symbol by European Christian forces, who regarded their military

expeditions as a sacred mission to reclaim Jerusalem from Muslim control. Jerusalem holds profound religious significance for both religions, making it a central point of contention and prolonged conflict.

Historically, the outbreak of the Crusades cannot be separated from the conditions of both the Islamic and Christian worlds at the time. On one hand, Islamic powers had successfully controlled strategic regions previously under Christian influence, including Jerusalem. On the other hand, the Islamic world was experiencing internal political fragmentation among major dynasties such as the Abbasids, Fatimids, and Seljuks. This situation was exploited by European Christian powers, strongly supported by the Catholic Church through the call of Pope Urban II, who framed the conflict as a “holy war.”

Beyond the military dimension, the Crusades also produced far-reaching impacts on global social, economic, and political life. These conflicts reshaped European social structures, stimulated the growth of international trade, and accelerated the transfer of knowledge and culture from the Islamic world to the West. Therefore, the study of the Crusades is essential for understanding the dynamics of relations between Islam and the West, as well as their influence on the formation of modern world civilization.

Methods

This study employs the historical research method with a qualitative approach. This method is considered appropriate for examining past events related to the processes, chronology, and historical impacts of the Crusades. Data collection was conducted through library research by reviewing written sources such as history books, scholarly journal articles, and academic literature relevant to the topic of the Crusades.

The research stages include heuristics (source collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The primary sources used in this study are derived from the Crusades chapter book, which discusses the background, periodization of the wars, socio-economic and political conditions, and their impacts on the Islamic world, Europe, and global civilization. Data analysis was carried out using a descriptive-analytical approach by explaining historical facts and linking them to the social, political, and economic contexts during the Crusades.

Through this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive and objective understanding of the Crusades as a historical phenomenon that was not merely a religious conflict, but also an event with significant implications for global development up to the present day.

Results

Sub 1 Background of the Crusades

The Crusades were a series of conflicts between two major religions, Islam and Christianity. The term “Crusade” emerged because Christians used the cross as a symbol of their struggle, which they regarded as a holy mission to reclaim Jerusalem (Baitul Maqdis) from Muslim control (Zubaiddah, 2013).

The conflict began when Islamic forces, particularly the Seljuk Turks, succeeded in conquering a number of territories previously under Christian influence. From another perspective, the Crusades were not solely motivated by

religious reasons, but also by political interests and the struggle for power (Aniroh, 2021).

In addition to the desire to reclaim Jerusalem, two major factors contributed to the outbreak of the Crusades. First was the religious factor following the Seljuk Dynasty's control of Jerusalem in 1076 CE, which resulted in restrictions on Christian access to holy sites, including the tomb of Prophet Jesus. These restrictions caused tensions between Muslims and Christians, as Christians lost their freedom to worship at sacred places. This policy provoked anger among European Christians, and news of the situation spread widely, leading to strong encouragement among Christians to retake Jerusalem from Muslim rule (Syukur, 2011).

The second factor was political. The defeat of Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus by Islamic forces in Constantinople prompted him to request assistance from Pope Urban II. The Pope approved the request with the aim of strengthening the position of the Catholic Church and reunifying the Roman and Greek Churches. In his sermon to Christians, Pope Urban II declared the struggle to be a "holy war."

On the other hand, the political condition of the Islamic world at that time was weak and fragmented. The Seljuk Dynasty in Asia Minor faced internal disintegration, the Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt was declining, and Islamic rule in Spain was under threat. Furthermore, rivalry among the Fatimid Caliph in Egypt, the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad, and the Umayyad ruler in Cordoba worsened the situation. These circumstances were exploited by Christian rulers in Europe to launch conquests against Islamic territories, including Edessa (ar-Ruha) and Jerusalem (Zubaidah, 2013).

Sub 2 The First Crusade (1096–1099), the Second Crusade (1147–1149), and the Third Crusade (1189–1192)

1. The First Crusade (1096–1099)

The outbreak of the First Crusade began with Pope Urban II's call urging Christians to reclaim Jerusalem (Baitul Maqdis) from Muslim rule. The call was reinforced by the preaching of a pilgrim named Peter the Hermit, who successfully aroused religious enthusiasm among European society. As a result of the campaign, in early 1096 approximately 150,000 troops—mainly from France and Normandy—were assembled and departed for Constantinople. During their journey to the Holy Land, their number increased to around 300,000 people.

However, the large force failed to demonstrate discipline and good morality. Many committed acts of violence, looting, and moral violations along the way, which provoked resistance from the populations of Bulgaria and Hungary. As a result, the first Crusader force was destroyed before reaching its destination, and many were killed by the Seljuk Turks. This defeat demonstrated that the early Crusaders lacked a mature military strategy and were driven more by religious fanaticism than by organized warfare.

One year later, in 1097, a new Crusader army was formed. They successfully captured Nicaea after a one-month siege, then continued their expedition to Edessa and Antioch. In June 1099, after a month-long siege, Jerusalem fell into Crusader hands. This conquest was accompanied by massive massacres of Muslims, Jews, and even Eastern Christians who refused to submit to Latin forces. This victory led

to the establishment of four Latin states in the Middle East:

1. The Latin Kingdom of Edessa (1096), ruled by King Baldwin.
2. The Latin Principality of Antioch (1098), ruled by King Bohemond.
3. The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099), ruled by King Godfrey.
4. The Latin County of Tripoli (1099), ruled by King Raymond.

At this early stage, the Muslim world suffered major defeats due to a lack of military preparedness and weak coordination, while the Crusaders were motivated by religious zeal and expectations of economic gain from controlling sacred territories.

2. The Second Crusade (1147–1149)

After the initial defeats, the Islamic world began to recover. A key figure in this revival was Imad al-Din Zangi, who successfully recaptured several important cities such as Aleppo, Hamimah, and Edessa in 1144. After his death in 1146, his struggle was continued by his son, Nur al-Din Zangi, who expanded Islamic influence in northern Syria and captured Antioch in 1164.

Successive Muslim victories reignited the spirit of jihad to reclaim sacred territories. After Nur al-Din's death in 1174, leadership passed to Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin), founder of the Ayyubid Dynasty in Egypt. Under his command, Muslims successfully recaptured Jerusalem in 1187. The call to prayer once again echoed in al-Aqsa Mosque, marking the return of the city to Muslim control.

In response, the Crusaders launched a counterattack led by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (Germany), King Richard the Lionheart (England), and King Philip Augustus (France). However, their efforts were unsuccessful. Although they managed to pressure Muslim forces in Acre, they failed to retake Jerusalem. Due to exhaustion and heavy losses, King Richard ultimately proposed a peace treaty with Saladin. On July 2, 1192, the Treaty of Shulh al-Ramla was concluded, with two main provisions:

1. The coastal areas around Acre remained under Crusader control.
2. Jerusalem remained under Muslim rule, but Christians were permitted to conduct pilgrimages without carrying weapons.

With this agreement, Jerusalem officially returned to Islamic rule. Shortly thereafter, on March 3, 1193, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi passed away and was buried in Damascus.

3. The Third Crusade (1189–1192)

During this phase, Crusader forces shifted their focus to Egypt, recognizing that control of Egypt would provide strategic and economic advantages due to its crucial position along Red Sea trade routes to Asia. In 1218, Crusader forces succeeded in capturing the city of Damietta, but failed to conquer all of Egypt.

Several years later, in 1229, Emperor Frederick II concluded a peace treaty with Malik al-Kamil, the Ayyubid ruler of Egypt. Under this agreement, Jerusalem was temporarily handed over to the Crusaders in exchange for the return of Damietta to Muslim control. However, this situation did not last long. In 1247, al-Malik al-Salih, son of al-Kamil, successfully recaptured Jerusalem. Islamic power was later continued by the Mamluk Dynasty. Under the leadership of al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars, important cities such as Caesarea, Acre, Jaffa, and Antioch were

captured between 1263 and 1271. After Baybars' death, the struggle was continued by Sultan Qalawun (1279–1290), who captured Tripoli and Latakia.

Sub 3 Social, Economic, and Political Conditions of the Crusades

1. Social Conditions

At that time, European society was divided into three main groups: the church, the nobility or wealthy, and the common people. Of these, the common people were the largest, but held the lowest social status. Their lives were filled with hardship and injustice; they had to obey powerful landowners and pay heavy taxes. Therefore, when the church called for participation in the Crusades with the promise of freedom and a better life for the victors, many people immediately responded enthusiastically and joined the war (Tasmin Tangngareng, 2017).

2. Economic Conditions

Before the outbreak of the Crusades, economic conditions in Europe and the Islamic world showed a close and mutually beneficial relationship. The majority of Europe's Christian population had established fairly strong economic ties with Islamic regions, particularly through trade activities. During the Middle Ages, trade between the two regions developed rapidly, with high-value commodities such as spices, silk, and various luxury goods becoming the main items of exchange. The Middle East played a crucial role as a global distribution center connecting trade routes between Europe, Asia, and Africa. Through these trade networks, not only goods were exchanged, but also knowledge and cultural influences that enriched both civilizations.

In addition to trade, agriculture served as the backbone of the economy in many regions. In the Islamic world, advancements in farming techniques and irrigation systems significantly increased agricultural productivity. Commodities such as wheat, fruits, and vegetables became primary products that supported economic stability within society. Meanwhile, mining activities also played an important role in meeting economic needs. Europe was known for its natural resources, including gold, silver, and iron, which became essential materials for industry and trade. At the same time, Islamic regions possessed valuable mineral resources such as copper, tin, and silver, which were utilized for both local consumption and international trade.

Economic development was further supported by the growth of handicraft industries in both regions. In Europe, skills in processing metal, wood, and glass produced a wide range of high-value goods. In contrast, the Islamic world was well known for its textiles, leather goods, and ceramics, which were characterized by high quality and distinctive artistic designs, making them leading commodities in interregional trade. In terms of financial systems, before the Crusades erupted, the Islamic world had already used precious metal currencies, particularly gold and silver, which facilitated trade transactions. In Europe, the use of currency still varied depending on the kingdom or region, but interregional transactions gradually increased along with the expansion of international trade.

Economic relations between Europe and the Islamic world further strengthened mutually beneficial trade cooperation. Europe imported large quantities of spices, silk, and luxury jewelry from the Middle East, while the Islamic

world obtained supplies of metals, textiles, and various industrial goods from Europe. These trade relations contributed to the growth of major port cities such as Baghdad, Damascus, Venice, and Genoa as centers of economic activity and cross-cultural interaction. After the end of the Crusades, Europe's economy underwent significant changes, particularly between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Trade relations with the Middle East became more open, modern financial systems began to develop through the role of bankers from port cities, and the manufacturing sector experienced notable growth. This process helped restore Europe's economy and paved the way for the emergence of a more dynamic economic system, which later became the foundation of the modern global economy, even though the Middle East, on the other hand, experienced economic decline as a result of the prolonged impacts of warfare.

3. Political Conditions

The fall of several regions in Asia Minor as a result of the Manzikart incident caused great concern among Christians at the time, especially for the Byzantine Empire, centered in Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire clearly did not want to lose its territory so easily, so it requested assistance from the Roman bishopric to defend Constantinople and reclaim Jerusalem. This proposal was clearly welcomed by Pope Urban II, who at the time held supreme authority over Christians. Pope Urban also had other intentions in his plan to invade the Seljuq Dynasty: an attempt to reunite the Greek and Roman Churches, which had split several years earlier. He then made the Seljuq Dynasty a common enemy in his efforts to unite the Roman and Greek Churches and to control some of the territories already controlled by Islam (Yusuf & Faridah, 2020).

Furthermore, the political situation of Islam itself was weak at the time, with various conflicts and divisions occurring within each of the major Islamic dynasties. This began with the divisions that began to emerge within the Seljuq Dynasty in Asia Minor, the weakening power of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, the increasingly marginalized power of the Umayyads in Spain, and the internal conflict within the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad. This presented a golden opportunity for the Crusaders to launch an attack on the Muslims, who were then unprepared (Amin, 2009).

Sub 4 The Impact of the Crusades on the World

1. The Impact of the Crusades on Islam

The Crusades brought significant and direct impacts on the Muslim world. Many lives were lost, and large amounts of property were destroyed as a result of warfare. Areas that became battlefields, such as the Levant involving local Muslim powers, experienced serious disruptions to political and social stability. External military pressure combined with the influence of Crusader forces made local institutions increasingly vulnerable.

The physical destruction of cities, fortresses, trade routes, and economic assets of the Muslim world caused extensive damage. Loss of property, disruption of access to economic centers, and limitations on population mobility were among the effects. These economic losses were not only temporary but also hindered several aspects of development in Muslim regions.

Despite suffering major losses, one of the more long-term and indirect impacts was in the fields of culture and knowledge. The Islamic world played an important role as a source of knowledge that was later transferred to Europe. After the Crusading period, figures such as Saladin (Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī), Nur al-Din Zangi, and Imad al-Din Zangi are mentioned as significant leaders in the context of the conflict and the changes it produced. Thus, although “under attack,” the Islamic world remained a center of learning and a point of exchange with Europe.

The Crusades strengthened Muslim awareness of their religious and geopolitical identity. The conflict became a kind of “turning point” in the collective memory of the Islamic world, highlighting the existence of major external challenges and the responses required to confront them. In the long term, although Muslim territories faced external pressure, in certain contexts Muslims succeeded in defending or reclaiming territories previously controlled by the Crusaders, which is described as ending with an Islamic victory.

In terms of the development of Islamic civilization, although the period of conflict brought obstacles, it also opened opportunities for renewal and development. The Islamic world, as a source of culture and knowledge for Europe, gained greater “recognition.” This positioned Islamic civilization not only as a pursued or besieged party, but also as one that made intellectual and cultural contributions to the wider world. The effects of the Crusades did not end with the conclusion of the conflict but continued to influence the history of Islam–West relations, the formation of Islamic political institutions, and the development of Muslim knowledge and culture in the post-conflict era.

2. The Impact of the Crusades on the World

The Crusades, which began in the late eleventh century and lasted until the late thirteenth century, were not merely military conflicts between Western Christian powers and the Eastern Islamic world, but also a phenomenon with broad cross-regional impacts affecting politics, economics, science, culture, and inter-civilizational relations. The conflict is described as “one of the longest and largest wars in the history of world civilization,” in which efforts between two major religions resulted in great moral and material losses, while also opening inter-civilizational contacts that had previously been limited. At the same time, various aspects of global life changed as a result of these expeditions.

In the political and geostrategic domain, the Crusades shifted the balance of power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Muslim cities and local powers that had previously been relatively strong experienced pressure from Western expeditionary mobilization, causing their security institutions and bureaucracies to become destabilized. These geopolitical impacts are still felt today due to lasting changes in territorial arrangements, control of trade routes, and interreligious power dynamics. In Europe itself, large-scale military mobilization, logistical demands, and overseas organization accelerated the early formation of centralized states and strong port cities that became new centers of economic and political power.

Economically and commercially, the Crusades created new routes and strengthened contacts between West and East. The Islamic world, with its traditions of trade, manufacturing, and scholarship, became both a partner and a rival for Europe, and these contacts facilitated the transfer of goods, technology, and

knowledge. Although the Islamic world suffered material losses, trade relations and cultural exchange continued and had a major impact on Europe.

More specifically, Italian port cities such as Venice and Genoa developed due to their logistical roles in the Crusades, strengthening their economic positions and supporting broader commercial expansion. These impacts were not merely regional; Mediterranean maritime trade networks expanded, making the world increasingly interconnected.

In science, culture, and technology, the Crusades functioned as a catalyst for contact between the Islamic world and Western Europe. The Islamic world brought advanced intellectual traditions, including Arabic translations, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, which later became accessible to Europe through interactions triggered by the Crusades. Although warfare caused destruction, cultural contact contributed significantly to Europe's intellectual growth, laying the groundwork for historical changes such as the rise of universities and the European Renaissance.

Social-religious life and historical memory were also transformed by the Crusades. Prolonged conflict fostered narratives of "Christian versus Muslim" that influenced interreligious relations for centuries. Although intercultural contact occurred, hostility and moral and material losses remained central features of Crusade history and continue to shape East–West perceptions today. In the Islamic world, this situation encouraged the consolidation of collective identity, learning from external threats, and reassessment of local institutions and culture. The vulnerability of affected regions generated political, military, and cultural responses that influenced post-Crusade Islamic development.

The long-term legacy of the Crusades for the world includes several aspects: first, the transformation of European political and economic structures that later enabled overseas expansion and colonialism; second, intensified Mediterranean and global economic integration; third, intellectual change through the transmission of Islamic thought to the West, forming foundations for European modernity; fourth, changes in interreligious and intercivilizational relations that persist in rhetoric, perceptions, and global interactions; and fifth, a turning point for the Islamic world in managing security, diplomacy, and scholarly institutions in response to external pressure. These impacts cannot be reduced simply to "victory" or "defeat," but rather represent processes of contact, adaptation, and transformation.

3. The Impact of the Crusades on Europe

The Crusades, which took place between the late eleventh and thirteenth centuries, not only shaped conflicts between European Christian powers and the Eastern Islamic world, but also triggered significant transformations in Europe's political, economic, social, and cultural structures. From large-scale military mobilization to the exchange of goods and knowledge, the Crusades acted as a catalyst for Europe's evolution toward the modern era.

Politically, Crusading expeditions forced European kingdoms and the Church to develop more effective systems of mobilization, logistics, and administration. Research by Lisa Blaydes and Christopher Paik shows that European regions that supplied large numbers of Crusaders also experienced increased political stability and stronger state institutions. War mobilization required resource extraction through taxation and labor, the use of port cities as logistical bases, and increased

urbanization, accelerating the transition from loosely structured feudalism to more centralized state forms. Royal authority increased as many nobles joined expeditions or lost local influence, allowing kings and central authorities to consolidate power.

Economically and commercially, the Crusades opened and strengthened trade routes between Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and the East. Due to logistical needs for Crusading forces—transportation, supplies, and provisioning—port cities such as Venice and Genoa gained substantial profits. Europe benefited from Islamic civilization through goods, technologies, and ideas that flowed westward during the Crusading period. Demand for silk, spices, and Eastern textiles, along with increased maritime activity, stimulated the growth of port cities and merchant classes. Financial and banking mechanisms also developed in response to the need to fund expeditions and manage capital transfers, laying foundations for early European capitalism.

Socially and culturally, the Crusades reinforced a collective Christian identity in Europe, with the concept of “holy war” granting legitimacy to the Catholic Church and the papacy to mobilize believers beyond Europe. At the same time, intense contact with the Islamic world enabled the transfer of ideas, scientific knowledge, and technology, particularly in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy.

As noted by Muhammad Yaseen Gada, the Crusades had both destructive and constructive effects, significantly expanding trade, exploration, and scientific development in Europe. These outcomes included increased urbanization, the growth of merchant classes, and the emergence of universities, contributing to the European Renaissance. However, negative effects were also evident, including widespread death, financial strain, and heightened xenophobia between Christians and Muslims, as well as between Christians and Jews in Europe.

More specifically, the long-term effects on Europe include the strengthening of monarchies and the centralization of governance, the economic dominance of trading port cities that later supported maritime expansion and colonialism, accelerated intellectual development through the transmission of Islamic knowledge, lasting changes in interreligious relations marked by conflict and stereotyping, and the gradual decline of feudalism in favor of urban economic power and centralized authority.

The Crusades had a profound impact on Europe not merely as a series of military expeditions, but as a driver of institutional, economic, and cultural change. Europe emerged from the period often labeled the “Dark Ages” into a continuum of evolution that enabled the rise of nation-states, early industrial capitalism, and new intellectual civilizations. Nevertheless, these effects were not solely positive; the conflicts also brought suffering, financial and social burdens, and long-lasting interreligious tensions that continue to influence the modern world.

Conclusion

The Crusades were a series of prolonged conflicts between the Islamic world and Christianity that were driven not only by religious motives but also by political, economic, and social interests. The struggle for the city of Jerusalem became the central symbol of this conflict; however, underlying it were internal divisions within the Islamic world and the ambitions of the Church and European Christian rulers to expand their influence and power. These interconnected factors

collectively intensified the occurrence of the Crusades across several major periods.

From a historical perspective, the Crusades illustrate the shifting balance of power between the two civilizations. In the early stages, the Muslim world suffered significant defeats due to weak coordination and political fragmentation. Nevertheless, in subsequent periods, it was able to recover under the leadership of figures such as Imad al-Din Zanki, Nur al-Din Zanki, and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi. Ultimately, Crusader rule in Islamic territories came to an end in 1291 CE, marking a strategic victory for the Muslim world in defending and reclaiming its lands.

More broadly, the Crusades had long-term impacts on global civilization. For the Islamic world, the wars resulted in substantial military, social, and economic losses, yet they also strengthened religious identity and reaffirmed Islam's role as a center of knowledge and learning. For Europe, on the other hand, the Crusades stimulated progress in trade, politics, and intellectual life, laying the foundation for Europe's subsequent rise. Therefore, the Crusades should not be understood merely as a conflict of winners and losers, but rather as a historical process that shaped inter-civilizational relations and influenced the development of the world up to the modern era.

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