INTRODUCTION

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I. The State of the Field

Interest in the legacy and memory of the Crusades in the modern Arab World has been rather modest compared to the amount of attention devoted to studying the impact of the Crusades on modern European thought and culture. Most studies that take up the topic of modern Arab reception of the Crusades are largely concerned with how the Crusades have been utilized in contemporary political and religious discourses in Arab and Islamic countries. They have very little to say about the modern Arabic historiography of the Crusades. This is particularly true of some recent English language scholarship that has discussed the impact of the Crusades on the modern Islamic World.[1]

A notable exception is a French article by Abbès Zouache which presents an overview of contemporary trends in Crusade historiography both in Western and in Arab academia.[2] Zouache displays a great familiarity with Arab (especially Egyptian) research on the Crusades and the conditions under which it is produced and he makes some valuable observations about it.

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[1] See for example Carole Hillenbrand, "The Legacy of the Crusades", in C. Hillenbrand, ed., *Islam and the Crusades: Collected Papers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) pp. 132-148; Mona Hammad and Edward Peters, "Islam and the Crusades: A Nine Hundred-Year-Long Grievance?", in A. J. Andrea and A. Holt, eds., *Seven Myths of the Crusades* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2015) pp. 127-149.

[2] Abbès Zouache, "Écrire l'histoire des croisades, aujourd'hui, en Orient et en Occident", in R. Abdellatif, Y. Benhima, D. König, and E. Ruchaud, eds. *Construire la Méditerranée, penser les transferts culturels* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), pp. 120-147.

Unfortunately, because of the article's vast subject matter, the amount of space devoted to Arabic scholarship is limited and the reader is left wishing that more had been said about it.[3]

In her monograph on twentieth-century Syrian historical scholarship, Ulrike Freitag devotes one chapter to the discussion of a major international conference sponsored by the Syrian presidency in Damascus in 1987 in recognition of the eight-hundredth anniversary of Saladin's famous victory over the Crusaders at the Battle of Ḥaṭṭīn (summer of 1187).[4] The chapter focuses mainly on the political uses and ramifications of this particular conference in terms of internal Syrian politics at that time and Syria's place in regional and Pan-Arab relations. It says rather little about the historiography of the Crusades and the medieval period in general in Syria, while the rest of the book focuses mostly on Syrian scholarship on the Ottoman and modern periods.

Indeed, modern Arab historical scholarship on the medieval Islamic period has long been neglected by Western specialists in Islamic history and Arabic secondary sources are largely absent from many of the key reference works and bibliographies in the field. Fortunately, this situation has begun to change in the last few years. A major turning point was the publication of the *Handbook of Modern Arabic Scholarship on the Ancient and Medieval Periods* in 2021.[5] Unfortunately, due to the late withdrawals of a couple of contributors, the above-mentioned reference volume does not contain a chapter on Crusade studies in the Arab World. It does, however, contain several valuable articles that considerably overlap with the subject of the Crusades, most notably the survey of Mamluk studies in the Arab World by Emad Abou-Ghazi and the bibliographical essay on the study of Medieval Europe in the Arab World by Al-Amin Abouseada.[6]

The present volume offers a fresh perspective on the Crusades, examining them through the rich tapestry of Arab historiographical and cultural narratives. It highlights the vital role of historical memory in shaping

[3] The first article of this volume by Ahmed Sheir provides a comprehensive historiographical and academic introduction, analyzing modern studies on the memory and historiography of the Crusades in the West.

[4] Ulrike Freitag, *Gesichtsschreibung in Syrien 1920-1990: Zwischen Wissenschaft und Ideologie* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1991) pp. 363-376.

[5] Amar S. Baadj, ed., *A Handbook of Modern Arabic Historical Scholarship on the Ancient and Medieval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[6] Emad Abou-Ghazi, "Mamluk Studies in the Arab World", in A. Baadj, ed., *Handbook*, pp. 481-533; Al-Amin Abouseada, "Modern Arabic Historical Scholarship on Medieval Europe: A Bibliographical Study", in A. Baadj, ed., *Handbook*, pp. 595-616.

contemporary views of these events. By drawing on a diverse array of sources—including historical texts, cultural epics, and cinematic representations—the project seeks to achieve several key objectives. First, it will trace the evolution of Arab scholarly perspectives on the Crusades during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reflecting the broader intellectual, cultural, and political shifts of those times. Second, it presents a survey of lesser-known Arabic historiographical works, making them accessible to English-speaking academics. Third, the volume provides an insightful exploration of how the Crusades have been received culturally, examining their portrayal in epics and films. Furthermore, this collection of studies lays the groundwork for future scholarly endeavors, encouraging deeper investigations into the themes of historical memory and public culture in the Arab world that still require extensive research. This book represents a significant first step in addressing these crucial areas, opening up new avenues for exploration and understanding.

The editors are confident that the present volume will be of great interest to all scholars interested in the reception of the Crusades in the Modern Arab World and furthermore that it will help to bridge the divide between Arab and Western scholars of the Crusades by making them more aware of each other's work. It contains seven chapters, the first five of which concern various aspects of modern Arab historiography of the Crusades, while the sixth deals with Arab literary reception of the Crusades and the last chapter with the Crusades in Arab film. Summaries of each chapter follow below.

II. Summary of the Chapters

In the first chapter Ahmed Sheir discusses important developments in Egyptian intellectual history of the nineteenth century. This was a period which witnessed the transition from traditional, "medieval" Arab-Islamic historiography, whose last Egyptian representative was Al-Jabartī (d. 1825), to the beginning of the modern Arab historiography of the Crusades with the appearance of the pioneering book on the subject by Sayyid al-Ḥarīrī in 1899. Sheir also examines in depth how leading nineteenth-century Islamic thinkers like Al-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1873), Al-Afghānī (d. 1897), and ʿAbduh (d. 1905) perceived the Crusades, and how their understanding of the Crusades influenced the discourse of twentieth-century ideological movements in the Arab World.

Chapter Two by Mohamed Mones Awad is the first comprehensive survey of modern Arab historical scholarship on the Crusades published in English.

This is important because most Western historians of the Crusades do not read Arabic and therefore such a reference tool will be of great use to them in forming an idea about the current state of Crusade studies in the Arab World. Awad is one of the most important contemporary Arab historians of the Crusades and he has pioneered the publication of Arabic-language bibliographies and handbooks of Crusade studies. In this particular bibliographical study, he focuses especially on the period from the 1940s, when the first academic history departments were established in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, until the time of writing in 2023. His article not only highlights the important contributions of Egyptian scholars of the Crusades, but also gives substantial coverage to the development of Crusade studies in Bilād al-Shām, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula as well as the Maghreb.

Mohamed Raheel has made a valuable contribution to a specific and important issue in the modern Arab historiography of the Crusades, namely, the question of the treatment of the Fatimids' role in the Crusades by contemporary Arab historians. He pays attention to the influence which contemporary political and sectarian concerns have exercised on some historians' treatment of this subject. Broadly speaking, Raheel identifies three major currents in Arab scholarship on Fatimid-Crusader relations: a sectarian Sunnī position, a sectarian Shīʿī trend which is apologetic in its approach, and a more objective, professional current which attempts to understand the history of the Crusades in its proper context.

Amr Moneer has presented a case study about teaching and research on the Crusades in the history department of Umm al-Qurā University in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Moneer says that in this particular institution the Crusades were understood and interpreted in the framework of a conservative, sectarian environment that was highly-influenced by the political and religious ideologies of the Saudi state. He demonstrates how ideology influenced the naming of history courses and the titles of published works, the choice of topics for students' theses, and some basic assumptions about the study of history and the nature of relations between the Islamic World and the West. Perhaps most noticeably, Moneer detects a very pronounced Islamo-centrism in the history curriculum, and a prevailing belief that the Crusades have not yet ended, but rather continue in our own contemporary period in different forms.

Amar S. Baadj has explored the treatment of conflict between Muslims and European Christians in the medieval Mediterranean world in the works of an important and highly-influential contemporary Egyptian Marxist historian – Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl ʿAbd al-Rāziq. His article takes into account not only the Crusades but also the Iberian Reconquista and conflicts in the central

Mediterranean (Sicily, the southern Italian Peninsula, and Ifrīqīya). Most noteworthy is that Ismāʿīl downplays the importance of religious and sectarian factors in these struggles, emphasizing that such wars were primarily economic in nature and merely assumed a religious garb.

Oleg Sokolov tackles the question of the perception of the Crusades in the early modern Arab Near East in non-elite circles. To do this, he utilizes an important genre of late-medieval and early modern sources known as the Arabic popular epics such as the epics of Sultan Baybars, the Banū Hilāl, and Dhāt al-Himma, among others. Before the age of the radio, public recitations of such epics were a major source of entertainment for the common classes in the great cities of the Arab World, and thus they reveal something of the popular image of the Crusades and their participants (both real and legendary) and how this memory of the Crusades influenced attitudes towards Europeans and the West in the Arab World.

Finally, Fadi Ragheb takes up the portrayal of the Crusades and the great hero of the Crusades, Saladin, in Arab cinema. Specifically, he focuses on the famous 1963 film by the renowned Egyptian director Youssef Chahine entitled *Al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn*. Ragheb presents a novel and highly innovative re-reading of this film. He draws attention to the film's rich and complex Christian symbolism, and also argues that this film expresses the perspective of Chahine as an Arab Christian who promoted a vision of Muslim-Christian cooperation, equality, and mutual respect within the framework of Pan-Arabist and Nasserist ideals.