



Chronicles of the Crusades: Contemporary Narratives of the Crusade of Richard Coeur de Lion, and of the Crusade of Saint Louis

Richard of Devizes, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Jean de Joinville

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When a crusader army of Western European Franks took Jerusalem by storm on July 15, 1099, it was one of the more unexpected conquests in history. Everything seemed to be against them for the previous three years of crusade, right up to the final siege, and yet they finally prevailed. And when they did, they massacred most, if not all, of the population, before establishing a Christian realm in a region that had been taken over by the Muslims in 634 CE. The First Crusade is a difficult and polarizing event, even among modern historians. For some, the crusaders were heroes and saints, and for others they were devils who disrupted the peaceful local sects of Muslims, Jews and Christians, establishing an alien colony that heralded modern European imperialism. To serve the needs of whatever story they want to tell, some historians will begin their tale at some convenient point in history that makes their “side” look good. In fact, the First Crusade is also a signal example of why it is unwise to choose sides in history, because neither side was correct and the situation was highly complex. The enduring figure of the Middle Ages is the chivalrous knight, who played the role of hero across much of Europe and was equal parts courage and valor, and nobody played a more defining role in casting the popular image of medieval knights than Richard the Lionheart, one of the most famous English kings and a leader of the Third Crusade. In many respects, it was ironic that Richard became one of the central characters of the Middle Ages, and his very popular legacy today belies centuries of controversy.



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