

His discovery of a heroic Welsh heritage convinced few serious historians, but earned him a key role in the Welsh National Pageant of 1909 and the 1911 investiture of the Prince of Wales. His romantic enthusiasm conferred on Welsh history a glamour only rarely discovered by more accurate and academic writers.

In August 1914 he immediately, and again unofficially, began recruiting a Welsh Regiment of Horse. Kitchener approved the unit, but when it became established, it was not under Rhoscomyl's command. This was not a cavalryman's war, but he made himself useful and ended the war as a temporary lieutenant colonel. He was awarded the D.S.O. and the O.B.E.

He died of liver cancer in 1919, with the dramatic question: 'Is it heaven or is it hell?' on his lips. His novels, his politics and his ideas about Welsh history now all seem impossibly dated, but John S. Ellis's biography is a suitably entertaining monument to a lively man who added colour to his age.

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Paul Cobb, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 368pp. ISBN: 978-0-1987-8799-0. Paperback. Price £12.99.

Paul Cobb's *The Race for Paradise* is an engaging and refreshing history of the crusades as they were perceived by medieval Muslims. It is a 'history of the crusaded, not just the crusaders' (p.278) intended for non-specialist readers, originally published in 2014 and recently made available in paperback. Cobb sheds light on the 'crusaded' by using an array of medieval Arabic sources which for too long have proved lamentably inaccessible for the many historians whose specialism and training lies in the history of western Europe. It is significant that it is these sources which provide the scaffold for Cobb's history: it is so often the case that sources from the Islamic world are used in a piecemeal fashion in studies of the crusades, and then usually in translation.

The Race for Paradise rewards the reader with both breadth and depth, simultaneously offering an overview of events from a Muslim perspective spanning from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, from the Iberian Peninsula, to Sicily, North Africa and the Levant, and sketching tantalising portraits of the individuals who witnessed, formed and were shaped by these changes. The extended chronological and geographical reach of this study is consistent with the overarching premise that an East-West perspective on these events must inevitably take a

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different form to more 'traditional' West-East crusade histories (i.e. those which begin at the Council of Clermont in 1095 and conclude at Acre in 1291). This is an important departure, which takes the study beyond the parameters of works such as Carole Hillenbrand's seminal book *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (1999). Rather, Cobb traces his study of Islamic perspectives on Frankish aggression from the involvement of Norman mercenaries in Muslim Sicily in the 1060s to the 1453 conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, and the 1491 capitulation of Granada to Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon.

One of the main contentions of this book is that the framing of our understanding of Muslim responses to the crusades requires a paradigm shift. This is made apparent at the beginning of the first chapter when the reader is introduced to Harun ibn Yahya, a ninth-century captive of the Byzantines. The reader has been advised to embrace this disorientation (p. 8), and it is a fruitful discomfiture indeed. Chapter 1 takes a step back even further than the eleventh century to destabilise Eurocentric historical perspectives by highlighting how, to Harun, Rome lay towards the very edge of civilisation. This is quickly made visual by the provision of a map by twelfth-century Moroccan geographer al-Idrisi (p. 14). It depicts landmasses that are at once familiar and unfamiliar. Africa and the Arabian Peninsula sit centrally in the image, with Europe being represented by a small cluster of shapes in the south-eastern corner of the map. This visual cue jolts the reader into embracing a new historical landscape. Important political and religious context is also provided here. Having thus set the scene, Cobb proceeds to demonstrate how the medieval Islamic world viewed the crusades as episodes in a broader narrative of Frankish aggression against the 'Abode of Islam'.

Many of the chapters open with discussion of individuals (the bibulous eleventh-century provincial commander from Sicily Ibn al-Thumna and the scholarly eleventh-century Andalusí jurist Abu Bakr al-Turtushi are just two examples), a method which lends an intimacy to what might – in less capable hands – have become an overreaching work focused solely on chronological coverage. The rationale for this technique is made clear in the book's closing remarks on the rewards of studying the crusades from multiple perspectives: namely, that it allows us to see historical actors as 'fellow humans... cultural beings subject to the vagaries of the world they created around them' (p.279). More familiar historical figures also receive due consideration: notably Saladin, whose legacy in statuary and film opens the prologue.

There are several features of this book that will prove valuable for the non-specialist reader. Aside from ten maps and fifteen colour figures, there is a glossary of key people and dynasties, and a brief note explaining Arabic naming conventions, both of which appear at the beginning of the book. Cobb has also included a concise bibliographical essay, which serves as an entrée into the English historiography of

Islamic history and the crusades. Certainly, these resources – and the book as a whole – will be welcome to anyone who is new to or unfamiliar with medieval Islamic history, whether they are a general reader, an undergraduate student, or an interested scholar.

The *Race for Paradise* is an important contribution to the ongoing rebalancing of crusade historiography. In it, Cobb has succeeded in offering a readable, well-researched and insightful study of value to specialist and non-specialist readers alike.

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