NOTES ON CRUSADES – Dr. Baijayanti Chatterjee

FOR CBCS 2ND SEM. (HONS –DAY)

CRUSADES: CONCEPT, HISTORIOGRAPHY, CAUSES AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

So what were the crusades and who were the crusaders? After many decades of rigorous investigation by historians of the Middle Ages we are now much better able to answer. During the Middle Ages virtually all western Christians believed that the crusades to the East were divinely sanctioned wars against the enemies of Christ and his church. Even after the fall of the crusader states in 1291 the recapture of the Holy Land remained an important matter for western Christians. Then the expansion of the Islamic Ottoman empire forced Europeans to put aside any ideas of reclaiming Jerusalem and instead defend Europe. In the sixteenth century, when western Europe was in the gravest danger of Muslim conquest, the crusades as an institution began to collapse utterly. As secular authority in Europe increased, religious unity crumbled. The Protestant Reformation severely undercut the crusades because doctrines were rejected that were central to crusading-in particular the secular authority of the Pope and the doctrine of indulgence. Martin Luther insisted that the crusades were the tool of a corrupt papacy. However, even Luther was aware of the threat that the power of the Islamic Turks posed to Christian Europe, and the old ideal of Christian unity in the face of the Muslim threat never died entirely-in 1571 the victory of a Catholic admiral over the Turks at Lepanto was celebrated in Protestant lands no less than in Catholic ones , and more than a century later Protestants joined the ranks of the pope's Holy League which, in the last crusades of all, began to roll back the frontier of the Ottoman empire.

Writing the History of the Crusades

By this time, histories of the earlier crusades had begun to appear. In his very popular *Historie of the Holy Warre* (1639), the English divine Thomas Fuller questioned the wisdom of the medieval crusades, which, in his view, had spent European lives and wealth for nothing more than a faraway plot of land and a few relics. His view was not untypical of Protestant writers. However, the French Jesuit historian Louis Maimbourg praised the movement and its participants in his own *Histoire des croisades* (History of the Crusades, 1675).

The **eighteenth century** saw a dramatic shift in western thinking. Not only had the Ottoman threat been averted, but European states were now expanding on a global scale. With the Muslim danger passed, many Europeans belittled it and cast doubt on its former gravity. It was the age of the **Enlightenment,** with its emphasis on rational thought, religious toleration, and anticlericalism-in such an

intellectual atmosphere the medieval crusades did not fare well, and they were denounced by Voltaire, Hume, and others as a bloody manifestation of medieval barbarism, ignorance, superstition, and fanaticism in which thousands of the foolish had set out in a pitiful attempt to save their souls.

However, the **Romantic movement** of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century embraced the chivalric piety of the medieval knight. In *History of the Crusades* (1820), the British historian Charles Mills criticized Enlightenment scholars such as Edward Gibbon for projecting modern values on medieval men. He judged that the crusaders were heroic, selfless, and courageous. **Nationalism** also changed historians' views, particularly in France, where the crusades began to be seen as an important part of the national heritage. The six-volume *Histoire des croisades* (1817-22) by Joseph-Francois Michaud extolled the achievements of the French crusaders. **Colonialism and racism** were also interwoven into the fabric of crusade history in this period. By the nineteenth century the Muslim Near East had not only ceased to be a threat, but to most Europeans it appeared backward, quaint, exotic, or just barbarous. The crusades, therefore, were frequently celebrated as Europe's first colonial expansion. During the wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries-including the First World War the romantic image of the chivalric crusader marching off to fight a foreign nemesis was pressed into service. Even after the carnage of the First World War, Europeans and Americans continued to characterize it as a noble "crusade" and the dead as fallen martyrs.

The Crusades in Modern History Writing

In the twentieth century new methodologies and sources gave a new generation of historians the tools to unlock many of the mysteries of the crusades. The starting point for modern investigations into the basic questions of definition and motivation is Carl Erdmann's groundbreaking book, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens* (The Origin of the Idea of Crusade, 1935). He argued that the crusades were not so much the result of events in the East, but born of the eleventh-century reform movement in Europe, which had abandoned Christianity's ideal of withdrawal from the world and embraced instead the secular militaristic culture in order both to purify that culture and to use it as a tool of purification. The crusades, therefore, were neither an ad hoc reaction nor an aberration, but an organic element of the medieval world.

It is unsurprising that the rise of Nazi Germany and the ensuing world war changed the way historians approached the crusades. Western scholars reflected the popular aversion to wars of conquest and campaigns of fanatical ideology; racism joined colonialism in the West's collection of discarded doctrines. Western intellectuals began to view the crusades much as their Enlightenment predecessors had done two centuries earlier. Many historians who had observed how totalitarian

leaders had covered their wars of aggression in the mantle of glorious moral crusades expressed cynicism for the professed motives and purposes of medieval kings, popes, and crusaders. Rather than heroes, crusaders were described as opportunistic conquerors cloaking their true motives behind a veil of pious platitudes. The most influential proponent of this view was Sir Steven Runciman. In his three-volume work, A History of the Crusades (1951-54), Runciman downplayed the role of piety, stressing what he saw as the base motives of rapacious men. Runciman's history, which had the benefit of being beautifully written, quickly gained a wide readership outside the academic world and remains a bestselling history of the crusading movement. It is no exaggeration to say that he almost singlehandedly crafted the modern popular view of the crusades. When one reads or hears media coverage about the crusades today it is invariably Runciman's judgment that reigns supreme. Yet Runciman was by no means the last word on the crusades. Since the 1960s there has been a boom in crusade studies. The Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East, a professional organization of crusade scholars, has at present nearly 500 members in thirty countries and hundreds of scholarly studies are published each year. As a result of all of this research, modern scholars have largely rejected Runciman's conclusions, returning instead to the idea that medieval people should be understood on their own terms rather than ours. //

One of the most exciting areas of recent crusade research is the investigation into the identity, methods, and motivations of those who took the cross. In the past, scholars have had to generalize about crusaders who were not in the ranks of the highest elite based on incomplete or impressionistic information. It is still not possible to learn very much about the poorest crusaders. However, through the use of the thousands of **medieval charters** held in European archives one can uncover the preparations and conduct of many thousands of otherwise unknown knightly crusaders. Charter studies have been around for a long time, but it is only relatively recently that historians have been able to employ new computer technologies in order to organize and evaluate these documents. Using these methods, scholars such as Jonathan Riley-Smith have exploded the old myth that crusaders were Europe's second sons, landless men leaving home to seek profit and wealth wherever it could be found or plundered. On the contrary, we now know that the costs of crusading were staggering. This has led many historians to the conclusion that the overriding motivation for crusaders to the East was not greed but pious idealism. Crusaders truly believed that in endeavoring to expel Muslim conquerors from formerly Christian lands, they were doing God's will. Crusading was, for them, an act of charity and love through which they sought to do penance for their sins and thereby merit eternal life. These beliefs may not seem very modern, but neither were the people who held them.

Conclusion : To seek to force the medieval crusades into nationalist, colonialist, or racist molds is to distort their fundamental character, and as a result the crusades are today among the most misunderstood phenomena in history. Modern scholarship should seek to dispel that misunderstanding.

Background and Causes:

The **Crusades** were a series of religious wars sanctioned by the Latin Church in the medieval period. The most commonly known Crusades are the campaigns in the Eastern Mediterranean aimed at recovering the Holy Land from Muslim rule, but the term "Crusades" is also applied to other church-sanctioned campaigns. These were fought for a variety of reasons including the suppression of paganism and heresy, the resolution of conflict among rival Roman Catholic groups, or for political and territorial advantage. Volunteers became Crusaders by taking a public vow and receiving plenary indulgences from the Church. Some were hoping for a mass ascension into heaven at Jerusalem or God's forgiveness for all their sins. Others participated to satisfy feudal obligations, obtain glory and honour or to seek economic and political gain.

The Islamic prophet Muhammad founded Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and had united much of Arabia into a single polity by his death in 632. Arab power expanded rapidly in the 7th and 8th centuries largely by military conquest. This influence spread to the north-west Indian subcontinent, across Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, southern Italy, the Iberian peninsula and the Pyrenees. Jerusalem was taken from the Byzantine Empire after a siege in 637.

Tolerance, trade, and political relationships between the Arabs and the Christian kingdoms waxed and waned. Pilgrimages by Catholics to sacred sites were permitted, Christian residents in Muslim territories were given Dhimmi status, legal rights, and legal protection. These Christians were allowed to maintain churches, and marriages between faiths were not uncommon. The various cultures and creeds coexisted and competed, but the status quo was disrupted by the western migration of the Turkish tribes. The 1071 victory over the Byzantine army at the Battle of Manzikert was once considered a pivotal event by historians but is now regarded as only one further step in the expansion of the Great Seljuk Empire into Anatolia.[25] Catholic pilgrims and merchants reported that the frontier conditions between the Syrian ports and Jerusalem became increasingly inhospitable.

From the 8th century, the Christians entered to recapture the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims, known as the *Reconquista*. The campaign reached a turning point in 1085 when Alfonso VI of León and Castile captured Toledo. In the same period, the Muslim Emirate of Sicily was conquered by Norman adventurer Roger de Hauteville in 1091.

Europe was immersed in power struggles on many different fronts. The Christian Church split along Latin Orthodox lines in 1054 after centuries of disagreement leading to a permanent division called the East–West Schism. Following the Gregorian Reform, an assertive, reformist papacy attempted to increase its power and influence over the laity. Beginning around 1075 and continuing during the First Crusade, the Investiture Controversy was a power struggle between Church and state in medieval Europe over whether the Catholic Church or the Holy Roman Empire held the right to appoint church officials and other clerics.[30][31] Antipope Clement III was an alternative pope for most of this period, and Pope Urban spent much of his early pontificate in exile from Rome. The result was intense piety and an increased interest in religious affairs amongst the general population in Catholic Europe and religious propaganda by the Papacy advocating a just war to reclaim Palestine from the Muslims. Participation in a crusade was seen as a form of penance that could counterbalance sin.

CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIVERGENCE

Unity of faith and worship has been a Christian ideal from the beginning, but never a reality. emperor Constantine I ("the Great," ruled 306-37) adopted Christianity as his favored religion. In 325 he called a council of church leaders at Nicaea (present-day Iznik) in Asia Minor to resolve the even more divisive Arian controversy. Arius, a priest of Alexandria in Egypt, claimed that Jesus was God only by adoption and "not of the same substance as the Father." The council promulgated the Nicene Creed, which affirmed Jesus' full godhood and condemned the Arians as heretics, or false-believing Christians. In 330 Constantine shifted the focus of the Roman empire eastward by dedicating a new imperial capital on the Bosporus: Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). But despite Constantine's beliefthat he had breathed new life into the empire, deep divisions persisted within the imperial church. The council of Nicaea had not extirpated Arianism, and in the following centuries new theological controversies arose. To settle such disputes, the church held six further ecumenical councils between 381 and 787, which articulated the core of the orthodox ("correctly taught") faith, defining what was to be believed and proscribing as heresy all contrary beliefs. However, these councils also divided Christians, because no doctrinal decision was accepted by every disputant.

During the same centuries, two competing centers of church authority emerged: Constantinople, whose emperor claimed to be *isapostolos*, the peer of the apostles; and Rome, whose bishop claimed the title of pope (Latin papa, father) by virtue of the powers of St. Peter, the putative prince of the apostles and first bishop of Rome. Pope Leo I ("the Great," 440-61) was emblematic of the Roman papacy's self-image and emerging status in the West. Leo, self-styled "primate of the bishops," managed to suppress an attempt to accord Constantinople ecclesiastical parity with Rome. Moreover, as imperial authority became weaker in the West in the face of invasions by Germans and other "barbarians," popes and other western church leaders found it necessary to provide security for their people. In 452 Leo apparently persuaded Attila, leader of the Huns, not to attack Rome. Three years later he negotiated a mitigation of the sack of Rome by the Vandals. In 494 Pope Gelasius I was confident enough to upbraid the emperor for interfering in church affairs; in doing so he articulated the papacy's classic expression of the responsibility and authority of pope and emperor .

The situation was quite different in the eastern Roman empire, where emperors were able to control church leaders effectively, and the chief prelate of the eastern church, the patriarch of Constantinople, was generally an imperial appointee. Emperor Justinian I ("the Great," 527-565), for example, was convinced that as God's viceroy on Earth he was uniquely responsible for the well-being of Christendom

and of the faith, and closely controlled the patriarchate. He even bent PopeVigilius to his will in a doctrinal dispute.

The sixth century was pivotal for Roman imperial Christendom. In the East a new Christian culture and civilization arose that is called "Byzantine." Centered on Constantinople (site of the ancient Greek city of Byzantium) and its imperial court, the Byzantine empire was an amalgam of late-Roman autocracy, Eastern Christianity, and the Hellenistic culture of the Levant. Byzantines saw and referred to themselves as Romans, but they belonged to an essentially Greek-speaking empire that persisted until 1453. In the West, another new culture and civilization was taking shape. Variously termed "Latin Christendom" and the "First Europe," this new western culture was an amalgam of the vestiges of Latin Roman civilization, the cultures of the West's new barbarian inhabitants, and a Christianity increasingly centered on Rome and the popes. Pope Gregory I ("the Great," 590-604) personified this transformation. Although a loyal subject of the emperor in Constantinople, he found himself guiding a western church that was drifting away from imperial control. Through his actions, personal example, and writings, Gregory was a key agent in the evolution of the Roman papacy as the moral and spiritual leader of the West.

In the meantime, the secular rulers of the West continued to look to the rulers in Constantinople as models of imperial majesty and legitimacy. The most successful early imitator of Byzantine imperial greatness was Charlemagne (Charles the Great), king of the Franks (768-814), who carved out western Europe's first medieval empire. But his claims to unrivaled power never went unchallenged. At his coronation as "emperor of the Romans" in Rome on Christmas Day 800, Charlemagne probably expected to be acclaimed emperor by the people and venerated by the pope, in the style of the Byzantine rulers. He also probably expected to place the crown on his own head. But Pope Leo III upstaged Charlemagne by crowning him, spotlighting a basic tension running throughout medieval European history-the struggle between popes and western emperors for supremacy over Christendom. The Byzantines were outraged that a German barbarian should usurp the imperial title, but in 812, after much wrangling, their emperor Michael I agreed to accord Charlemagne the title "emperor" (but not "emperor of the Romans"). By 843 Charlemagne's empire had split into three kingdoms and it was dead before the ninth century ended. In 962 the western empire and title were revived when Pope John XII found it expedient to crown King Otto I of Germany as Roman emperor, laying the foundations for the later Holy Roman empire. John was to regret this coronation. When he realized that Otto intended to rule Italy with full imperial authority, he turned against him; Otto then engineered John's deposition. Otto and his successors saw themselves as the true heirs of the Caesars and Charlemagne, but they were also aware that to their east lay a larger, richer, and grander "Roman" empire. And they knew that these "Romans"

were in fact Greeks-Christians with suspiciously different rites. They viewed Byzantium, one might say, with a mixture of envy, mistrust, and even a degree of contempt. At the turn of the millennium, popes and western emperors were not the only authorities in Latin Europe. Most of the Christian West, which by then extended from Greenland to Poland, Bohemia, and Croatia, was divided into a dizzying array of kingdoms and feudal lordships. This political pluralism, which stood in stark contrast to Byzantium's centralized autocracy, would prove to be a dynamic factor in the history of Western Europe.

THE RISE OF ISLAM: From Muhammad to the Abbasid Caliphate

Islam, which means "submission [to God]" in Arabic, is a faith, culture, and community whose members are known as Muslims ("they who are submissive"). Muslims are theoretically united in belief and practice because the will of Allah (Arabic al-Ilah, which means "the God") is unchanging, undivided, and unambiguous. That is the theory; historical reality presents a different picture. Islam traces its lineage back to Adam, Abraham, and a line of other prophets (including Jesus) but claims to have received the fullness of divine revelation through Muhammad (ca. 570-632), the "Seal of the Prophets, "the last and greatest of God's messengers.

Around 610, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, a prosperous merchant of Mecca (Makkah) in Arabia, received revelations that impelled him to preach the oneness and uniqueness of God; the imminence of the resurrection of the dead, the coming of a Day of Judgment; an after death hell fire for unbelievers and the unjust; and a paradise of bliss for all who believed and lived righteous lives according to a strict code of conduct. Most Meccans initially rejected Muhammad's message, and in 622 the Prophet, preceded by most of his small band of converts, journeyed to Yathrib (later Medina), an oasis town that invited him to serve as an arbiter among rival factions and as its de facto ruler. This migration, known as the hijra ("breaking of ties"), meant that these first Muslims abandoned their tribal bonds and became members of a new community, or umma, that was defined by a shared Islamic faith and not by blood kinship. In the eyes of Muslims, this pivotal act, which led to the creation of a theocratic community at Medina, inaugurated Year I of the Islamic Era. At Medina, Muhammad added the duties of statesman and warrior to that of prophet. After more than seven years of jihad, or holy war, against the Meccans and others who rejected his message, Muhammad and a reputed 10,000 followers were able to enter Mecca in triumph in 630.

Mecca now became Islam's premier holy city, while Medina remained the political capital of the Umma. Because of his triumph, many of the tribes of Arabia united under the leadership of the "Messenger of God."

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When Muhammad died in 632, many Arabs severed their ties with the Umma, believing that their loyalty had lain personally with Muhammad. One of Muhammad's closest companions, Abu Bakr, emerged to assume the office of "commander of the faithful," a title later changed to khalifah (caliph), or "successor" (of the Prophet).As commander or caliph from 632 to 634,Abu Bakr claimed not to be a prophet (since prophecy had ended with Muhammad) but simply the head of the indivisible community of Islam. He prosecuted war against all who would cut these ties, as well as against the remaining pagan Arab tribes. By his death, just two years after Muhammad's, Abu Bakr had welded together a vigorous community of believers that encompassed the entire Arabian peninsula. What is more, he had forged an Islamic army that was ready to advance against Arabia's two neighbors, the Byzantine and Sassanian (Persian) empires. Islam's second caliph, Umar (634-644), launched raids against unbelievers outside the peninsula that soon turned into wars of conquest. Byzantium and Sassanian Persia, exhausted after more than a century of wars and suffering bitter internal divisions, were unprepared for the onslaught. Before Umar's death in 644, the Byzantines had lost Syria-Palestine and Egypt-Christianity's most ancient and sacred lands-to Islam, and the Arab conquest of the Sassanian empire (essentially present-day Iraq and Iran) was almost complete.

Further territories were conquered with astonishing speed over the following century. By 751, when Islamic forces defeated a Chinese army at the Talas river (in present-day Kazakhstan), lands under Islamic domination stretched from Spain in the west (see page 120) to present-day Pakistan and Central Asia. The Byzantine empire was a truncated version of its former self, having lost Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa to Islam. In the mid-eighth century, the community of Islam was a vast multi-ethnic empire. Despite the influx of non-Arab converts, many subject Christians and Jews (and to a lesser extent Zoroastrians) remained faithful to their ancestral religions. On the eve of the crusades, ca. 1095, Christian and Muslim populations were probably of equal size in Syria-Palestine. In many Muslim-dominated regions, such as southern and eastern Anatolia (modern Asiatic Turkey) and northern Syria, Christians still greatly outnumbered Muslims.

As Muslim armies were establishing an empire in the seventh century, a schism arose. Many Muslims, especially members of the Prophet's clan, the Hashim, accused the third caliph, Uthman (644-656), of favoring his own clan, the Umayya (Umayyads). The result was rebellion, Uthman's assassination, and civil war. One faction, the Party ofAli (Shiat Ali), favored the claim to the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law.The other, led by Muawiyah, a kinsman ofUthman, represented the Umayyads.

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The war ended with Ali's assassination in 661. Most Muslims acknowledged Muawiyah as caliph, ushering in the Umayyad caliphate (661-750).The political capital ofthe Umma was moved from Medina to Damascus, in part in recognition of Islam's expanding horizons but also because Medina had been Shiat Ali's center of support. Upon Muawiyah's death in 680, war broke out again with the supporters of Ali's family, more commonly known as Shias or Shiites ("Partisans").The Shias held that the caliph must be a blood relation of the Prophet, which meant al-Husayn, Ali's son and grandson of Muhammad. But on 10th October 680, al-Husayn and most of his family were massacred at Karbala in Iraq, an event still commemorated by Shias.

By 692 the Umayyads had crushed their rivals, but it was a short lived victory. In 750, supported by many Shias, non Arab converts, and other disaffected Muslims, the Abbasids, a family tracing its lineage to the Prophet's uncle, overthrew the Umayyads in a bloodbath and established the Abbasid caliphate (750-1258). Most Shias, who believed that only a descendant of Ali could be the rightful imam, or religious leader of the Umma, were as hostile to the Abbasid caliphs as they had been to their predecessors. Mainstream Muslims, who accepted Umayyad and Abbasid authority, styled themselves Sunnis-followers of the path of tradition (sunna) as it evolved from the days of the Prophet. Underlying the Sunni self image is the belief that God's community is infallible. Consequently, the practices and institutions of mainstream Islam are always correct.

The Abbasids moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad in 762, in recognition of Iraq's geographic, economic, and cultural centrality. Muslim Spain (al-Andalus), remained outside the sphere of Abbasid authority. An Umayyad prince, Abd al-Rahman, who had escaped the bloody coup of 750, defeated the resident governor of Cordoba and in 756 established an independent Umayyad state that ruled Muslim Spain until 1031.