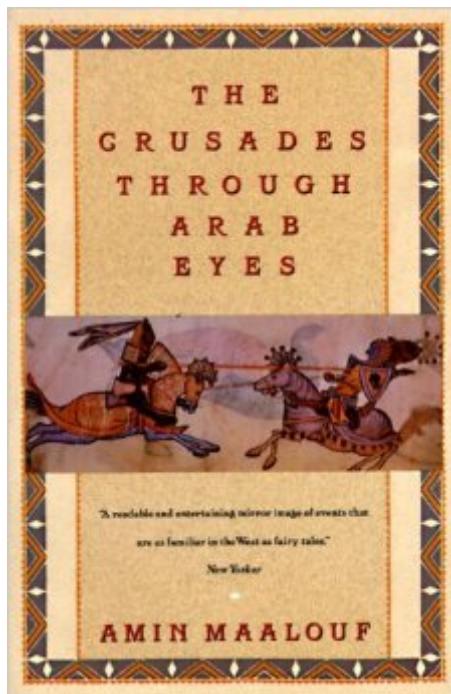


The book was found

The Crusades Through Arab Eyes (Saqi Essentials)



Synopsis

The author has combed the works of contemporary Arab chronicles of the Crusades, eyewitnesses and often participants. He retells their story and offers insights into the historical forces that shape Arab and Islamic consciousness today.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (155 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

What can one say about a book that has the chief fault of leaving one wanting more? *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (hereafter, "Arab Eyes") is a beautifully composed book that draws almost exclusively from Arabic primary sources to tell the tale of the Western conquest, 1100-1300 AD. Unfortunately, whenever Maalouf isn't talking about military or political intrigue, he seems to lose interest. The book raises many fascinating topics -- the influence of Arab society on the Holy Roman Empire, the rise of a slave class to become the masters of all Islam -- without going into detail on any of them. The first encounter between Muslim and Crusader is told from the perspective of Kilij Arslan, a seventeen-year-old sultan who would go on to become a legendary name in the struggle of the Islamic people. The "Franj", as the invaders were called, were pouring into his country by the tens of thousands. A skilled military leader, Arslan carefully withdrew his forces into a defensive position, only to be startled by his first glimpse of this "army": ragged, untrained peasants with strips of cloth pinned to their tunics in the shape of the cross. Reluctantly forced into battle, Arslan easily smashed the Crusader legion into bits, considering the matter settled. He had no way of knowing that what he had seen was only the rumor of war, not the war itself. What may be most surprising to

Western readers, such as myself, was that the majority of the Islamic struggle during the Crusader period, 1100-1300 AD, was not against Europeans, but against other Muslim leaders. The "empire" of Islam was sharply divided, and the question of rule was always at issue.

This is really a terrific idea. Before this book, you probably would have needed to be a graduate student in history before you even realized that the Arab point of view of the Crusades had ever even been recorded, let alone preserved. This book strikes a beautiful balance between being a purely popular edition, and being something that people who study stuff like this for a living might read... It's the kind of book that Barbara Tuchman might have been proud to write. Amin Maalouf specifically disavows any intention to write a "history book" in his preface. His background is in journalism, and sure enough, he shows evidence of a journalist's ear and eye for the great story... for the gripping and/or galvanizing detail... for the telling gesture that provides the key to a character's persona. Furthermore, he makes it plain that he is not out to write a balanced account, any more than Western authors have historically been interested in providing balanced accounts of the Crusades. This really is presented from the Arab point of view... That said, it might be worth balancing your reading of this book with a concurrent reading of a western account, or you might get a little lost. It isn't easy to read a long book with so few familiar points of reference. Admit it -- unless you are a major history buff, you probably don't know much about this period even from the Western point of view! I think especially as Americans, there is a tendency to feel that this period in history is not very relevant to our country's history. After all, the events of this book took place long before nationalism, before (clearly) freedom of religion or of speech, mostly even before the Magna Carta was a glimmer in anyone's eye.

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