

**David Crispin, »Ihr Gott kämpft jeden Tag für sie«. Krieg, Gewalt und religiöse Vorstellungen in der Frühzeit der Kreuzzüge (1095–1187), Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich (Ferdinand Schöningh) 2019, VIII–241, ISBN 978-3-506-79242-6, EUR 49,00.**

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The crusading movement, in general, and the First Crusade, in particular, have received enormous attention from scholars since long before the beginning of »scientific history« in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Very few aspects of the crusading movement and individual crusades remain complete *terra incognita*, and a great many have benefitted from very extensive scholarly analysis. This is certainly true of matters such as the conduct of the First Crusade as a military campaign, and the religious belief and behavior of the crusaders. A scholar entering into the lists on these topics requires not only a thorough understanding of the sources, but also a deep knowledge of the historiographical tradition. Unfortunately, as will be discussed in more detail below, David Crispin, in his revised dissertation completed under the direction of Gerd Althoff and Claudia Garnier, demonstrates only a limited engagement with and understanding of the work done by earlier scholars on the interrelated topics of war, violence, and religion, particularly in English and French, and a superficial treatment of his main sources.

The ostensible focus of Crispin's study is religious violence in the First Crusade. His thesis is that an understanding among contemporaries that the crusade campaign was organized and supported by God for the purpose of taking vengeance on Muslims for the pollution of Christian holy sites led to »excessive acts of violence« (p. 206). Aside from brief references to crusading letters, as well as a lengthier treatment of Pope Eugenius III's crusading bull »Quantum Praedecessores« (1145), Crispin draws almost exclusively on crusading narratives. However, notably missing from Crispin's roster of sources is Ralph of Caen's »Gesta Tancredi«. The neglect of Ralph's work, without even an explanation for why it is not apropos to this study, is particularly disconcerting given Crispin's expressed intention to detail the ostensibly extraordinary levels of violence committed by the crusaders against their Muslim opponents. Ralph offers what today is sometimes denoted as a »pornography of violence«, particularly in his depictions of the actions of his protagonist Tancred, the nephew of Bohemond of Taranto, and future prince of Antioch. Any study that deals with religious violence in the First Crusade must deal with this text.

In the introduction, Crispin offers a brief overview of the largely German language treatment of violence (*Gewalt*) as a sociological phenomenon, before tying his own study to the similarly German language scholarly tradition of attempting to examine contemporary understanding of war, rather than



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examining the actual conduct of war. Crispin then turns to a short discussion of his historiographical sources. Notably, Crispin tends both here and throughout his text to cite German language scholarship, and to omit pertinent English works even when these are listed in the bibliography. As noted above, Crispin does not draw upon any of the pertinent French scholarship, and includes just two French language works in the entire bibliography.

In the first chapter, Crispin sets the stage for his argument regarding the supposedly hyper-violent nature of the First Crusade by asserting that Pope Urban II always intended for the campaign to be directed against Jerusalem for the purpose of avenging the pollution of this holy city by the Muslims. Although he recognizes the problematic transmission of Urban's sermon at Clermont on 27 November 1095, Crispin confidently asserts that the only reasonable conclusion is that the pope, drawing upon the model of Gregory VII, preached a war of vengeance.

Crispin does not address the lengthy scholarly controversy about Urban's goals, including his desire to bring about a reunification of the western and eastern churches, which calls into a question a mono-causal explanation of papal policy. In addition, it is likely that many scholars will not agree with Crispin's assertion that Christian military operations in Iberia, including those supported by Urban in his earlier position as grand prior of Cluny, played no role in shaping contemporary conceptions of holy war, despite the exceptionally important role played by the order of Cluny in Christian military operations in Spain. Indeed, Crispin does not address this point at all in the text or notes, despite including H. E. J. Cowdrey's study on Cluny and the First Crusade in the bibliography.

The second chapter begins with a brief overview of the First Crusade campaign, and then turns to the depiction of violence by crusaders in the eye-witness accounts of the First Crusade. Crispin attempts to tie these depictions of violent behavior to a concomitant stress by the crusade chroniclers on God's support for the crusaders and their own role as holy warriors, including the images of white clad saints bearing golden arms participating in the battle at Antioch on 3 June 1098. His conclusion is that the heightened religious fervor of the crusaders, created from the outset by a papally-sanctioned war of vengeance, led to unprecedented levels of violence by the western Christians against their opponents.

This conclusion, however, is problematic in numerous ways. First, as Crispin is compelled to admit, there is nothing new about the claims of divine support, the violence committed against defeated enemies, or the religious rituals seeking divine intervention. These had all been present in Christian warfare for centuries before the First Crusade. Crispin's argument comes down to the assertion that the crusaders were so much more violent and were so much more committed to the idea that they were fighting with God's support and for God, that they consequently were engaged in a fundamentally different type of war.

But in the absence of anything resembling statistical data, even on its own terms, this claim amounts to nothing more than an unsupported assertion. In this context, Crispin also



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completely ignores the extensive English language scholarship on the treatment of enemies, particularly the crucial studies by John Gillingham, which would have gone a long way toward contextualizing the depiction of violence in the crusading sources.

This is not, however, the only problem with Crispin's argument. In the introduction, Crispin promised a study of perceptions of war rather than the actual conduct of war, and in chapter two, he eliminates this boundary and claims that the crusaders actually behaved in an ultra-violent pattern beyond that seen in previous wars. However, in making this leap, Crispin ignores the lengthy scholarly tradition that emphasizes the highly pragmatic nature of the relationship between the leaders of the crusade and their Muslim opponents, which often included truces, treaties, and even formal cooperation. He also does not ask about the rhetorical strategies of the authors of the crusade chronicles, and the models that they employed to discuss violence. In this context, the »Gesta Tancredi«, with its prose-metric style, may have suggested to Crispin the influence of the contemporary *chansons de geste* entertainment literature, with their lovingly detailed depiction of dueling warriors, decapitations, and spilling of entrails.

Crispin continues his discussion of the First Crusade in a brief chapter three, drawing on what he calls the second wave of crusade narratives by Robert the Monk, Guibert of Nogent, Balderich of Dol, and Albert of Aachen. He considers the way in which the first three of these authors altered their main source, that is the anonymous »Gesta Francorum«, and argues that they tended to emphasize even more than their model God's role in the campaign. Crispin then turns to a discussion of Albert of Aachen's history, and largely repeats the findings made by Susan Edgington, regarding the central role of Peter the Hermit in preaching the crusade.

Crispin concludes that all four of these works deal at length with the concept of pollution of the Christian holy sites, and concludes that by the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, the First Crusade had come to be understood broadly as a war of vengeance that resulted in the purification of Jerusalem. He does not, however, deal with the problem of whether retrospective accounts can be used to support his conclusions regarding actual behavior in the previous chapter.

The fourth chapter begins with a brief summary of the course of the Second Crusade in the East before turning to a discussion of Pope Eugenius' crusading bull. Here Crispin reiterates the scholarly consensus that the First Crusade provided an exceptionally important model for Eugenius III. Consistent with his argument that the papacy was responsible for unleashing a new type of war of vengeance, Crispin emphasizes Eugenius' comments regarding the pollution of holy sites, and the need to recover the ostensibly »holy« city of Edessa.

Problematically for Crispin's argument, Bernard of Clairvaux, the great theologian and crusade preacher as well as Eugenius' teacher, was not particularly interested in Edessa, whether as a holy city or not. Rather, Bernard was much more concerned in his letters about the overall danger posed to the Christian position in the holy land. In order to justify his claim that the central concern of Christians in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century was about religious pollution



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and the need to spill huge quantities of blood to gain vengeance, Crispin finds it necessary to try to diminish the importance of Bernard in preaching the crusade and to elevate Eugenius' role. It is doubtful whether many specialists will follow Crispin here. He concludes the chapter with a brief discussion of Odo of Deuil's account of the Second Crusade and the unobjectionable observation that Louis VII's chaplain sought to provide guidance to subsequent crusaders about errors to avoid.

The fifth chapter, which is titled »A New Point of View in the Holy Land?: The Perspective of the Crusader Lordships«, does not deliver on this theme but rather is focused almost exclusively on the work of William of Tyre (# 1186), and his treatment of the First Crusade. Crispin's focus here is on the question of whether William actually offered a tolerant view of Muslims, as Rainer Christoph Schwinges had argued, or was instead still largely concerned with the themes of pollution and religious violence that Crispin sees dominating the discourse of the First Crusade. Crispin concludes that in most respects, William follows his sources in discussion of the First Crusade and does not exhibit any noticeable change in attitude, other than criticizing Christian rulers for violating truces and other agreements made with the Muslims.

In a brief conclusion Crispin reiterates the main points in the individual chapters. The volume is equipped with an apparatus of notes, which in many cases are not reflective of the scholarly works included in the bibliography. The text is rounded out with an index, and does not include any images, maps, or figures.

Ultimately, this is a book in search of a purpose. Much of what Crispin writes already has been said in detail by other scholars. Crispin's specific arguments regarding the supposedly heightened levels of violence by the crusaders, particularly in the sack of Jerusalem in 1099, have been addressed and rejected by numerous scholars, and he does not offer new evidence to indicate that the earlier interpretations are incorrect. The one issue raised by David Crispin that would benefit from an extended analysis that focused on the rhetorical strategies and models of the authors of crusade narratives is the *chansonesque* depiction of violence in battle. Unfortunately, readers will not find that discussion here.



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