Tyerman, Christopher Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press 2006 Pp. xvi, 1024 $35.00 (hb) 978-0-674-02387-1

review Transformed encoding to P5 TEI.

It is the aim of this volume to present, as the editors put it, a "sweeping new vision of one of history's most astounding events: the Crusades." Christopher Tyerman, a lecturer in medieval history at Oxford University, undertook this daunting task in a 1000+ page volume published by the Harvard University Press in 2006. By presenting a "New History of the Crusades," Tyerman attempts to correct our modern and often simplistic misconceptions about the Crusades and the numerous wars that were fought between Western Christendom and Islam from 1096 to 1500. While such an objective is alarmingly ambitious, Tyerman's volume certainly comes off as an impressive achievement by its sheer size and scope. His book is also the most complete and thorough survey of the Crusades to be published in recent years, if not decades. This has led many commentators to forecast that Tyerman's volume will inevitably replace Steven Runciman's landmark "History of the Crusades" as the standard work on the Crusades for scholars and students alike. However, even though Tyerman does offer interesting new insight on the Crusades and a much needed reconsideration of Runciman's 50 year-old classic, a more cautious appraisal of his work is in order.

Overall, Tyerman's book is striking in its scope and breadth. The volume is divided into 8 parts and 26 chapters that focus mainly on the four major crusades of the twelfth century, although a few of these sections are also devoted to the Crusader States and the expeditions of the thirteenth century and beyond. While the author mainly deals with the campaigns in the Middle East throughout most chapters, he also focuses his attention on the crusades against Muslim Spain and the pagan Baltic region. In addition, the book is endowed with over 30 color illustrations of familiar crusade images, many of them contemporary to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These illustrations are supplemented by a fair number of detailed and comprehensive maps, which are certainly welcome additions to the book and helpful tools for all readers. Tyerman's text is also followed by endnotes that are both detailed and concise, as well as a select list of further readings, a list of popes and monarchs mentioned throughout the book, and an index. Although all of these appendices are most useful and relevant to the book, scholars and students would nonetheless have benefited from a more complete bibliography. After all, if Tyerman's book is meant to replace Runciman's magnum opus, such a bibliography--despite being cumbersome--would certainly have been useful to future generations of readers willing to use the volume as the new standard for Crusade history.

In itself, Tyerman's reassessment of the Crusades is magisterial, encyclopedic and above all meticulous. The volume is an impressive work of historical criticism, bent almost solely on corrective scholarship and the importance of demolishing any myths or misconceptions about crusading motives and ideals. As a result, Tyerman's overall interest is to present the Crusades as they were in the period they occurred in, rather than understanding them from the perspective of our own twentieth century concerns and world conflicts. Among the book's many novelties, the author argues against and corrects past and long-held theories, such as the notion that the Crusades were motivated by colonialism, or that they were fueled solely by politics and economics. Tyerman also dismisses once and for all our often naïve conception of an intolerant and rapacious West that ended up corrupting an otherwise innocent and tolerant Islam. In fact, throughout his reassessment, the author neither vilifies Islam nor does he surrender to the temptation of accusing the West for past crimes or mistakes; instead, he focuses on the Crusades' human paradoxes and avoids any oversimplifications. Most interesting, however, is Tyerman's reconsideration of important historical figures from the Crusades, which he generally attempts to present in a more realistic and complex fashion. Often vilified individuals such as Bohemund of Taranto, Guy of Lusignan or Reynald of Châtillon are thus rehabilitated and recognized for their qualities and overall accomplishments. All in all, Tyerman's work is certainly refreshing, as it presents the Crusades from a more nuanced and modern perspective, while having the breadth and scope to guide the reader through the tiresome complexities of past historiography.

On the other hand, this volume, despite all of its qualities and achievements, cannot hope to replace Runciman's work as the new standard for Crusade history in university classrooms. To begin with, Tyerman's book is not an easy read and does not have the elegance of style that immortalized Runciman's volume among crusade enthusiasts for more than half a century. Some sentences are so complex and confused that they leave the casual reader scratching his head as to the author's precise standpoint on a given topic. Even readers familiar with the Crusades might have difficulty sifting through numerous references to events, people and places that the author fails to describe or insist upon. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that Tyerman's work is above all a commentary and a critical reassessment of Crusade history, and not historical narrative in the style of Runciman. Therefore, readers will most likely feel the need to consult Runciman before turning to Tyerman, if only for the basics and a simpler overview of the Crusades as a whole. For all of these reasons, Tyerman's book will probably have a limited appeal among future readers. The academic community might pick up Tyerman's work for a while, simply because it is up to date on current historiographical problems, but will undoubtedly turn to a more elegant and convenient survey once it is written. University students, for their part, will almost certainly stick with Runciman's more stylish, although very outdated, history of the Crusades. Everything considered, Tyerman's book is not for beginners and will therefore likely not surpass Runciman's in years to come.

Nevertheless, historians and other enthusiasts will certainly appreciate this book for its novelties and interesting insights on the crusade
movement. Scholars will also gather much valuable information from the book's detailed content, as well as Tyerman's impressive command of primary sources. Despite its literary flaws, this volume remains a truly impressive and fascinating account of Crusade history that no medievalist can ignore. If considered as a reference book rather than an introduction to the Crusades, Tyerman's book might very well guarantee its place in academic circles for years to come.

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