

discontinues ou incomplètes, elles permettent une analyse plus fine et certainement plus en phase avec l'époque et le lieu étudiés (par ex. B. Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300–1348*). En conséquence, les comparaisons peuvent difficilement aboutir à des certitudes.

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MICHAEL A. KÖHLER (trans. Peter M. Holt. Revised, edited and introduced by Konrad Hirschler):

*Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades.*

(The Muslim World in the Age of the Crusades.) xv, 368 pp. Leiden: Brill, 2013. €136. ISBN 978 90 04 24857 1.

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In 1991, Michael Köhler published *Allianzen und Verträge zwischen fränkischen und islamischen Herrschern im Vorderen Orient*. Reviewers such as the late James Powell commented positively on the work and noted that in order to reach a wider readership it deserved an English language translation. Professor Peter Holt took up this challenge and Dr Konrad Hirschler completed the task to give us the volume we have now. The result is a provocative and important book that offers a detailed analysis of relations between (and amongst) the Frankish settlers in the Levant, the Western European crusaders and the contemporary powers of the Muslim Near East.

The familiar image of First Crusaders is that of zealous fanatics, spurred on by the inflammatory and uncompromising messages of Western clerics and intent upon killing Muslims and recovering Jerusalem. As Köhler shows, however, even during the course of the crusade itself the Frankish leadership chose to contemplate co-operation with the Fatimids of Egypt. After the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, the few hundred knights who decided to stay in the Levant founded what we know as the Crusader States. This new position as permanent residents in the region caused the settlers to recalibrate the balance between practicality and rhetoric – with the outcome falling decidedly towards the former. They adapted quickly to local political conditions and displayed a different and more flexible perspective on relations with the Muslims, one that was a far cry from the preaching of the First Crusade.

While earlier historians have noted several occasions when individual Muslim powers formed alliances or made truces with particular Frankish powers, for example those between Jerusalem and Damascus in the early 1140s, this is the most systematic survey of such arrangements during the twelfth century. In fact – and this is integral to the author's argument as well as being one of the book's most important contributions – it is also an outline of relations amongst the highly fragmented Muslim rulers of the Levant. An understanding of existing regional power structures in the decades prior to the First Crusade provides vital context for events during the expedition. Muslim disunity as a reason for the success of the First Crusade is now widely acknowledged but the framework within which Köhler sets these internal struggles is then carried over to incorporate the Franks as they quickly moved from the language of conquest to the realities of settlement. He argues that the concept of “no place” predominated; meaning that there was an

overriding desire to avoid one political body establishing dominance over the area. Should Aleppo, for example, look too threatening (possibly in conjunction with a Frankish state), then other Muslim and Frankish groups would make a treaty to counter this; similarly, the Fatimids often feared Damascene or Syrian strength and this sometimes caused them to work with the Franks. Thus, issues of religious ideology were subsumed by this practical desire to maintain a degree of independence. The periodic arrival of Western crusaders, people not party to such a nuanced structure and motivated largely by a desire for war, was one way in which such a framework could be disturbed. Of course, crusading was, by its very nature, temporary, but the needs of the Franks in the East might bring them into conflict with their co-religionists, as at the end of the siege of Damascus (1148) when the settlers encouraged the withdrawal of the Christian armies, in part to prevent the city falling into the hands of the northern Syrian Zengids. In this close dissection of diplomatic relations between the myriad competing powers Köhler offers much that is original and of lasting value, not least in illuminating the formation of condominium (in essence, equal division of lands and revenue between Franks and Muslims), a legal institution which evolved specifically to deal with the circumstances of the Levant.

Where the book both displays its age and, for this reviewer at least, is less successful, is in its treatment of religious motivation during the rise of Nur al-Din and Saladin. Köhler dismisses as mere propaganda the idea that genuine religious impulses steered their actions and even as the two men loudly proclaimed their desire for jihad he continues to fit relations between the Franks and the various Muslim powers into his (largely secular) “no place” thesis. His work does not take into account the pressure of popular religious feeling or the influence of the religious classes on the leadership. Yes, of course there was an element of propaganda in the actions of Nur al-Din and Saladin, and the overlap between political advantage and religiosity was, at times, considerable. But to separate popular religious feeling from the actions of political leaders – not to mention any sense of the two men’s personal piety – is not convincing. Köhler undertook his research during the 1980s and this criticism derives in large part from work produced in subsequent decades; in that sense it is unfair because historians have since come to explore and to give increasing recognition to the centrality of religion as a driving factor in the struggle for the Holy Land, especially when viewed from a Muslim perspective. Writers such as Hillenbrand, Talmon-Heller, Mourad and Lindsay, Cobb, Eddé, and Latiff have, to varying degrees, examined this issue and given us a far more comprehensive understanding of it. To an extent, therefore, Köhler’s work is compromised, but overall there is no doubt that this (highly fluent) translation was a thoroughly worthwhile project; James Powell was indeed correct in his assessment that the book merits a wide readership. The task for historians in the future is to blend some of Köhler’s excellent and insightful work into a broader picture of the cross-cultural engagements of the twelfth-century Levant.

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