

The Bible and Crusade Narrative in the Twelfth Century. By Katherine Allen Smith. Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2020. xi + 294 pp. \$99.00 hardcover.

Historians of the crusading movement long have understood that the narrative accounts written during the first half of the twelfth century include extensive quotations from and allusions to the scriptures. In her analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed by the authors of these crusade narratives, Katherine Allen Smith, associate professor of history at the University of Puget Sound, seeks to “privilege” the scriptural materials and exegetical methods that they employed. Smith argues that only this narrow focus on the scriptural education and world view of twelfth-century writers will permit modern readers to understand the intellectual and spiritual milieu in which these texts were composed and, concomitantly, the scriptural prism through which contemporaries viewed the early crusading movement.

In the introduction, Smith sets the stakes for her examination of the use of scriptural language by the authors of crusade narratives, arguing that the considerable number of references to and quotations of scripture demonstrate both the omnipresence of biblical imagery in the Latin West and well-established practice of medieval Christians connecting their own experiences to the scriptures. Based on Smith’s count, these references average just over one per modern printed page of surviving crusading narratives. Smith concludes that essential to the process of recovering the thought-world of twelfth-century authors of crusading narratives, and their audiences, is conceptualizing their works of history within the context of contemporary biblical exegesis, which she argues dominated both their education and intellectual *praxis*.

The first chapter begins with a treatment of the education provided to monks and clerics in the monastic and cathedral schools of the eleventh-century West. Smith emphasizes the centrality of exegetical learning and analysis in this education, and she presents the second half of the eleventh century in particular as a period of exegetical revival. By contrast, Smith asserts, historical writing was a minor art, which not only was of marginal importance in the schools but also was read by few people. In this context, Smith also claims that students of history, in contrast to those working in exegesis, had no theoretical treatises upon which to draw for models and inspiration in the period before the twelfth century.

While one can readily agree with Smith that exegesis played a significant role both in the education and intellectual activity of clerics and monks throughout the Latin West, her claims regarding the role and status of historical writing do not bear close scrutiny. It is not controversial in current scholarship, for example, that historical writing played a central role in the education of both secular and clerical elites throughout pre-crusade Europe. Moreover, the early medieval West enjoyed a long tradition of theorizing about the writing of history and its purpose that drew upon classical models. The reading of both classical and medieval historiographical texts was enhanced even further through the reading of Cicero’s work on the rhetoric of history, which was widely known and studied in precisely the same schools discussed by Smith in the context of exegetical learning.

In chapter 2, Smith offers a quantitative approach to examining the impact of scriptural texts on the thinking of the authors of crusade narratives. The quantitative basis

for her conclusions is provided in two lengthy appendices. Smith draws several interesting conclusions here, including the fact that the Old and New Testaments both provided important interpretive lenses for understanding and describing the events of the First Crusade. Through an analysis of the scriptural references made by individual authors, Smith also shows that, although all crusade historians drew extensively on the Bible as a whole, each of them demonstrated a unique pattern of quotations and allusions.

Smith examines three issues in chapter 3. The first of these is the effort of crusade historians to draw connections between the crusaders and earlier “chosen peoples” inhabiting the Holy Land. Smith then turns to a discussion of the ways in which crusade narratives present the suffering and triumphs of crusaders in the context of the spiritual election of the Israelites. In the final part of the chapter, Smith examines the rhetorical strategies of the crusade historians in their effort to use the Israelites to prefigure the crusaders at the same time they cast aside contemporary Jews as the legitimate heirs of the Israelites.

Chapter 4 begins with a detailed discussion of the impact of Augustine’s model of the two cities on medieval exegetical thought. Smith argues that crusade narratives consistently presented the struggle between the spiritual love for God and the earthly lust for material ends, embodied in the over-arching concepts of the two imagined cities of Jerusalem and Babylon, as an essential metaphor for the First Crusade. The crusaders themselves took on the role of inhabitants of Augustine’s Jerusalem by embracing *caritas*, poverty, and exile. By contrast, their Muslim opponents, particularly the Egyptians, were cast in the role of pagan Babylonians, with Cairo as the earthly Babylon. This chapter is followed by a brief conclusion in which Smith reiterates the main arguments of the book.

In sum, Smith has addressed an important lacuna in the intellectual history of the first half of the twelfth century, rightly emphasizing the importance of both the scriptures and the associated corpus of exegetical literature to the conceptual framework of the authors of crusade narratives. She also has done important work in describing some of the ways in which these authors drew upon the vast repository of scriptural images and concepts to tell the story of a military campaign that was understood by practitioners of biblical exegesis as having multiple layers of meaning. Where Smith likely will lose some of her readers is her insistence on treating the scriptures and scriptural exegesis in isolation from the many other factors that impinged upon the intellectual and conceptual models of early twelfth-century writers. Ralph of Caen, the crusade historian with whose work I am most familiar, enjoyed an exceptionally broad education and utilized many models when he sat down to write his *Gesta Tancredi* in the early twelfth century. These included not only classical works of history and mythology, on which he drew far more than he did the scriptures in writing his crusade narrative, but also the lengthy tradition of Norman history writing. It is to be hoped that future analyses of crusade narratives will address the interplay of the multiple intellectual traditions that shaped the learning of both churchmen and laymen in the crusading era.

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