

WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL CRUSADES: THEIR ROLE IN THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of the role women played in the medieval crusades and their role in success and failure. Aside from considering the evidence that women participated in Crusade expeditions as pilgrims, combatants, or camp followers, the wide range of contributions women made outside the battlefield and in propaganda, recruitment, fundraising, and organization. Attention is paid to the influence of women. The role of caring for the Crusaders and their families and property, and providing liturgical support to the Crusaders in their campaigns at home. It is to show the gender boundaries that defined roles, their origins, and development. This article reviews the available research and specifically illustrates two prominent women, Margaret of Beverley, who joined the Crusades in the 1180s, and Catherine of Siena, an ardent and outspoken supporter of the Crusades in the 1180s. 1370s.

The history of medieval women has received considerable attention in recent decades from scholars who have studied women as individuals or social groups, their perceived roles, and their varied experiences in many aspects of medieval life. Nevertheless, there are areas of medieval society. another not attracted much interest from historians dealing with women or gender. One such area is the medieval crusade movement. The recent publication of a volume of collected essays entitled *Gendering the crusades* and edited by Susan Edgington and Sarah Lambert presents but a first inroad into a largely uncultivated field of scholarly pursuit. The majority of studies in *Gendering the crusades* are concerned with the military roles of men and women on the battlefields of the crusades and the way in which (male) medieval authors described the crusade as a fundamentally male activity. The female crusade experience is difficult to assess because crusade chroniclers, as a rule, represented participants in terms of stereotyped gender roles, which largely obscured women's contributions. As a number of the contributors show, women on the crusade were represented not in their own right but with reference to an ideal of the crusader who was male, pious, obedient to God, and fearless in battle. Taking a lead from the earlier important contributions on the topic by Helen Nicholson and Robert Finucane, the essays in *Gendering the crusades* deal almost exclusively with the crusade to the Holy Land, the 12th and early 13th centuries, the 'crusader' societies of the Latin East and the military aspects of the crusade expeditions. They do not, however, reflect the broad scope of crusade studies that has emerged over the past 30 years and which has shown the crusade to be a movement lasting well into the early modern period, one which shaped conflicts not only on the frontiers of Christian Europe but also within it and profoundly affected large parts of medieval society even outside the crusade theatres

proper. But even if we look beyond the narrow scope of Gendering the crusades, there are only a handful of studies of women's contributions in other areas of the crusade movement.

The relative dearth of scholarly work concerning women in the crusade movement is matched by an almost complete absence of substantial studies on the role of women in medieval warfare in general. By comparison, the themes of 'women and 'gender' in wars and warfare during the post-medieval era have been the subject of much fruitful research in recent years. The apparent neglect of the question of women's roles in medieval warfare is all the more surprising if one considers Megan McLaughlin's hypothesis, which claims that access to the male-dominated sphere of warfare was much easier for many medieval women than for their counterparts in later centuries: at least up to the 14th century, medieval warfare was in essence based on feudal structures, which meant that aspects such as military training or the recruitment of warriors usually happened within the context of household and family. This gave medieval women, generally speaking, much better access to and greater familiarity with all aspects of warfare than in post-14th-century Europe, when warfare became increasingly professionalized and technical and was therefore further removed from the everyday experience of the majority of women. It thus comes as no surprise that, despite the bias of medieval sources, which tend to portray warfare as a fundamentally male activity, texts of the 10th to 13th centuries occasionally mention the active participation of women in warfare.¹⁰ Both topics, 'women and medieval warfare' as well as 'women and the crusade movement, should not, however, be reduced to the question of women's participation in military expeditions and warfare on the battlefield.

There has for a long time been a tendency to view wars as taking place in extraordinary situations divorced from the 'normal' world of everyday life. By the same token, warlike behaviour and mentalities have been considered to be governed by rules and traditions particular to war contexts, standing in clear contrast to patterns of behaviour and thought in 'normal', i.e., peaceful, circumstances. In contrast, recent developments, particularly in gender history, emphasize the connections and mutual interactions between women's and men's roles in times of war and peace, on the battlefield and on the home front. Recognition of gender roles in military contexts as having an impact on gendered behaviour in civilian life and vice versa, in the same way as gendered experience during wartime is said to shape the roles of men and women in everyday life in times of peace. From this perspective, the further investigation of themes linking war and gender, such as 'women and medieval warfare' or 'women and the crusade movement', seems a task worth tackling. In this essay, I want to survey the roles women played in the crusade movement by also including the vast area of women's contributions away from the battlefields and the purely military aspects of the crusades in the course of preparing for the campaigns and on the home front during the wars. The impact women had on the propaganda, recruitment, financing, and organizing of the crusades and their roles in looking after families and properties as well as providing liturgical support at home for crusaders on the campaign have been investigated systematically in only a few isolated studies, notably by Constance Rousseau, James Powell, and There's de Hemptinne. My aim is to map

out the gender boundaries, their genesis, and development, which defined women's roles both within crusade armies and in the wider crusade movement in the 12th and 13th centuries and beyond. In order to do so, I shall draw on available studies which touch on the roles of women within the crusade movement, and also introduce, as particularly illustrative examples, the experiences of two prominent female exponents, Margaret of Beverley, who went on crusade in the 1180s, and Catherine of Siena, an ardent and outspoken promoter of the crusade in the 1370s.

Margaret of Beverley's story, which is hardly mentioned in the existing studies, probably represents the best-documented case of one woman's experience on the crusade. Margaret's brother, the Cistercian Thomas of Froidmont, recorded her story in his *Hodoeporicon et pericula Margarite Iherosolimitane*, which is now available in a new scholarly edition by Paul Gerhard Schmidt.¹⁴ The *Hodoeporicon* tells Margaret's life from her birth during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land around the middle of the 12th century to her death as a nun in the Cistercian monastery of Montreuil-sous-Laon around 1215. Written in the form of an *opus germanium*, i.e., divided into a prose and a verse section, Thomas mentions the principal stations of the sister's life. Few episodes are detailed and not a complete account of Margaret's life. Their voyage to the Holy Land in the mid-1180s, however, is a large part of *Hodoeporicon's* poetic portion. The text describes Margaret's Crusade as follows: As an adult, Margaret bore her cross, travelled through the Holy Land, and arrived in Jerusalem after the Battle of Hattin, just before the city was besieged by Saladin's forces in the late summer of 1187. During the 15-day siege, Margaret fought the defenders on the ramparts and was wounded. After Christians surrendered Jerusalem to Saladin, Margaret was one of the women released after her ransom was paid. Nevertheless, Margaret was soon captured by some Muslims and as a slave laborer, she was held captive for 15 months. Finally, early in 1187, the Christian citizens of Tyre freed her and her other captives. Margaret then decided to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of her patron saint, Saint Margaret, in Antioch, but she had no money and had to work as a laundress for some time, so she postponed. Islamic forces involved. After the battle, she is said to have continued her journey to Tripoli after taking part in the looting of dead Muslims. In the summer of 1191, she was at Acre, from where she returned to Europe. Thomas von Froidmont, in his "Itinerary", dealt particularly with the hero's sister's piety and the suffering and sacrifices she suffered. At the beginning of his text, Thomas introduced the theme of the suffering of godly sacrifice and the good that derives from it by quoting a passage said to be from St. same token, Thomas of Froidmont portrayed his sister as a 'servant of Christ, and her crusade as service for Christ done in Christ's name. But Margaret of Beverley did not become a martyr and thus did not suffer sacrificial death in a radical interpretation of an *imitatio Christi*; twice the Virgin Mary miraculously saved her from being killed by her captors.²⁶ This marked a re-orientation in Margaret's life: instead of following Christ into death as a crusader, she became a nun in the Cistercian nunnery of Montreuil-sous-Laon. In Thomas of Froidmont's interpretation, this re-orientation did not, however, change Margaret's focus in life, i.e., her preoccupation with the suffering and death of Christ. Symbolically, so Thomas argued, his sister's devotion to the

Virgin Mary, whose life was so closely linked with her son's suffering, still kept her in close spiritual touch with Christ and his passion.

In essence, Thomas wanted to explain the salutary sense of suffering and deprivation in his sister Margaret's life, first as a crusader and then as a nun, against the background of her Christocentric devotion. The story of Margaret's crusade to the Holy Land served Thomas as the central narrative element to convey this meaning. Even if the *Hodoeporicon* faithfully renders historical details, Thomas of Froidmont's text was not primarily written as a historical record of his sister's crusade. This explains why there is no detailed information about the concrete circumstances of Margaret of Beverley's journey to the Holy Land or indeed her exact motivation. If we presume that Margaret left on a crusade around the middle of the 1180s, it is probable that she was traveling alone or with a group of other pilgrims independent of a crusade army proper. We do not know whether she expected to be involved in warlike action. Even though no major crusade campaign was being organized at the time, Margaret could well have followed other individual crusaders who expected to serve with the armies of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In the years prior to the battle of Hattin, there would have been plenty of opportunity to do so. On the basis of Thomas of Froidmont's short report, we also do not know whether Margaret went to Jerusalem in order to serve in the defense forces or whether she happened to fulfill her pilgrim's obligations when the city came under attack. Regarding the way in which Margaret was involved in the fighting at Jerusalem, Thomas's text describes how she fought on top of the walls like a 'heroine' (*virago*) and how she was wearing a helmet 'like a man, even though she used an upside-down cooking pot instead of a real helmet; Margaret was portrayed as a woman who feigned to be a man, like *tufa* pretending to be sapphire'. Margaret was also said to have brought the drink to the fighting men because it was hot and there were no breaks in the fighting.³⁰ This description shows many parallels with portrayals of other female crusaders involved in the fighting during sieges. As Helen Nicholson, Keren Caspi-Reisfeld, and Rasa Mazeika have highlighted in recent studies, women were repeatedly portrayed in auxiliary roles, drafted in to fight with weapons when not enough male crusaders had been available, operating catapults, helping with filling ditches or supplying the fighting men with food and drink. The description of Margaret of Beverley's experiences on the crusade thus fits the traditional stereotyped image of the female crusader that narrative sources convey. This is not only true for Margaret's purported role during the siege of Jerusalem but also for the description of her captivity, which also reflects typical experiences attributed to women captured during the wars in the Holy Land, recently analyzed by Yvonne Friedman.³² The portrayal of Margaret's role during the siege of Jerusalem reveals a fundamental problem hampering the analysis of women's roles on crusade, namely stereotyping. As Sarah Lambert, Matthew Bennett, and Michael Evans have recently pointed out, the vast majority of narrative accounts of female crusaders' on the campaign were written by male authors, who portrayed crusading as a typically male activity.³³ The most poignant expression of this designation of crusading as a male sphere can be found in an often-quoted passage of the *Itinerarium peregrinorum* referring to the preparations for the Third Crusade:

The enthusiasm for the new pilgrimage was such that already it was not a question of who had received the cross but who had not yet done so. A great many men sent each other wool and distaff, implying that if they exempted themselves from this expedition they would only be fit for women's work. The story of how a group of women camp followers of the Third Crusade decided to behead many Muslim prisoners of their own accord was unusual in the narrative accounts. It would have allowed us to draw on individual behaviors on the basis of established independent role models of crusader women. It's hard to say why she joined. The roles of women in modern texts are: Mention is made of women who were involved in various kinds of logistical work on trains and among camp holders. I do not know if they viewed the Crusades primarily as a spiritual experience because they bore their crosses, but there is no apparent reason to believe otherwise. The men mentioned Another group of crusaders were women, mostly women of the noble nobility, who led their own contingent of (male) vassals. They, therefore, chose a military role that contributed to the Crusaders' war effort, although few of these nobles probably took an active part in the fighting. Training enlisted in the Crusades as armed combatants. As noted by Carol Hillenbrand and again by Helen Nicholson, Muslim sources report that many female Crusaders were forced to fight against their own forces. but they perhaps overemphasize their importance and number, emphasizing the immoral and even perverse attitude of Christian soldiers toward their wives.

In contrast, as noted above, Christian sources tend to portray the Crusade effort as a typically male activity, ignoring specific military contributions by women. Proposed by Maureen Purcell However, the claim that they were not technically Crusaders is unconvincing, as most of the female participants were not specifically called Crusaders in their sources Before the beginning of the 13th century. However, there is still a great need for research in this area. No. It is difficult to identify a single adequate description of the full range of women's roles in the context of the Crusade campaigns. It's equally difficult to judge. After all, the Crusades weren't just collective military actions like other wars. Crusades had a strong personal component because they were seen as personal acts of service and devotion to God, shaped by the model of pilgrimage as a journey to serve a particular saint. The service to God of the individual crusaders was incorporated into the collective effort of the crusaders but was not necessarily directed to the military success of the crusaders. The goal was the salvation of souls. Crusaders are expected to receive God's grace in return for their service on the crusade. This was conceived as the perfect indulgence desired by the Crusaders, mediated through the Sacrament of Asceticism, and obtained through the fulfillment of the formal standards inherent in the Crusader Oath. Crusaders' motives for both men and women. Participation in the Crusades did not necessarily depend on taking an active role in the military or logistical aspects of the Crusade campaign. The Crusades also offered participants the opportunity to pursue their desire for transcendence and redemption in military expeditions. please. This religious motive largely did not depend on the gender of the individual Crusaders and encouraged men and women alike to join the Crusades.

Catherine of Siena's enthusiasm for the crusade was not of principally political nature but was motivated by her ideas of human redemption shaped by her Christocentric mysticism. For her, the crusade was closely bound up with the figure of Christ and its metaphorical meanings. Crusading primarily meant paying service to Christ and his bride the Church. In 1375, Catherine wrote to John Hawk wood, a mercenary leader working in Italy, suggesting he stop fighting other Christians and enter the 'service of the good gentle Jesus as a repayment for all the sins we have committed against our Saviour' and join 'Christ's companies' on crusade in order to free the holy sites from the hands of 'the unbelieving dogs'. Around the same time, she asked Joan of Anjou, the queen of Naples, 'in the name of Christ crucified to come to the aid of Christ's bride [i.e. the Church] in her need with your possessions, your person and your counsel' and to join her, Catherine, on crusade in order 'to die for Christ'.⁹⁴ To a group of nuns from Fiesole, Catherine suggested, also in 1375, that they go to Jerusalem and seek martyrdom there: 'I am inviting you to shed your blood for him [i.e. Christ] just as he shed his for you.'⁹⁵ Her frequent exhortations to Pope Gregory XI to speed up his preparations for the crusade were also worded in terms of the obligation of the Vicar of Christ to follow Christ's wish.⁹⁶ In fact, in practically all her letters of the 1370s concerning the crusade, Catherine spoke of the crusade as a service for Christ and his Church.⁹⁷ In terms of Catherine of Siena's particular brand of mysticism, crusading was above all seen as a service for Christ the Crucified, who shed his blood for the salvation of humankind. For her, going on a crusade was one way of getting in touch with the redemptive powers of Christ, symbolized by his blood. In the final Catherine, herself gladly accepted conclusion 98, which meant that the Crusaders would gladly die for Christ: "Blood for blood," as Catherine called it in several places. "Giving 99 An extreme form of Christ-centred devotion. Even the role of the Pope in the face of the Crusades was embedded in the language of the atoning attributes of Christ's blood. Catherine called Gregory XI. As the founders of the Crusades, they were responsible for distributing Christ's Blood to the believers as the "basement" of Christ's blood. For them, the Crusades were also a way of saving mankind, both Christians and "non-believers." did. This collective aspect of the Crusades was also expressed through the metaphor of the body of Christ. In one of her visions, Catherine saw images of Christians and supposedly converted "unbelievers" people marching through a wound in his side to the body of Christ. A believer who is one with God. Thus, Catherine of Siena promoted the Crusades as a way of salvation and, eschatologically, of establishing a divine order. Catherine's Christ-centred approach to the Crusades was nothing new in the late 14th century. By the mid-thirteenth century, the emphasis on imitative Christ ideas, which presented the Crusades as a means of penance and personal salvation, was already established as a central element of Crusade ideology and propaganda. Catherine Siena's clergy, simply offered a radical interpretation of the ideas of imitative Christ and expressed it in their own exuberant language of Christ's blood mysticism. the almost complete absence of the idea that When the Crusades were presented as a countermeasure against "infidels" and as an opportunity for martyrdom, the martial aspect was only implied.

Ideology 103 But they were not part of Catherine's crusader conception. As a result, their views of the Crusaders were largely unaffected by gender differences. For Catherine, the Crusades were a means of achieving martyrdom for both men and women, and she did not give much thought to the military aspects of the Crusades, thus creating a distinction between the male realm on the battlefield and the female realm on the domestic front. The gender split between the two was very difficult. Not very important. For this reason, she encouraged men and women alike to carry their crosses and join the Crusades the same reasons. Catherine of Siena's zeal for the Crusades was by no means the typical role women played in promoting the Crusades in the late Middle Ages. Her views and ways of advocating the crusade were clearly those of an extremely eccentric, but she was not the only woman taking an active role in furthering the cause of the crusades in this period.¹⁰⁴ It is therefore difficult to argue that Catherine's 'un-gendered' vision of the crusade represented a typically female view. Catherine's example, however, clearly illustrates that the crusade movement, despite its focus on the military expeditions of the crusade armies, was couched in religious mentalities and informed by religious discourses which could produce enthusiasm for the crusades that were not primarily tied to their political and military aims. Indeed, the crusade movement was always bound up with typical forms of medieval religious revivalism aimed at the renewal of Christian society by penance and greater devotion to God, at times with clear eschatological undertones. In the context of these overriding religious concerns, the gender divisions within the crusade movement between the battlefield and home front did not necessarily play a decisive role. As examples of women involved in the armies and the home front of the crusades, the stories of Margaret of Beverley and Catherine of Siena clearly show that gender roles within the crusade movement varied and changed according to context and that women's contributions went far beyond their involvement in other medieval wars. Despite the fact that gender divisions existed and gender roles were promoted to perpetuate those divisions, not only did some women participate in military campaigns, but also their participation in the domestic front. Because of the great involvement, the crusade was led by men and women. Helps ensure the holding of men's crusades. If we are to understand the crusader movement as the collective expression of the medieval religious culture sustained and influenced by much of medieval European society, then the crusader movement also needs to be explained.

References

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