

Holy Warriors - A Modern History of the Crusades by Jonathan Phillips.  
Bodley Head 2009.

It would not be unreasonable to describe Professor Jonathan Phillips as the doyen of Crusader history in view of his huge knowledge of the subject; it would be equally appropriate to state that, on the basis of his previous books on the Crusades published since 1996, he has established himself as the best known communicator of this major historical period alive today.

In Holy Warriors, Phillips brings to life as only he can various aspects of the several crusades, ranging from the first in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the crusade of Louis IX in the 13<sup>th</sup>; this is a narrative rich in both incident and individual, as might be expected, and while some are well-known to those with a modicum of knowledge of the Crusades, others are novel, such as the fevered and fetid atmosphere of the court in Jerusalem under Queen Melisende, a woman who both struggled against and overcame the attitudes of her time.

In the spirit of the post 9/11 world view, Phillips also introduces much material about events from a Muslim perspective, so often, with the exception of a focus on Saladin, otherwise ignored. Among this material Usama ibn Mundiqlh is a notable example; he was a writer and poet of great renown who was born just after the launch of the first Crusade and died, aged 93, a year after Saladin's reconquest of Jerusalem.

The word 'Modern' in the title is further justified by the final two chapters, when Phillips reflects on the enduring influence of the Crusades that drove Ferdinand and Isabella and led ultimately to the discovery of America, and then considers the influence of the Crusades in modern times, in politics, literature and the arts, and from both a Christian and Islamic perspective.

He starts his conclusion by quoting Churchill's famous saying 'The further back you look , the farther forward you can see', and makes it clear that much can be drawn from this historical period that is deeply negative, and into which extremists will all too happily tap, but also that there were periods of co-operation and even harmony and cross-fertilisation from which much could be learned in the cause of building a safer and securer future for us all.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh