



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *John D. Hosler, The Siege of Acre, 1189–1191: Saladin, Richard the Lionheart, and the Battle that Decided the Third Crusade*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. xv, 253; 12 black-and-white plates, 4 maps, and 4 tables. \$30. ISBN: 978-0-3002-1550-2.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/174238/>

Version: Published Version

---

**Other:**

Murray, AV (2021) John D. Hosler, *The Siege of Acre, 1189–1191: Saladin, Richard the Lionheart, and the Battle that Decided the Third Crusade*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. xv, 253; 12 black-and-white plates, 4 maps, and 4 tables. \$30. ISBN: 978-0-3002-1550-2. University of Chicago Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/711859>

---

© 2021 by the Medieval Academy of America. All rights reserved. Reproduced in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

was a repository of the sacred body and also the reliquary that embodied the religious and imperial ideals of the Safavid Empire” (290–1). Tombs, as well as their representation and the artifacts associated with them, served to commemorate a leader after their death, imbuing space and object with sacred meaning. Finally, Anthony Cutler offers a powerful concluding essay reflecting on the theme of temporality embedded in and carried through relics, both in practices of devotion over time and in relics’ scholarly treatment. Relics facilitate encounters with the sacred and rely upon an encounter’s repetition, in reproducible, serial, and recursive ways that have the effect of collapsing time and space to render the sacred present in the object. Far beyond the power of words, relics in their evasion of narrative fixity, remain with us. Such a brief summary cannot do justice to the immense detail gathered here, nor to the theoretical sophistication of each discussion. Suffice it to say, this is by far one of the most important and useful gatherings of scholarship to date on relics and their meanings.

ANNE E. LESTER, Johns Hopkins University

JOHN D. HOSLER, *The Siege of Acre, 1189–1191: Saladin, Richard the Lionheart, and the Battle that Decided the Third Crusade*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. xv, 253; 12 black-and-white plates, 4 maps, and 4 tables. \$30. ISBN: 978-0-3002-1550-2. doi:10.1086/711859

The two-year siege of the port of Acre by the forces of the Third Crusade has been tellingly likened to a “medieval siege of Troy” (by John H. Pryor in *The Medieval Way of War*, ed. Gregory I. Halfond [2015], 97–115). Indeed, while it may not have had the duration of the fabled conflict before the walls of Ilium, the siege of Acre more than made up for it in the intensity of action on both sides. The largest city and most important harbor in the kingdom of Jerusalem, Acre (modern ‘Akko, Israel) was seized by Saladin along with most of Palestine soon after his defeat of the Franks at Hattin in July 1187. Two years later Guy of Lusignan, king of Jerusalem, laid siege to the city, and as reinforcements arrived from the West in response to calls for a new crusade, they gradually established semi-permanent fortifications outside the walls, only to be in turn encircled and besieged by Saladin’s forces on the landward side. This double siege was a long, exhausting slog, characterized by hunger and deprivation on both sides, but as ever more ships and crusaders arrived from the West under Richard I of England, Philip II of France, and others, the military balance shifted, and after two years Saladin’s starving garrison was obliged to surrender the city, in defiance of his orders.

The siege is dutifully covered in most histories of the Crusades, but given the number of original sources in both Latin and Arabic that narrate its course in considerable detail, it is surprising that it has never formed the subject of a monograph, a lacuna that has now been met by John Hosler’s lively and accessible study. This presents a reconstruction of the course of the fighting, with analysis of the opposing forces, their commanders and strategy, logistical issues, and the political and economic factors that influenced the outcome of the campaign. The main episodes have long been well known, but Hosler’s analysis brings out several less-appreciated aspects. While the wider framework of the siege was a blockade (with the besiegers themselves blockaded), it was punctuated by seventy-five separate military actions (an average of one every eight or nine days!): crusader assaults on the city and sorties by its garrison, attacks and skirmishes on the crusader perimeter, and no fewer than eight major battles. Hosler gives the most detailed account to date of these events and their effects. Sea power was also crucial. We must marvel at how Western fleets regularly managed to land reinforcements, supplies, and siege machinery at the crusader camp despite having no harbor facilities; and although Saladin’s ships (operating out of Egypt) were often able to run the crusader blockade, they were rarely able to break out again. Thus, Saladin not only lost the best port

on the coast, but most of the Egyptian fleet that was stranded within it. Hosler also offers new evaluations of generalship on both sides. He argues that “Saladin’s inability to defeat the Christians at Acre was mostly of his own making” (164), largely through failure to follow up promising breakthroughs with direct assaults, despite his superiority in numbers. Conversely, Hosler concludes that Richard’s role as a commander has been much overrated, reminding us that he was present for less than two months, and for much of that time he was incapacitated by illness. The king’s personal charisma and his plentiful finances undoubtedly gave a boost to crusader morale at a crucial point, but Hosler emphasizes often overlooked initiatives before Richard’s arrival that were organized by Count Henry of Champagne, Geoffrey of Lusignan (brother to the king of Jerusalem), and even the much-maligned Philip II, who was the first commander to organize the undermining of Acre’s walls, a tactic that proved far more effective than assaults with ladders and siege machines (which were frequently burned down by the defenders). Richard has been almost universally condemned by historians for his massacre of several thousand members of Acre’s garrison, but Hosler questions whether medieval commanders can be judged according to modern ideas of war crimes, and points out that despite having acquired a reputation for humanity, Saladin also executed large numbers of prisoners, albeit “not in a single, newsworthy incident” (155).

Useful information is presented in appendices: a complete table of military engagements, the order of command in the battle on 4 October 1189, and a catalogue of named participants on both sides for the duration of the siege. There are several useful photographs and maps (although the schematic diagram showing the October battle is somewhat confusing as the key showing the shadings denoting the opposing forces appears to have been inadvertently reversed). It is a pity that there is no detailed map showing the topography of Acre and its immediate environments, which would have helped one to follow the complex course of events and perhaps given a sense of the extent of the fortified area held by the crusaders. Hosler does not devote a great deal of discussion to numbers, but as he claims that 30,000 was the maximum strength of the Christian army, one would like to test whether this number could be accommodated within their fortified camp, along with horses, gear, siege machinery, workshops, and other impedimenta. This is, however, a minor criticism of a highly readable account of the decisive action of the Third Crusade, which deserves a prominent place in the study of both the Crusades and medieval warfare in general.

ALAN V. MURRAY, University of Leeds

SARA JAPHET and BARRY DOV WALFISH, *The Way of Lovers: The Oxford Anonymous Commentary on the Song of Songs (Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 625). An Edition of the Hebrew Text, with English Translation and Introduction.* (Commentaria 8.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017. Pp. xii, 274; 12 black-and-white plates. \$121. ISBN: 978-9-0043-4319-1.

doi:10.1086/712188

Scholarly work in the field of medieval Jewish studies has yet to undertake basic philological research on manuscripts, commentaries, and their geo-cultural background. In particular, medieval Hebrew philology has yet to deal with the fact that most of the manuscripts left were written much later than their authors’ lifetimes. Therefore, the present study on an anonymous commentary on the Song of Songs represents an important contribution to this field.

The book in its first part consists of an annotated edition and translation of an anonymous commentary on the Song of Songs as it is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 625; a brief introduction (chapter 1); a section on the Jewish sources the anonymous author might have used (chapter 2); a description of the Anonymous’s exegetical method and

*Speculum* 96/1 (January 2021)