The last crusaders: the hundred year battle for the center of the world, by Barnaby Rogerson (book review)

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short takes: The Crusades


Covering the 200-year period of the Crusades in a single volume is a monumental task, but Asbridge (medieval history, Queen Mary, Univ. of London) handles it well, presenting an evenhanded view of the actions of Christian and Muslim forces and paying particular attention to the larger-than-life figures of Richard the Lionheart and Saladin. In addition to relating the facts of the expeditions, he explores both the motivations of the Crusaders (religious devotion played a part but was often combined with the need of leaders to harness the violence of their subjects and consolidate their own power) and the reasons that Christians eventually failed to retain any hold on conquered territory. These perspectives have been lost to the romanticized image of the Crusades and its appropriation into modern propaganda—which underscores Asbridge's conclusion that drawing too many parallels between the Crusades and today's conflicts is both inaccurate and dangerous. Strongly recommended for interested general readers and of some value to academics for its use of both Christian and Muslim primary sources.—Kathleen McCallister (KM), Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia


Written for general rather than academic readers, this work is centered more on character than on chronology. Though Philips (Crusading history, Royal Holloway, Univ. of London) follows the overall time line of the Crusades, his narrative often pauses to provide extensive sketches of figures and events not part of most popular histories of the Crusades. Philips also continues past the ostensibly "end" of the Crusading era in 1291, exploring some of the later Christian-Muslim battles that occurred outside the Middle East and analyzing how the cultural idea of Crusading developed as both action and metaphor from the medieval era to the modern day. Though somewhat brief considering the vast amount of history it covers, this work succeeds in providing a vivid and engaging narrative for a general audience while demonstrating excellent scholarship and a balanced presentation of Christian and Muslim viewpoints.—KM


Martin Luther King's murder on April 4, 1968, which destroyed Lyndon Johnson's hopes for a Great Society and fragmented the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement, was neither the result of an FBI conspiracy nor the impulsive act of a deranged killer, claims Sides (Blood and Thunder: An Epic of the American West), but rather a carefully planned assassination by James Earl Ray. Sides follows Ray from his escape from the high-security Missouri State Penitentiary, a year before the murder, to Mexico and then to Los Angeles, where Ray, a lifelong racist drifter going by the alias Eric S. Galt, fell under the political spell of presidential candidate George Wallace. Galt stalked King in Selma, AL, and in the civil rights leader's hometown of Atlanta before fatally shooting him in Memphis, TN. Sides's riveting account shows how the FBI, along with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Scotland Yard, worked through a mountain of leads and evidence to build an indisputable case against Ray. VERDICT Sides skillfully weaves his narrative as his book builds to the fateful conjunction of King and Ray in Memphis and to Ray's capture in London two months later. The results are a spellbinder that all interested readers will find hard to put down.—Karl Heicher, Upper Merion Twp. Lib., King of Prussia, PA


Native American slavery was brought to the scholarly forefront with Allan Gallay's The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717. Now Snyder (American studies & history, Indiana Univ.) examines captivity in the same region from pre-Columbian times to the 1840s but focuses on the evolution of slavery from the perspective of individual Native American groups. She demonstrates that captivity, before the arrival of Europeans, played an important role in Native societies, as some captives became kinfolk while others became slaves. The Europeans introduced slavery for profit and racialized slavery in the region, which had different consequences for different Native groups. The scale of slavery grew exponentially, with some Native groups ac-