

NARRATING THE  
CRUSADES

*Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern  
English Literature*

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## *Conclusion*

This book has explored the extensive and persistent influence of crusading narrative patterns and political thought on England and the English imagination from the later Middle Ages to the early modern period. It is intended to complement and broaden the recent work of crusade historians, who have explored crusading's variety and adaptability, which precipitated changes in art, preaching, ritual, social orders, finance, and trade, and its longevity, stretching as it did from the second half of the eleventh century to the last crusading league against the Ottoman Turks in 1684–99.<sup>1</sup> This study has also attempted to indicate several problems with our current understanding of English crusading activity and crusading literature: the limitations of a strict periodization of medieval and early modern England, which obscures the presence of crusading's religious intolerance at the beginnings of the modern world; an overemphasis on constructions of national identity at the expense of the associational political forms that crusading engendered; a lack of attention to the formal aspects of crusading literature; and an awareness that crusading literature represented military campaigns as well as individual crusading while commenting upon or criticizing contemporary behavior. This book has argued throughout that, although the number of participants in ecclesiastical crusade campaigns was small compared to the overall population of Europe, crusading comprised more than the papal institution; instead, it touched nearly all of the population in some regard via a variable set of behaviors, religious discourse, and a transposable story.

Crusading's impact on English thought can be detected in the development of the medieval crusading romance and its later reconfigurations in poetry, drama, and historical writing in the early modern period. A redefinition of the crusading romance based on characteristic components of crusade discourse goes beyond identifying the presence of crusade rhetoric – typically anti-Muslim invective or the creation of a religious “Other” – in an array of texts. Instead, it uncovers a coherent subgenre

engaged with topical concerns and changes in crusading thought that continued to influence English culture up to the late sixteenth century. In this respect, what had previously appeared as texts isolated from historical developments and largely unworthy of literary study, such as *Richard Cœur de Lion*'s lengthy narrative of divinely sanctioned military conquest in the Holy Land and *Sir Isumbras*'s brief narrative of personal redemption and divinely aided conquest in the Holy Land, become comprehensible as expressions of distinct but intertwined strands of crusade discourse that reacted to the historical loss of the Holy Land in 1291. Though these anonymous romances and later texts such as *Octavian* and *The Sowdone of Babylone* may not meet lofty aesthetic criteria, their popular nature is in fact a strong indication of the prevalence of the crusading romance and its influence on English culture across various social levels. In other words, these romances could rely on audiences to recognize a set of common features and a narrative pattern of loss and recovery; they could then manipulate such expected features in order to make, for example, *The Sowdone of Babylone*'s depiction of Christendom's expansion through marital claims a commentary on English interest in Iberia abstractly related to John of Gaunt's marriage alliances, the Anglo-French conflict, and the *reconquista*. Instead of merely reflecting historical events, these romances offered solutions to perceived issues – however unrealistically – and they contributed to crusading by urging participation, reform, or at least sustained consideration among their audiences. Thus, rather than categorizing such narratives according to the misleading “Matters” of Rome, France, and Britain, or by the less precise terms of “homiletic romance” or “secular hagiography” or their more recent variations, we can employ the label “crusading romance” to identify a discrete genre of texts that, as with crusade discourse's modification of prior holy war ideology, adapts existing source material for a new purpose.<sup>2</sup> It is important to realize the wider role crusading played in Middle English literature not simply to portray the surviving corpus more accurately, but also to acknowledge that crusading texts, like other medieval devotional works, are more diverse and at times more subversive than they appear.

Moreover, describing these texts as crusading romances helps to highlight the lasting influence of crusading narratives on early modern literature and culture. In the early modern period, when the Reformation and other cultural changes eliminated the ecclesiastical institution in England, the narrative power of crusading remained a potent force in literary and historical production, which drew upon and was shaped by the medieval tradition to a greater degree than previously has been accepted. Crusading

romances were still produced and printed in early modern England, as seen in the anonymous *Capysstranus*, William Caxton's *Godeffroy of Boloyne*, and Lord Berners's *Huon of Bordeaux*, and their production is largely due to the continued positive regard for the concept of united Christian warfare against religious enemies across confessional divisions. While certain sections of English society and even Elizabeth I's government may have actively opposed this concept, most of the populace and most literary authors celebrated crusading victories and their own crusading past. Though articulating Protestant discomfort with aspects of Catholic theology, poetry such as James I's poem *Lepanto* and Book I of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to a certain extent repeat the respective strands of holy warfare and private crusading found in *Richard Cœur de Lion* and *Sir Isumbras*, both of which were reprinted multiple times in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, English drama demonstrates a recurring engagement with crusading material and topics throughout the sixteenth century. In particular, plays such as Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London, with the Conquest of Jerusalem*, and William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* all reinvent crusading history in order to examine the subject of conversion or the failure of Christian cooperation against the Turks. Even original English historical writing, as found in Richard Knolles's *Generall Historie of the Turkes* and Thomas Fuller's *Historie of the Holy Warre*, maintains the trend of ignoring or rejecting papal involvement while promoting the concept of a united Christendom recovering its lands from the forces of Islam.

In its medieval beginnings crusading involved a radical "sacralizing of war" that assimilated aspects of penitential pilgrimage but was nonetheless couched in terms of revival and reform; it soon encompassed political claims to rule the Holy Land and, indeed, any place deemed to have belonged formerly to the Roman empire or to Christendom, drawing on theories of just war and of Christian militancy.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, crusading offered people living in England and elsewhere a more flexible set of parameters for shaping a collective identity than incipient nationalism, one that could value interregional cooperation and temporary bonds under categories such as "Franks" or "*crucesignati*" while still enabling competition among rivals. By the later Middle Ages the Holy Land had been won and lost again, but these events were only part of a larger series of conflicts that drew English interest to places as diverse as Africa, Iberia, Italy, Flanders, the Baltic, and the eastern Mediterranean. During this time preachers, propagandists, and treatise authors blamed Christian

sinfulness and used crusading for several purposes, from raising donations to reforming an individual's behavior to speculating on exemplary society, government, and the legitimacy of claims over non-Christian peoples. In general, notwithstanding their distressing prejudice, medieval crusading practices and literature represent an ambitious, uneven, and idealized attempt to explicate and reconcile several competing or contradictory forces within European culture.

It is perhaps fitting, then, to conclude this study by returning briefly to the influence of crusading's religious warfare on one of early modern England's intellectual authors as a final demonstration that crusading was a part of humanist thought and the early modern world.<sup>4</sup> In Fuller's 1639 *Historie of the Holy Warre*, after he describes preparations for the First Crusade, he pauses to consider the war's legitimacy as a controversial contemporary topic, listing several reasons on each side.<sup>5</sup> In a later chapter Fuller then comments on its legitimacy by referring to another work by Francis Bacon (1561–1626), the English humanist, political figure, and philosopher, best known today for his championing of the empirical scientific method in his *Novum organum* and his utopian fiction in the *New Atlantis*.<sup>6</sup> However, Fuller's reference to Bacon concerns none of these more familiar and seemingly modern aspects of his life; instead, he laments Bacon's incomplete work about crusading:

Before I go further, I must deplore the worlds losse of that worthy work which the Lord Verulam [i.e., Francis Bacon] left unfinished, concerning the Holy warre; an excellent piece, and alas! it is but a piece ... It was begun not in an historicall but in a politick way, not reporting the Holy warre past with the Turks but advising how to manage it in the future. And no doubt if he had perfected the work, it would have proved worthy the Authour.<sup>7</sup>

The work to which Fuller alludes so favorably here is Bacon's *An Advertisement Touching an Holy Warre*, a dialogue debating the possibility of a crusade against the Turks and the lawfulness of holy warfare written in 1622–3 after his loss of public office but only printed posthumously in 1629.<sup>8</sup> Although written in the form of a philosophical dialogue, the *Advertisement* contains some literary aspects in its characterization of the speakers and setting, and also intervenes in contemporary political affairs, specifically James I's negotiations with Spain for a marriage alliance. In this respect the *Advertisement* can be understood as an early modern version of the medieval recovery treatises, as it attempts to deal with the problems dividing Christendom and preventing a crusade by exploring crusading's fundamental justification and by identifying the conditions

necessary for its success. Though Bacon advances arguments and raises concerns unimaginable to his medieval predecessors, his dialogue nonetheless represents a thorough engagement with crusading's role in early modern England that not only earned Fuller's admiration but also would be used by Fuller as an authoritative statement on the criteria for a legitimate holy war.

Bacon's *Advertisement*, though "politick," as Fuller puts it, in its discussion of a future crusade, contains several "historically" references to wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the crusading battles of Lepanto and Alcazar, conflicts among Christians over Portugal, Milan, and Bohemia, and the conquest of Peru and Mexico, thus situating crusading within a range of military endeavors in the early modern period including warfare among European rulers and forcible colonization in the New World. In his prefatory letter Bacon explains that it is "an argument mixt of religious and civil considerations; and likewise mixt between contemplative and active," indicating the dialogue's intended dual purpose of establishing the general legitimacy of holy war and the particular possibility of its enactment in the early seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup>

A summary of the *Advertisement* reveals how even in its incomplete state the text balances the various views of different social and religious groups in early modern Europe about crusading. The dialogue itself features six characters: Martius, a soldier; Eupolis, a moderate supporter of monarchy; Eusebius, a moderate theologian; Gamaliel, a zealous Protestant; Zebedaeus, a fervid Catholic; and Pollio, a courtier. Of these six characters, all are Catholic except for Gamaliel, whose extreme view, as with that of Zebedaeus, makes it likely that Bacon's conclusion on holy war would have been expressed by one of the other Catholic characters – perhaps as a sign of moderate Christian cooperation. The six figures meet at Eupolis's house in Paris sometime in the early 1620s, and after some banter Martius begins by censuring the "meanness" of "Christendom," which for the past fifty years mainly has been occupied in wars against other Christians, as shown in the "ships and forces of [the] Spanish, English, and Dutch" who sail "unto the ends of the world" for gold, not for the "cause of Christ."<sup>10</sup> After Martius declares, "a war upon the Turk is more worthy than upon any other gentiles, infidels, or savages ... both in point of religion and in point of honour," he asks the assembled experts to explain the legitimacy of holy war before he continues.<sup>11</sup> Eupolis then assigns various parts for the ensuing discussion to the other characters, which will proceed from Zebedaeus's discussion of holy war's general legitimacy, Gamaliel's examination of its obligatory status, Eusebius's discussion of its priority, Pollio's

attempt at rebuttal, Eupolis's proving of the possibility of a current war, and Martius's concluding with its specific planning; they all resolve to meet the next day to continue the debate. When they do Martius proposes a modification of the speaking order so that he may present a "model of the enterprise" before Pollio and Eupolis debate its current possibility, which is accepted.<sup>12</sup> The zealous Catholic Zebedaeus then offers a lengthy speech that attempts to prove that war against "the most potent and most dangerous enemy of the faith, the Turk" is a "just war," even when one discounts "the cause of religion."<sup>13</sup> Comparing the Turkish empire to various illegitimate governments, including pirates, the Islamic sect of the Assassins, the radical Anabaptists of Munster, and the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt, all of which, he claims, were worthy of destruction by the "natural and tacit confederation amongst all men against the common enemy of human society," Zebedaeus's speech breaks off before its conclusion, leaving the intended end of the *Advertisement* unknown.<sup>14</sup>

Even with Martius's modification of the presentation order, the stated design for the dialogue, which moves from general legitimacy to particular instance, parallels the broad outline of several medieval recovery treatises, which frequently justify Christian claims to the Holy Land, vilify Islam and its rulers, and then offer reasons for and against specific courses of action. However, without a sense of the lasting influence of the medieval crusading tradition on early modern England, scholars have frequently overlooked Bacon's *Advertisement* or presumed that it must be discussing something other than holy war. In what little has been written on Bacon's dialogue, some scholars have regarded it as a kind of allegory that continues the utopian and scientific vision of Bacon's other writing. For instance, Jerry Weinberger, Laurence Lampert, and Ralph Lerner have offered highly intricate interpretations of Bacon's text, placing extraordinary weight on Pollio's role and on his comment, "except you could bray [grind] Christendom in a mortar, and mould it into a new paste, there is no possibility of an Holy War."<sup>15</sup> All three critics generally see Pollio's comment as rejecting religious violence entirely in favor of a struggle for scientific and social progress. That is, in Weinberger's view, the *Advertisement* "treats problems of civil and ecclesiastical policy ... as ... the means to scientific conquest," while for Lampert it constitutes a metaphoric war on religion to improve humanity, and for Lerner the dialogue is an attempt to redirect religious fanatics in the service of a utopian world ruled by the wise.<sup>16</sup> Pollio's statement about Christendom requiring the magical reconstitution of an alchemical grinding before it could launch a new crusade is certainly significant as an indication of the lasting power of the concept of

reform in crusade discourse, but in the context of Bacon's situation in the 1620s – a debt-ridden, disgraced royal advisor seeking to regain the king's favor by supporting his political plans – it seems unlikely that his dialogue sought to establish a scientific revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Other critics have rightly considered the text to be in favor of a more moderate form of holy war than is found in Zebedaeus's speech. For example, the text's nineteenth-century editors view the dialogue as consistent with Bacon's other statements about crusading as a means of uniting England and Spain in joint action against the Turks, a stance that reflects James I's policy; they conclude that the dialogue probably would have approved war against the Turks in self-defense, and that its incomplete state was only due to the breakdown of negotiations with Spain after 1623, making its argument moot.<sup>18</sup> J. Max Patrick sees Bacon's dialogue as inspired by James I's *Lepanto* for its endorsing of "an ecumenically Christian rather than a Roman Catholic holy war against the infidels," and as Bacon's attempt to cure internal dissent in England through war.<sup>19</sup> In a related vein, Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, though not discussing the *Advertisement* directly, identify several instances throughout Bacon's life when he favored religious moderation over Christian division and when he portrayed the Turks negatively, thus supporting the views of Patrick and the earlier editors indirectly.<sup>20</sup> Glenn Burgess, comparing Fuller's and Bacon's views on religious war, also generally agrees with this earlier assessment, as he argues, "there was much unease about the place of religion in [the just war] tradition," so that "[r]eligious reasons for war were seldom advanced, at least by the learned, in any pure form, and tended always to be blended with legal arguments."<sup>21</sup> These interpretations of Bacon's text, especially Burgess's comparison of Bacon with Fuller, accord with this study's argument that many early modern English authors supported crusading or holy warfare by seeking to circumvent issues of religious division or papal authority.

Nearly all these critics agree, however, about the unlikelihood of Bacon's endorsing Zebedaeus's view, which, as that character's description indicates, overzealously asserts the right to wage offensive war against any people based solely on an unnatural government. Nonetheless, Zebedaeus's extreme argument does not mean that the *Advertisement* rejects holy war and crusading entirely. As I see it, Bacon probably shared Martius's assessment of the Turkish empire as "[a] cruel tyranny, bathed in the blood of their emperors upon every succession; a heap of vassals and slaves; no nobles, no gentlemen, no freeman ... a nation without morality, without letters, arts, or sciences"; indeed, this was one of the passages borrowed

by Fuller for his *Historie's* closing hope for the destruction of the Ottomans.<sup>22</sup> Fuller's regard for and use of the *Advertisement* provide some guidance from a contemporary author for its intended purpose, since despite Fuller's condemnation of the abuses of the Catholic church, he endorses Christian warfare against the Turks. Furthermore, Fuller directly borrows Zebedaeus's criteria about determining the justice of a war to reach his own ambivalent conclusion about the crusades to the Holy Land, stating, "From that Authour [i.e., Bacon] we may borrow this distinction, That three things are necessarie to make an invasive warre lawfull; the lawfulnessse of the jurisdiction, the merit of the cause, and the orderly and lawfull prosecution of the cause."<sup>23</sup> Fuller's *Historie* implies that the medieval holy war was unlawful because the participants acted immorally and because papal claims were dubious, but this judgment does not extend to the general concept of the holy war. Bacon's work, exhibiting similar discomfort with religious justifications based on Catholic doctrine, nevertheless seems to determine that the defensive action of a united Christendom against the Turks is better than European war over confessional differences or the extermination of natives in the New World for profit.

In this respect, Bacon's dialogue presents a glimpse of the elder statesman and humanist's wrestling with the problem of locating crusading in a world far different from that of the eleventh century, one with cannon, printed books, religious divisions between Catholic and Protestant, a better disciplined Islamic enemy, and of course new continents and peoples. However, many of the *Advertisement's* concerns are similar to those facing early crusaders; crusading alliances were still necessary, although increasingly unlikely, and the questions about the purpose and plans for holy warfare were major components of crusade discourse from the eleventh to the early seventeenth centuries. Hence, when Zebedaeus declares, "It is a great error . . . if any man think that nations have nothing to do one with another . . . There are other bands of society, and implicit confederations," and asserts that there are problems with which "all nations are interested [have an interest in]," it is easy to detect an echo of medieval crusading's associational forms appealing to such "implicit confederations" in the service of the common good.<sup>24</sup> All in all, the *Advertisement's* unfinished state is an appropriate emblem for crusading's role in early modern England, since it shows how crusading was a narrative and ideal still occupying literary and intellectual production and still able to generate questions about the legitimacy of religious violence, forcible conversion, the charitable liberation of other Christians, or the recovery of the "ancient patrimony of Christ."<sup>25</sup>

In terms of direct participation the medieval experiment of crusading ended in the seventeenth century; its termination was not due to the denunciations of enlightened thinkers or a sudden religious tolerance, but because its systems channeling holy violence and devotion were supplanted by the activities of the secular, sovereign state.<sup>26</sup> In the centuries leading up to that point, however, crusading remained an incomplete narrative of loss and recovery, of legal rights and religious violence, that expressed the sincere hopes and dreadful ambitions of a wide range of people attempting to reconcile their religious doctrine with a divergent reality where Christendom was neither dominant nor regularly divinely favored. Because it occupied such an important role, bypassing any neat separation between medieval and early modern England, crusading demands a historical and literary analysis that can account for its notable combination of elevated images of human beings united in a transcendent cause with the desire to effect, as Bacon says, the “extirpation” of other peoples.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

- 1 On the end of crusading see Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1274–1580: From Lyons to Alcazar* (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 452–6; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 297–8; and Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), pp. 917–22.
- 2 For the “Matters” see W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (New York: Longman, 1987); for “homiletic romance,” see Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1968), pp. 120–58; for “secular hagiography” see Ojars Kratins, “The Middle English *Amis and Amiloun*: Chivalric Romance or Secular Hagiography,” *PMLA* 81(5) (1966): 347–54 and Diana Childress, “Between Romance and Legend: ‘Secular Hagiography’ in Middle English Literature,” *Philological Quarterly* 57 (1978): 311–22.
- 3 Tyerman, *God's War*, pp. 33–78, citation from p. 73. See also James Turner Johnson, *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), pp. 50–6 and pp. 84–9.
- 4 See Johnson, *The Holy War Idea*, pp. 57–60.
- 5 Thomas Fuller, *The Historie of the Holy Warre* (London, 1639), p. 13.
- 6 See Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), pp. 7–9.
- 7 Fuller, *Historie of the Holy Warre*, p. 242.
- 8 See the introduction to Francis Bacon, *Advertisement Touching an Holy Warre*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding *et al.* (London, 1859), vol. VII, pp. 3–7, and to Francis Bacon, *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, introduction by Laurence Lampert (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000), pp. 1–5. All citations will be from Spedding *et al.*'s edition.
- 9 Bacon, *Advertisement*, p. 15.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 16 Jerry Weinberger, “On Bacon's *Advertisement Touching a Holy War*,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 9 (1981): 191–206, citation at p. 192; Laurence Lampert, “Interpretative Essay,” in *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, introduction by Lampert, pp. 41–82; and Ralph Lerner, “The ‘Jihad’ of St Alban,” *Review of Politics* 64(1) (2002): 5–26.
- 17 See Jardine and Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*, pp. 473–501.
- 18 *Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. Spedding *et al.*, pp. 5–6.
- 19 J. Max Patrick, “Hawk versus Dove: Francis Bacon's Advocacy of a Holy War by James I against the Turks,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 4(1) (1971): 159–72, at p. 167.

- 20 Jardine and Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*, p. 124, p. 273, p. 310, p. 336, p. 347, and p. 481. Furthermore, in essays called “Of Goodnesse and Goodnesse of Nature” and “Of Nobility,” Bacon calls the Turks a “Cruell People” who live under “pure, and absolute Tyranny,” respectively; see Francis Bacon, *Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Israel Gollancz, 3rd edn. (London, 1899), citations at p. 42 and p. 45.
- 21 Glenn Burgess, “Wars of Religion and Royalist Political Thought,” in *England’s Wars of Religion, Revisited*, ed. Charles W. A. Prior and Glenn Burgess (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 169–92, citations at p. 175.
- 22 Bacon, *Advertisement*, p. 22; see Fuller, *Historie of the Holy Warre*, p. 285. This borrowing was noted by C. F. Beckingham, “Parallel Passages in Bacon and Fuller,” *Review of English Studies* 13(52) (1937): 449–53, at p. 449.
- 23 Fuller, *Historie of the Holy Warre*, p. 242; the original passage in Bacon’s text reads, “The justice of every action consisteth in the merits of the cause, the warrant of the jurisdiction, and the form of the prosecution,” *Advertisement*, p. 28.
- 24 Bacon, *Advertisement*, p. 35 and p. 36.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 26 See Tyerman, *God’s War*, pp. 918–19.
- 27 Bacon, *Advertisement*, p. 19.