



The Crusades and their Effect on the Mediterranean Economy

JOSEPH SMITH

 READ REVIEWS

 WRITE A REVIEW

CORRESPONDENCE:

jskofc8@gmail.com

DATE RECEIVED:

April 05, 2017

KEYWORDS:

HISTORY, economics,
Medieval Trade

© Smith This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and redistribution in any medium, provided that the original author and source are credited.



The Crusades and their

Effect on the Mediterranean Economy

Joseph S Smith

In looking at the previous research that has gone into the topic of the economics of the Crusades and the medieval Mediterranean it can be said that a great deal of work has been done already but much of this work has still left some questions unanswered. It is known that the Crusades were multiple wars fought as a series of events over the period of several centuries from the 11th century up into the 14th century. The Mediterranean Crusades were fought between numerous Christian kingdoms of Europe and Asia Minor against Muslim forces from the Middle East and North Africa. There were many players involved and many of the kingdoms that stepped into the fighting did so in an effort to help Christian pilgrims, the Christian east or to gain some sort of favors such as indulgences. However, some groups that ventured east during the time were able to secure multiple business contracts and deals that added to their wealth or it provided a means for it. There is still much to research in the way that some kings and political powers were able to obtain wealth from the Mediterranean during the time period beginning in the latter part of the 11th century until the 14th and 15th centuries.

This is a complex topic to say the least. There has been substantial debate over the eventual effects of the Crusades that have persisted to this day that range from personal feelings up to and including how nations of the present interact with one another. A topic such as this can delve deeper into the subject with less bias towards one side and instead look at the materials on hand. While this has been done before there is still much more to find if a researcher is able to find the right sources and materials for

such a task. Materials such as the reports of shipping and trade, contracts made and goods needing to be utilized in various markets could instead provide a deeper and more critical insight on why these treacherous voyages were made in the first place. Much has also been written in the past over the influence Middle Eastern culture had on Renaissance Europe but in comparison less has been discussed over how some of the smaller city states gained such influence. In terms of a student learning of the Crusades and then transitioning into topics centering on the Renaissance we have always just said that certain city states like Venice and Genoa were major influential forces while the Byzantines eventually faded away.

However, the Byzantines did not just cease to exist. Instead the empire saw a short but quick resurgence in their economic fortunes due to the Crusades and the exchange of goods and gold from Muslim lands and the coastal trading towns that began to pop up in the Mediterranean. Many of these colonies grew vastly from this resurgence that began before the Crusades and then helped in keeping their wealth and trade routes during the wars.[1] In truth, however, the idea behind much of the current education on the Byzantine Empire that is taught prior to the university level is that the Crusades led to the downfall of the empire and while there is truth to this it is not the whole story. There was a time when the Crusades benefitted Byzantine lands and it was not until a couple centuries after the wars began that the Byzantines saw their financial fortunes truly crumble just as their physical empire had already begun to decline rapidly centuries before.

The current teachings in classrooms throughout the academic world certainly has fueled debate over the years as the stance on the overall effects of the Crusades has changed in the thousand years since the first war was called for. The question then has remained on how exactly did small city states get to be such large powers? Is it possible to find the definitive answer to whether or not small city states grew seemingly overnight due to their involvement in the holy wars of the Middle Ages?

Several kingdoms and city states, mostly those built on maritime trade were able to capitalize on the wars economically and expand not only in land but also in finances. Trade itself was directed by what could be transported in certain fashion. Since many spices and other more fragile materials could not be taken on long sea voyages many such items that came from India would be diverted from a sea route to Egypt and instead be taken over land to Syria. However, Egypt needed goods as well for her trade so there for many deals were done for items needed and a shorter sea route for the spices could be taken from Syria to Egypt. This is not the only way in which researchers see how important the area was to trade. It existed in those days that whoever controlled the Levant basically could control the most important market in all of the Mediterranean, perhaps the world. This area switched hands over the centuries but during the Crusades as well as before and after it could be said that Syria provided one of the most important sea ports for trade.[2]

With such importance in trade it is interesting to note that many political powers joined in the debate and these leaders would throw their ideas and policies into the fray. One of the more major policy makers to do such a thing was the office that called the Crusades in the first place. The Pope was interjecting his policies on Christian Europe by calling for boycotts on trade with Muslim people. This is noted in the Fourth Council on Lateran that Pope Innocent III forbids trade that would include wood and iron that was used to create warships in Egypt.[3] Most people, merchants and kingdoms followed this decree but some were noted to independently go against the decree by trading these goods anyway. It is noted that when Pope after Pope felt the need to repeat the ban on trade with Muslims that the bans were not having the desired effect. Later Popes like Urban IV extended the ban to non-Mediterranean states in an effort to widen the reach and this can be concluded necessary because of the growing trade with Muslims. There is evidence of slaves being trade with Muslims by Christians during the years this ban was supposed to be in effect.[4]

This goes to show how important the maritime trade was to the governments in Europe and the Middle East. The punishment was typically excommunication, a detrimental punishment for any Christian of

the Middle Ages, but this was seen as being worth the risk to many who still operated in the illicit trade. Trade was definitely important to the Mediterranean. The fortunes of the world operated on the economics of the whole world coming together. The world didn't need to be peaceful for the trade to happen but there had to be some common ground for everyone to stand on in order for it to occur.

However, small city states like Venice, Genoa and Pisa excelled at maritime trade and used the wars as a springboard for increasing their fortunes and influence. However, in many texts we only discuss their lasting effects culturally. One such example is Venice's role in the Fourth Crusade which saw the Byzantine Empire fall briefly for a 60 year timespan. This is not as important as to the economic factors that led to that ill-fated venture in terms of this discussion. Thomas Madden has written extensively on the subject of the Crusades with some focus being held on Venice during the Fourth. This is important because there is some information that does go into more detail about the lead up to the reasons for venturing into the Byzantine Empire instead of the Holy Land. We can see in Madden's book *Enrico Dandolo & the Rise of Venice* that Venice took advantage of Crusader debts from the Franks, the lack of reliable communication along with withholding that communication and they used that to help defeat longtime rival the Byzantine Empire while gaining lands on main land Europe around the Adriatic Sea.[5]

Pisa and Genoa too had benefits to the events that transpired that allowed them a measure of success based on their roles in the wars. Pisa and Genoa were able to gain lands about 10 years before the First Crusade in Northern Africa. In his 1914 article "Industry in Pisa in the Early Fourteenth Century" Frederick Dietz discusses the success of Pisa in North African trade and then how that helped to expand east into Jerusalem. Many of the contracts and concessions given in Jerusalem were awarded as debt repayment for Pisan ships. This being such a lucrative deal and reward for Pisa that during this time Pisa was regarded as having the wealthiest of all Italian citizens[6] Genoa had the similar rewards as detailed by Genoese diplomat Caffaro in numerous letters and documents. Caffaro detailed that Genoa was able to secure many rights to trade and ports following the First Crusade and the subsequent expeditions. We have records from King Baldwin I and Bohemond of Antioch which showed how richly Genoa was rewarded for their efforts in battles. What's more on this source is the fact that it is a collection of firsthand accounts.[7]

Finally researchers can compare these efforts in the major reason these three city states had such great success and see that ship building was key to their development and lasting success. Based on the book *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean* we know of the different ships that sailed during that time and the vastly important role each ship had in not only trade but in transport of people which would go on to include soldiers. The agreed upon opinion is that the galley was the best ship that sailed the Mediterranean and each of these three city states' navies utilized the galley for their shipping needs.[8] With this evidence we can see how success could be called a given to those involved in the sailing trade of the Mediterranean if they took part in the Crusades.

Shipping for trade efforts was the major key within the Mediterranean and Malta was a major component in that area. Malta held strategic value to the Crusaders not only for a staging point for invasion into North Africa but also keeping pirates under control. This meant that trade goods and pilgrims would be safe in the Mediterranean. Without the success of capturing Malta and then holding it much of the trade in the Mediterranean would be at risk. Sicilian and French rulers would control Malta for several hundred years and it is no wonder the efforts they put into the island given their status as Crusading States.[9]

Perhaps that is one of the statements that would be challenged. Would it be possible to have success without participating in the Crusades? One could say yes based on Venice. Venice did not actively participate in the first efforts of the early wars but began to integrate themselves later on and at the time of the Fourth they had decided to venture out into wars with the Franks. However, many have

discussed the goal of the Venetians to have been purely economic and financial. While some have pointed this out based on the evidence of debt repayment from the Franks as Thomas Madden wrote about others have come to Venice's defense. Writers like Donald Queller and Gerald Day have noted Venice's zeal in collecting holy relics, which did have a commercial value but was also a moral value as well. They also went on to explain that each Venetian that sailed out in the Crusade made the Crusader's Vow at St. Marks prior to leaving. This is the same vow that the northern knights that Madden had said were being held on debts had made. Some argue that staying out of earlier Crusades shows their hesitance to the religious effort but instead Queller and Day note that the people felt the opposite and part of that reason is due to the fact that they did not participate early on. In fact Queller and Day go on to point out that Venice sailed with Pisa in the late 12th century to send troops to relieve Acre during a siege. [10]

There is evidence of the relic trade and the importance of acquiring relics in a Venetian manuscript *Translatio sancti Nicolai* provided by Elena Bellomo. In this document we are given an account of Crusaders venturing with a goal, among the main goals of liberation, of finding and exporting the relics of St. Nicolas from the Holy Land and back to Venice. This is important in the Venetian defense because it gives a record of Venetians sailing into battle at the very end of the First Crusade in order to fulfill a religious task of bring home relics.[11] Not something a commercially driven society would usually take time to do.

As was stated earlier Pisa and Genoa both had success in taken lands held by Muslims and exploiting that trade in Northern Africa prior to the Crusades had even been called. Furthermore many of the Crusading kingdoms sought to expand trade into Africa due to the valuable resources that were held and available but the Crusades were originally intended to be held primarily in the Holy Land and Levant. One such source that could provide evidence away from Jerusalem is a collection of letters written during the 11th century that discusses the flax trade in Cairo. While this collection doesn't expressly discuss the Crusades and hordes of soldiers coming to Cairo to raid the flax stores it does go into detail on how important that trade commodity was to the people of the time.[12]

Of course there will be challenges to the research and even the researcher's opinions might change as more research is conducted. In the end the facts and the best conclusions that can be drawn from the available evidence provided by the research is what the conclusions need to be based on. The conclusions have to be made from research. The research should not be done or made to fit a conclusion that may be already held but not supported.

Many of the previous historians who discussed this topic have looked to historical documents written by chroniclers or in archives. As noted previously some have used collections of letters like those of Caffaro, Venetian Crusaders hunting for saint relics and merchants in the flax trade. Others like Sophia Menarche used papal councils in order to discuss limits to trade. These can provide excellent details that might have since been lost to the world due to the age of the documents or even due to the fact that so many years have passed and sometimes writings are misplaced. However, some of these documents could be slanted. As we can see in Caffaro's letters he is looking solely at the Genoese interests so we can glean little on the state of the Crusader Kingdoms or of rival factions. With this disadvantage we also see that same instance in *Translatio sancti Nicolai* which Bellomo does offer some insight on other national efforts in the Crusade but only as a comparison to Venice. That leaves us searching for more information that could be useful since the Crusades were a major operation that was conducted by multiple groups of people at one time.

For this project the best type of research would employ many of the same research methods as those used previously. Collections of letters or manuscripts that hold clues to market movements and archives that house documents would be treasure troves of information. In general a time frame of early 12th century extending to the late 14th century would provide the best time period example for the research due in large part to the activity of the crusaders during that time period. Perhaps extending

the search into private collections could shed new light on certain key players in the Crusades. Not only in looking at that particular time period but also keeping the research to the Levant and Northern African regions would prove the most useful. This would be because of the amount of spices that came from the Silk Road into Europe would have followed within this pathway. Having firsthand accounts or perhaps manifests that specifically discuss the movement of such materials would help enlighten the research that has been done previously.

Having access to libraries in European Universities that would house such collections could be the most useful due to their ability to not only acquire such materials but to objectively house them as well. One such place that would be of great value would be the Vatican. This suggestion is due to the fact that the Pope was the one who in the beginning called on the Crusades and the subsequent boycotts of Muslim goods. While we do have documents discussing the councils there would surely be many more manuscript of private nature that could provide clues to the ideas of the time. While this sort of archive would not be easy to access and the volumes of manuscripts would be difficult to sort through the fact remains that such a depository of manuscripts would possibly hold something that illustrates the trade practices utilized by kings or other leaders with or perhaps without the blessing of the Vatican. Such a powerful ruling faction of the time, as well as the driving force behind the Crusades, would be a great starting point for such research.

It has not gone unnoticed that much of the Vatican's opinion outside of what was stated in the councils has been omitted. While multiple Popes ruled during that time period it was not of common practice to not have some form of communication with other rulers and the fact that little documentation is found is an odd fact. This would be a great area to add to the research that currently exists and to try to fill in the gaps.

It would be important to discuss that conclusions might change and as already stated the conclusions should be allowed to be adapted based on the research conducted. This is sometimes difficult especially when travel or access to certain archives or collections is impossible. While important information would be left out of the research it may be unintentional. It is important to note that if all the research is documented carefully and accurately then all due diligence has been taken in order to be as objective as possible.

While the secondary sources that have been utilized for this project has been helpful it may not be as complete as some would prefer. Scholarly journals and books have been able to provide valuable information and this project would be able to expand on that information due to the goal of providing more research on the subject. Each of the sources used gave insight into the topics of economics during the Crusades, however, a couple of the sources such as Thomas Madden's *Enrico Dandolo & the Rise of Venice* goes into a much wider stance and background that takes the reader away from the topic of economics. So as a source Madden's work would only provide limited information due to having to include much more background on Venice and the Dandolo family than is relevant to this topic.

While Dietz's work excited solely on the industry of Pisa but expands passed the Crusade years which brings the reader again to the same place as Madden's work with more information off the main topic than what is needed. Others writers such as McManamon find it helpful to go into a broader overview of the topic in order to better expand on multiple ideas. Economics is not the only maker of a society after all. While each of these writers and sources include valuable information their work is not solely focused on the economics of their chosen kingdoms or city states during the 11th through 14th centuries. They have instead chosen to research from a much broader scope and write about a topic that uses more generalized views of the Crusades or in Madden's case writes on one city state with the focus being primarily on one family leading up to the Fourth Crusade. Having more research done that focuses solely on the Mediterranean trade economics coming from North Africa and the Levant area from the 11th to the 14th century would be the more appropriate area of research to this proposal due in part to keeping the research within a much more specific time frame.

The main source for primary information has been the Shapiro Library of Southern New Hampshire University which has been able to provide access to a variety of sources coming from collections and archives. While this has been more useful on this project than first considered there have been limitations in the materials available. Perhaps more information is available through other institutions that are currently inaccessible. A wider search would be the most advisable solution to such a limitation. For this project it was best to not ignore such minor primary sources like the topic of flax trade as it does show a particular important demographic of the time period. This type of source gives valuable insight into the workings of merchants who could have had a larger area of control over a society than in the present day. Other primary sources held information on a large scale that gave insights to particular rulers and diplomats and how they ran their societies. Given the wide variety of information that could be used for such a topic I find that it would be best to not ignore any point that could add a note of clarity and substance to the project.

As stated earlier other university libraries, such as European universities, could prove useful due in large part to being able to house surviving documents from the time period. While kingdoms changed rulers and some documents might not have been saved it would be worth the look to go into the major university libraries to see just what does exist to this day. Many kingdoms took part in the Crusades and many scholars from the middle ages looked to saving certain things that seemed to care some importance. These would be useful now in the research due to being able to provide a major link to the people who created the works.

The argument would then be if the Crusades truly gave rise to the smaller city states because of advantages in the economic trade or perhaps these states would have been just as successful without the holy wars lasting several centuries.

Bibliography

1. Ashtor, Elihayu. "Investments in Levant Trade in the Period of the Crusades." *Journal of European Economic History* 14, no. 3 (Winter 85 1985): 427. (accessed September 23, 2016)
<http://www.jeeh.it/articolo?urn=urn:abi:abi:RIV.JOU:1985;3.427&ev=1>
2. Bellomo, Elena. 2009. "The First Crusade and the Latin east as seen from Venice: the account of the *Translatio sancti Nicolai*." *Early Medieval Europe* 17, no. 4: 420-443. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 22, 2016).
3. Caffarus, Jonathan Phillips, and Martin Hall. 2013. *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-century Crusades*. Farnham, Surrey, UK: Routledge, 2013.
4. Day, John. "The Levant Trade in the Middle Ages." *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, 39th ser., 3 (2002): 807-14. Accessed September 23, 2016. <http://www.doaks.org/resources/publications/doaks-online-publications/economic-history-of-byzantium/ehb38-levant-trade>.
5. Dietz, Frederick C. "Industry in Pisa in the Early Fourteenth Century." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 28, no. 2 (February 1914): 338-359. *Business Source Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 23, 2016).
6. Gil, Moshe. "The Flax Trade in the Mediterranean in the Eleventh Century A.D. as seen in Merchants Letters from the Cairo Geniza." *Journal Of Near Eastern Studies* 63, no. 2 (April 2004): 81-96. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 22, 2016).
7. Jeffreys, Elizabeth, and Ruth Gertwagen. *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean*. Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2012. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 23, 2016).
8. "Lateran 4 - 1215." Lateran 4 - 1215. 1215. (accessed September 34, 2016).

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/LATERAN4.HTM#71>.

9. Madden, Thomas F. *Enrico Dandolo & the Rise of Venice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003. (accessed September 23, 2016).
10. McManamon, John. "Maltese seafaring in mediaeval and post-mediaeval times." *Mediterranean Historical Review* 18, no. 1 (June 2003): 32. *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 24, 2016).
11. Menache, Sophia. "Papal Attempts at a Commercial Boycott of the Muslims in the Crusader Period." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63, no. 2 (2012): 236-259. (accessed September 23, 2016) doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/10.1017/S0022U911002661>
12. Queller, Donald E., and Gerald W. Day. 1976. "Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade." *American Historical Review* 81, no. 4: 717. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 23, 2016).

[1] Day; 807-808.

[2] Ashtor; 427-429.

[3] Lateran.

[4] Menache.

[5] Madden.

[6] Dietz; 339-340.

[7] Caffarus, Jonathan Phillips, and Martin Hall.

[8] Jeffreys, Elizabeth, and Ruth Gertwagen.

[9] McManamon; 36-38.

[10] Queller, Donald E., and Gerald W. Day; 718-721.

[11] Bellomo; 422-424.

[12] Gil; 81-83.