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HIS 114s

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Response Paper 3

In the centuries proceeding the Crusades, Christians and Muslims held a mutual respect for one another, which resulted in a firm truce. By the time the First Crusade was called by Pope Urban II in 1095, these respective groups had looked upon each other with contempt. This stemmed from perceived ideological differences and a desire to gain political, economic, and territorial influence. This hatred created a myriad of stereotypes and preconceived notions evident by the written accounts produced by Christians and Muslims during the Crusades. These accounts would have a profound impact, influencing Christian's and Muslim's thoughts and behavior toward each other, which is seen in the 2005 film *Kingdom of Heaven*.

During the Crusades many actions of Franks or Christian Crusaders were documented by Muslim witnesses. Usamah ibn-Munqidh, a Muslim merchant and government administrator claimed that the lord of al-Munaytirah wrote to his uncle about a Frank physician who undermined the work of an Arab physician. The letter described how the Frank physician offered to save the life of an injured knight in recovery, by amputating his leg. The Frank physician's actions resulted in the knight's death. It states "A knight came with an axe...Accordingly he struck it—while I was looking down—one blow, but the leg was not severed. He dealt another

blow, upon which the marrow flowed out and the patient died on the spot.”¹ This account casts the Frank physician as a savage for unnecessarily cutting the leg off of a recovering patient. The physician shows no remorse for maiming and killing the knight when, upon the knight’s death he casually moved on to the next patient. The purpose of this story is to present Christians as evil people with a willingness to engage in violent acts against helpless people desperately requiring help. This perhaps caused Muslims to then show no mercy and participate in similar actions as a form of justice when fighting the Christians.

Christians, like Muslims wrote about their adversary’s conduct during the Crusades. Lord de Joinville in his account called *Concerning These Bedouins* discussed his observations of the Bedouins or desert dwellers whom are among the Shite sect of Islam. Lord de Joinville viewed them with condescension, he stated “They are an ugly race and hideous to look at; for their hair and beards are long and black.”² Lord de Joinville attempts to dehumanize the Bedouin people. He observes them more as animals than as human beings. This would, conceivably inspire Christians who read his accounts to cultivate the same perceptions about muslims.

The film *Kingdom of Heaven*, illustrates the hatred that Muslims and Christians felt for one another. The battle field scene in which Sultan Saladin’s army decapitated the heads of the Templars represents the disdain Muslims possessed for Christians. The scene shows the heads of Templars displayed on pikes or stacked up in massive piles. This action went beyond a victory, it was a demonstration of how inferior the Muslims perceived the Christians to be. The scene

¹ *Usamah ibn-Munqidh*, an Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades, trans. Philip K. Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929; reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 161-169

² John Lord de Joinville, *Memoirs of Louis IX. Kings of France. The Crusade of St. Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), pp 420-421.

where Tiberias angrily confronts Reynald de Châtillon for commanding the Templars to conduct an unsanctioned raid on the Muslims shows how Christians felt about Muslims. When a witness to his raid is pointed out to him Reynald responds by saying, “That witness, if you call him that, is a Saracen, he lies.”³ The raid by Reynald and the Templars express the disdain Christians felt for Muslims. His quote further corroborates that a Saracen is not viewed as worthy of respect and lacks integrity, thus should not be believed or trusted. By indicating that the witness is a Saracen who lies, Reynald implies that a Saracen is inferior.

In the period before the Crusades, Christians and Muslims shared a reciprocal regard for one another, which allowed for them to coexist. Pope Urban II’s call for a crusade in 1095 caused these two groups to develop a disdain for each other. Presumptions of opposing philosophies about religion, as well as political, economic, and jurisdictional rights resulted in disputes among them. Disputes lead to an aversion that precipitated stereotypes and biased ideas discernible through the written records of both Christians and Muslims. These documents influenced how Christians and Muslims felt about and behaved toward one another. The animosity the two groups shared are depicted in the film, *Kingdom of Heaven*.

³ *Kingdom of Heaven*, dir. by Ridley Scott (2005; 20th Century Fox, 2005 dvd).