



Gil Fishhof. *Shaping Identities in the Holy Land. Crusader Art in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: Patrons and Viewers*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge 2024. 361+xiii pp, ill. ISBN: 978-1-032-27171-2.

Several leading studies dealing with the history of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem have mainly described the events of the fighting between the Crusaders and their Muslim enemies, as well as the history of the military orders, the church and the Crusader nobility and royalty. Others have dealt with the history of settlement in the territory of the Frankish Kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries, descriptions of its cities, and the connections formed between its inhabitants and the people of Europe who attempted to secure the survival of the Latin Kingdom.

One of these research fields sparking a response was Crusader art, painting and sculpture. These issues developed mainly in the leading studies of Gustav Kühnel, Bianca Kühnel, Zehava Jacoby, Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, Jaroslav Folda, and Denys Pringle who observed Crusader sites, offering their interpretation regarding the construction of religious buildings, architecture details and Crusader art.

In recent years, a prominent student of the late Crusader art researcher, Prof. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, has become a leader in this field of research: Gil Fishhof. This researcher, in his exceptional way, examines in his new book the existing studies in the field of Crusader art. Fishhof's book offers a new and original interpretation of those medieval sites where Crusader elements appear in the cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth, in impressive Crusader churches, and remaining as prominent sites of that period, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of Emmaus in Abu-Ghosh.

According to Gil Fishhof, the Crusader conquest of the Holy Land in 1099 launched intricate processes into motion. In the religious spheres, for example, the Franks sought to identify the sites of many Old and New Testament events, having to choose between competing traditions. They also needed to establish their own structures. They noticed the tensions between the memory of the Early Christian and Byzantine traditions, and the very different 12th-century

demographic reality that they encountered, composed of a variety of Eastern-Christian, as well as Muslim, *Saracen*, communities.

It was within this dynamic society that arose from these activities that the Franks rebuilt many of the most significant monuments in the Holy Land, or decorated others with mosaics, wall paintings or sculptural series. This book presents these series “not only as manifesting the unique circumstances of the Latin Kingdom, but also as active agents intentionally shaped by their patrons as part of the struggles” (p. 1) that had begun to ascend within the budding society of the Latin Kingdom. Its focus is on the monumental sculptural and mural series adorning some of the most important shrines in the Latin Kingdom, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Basilica of the Annunciation, and the Church of the Nativity. Fishhof’s book also investigates such aspects as the use of images as part of the pilgrimage sites, crusader manipulations of biblical representations, the influences of Byzantine and Armenia on the local Crusader art, and Muslim depictions.

The chapters in Fishhof’s book follow the research of Crusader Art themes:

As author states himself (p. 4), the first chapter examines the long historiography of crusader art from its inception in the 19th century up to the present.

The second chapter is dedicated to the directions in which the past (real or completely imaginary) was developed in Crusader art. The First Crusade and the capture of the Holy City of Jerusalem in 1099 were seen by their contemporaries as remarkable events. The Crusaders turned to the Bible in search of explanation and appropriate models. Fishhof observes (p. 4–5) that biblical models were therefore of immense importance to the Crusaders. Art pieces analyzed in this context are “the western lintel of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and the capitals from the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth”. The author demonstrates that the Maccabees, Joshua and King David were also central figures for the Crusaders. They served as prototypes “designating the Crusaders as the New Israelites who had conquered the Holy Land” (p. 5), premeditating the *loca sancta* that drew numerous pilgrims. This chapter also discusses the ways in which one of the major institutions of the Latin Kingdom, the Military Order of the Hospital of Saint John, shaped “such a corpus of foundation legends and incorporated them into the pictorial” series (p. 5). The mural cycle of the Hospitaller church in Emmaus (the village of Abu-Ghosh) is discussed

in the book as a main example, “manifesting the ideas of the Order’s origin” (p. 5), and its claim to a significant past aimed at boosting the holiness of sites connected to this military religious order to enlarge its prestige and legitimacy.

Chapter 3 emphasizes the dynamics that took place in and among the major holy sites of the Crusader Kingdom. As the author states, Franks usually renovated the churches located at holy sites commemorating the most sacred events of Christianity. This chapter investigates such questions as the influence of pilgrims’ preconceived ideas and expectations; the changing, evolving identities and traditions of the sites which competed with one another; and the financial challenges.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the image of Muslims in the Crusader art developed in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The first part of this chapter presents the relations developed between Christians and Muslims in the Crusader Kingdom, exploring factors such as trade and administration. The author wonders “what such existence can clarify us about the possible references to Muslims in the Crusader art”. In the other part of this chapter, Gil Fishhof shows how perceiving the Muslims “as both enemies and as partners” (p. 6) was reflected in art. This is demonstrated in a unique way in the eastern lintel of the southern façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as well as in the rectangular capital of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth.

In chapter 5 the author “seeks to integrate the new assessment” of the relations developed “between the Franks and the indigenous Eastern Christians” (Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian and Georgian) “into the study of Crusader art”, (p. 6) asking in what directions did the series address the Eastern Christians. The appearance of all these in the monumental series of the Latin Kingdom is then examined through two case studies: the southern façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the mural cycle in Abu-Ghosh.

Chapter 6 focuses on patterns of patronage within the Latin Kingdom. It is considered “through the lens of current models of artistic patronage in the Middle Ages”, offering “a sustained examination of its operation in the case study of the mosaic program and in the column paintings of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem” (p. 7). It mentions several of the prominent historical figures involved in the development of this structure, such as Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus and Amalric, King of the Latin Kingdom.

In Gil Fishhof’s concluding remarks, he emphasizes that the primary goal of this book was to present the major extant Crusader edifices and monumental series. These were not only manifestations of the exceptional conditions of

the Latin Kingdom, but also should be viewed as “active agents intentionally shaped by their patrons as part of the struggles, tensions and opportunities that had begun to arise” (p. 1) within the budding society of the Latin Kingdom. While each of the book’s chapters presented a study of the specific circumstances of its subject matter, drawing conclusions regarding their manifestation in Crusader art, it is only when read together that the book’s main conclusion – the understanding of Crusader art as a multi-layered system – can be fully comprehended. The art and architecture of the major shrines in the Latin Kingdom were not confined to addressing just one of the aspects discussed in this book. They needed to respond to them all, which included, as the author point out, manifesting the patrons’ claims of legitimacy and status; competing with contending sites for recognition, pilgrims and donations; orchestrating the pilgrims’ experiences at a holy site; as well as simultaneously engaging with the various groups of spectators, including Franks and Eastern Christians. The book concludes that only when studying Crusader art as simultaneously responsive to all these different circumstances of the Latin Kingdom, and as operating as a multilayered system, can one fully understand both the originality and the complexity of this art.

The book has also offered and examined a model – The Model of Flexibility, explaining the various mechanisms that allowed Crusader art to simultaneously engage with such very different concerns. According to this model, the specific “imagery chosen at each site was selected precisely because it allowed for simultaneous, diverse meanings, often complementary and sometimes even contradictory, in a way that facilitated their acceptance by the vast and diverse array of patrons and audiences” (p. 3). In some cases, a type of formal discussion and negotiation among the different agents involved can be imagined. It is this diversity of audiences and patrons, and its operation within a heterogenous and complex budding society establishing its institutions, traditions, and power structures in a holy land, that gave crusader art its unique characteristics and originality.

In my opinion, this important research will enrich all themes of Crusader studies. The combination of Crusader art studies, medieval sources, historical analysis and the religious context contributes to the construction of complete knowledge supporting the understanding of that reviving period.

I have no doubt that Gil Fishhof will continue to offer new research ideas related to the history of Crusader art in the realm of the Latin Kingdom and its surroundings in the Frankish East. Most of all, I am intrigued by his opinion

of new research topics accompanying the contemporary archaeological discoveries at sites such as the Montfort Castle of the Teutonic Order, Belvoir of the Hospitallers and 'Atlit of the Templars, or later in the development of new ideas at leading sites, such as the churches of the city of Jerusalem, Nazareth and Mount Tabor in the Galilee mountains.

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