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Research Assignment

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March 19th 2010.

Civil Relations Between Roman Crusaders and Muslim Warriors **During The First Crusade**

Brief History and Background



In 1076 Muslim forces captured the Holy city of Jerusalem. Alexius I of Constantinople a Byzantium emperor feared that Muslim Seljuk armies would eventually enter into Byzantium and threaten both the Christian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the Byzantine city of Anatolia. With this threat the Emperor pleaded to Pope Urban II to call on Christian warriors to join a Christian Crusade against Muslim enemies and retake the Holy Land.

Section 1

The Historical Question

The social and interpersonal relationships between Christians and Muslims during the crusades have been historically ignored. Mountains of historical knowledge exist

concerning the conflict, however, when asking the question if Roman Crusader and Muslim warriors engaged in social interactions, times of sharing or cultural exchange the argument can be made that historians have pushed this area of study aside to explore the larger concepts of the conflict that are deep rooted in religion and politics. My historical question will ask how conflict brought these two groups together in some ways. In particular how did the role medicine and medical knowledge play into this exchange? The history of the crusades is very much painted in black and white i.e. Christian vs. Muslim. The events of the Crusades stand as obstacles in the contemporary Christian-Muslim relationships, interaction and dialogue. This history has very much scared the notions of otherness that both parties feel today. Using the primary source Usama Ibn Munqidh's Book of Contemplation I can argue that times of medical sharing and cultural exchange occurred on a peaceful level between Christians and Muslims. (Because there are many occurrences of Muslim and Crusader interactions in Usama's book I have selected the exchange of medical information as the underlining theme for this research.)

Why is this historically significant?

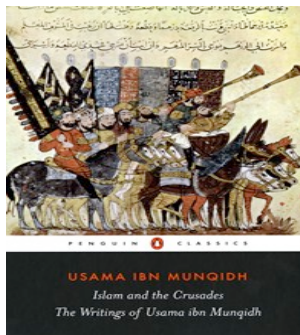
This study is historically significant because our contemporary world has been dramatically influenced by the crusades that occurred hundreds of years ago. The Crusades have a negative effect on the way both west and east see each other still to this day. By researching this time of crisis using a perspective that focuses on the positive interaction we can work towards a more complete understanding of a relationship that has been generally ignored.

Primary & Secondary source evidence

The primary source.

Usama Ibn Munqidh's was a Muslim warrior and poet during the time of the first crusade. His book titled The Book of Contemplation (see below) was written in the year 1183. This book entails many firsthand accounts of Christians and Muslim interactions. According to Usama he experienced on many occasions the positive exchange between Muslim warriors, civilians and Roman Crusaders. For example: Usama tells us a story of

a young Muslim male from Shaizar who travels to Antioch to seek treatment for Scrofula (Tuberculosis). A Roman crusader skilled in medicine told the young male how to heal the disease by using topical poultices based on vinegar, oil, fat, lead, and herbs and it appeared to cure the illness. Later Usama claims to have used this medicine in his own practice, "I myself treated with this medicine many who were afflicted with such disease and the treatment was successful (Munqidh Ibn Usama. *Translated by Cobb p.64*) The claim that Usama used the medicine on some of his own patients suggests that there was a level of acceptance in regards to this western medicine and practice. This evidence suggest that there was a positive exchange of scientific knowledge occurring between both parties.



Secondary sources

Munroe D. Arabian medicine as represented in the memoirs of Usamah Ibn Munquidh.
Oxford Press. London, 1933.

Piers D. Mitchell *Medicine in the Crusades Warfare, Wounds and the Medieval Surgeon*
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Continuity and Change & Relevant Similarities and Differences Between Historical and Contemporary Contexts

In regards to historical continuity it is evident that the effects of the first crusade are still present today. Cultural dichotomies still exist and rather than addressing the issue of cultural misunderstandings and ethnocentrism on both sides we tend to focus on the violent conflicts that have come to represent a culture of fear and unknowing. Generally speaking, the west subscribes to an ideology that we must civilize the Middle East and in turn this harbors resentment. Just as Alexius I of Constantinople feared that Muslim Seljuk armies would eventually enter into Byzantium and threaten the Christian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, contemporary western culture fear Muslims for similar reason and keep them at bay through the powers of global authority. It is not surprising that when former president George Bush Jr. addressed the American people following the attacks of September 11th 2001 he asked America to join him in a Crusade against evil. However, within this discourse we can argue that positive growth and communication is one the rise. Both Christians and Muslims are becoming more critical of the conflict and are communicating ideas to resolve angst and misunderstanding. In this day and age global communication can take form in many shapes and helps to flesh out dialogue between both parties; soldiers and civilians. The exchange of information no longer occurs on the battle field but rather in city parks, the internet and classrooms.

Analyze Cause and Consequence

Cause and consequence in regards to why positive interaction between Roman Crusader and Muslim Warrior is not highlighted or discussed in history is arguable. One suggestion is the idea that information on the topic is difficult to find and is rather limited. To find this two way exchange of knowledge between both groups during this time has been difficult to say the least. Secondly, the idea of friendly relations between both parties could result in a misunderstanding. Readers, though limited during this time, could see this as a morale killer. Consequentially, the reality of the situation is skewed by the

notion of having a fixed enemy.

Historical Perspectives.

Historical perspectives often have biases. As the old saying goes *if it bleeds it leads* is very much correct for the historiography of the first crusade. This being said, I feel that that the relationships between Crusader and Muslims are often portrayed as good Christian vs. Evil Muslim. We seldom hear of any interaction other than violent conflict. The history of this conflict is also rooted with deep set stereotypes that are reinforced by today's representation of the conflict such as Ridley Scott's film *Kingdom of Heaven* and Youssef Chahines' *El Naser Salah el Dine*.



Argument

Usama Ibn Munqidh (1095-1198) was a Muslim warrior, a distinguished writer and a trained physician during the first crusade. His medical accounts of Byzantine doctors suggest that he and others benefited from sharing remedies and methods of practice with Byzantine doctors. An argument can be made that a significant two way exchange of cultural and medical knowledge transferred between both Byzantine crusader and Muslim medical practitioners. At times, this exchange was peaceful and other times medical texts were apprehended during enemy acquisitions for the sake of knowledge. Since Usama is critical of Byzantine medicine we must pay close attention to

the medical events in his book to further understand the significance of the practical medical skills that were shared between Christians and Muslims. An examination of Usama's book suggests that medical knowledge was in fact shared on a large scale, significantly benefiting both Byzantines and Muslims for years to come.

Evidence & Sources

The transfer of medical knowledge happened in multiple ways during the Crusader years. Firstly, we can look at Usama's Book Of Contemplation and see that medical practitioners of ethnic diversity worked side by side during times of conflict. Medical knowledge, such as practical patient management was applied differently from location to location. Usama was shocked at the way the Romans dealt with their own subjects. He states in part II of The Book Of Contemplation that Byzantine medical practitioners were unethical and ignorant in dealing with their own patients. An example of this is when Usama tells the reader that a physician by the name of Thabit a Muslim doctor had applied a small poultice to the abscess of a Byzantine warrior patient. Thabit felt that the medicine was healing the wound; however, this very much displeased a Byzantine physician who was attending the healing. This Byzantine physician turned to the patient and said "would you prefer to live with one leg or die with two" (Ibid p.74) The patient answered, "living with one leg" (Ibid p.72). The Byzantine physician then summoned a Byzantine knight with a sharp axe, the leg was placed on a wooden block and then the knight was ordered to bring the axe down on the patient's leg. The leg was not removed with the initial blow and, so the knight took a second strike which then caused the marrow to spill out of the patient's bone killing him almost instantly (ibid p.73).

Scholars such as Dan Munroe author of Arabian medicine as represented in the memoirs of Usamah Ibn Munquidh suggest that this example gives a clear indication of the unethical treatment of patients by Byzantine doctors during the crusade years. One should question this interpretation . The Usama passage is merely a classic example of his selective choosing and as always an embellishment for entertainment purposes. He chooses to submit this story while omitting others in order to insult western

intelligence and to further support his theory. In any case, if we are to believe this story, the example provides an example of medical interaction between eastern Muslims and western Byzantine doctors. Though Usama's take on the events was critical it can be seen as an exchange of knowledge for both groups.

Perhaps, with years of war time experience the Byzantine doctor recognized that the patient was infected by gangrene or some other deadly condition unknown to Thabit or Usama, moreover, Usama does not hypothesize this claim, rather, he dismisses the practice entirely. Any medical treatment provides a baseline level of medical knowledge for anyone in attendance.



Issues with sources

Usama's Book of Contemplation as a source can be critically analyzed on a number of grounds. For one Usama was poet by nature and was known to embellish the truth for the sake of his readership. This book also doubles as his autobiography of events that occurred during the crusade years. As mentioned one can be critical of these events due to the fact the he could be inflating the events for the sake of making his stories more interesting.

Dan Munroe's Arabian Medicine as Represented in the Memoirs of Usamah Ibn

Munquidh can be criticized on the grounds that Munroe was responsible for translating Usamah's text from Arabic to English. Like many translations many messages get lost and meanings get twisted. So with this being said, Munroe should be analyzed carefully.

Explore Possible Applications or Lessons Learned for Contemporary Education /Social Studies / Science.

This history is significant for contemporary social studies/science lesson as it allows us to conceptualize the issues facing Muslims and Christians today on the global scale. To highlight the notion that the two groups did in fact share medical knowledge speaks to the fact that there was at times moments of caring and compassion during battle and warfare. As Abbijit Nayak puts it "The events of the Crusades during the 11th, century stand as an obstacle in the midst of contemporary Christian-Muslim relationships, interaction and dialogue" (Nayak p.172) Students today have been part of a 9/11 generation so I truly feel that a lesson in early Byzantine /Muslim relations could provide an interesting lesson in how past events shape contemporary times.

Conclusion

The medical world for Muslims and Byzantine Romans undoubtedly evolved throughout the crusade years. The battles that raged across the eastern world provided ample experience for medical practitioners to hone their skills. Usama illustrates primary accounts of cross cultural exchanges of medical knowledge. His accounts are to be questioned, however, if we accept these stories they provide ample evidence to suggest that the medical relationship between crusader and Muslim was not as static as one may think but rather, very active and reciprocal. This transfer has had a significant impact on both Muslim and European worlds. The information that was gathered, accelerated advancements in the field of medicine ranging from practical patient management to the application of medical institutions in Europe (Piers p.23). A more analytical view may suggest that Roman practices were done for a reason unknown to the Muslim warrior. The two way transfer of medical knowledge emerged as a significant factor in understandings each other's culture and customs and also acted as a common ground for learning and mutual respect.

Works Cited

Munqidh Ibn Usama. *Translated by Cobb, P. The Book Of Contemplation Islam and the Crusades*. Penguin Ltd. London, England 2008.

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