



Transparency 4.1F: The Impact of the Crusades

What do you see here? Describe the people you see in this image. What are they doing? What are some of the differences between the various traders? Why would Europeans, after spending nearly 200 years of trying to drive the Muslims from the Holy Land, begin to do business in the Muslim world?

- ❑ In this transparency we see medieval merchants trading at an Arabian seaport.
- The Europeans reaped considerable and long-term benefits from their collision with the Muslim world. The Crusades gave thousands of Europeans, who had never been more than a few miles from their homes, an opportunity to see the world and the cultures of the East. During the Middle Ages, it was Eastern culture that was far more advanced and sophisticated than western European culture. These people wanted to possess the rich goods they had seen in the East—rugs, silks, spices, camphor, musk, ivory, and pearls. This desire made trade and commerce necessary. Hundreds of Italian merchants from Venice, Genoa, and Pisa settled in Asia Minor and set up trading stations. At these stations they could buy and ship home the new articles which Muslim caravans were bringing from India and the Spice Islands. This trade was exceedingly profitable to the Italian merchants, who took advantage of the fact that sailing vessels had been improved and made larger during the Crusades. For Europeans, this increased trade was one of the important outcomes of the Crusades.
- The Crusades also weakened both feudalism and the manorial system of medieval Europe. Many knights left their fiefs to fight in the Crusades, and many serfs were freed. As powerful nobles became involved elsewhere, the kings of Europe became more powerful. The Crusades also increased the use of money throughout Europe. A crusading knight could not pay his expenses with sacks of grain. Although most of these changes were slowly taking place as Europe became more stable, the Crusades hastened them.
- Nearly 200 years of struggle between the crusaders produced important political changes in the Muslim world. The Muslims won nearly all of Asia Minor, but were driven from three-quarters of Spain. Zangi, Nur-al-Din, and Saladin drove the Christians back to the coasts and wiped out almost all the gains of the First Crusade, but the Europeans retained naval control of the Mediterranean and its islands. Saladin's attempt to conclude a naval alliance with the Almohads of the Maghrib, in order to repel attacks on North Africa from Norman Sicily, was unsuccessful, and Egypt was exposed to European naval assault on several occasions. Although the split between the Greek and Latin churches destroyed the last chance of a united Christian front against the Muslims, the death of Saladin in 1193 led to political fragmentation in the Muslim world.
- Intellectually, the Crusades produced some positive results. Through the conflict over the Holy Land, Muslims learned how to improve their defenses and build better

fortifications, which were based on the castles of Europe. Europeans benefited from the capture of Toledo, Spain in 1085, as it brought Europe into closer contact with the rich accumulation of Muslim learning. A school of translators had been established there, and Arabic works on science and philosophy were translated into Latin and circulated throughout leading universities of Europe. The sophisticated urban culture of Muslim Sicily also instructed its Christian conquerors, and the art of scholarship of the Muslim world extended its influence deeply into Italy, thereby contributing to the later Renaissance. In the Holy Land itself, the crusaders were far removed from the chief cities of the Muslim world, and intellectuals among them were few. To the Muslims, the knights and barons of Europe were not only invaders but barbarians.

- Still a third means of interchange took place in the form of trade and commerce between the Europeans and the Muslims. All of the major seaports of the Mediterranean were inhabited by a wide variety of peoples, all brought together in the interest of exchanging goods and services. In this manner, particularly in Genoa and Venice, and exchange of languages took place. For example, the words *sugar*, *syrup*, *cotton*, *admiral*, *magazine*, and many others came directly from Arabic. Also, dockside workers and sailors often passed their free time by playing chess, which came to Europe through the Muslims. The introduction of paper led eventually to the development of the printing press in Europe. The Muslim pointed arch led to the construction of enormous cathedrals with their vaulted ceilings. Also, Arabic themes began appearing in literature, as in Chaucer's *The Squire's Tale*.
- The Muslims also benefited from the interchange of trade and commerce. The textile industries of the Byzantines led the Muslims to develop mills. In addition, some of the administrative techniques used by the Byzantines—especially maintaining a professional army—were adopted by Muslims. In trade, the Muslims, situated between Europe and the Far East, acted as go-betweens for all the goods flowing through the Muslim world. The silks and spices of India and China were exchanged for furs, leather goods, and wood from Europe. With such an enormous exchange of goods and ideas, the Muslims were able to create an advanced civilization.
- Muslims had long been familiar with the Christian faith, since many Christians lived in the Holy Lands. Although they did not agree with certain teachings of Christianity, they generally respected Christians as “People of the Book” and believed in its essence as God's message. For the Christians, disappointment with the ultimate failure of the Crusades made them bitterly antagonistic. While the Qur'an was translated into Latin in A.D. 1143, late medieval literature displays little knowledge of Islam and many obvious errors and misconceptions.