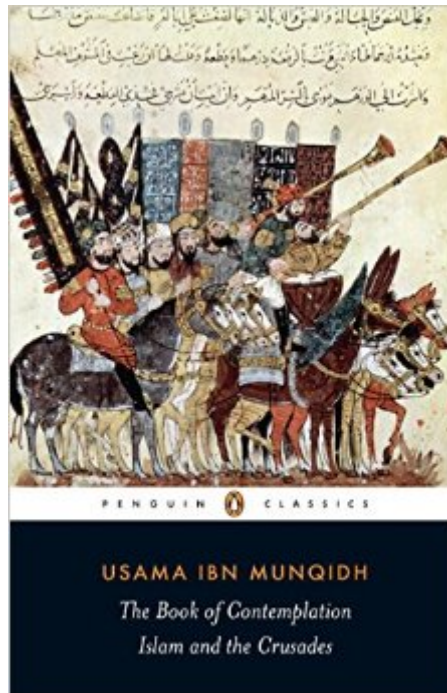


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# The Book Of Contemplation: Islam And The Crusades (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

The Crusades as seen through the eyes of Muslims A significant contribution to the understanding of the medieval holy wars between Christians and Muslims, this volume brings together the best and most complete eyewitness account of the Crusades from the perspective of a medieval Muslim writer. Focusing on twelfth-century Arab aristocrat Usama ibn Munqidh's *Book of Contemplation* but also including extracts from *The Book of the Staff* and *Kernels of Refinement*, this volume offers a strikingly human portrayal of Islamic perspectives on day-to-day existence, warfare, and the curious European invaders. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was required to read one of three books for a low level history course. I chose this one just because I had never heard of it and didn't really know anything about the Islamic perspective of the crusades (or really anything). It's astoundingly great and I can't believe that it isn't more popular (though according to Wikipedia it is a translated work that has been under many names, and *The Book Of Contemplation* is just the latest one). The stories are very visceral and sometimes gory, but

there's also plenty of light-hearted stories and lessons to be learned. It's definitely a fun read, but can be a little confusing due to the muslim names and places if you aren't familiar with their structure. However, the book includes a glossary of names, maps, and references for expressions and historical things you might not know. I highly recommend this book for anyone that has the slightest interest in the crusades!

Paul M. Cobb seems to have done a great job translating the thoughts of medieval Muslim misfit Usama Ibn Munqidh. Many historians and anthropologists have studied this work as it gives us a glimpse into how the Islamic world was reacted to the influx of crusaders in the twelfth-century. The book is most revealing in its more subtle moments; for example Usama recording the dress, bathing habits and gender relations of the crusaders and how this fit (or didn't fit) into Usama's Muslim community. Much of the book however contains a great deal of confusing, often funny, contradictory trash-talking. Usama marvels at the discipline and bravery of Christian knights but then boasts of battling one warrior after another (often with nothing but his wits) and, of course, claiming victory at every turn. Like many of his contemporaries Usama was forced to live, work and trade with Christian emigrants who followed the Crusader armies and he fluctuates between pride in his ability to navigate this new world and denigrating his business partners and neighbors. While Usama champions Islam he does things like engage in sport hunting and runs through the woods slaughtering wild pigs on Ramadan; not exactly things condoned by even the most basic Islamic jurisprudence. In the end what we have is a very linear, very personalized view of the crusades and sketches of a number of localized skirmishes most of which cannot even be historically verified. In short, *The Book of Contemplation* is interesting read, but often for reasons outside the realm of real scholarship.

Fascinating glimpse of life a thousand years ago in the middle east. Delightful surprises for me included lions roaming the region, hunting with raptors, the state of medicine, and the range of travel. The writer went back and forth from present day Syria to North Africa in an era long before motorized transport. Added bonus, places in the news today crop up including Homs, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Baghdad. These were already well established cities even then. Certainly sheds light on how western intervention was regarded back then, and by extension, now.

Usama's account gives us a glimpse into the medieval world. I highly recommend it if you are having trouble comprehending how crucially different life was back then. People, literally, think

differently, their world is governed by religion and every act is subject to judgement. Mr. Cobb does an excellent job, making hundreds of interesting notes on the smallest details.

I thought this book was clear and direct of its defense of Islam.

Excellent

AS EXPECTED,CAME IN GOOD CONDITIONS,LOOKS JUST LIKE THE PICTURE.IT'S SOFT COVER.

An easy to read collection of rambling tales and facts. This puts a humanizing face on Islam that is sorely needed in the Western world. Funny, entertaining, and fascinating. Munqidh is unique (almost a palindrome (Well, not really)).

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