Conclusion

This book has argued for an understanding of post-1291 crusade culture as ambivalent and self-critical, animated by tensions and debates, and fraught with anxiety. Middle English crusade romances uphold ideals of crusading, whether by promoting "curative" violence, deploying a rhetoric of compassionate vengeance for the crucifixion of Christ, or enjoining sorrowful solidarity for injured Christians. But they also articulate anxieties about issues as fundamental and diverse as God's endorsement of the enterprise, the allure of Islam, Christendom's beleaguered state and internal divisions, the inadequacy of Christian warriors vis-à-vis their Muslim counterparts, the baser instincts and selfish ambitions crusading could satisfy, and the violence it involves. These anxieties, or "uneasy concerns," are religious as much as they are political, providential as much as moral, historical as much as literary.

Some of these anxieties – about the morality of violence and the motives of those who fought – go back to the early days of the enterprise. Others were engendered and perpetuated by the long series of Muslim victories and territorial (re)conquests that took place in the eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, and the Balkans. Crusading defeats raised troubling questions: Had God abandoned his followers? Did he support the enemy? Was Muhammad more powerful than Christ? In the real world, such doubts were voiced by laypeople, clerics, and crusaders in Europe and the Near East. In the world of fiction, they were both assimilated to the Christian self and projected onto the Muslim Other. Beneath the ubiquitous motif of the "afflicted Muslim," commonly viewed by scholars as a mere literary construct, lies a fascinating history of blasphemy and religious doubt. Conventionally, of course, crusading defeats were interpreted as manifestations of divine anger against Christian sinfulness. The *peccatis exigentibus hominum* logic goes a long way in explaining why post-1291 crusade romances temper triumphalism with self-criticism, rarely imagine the Christian community as harmoniously unified, and often ascribe to

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:45:52, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935463.006

Muslim characters behaviors and emotions that reflect unfavorably on Christians. The reason that providential questions – such as "if Christians were defeated on account of their sins, had Muslims achieved victory on account of their moral merits?" – are so important to understanding medieval European views of Muslims and Islam is that they were asked by those (like John Bromyard) who had little experience of the peoples they described and those who had traveled extensively. As we saw in Chapter 2, the Italian missionary Riccoldo da Monte di Croce based his assessment of Islamic deeds, what he calls "opera perfectionis" (works of perfection), on both providential beliefs and sustained interaction with the Muslim communities of Baghdad.

Bringing out the heterogeneity of, and conflicts within, post-1291 crusade culture has involved placing Middle English romances in dialogue with diverse materials, many of them relatively neglected by scholars. Crusade romances take up and endorse ideas that feature in ecclesiastical propaganda. But they also dramatically enact invectives against heaven found in poetry, letters, and chronicles produced in Latin Christendom (England, France, Germany, and Italy) and the Near East. They creatively adapt "reverse Orientalism," an international, cross-generic mode in which Muslim figures look down on and offer damning critiques of Christians. They intervene in debates on conflicting "philosophies" of crusading that played out in the realm of love and were of primary concern to poets (Gower, Chaucer, and Machaut), writers of chivalric treatises (Geoffroi de Charny and Philippe de Mézières), and chroniclers of the Baltic *reysen* (Nicolaus of Jeroschin and Peter Suchenwirt). They engage with centuries-long dilemmas about the morality and human toll of religious warfare, even as they assert its politically healthy nature. These romances resist totalizing assessments, demanding instead to be integrated within, and considered key constituents of, a multivocal political culture. What makes them such remarkable cultural objects is the sheer variety of modes, traditions, and perspectives they accommodate, both individually and as a group.

Even as I have sought to cast a wide net in my coverage of primary sources, I have attempted to do justice to the translational or adaptive processes by which (most) Middle English crusade romances were created. On close examination, these romances reveal themselves to be accomplished literary works subject to what Bernard Cerquiglini calls *variance* – that is, the creative innovations of writers who thrived on the challenges and pleasures of rewriting and reinventing.[1] The author of *The Sultan of Babylon* turns the archetypal villain Laban of *La destruction de Rome* and

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:45:52, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935463.006

Fierabras into a worthy conqueror who enacts divine vengeance against sinful Christian Romans and whose spiritual crises, mirroring Charlemagne's fits of rage, perform complex cultural work. The adaptors of the *Otuel* story enhance the eponymous character's strength and moral qualities while transforming Roland and Oliver, Europe's paragons of chivalry, into disruptive troublemakers. Guy of Warwick's postconfessional life is made more exemplary to accentuate the critique of his love-spurred, worldly career. *The Siege of Jerusalem* recasts the Jews as compassion-arousing victims of merciless Roman leaders of a righteous crusade that degenerates into wanton cruelty. The interpolations to *Richard Coeur de Lion* invite moral scrutiny of the king's violent actions by exposing their adverse effects on families and chivalric communities, both Christian and Muslim. Writers of crusade romances took a serious approach to translation or adaptation, inscribing in their productions the greatest pressures and preoccupations of the world in which they lived. They knew what their audiences expected: topical, historically evocative stories that stimulated reflection, dialogue, and debate.

In the Introduction, I pointed to some key differences in the reception of Edward Said's *Orientalism* between scholars of medieval crusade literature and modern colonial fiction, citing work by Lisa Lowe, Elleke Boehmer, Jennifer Yee, Priyamvada Gopal, and others to frame my contributions. I end this book with a sense of the enduring productiveness of such debates, well over forty years since the publication of *Orientalism*, and of the possibilities for research ahead. In *Insurgent Empire* (2019), which takes as its subject indigenous anticolonial resistance and British dissent during the nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries, Gopal makes a powerful argument about the study of history: we need to attend to broad cultural developments in Europe engendered not just by European expansion but also by non-European opposition.[2] The foregoing chapters (especially the first and second) have explored the role of Muslim Levantine reconquests, and the subsequent rise of the Ottomans, in shaping and diversifying crusade culture, focusing on Middle English romances and their contexts. But there is, I believe, a need for a full-length study of the transformative pressures exerted by these geopolitical developments not only on "crusade culture" but on culture more generally – a new history of medieval European views of, and self-definition in relation to, Muslims and Islam.[3] Drawing on a pan-European archive, such a study would offer an alternative to the scholarly narrative that sees conquests and postconquest conditions (peaceful or otherwise) as the primary catalysts to cultural change in Latin Christendom.[4] It would more fully establish the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:45:52, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935463.006

importance of the Ayyūbids, Mamlūks, and Ottomans in European history.[5] And it would open up areas of inquiry where scholars of this subject have yet to fully venture: analogical thinking in relation to Islam; shared moral values; anti-Orientalism; resistance to dominant racial ideologies; criticism of Europe in a global frame; the place of Muslims in debates on universal salvation; and nascent, if imperfect, ideas of equality.[6]

It is perhaps fitting to close with the qualified anticrusade argument, grounded in imperfect ideas of equality, voiced by the French lawyer Honorat Bovet in his widely disseminated *Arbre des batailles* (1387). Bovet writes that Christians have a superior claim to the Holy Land, which they gained through the Passion of Christ. But he refutes Christendom's right, and the lawfulness of papal indulgences, to wage war against Muslim peoples over any other territory on account of God's benevolence to all humans, "la creature humaine," regardless of religious belief. God graces the lands of Christians and Muslims equally with good corn and good fruit. Muslims, like Christians, have science and a sense of discretion to lead them in justice, as well as kingdoms, empires, sacred texts, and their faith. "Et doncques puisque Dieu leur a donné tant de biens pourquoy les leur osteroient les Chrestiens?" (And so, since God has given them so many blessings, why should Christians take these from them?).[7]

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:45:52, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935463.006