

## IN MEMORIAM

JOSHUA PRAWER

JOSHUA PRAWER died in Jerusalem on 30 April 1990 at the age of seventy-two. He came to Israel in 1936 from Poland and studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Shortly after his arrival in Palestine he joined the Haganah; during the War of Independence he served as liaison officer between the Haganah and the Christian institutions in Jerusalem. As deputy dean (1953–1955) and dean (1961–1965) of the Faculty of Humanities at the Hebrew University, Praver played a decisive role in devising the liberal arts curricula now normative in Israel's universities. At the same period he established at the Hebrew University a pre-academic unit, conceived to enable applicants like new immigrants and students from overseas to meet the requirements of admission; such a unit became a common feature of all the universities in Israel. As an acute observer of the Israeli educational system, Praver served in the years 1956 to 1958 as a chairman of the pedagogic secretariat of the Ministry of Education, working for the advancement of pupils of oriental origin and devising a system of graded tuition fees. From 1964 through 1966 he headed the government-appointed Praver Committee, which established an interim stage between primary and secondary education. Praver was also one of the founders of Haifa and Beer Sheva Universities.

As a teacher of medieval history at the Hebrew University, Joshua Praver attempted to introduce to Israeli students a civilization alien to them in language and religion by making it alive through written sources and excursions to crusader monuments. The impact of his lectures at the Hebrew University and the excursions he conducted to the remains to the Latin Kingdom from the 1950s onward is best reflected by the fact that in contemporary Hebrew literature history students are frequently depicted as working on some aspect of the Crusades. His students are now those who teach medieval history in the universities of Israel, and Israel is one of the major centers of the study of the Crusades and the Latin East.

As a historian, Joshua Praver holds an outstanding place among historians of the Crusades and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. His early work broke new ground in this field by his revolutionary studies of the constitutional, social, agricultural, economic, and military history of the Latin Kingdom. The importance of these studies (reissued and collected in *Crusader Institutions*, Oxford 1980) transcends the Crusader Kingdom itself and forms a major contribution to the social and economic history of the Near East. The rich crusader documentation compensates for the penury of Near Eastern sources, particularly on the history of agriculture and the peasant population of Palestine. The study of the different strata

of society points to the continuity of some of the Palestinian social institutions, such as the transformation of the Muslim *dhimmi*s into strata of semi-servile serfs of the Latin Kingdom. The two volumes of his *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem* (Paris 1969–70) contain not only the best account now available of certain major crusades but also a rewriting of much of the legal, political, social, and military history of the Latin Kingdom. His book on the *Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: European Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (London 1972) not only deepened his description of all aspects of crusader society from the crown to the ethnic and religious minorities, including art and daily life, but reconstructed a comprehensive model of colonial society long before the classical age of European colonialism.

Though this study served the Arab nationalists' polemics and their presentation of the Crusades as a prefiguration of Zionism, Praver himself refused to be drawn into discussion about analogies between the Latin Kingdom and the state of Israel. Yet his studies reflect a latent sensitivity to this subject. So, for example, in describing the crusader resettlement of Blanchegarde, he observed that "the settler's plow followed the horse of the conqueror" (*Crusading Institutions*, p. 105), thus repeating almost verbatim the declaration of the Jewish National Fund that the JNF tractor follows in the wake of the army tank. His sensitivity to this subject is also reflected by the fact that the problem that interested him most of all as a historian was that of the failure of the Latin Kingdom. In his early works he explained it in terms of the modest dimensions of the crusaders' rural settlements, the failure of the kingdom to colonize the captured territories, as well as the failure to attract enough manpower from Europe to master them effectively, let alone settle them. In his later studies, however, Praver emphasized the paramount importance for the Latin Kingdom of the Pan-European sentiments of Christian solidarity. As long as those sentiments were strong, as they were in the twelfth century, the kingdom could expect significant military and financial aid, but when they weakened in the second half of the thirteenth century the kingdom had to rely largely on its own resources, which proved to be insufficient.

Joshua Praver was a recipient of the Israel Prize, as well as numerous other accolades like the Ordre Nationale du Mérite. Editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopædia Hebraica*, chairman of the Humanities Section of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, academic chairman of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, member of the boards of the Israel Exploration Society, the Yad Ben Zvi Institute, and the Open University, Praver was one of these who established the frameworks of Israeli academic and intellectual activities and managed them for several decades. His death is a great loss both to the international community of medieval historians and to the cultural life of Israel.

SYLVIA SCHEIN  
*University of Haifa*