Roles Performed By The Women In Crusades

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Introduction

The strength of women and the wide variety of things that they are capable of doing have been the center of feminist debates for a very long time now. It has been argued and proven through historical examples as well that women can do everything that men can do, as well as everything that men cannot do. Such examples include many European figures, for example, the great Queen Elizabeth I, as well as many other personalities from other parts of the world.

Particular historical events also prove that women are strong and play important roles in different kinds of events, be it wars or times of celebration. World War II provides us with such an example in which women took up the workforce and kept the industries working because the men were too busy fighting in the army. Though history is loaded with examples of similar events, the focus of this paper is going to be on a time period way before the Second World War: the first, second, and third Crusades. It will be argued that women played significant roles in all three of these crusades, roles which have not only been underrepresented but also underrated. Their efforts are hardly ever discussed, and the main focus is only on the men, as it always is. The intention of this paper is to deviate from the norm and shed light upon something that deserves a lot more attention than it has received.

What Were The Crusades?

Before entering into a discussion on the importance of women and the significance of their contributions to society, it is important to highlight the context that is under analysis and scrutiny here. This goes all the way back to the eleventh century. The Crusades were mainly a religious conflict between the Muslims and the Christians, mainly over land that was considered to be sacred by both groups (Scham, 2002). At this time, Europe was emerging as a profound power having international influences. However, the European powers were still not as strong as those of the Byzantine Empire as well as the Muslim Empires in the Middle East. In 1095, Alexius had power over the Byzantine power and he sent envoys to Pope Urban II and asked for help against the Turks who had been threatening his empire. Conflict with the Turks was over land that was claimed to be sacred and holy by the Byzantines as well as the Muslims. Thus, the Crusades can be thought of as a religious conflict. Alexius's request was accepted by the Pope, who ended up gathering considerable support for him against the Muslims from surrounding areas.

In 1905, the Pope declared that the Western Christians were to take up arms against the Muslim forces, and this marked the starting point of the Crusades. The Pope's call received a great response from people all over, including the elite as well as the commoners. The first, second, and third Crusades can be considered separate events based on their time frames. Though it was the men who were mainly the soldiers fighting on both sides, the women of the time period also played considerable roles throughout. It is because of them that the events unfolded in the ways that they did. If it weren't for these women, the situation and the conclusion of the conflict might actually have been the complete opposite of what it was.

Roles Performed By The Women

Fighting in the Battles:

Throughout the time period during which the Crusades lasted, women were very active both physically and politically. Though their work and contributions have been highly underrated, the efforts that they put in cannot be denied. Because of the deadly fighting that kept going on for such a long time period, and because of the savage nature of the fighting, a lot of lives were lost. Most of the people who died were men. This is because the initial military recruits were men. At that time, it was not predicted by either side that the fighting would become so prolonged. Nor could it be imagined that such a large number of men would end up losing their lives. Once that started happening, there was a lack of soldiers, particularly on the Christian side. It was at that time that the women proved to be the saviors. They started filling in the ranks of the men and took their places (The Role of Women During the Crusades, 2015). They fought battles bravely and with immense valor and courage when men were not available to do so. Christian women fought against Muslim men, something which deserves much appreciation. The value of their fighting can never be overestimated, given the fact that men are physically powerful and much stronger than women. Despite that, the women were able to fight them with equal strength and courage and ended up winning a good number of battles using their keen minds and thoughtful war strategies. What they lacked in physical strength, they made up for in their mental capabilities. It was primarily because of their brilliant strategies that they emerged victorious.

Another very important function that the women performed was protecting their towns and villages as well as the larger, more prosperous areas of residence, which can be called cities. They were armed with weapons of all kinds and trained to use them. They were also given the best kind of military equipment of that time, including large and highly destructive weapons such as catapults. These were primarily for the protection of places of royal residence. Most of the women who were recruited for defense purposes were around castles. Apart from castles, protecting other important sites was also a role entrusted to the women. In the absence of men, only the women could do this. This was a very important task that had to be carried out because already the war was about conquering lands. If it weren't for these strong and fearless women, there would have been no defense on any of these

sites. Moreover, the Muslim enemies could very easily have attacked these places and conquered more land. Luckily enough, they could not do so despite making many attempts, thanks to these strong and courageous women.

Working as the Breadwinners:

Because of the huge number of male lives that were lost during the Crusades due to the battles, oftentimes, families were left without any breadwinners. This is because, at that time, gender roles were rather strict. Women were confined to the domestic realms, and going out to earn money for the family was exclusively the responsibility of the men. Though women were involved with the economy, their contributions were rare and rather insignificant. When fighting broke out and men started dying, leaving their families without a male head who could earn, it was the women who took up this responsibility as well. They found themselves working in the factories and industries as workers, working in the state in positions of representation, as well as in trade. The women came forward and took care of the economy of the empire and made sure that it did not collapse (The Role of Women During the Crusades, 2015). Not only was this beneficial for the Empire as a whole but also for the individual families because they found a source of income with which they could provide food and shelter for themselves. This is a situation that was again seen during the Second World War when women came out and took the positions of men in the workforce to keep the economy going. Thus, this proves that women are highly capable of performing all those functions that men perform, which is why their abilities must never be underestimated.

Administration of Property:

By the time of the Second Crusade, men had started filling up the military ranks once again. This, however, still meant that men had to be away from their homes, and the women had to take up their responsibilities. This not only included being the breadwinners but also carrying out other everyday tasks that are usually performed by men, such as fixing things, performing outdoor errands, building, painting, etc. At this time, women were also handed the responsibility of protecting land, property, and wealth (Edbury, 2003). Those men who went to war usually entrusted everything that they had, all of their property, wealth, investments, savings and assets to the women. In the case of land, women were not only supposed to protect it but also had to work with it. Thus, they found themselves engaged in farming and agricultural activities, which can oftentimes be extremely arduous, particularly for women. They cultivated land, planted crops, harvested them and even sold them once they were produced. They managed all of their monetary affairs on their own and lived in a world where there were hardly any men. Women need to be greatly appreciated for being able to manage on their own because they were forced to do not just one but all the activities that they had never done before. This was in addition to having to continue doing those things that they had already been doing. Women of the time period became overburdened with work as they had never been before. The fact that despite all of these difficulties and challenges, they managed to remain firm and

surefooted and were able to carry out all of these tasks meticulously is remarkable. This is something that men would perhaps never be able to do.

Creation of Art and Culture:

Because the men were away from their families, particularly the women, the women had a lot of free time on their hands. This does not go for the women who were engaged in warfare and defense mechanisms of the Empire but for those who had only their young children to cater to. Their responsibilities were lessened because of the unavailability of their husbands, brothers and generally the male members of their families. Because of having more time, these women spent a lot of time on the creation and perpetuation of culture. They wrote books, poems, and other impactful literature including that related to science and new discoveries. They became engaged in art and painting. They created many new forms of painting through which they were able to capture the different aspects of life at the time (The Role of Women During the Crusades

,2015). This literature and these paintings are extremely helpful because they have made a lot of contributions towards recording history. They have provided a lot of important cultural details for historians, which have, in turn, pointed towards a lot of significant facts that provide information about the political situation of the time. Thus, the fact that the particular history of the Crusades and happenings is known to us today can be attributed to the women of the time period (Edbury, 2003). If it weren't for these women who put in the effort of recording the cultural and political details of the time period, all of this information would not have been available to us.

Through these writings and literature, it is apparent that during this time, women were very actively participating in the field of science as well. They were conducting scientific experiments of their own, coming up with various conclusions and making discoveries. It was during this time period that the seeds of Enlightenment thinking were planted. Because of these critically thinking women, people started thinking along scientific lines and began to question their existing knowledge. Enlightenment thinking is very important because it ended up giving rise to the Scientific Revolution. The technological advancements that we have available to us today go all the way back to the Scientific Revolution, for which women deserve and must be given credit.

Political Propagation:

Women played a very significant role in spreading the political agenda of the Church and the Crown among the people. The people had to be convinced that they were to fight against the Muslims who had occupied that land that rightfully belonged to them. The women who were the most active in performing this function were those who were the most religious and closely affiliated with the Church. Records are present of women who would show discontentment with the male members of their families if they refused to participate in the fighting and enlist in the military of the empire. The women reminded them that by fighting the Muslims, they would be performing a great religious task

that was more or less obligatory for them. There are also recorded incidents of women who refused to marry the men they were betrothed to because of their refusal to provide military services to the crown. The women also preached at the churches even though they were often not given positions of representation at the churches. They would preach religion to their children as well, and many mothers also convinced and forced their sons to participate in the fighting. Furthermore, in the cases where the women had to enlist in the army, they also convinced their female friends and relatives to do the same and, therefore, contribute to the cause of the Church. This is another important function that women performed and for which the Church owes them gratitude, yet it has not received the attention that it deserves.

Conclusion:

An extremely important point to make is the fact that it is only the men who receive attention when it comes to making contributions to society. The women's efforts and actions are hardly ever recognized, and even then only in passing. A detailed scrutiny of historical events sheds light upon the activities of the women and the importance of their contributions. The particular historical example of the Crusades shows that women are able to perform not only the difficult tasks that they already perform but also those tasks that the men perform. Furthermore, they also have the potential to perform both sorts of these tasks together at the same time and simultaneously. Women and famous female figures, in particular, must receive greater scholarly and historical documentation than what they have so far gotten. This also teaches contemporary society of today to respect women and recognize their abilities because, if need be, they have the potential and the power to defeat everything in order to achieve whatever they wish (Scham, 2002).

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