What is Crusader Art? Several publications have been devoted to analyzing, expounding upon, and debating the possible elements that factor into this elusive art. Jaroslav Folda, the undisputed leader in the area of history of art of the Crusaders has spent a life time publishing monographic studies and historical surveys on this topic and in this, his most recent work, provides us with an unequivocal definition of Crusader art. Crusader art is that art commissioned by Crusaders in Syria-Palestine during the years 1099-1291; it is a unique art developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Eastern Mediterranean world, embodying a cultural richness that includes the traditions of the Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Syrian Melchite, Armenian and Copts.

Professor Folda provides the reader with a strong historical background of the development of the Latin kingdom while discussing the architectural monuments, churches, and castles that Crusaders designed and built (and throughout the warfare rebuilt) alongside their Eastern counterparts. He allows us to see and comprehend the visual message with non-twentieth century vision, through his analysis of the multicultural art forms; the reader is able to comprehend how a twelfth century pilgrim might experience the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or the Church of the Nativity. Artists from many traditions worked as a team not only in architecture but in the fine arts, particularly mosaics, the evidence being texts written in tesserae in Latin, Greek, Syriac and the Venetian dialect. Other art forms – panel paintings, enameled glassware, metal ware, decorative pottery, illuminated manuscripts – were ecclesiastical art, pilgrimage art, royal art, military art. The study of these forms enables us to learn more about the patrons who commissioned these works, the most famous having been royalty (Louis IX and Richard I) but also including local royalty, military orders (especially the Hospitallers, the Templars, and the Teutonic Knights), educated nobles, bourgeois, and merchants.

The author presents his most recent theories on the dispersion of color-palettes in icon paintings and reinforces his arguments through the inclusion of numerous, sizable, color illustrations. His new research on the Mellon Madonna and the Kahn Madonna show the transmission of Eastern styles or techniques to Italian painters via the Crusaders, namely chrysography (the network of golden painted highlighting) and iconography that influenced the work of Italian painters such as Cimabue and Duccio. Ultimately, the artistic interchange and cultural interpenetration in the Medieval Mediterranean world of the Crusaders was transferred to the West with the return of the “Franks” to their native lands. A clear and concise text complete with lavish color illustrations, notes, and bibliography make this volume a fundamental tool for the understanding of the art of this era.

Lamia Doumato, Head of Reader Services, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC), LD-OUMATO@NGA.GOV

Copyright © 2009 ARLIS/NA