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The Crusades as a European Master Narrative of National Memory Culture

Abstract

This contribution discusses the various enemy images conveyed by crusades narratives in French and German research literature and history textbooks. It addresses how the concept of a ‘non-European other’ emerged on the basis of long-standing traditions, and how this inspired highly varied enemy representations (dangerous, violent, weak, cowardly, culturally superior). Further, the comparison of textbooks and research literature reaches important insights, unveiling a clear dichotomy within enemy portrayals.

The crusades were penitential war pilgrimages carried out by European armies in Levant, North Africa, Spain, Portugal, Poland, the Balkans, Hungary, Scandinavia, and Western Europe. They began in the 11th century and, according to most historians, ended with the fall of Acre in 1291, although modern historical research questions this chronological classification.¹ The historian Jonathan Riley-Smith, one of the leading experts on crusades, has placed the end of the crusades in the late 18th century when the last Order, the Sovereign Military Knights of Malta, was dispersed by Napoleon after he conquered Malta in 1798.²

So the crusades were not confined to the high and late Middle Ages; they are instead a central part of European history. The crusades play a significant role in the history and historical awareness of Europe and the Mediterranean area, from the Renaissance and the early modern era up to modernity. If we follow Riley-Smith’s chronology then we can see that, ironically, Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt and Palestine – the reason why the Knight’s Order was dissolved in the first place – was also the starting point for a new epoch of euphoric appreciation of the crusades in Europe. The expedition triggered a burst of enthusiasm for all things oriental on the part of historians, archaeologists, artists, politicians, writers and theologians, which found its expression in the reception of the crusades.³ After 1800, we can discern a rise of scientific and li-

¹ See also Jürgen Sarnowsky, “Kreuzzüge und Ritterorden in der neueren Forschung“, in: *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, Hans-Werner Goetz, ed. (Bochum: Winkler, 2000), 25-55; Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades 1274-1580. From Lyons to Alcazar*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 1992.

² Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008 (Introduction), *Wozu heilige Kriege? Anlässe und Motive der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2003), 142ff.; Adam Knobler, “Holy Wars, Empires, and the Portability of the Past: The Modern Uses of Medieval Crusades”, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (2006), 293f.

³ Mary Anne Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity. The Legacy of a Grand Narrative since 1789*, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2004, 256f.; Elizabeth Siberry, “Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, in: *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, Jonathan Riley-Smith, ed., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995, 365.

terary publications with new questions and perspectives on the crusades. It stands to reason to see Napoleon's conquests and the new perception of the crusades they inspired in Europe as a turning point. What place does the recollection of the crusades have in European memory and which arguments and ideologies are connected to this memory? My paper will seek to answer these questions. In doing so, we should bear in mind that speaking of a '19th-century European memory culture' is in itself problematic. While the national crusades narratives are indeed closely tied to concepts of a Christian Europe, Christian heroism and descriptions of Christian morals and virtues, they are nevertheless also always formulated from a clearly national perspective.⁴

I will begin by considering the crusades as a master narrative from an external perspective. This view from the 'outside' gives us a good idea of the effect the reception of the European crusades had in the 19th century on the concept of 'heroic history' in the Mediterranean, 100 years after Napoleon's adventures in Egypt and Palestine. It is striking that around 1900, Muslim intellectuals lamented that the younger generation in their countries were not acquainted with the heroes of their own history. While the Europeans, they claimed, had a proud awareness of their history, the younger generation of Muslims was not well prepared for an altercation with Europe. It was with this in mind that Muslim intellectual Rafiq al-Azm from Damascus (1865-1925) defended the publication of a collection of heroes' biographies (1903) with which he wished to redress this deplored defect in contemporary Arabian literature. This regrettable situation must be remedied, he said, because one of the reasons why Europe is so strong and culturally advanced is because the young grow up with a sense of their past's own heroes. This admiration fuels their own efforts and makes them committed to their nations. Muslim youths in Arab countries should therefore be educated in the same way.⁵

It might surprise you that I am starting my presentation on the analysis of the European memory of the crusades with an invective by al-Azm from Damascus on the value of heroes of the past. But this perspective from the 'outside' hints at the enormous implications of the production of European historical images and interpretations. And indeed the narratives concerned with crusades in modern European historiography and literature aim at a historical complex in which heroism and religion, nation building and concepts of Europe are tightly interwoven. With regard to the history of science, modern historiography in particular is closely linked to the emergence of nationalism.⁶

Historians' interpretations of national histories are a constitutive element of nationalism. Each closer determination of the connection between nationalism and crusade narratives must, however, also provide a definition of the aims and values, patterns of thought, argumentation and behaviour, if the definition is not to remain an insignificant abstract analysis.

⁴ I thank Stefan Berger for pointing this out.

⁵ Werner Ende, "Wer ist ein Glaubensheld, wer ist ein Ketzler? Konkurrierende Geschichtsbilder in der modernen Literatur islamischer Länder", in: *Die Welt des Islams* 23/24 (1984), 70-94. This quotation shows that 19th-century national historiography in Europe can be regarded as a highly successful export model.

⁶ Jörg Echternkamp, *Der Aufstieg des deutschen Nationalismus (1770-1840)* (Frankfurt/M./New York: Campus-Verlag, 1998), 14; Stefan Berger, *Inventing the Nation – Germany* (London: Arnold, 2004).

This is why I have decided to focus on two main points in my presentation: firstly, I will briefly speak about the presence of the crusades in public awareness in European countries and raise the question as to why the crusades suddenly gained in popularity at the turn of the 19th century. Secondly, I would like to outline some of the main nationalistic figurations to be found in the research literature of historiographical crusades discourses. In doing so I will examine to what extent colonialist and/or imperialist patterns of argumentation appear in these discourses.

The presence of crusade images in Europe's public culture, trans-nationally and in all social classes since the early 19th century is amazing. The royal palace of Versailles in France was turned into a national museum in the 1830s (dedicated to 'the glories of France'). The majority of paintings with medieval themes glorify the crusades. The majority of crusading scenes in Versailles were commissioned between 1838 and 1842, corresponding to Louis Philippe's renewal of Charles X's 'crusade' in Algeria.

In Spain, the collective memories of the crusades seeped into the anti-Napoleonic propaganda around 1800 and were reproduced throughout the century in various anti-Muslim and imperial discourses. The clergy in rural areas were particularly successful in their political rhetoric, following the tradition of the Medieval *Reconquistadores*. As they were responsible for a large part of the rural population's education, it was easy to let crusade propaganda flow into religious teachings. The secularised schools too became arenas for political battles, where for decades ideological debates were fought about the return to national greatness through the successes of the holy wars at the time of the *Reconquista*⁷

In Russia, Catherine the Great's successor, Paul I, educated in the tradition of French history, wished to revive the tradition of the crusades. An important step in this direction was his attempt to re-establish the Maltese Hospitaller Order in Russia that had been dissolved in 1798. Paul I's idea was that through the re-establishment of the Order, Russia and the Russian elite in particular would develop a feeling of past greatness and, at the same time, register a claim as the Christians' defenders in the Levant.

Elizabeth Siberry has compiled an impressive study on the fascination the crusades inspired in British literature, art and music.⁸ 'In Britain the crusades were de-catholicized and gradually blended into "the cult of Christian militarism" which first took hold in Britain at the time of the Crimean War. The image of the crusades and the crusader re-entered the public sphere as part of the popular political empire discourse to such an extent that, by World War One, war campaigns and war heroes were regularly lauded as crusaders in the popular press, from the pulpit, and in the official propaganda of the British war machine.'⁹

⁷ Knobler, *Holy Wars*, 301.

⁸ Elizabeth Siberry, *The New Crusaders. Images of the Crusades in the 19th and early 20th centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

⁹ Cit. Knobler, *Holy Wars*, 310.

The rhetoric of the crusades was not just reflected in representative places of remembrance for lost glories of the Middle Ages and early modernity, in the literature of the educated classes and in political media. For historians and orientalists the rediscovery of the crusades was a fertile soil. The 19th century was, particularly for France and Germany, a century of crusade narratives.¹⁰

The apparent omnipresence of crusade images poses the question as to how the complexity of medieval conflicts between Christians and Muslims could penetrate the public discourse so distinctly, especially since the 'crusade mentality' had been unpopular in Church politics since the late 17th century. A lot of historians at the time of the Enlightenment criticised the crusades as being a fanatic and barbaric aspect of a distant and unenlightened past. This makes it even more amazing that many 19th century historians, intellectuals and rulers did not share this view without indulging in a romanticised image of knights in shining armour and noble maidens in peril.¹¹ Instead, for many of those at both the apex and nadir of the social classes, the crusades were an apt and readily portable symbol for the current political landscape.¹² For the followers of the Ancien Regime in the face of the French revolution, the crusades represented a time where exercising power was sanctioned by God and political actions followed an uncomplicated set of moral certainties. It was conservative monarchists and religious rightwing ultra-monists who, protesting against Europe's steady secularisation, 'rediscovered' the crusades, thereby causing the implementation of crusades metaphors into the political language of the 19th century. A specific term, 'medievalism', has come to be broadly identified with those working on the 'uses' of the Middle Ages' later periods, yet few historians have examined the place of the crusades in the context of broader political and social discourse.¹³

The enthusiasm conservative Christian groups felt for the Middle Ages was largely determined by overall concepts whose focus and scientific interest was on 'moral development', i.e. the relationship between politics and religion.¹⁴ Their aim was to revitalise the medieval crusaders' values, ideas and ways of life that brought to mind terms like chivalry, submission and purity. The idea of a Christian hero was central to these efforts. Schlegel's understanding of history was paradigmatic for this group. Schlegel's romanticised thoughts on the philosophy of history draw on empire narratives the appreciation of which is connected to the glorification of medieval empires. Schlegel is being consequent in his 'Universal History' when he says Christ and the German hero: everything good comes from them.¹⁵

¹⁰ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 6ff.

¹¹ Knobler, *Holy Wars*, 294.

¹² Riley-Smith describes this phenomenon as a number of paracrusading projects and a large amount of pseudocrusading language, see Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam*, 53f.

¹³ Knobler, *Holy Wars*, 295.

¹⁴ See Werner Maleczek, "Auf der Suche nach dem vorbildhaften Mittelalter in der Nationalgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Deutschland und Österreich im Vergleich", in: *Nationalgeschichte als Artefakt: Zum Paradigma „Nationalstaat“ in den Historiographien Deutschlands, Italiens und Österreichs*, Hans Peter Hye, Brigitte Mazohl and Jan Paul Niederkorn, eds. (Wien: Verlag der Österr. Akad. der Wiss., 2009), 106f.

¹⁵ Cf. Echternkamp, *Aufstieg des deutschen Nationalismus*, 203ff.

Despite their obvious failure, it is therefore hardly surprising that the crusades play such a large role in the glorification of the Middle Ages. The crusades present the culmination of a symbiosis between politics and religion and also the start of an international cooperation of European powers based on Christianity. But for the first part of the 19th century at least, the political actors' evaluation, romantically tinged as it was, allowed neither the people nor the Church to be independently manoeuvring subjects; both in general and with regard to the crusades. Instead, the subject was a heroic individual, or rather a theocratic concept of history, and his actions were attributable to God.¹⁶ The extent to which this concept of history changed in the crusade narrative throughout the 19th century will become clear in the following deliberations.

I now come to the second part of my presentation in which I wish to give a brief summary of some of the main nationalistic figurations to be found in the research literature of historiographical crusades discourses.

Throughout the whole of the 19th century, European states and countries discussed the meaning of nations, nation-states, the use of national symbols, and the value of national history. Christianity was nearly always the constant unifying factor for nation concepts and ideas of 19th century Europe. The relationship between the two concepts 'nation' and 'Europe' is problematic. Both concepts offer guidance for social behaviour according to various religious, social or aesthetic maxims and therefore the construction or perpetuation of a legitimate system.

A glance into 19th century history books shows that the topos of the crusades' takes up a central position in national narratives on the Middle Ages. A look at primary school textbooks from the period in question shows that the prevailing romanticisation of the medieval crusades was not, it seems, only restricted to social elites and ultra-conservative Christian milieus. This is a phenomenon that can be found all over Europe. As well as biblical stories, the adventures of Richard the Lionheart, Godfrey of Boullion, Bohemond of Tarento, St. Louis, Saladin or the fall of Constantinople in 1453 have their fixed place in European cultural memory. But which main concrete nationalist figurations can be found in historiographical research literature and textbooks with regard to the crusades? To which traditions were the crusade narratives able to refer? Did stories that were passed down from generation to generation change according to pre-existing traditions and myths to the extent that something new emerged with significant impulses for a nationalist version of history? In other words, which long-enduring collective tendencies provided strongholds for nationalist narratives of history, and can these be held responsible for the success of nationalist narrative figures or images that form in the mind of the reader? I would like to address these questions with a glance at a selection of significant German and French crusades historians.

¹⁶ For early German nationalism, *ibid.*, 207. On the significance of romanticism for the emergence of historicism see, for instance, Ernst Schulz, "Der Einfluss der Romantik auf die deutsche Geschichtsforschung," in: *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch: Studien zur Entwicklung von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischem Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 24-43; Stefan Berger, "The Power of National Pasts: Writing National History in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe," in: *Writing the Nation. A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30-62.

I would like to begin with Friedrich Wilken's 8-volume work on the history of the crusades based on reports both from East and West.¹⁷ Wilken (1777-1840) was Professor of History at Heidelberg and Berlin, Royal Librarian and clerk of renowned French and Prussian academies. His monumental work on the crusades is distinguished not so much by its national reception than by its euphoric, conservative and Christian interpretation, which sees the true greatness of the crusades in the unity of Europe through holy war. After the Council at Clermont, he claims, there was hardly any family whose father or son had not 'sacrificed himself for Christ' by taking the cross.¹⁸ Wilken describes the ideal Christian warrior who – cleansed by the blood of Turks – receives true forgiveness for his sins. Although the crusades were an endeavour affecting the whole of Europe, it was the Norman warriors who particularly excelled during them. The connection he draws between landscape and character is especially striking here: Wilken explains the Norman's penchant for pilgrimage in terms of their sense of romance inspired by the northern forests. And he explains the Germans' hesitation at the beginning of the crusades movement as a result of the conflict between 'the German people' and the Curia.¹⁹ Wilken's nationalism does not appear until he speaks of the conquest of Jerusalem, where it was Godfrey with his Lorraine troops and courageous Germans who fought at the most dangerous points of the siege.²⁰ Wilken places the battle for Jerusalem in the biblical context of crucifixion, divine intervention and salvation.²¹ What is more, in the second volume of his crusades history he anticipates the mobilising power of a lasting Christian holy war, even after the conquest of Jerusalem. This holy war, he claims, was only provoked by the unity and strength of Europe and thus the victory in Palestine.

Wilken describes the survival measures undertaken by the Frankish crusaders using martial turns of phrase: 'For whoever wished to kill the snake would have to stamp on its head ... And so, now that the First crusade had regained the Holy Sepulchre and founded the Empire of Jerusalem, the Second crusade was to destroy the caliphate and complete the victory of Christianity over the delusion of the Muslims.'²² According to his logic, the reasons for the failure of this military and political undertaking were transgressions against Christian moral standards and the loss of the true faith in the one and only God. Nationally tinted criticism of the barbaric nature of the crusades filters through only very hesitantly; the Italians, so claims the text in one example, soiled the reputation of the Christians through their disloyalty and cruelty, while not a shadow of doubt was cast upon 'the glory of the pious valour shown by the Norman pilgrims'.²³

¹⁷ Friedrich Wilken, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge nach morgenländischen und abendländischen Berichten*, Seven parts in Eight Volumes (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1807-1832).

¹⁸ Friedrich Wilken, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge nach morgenländischen und abendländischen Berichten*, Part 1: *Gründung des Königreichs Jerusalem* (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1807), 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 63f.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 281.

²¹ *Ibid*, 291ff.

²² Quoted in Friedrich Wilken, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, Part 2: *Das Königreich Jerusalem und die Kämpfe der Christen wider die Ungläubigen bis zu dem Verluste der Grafschaft Edessa und dem Kreuzzuge der Könige Conrad des III. und Ludwig des VII. im Jahre 1146* (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1813), 119f.

²³ *Ibid*, 213.

The conflicts between the European army and Byzantium are also interpreted thus. The Byzantine Emperor forgot, so runs the account, that those crucified included the most noble and courageous of knights – the pride and joy of their peoples. Wilken vehemently criticises Alexios' scepticism towards the crusaders and postulates that the Byzantines, 'interested primarily in worldly things, were unable to grasp the selfless heroism of the Europeans, shaped by religious devotion and the capacity for suffering'.²⁴ Particularly interesting in this context is the evaluation of the escalating conflict between the German army of crusaders and Byzantium during the crusade of Conrad II and Louis VII. Wilken paints a picture of egalitarian Germans as opposed to obsequious Greeks. According to his account, the conflicts between the Germans and the Greeks did not arise because of a lack of diplomacy and knowledge or a conflict of interests, but due to the particular honesty of the Germans. This led, he claims, to the fact that the Germans – unlike all other crusaders – were unable to understand or honour the feigned subservience of the Greeks, nor could they hide their own anger as a result of it.²⁵ It is therefore hardly surprising that Wilken's preface to the fifth volume reveals a colonialist perspective against both the Muslims and the Byzantines. Wilken deplores the failure of a European empire in Constantinople. The former Byzantium could have had a share in the great developments of the western empires as a result of the crusaders' founding of a German empire at the Bosphorus. The 'blessed lands' at the Bosphorus and the Black Sea were, he continued, now sadly under the control of 'eastern hordes', who resisted all forms of education and development with a 'frozen stubbornness'.²⁶

On the French side, Joseph Francois Michaud (1767-1839) was one of the first authors to write multi-volume historical works on the crusades at the beginning of the 19th century.²⁷ His work too contains a clear historical theology and, like Wilken's, can be seen as a Christian treatise for mobilisation. For Michaud the crusades and the idea of a Christian holy war undoubtedly had a civilising effect, inspired by the nobility of mind of great generals.²⁸ According to Michaud the Franks may have been rough, yet they were also noble and generous in character, thanks to the power of the Gospel which inflamed western Christianity and produced saints and heroes. During times of darkest despotism – here Michaud is indirectly criticising the French Revolution, which he deeply deplored – Christianity was the only power capable of upholding morality and remembrance of the past as well as pointing towards a better future.²⁹ In his crusade narrative, Michaud paints a picture, with recourse to the myth of Peter of Amiens, of all oriental Christians desperately awaiting redemption

²⁴ Ibid, 306.

²⁵ Friedrich Wilken, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, Part Three, Section 1: *Der Kreuzzug der Deutschen und Franzosen unter Conrad III. und Ludwig VII.* (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1817), 107f., quotation 115.

²⁶ Friedrich Wilken, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, Part Five: *Der Kreuzzug des Kaisers Heinrich des Sechsten und die Eroberung von Constantinopel* (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1829), IIIf.

²⁷ Joseph Francois Michaud, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, trans. from the fourth French original edition by Dr. F. H. Ungewitter, vol. 1, with 2 maps and 8 illustrations (Quedlinburg/Leipzig: Verlag von Gottfr. Basse, 1827).

²⁸ Ibid, 6, 11f.

²⁹ Ibid, 66.

by Europe. A clearly nationalist perspective only appears, however, in the depiction of the Councils of Piacenza and Clermont. Here, Pope Urban II knew of the unreliability of the greedy Italians and therefore held a second council at Clermont. The portrayal of the call to the First Crusade at Clermont takes place as a direct speech to the 'chosen' French nation, 'beloved of God' and the hope of the entire Christian Church. Michaud relates this directly to the Battle of Poitiers. All French descendants were committed by those immortal heroic deeds carried out whilst fending off the dangers inherent in 'Mohammed's laws'.³⁰ Here Michaud constructs a direct association between Jesus, Jerusalem and the alleged liberation of Europe and Asia as the continuation of the historic mission of the Christian forefathers. From Michaud's perspective, the crusade is thus shifted into a discipleship of Jesus and is seen as God's revenge, while the heavenly riches of Asia beckon in true colonialist style as a reward for Christian bravery. For this author, Asia is a country of milk and honey for Christians as long as the barbarians no longer engage in acts of violence towards Christ's followers. In Clermont, he claimed further, the mighty France had united the whole of Europe to a powerful crusade. For him, Clermont is therefore the epitome of a glorified French history in which France becomes the reformer of Christianity.³¹

It is remarkable that Heinrich von Sybel (1817-1895), a pupil of Ranke and Professor of History at Marburg, Munich and Bonn, in his works on the crusades also interprets the myth of Poitiers as the battle that decided the fate of Europe. In Sybel's works, however, it is the Germans, 'men with sharp eyes, weighty chests and arms of steel', who crushed the Arabs before Poitiers and saved Christianity.³² Sybel places the crusades as well as Poitiers within the pattern of a holy war lasting over a thousand years, hugely influencing the Middle Ages as well as the present day, ever since the founding of Islam. This conflict, he claims, is the most severe, the longest and most encompassing war in human history.³³ Sybel's interpretation of the crusades is, however, fundamentally different from the accounts of the authors mentioned previously. Sybel seeks to deconstruct the crusade myths, usually passed on within a Christian context, using a scientific and rational analysis of the political power relations, distancing himself from the Christian semantics of historians such as Michaud and Wilken. He therefore criticises the rapturous enthusiasm of the Christian armies and the fact that their military strategy was restricted to the liberation of Jerusalem, while the key to a successful conquest and colonisation of Palestine would have been in the occupation of Egypt and in the destruction of the Turkish sultanate.³⁴

For Sybel, not Urban II but rather Gregor VII therefore constitutes the epitome of a politician with the qualities of an ideal ruler. Sybel compares him with Bonaparte and Cromwell, as that Pope, he claimed, sought to lead the Euro-

³⁰ Ibid, 80f.

³¹ Ibid, 86.

³² Heinrich von Sybel, *Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges* (Leipzig: Robert Baum, third unaltered edition 1881), 147; and "Aus der Geschichte der Kreuzzüge", in: *Kleine Historische Schriften*, 2 vols. (Munich: Literarisch-Artistische Anstalt, 1869), 7.

³³ Ibid, 4.

³⁴ Ibid, 15ff.

pean peoples and the whole of Christendom in battle against 'Mohammedian Asia', and to liberate the entire Orient.

In Sybel's description of the Third Crusade we find clearly nationalist and European colonialist perspectives. Firstly, he compares the Siege of Acre and/or the confrontation with Saladin with the Siege of Sewastopol during the Crimean War. The Fall of Acre, he claims, forms a new act in the great war between Orient and Occident, which – although it is no longer a holy war as such – has shown, if not Europe's military power, then certainly its spiritual superiority at its best. Secondly, according to Sybel, with Frederick I, Europe 'saw for the first time in these wars of armed pilgrims a spirit aware of its destiny and empowered by its own means'. Frederick I steered the army 'with an unwavering and relentless will' and the sons of the Emir of Iconium experienced through him 'the heaviness of the German arm'. The news of Barbarossa's arrival caused Saladin's front line to crumble, an allusion to the renown of the German Kaiser. His mere shadow was capable of more than any Frankish sword. The death of Barbarossa by drowning is thus interpreted by Sybel as a warning: the highest hopes were thus destroyed in the tragedy of death, as a harsh fate was to demonstrate to the Christian world the possibility of victory. These who had underestimated the great Kaiser, however, were now destined for misery and defeat.³⁵ He can only criticise the political benefit from the negotiations between the European armies and Saladin: "What an end to this world war, to these immeasurable efforts! Once the only true leader had been torn away from the Christians by a terrible turn of fate, the aimlessness of the others ruined all fruits gained thus far in the battle; from Baitnuba the flocks of devout pilgrims were able to see Jerusalem, and then, numbed by their grief, had to turn away from the holy city."³⁶ In other words, the French with Philippe August and the English with Richard the Lionheart failed utterly in the self-proclaimed struggle between Christianity and Islam.

For Sybel it was ultimately the Mongol invasions that broke the will of Islam and thus assigned the rule of the earth from this point forward to the 'more fortunate nations of our part of the world'. With his idea of the struggle for the world, Sybel identifies the strength of Christianity not in the fanatic crusaders' religiously founded contempt of the world, but rather in their calmness and rationality which, he claims, can still be observed today. For the Christian states, he continues, religion is now a private matter and questions of trade and war are decided by politics. Wherever there is Christian power and education, the world recognises – either with pleasure or with anger – the steps of the conqueror and ruler. According to Sybel, therefore, Jerusalem, the conquest of which cost millions of lives quite unnecessarily, would today be taken from the hands of the Turkish ruler by a proceedings report of 5 lines, should Europe be interested in doing so.³⁷

Unlike Sybel's work, the cultural history of the crusades by Hans Prutz (1843-1929), history professor at Königsberg, provides no positive assessment of the

³⁵ Ibid, 84f, 88f.

³⁶ Quotation: *ibid*, 92.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 103.

significance of the Popes for the crusades. On the contrary, for Prutz the Catholic Church is the stumbling block of 'the West'. Nevertheless, in his view the crusades are the catalyst for the national self-discovery of the nations involved. Each nation, he claims, became aware of its own idiosyncrasies as a result of encounters with other European entities. This was the most significant basis for the cultural development of the following centuries, in which the rights of the individual nation were diametrically opposed to the Roman idea of a world state.³⁸

For Prutz, it was not until the Third Crusade that the masses in Germany were united and sufficiently moved to participate. The great crusades hero of that time is in his view not Frederick I but Heinrich VI. Barbarossa may indeed have 'had the disloyal Greeks suffer at his hard and punishing hands and won immortal glory in the battle against the infidels'. And on the occasion of his death the German nation honoured him as the illustrious reformer of their lost glory. Barbarossa, however, had embodied the idea of a world empire for the whole world, claims Prutz.³⁹ He nevertheless rates the influence of Heinrich VI higher, because the latter would, he claims, have led the Christian world rule to its final completion, initiated by the German people, had he not met sudden death in Italy. Prutz characterises Heinrich VI as a ruler who during his time was perceived as an 'Übermensch'. Thanks to his greatness, the German people were able to grow into the primary people of the world and to the bearers of world rule with joyous pride. Prutz reinforces this glorification with the prophecy of a monk from the Black Forest who revealed in the lament for the death of Heinrich that in future the Germans would have been able to grow superior to all other nations.⁴⁰ Ultimately, for Prutz the crusades brought about the advantage that the European states were liberated from the cultural authority of the Catholic Church, marking the beginning of a new age. Nevertheless, this also meant a loss of power for Germany and Italy, who found themselves lagging behind the other peoples they had been leading for so long. Prutz criticises the shift of political and economic power from Germany to the west and the loss of national greatness, despite the 'cultural work of unfading value' achieved, so he claims, by the German colonisers in the east.⁴¹

Which interpretations and conclusions can be drawn from my observations?

I hope that it has become clear from my paper that at the beginning of the 19th century a novel fascination for the crusades emerged in European historical consciousness. It has left clear tracks in memory culture, in the political semantics of public discourses and in research. Within the space of only a few years, a neo-crusades ideology was established almost simultaneously in various European states. There is no doubt that, in France at least, Napoleon's

³⁸ Hans Prutz, *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin: Mittler, 1883), 5.

³⁹ Hans Prutz, *Allgemeine Geschichte in Einzeldarstellungen. Staatengeschichte des Abendlandes im Mittelalter vom Karl d. Großen bis auf Maximilian*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Grote, 1885), 536f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 568ff. There is also material on the characterisation of Heinrich VI as a German *Übermensch* and emperor in the school programme by Carl Hopf, *Bonifaz von Montferrat, der Eroberer von Konstantinopel und der Troubadour Raimbaud von Vaqueras*, Ludwig Streit, ed. (Berlin: Habel, 1877), 23f.

⁴¹ Hans Prutz, *Allgemeine Geschichte in Einzeldarstellungen*, 8ff.

conquest of Egypt served as the turning point in the European evaluation of the crusades. This modern crusades metaphor related to older narratives that had emerged in the context of predictions regarding the weakness of the Ottomans in the 17th and 18th centuries and here there was discussion as to whether the European great powers should perhaps be better advised to divide up the Ottoman Empire between them in a new crusade. This referred back to the idea of the illegitimacy of the Ottomans and the legitimate claims of the Christian countries.⁴² Although enlightened historians did indeed interpret the crusades extremely critically in terms of their religious fanaticism, in doing so, they served to develop a new dichotomy of Orient and Occident. The new perception of Islam as fanatical and despotic that emerged with the Enlightenment paved the way for an imperialist and colonialist policy in the 19th century. With their unwavering faith in rationality and progress it was precisely these enlightened Europeans, so it was believed, who should introduce the Orient to true civilisation. To a certain extent, France played a pioneering role in this respect with its many historical and literary works.⁴³

Selected works of significant French and German crusades historians, which could only be briefly outlined in the scope of this paper, show that individual contributions to European crusades narratives emerged from different political, religious, national or regional perspectives. A comparison reveals that the neo-crusades ideology at the beginning of the 19th century was firstly established with an enthusiasm for theological history. The crusades were seen as works of God, even when related to the present. The representatives of this expressly Christian crusade narrative vehemently countered processes of secularisation within Europe and their narratives clearly tended towards a Christian and European – rather than national – direction. With the turn towards historicism, there was in turn a move away from the primarily theological interpretations of the crusades; in the course of the 19th century the originally Christian crusades idea was secularised and historicised, as can be seen in the nationalistic interpretations of the Battle of Poitiers. The nationalisation of the crusade narratives reflects a tendency already noted by Thomas Nipperdey: 'In the national context, religious aspects become secularised and the secular becomes sacralised'.⁴⁴

At the same time, the Christian idea of the crusades evolved into a primitive conception of colonialism, which was also lent a new national flavour with regard to the idea of civilisation. Here, the difference between medieval crusades rhetoric or the medieval picture of Islam and the new Laicist ideology becomes clear. We can probably call this a caesura, despite the fact that this process of change took place slowly and ambivalently. Norman Daniel describes the difference between the new Laicist ideology and the Medieval image of Islam and the crusades as follows: 'The difference came when the old 'legal right' to rule in territory once Christian was replaced by a 'moral right' to

⁴² See Michael F. Klinkenberg, *Das Orientbild in der französischen Literatur und Malerei vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zum fin de siècle* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009,) 209.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 228f.

⁴⁴ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: Beck, 1993), 300.

civilise any alien people'.⁴⁵ From the medieval perspective on Islam, the crusades were defensive wars that served the recapturing of Christian territories. In the 19th century the concept of the crusades changed into that of a blueprint for national, colonial and imperial ideas. Obviously the nationalisation of the crusade narratives influenced this change in the long term. For now national arguments come more visibly to the fore, whether in the form of the secular idea of a civilising mission, as in France, or in line with the idea of a medieval, nationally organised world dominion as we find, for instance, in the words of Sybel or Prutz.

The caesura that we may perceive here becomes somewhat blurred, however, when we look at the crusade narratives in the history textbooks – rendering our assessment even more complicated. In a varied sample of over 90 German textbooks from our period of study, we find a normative, religiously inspired crusades semantics alongside national and imperialist arguments, even at the end of the 19th century. As a general rule, however, we can ascertain that the significance of the medieval crusades for Europe, the development of its nations and of the Mediterranean is exorbitantly overrated, both in the research literature and in the textbooks. The energy Europe expended on Crusade and in Spain on Reconquest was little in comparison with what it expended on internal struggles.⁴⁶ The crusade narratives were lent immense significance for collective identity construction – both Laicist and Christian – within the context of the emergence of modern European nation-states in the 19th century. In these narratives, central political concepts of nationalism, such as victims, heroism, holy war, etc. were associated with orientalist or nationalist 'enemy' constructions and with collective ideas of 'Volk', Christianity and Europe. Certain crusade myths also possessed a function of promise regarding the present and future, such as the myth surrounding Barbarossa.

Not surprisingly, these moral values and political objectives of the educated middle-classes reappear in the crusade narratives, which served as a projection screen for modern concepts of the nation. The narratives feature a middle-class ethic directed towards the general well-being that preaches the improvement of conventions, the upholding of Christian virtues and self-discipline in the sense of avoiding temptation. Normative statements regarding the 'noble knights and heroes' are given a nationalist flavour. The question as to whether a knight such as Godfrey of Bouillon was of German or French origin is ultimately a negotiation between the lines regarding what is to be considered French or German.⁴⁷ Nineteenth-century crusade portrayals thus prove to be extremely adaptable texts that can integrate secular and Christian ideas as well as structure classifications of the European, colonial or the national into a historical master narrative.

⁴⁵ Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1966), 67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁷ Godfrey of Bouillon was claimed as a national hero not only by the Germans and French, but also by the Belgians. On the nationally flavoured debate surrounding Godfrey's origin as well as on the changes to images of Godfrey in 19th-century historiography, see Gerhart Waeger, *Gottfried von Bouillon in der Historiographie* (Zürich: Fretz und Wasmuth, 1969), 29-90.