

The Ennobling Oath

A Pilgrim's Reflections on the Historiography of the Knights Templar

Seminar #1: The Stream of History, the Rivers of Historiography

"Wisdom is of utmost importance, therefore get wisdom, and with all your effort work to acquire understanding."
– Proverbs 4:7

A. Open Disclosure

1. Interest in the crusades today is deeply influenced by the politics and ideologies of the present
2. It's not just about history—belief systems, European colonialism, race, Western/non-western traditions
3. Legitimacy of the use of force, Just War, Holy War, Jihad, Total War as “evil of evils”
4. Interpretation is influenced by the times of the interpreter (historian, chronicler, story teller, etc)

B. Periodization of the Crusade Historiography

1. 1095-1599:

- a) A defensive war; Muslims perceived as an existential threat
- b) History of the Crusade was understood as a branch of theology—influence of the Abbey of Cluny
 - The 11th-century reformers were doing what all theologians do: reinterpreting tradition in light of contemporary beliefs and crises.
 - "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mt 16:24/Mk 8:34/Lk 9:23)
 - *Non nobis, non nobis, Domine, Sed nomini tuo da gloriam.* Psalm 115:1
- c) Early “historians” were participants and members of the clergy
 - William of Tyre (c. 1130 – 29 September 1186)—greatest of all crusader historians
 - Guibert de Nogent (c. 1055–1124)—a Benedictine historian, theologian and author the First Crusade called *Dei gesta per Francos* ("God's deeds through the Franks"), finished in 1108
 - Albert of Aachen (floruit circa AD 1100), historian of the First Crusade
 - Fulcher of Chartres (born around 1059 in or near Chartres) was a chronicler of the First Crusade

2. 1600—1799:

- a) The idea of the Crusades moved increasingly from the “present” to the “past”
- b) But also a “past” that was colored by confessional and/or rationalist historians
- c) Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Age of Reason, Age of Enlightenment
- d) Historians are more probing, questioning, critical of the legitimacy of the Church and Crusades
 - Jacques Bongars (1611: *Gesta Dei per Francos*); Thomas Fuller (1649: *Historie of the Holy War*)
 - Voltaire (1751: *History of the Crusades*); Lois Maimbourg (1675: pro-Catholic *Historie des Croisades*)
 - Edward Gibbon (1776: *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire ... “savage fanaticism”*)

3. 1800—1950:

- a) Crusades values re-emerge but the religious calling is secularized: honor, chivalry, duty, pure, noble
- b) Age of Romanticism; Victorian Age—historians and storytellers recount the “best of the Crusades”
 - Sir Walter Scott (15 August 1771 – 21 September 1832); Thomas Rowley (1721–1796)
- c) Rise of first professional historians:
 - Leopold van Ranke (21 December 1795 – 23 May 1886)
 - Heinrich von Sybel (1841/1861: *Geschichte des ersten Kruessugs*)
 - Rene Grousset (1934-36: *History of the Crusades*); Steven Runciman (1952-54: *History of the Crusades*)

4. 1950—Present:

- a) Historians are divided: Traditionalist vs Pluralists vs Generalists
- b) The Wisconsin history (1955-1989: 6 volumes); The Oxford history (1 volume: 1095 to the modern world)
 1. Top historians today: Jonathan Riley Smith, Jonathan Phillips, Christopher Tyerman, Giles Constable