



International Conference 16 / 17 December 2011 in Hildesheim, Dr. Felix Hinz

## **Crusades of the Middle Ages and in the Modern Era: History – Reflections – Teaching**

### **Aims of the Conference**

The very fact that fundamentalist Islamic preachers since 9/11 have regularly referred to western soldiers involved in their “war against terrorism” as “crusaders” show the relevance of the topic “crusades”. By using the term “crusader” they affirm that the western world still spurs on an aggressive tradition against the Muslim world and/or the Islam.<sup>1</sup> Could this be more than just an infamous allegation by analysing it in greater detail? Is it possible that it contains a core of truth as far as a certain “western mentality” is concerned?

A self-critical discussion on this approach has not taken place so far. The most important aim of the conference therefore is to try to clearly define the terms „Kreuzzug“ and “crusade”. This can only be done if both the factual history of the Medieval crusades and their later reflections are taken into consideration. In order to accomplish a convincing result an interdisciplinary dialogue is necessary, which looks at the phenomenon of “crusades” from different angles – especially in their modern forms.

As a second aim of the symposium didactic concepts are intended to be developed which focus on the actual meaning of the crusades. Apart from the political actuality the topic contains more toeholds for a specific training of critical awareness of history. Especially the later perception of the crusades generated a lot of abundant sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Already in 2002 the famous Islamist TV-preacher Sheik Yussuf al-Qaradhawi published a text about the new US-American crusade against the Umma. Since then this argumentation has continued in fundamentalistic circles till the present day. Eiman al Zawahiri f.e. at 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2010 wrote to the “Muslim people of Turkey”: “Your government and your army became instruments in the hands of the crusaders at their campaigns against the Islam (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 16.08.2010, Nr. 188, p. 5, transl. FH). The same duct can be found with the Hamas: “Yunis al-Astal, cleric and parliamentarian of the Hamas, explains, “[...] Rome, the capital of the Catholics and crusaders, declared war on the Islam.” (Alexander Ritzmann, Welt online Hamas ruft weltweit zu Anschlägen auf Israelis auf, 08.01.2009, transl. FH).

Finally there are chances of intercultural learning that promise important new learn-  
results in modern society, which is strongly characterised by migration.

To be able to come up with an accurate definition firstly requires marking out the  
framework of meaning. There is a broad consensus that the crusades originally had the  
goal of recapturing Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim rule. Jonathan Riley-  
Smith, one of the most prominent experts in this area, defines a crusade as “holy war”  
with the purpose to regain Christian possession rights or to protect the Church or the  
Christians against those who were regarded as outsiders or internal enemies of  
Christianity. Since this was considered as a request of the whole Christian world  
crusades were generally accepted.<sup>2</sup> These crusades already included those that were  
not aimed at “freeing” the Holy Land but also for example crusades against the Muslims  
on the Iberian Peninsula (approx. 11th century – 1492), the pagan Old Prussians (1234  
– 1272 and later) or against Catharism (1209 – 1229).

Furthermore it is important to acknowledge that the German term “Kreuzzug” is not  
synonymous with the English word “crusade” – a term that is apparently not exclusively  
used in a religious sense but can also refer to other sorts of campaigns. This leads to  
the question if one can speak of crusades in modern times. For the 16th century this  
was undoubtedly the case<sup>3</sup> whereas in later times it is questionable to what extent the  
idea of crusading had been secularized. Did the French Revolution in parts have the  
character of a crusade?<sup>4</sup> In addition we critically have to question whether or in how far  
we can still ascribe a certain mentality of crusade to the western world and especially to  
the USA. According to the aforementioned definition of Riley-Smith it will be important to  
discuss what is “holy” to “us” today.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *Kreuzzüge*, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 20 (1990), pp. 1-10, here p. 1 (transl. FH).

<sup>3</sup> The Spaniard Hernán Cortés conquered Mexico 1519-1521 with a flag, on which one could read: “Friends, let us follow the cross! And if we  
have faith by this sign we will be victorious!” (Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. Carmelo  
Saenz de Santa María, Madrid, cap. XX, 1982, p. 38, transl. FH), which clearly refers to Constantine I. In 1535 the Emperor Karl V. (1519-1555;  
1516-1556 also king of Spain) headed a campaign in form of a crusade against Tunis, 1541 another and similar one against Algiers. (Alfred  
Kohler, *Karl V. 1500-1558*. Munich 2005, pp. 240-246 and pp. 258ff.).

<sup>4</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte heralded with his Egyptian campaign (1798 – 1799), which lead him also to Palestine, the anewd subjection of Muslim  
states under western rule. But this time it was to a far more dramatic extent than during the Medieval crusades. Regarding the modern  
imperialism Heinz Halm points out: „One must note that almost the entire Muslim population of the earth has come for shorter or longer time  
under the direct or indirect rule and the substantial influence of the Europeans and that this foreign rule had a deep impact on the awareness of  
the Muslims.“ (Heinz Halm, *Der Islam. Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Munich 2007, p. 56. transl. FH).

In the second part of the conference the modern perception of the crusades in politics, visual art and mass media will be analysed. To what extent did popular mythifications have political effects? In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon tradition which can relate to Richard I. „the Lionheart“ (1190 – 1192, 3<sup>rd</sup> crusade) the noble crusader *par excellence* Germans were missing out on an appropriate idol. The Emperors Konrad III. (1147, 2<sup>nd</sup> crusade) and Friedrich I. „Barbarossa“ (1189 – 1190, 3<sup>rd</sup> crusade) failed in their attempts to regain the Holy Land in a disastrous way. On this basis it has to be investigated whether and/or how these facts were politically perceived – not only in Europe but also in the Islamic Middle-East.

Partially in close connection to this perception the crusades found a strong artistic repercussion. Not only paintings and films<sup>5</sup> but also literature reflected the topic extensively. Since Gotthold Ephraim Lessing recognized the humanistic potential of the topic „crusades“ in his drama *Nathan the Wise* (1779) the literary tradition has ceaselessly continued.<sup>6</sup> Since then more than 100 crusader-novels have been published in German and the fact that several new ones are published each month reflects the actuality of this theme.<sup>7</sup> In this context the figure of Raschid ad-Din Sinan also known as the *Old Man of the Mountain* (approx. 1132/1135 – 1192) who was one of the leaders of the Syrian wing of the Hashshashin sect is of great importance. Their suicide attacks caused similar panic at the time of the crusades in Syria and in the Holy Land like today's Muslim groupings that use similar methods. It seems remarkable, too, how different the legendary Knights Templar (approx. 1118 – 1312) – the military elite of the crusader states – were perceived who although they were Christian fundamentalists had close diplomatic relations to Muslim partners. In crusader-novels they are either depicted as the noblest bloom of knighthood<sup>8</sup> or as their 'worst scum'.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand there is consensus regarding the figure of Ayyubid Sultan Saladin (Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn, 1174 –1193). Not only Muslim historiography glorifies him as the great unifier of the Middle East and re-conqueror of Jerusalem (1187) but also in Christian and western perception he is

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<sup>5</sup> For example *Kingdom of Heaven*, dir. Ridley Scott, U.S.A./ Spain/ Great Britain/ Germany 2005 or *Am - Tempelriddaren*, dir. Peter Flinth, Sweden/ Great Britain/ Denmark/ Germany/ Norway/ Finland 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Johann Georg Schilling designs this in a long passage at his novel: Berthold von Urach. Eine wahre, deutsche, tragische Rittergeschichte aus den Zeiten des Mittelalters. 2. Theil. Leipzig 1789, p. 310.

<sup>7</sup> Rechercheble at: <http://www.histo-couch.de>.

<sup>8</sup> F.e. Rainer M. Schröder, Die Bruderschaft vom Heiligen Gral – Bd. 1: Der Fall von Akkon. Würzburg 2007, p. 25 or André, Martina: Das Rätsel der Templer. Berlin 2009, pp. 723f.

<sup>9</sup> Umberto Eco, Baudolino. Munich 2003, pp. 320f.; similar f.e. Ulrike Schweikert, Das Siegel des Tempelers. Munich 2006, pp. 268f.

characterized as a man who despite his military rigidity struck his opponents as a noble, fair and human knight.

History didactics should not ignore the actuality of the topic. The second part of the conference should focus on school and first evaluate to what extent crusades are already a topic in history classes.

This should form the basis for a closer analysis on whether references to the present time have been examined. This analysis should not be restricted to accounting for today's political events. One should not forget that the modern states which were particularly involved in the crusades of the Middle Ages are nowadays affected by an increasing immigration. According to a census almost every fifth inhabitant in Germany had a migration background in 2008.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it seems important to develop more differentiated didactical and educational concepts of intercultural learning. History has got the advantage that it deals *per se* with “the other”, i.e. at least it deals with temporal, but in case of the topic “crusades” also with spatial, cultural and religious difference.

Hence the crusades have even got further didactical potential. Since the spatial dimension receives in present time a kind of *renaissance* it finally has to be asked from a historical-didactically perspective which possibilities are out there to form a historical awareness of space in the pupils' minds. It seems worthwhile to inquire in how far the Holy Land has (had) relevance for the shaping of identity for Europeans. From the Muslim point of view the State of Israel appears like a new crusader state in disguise which like the former Frankish possessions in the Holy Land is nothing less than a contaminant as well as the expression of a western attempt to occupy the religious centres of Islam.<sup>11</sup> Even if this does not apply for the European perspective it still has to be investigated in greater detail what it means that the holiest places of Christian Europe are situated beyond the borders of the continent. If a certain yearning towards Jerusalem still existed – and an unbroken tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem seems to affirm this presumption – it would be worth looking for the references which reflect this today. For this purpose one should especially account for the important places on the

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<sup>10</sup> Migrationsbericht 2010 des Bundesamts für Migration und Flüchtlinge, [http://www.bamf.de/clin\\_170/nn\\_442016/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Migration/Publikationen/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2008.html](http://www.bamf.de/clin_170/nn_442016/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Migration/Publikationen/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2008.html) - checked 18.08.2010.

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Kepel, Die neuen Kreuzzüge. Die arabische Welt und die Zukunft des Westens. München 2005, p. 175. English version: The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West. Cambridge 2004.

basis Maurice Halbwachs'<sup>12</sup> study in which he demonstrated that the Holy Land is one of the best examples for the construction and effects of *lieux de mémoire*.<sup>13</sup> The Temple-Mount complex for example can be used to explain to pupils how to a certain extent the whole Arab-Israeli conflict culminates at this place and also Jewish history cannot be adequately understood without the knowledge about the meaning and complicate linkage of this site.<sup>14</sup>

On this basis it will finally be discussed how the topic “crusades” affects the present situation and which unutilised didactical opportunities it still comprises.

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Dr. Felix Hinz, October 2011

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<sup>12</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Stätten der Verkündigung im Heiligen Land. Eine Studie zum kollektiven Gedächtnis*. Konstanz 2003. As far as I can see, an English translation does not exist. French version: *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte. Étude de mémoire collective*. Paris 1941.

<sup>13</sup> Only the Temple Mount of Jerusalem contains the western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, the Al-Aqsa Mosque (the former headquarter of the Knights Templar), Solomon's Stables, the Golden Gate and more places, which are important for the collective Jewish identity.

<sup>14</sup> Very interesting because it has been written from a Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspective: Gil Yaron, *Jerusalem. Ein historisch-politischer Stadtführer*. Bonn 2008.