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PART I

*National discourse and the study of
the Crusades*

CHAPTER I

From moral failure to a source of pride

On 11 April 1806, the Classe d'Histoire et de Littérature Ancienne of the Académie Française announced the subject for its annual historical competition. The participants were asked to 'Examine the effects which the Crusades had on the civil liberties of the peoples of Europe, on their civilisation, and on their progress towards enlightenment, commerce, and industry'. In other words, in 1806 the French Academy called for a reassessment of the Crusades in the light of the ideas of the French Revolution. The two prize-winners, announced on 1 July 1808, were Maxime de Choiseul-Daillecourt, a 26-year-old Frenchman, and Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, a professor of history at the University of Göttingen. The manuscript submitted by the third candidate, Jan Hendrik Regenbogen, who would later become a professor of theology in Leiden, was lost in the mail.¹

All three essays were true to the dictated guidelines and all of them portrayed the positive influence of the Crusades on Western civilisation as being all-inclusive and discernible in almost every cultural and material aspect of human life. They succeeded in tracing the positive influence of the Crusades even in such unexpected areas as the status of the peasantry, land ownership, development of the feudal system, court life, abolition of the duel as an instrument of justice, ascendancy of papal power, fine arts, geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, languages, poetry, and music. All these were mentioned in addition to aspects of medieval life in which the influence of the Crusades could be considered 'natural', such as the creation of the military orders, chivalry, heraldry, weaponry, commerce with Asia, the growth of Italian cities, maritime navigation,

¹ Choiseul-Daillecourt joined the French administration and eventually became a member of the French Academy. He was the only candidate who wrote his entry in French. Regenbogen's entry was written in Latin, whereas only the French translation of Heeren's German essay was submitted to the committee. All three of them published their essays before 1809.

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architecture, naval law, hospitals, and many more. All three authors, however, perceived the Crusades as a pan-European phenomenon which could not be ascribed to any particular nation or specific national movement: they were not defined as 'French', 'German', or 'English'. Even Gothic architecture, one of the 'positive aspects of the Crusades', was not yet interpreted as being more French or German than Syriac, Saracen, or Lombard.²

This functional and positive approach, which ignores any ethical or theological considerations, was indeed a novel perception of the Crusades. Early modern writers were more occupied with the negative morality implied by their failure. Many of them depicted the Crusades as a quasi-mythological epic that had begun heroically and ended in ignominy. The only way to resolve the apparent contradiction between the praiseworthy origin and the disastrous end was to provide readers with moral and theological justifications fitting for such an epic.³

Until then, the moral discourse had been based on the general understanding that the Crusades were a failure and that such failure deserves an appropriate, i.e., moral, explanation. Since there was punishment, obviously there had also been sin. The nature of the sins, however, and the exact identity of the sinners were disputed. Early modern Protestant authors tended to put the blame for the immoral nature of the Crusades on the papacy and the Catholic Church, whereas contemporary Catholic writers tended to rehabilitate the religious leaders and accuse the bearers of the Cross themselves (mainly for being too naïve and disobedient). But both Catholic and Protestant scholars applied an ethical yardstick when considering the impact of the Crusades on history.

The early nineteenth-century French royalist scholar Joseph-François Michaud (1767–1839) suggested, in the fourth volume of his monumental history of the Crusades (published in 1822), a threefold division of Crusader historiography: a period of favourable perception, which characterised the seventeenth century 'when scholars tended to admire the bearers of the Cross and to esteem their motives'; a second period (mainly during the eighteenth century) when 'scholars who were inspired by Protestant manner of thinking' condemned the Crusades; and a third period, which had already begun in the 1760s, when the tide changed again 'in the right direction'.⁴ Michaud attributed the last phase to

² Choiseul-Daillecourt, 1809, 154, 306; Regenbogen, 1809, 332–33.

³ For the volume and importance of medieval criticism on the Crusades, see Siberry, 1985.

⁴ Michaud, *Histoire*, IV, 1822, 162. For recent studies of Crusader historiography which accept Michaud's point of view, see Siberry, 2000; Siberry, 1995, 365–85; Tyerman, 1998; for modern

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Scottish philosopher William Robertson, 'who was greatly influenced by the analytical spirit of research' and was therefore able to point to 'the great contribution of the Crusades to progress, freedom, and the advent of the human spirit'. But in accusing Protestant scholars and 'their followers' of condemning the Crusades, and in claiming that seventeenth-century scholars were less hostile towards the Crusades, Michaud ignored the moral discourse that had been going on unceasingly since the sixteenth (and in many ways since the thirteenth) century. Michaud was right in pointing out the great contribution of Protestant thinkers to the renewal of this discourse.⁵

Thomas Fuller, a sixteenth-century Cambridge-educated doctor of divinity, summarised the Protestant moral attack on Crusader history.⁶ Directing poisonous arrows at the leadership, Fuller accused the papacy of spilling blood unnecessarily, arrogance,⁷ disregarding treaties, and even placing itself in a position superior to God himself.⁸ The popes did not hesitate, he maintained, 'to exploit every simpleton'; the kingdom of England, especially, was 'the pope's pack-horse . . . which seldom rested in the stable when there was any work to be done.'⁹ The greedy Catholic Church, which always knew how to 'buy earth cheap and sell heaven dear,'¹⁰ made a profit even from the Crusades. 'Some say', he wrote, that 'purgatory fire heateth the pope's kitchen; they may add, the holy war filled his pot, if not paid for all of his second course.'¹¹

historiographic studies that do not share this point of view, see Kedar, 1998a, 11–31; Kedar, 1998b, 187–200; Kedar, 1999, 135–50. Compare also: Boase, 1937, 110–25; for the biography of Michaud see Poujoulat, 1841, I, vii–xlvii; Bordeaux, 1926; Richard, 2002.

⁵ For Luther's attitude towards the Crusades, see Martin Luther, 'To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate' (1520), trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in Helmut T. Lehmann and James Atkinson (eds.), *The Christian in Society*, in H. T. Lehmann (general ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. XLIV, 144; see also Martin Luther, 'Defense and explanation of all the Articles' (1521), trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Luther's Works*, vol. XXXII: George W. Forell (ed.), *Career of the Reformer*, II, Philadelphia, 1958, pp. 89–90; and see John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: A New and Complete Edition*, Stephen R. Cautley (ed.), 8 vols. London, 1837–41, vol. IV, 1837, pp. 18–21, 27–34; Robertson, 1769.

⁶ See Fuller, 1639. Fuller's highly critical book was published in no less than four editions within fewer than thirteen years. For Fuller's personal history and political views see Patterson, 1979.

⁷ Fuller, 1639, book V, ch. 12, 249–51.

⁸ For the importance of this type of perfidy in Protestant thinking, see *Luther's Works*, vol. XXXII, p. 144.

⁹ Fuller, book I, ch. 13, 19–21.

¹⁰ '[B]y these sales the third part of the best feoffs in France came to be possessed by the clergy, who made good bargains for themselves, and had the conscience to buy earth cheap and sell heaven dear.' *Ibid.*, ch. 11, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, book V, ch. 12, 251.

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But Fuller also does not spare the rank-and-file Crusaders from the lash of his tongue. ‘Many a whore was sent thither to find her virginity; many a murderer was enjoined to fight in the Holy War, to wash off the guilt of Christian blood by shedding blood of Turks.’ The established Catholic royal houses which degenerated into disobedience, greed, and actual treason, were, however, even worse. ‘One may wonder’, he concluded, ‘that the world should see most visions when it was most blind; and that age, most barren in learning, should be most fruitful in revelations.’¹² Fuller, like Martin Luther, Matthew Dresser, John Foxe, and other Protestant writers, deals with the Crusades from the moral point of view. In his opinion all the Crusades were a momentous moral failure; since they were born in sin, they failed because of their moral weaknesses.

Michaud was correct in claiming that Protestant authors were the vanguard of the Crusades’ critics, but he also ignored the fact that such criticism had begun long before them, coming from the plumes of writers who were not Protestants yet levelled no less harsh ethical accusations against the Crusades. As already noted, many Catholic writers participated in the moral debate, although they usually succeeded in finding points of merit in the failed expeditions. There were Catholic scholars who glorified the Crusades for their heroic deeds and ‘honoured the French court and nobility’ of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they were in the minority.¹³ An equivocal attitude towards the Crusades is exemplified by Joseph de Guignes, who describes the Crusades both as a demonstration of heroic zeal and as a devastating experience for the entire continent.¹⁴

Another Catholic author, Charles Lebeau, secretary of the French Academy in the third quarter of the eighteenth century,¹⁵ depicts the Crusades as ‘the culmination of human evil’, as ‘devoid of any theological or moral justification’, and as an episode that emanated from the ‘lust for power and senseless chivalry’. But at the same time he tends to forgive the bearers of the Cross ‘because of their pure intentions’. ‘It is true’, he says, ‘that a man cannot be a martyr because of an act of war and the gates

¹² *Ibid.*, book V, ch. 16, 256–57; book II, ch. 4, 48; book I, ch. 8, p. II.

¹³ For a general discussion of the desire of absolutist nobility to associate itself with the values of medieval chivalry, see: Ward, 1975, 9; Gossman, 1968, *passim*.

¹⁴ De Guignes, vol. II, 1756, book XI, 14: ‘Voilà ce qui rend condamnable à nos yeux une expédition dont laquelle nos ancêtres ont donné les plus grandes preuves de valeur & de zèle pour la Religion. . . Cette grande expédition qui changea la face de l’Asie Occidentale, qui couta à l’Europe des millions d’hommes, & qui ruina un grand nombre de familles de France. . .’ See also Mailly, 1780, and Schoepflin, 1726.

¹⁵ Lebeau, 1833, vol. XV.

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of Heaven could not be opened by the threat of a sword, but we still owe some respect to these simple and pure souls who sacrificed their own lives in these wars.¹⁶ Lebeau, a Catholic, condemned the Crusades because of their immorality but refrained from condemning the popes who led them,¹⁷ or the ‘heroes’ and ‘pure souls’ who participated in them.¹⁸

Ethical discourse also dominated the writings of Voltaire (1694–1778) on the Crusades. Combining absolutist ideology with admiration for Louis XIV, in his *Histoire des Croisades* (first published in 1751)¹⁹ Voltaire traced the progress of Western civilisation,²⁰ which he believed attained its apogee during the reign of Louis XIV.²¹ For him, the fall of the Latin kingdom was a natural result of the weakness of its leadership, which he labelled ‘a band of corrupt and ignorant criminals’.²²

Following his own absolutist ideas, Voltaire blamed the leadership for establishing a morally corrupt and unjust central government, whereas Diderot’s rationalist *Encyclopédie*, which shared a negative attitude towards the Crusades, eschewed any religious standpoint.²³ ‘It was hard to believe’, said the compiler of the *Encyclopédie*, ‘that . . . rulers and ordinary people could eventually not understand their own real interests . . . and drag a part of the world [into conquering] a small and unfortunate country in order to shed the blood of its populations and get control of a rock.’ ‘The Crusaders’, he wrote, ‘combined the political interests of the Pope together with the hatred of the Muslims, the ignorance and suppressive authority of the greedy clergy, and the bloodthirstiness of their rulers . . .’ The popes and the rank-and-file Crusaders were to blame for the failure of this endeavour:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 301–3.

¹⁷ For other contemporary negative references to the behaviour of the popes during the Crusades see Müller, 1709, 20–33.

¹⁸ Lebeau, p. 303: ‘On y avait perdu des armées des héros, on n’en remporta que des armoiries, symboles bizarres qui honorent les familles du témoignage immortel de la pieuse imprudence de leurs ancêtres.’

¹⁹ Voltaire integrated this *Histoire des Croisades* into his *Essai*, 1756. For this discourse see 570; and also 552–61 (ch. 53).

²⁰ Voltaire does not use terms such as ‘civilisation’ or ‘culture’, which were unknown in his time, but his ‘moeurs’ and ‘esprit’ are equivalent. See Febvre, 1929; Tonnelat, 1941; Niedermann, 1941.

²¹ Weintraub, 1966, 43.

²² Voltaire, *Essai*, 1756, 570; see also *Oeuvres de Voltaire*, Paris, 1879, vol. XIII, p. 314: ‘The loss of all these prodigious armies of Crusaders in a country which Alexander had subjugated with 40,000 men . . . demonstrates that in Christian undertakings there was a radical vice which necessarily destroyed them: this was the feudal government, the independence of commanders, and consequently disunion, disorder and lack of restraint.’

²³ Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, vol. IV, 502b–505b.

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The dizziness passed from the crazed head of a pilgrim to the ambition-filled head of the pope and thence to the heads of all the rest . . . The Crusades served as a pretext for indebted peoples not to pay their debts; for evil-doers to avoid punishments for their crimes; for undisciplined clergymen to free themselves from the burden of their ecclesiastical state; for restless monks to leave their monasteries; for lost females to continue freely in their behaviour . . . Those whose duty it was to prevent all these . . . did not do so either because of their stupidity or because of their political interests . . . Peter the Hermit . . . led an army of eighty thousand robbers . . . how could we label them differently remembering the horrors they committed on their way – robbery, slaughter . . .

Eighteenth-century German scholars also shared this critical attitude, accusing the Crusaders of being barbarians who acted according to the standards of their time: ‘Urban and Peter!’ exclaims Wilhelm Friedrich Heller in 1780, ‘the corpses of two millions of men lie heavy on your graves and will fearfully summon you on the day of judgement.’²⁴

It should be noted, however, that not all scholars of the time held such negative views of the Crusades. There were some, in both the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, who considered them to be a positive and important episode, but these were generally a small minority of scholars who were loyal to the royal courts of their day and to their own social class – the nobility. Louis Maimbourg, for example, a Jesuit priest and an enemy of the Jansenists who was a courtier of Louis XIV, refrains from dealing with the Crusaders’ moral behaviour; his positive attitude stemmed from what he considers to have been their incomparable heroic greatness and deep Christian faith and sacrifice, and his own conviction that their heroic deeds had brought honour upon the French court and nobility. He wrote a history of the Crusades, dedicating it humbly to Louis XIV. From the introduction one learns that his work is intended for members of the nobility. He addresses his fellow nobles directly, assuring them that his book contains the names of all nobles mentioned in the sources at his disposal. However, should anyone ‘of quality’ claim that one of his forefathers who participated in the holy wars is not mentioned in the text, he is requested to send the author the historical documentation in his possession.²⁵

²⁴ Heller, 2nd edn, 1, 16.

²⁵ Maimbourg, 1685, 2–3: ‘Si les personnes de qualité qui prétendent que quelques uns de leurs ancêtres aient eu part à ces guerres saintes, me font la grâce de m’envoyer de bonnes mémoires.’ Even the Huguenot diplomat Jacques Bongars (1554–1612) who did not indulge in a criticism of the Papacy dedicated his book to Louis XIII and asserted that the kings of France had the closest concern with the Holy War. See Bongars, 1611, dedicatory preface; see also Bourdeille, 1876, ix, 433–34. For a discussion see Tyerman, 1998, 107–8.

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Maimbourg was not alone. Other authors dealt in similar fashion with what they believed to be the positive role of the Crusades and their importance for French nobility. Such writings formed part of a genre which resulted from conservative political thinking and a desire to link present-day nobility to that of ancient France. Thus Jean Baptiste Mailly (1744–94) placed the Crusades on the same level as the Ligue and the Fronde, counting them among ‘the principal events in the history of France’.²⁶ It was not by chance that the Crusades were compared to those two great pro-monarchist episodes; this fitted in well with the political outlook of such authors.

Obviously, therefore, the controversy over the Crusades between the two schools – as suggested by Michaud – was not limited to the opposing views of the positive outlook on the Crusades, ‘which was prevalent in the seventeenth century’, and the negative one, ‘prevalent in the eighteenth century’. The controversy centred primarily around the degree to which the Crusades were morally justified and arose because it was universally admitted that they were indeed a failure.

A real conceptual change in the general attitude towards the Crusades can be discerned in a treatise written by Scottish pastor and philosopher William Robertson in 1769, but the roots of the change were already evident in the writing of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz a century earlier. Robertson, who was, together with Gibbon and Hume, one of the most important *philosophes* of the enlightenment in the British Isles, was not interested in the Crusades *per se* but in the development of society from the Roman period until the sixteenth century.²⁷ He certainly shared his predecessors’ moral negative outlook on the Middle Ages, which he conceived as a dark and ignorant epoch filled with ‘deeds of cruelty, perfidy and revenge so wild and enormous as almost to exceed belief’. But although he claimed that the Crusades were ‘a singular monument of human folly’, he did succeed in discerning indirect positive aspects in the very departure to the East.²⁸

Robertson believed that while crossing more civilised countries on their way to the Holy Land, the Crusaders were deeply impressed and later influenced by the advanced cultures. This was ‘the first event that roused Europe from the lethargy in which it had been long sunk, and that tended

²⁶ See Richard, 1997–98 and 2002.

²⁷ Robertson, 1769, 22ff. For Hume’s negative opinion on the Crusades see Hume, *History*, 1, 209; For Gibbon’s opinions which were closer to Robertson’s see Gibbon, 1862, ch. 61, vol. VII, 346–49.

²⁸ Robertson, 24.

to introduce any change in government, or in manners'. Is it possible, he asked himself, for people to pass through civilised countries or a city like Constantinople without being influenced?

Their views enlarged, their prejudices wore off; new ideas crowded into their minds; and they must have been sensible on many occasions of the rusticity of their own manners when compared with those of a more polished people . . . And to these wild expeditions, the effect of superstition or folly, we owe the first gleams of light which tended to dispel barbarity and ignorance.²⁹

Passing through more developed countries explains, in Robertson's view, the appearance of splendid princely courts and ceremonies, more refined manners, the romantic spirit, etc. In other words, although he severely criticises the Crusades *per se*, Robertson does not ignore their positive side effects, which emanated from the very awareness of the existence of more developed cultures. Like Voltaire, Robertson tries to fathom the transition from a barbarian to a civilised society (he was one of the first to use the word 'civilisation'), but unlike Voltaire he developed a theory of the unconscious influence of cultured (Eastern and Italian) peoples upon the barbarians (the Crusaders) who crossed their lands. Robertson, therefore, does not praise the Crusades, but acknowledges them to be a critical stage in the development of Western civilisation and recognises the usefulness of journeys to the East. It seems that this point of view was influenced more by the popularity of the 'Grand Tour' than by the 'analytical spirit of research' which Michaud ascribed to him.

Robertson's views on the essence of civilisations and the manner in which they were imparted to others are worthy of wider discussion and more serious thought. However, what is important and relevant to our analysis of the Crusades, is that Robertson did not treat the expeditions merely as an episode which should be condemned on ethical grounds. He considered them to be an important, perhaps even critical, phase in the development of Western civilisation, recognising the advantages they offered the European nations. This utilitarian attitude, which evaluates the Crusades on the basis of their indirect influence, was the assumption which lay at the basis of the competition held by the Académie Française in 1808.

The influence of this way of interpretation can be better understood against the background of the Napoleonic wars, in the course of which, for the first time since the thirteenth century, the East was reconquered by

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

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a European power. Napoleon's conquest of Egypt had an appreciable effect on the creation, once again, of a positive view of the Crusades and on the replacement of the moral attitude characteristic of most scholars who dealt with them until the late eighteenth century by a more utilitarian viewpoint. In the late 1790s, while Napoleon and France were gaining in strength, a document was discovered anew in Hanover which had been written over a century earlier, in 1672, by the philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646–1716) and which even then hinted, according to some of its readers, at long-term French plans to gain control of Egypt.

Leibnitz, in the employ of the elector of Mainz, was concerned about French expansionism and tried to divert Louis XIV's aggression from the Low Countries to less dangerous objectives, such as Egypt.³⁰ He regarded the Crusades as the unfulfilled dream of many medieval leaders, among them Philip II Augustus and Saint Louis, which he believed could be achieved in his own time.³¹ The conquest of Egypt, wrote Leibnitz, would endow Louis XIV with the glory of a king who accomplished the dreams of his ancestors and would restore the title of 'Augustus of the East' to a French king. In short, new Crusades could glorify and bring honour and political gain to their initiators.³²

Leibnitz's memorandum was lost, to be rediscovered only in 1795 and then passed on from one French general to another. In August 1798 it was forwarded to General Mortier, who sent it to Napoleon, who handed it over – without reading it – to General Monge, who on 3 July 1815 deposited it in the French Institut, where it is kept to this very day. Napoleon himself read an abridged French copy when he returned from Egypt. Another abridged version of the text had been translated into English before 1803³³ by an anonymous translator who firmly believed that Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign was the execution of this 'operative top secret plan' which had been kept in Versailles since 1672. The translator overlooked the fact that the full memorandum had been kept

³⁰ Leibnitz, *Projet*, 29–299. A short version of the proposal was sent to Versailles already in 1671, a year before the full version was submitted. But Leibnitz himself did not gain access to the French king: *ibid.*, 'Introduction', pp. 1–lxviii.

³¹ A similar treatise, advocating a utilitarian interpretation of the Crusades, was written seventy-five years later (in 1747) by Dominique Jauna, an adviser to Marie Thérèse d'Autriche. The second volume of Jauna's book contains reflections on the means needed for a new conquest of Egypt. See Jauna, 1747.

³² Leibnitz, *Projet*, 35–37.

³³ Leibnitz, *Summary*.