The New Western Wall: the use of the Crusades in the rationale of far-right organisations and what this reveals about the readings of its history.

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Introduction

"The triumphs of the Crusade were the triumphs of faith. But faith without wisdom is a dangerous thing."[1]

After the events of 9/11 in 2001 and President George W. Bush's declaration of war on Al-Qaeda, interest in Crusade history significantly increased. Simultaneously, European, and North American Christian far-right groups seized the opportunity to further ignite the already present hostility shown by Western leaders towards Islamic nations. Incorporating aspects and writings from the crusading age into their rationale and even founding new groups based on this aesthetic seemed the unfortunately perfect kindling. Likewise, Islamist groups also found themselves reinforcing their rhetoric with anti-crusader rhetoric in conjunction with their pre-established jihadist ideologies in the wake of 9/11. Additionally, a seemingly direct response to the proclaimed crusade against terrorism in the Arab states. Most notably, via linguistic references in propaganda and taking inspiration from late twelfth and thirteenth century Muslim chroniclers and their rulers.

For this discussion, Islamist groups will also be included under the umbrella-term of 'far-right' since they share many characteristics with the Eurocentric far-right. Of course, Islamist groups and the Christian extremists are not identical in their usage of crusade history since they both strive to rebuke the legitimacy of each other's core social ideals and religious beliefs. Nonetheless, the organisations which fall into these two extremist circles who utilise crusade history for their respective benefits have done so based on seven concepts altogether. On the one hand, these include: militant Christianity, colonialism, romanticisation of the past and pan-European nationalism for the Euro-centric far-right. On the other hand, for Islamists these are Salafi-jihadism, Arab nationalism, and anti-Zionism. All of which, rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and hence, where we will begin analysing our historiography from. Therefore, the decision to analyse historiography from this point onwards instead of referring to the romances and scholarship of the Renaissance and eighteenth century is deliberate.

This paper's methodology includes primary sources from the Crusades (1095-1291), nineteenth to twenty-first century historiography and literature, online news articles, and digital media. From the 1800s, medieval historians can both pinpoint the resurgence in wide-spread fascination over the Crusades in scholarship and corresponding popular culture and can trace the emergence of far-right and Islamist ideologies. Essentially, we can see the

[1] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades.* Vol, 3, (Cambridge, 1954), p.480.

approach that will be used to discern the uses of Crusades by far-right organisations in their rationales, but the second half of our title question remains unanswered.

The quotation above is from Steven Runciman (1903-2000) and it reflects a popular opinion on the Crusades – that the successful outcomes for the European crusaders were due to their unwavering religious faith. Of course, this is a deeply contested point and one that will be explored later, yet it is the second half of the quote that can be applied to the whole question. "Faith" is a powerful word in Runciman's quotation. Faith in ideas, in ideologies, and in violence have contributed to the changing direction of crusade historiography since the popularisation of the fascination with the medieval in the early nineteenth century. Also, they have both directly but more commonly indirectly, arisen from far-right revisionist perspectives on the Crusades, especially in the past two decades. One example is the shift in crusade scholarship during the 1950s to emphasise the notion of the crusades as a religious experience which is a frequent trope adopted by modern Christian extremist groups which has persisted into the early 2000s. [2] Despite Runciman's observation being on the crusaders themselves, we can apply it to members of far right and extremist organisations today. The actions and rationale of those who proclaim themselves to be the new crusaders and defenders of Western civilisation, or the true jihadists are dangerous – they are, in the eyes of people who do not subscribe to these fanaticisms, without wisdom.

Undeniably, along with some obvious differences, this paper will show that the readings of crusade history have been repeatedly romanticised and de-contextualised to justify the violence and conflict of Christian extremist and Islamist organisations. Furthermore, that the political contexts from the late twentieth century onwards have defined these current controversial applications of crusade history. Finally, it will be argued that the romanticisation of the crusades via non-historiographical sources since the nineteenth century are indirectly responsible for its appeal to current Christian extremist groups.

[2] Johnathan Riley-Smith, *The Oxford History of the Crusades* (Oxford, 1999), p.383; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades.* Vol 3., pp.478-479; Thomas Madden, "What the Crusades Were Really Like", *Zenit*, October 10, 2004. URL: https://zenit.org/2004/10/10/what-the-crusades-were-really-like-part-1/ (Accessed September 24, 2021)

The ‘New Crusaders’

The term ‘crusader’ in the general western context initially evokes the ideas of knighthood, chivalry, and the intense Christian duty to reclaim the Holy Land. Like other medieval terminology such as ‘Anglo-Saxon’, ‘crusader’ and its immediate associations have been taken from books, magazines, and internet archives by a multitude of Eurocentric extremist groups to reinforce or make sinister improvements to their rationales. Still, it must be acknowledged that these organisations who choose to inject the crusader notion into their main body are not wholly neglectful of the historical context surrounding the Crusades. From an initial glance at Guibert of Nogent’s account of Pope Urban II’s speech at the Council of Clermont in 1095, anti-Muslim sentiments are clearly visible. [3] According to the Benedictine abbot, Urban’s speech frequently used the words ‘antichrist’ to refer to Muslims in general and employed connotations associated with pollution, injustice, and the active persecution of Christians in the Holy Land to reinforce his message to the conciliar audience. [4] Additionally, Guibert’s personal feelings towards Islam are highly resentful as seen in his gruesome anecdote of the Prophet Muhammad being “eaten by pigs”. [5] Arguably, Guibert of Nogent’s own anti-Muslim sentiments could have influenced his account of Urban II’s speech by a great extent. Even so, his own judgement of the Turks who fought against the crusaders during the First Crusade (1095-1099) is highly complementary regarding their military prowess. [6]

Guibert of Nogent’s recollection of Urban II’s speech and his anecdote on Muhammad’s torture are certainly not unique instances which mention the opposing side in a bloodthirsty manner. For instance, Runciman suggests that Urban II’s aims were meant to find work for warring barons from preventing further destruction in Europe. [7] In turn, meaning Urban needed to be evocative and direct their focus onto a faraway ‘enemy’. However, Guibert may have been present at the council, but he did not go on the Crusade itself unlike other chroniclers such as Fulcher of Chartres. Guibert completed his chronicle in 1128, long after the First Crusade ended; therefore, it is likely that he might have adapted his writings to reflect post-crusade sentiments after the battles that occurred in the region. Similarly, fellow chroniclers who stayed behind like Balderic of Dol and Robert the Monk follow this trend as

[3] Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of the Gods through the Franks*. Vol. 2. Robert Levine (trans.), (London, 1997), pp.83-93
[4] Ibid., pp.85-89
[5] Ibid., p.70
[6] Ibid., p.134
[7] Runciman, *A History of the Crusades.* Vol 3., p.471

well. Of course, crusade historians have attempted to determine precisely when these sentiments became more well-formed. For instance, Johnathan Lyons identifies Urban II's speech as anti-Islam discourse "taking shape", yet anti-Islam sentiments in their whole form were not widely established amongst the crusaders until later. [8] The *Gesta Francorum* is an anonymous work completed in 1101 forms the basis of many other contemporary chronicles about the First Crusades and its account of the fall of Jerusalem in 1099 aligns with this belief. During the fall, the massacre of Muslims at the Temple Mount is one of the greatest pieces of evidence to suggest the origins of strong anti-Islamic sentiment amongst the crusader forces. [9] Simultaneously, reflecting the heightening of the sentiment which undermined the ejection of Muslims and prioritised the imposition of Christians. Therefore, the motivation to use crusading history by current extreme right-wing groups to employ harmful rhetoric against Muslims did not arise from a vacuum and this is something we need to clarify.

The positions taken by Ariel Koch and his analysis of extreme-right symbolism and rhetoric certainly compliments this observation. Koch explores the concept of the Counter Jihad Movement (CJM), classified as an extreme right-wing pan-Euro identity which according to him, indirectly calls for violence using crusader discourse. [10] The CJM did not truly emerge until after 9/11 and the increased rate of Islamophobic incidents in Europe and North America in the past two decades unfortunately reflects this development. Furthermore, according to CREST, it is vital to note that the CJM is not a monolith but "a container for a range of views critical of, or hostile to, Islam and Muslims."[11]

Organisations including Britain First and the EDL correspond well with the criteria for the CJM along with Koch's additional observation and this is most visible in both groups' usage of the Templar cross also known as the crusader St George's cross. [12] The Knights Templar was a medieval military order primarily based in Jerusalem but possessed multiple headquarters across Europe during the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries. [13] The

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[8] Johnathan Lyons, *Islam through Western Eyes* (New York, 2012), p.59
[9] Paul Halsall, 'The Fall of Jerusalem', *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook – Fordham University*. January 1996. URL: https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/gesta-cde.asp#jerusalem2 (Accessed September 12, 2021)
[10] Ariel Koch, 'The New Crusaders: Contemporary Extreme Right Symbolism and Rhetoric', *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol. 11. (2017), p.15
[11] Ben Lee, "The Counter Jihad Movement", *CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE ON SECURITY THREATS (CREST).* November 3, 2016. URL: https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/counter-jihad-movement/ (Accessed September 15, 2021)
[12] Koch, 'The New Crusaders', pp.17-20
[13] Riley-Smith, *The Oxford History*, pp.176-179

Templar cross itself was worn by the knights of the order and donned upon their flags that were flown into battle. Moreover, famous crusaders such as the English king Richard the Lionheart and the first ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem Godfrey of Bouillon placed themselves under the protection of St. George during the Crusades.[14] In the context of Christian far-right organisations, its members view themselves as partaking in a constant battle against the things they deem a threat to their pan-European and white supremacist vision to combat the 'degeneration' of the West. The cross serving as a sign of their adopted protector.

Rally banners of the EDL frequently showcase the Templar cross and sometimes include a photoshopped image of a "Templar knight". Or more specifically, a Hollywood and pop culture incarnation of one like the crusader armies in the 2005 blockbuster film *Kingdom of Heaven*. [15] Arguably, this could be interpreted as a deliberate move. The image of the modern perception of a Templar knight is more recognisable, and therefore, can be easily connected to the romanticised ideals of medieval chivalry, piety, and honour that were first formed in the nineteenth century. Matthew Godwin and Elisabeth Trischler categorise these applications of crusade symbolism as examples of "unifying ethno-symbols", which is ironic considering the far-right's objection to globalist development. [16] A similar line of thought is expressed by Koch who believes the Templar cross is a symbol of motivation and provides religious justification and inspiration for groups like the EDL.[17] Indeed Godwin and Trischler are correct in emphasising their unifying purpose in far-right organisations. The acquisition of the Templar cross from the Crusades and the depiction of the immaculate holy knight is not confined to British nationalist groups and neither are they only present within rallies.

Writing a few days after the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol in Washington D.C. this year, Matthew Gabriele made it very clear that the use of crusader symbolism by far-right groups is certainly transnational and tactical. The implementation of what Gabriele notes as "Templar shields and pseudo-medieval armour…" amongst their appropriation of the Medieval era as the posters and flags scattered throughout the insurrection implied is

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[14] Matthew Godwin and Elisabeth Trischler, "Mythologizing the Medieval: Ethnonational symbolism by far-right extremists", *PaCCS.* November 12, 2019. URL: https://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/blog/mythologizing-the-medieval-ethnonational-symbolism-by-far-right-extremists/ (Accessed September 4, 2021)

[15] *Kingdom of Heaven.* Dir. Ridley Scott. Starring Orlando Bloom, Eva Green, Jeremy Irons, Liam Neeson et al. Film. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005.

[16] Godwin and Trischler, "Mythologizing the Medieval", URL: https://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/blog/mythologizing-the-medieval-ethnonational-symbolism-by-far-right-extremists/

[17] Koch, 'The New Crusaders', p.20

seemingly on the rise [see Figure 1]. [18] Captured on media outlets across the world, there was little concealment of the ferocity and chaos of the event with attendees from white supremacist groups like the Proud Boys and far right conspiracists Q Anon that appeared to have been instigated by the former outgoing US president Donald Trump. Gabriele has openly linked the root of this appropriation of crusade history for overtly political purposes to "being in service to European colonialism" during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. [19] Indeed, Godwin and Trischler share this sentiment when mentioning Kaiser Wilhem II of Germany's visit to Jerusalem and Damascus in 1898 whilst obviously dressed as "a pilgrim and holy warrior" – appealing to German nationalists. [20]

Figure 1. Photograph of a flag with the Templar cross with the text "Deus Vult" beneath it (credits: American Historical Association, 2021)

As previously stated, the emphasis of militant Christianity, the romanticisation of the past and pan-European nationalism were three key concepts which rose to notability in the nineteenth century and are utilised by the Eurocentric far-right. Indeed, Wilhelm II's propagandised outfit

[18] Matthew Gabriele, "VIKINGS, CRUSADERS, CONFEDERATES: Misunderstood Historical Imagery at the January 6 Capitol Insurrection", *Perspectives on History*. January 12, 2021. URL: https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2021/vikings-crusaders-confederates-misunderstood-historical-imagery-at-the-january-6-capitol-insurrection (Accessed August 26, 2021).

[19] Gabriele, "VIKINGS, CRUSADERS, CONFEDERATES". URL: https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2021/vikings-crusaders-confederates-misunderstood-historical-imagery-at-the-january-6-capitol-insurrection

[20] Godwin and Trischler, "Mythologizing the Medieval". URL: https://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/blog/mythologizing-the-medieval-ethnonational-symbolism-by-far-right-extremists/

on his state tour corresponded with these attitudes and these displays of perceived superiority were to some extent the result of contemporary historiography. European crusading historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in particular, frequently included colonist language and imperial sentiments with racially charged tones. Although, this is does not imply that historians of this era were always neglectful of non-flattering discourse surrounding the Crusades.

English historians Thomas Archer and Charles Kingsford's 1894 work falls into both categories. They clearly state that politically speaking, the Crusades acted as a "combining and disintegrating force" in European life, most of which was felt in France.[21] Despite this, they agree in the conclusion that it was necessary for the welfare of Latin Christendom for the Crusades to have occurred to prevent "a new influx of barbarism" which had apparently already ruined Western Asia. [22] This line of argument corresponds with the European hostility towards the East in the nineteenth century ranging from orientalism to economic and social domination and the views of the British Empire. Likewise, it also argues for the idea of the Crusades as defensive wars to prevent a form of pollution upon the Christian West. Of course, this is further reinforced by Charles Kingsford's military and policing background during WWI. Moreover, this further proves the initial point of modern Eurocentric far-right rationale being linked to emerging ideas in the nineteenth century. According to Godwin and Trischler, the EDL and other similar groups frame their rationale as an effort to defend European culture and the purity of the ethno-European homeland.[23] Both sets of academics demonstrate an emphasis on militant Christianity in their contentions, hence showcasing the perseverance of this concept and of imperialist notion of the vision for a purely Euro-Christian society in Europe.

Still, we cannot declare nineteenth century historiography of Archer and Kingsford's nature as the only culprit for the foundation of these notions within the Eurocentric far-right and this is evident through the case of the Utøya Island massacre carried out on the 22nd of July 2011 by the far-right terrorist Anders Breivik. Although the title of this essay refers to groups, the case of Anders Breivik and his ethnonationalist ideologies and far-right rationale that were more thoroughly investigated by Norwegian authorities after the massacre still hold immense

[21] Thomas Archer and Charles Kingsford, *The Crusades: The Story of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*. (London, 1894), pp.426-427
[22] Ibid., pp. 449-450
[23] Godwin and Trischler, "Mythologizing the Medieval". URL: https://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/blog/mythologizing-the-medieval-ethnonational-symbolism-by-far-right-extremists/

relevance. Regarding his own use of the Crusades, Breivik has manipulated crusade history in two distinct ways. Firstly, through his self-proclaimed title as a 'Knight Justiciar' in the fictional organisation Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon – Knights Templar (PCCTS – Knights Templar). [24] Secondly, a large section of his online manifesto titled *2083: - A European Declaration of Independence* appears to have been heavily inspired by the Templars and Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood,* which features as a large section of his manifesto. [25]

Unsurprisingly, Breivik's contention about the Knights Templars, its hierarchy, and the history surrounding them is disjunctive with the rest of his morbid document. Once establishing his new crusader identity within his texts, he discusses strategies, violence, and resources necessary for his 'operation' along with plans of bioterrorism before returning to focus on the aesthetics of the Knights Templar. [26] According to Daniel Wollenberg, Breivik's utilisation of the Knights Templar acts as a legitimisation of his opinion whilst acting as a moral defence of his aims – intertwining militant Christianity with his own beliefs. [27] Furthermore, Breivik's necessity to defend his actions is significant considering the PCCTS organisation that he referenced in his manifesto was found to be non-existent and only existed in his imagination. [28] Nonetheless, his apparent obsession with Bernard of Clairvaux's 1130 treatise and ideals of knighthood provides us with cause to investigate this source.

In Praise of the New Knighthood was allegedly completed in 1130 by Bernard of Clairvaux who in the next two decades, became one of the most famous crusade preachers in France, aiding in the recruitment drive for the Second Crusade (1144-1150). [29] Not only does Bernard commend the Templar order for its existence, he actively legitimises their militant presence in the Holy Land as defensive and exonerates those responsible for the deaths of the Muslim opposition for they in his view, were not men but "evil doers". [30] In turn, absolving the knights of carrying the sin of murder. The total dehumanisation of the Muslim forces before the Second Crusade corresponds with some of the attitudes present in the earlier European chronicle accounts of Urban II's speech after the First Crusade's end. Combined

[24] Anders Breivik (aka. Andrew Berwick), *2083 – A European Declaration of Independence*, (2011), pp.821-839
[25] Breivik, *2083*, pp.821-824; pp.833-843; pp.1073-1120; pp.1335-1341
[26] Ibid., pp.848-1072
[27] Daniel Wollenberg, 'The new knighthood: Terrorism and the medieval', *Postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*. Vol. 5. (2014), p.24
[28] Ibid., p.22
[29] Riley-Smith, *The Oxford History*, pp.69-70
[30] Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, 2nd Ed. Conrad Greenia, (trans.), (Kalamazoo, 2000), pp.39-43

with the notion that the Templars were seemingly "handpicked" by God according to Bernard, this suggests a sense of exceptionalism associated with crusader knights. [31]

Both the dehumanisation of Muslims and the exceptionalism of the Christian military order are adopted by Breivik for his own rationale. With the analysis of Breivik's rank above, Wollenberg is correct in stating that he saw himself as "a rebirth of Bernard's ideal", even if it was romanticised to some extent. [32] However, despite the general idea that the nineteenth century witnessed the spearheading of romanticised views of the Crusades, Charles Oman a military historian who wrote from the 1880s onwards, seems to quell the perception of the immaculate crusader knight. Oman implies the military efficiency of the crusaders relied on the energy of the crusaders, not their skill against unfamiliar war practices of the Turks and 'Saracens'. [33] Plus, he states the military results of the Crusades overall were "curiously small". [34] Moreover, Runciman's somewhat cynical mid-twentieth conclusion over the efficiency of the crusaders demeans Breivik's rationale entirely by stating their crusaders' legitimate faith was "combined with unashamed greed." [35] These contentions undermine the popular line of argument about the Crusades during the nineteenth century which insisted that the Crusades were the pinnacle of chivalry and Christian presence in the face of the 'mysterious enemy' in the Holy Land.

Of course, this contention has been forged with the help of medievalist fiction written which became hugely popular in the nineteenth century, most notably beginning with Walter Scott's 1825 novel *The Talisman.* Set during the height of the Third Crusade (1189-1192), Scott's novel subverted his era's conventional notions of Richard the Lionheart's and Saladin's traits respectively by instead characterising Richard as showing "the cruelty and violence of an Eastern sultan". [36] Whereas Saladin was written to display the qualities of a "European sovereign". [37] Undeniably, this belief was rooted in both orientalism and romanticism which was a common approach to medieval history in the nineteenth century. Throughout the novel, Saladin's identity is shrouded in mystery since Scott provides his character with two alternative personas, those of an Emir and a physician. [38] Both of which,

[31]Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise*, pp.47-48
[32] Wollenberg,'The new knighthood', p.31
[33] Charles Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages, A.D. 378-1515*. (Oxford, 1885), pp.51-60
[34] Oman, *The Art of War,* p.61
[35] Runciman, *A History of the Crusades.* Vol 3, p.478
[36] Walter Scott, *The Talisman,* (London, 1825), p.2
[37] Ibid., pp.2-3
[38] Ibid., pp.17-30; pp.87-95

he uses to secretly help acquaint himself with Richard and his 'allies' and eventually help save his life at a dinner celebrating the peace treaty signalling an end to the Crusades. [39]

According to Robert Irwin, Scott participates in "literary orientalism" in his construction of the landscape and characterisations within the novel rather than through serious research. [40] Indeed, Scott was criticised by later contemporary historians such as Stanley Poole who lamented at what *The Talisman* could have been if Scott had access to Poole's later research from his 1896 article. [41] Still the orientalist fascination with Saladin continued with Poole's scholarship through a theatrical account of Saladin that relied on the narrative account of the twelfth century poet Usama ibn Munqidh.[42] All of which Irwin explains, has meant the excessive focus of Saladin and his *jihād* distorted the understanding of late twelfth century Egypt and Syria. [43] This excessive focus has indirectly persisted into the rationale of Eurocentric extremist groups in the twenty first century which has been assisted by some historians such as Thomas Madden who wholly perceive the Crusades to be a response to Muslim aggression. [44] Wollenberg even discovered a connection between the rhetoric displayed in Madden's interview with the Catholic news platform *Zenit* and Breivik's own historical perspective – the denial that the Crusaders were aggressors in any sense. [45] A fundamental belief of Breivik that manifested clearly in *2083* which helped justify his rationale even further with the indirect support of a modern historian.

So far, it is evident that the Crusades are used to create more than just a sense of identity, but instead provide a whole new personhood for those who subscribe to far-right ideologies to embody and live out. In turn, assisting in hardening the belief that these groups possess a legitimate cause despite its destructive and violent rationale. Furthermore, we can also acknowledge that the modern manipulation of crusade history to fight against so-called 'enemies' of the Christian West was formulated mainly through scholarship of the last two centuries. Therefore, let us now turn to examine the uses of crusade history by Islamist groups and what they show about its historical interpretations.

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[39] Scott, *The Talisman*, pp.51-56; pp.347-350
[40] Robert G. Irwin, 'Saladin and the Third Crusade: a case study in historiography and the historical novel', in Bentley, Michael, (ed.) *Companion to Historiography*. (London, 1997), p.141
[41] Stanley Lane Poole, 'The Age of Saladin', *Quarterly Review* (1896), p.165
[42] Ibid., pp.182-187
[43] Irwin, 'Saladin and the Third Crusade' p.149
[44] Madden, "What the Crusades Were Really Like". URL: https://zenit.org/2004/10/10/what-the-crusades-were-really-like-part-1/
[45] Wollenberg, 'The new knighthood', p.29

The 'Revival' of *Jihād*

Before this section begins, it must be established that there are significantly less historical perspectives on the Muslim forces of the Crusades than there are on the Christian forces and settlers for two main reasons. Historiography of European and North American origins wholly dominated the discourse on crusade scholarship until very recently. [46] Plus, translations of Arabic sources into multiple languages have enabled a more informed perspective to be taken by primarily historians of said origins, with this being addressed more sufficiently in the late 1990s by historians like Hillenbrand.

Within the last decade, these obstacles have minimised but for dramatically different reasons. On the one hand, the events of 9/11 brought the Crusades, a historical and seemingly religious conflict between Muslims and Christians to the forefront in the twenty first century. Combined with a sense of political urgency to understand the rationale of Islamist groups, this arguably also spearheaded a new wave of scholarship with more focus on the premise of *jihād*. On the other hand, the recent focuses on bringing non-Eurocentric historical events to light along with a growing emphasis on decolonisation in academia throughout the last decade has provided crusade historians with a fuller understanding of the period. So, we are now able to engage in a deeper conversation over the uses of crusade history by Islamist groups and what this reveals about the readings of history.

Before delving into the analysis of Islamist groups' employment of crusade history, the premise of jihad should first be examined. Western media coverage of current Islamist groups such as IS and Al-Qaeda has often featured the word '*jihād*' when describing their ideologies and rationales. In turn, *jihād* in the European and North American political context, has become synonymous with terrorism and incidents such as Tunisian beach massacre and the Paris Attacks, both occurring in 2015. [47] So, it must be acknowledged that what we know as *jihād* today is not the same as the form instigated during the crusading era. However, as the following section will demonstrate, Islamist groups have attempted to centre the premise of *jihād* within the rationale of their organisations along with emphasising the historical conflict between Christians and Muslims within the Holy Land.

[46] Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusade: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), p.9
[47] Emma El-Badawy, Milo Comerford, Peter Welby, 'Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding Ideology and Propaganda', *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change* (2017), p.13

The most well-known source that we can evaluate is *The Book of the Jihād,* a treatise published in 1105 by the Sunni Muslim Syrian jurist Ali ibn Tahir al-Sulami. [48] Al-Sulami was the first to preach jihad against the crusaders, having known about the Frankish invasion of Sicily in the mid-eleventh century and the events of the First Crusade in Syria. [49] Despite the dangerous implications of these developments for the Abbasid Caliphate, al-Sulami notes the lack of Muslim unity to dispel the "polytheists" from the territory and suggests their presence is a warning from Allah (God). [50] From this, he goes on to outline the individual and collective duties of *jihād*, stressing that the "*jihād* against this group [crusaders] and their objective is made an individual obligation" for eligible Muslim men, especially those who are young and without diseases. [51] Carole Hillenbrand argues that the initial preaching of al-Sulami appears not to have resonated with Muslim rulers nor have inspired any significant formations of military plans afterwards. [52] Indeed, the formative development of *jihād* as a means of defensive and then offensive warfare began in the late eighth century during the Muslim expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula. [53] Hadia Dajani-Shakeel notes that the doctrine of *jihād* was formalized during a strong period for the caliphate and the original jurists who formulated it mainly prescribed an aggressive *jihād* which advised the constant fighting against polytheists until they embraced Islam. [54] Subsequently, this does help explain the lack of *jihād* being instigated immediately in the early twelfth century. With the expansion of the Islamic Empire in the early medieval era and the disunity amongst rulers within the caliphate during the early twelfth century, the need to encourage it perhaps seemed minimal.

The first successful widespread encouragement of *jihād* in the twelfth century occurred during the reign of Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd Zengī (c.1146-1174) in what Hillenbrand describes as a culmination of the looming threats. [55] Notably, his political rivals in Syria, Egypt, and non-Sunni territories, the interference of Byzantium in Syrian affairs, and the presence of the Franks amid rising tensions with the local populations. [56] Arguably, the reign of Nur al-Din is

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[48] Niall Christie (ed. & trans.), *The Book of the Jihād of 'Ali Ibn Tahir Al-Sulami (D. 1106): Text, Translation and Commentary.* (Abingdon, 2016), p.vii
[49] Ibid., pp.206-207
[50] Ibid., pp.207-208; Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, 'A reassessment of some medieval and modern perceptions of the counter-crusade', in Dajani-Shakeel, Hadia & Messier, Ronald A. (eds.) *The Jihād and its Times*. Vol. 4, (Michigan, 1991), p.52
[51] Christie, *The Book of the Jihād*, pp.209-210
[52] Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, pp.108-109.
[53] Christie, *The Book of the Jihād*, pp.1-2
[54] Dajani-Shakeel, 'A reassessment of some medieval and modern perceptions of the counter-crusade', p.44
[55] Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives,* pp.116-117
[56] Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, pp.117-131

most intricately documented by the late twelfth to thirteenth century Arab/Kurdish chronicler Ibn al-Athīr who served Saladin at the end of his reign and became vizier under his son Al-Afdal.[57] Al-Athīr also documented the events of both the First and Second Crusades, repeatedly showing much disdain for the Franks in the Second Crusade and the spread of "their wickedness", especially in the conquest of Edessa in 1144. [58] Regarding this, it can be argued that the form of *jihād* preached by al-Sulami that was deployed during the Crusades has been legitimised for use in political contexts as well as religious ones. Subsequently, the immediate groundwork would appeal to Islamist groups to utilise for their own recruitment purposes as well as rationale. However, a small concept within *jihād* has been clawed from al-Sulami's treatise which is infamously popular in modern Islamist ideology – martyrdom.

Unlike the umbrella term categorisation of Islamist groups being far right as stated in the introduction, Ari Ben Am and Gabriel Weimann identify Salafi-jihadism and the Far Right as two separate entities who employ the use of martyrdom to encourage members to carry out attacks. [59] Salafi-jihadism being an extreme religious and political ideology based on the Sunni sect of Islamism. According to both authors, the notion that Islam views martyrs as those who died whilst conducting *jihād* became popular during the Islamic revolution in the late 1970s, corresponding with the late twentieth century rise of Arab nationalism. [60] Subsequently, this had an immense impact on the rationale of Islamist groups and their *hadith* (narratives of sayings/customs) literature in the following decades. The cult of *shahid* (martyr) was popularised in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the concept was utilised by Sheik Abdullah Azzam to lay the foundations of Al-Qaeda which directly associated the holy war of *jihād* with martyrdom which is an infamous concept in the case of the attack on the Twin Towers during 9/11 [see Figure 2]. [61]

The altered use of the *jihād* ideal which had emerged in the aftermath of the Crusades in current Islamist groups has been manipulated to justify suicide terrorism and features significantly in their respective propaganda materials. In a report by Emma El-Badawy, Milo Comerford, and Peter Welby, they state the notability of *jihād* runs deep throughout the propaganda of Salafi-jihadist groups, often presented in chivalric terms and with

[57] D.S. Richards (ed. & trans.), The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for The Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh. Part 1. (Aldershot, 2006), p.1
[58] Ibid., pp.372-373
[59] Ari Ben Am, and Gabriel Weimann, 'Fabricated Martyrs: The Warrior-Saint Icons of Far-Right Terrorism', *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol 14, (2020), p.130
[60] Ibid., p.130
[61] Ibid., p.131

romanticised adorations of Saladin – appearing in 71% of all examined propaganda.[62] It is no surprise to crusade historians that Islamist propagandists would utilise the life of Saladin in this manner. Part of the report attempts to draw attention to the inconsistency of these historical references amongst Salafi-jihadist groups' propaganda such as Al-Qaeda's magazine *Inspire* and IS's *Dabiq*. For example, one supposed inconsistency is that Saladin in these publications is used to emphasise mercy in his sparing of Richard the Lionheart rather than his character used to demonstrate martial honour and bravery.[63]

Figure 2: Image taken from an Al-Qaeda propaganda video showcasing the martyrdom of one of the 9/11 United Airlines flights' hijackers, Wail al-Shihri (credits: Wikimedia Commons, 2001).

Indeed, the report is correct in suggesting that this conflicts with scholarship since Dajani-Shakeel argues Saladin envisioned "a vast Islamic front" to uproot the crusaders then commit the *jihād* against the enemy in the Christian west.[64] After the death of al-Malik al Salih, son of Nur al-Din, a letter that he wrote to the caliph of Baghdad in 1181 reveals his immense expansionist plan stretching from Mosul in Iraq to Georgia. [65] In turn, a series of decisive victories in the contested regions (Outremer) against the Franks and both the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaller accounted for by al-Athir and Saladin's biographer Bahā' ad-Dīn ibn Shaddād reaffirm this. Throughout the latter half of 1187, Saladin and his

[62] Emma El-Badawy et al. 'Inside the Jihadi Mind', p.6
[63]Ibid., p.51
[64] Dajani-Shakeel, 'A reassessment of some medieval and modern perceptions of the counter-crusade', p.62
[65] Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, p.184

forces severely inhibited the crusader settlements and destroyed key leaders such as the Grand Master of the Hospitallers. [66]

Nonetheless, the notion of the merciful and righteous Saladin is not entirely absent from crusade historiography. Some nineteenth and early twentieth century historiography of the crusades presents Saladin in a rather pleasant light Saladin. For example, the early twentieth century 'Sudan Agent' Edward Hyde Macintosh who at the time of writing was mainly stationed in Cairo in the 1930s-1940s, mentions how history reports Saladin as a "generous enemy". [67] This sentiment corresponds with the biography of Saladin written by the ibn Shaddād. Of course, the biography is overwhelmingly complimentary towards Saladin, praising his religiosity, noting his charity towards his subjects, and the alliance he formed with Balian II of Ibelin in the 1190s. [68] Furthermore, Macintosh positively summarises Saladin's military prowess, administrative abilities, and even his impact on agriculture. [69] The chosen examples of Saladin's wisdom relate to his improvement of irrigation systems and maintenance of cultivation along with his decision to priorities the use foreign mercenaries as soldiers instead of cultivators. [70] There appears to be no obvious romanticisation of Saladin by Macintosh in his writings, however it is curious to note the chosen aspect of his leadership that was discussed was almost entirely unrelated to warfare. Perhaps this is due to the following contextual factors: the apparent failure of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and the severe drought affecting Sudan in 1940. [71]

From this section, we can observe the primary uses of the Crusades by Islamist groups. Firstly, that the twelfth century concepts of *jihād* preached by al-Sulami in the early twelfth century have been manipulated by current organisations to instigate and convince its members to commit terrorist acts. Secondly, the figure of the twelfth to thirteenth century sultan Saladin is seen as a source of inspiration for *jihad*, a justification for their rationale, and a figurehead of their perceived notion of mercy.

[66] Francesco Gabrieli, (trans.), *Arab Historians of the Crusades*. (London, 1969), pp.70-76
[67] Edward Hyde Macintosh, "Memoirs: chapters 9-17". Unpublished. *Barker Research Library in Palace Green*, (Cairo, ca.1958-1962) 895/4/1-173, c.10.1
[68] Gabrieli, *Arab Historians*, pp.54-55
[69] Macintosh, "Memoirs", c.10.2
[70] Ibid., c.10.1-2
[71] Ibid., c.9.1-3

Conclusion

By using the umbrella term categorisation of ‘far-right’ to refer to both Eurocentric Christian extremist groups and Islamist organisations in this essay in conjunction with the analysis of both historiography and primary sources, two distinct points can be realised. Firstly, there are distinct parallels between the uses of crusade history for the rationales of Islamist and Christian extremist groups respectively which involve the deliberate manipulation of historical narratives to serve violent and harmful purposes under the guise of defence. Secondly, crusade history is particularly susceptible to be interpreted as justifications for far-right causes and ideologies. This is due to the perception of the Crusades as a historical conflict between the ‘Christian West’ versus the ‘Islamic East’ which has now become a prominent political contention since 9/11.

The methodology of this paper has been used to reflect both contextual political developments which would affect the readings of crusade history and reflect the vast changes in crusade historiography from the nineteenth century to 2021. Furthermore, we have uncovered indirect links between primary sources from the Crusades and their usage in the formation of far-right rationale. However, there is a notable imbalance regarding the difference in the documentation and analyses of the Christian forces of the Crusades compared to the Islamic side. Subsequently, resulting in less historiography that examines current Islamists’ usage of the crusade era which this paper has attempted to fulfil. Overall, this discussion has allowed us to trace the emergence of modern far-right concepts and the formative ideas of Christian extremist and Islamist groups who utilise crusade history in their organisations’ thinking and propaganda.

The Crusades are not the only historical event and era that has been exploited by far-right organisations in this manner. The Roman Empire is another one of the numerous examples of an historical topic that has been manipulated to justify far-right organisations’ rationale. Of course, we cannot place restrictions on what history reveals to us and how we initially interpret it. Challenging historical as well as historiographical narratives has helped to advance our current understanding and knowledge of events. Especially, if they have been deliberately concealed, repressed, or previously deemed ‘unfit’ for study within Western institutions. Nonetheless, historians of this generation have a responsibility to acknowledge the current uses of history outside of the immediate academic sphere which as we have

seen, involve the misguidance or deliberate manipulation of historical narrative to instigate harmful rationale and result in fatal, tragic events.

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