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The Fall of Acre and the Salvation of Sodom. The use of *peccatis exigentibus* in response to the loss of Acre in 1291.

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Abstract

In 1291 the Egyptian Mamluks conquered the city of Acre. The loss of Acre has come to signify the end of the crusades into the eastern Mediterranean from the Latin West. This fact posed a great challenge to medieval audiences and the authors writing for them. The crusades were supposed to be ordained by God. How could their failure be explained in a world in which everything is supposed to happen according to God's plan? A common discourse used to explain defeat that seemingly went against God's plan is the so-called *peccatis exigentibus*. This phrase is frequently used in medieval historiography to posit that bad things happen to God's favoured people – in the Latin Middle Ages this refers of course to the European Christians – as punishment for their sins. This template has been used and developed throughout the entire crusading period to explain the many defeats the crusading movement had to suffer since the early 12th century. It is again on display in various texts who now aim to explain the conquest of Acre from a Western point of few. This article explores the development of the *peccatis exigentibus* argument from its biblical roots to its particular place in crusader historiography in the 12th century and subsequently referring to the capture of Acre after 1291. The article then takes a closer look at two texts which in reaction to the conquest of Acre adapt the *peccatis exigentibus* argument with reference to the same passage from the Old Testament (Genesis 18,17–32) but arrive at very different conclusions.

Keywords

Medieval Studies, Historiography, City Studies, Reception of the Bible, Crusader Studies, Medieval German Studies

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The Capture of Acre and the Origins of *peccatis exigentibus*

Confronting failure is hard. Harder still if an entire world-view is bound up with the failed task. But this was the challenge posed to authors in the Latin West and beyond when in 1291 the city of Acre — most important of the harbour cities still controlled by the crusaders on the Eastern Mediterranean seaboard — was conquered by the Mamluks of Egypt. Even though it took several decades for it to become clear that the loss of Acre did indeed mark the end of the Western crusader presence in the Holy land, the event itself was almost immediately perceived as a pivotal moment. Across Europe and the Mediterranean, a variety of texts responded in various ways to the loss of the city: the so-called Templar of Tyre — probably a clerk in the employ of the Knights Templar, and an eyewitness to the events who had barely made his escape to Cyprus — used the fall of Acre as the lynchpin of his historiography in his Old French chronicle, which survives as the third part of the *Gestes des Chiprois*. He used it to lament the end of the knightly and chivalrous world he had inhabited and the beginning of a mercenary new world order bereft of virtue and chivalry.[1] Yosef ben Tanhum Yerushalmi, a prominent member of Cairo's Jewish community, wrote a קִינָה (*Qinah*), an intricate lament steeped in the lyrical forms of the Hebrew Bible, in which he interwove the personal lament over the passing of his father in the same year with the lament over the Jewish community of Acre (which had perished in the capture).[2] Riccoldo da Montecroce, a Dominican missionary, who had just arrived in Baghdad when he heard of the capture of Acre, wrote five fictitious letters *ad ecclesiam triumphantem.* These are touching in their articulation of grief, giving a unique formulation of profound theological doubt, and evincing a powerful sense of disorientation in the face of overwhelming historical evidence that the world might not be organised along the lines medieval Christianity taught.[3] An anonymous priest, probably of lower rank and originally from France, wrote the *Excidium Aconis*: this scathing pamphlet accused everyone in Christendom — from the papacy down to the lowliest knights and priests — for the collective failure to save the city.[4] The Venetian politician Marino Sanudo Torsello committed many years of his life advocating for a new crusade, his efforts culminating in the *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*: a comprehensive and elaborate multi-year-plan for a vast military operation to reclaim Acre and the Holy land, including detailed logistical suggestions and financial budgets. He dedicated the work to the pope in Avignon, hoping to spur him to action.[5] Still further afield in Alpine Styria, Ottokar aus der Gaal (a member of a knightly family of lower nobility) included in his monumental *Styrian Rhyming Chronicle* a book dedicated to the fall of Acre — the only German vernacular text to explicitly make the lament for the loss of a city into its *raison d'être*.[6]

All these texts shared a daunting task: to explain how something that supposedly had been divinely ordained — Christian control of the city of Acre, and through it access to the Holy land with its *loca sancta* — could have ended, and how the effort to sustain it could have failed. They were all writing in the face of historical events, which seemed to overwhelmingly suggest not only that the crusades had failed, but also that they as Christians might have lost God's favour — and that their position as a chosen people in the centre of a world order ordained by divine decree was in doubt.

Of course, after almost two hundred years of tumultuous crusading and often disastrous warfare, the authors of these texts could build on a rich trove of experience of how to explain loss, defeat, and setback to their audiences. From the very beginning, the crusades had been beset by catastrophic setbacks: despite the initial success of the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 and the establishment of a crusader kingdom in the Holy land, military defeat and constant crisis became the refrain of much of the relevant Christian historiography. Perhaps the most pervasive (and indeed persuasive) trope routinely employed by historiographers is the argument of *peccatis exigentibus*. This argument throughout premodern writing states, in sum, that bad things befall the crusaders because they are sinful and their sins require punishment.[7] God's cause is just, but his agents repeatedly fail to achieve it on

[1] *Les Gestes des Chiprois, Recueil de chroniques francaises ecrites en Orient au XIIIe & XIVe siecles, Philippe de Navarre & Gerard de Monteal* [sic], ed. Gaston Raynaud, Publications de la Société de L'Orient Latin Série Historique 5 (Geneva, 1887). *The Templar of Tyre, Part III of the Deeds of the Cypriots*, ed. Pau Crawford, Crusade Texts in Translation 6, (Aldershot, 2003).

[2] Joachim Yeshaya, "A Hebrew Elegy by Yosef ben Tanhum Yerushalmi on the Death of his Father and the Mamluk Conquest of Acre", in *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 39 (2014), 33–52.

[3] Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Lettres Sur La Prise d'Acre (1291)*, ed. Reinhold Röhricht, Archives de l'Orient Latin 2 (Geneva 1884), 258–296. Rita George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo Da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam*, Medieval Voyaging (Turnhout, 2012). In the following quoted as: Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistolae*.

[4] Edited together with Thaddeus of Naples' similar historiographical tractate in: *Excidii Aconis gestorum collectio; Magister Thadeus civis neapolitanus: Ystoria de desolatione et conculcatione civitatis Acconensis et totius Terre Sancte*, ed. Robert Burchard Constantijn Huygens. With contributions by A. Forey and D.C. Nicolle, CCCM 204 (Turnhout, 2004).

[5] So far there is no critical edition of the *Secreta*, only an English translation: Marino Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross: Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis,* trans. Peter Lock, Crusade Texts in Translation (Ashgate, 2011).

[6] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Österreichische Reimchronik*. Nach den Abschriften Franz Lichtensteins. Unveränderter Nachdruck der 1. Auflage von 1890, ed. Josef Seemüller, Deutsche Chroniken und andere Geschichtsbücher des Mittelalters 5 (Dublin, 1974). In the following quoted as: *Book of Acre*.

[7] For an overview over the development of the *peccatis exigentibus* argument and its meaning in the context of crusader historiography see Siberry, Elizabeth, *Criticism of Crusading, 1095–1274* (Oxford 1985), esp. pp. 70–84. A more recent but less extensive discussion can be found in Dirk Jäckel, "Deutungen der christlichen Niederlagen im Heiligen Land (12. Jahrhundert). Ein Vergleich okzidentaler und christlich-orientalischer Bewältigungsstrategien," in *Comparativ, Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 18 (2008) Heft 3/4, pp. 95–107, esp. pp. 99–102.

For an in-depth study of the theological and historiographical underpinnings of the argument see Gary Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography. Narratives of Retribution* (London, 2000).

account of their sinfulness. The idea foundational to the *peccatis exigentibus* discourse that the fortunes of a people are reflective of its relationship to their deity is deeply engrained in various Judaeo-Christian traditions and reach back into the Bible and classical literature.

The notion features throughout the Old Testament. A few examples, picked from many possibles, should illustrate the width and scope of the concept: in Numbers 32:11–13 a clear mechanical link between human action and divine reaction is set up, Judith 8:26–27 introduces the idea of the punishing God as a pedagogical God, who metes out punishment not in order to destroy, but in order to correct and improve, Jeremiah 17:7 clarifies that God's chosen people despite their sinfulness and his need to chastise them remain his beloved people, Isaiah 10:9–15 illustrates that the instrument of God's chastisement, in this case the Assyrians, should not presume to think that their successes are part of their own agenda and not part of God's plan for his chosen people.

The ideas underlying the Old Testament are also an deeply rooted in Greek philosophical thought, where it was most influentially articulated three centuries prior to the writing of the later books of the Old Testament, like *e.g.* the *Book of Judith*, in Plato's *Republic*.[8] In the so-called 'Myth of Er' Socrates explores the idea that the just [δικαίων] are rewarded after death and the unjust [ἀδίκων] are punished,[9] through the eyes of warrior called Er (*Ἤρ*)[10], who died in battle, but later came back to deliver an account of what he witnessed in the afterlife.

Later Flavius Josephus, the Jewish author, writing in the second half of the first century CE at the confluence of Jewish, Roman, and Greek scholarly traditions, stated as the mission statement in the introduction to his *Jewish Antiquities* his desire to impress on his readers through his account "that God is the Father and Lord of all things, and sees all things, and that thence he bestows a happy life [εὐδαίμονα βίον] upon those that follow him; but plunges such as do not walk in the paths of virtue into inevitable miseries [συμφοραῖς]."[11]

Unsurprisingly, within Christendom, it fell to the church fathers, primarily Augustine and later Gregory to gather and expound the historiographical implications of these biblical and classical frameworks. In his *De civitate Dei* Augustine writes: "[A]nd every victory, even though gained by wicked men, is a result of the first judgment of God, who humbles the vanquished either for the sake of removing or of punishing their sins."[12] Thus, even the victories of the wicked become a part of God's plan, who uses defeat in battle either to better or to punish his chosen people.

The pedagogical aspect is later foregrounded by Gregory the Great, probably the first medieval author to explicitly make use of the phrase. In his *Moralia in Iob*, an expansive consideration of moral questions from a Christian point of view, written in the late 6th century, but circulating widely throughout the Middle Ages all over Europe, Gregory introduces the fear that "our sins demanding it, we are now no longer stricken as sons by a Father, but as enemies by the Lord."[13] According to Gregory there are two qualities of divine chastisement: one used for pedagogical purposes against his people, and one reserved for punitive action against his enemies, and the great fear of the Christians should be to cross over from the remit of the pedagogical quality into the remit of the punitive quality.

Drawing from the various strands of the tradition laid out above the key merit of this argument becomes clear: even though in a conflict situation an external force has prevailed over the chosen people, the chosen people's centrality in God's greater plan remains unchallenged. The successes of external forces are not actually about them or their agendas; rather, they are relegated to the role of instruments. As mere instruments, therefore — even if they prevail — the consequences of their successes remain peripheral and ancillary to God's order of the world. Their actions become relevant in this order of the world only when aimed at the group in the centre of this order: God's chosen people. Thus, the chosen people, even though they find themselves temporarily reprimanded and humbled, see their centrality in their own world view reaffirmed. This affirmation happens not despite adversity, but through adversity.

Building on these preliminary sketch of the sources, tradition and history of the *peccatis exigentibus* template the article will explore its applications in particular with regard to the city of Acre and its loss in 1291. It will answer the question of how, at this particular juncture, *peccatis exigentibus* worked as a salvific explanation of historical events — and how it was modified to respond to the contemporary concerns of the authors and the audiences they were writing for.

Peccatis exigentibus in Crusader Historiography

The argument's ability to admit the defeat of a chosen people, whilst at the same time reaffirming their centrality, makes *peccatis exigentibus* attractive in contexts where two factors come

[8] Plato: *Republic*, in Plato in Twelve Volumes, 5, trans. Paul Shorey. Cambridge (MA)/ London, 1969.

[9] Plato's *Republic* 10. 613c–614a. English translation and Ancient Greek quoted after: https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D10%3Asection%3D613c. Last accessed on 23.06.2023.

[10] In the text only in the genitive case: *Ἤρὸς*.

[11] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.1.4, English translation and Ancient Greek quoted after: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D1%3Awhiston%20chapter%3Dpr.%3Awhiston%20section%3D4. Last accessed on 23.06.2023.

[12] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York, 1993), 635. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, Libri XI-XXII*, eds. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48 (Turnhout, 1955 repr. 2003), 19.15, 682: " […] et omnis uictoria, cum etiam malis prouenit, diuino iudicio uictos humiliat uel emendans peccata uel puniens."

[13] *Moralia in Iob*, PL 75, 14.37.11, col. 1063: "Cum ergo virtutem nostrae patientiae flagella transeunt, valde metuendum est ne, peccatis nostris exigentibus, non iam quasi filii a patre, sed quasi hostes a Domino feriamur."

together: firstly the presence of an external enemy, and secondly the experience of loss, defeat, or setback. It is no surprise, therefore, that the formula should occur as a fully realised part of crusader historiography from the outset — as, for instance, in Baldric of Dol's version of Pope Urban's II speech at Clermont, related in his *Historia Ierosolimitana*: "De sancta Jerusalem, fratres, hucusque quasi loqui dissimulauimus, quia ualde loqui de ea pertimescimus, et erubescimus: quoniam ipsa ciuitas, in qua, prout omnes nostis, Christus ipse pro nobis passus est, peccatis nostris exigentibus, sub spurcitiam paganorum redacta est, Deique seruituti, ad ignominiam nostram dico, subducta est."[14] [Of holy Jerusalem, brethren, we dare not speak, for we are exceedingly afraid and ashamed to speak of it. This very city, in which, as you all know, Christ himself suffered for us, because our sins demanded it, has been reduced to the pollution of paganism and, I say it to our disgrace, withdrawn from the service of God.[15]]

Here, Baldric's use of the *peccatis exigentibus* formula mirrors the *Christus ipse pro nobis passus est* from the preceding line. In this way, Baldric's Urban in his version of the sermon does two things simultaneously: he reminds his Christian audience that their sinfulness necessitated the sacrificial death of Christ to begin with, and at the same time blames this very sinfulness for the loss of Jerusalem. Baldric's Urban II goes on to lament the despoliation of the holy sites, in particular the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the *Templum Domini*, by the presence of the heathens and their idols and practices.[16] In Baldric's chronicle, at the very beginning of the crusading movement, the defeat to be rationalised is Christian negligence, which has allowed the heathens to despoil the *loca sancta* and to deny the Christians access to the Holy land.

Fulcher of Chartres, another chronicler, unlike Baldric actually participated in the First Crusade. As such, he was eyewitness to many of the events related in his own *Historia Hierosolymitana*. Fulcher now uses the phrase *peccatis exigentibus* to frame the military defeat of the crusaders — for instance at the battle of Harran in 1104. This was one of the first bloody setbacks endured by the crusaders after the successful First Crusade; indeed, it was the first in a string of many which the crusader kingdoms — and in particular the Principality of Antioch — suffered in the first decades of the twelfth century.[17] This presentation of a contemporary crusader defeat as a defeat *atrocior* [more terrible] than all previous defeats[18] points towards an dynamic of superlative escalation — one which almost becomes a necessity for the *peccatis exigentibus* template when used over time. In order for it to work, to apply its salvific effect to the events it is mustered to frame, each successive event must be presented as superlative to all preceding comparable events. This is inherent in both the (dark) pedagogical and the retributive logic of the argument: since previous reprimands or punishments failed to effect a change in the chosen people – otherwise, why would they continue transgressing and thus require further sanctioning – the most recent reprimand has to be more severe than all previous ones. Only thus can there be a hope for it to have an effect — until the next time, that is, when the chosen people will inevitably require disciplining again.

Interestingly, Fulcher also deploys the *peccatis exigentibus* argument for the historical Judeans. In an excursus back to the Maccabean Revolt of the second century BCE, the Judeans find themselves persecuted by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes.[19] At this point, the Judeans are still the people of the covenant. The translation of the soteriological burden of history to the Christians is yet to happen, and consequently the discourse of *peccatis exigentibus* is still applicable to the ancient Judeans.[20]

As we have seen in the above, in the context of the early crusades, the *peccatis exigentibus* template could be used to re-contextualise averse historical events, to assign blame and therefore responsibility, and to assert the centrality of the chosen people in God's salvific plan.

[14] Baldric of Bourgueil, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, ed. Steven Biddlecombe (Woodbridge, 2014), 7.

[15] Unless otherwise stated, translations (in the square brackets) in this article were performed by the author.

[16] During the crusaders' period in Jerusalem, various conflicting and overlapping identifications of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock were prevalent. Association with the Old Testament, in particular with the Temple of Salomon, stood alongside those with the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. For example, the indentions on the rock in the centre of the structure identified footprints — previously associated with Abraham and Isaac, and later seen by the Muslims as those left by the Prophet Muhammad when he had embarked on his night journey — were now associated with Jesus. For more on the complex Christian de- and connotations of the Dome of the Rock, see Denis Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus. Volume 3, The City of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 400–409.

[17] Fulcher of Chartes, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 2.28.3, 471–473 "[E]t Euphrate flumine praetergresso, Carramque deinde civitatem prope flumen Chabor nominatum hostium phalangibus obviaverunt, et commisso statim proelio iuxta Racha, peccatis nostris exigentibus, in dispersionem et confusionem Christiani sunt "dati."

[18] Fulcher of Chartes, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 2.28.3, 473.

[19] For the medieval reception of the Maccabeans, see Hans Kloft, "Die Makkabäer – Geschichte und Erinnerung," in *Von Magna Graecia nach Asia Minor. Festschrift für Linda-Marie Günther* (Wiesbaden, 2017), 350–364.

[20] Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana* 3.30.7, p. 712: "[…] post annorum plurium spatia, peccatis ludaeorum exigentibus, Antiochus Epiphanes legem eorum impugnans, Machabaeos valde coartavit."

A glance at another source from the early twelfth century, the *Bella Antiochena* by Walther the Chancellor,[21] shows that a hostile external force is not always a precondition for appeal to *peccatis exigentibus*. As expected, Walther uses the template to frame the painful defeat suffered by the Principality of Antioch at the battle of Ager Sanguinis (1119) — in which his lord Roger of Salerno was killed and he himself was captured — as God's judgement.[22] But he also finds use for it in making sense of the havoc wreaked by an earthquake: after the event, all the survivors confess together that the devastation surely has been inflicted on them *peccatis exigentibus*.[23] It appears that not only victorious enemy forces can figure as the source of divine chastisement through an averse historical event; so too can natural disasters. Conversely, this fact helps illustrate the function of enemy peoples in this scheme: they are more like natural forces than fully-fledged entities driven by their own plans and agendas.

Two of the greatest authors of the twelfth century, who both made ample use of the *peccatis exigentibus* argument – Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Tyre – can only be treated with here in passing. Their engagement with this concept is so rich, versatile, and distinctive that it warrants a separate consideration in a future article beyond the scope of the overview offered here.

To summarise: Bernard of Clairvaux had thrown his full weight as maybe the most influential ecclesiastical figure of his time behind the second crusade and subsequently, after the catastrophic failure of this operation with the abortive siege of Damascus, became the target of attacks. He dedicated as small section of his *De Consideratione,* composed between 1149 and 1152 primarily as advice to Pope Eugene III on the creation of an ideal ecclesiastical government, to justifying himself and to negotiate blame and accountability in the face of defeat. He admits that, in the face of events, God *provocatus peccatis nostris* [provoked by our sins] seems indeed to apply an excess of justice not mitigated by mercy.[24] Moreover, he concedes that historical occurrence has made him a liar: "Diximus, 'Pax', et non est pax; promisimus bona, et ecce turbatio."[25] Finally he has to admit that the course of events, which he describes as *iudicium hoc,* is *abyssus tanta* [this judgement / so abysmal] and that he finds his ability to accept this outcome as God's will greatly tested.[26] Admitting a gap between the severity of the punishment and the perceived reason for it, he turns to biblical examples for consolation and instruction: he first remarks that Moses did indeed lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but not into the land he had promised. Again he hurries to exculpate the leader: Moses in his biblical example, himself in the contemporary crisis — which he terms a *tristis et inopinatus eventus* [lamentable and unforeseen event]. The leaders — Moses and Bernard himself — did only as they were ordered by God, an order empirically confirmed by divine signs. If the rashness of the leader is not to blame, then blame must be sought with those being led: the Israelites of Bernard's biblical example, and his contemporary crusaders of the Second Crusade. Bernard argues that, like the Israelites, the crusaders never stopped looking back. Half-hearted and unreliable in their endeavour, they were always arguing with God and his servant (Moses or Bernard). How, Bernard asks, could the crusaders — equal in human fault to the ancient Israelites, who failed and perished on their way out of Egypt into the Promised Land — not be expected to suffer the same fate on their way into the Holy land?[27] In consequence, this must mean that their deaths are not contrary to God's promises. God still has to remain just, his promises do not cancel out his justice: "Neque enim aliquando promissiones Dei justitiae Dei praejudicant."[28] [Never do God's promises prejudice God's justice]. Or, put the other way round: according to Bernard, divine justice overrules divine promises. If there is a clash between God's need to fulfil his promises to his chosen people and his need to chastise them, he will necessarily prioritise the latter. Thus Bernard enshrines the priority of justice over grace inherent in the conception of *peccatis exigentibus*.

Bernard's near contemporary William of Tyre displays a rather different approach. He uses the *peccatis exigentibus*

[21] Walther the Chancellor, *Bella Antiochena. Mit Erläuterungen Und Einem Anhange*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Innsbruck, 1896). Walther's chronicle also displays an intriguing contrast between its first part — dealing with the victory of the Antiochene host led by Roger of Salerno at Tell Danith in 1115 — and the second part, dealing with the Frankish defeat at *Ager Sanguinus* and its catastrophic aftermath. While the first part presents the violence of the battle (in which the Christians are victorious) in fairly conventional terms, the second part presents the defeat of the Christians in a graphic and bloody way. In contrast to the chroniclers of the First Crusade, who use the imagery of bloody slaughter mostly in connection with the victorious Franks and almost never with the Muslims, Walther — in the wake of the Antiochene defeat in 1119 — seems to have reversed this pattern in order to paint the crusaders' adversaries in a darker light. See: Thomas Asbridge, "The Portrayal of Violence in Walter the Chancellor's Bella Antiochena," in *Syria in Crusader Times. Conflict and Co-Existence*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand (Edinburgh, 2019) 163–183, especially 169–171.

[22] Walther the Chancellor, *Bella Antiochena*, 2.3, 81: "[…] spectentur autem, ut ipsi multitudine exercitus gloriosi haberentur et nos a solita probitate repulsi timore multitudinis defecisse uideremur quod in breui non ui illius multitudinis, sed commissis et sceleribus nostris exigentibus iusto Dei iudicio in nobis completum est [.]"

[23] Walther the Chancellor, *Bella Antiochena*, 1.2, 63: "Mane autem facto, cum sub ruina tam hominum quam et aliorum miserae cladis pateret inmanitas, omnes unanimiter Latini, Graeci, Syri, Armeni, aduenae et peregrini, suis peccatis exigentibus id accidisse profitentur."

[24] Bernard of Clairvaux. *De Consideratione*, eds. J. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais, Sancti Bernardi Opera vol. III (Rome, 1963), 2.1, 410–411: "[…] cum Dominus scilicet, provocatus peccatis nostris, ante tempus quodammodo visus sit iudicasse orbem terrae, in aequitate quidem, sed misericordiae suae oblitus".

[25] Bernard of Clairvaux. *De Consideratione*, 2.1, 411.

[26] Bernard of Clairvaux. *De Consideratione*, 2.1, 411: "At iudicium hoc abyssus tanta, ut videar mihi non immerito pronuntiare beatum, qui non fuerit scadalizatus in eo."

[27] Bernard of Clairvaux. *De Consideratione*, 2.1, 411–412.

[28] Bernard of Clairvaux. *De Consideratione*, 2.1, 412: "Quod si illi ceciderunt et perierunt propter iniquitatem suam, miramur istos eadem facientes, eadem passos? Sed numquid illorum casus adversus promissa Dei? Ergo nec istorum. Neque enim aliquando promissiones Dei justitiae Dei praeiudicant."

formula frequently (and in various modulations) throughout his *Chronicon*, perhaps the most influential chronicle of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth century.[29] In particular he dedicates the seventh chapter of the twenty-first book of his *Chronicon* to a more detailed reflection on the topic — specifically considering *peccatis nostris exigentibus* from the perspective of the Franks in the Holy land.

Announcing a short but fruitful departure *ab historie textu* [from the fabric/matter/text of history], he embarks upon a discussion of why and how in the past crusader armies in the East had prevailed so much more often against superior enemy forces — while in his own time they would, more often than not, succumb to inferior forces.[30] For this he proffers three explanations. One is that the Franks of the Orient, accustomed to peace, have become weak and effeminate and are no longer fit to fight, unlike their ancestors who fought the First Crusade (and who were used to hardship and warfare).[31] Another explanation is the unity of the previously scattered and quarrelsome Muslim dominions surrounding the crusader states, which are now united under the rule of Saladin.[32] The most important reason, however — and the one with which William opens his considerations — is the sinfulness of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. These, he alleges, have turned away from the virtue of their ancestors and the path of God. Their vices are so outrageous that they turn any attempt to write a history about the Franks of the Holy land into satire.[33]

Here, William places *peccatis exigentibus* — alongside two other considerations — to explain the dire state of affairs for the Christians in the East. It is, for him, the primary explanation; and the language he uses there suffuses the other two explanations also. But this should not detract from the fact that in William's *Chronicon,* salvific arguments sit quite comfortably next to more strategic considerations: yes, God has to punish the Franks for their many vices, but the enemy is also now united, and the Franks themselves are less warlike than they used to be. This leaves *peccatis exigentibus* as the most important reason for the crisis of the Kingdom of Jerusalem — but not the only one. There is no direct competition between salvific explanation and strategic consideration. On the contrary, they can be productively woven together to amplify each other.

William of Tyre had the good sense to pass away a year before he had to wirness the devastating defeat of the crusader states in the battle of Hattin in 1187. This decisive battle against Saladin and his forces took place close to the Sea of Galilee and all but sealed the fate of the Kingdom of Jerusalem: Saladin inflicted critical losses on the crusader army, took most of the leading aristocracy captive – among them Guy of Lusignan, the embattled King of Jerusalem – and several hundred captured Templars and Hospitallers were in the aftermath sentenced to death and beheaded.[34] Saladin was now free to attack Jerusalem; the city surrendered after a short siege, and the crusader states were reduced to a narrow strip of land along the Eastern Mediterranean littoral.

The battle and its aftermath were, of course and even without William's discerning eye, quickly framed with the *peccatis exigentibus* argument as well. In his *Historia Hierosolamitana,* written in the early thirteenth century, Jacob of Vitry (of whom we will hear more anon) sees the defeat as a sign that God has given the Christians into the hands of their enemies *infinitis eorum peccatis exigentibus*[35] [their infinite sins requiring it]. The logic of superlative escalation has now carried the argument into infinity. The full scale of God's wrath against his chosen people is signified by the loss of the true cross, which the crusader armies were accustomed to carry into battle with them.[36] Once again, the pedagogical and judicial logic of this established form of discourse is on

[29] William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. Robert Burchard Constantijn Huygens, CCCM 63 (Turnhout, 1986), e.g. 1.15, 131: *peccatis inhabitantium id exigentibus*, referring to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; *Chronicon*, 6.5, 311: *peccatis eorum exigentibus*, referring to Christians deserting their fellow crusaders on the First Crusade during the siege of Antioch; *Chronicon* 14.2, p.635: *peccatis suis exigentibus*, referring to Joscelin II of Edessa.

[30] William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 21.7, 969.

[31] William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 21.7, 970.

[32] William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 21.7, 970.

[33] William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 21.7, 969: "Quibus merito, peccatis eorum exigentibus, gratiam subtrahat dominus tanquam iracundiam provocatus. Tales sunt presentis seculi et maxime Orientalis tractus homines, quorum mores, immo vitiorum monstra si quis diligentiore stilo prosequi temptet, materie inmensitate subcumbat et potius satiram movere videatur quam Historiam texere."

[34] Benjamin Kedar, "The Battle of Hattin Revisited", in *The Horns of Hattin*, ed. Benjamin Kedar (Jerusalem, 1992), 190–207. Klaus van Eickels, "Die Schlacht von Hattin und der Fall Jerusalems 1187," in *Saladin und die Kreuzfahrer. Begleitband zur Sonderausstellung 'Saladin und die Kreuzfahrer' im Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte Halle*, eds. Alfred Wieczorek *et al.*, Publikationen der Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Band 17 (Mannheim, 2005), 101–114.

[35] Jacob of Vitry, *Histoire Orientale = Historia Orientalis*. ed. and trans. Jean Donnadieu, Sous La Règle de Saint Augustin 12 (Turnhout, 2008), 1118–1119: "[…] tradidit Dominus populum Christianorum, infinitis eorum peccatis exigentibus, in manus impiorum, adeo quod nostri subito terga dantes inimicis fere omnes a maximo vsque ad minimum trucidati sunt, vel captiuitate detenti."

[36] Jacob of Vitry, *Historia Orientalis*, 1118–1119: "Vt autem vertis indicis & euidentibus signis Dominum sibi terribiliter offensum agnoscerent, & diuinae protectionis clipeum ab ipsis recessisse non dubitarent, lignum salutiferae Crucis, quod die illo tenebroso secum in praelio detulerunt, lamentabili infortunio amiserunt."

display: God's plan gives a higher priority to disciplining and reprimanding the chosen people than to earthly concerns. Consequently, punishing or educating the Christians takes precedence over maintaining the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other crusader states."

Acre as Sin City

It has been shown how the *peccatis exigentibus* discourse was used very effectively and pervasively throughout the twelfth century to frame the various setbacks suffered by the crusading movement — culminating in the decisive defeat at Hattin and the subsequent loss of Jerusalem in 1187. But the history of the crusader states did not end there, for various reasons, which can be briefly summarised as follows: despite his comprehensive victory, Saladin did not conquer Tyre — leaving the crusaders with this important harbour as a foothold on the Eastern Mediterranean littoral. This enabled the crusaders to lay siege on Acre for almost two years (a massive double-siege likened by one of its chroniclers to the Trojan War).[37] The siege ended in 1191, when, after the arrival of the kings Philipp August of France and Richard I of England, the city was handed over to the crusaders under Guy of Lusignan.[38] The capture of Acre inaugurated further successes on the so-called Third Crusade, now led solely by Richard I.[39] Despite ultimately falling short of its aim to again conquer Jerusalem, the Third Crusade succeeded in securing the remaining crusader holdings along the Mediterranean coast (at least for the next couple of decades).

Jerusalem itself was later temporarily recovered — not through warfare, but rather through a treaty concluded by Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen with the Ayyubid Sultan Al-Kamil in 1229 for a period of ten years.[40] After the expiry of that treaty, and the defeat of the crusaders and their Syrian allies against the Egyptian Ayyubids at La Forbie in 1244, the crusaders never gained control of Jerusalem again.[41]

The loss of Jerusalem set the stage for the rise of the city of Acre, an important harbour located at the northern end of the Bay of Haifa. Throughout the thirteenth century it became not only the most important economic hub and demographic centre of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, but also its de facto temporal and spiritual capital. However, Acre also acquired a reputation, particularly in the Latin West, as an unsavoury mire of sin and depravity. This image became firmly enshrined, long before the Mamluks conquered the city in 1291. Perhaps the most prominent propagator of this image was Jacob of Vitry, a French ecclesiastic and bishop of Acre in the early thirteenth century. In his *epistolae*, addressed to various colleagues at home in France,[42] Jacob paints a dark picture of Acre.

Of particular interest is Letter II (from 1216/1217). Here, Jacob characterises the city as *tanquam monstrum et beluam IX capita sibi adinvicem repugnatia habentem*.[43] [like a monster and a beast with nine heads towards each other]. Faced with this, he presents himself as overwhelmed by the task of

[37] *Itinerarium peregrinorum*. Eine zeitgenössische englische Chronik zum dritten Kreuzzug in ursprünglicher Gestalt, ed. Hans Mayer, MGH Schriften 18 (Stuttgart, 1962), 1.32, 317: "Si enim decennale bellum Trojam reddidit celebrem; si Christicolarum triumphus Antiochiam illustrius extulit; Achon profecto perpetua fama extollet, pro qua pariter orbis confluxit."

[38] For a concise summary of Christian and Arabic historiography on the event, see John Pryor, "A Medieval Siege of Troy: The Fight to the Death at Acre, 1189–1191 or The Tears of Salah al-Din," in *The Medieval Way of War. Studies in Medieval Military History in Honor of Bernard S. Bachrach*, ed. Gregory Halfond (Fernham, 2015), 97–115. For a more comprehensive study of the siege of Acre at the beginning of the Third Crusade, focussing on its military and logistical dimensions, see John Hosler, *The Siege of Acre. Saladin, Richard the Lionheart, and the Battle That Decided the Third Crusade* (New Haven, 2018).

[39] As Philipp Auguste departed the Holy land directly after the capture of Acre, Richard of England remained as the leader of the crusader armies. His campaigns led him to victory over Saladin's army at the battle of Arsuf later in 1191, the rebuilding of Ascalon, and the successful defence of Jaffa in 1192. Sidney Painter, "The Third Crusade: Richard the Lionhearted and Philip Augustus," in *A History of the Crusades. Volume II: the Later Crusades, 1189–1311*, eds. Robert Lee Wolff and Harry W. Hazard (Madison, 1969) 45–85, especially 64–85.

[40] Frederick II of Hohenstaufen had longstanding diplomatic relations with the Ayyubids of Egypt — at the time led by Sultan Al-Kamil, a nephew of Saladin. These culminated in the treaty of Jaffa, shortly after his arrival in the Holy land on his long-delayed crusade in 1228–1229. The treaty famously ceded without bloodshed the city of Jerusalem and a corridor connecting the city to the coast to the crusaders, but left the Temple Mount as a Muslim enclave within the city. It also established a truce for the following ten years. See Hiroshi Takayama, "Frederick II's Crusade: an Example of Christian–Muslim Diplomacy," in *Mediterranean Historical Review* 25/2 (2010), 169–185.

[41] The battle of La Forbie took place on October 17 1244 at the village of Hirbiya, close to the Mediterranean coast between Ascalon and Gaza. The crusaders had mustered the largest army since the battle of Hattin and, together with the allied Ayyubids of Damascus (who provided the bulk of the army), they had set out south to confront the Ayyubids of Egypt and their Khwarizmian allies, who had sacked Jerusalem in August 1244. The battle was a catastrophic loss for the crusaders and the Syrian Ayyubids. The Military Orders in particular lost almost their entire fighting forces. Most of the nobles who had led the army were either killed or captured. Curiously the Egyptian Ayyubids and Khwarizmians did not capitalise on this significant victory. When the French King Louis the Pious arrived in the Holy land five years later, after his failed attack on Egypt, he was able to salvage the crusader kingdom and stabilise it for the time being. See Shlomo Lotan, "The Battle of La Forbie (1244) and its Aftermath — Re-examination of the Military Orders' Involvement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Mid-Thirteenth Century", in *Ordines Militares. Colloquia Torunensia Historica*. Yearbook for the Study of the Military Orders 17 (Torun, 2012), 53–67.

[42] Jacob of Vitry, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry (1160/70–1240), Évêque de Saint-Jean-d'Acre, Edition Critique*, ed. Robert Burchard Constantijn Huygens (Leiden, 1960), 79–97.

[43] Jacob of Vitry, *Epistola II*, 83.

being bishop in this *monstruos*[a] *civita*[s] [monstrous city].[44] While settling into his new role, Jacob found all manner of vices abounding in the city: he reports of murder, both open and in secret, sees no trust within households, claims that no family ties are safe, and emphasises the reliance on poison. This was to become a staple of the trope of the innate treacherousness of the people of Acre.[45] Furthermore, he finds the city filled with prostitutes going about their business openly, frequented even by priests. Most damningly, he describes the sins of the Christians of Acre as the sins of a second Babylon — more specifically, the denial of baptism to Muslims willing to convert.[46]

Many of Jacob's points are echoed by the German poet Freidank, who might (or might not) have accompanied Frederick II on his expedition to the Holy land between 1228 and 1229. In his *Bescheidenheit* (Knowledge),[47] a moral-didactic work written in the first third of the thirteenth century, he encloses the so-called *Akkonsprüche* [Lays of Acre] a collection of polemical strophes concerning the dire state of affairs in the city. Acre is presented as an all-devouring bottomless pit filled with diseases,[48] which kills so many people that no one bothers to lament for them any longer.[49] Chief among the sins in the city is the fact that Christians and heathens live there in peaceful coexistence, and new arrivals are unable to separate them in their fellowship.[50] This leads the voice of the poem to exclaim: "in ist ein heiden lieber bî | dan zwêne kristen oder drî."[51] [they prefer a heathen with them over two or three Christians.]

A further good indication of how widespread and readily available the trope of Acre as Sin City was is that Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*, a collection of miracle stories and one of the most widely circulating texts of the first half of the thirteenth century, contains one story entitled "De pagano, qui apud Achonem dicebat Christianos propter superbiam et gulam de terra sancta eiectos."[52] [Of the heathen who, at Acre, said that the Christians had been expelled from the Holy land because of their pride and gluttony]

The trope of Acre as Sin City had been well established by the time of the — first slow, and then increasingly rapid — collapse of what remained of the Kingdom of Jerusalem towards the end of the thirteenth century, culminating in the Mamluk conquest of Acre in 1291. This event rippled through texts from all over the Mediterranean and the Latin West. A comprehensive history of the discourse occasioned by this event is yet to be written, and this study too can only be a small step towards a fuller understanding of the effect which the loss of Acre — and, by extension, the Holy land — had in the Latin West and beyond. That said, the most salient research on this has been done by Sylvia Schein, who collated and evaluated most of the relevant sources in two publications.[53] She also showed a general trend within the sources dealing with the loss of Acre and the failure of the crusade to move away from an even dispersal of guilt towards a clearer and more one-sided blaming of Acre as a sinful, morally corrupt, and dysfunctional city which brought its downfall upon itself.[54] This image has only slowly been corrected, since the positivistic research of the nineteenth century.[55]

Before a closer examination of texts more specifically and exclusively responding to the events of 1291, a first look at some contemporary chronicles will prove instructive. These chronicles did not specifically react to the event, but rather dutifully recorded it as part of their annalistic mission. Looking at these texts can serve a useful tour d'horizon: how was the loss of Acre conventionally received and framed in the ongoing contemporaneous historiography of the Latin West?

A good example for a rather cursory treatment can be found in the *Annales de Dunstalpia*, the annals of Dunstable Priory in what is now southern Bedfordshire. As a monastic source the text is mostly concerned with the annalistic overview of the affairs of the priory, but it does contain a quick note as the progress of years leads it through 1291. The text pauses only briefly to blame discord between the defenders, and the deathly sin of *luxuria* of its inhabitants, for the loss of Acre,[56] neatly working into the premises of the *peccatis exigentibus* concept. After this, the annals promptly return to the monastic concerns of Dunstable.

A continental example that gives the event somewhat lengthier consideration are the *Gesta Boemundi archiepiscopi Trevirensis*. This episcopal chronicle, written between 1299 and 1302, focuses on the life and deeds of archbishop Bohemund of Trier (1286–1299), but includes a sizeable excursus regarding

[44] Jacob of Vitry, *Epistola II*, 87: "Cum autem monstruosam civitatem ingressus fuissem et eam innumeris flagitiis et iniquitatibus repletam invenissem, mente valde confusus sum, timor et tremor venerunt super me et contexerunt me tenebre, quia tam grave et inportabile onus susceperam et pro his districto Iudici redditurus eram rationem." Jakob's depiction of the vices of Acre may have been influenced by classical Roman satire, with which it shares many motifs, see. e.g. Juvenal, *Satura* 3.

[45] Sylvia Schein, "Babylon and Jerusalem: The Fall of Acre 1291–1995," in *From Clermont to Jerusalem. The Crusades and Crusader Societies 1095–1500*, ed. Alan V. Murray, International Medieval Research 3 (Turnhout, 1998), 146–147.

[46] Jacob of Vitry, *Epistola II*, 87.

[47] Freidank, *Bescheidenheit*, ed. Heinrich Ernst Bezzenberger (Aalen, 1872 repr. 1962).

[48] *Lays of Acre*, 155,3–6.

[49] *Lays of Acre*, 155,23–26.

[50] *Lays of Acre*, 156,6–9.

[51] *Lays of Acre*, 156,12–13.

[52] Caesarius von Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed Joseph Strange (Cologne, 1851), 4.15, 185.

[53] Schein, *Babylon and Jerusalem*, 140–150. For a list of sources dealing with the image of Acre after 1291, see in particular footnote 4 on p. 143. Sylvia Schein, *Fideles Crucis. The Papacy, the West, and the Recovery of the Holy land 1274–1314* (Oxford, 1991), especially 112–139.

This article owes much — in particular with regard to the selection of relevant sources — to Sylvia Schein's work, which was tragically cut short by her untimely death in 2004.

[54] Schein, *Babylon and Jerusalem*, 142–143, 146–147.

[55] Schein, *Babylon and Jerusalem*, 149.

[56] *Annales Prioratus de Dunstaplia (AD 1–1297). Annales Monasterii de Bermundeseia (AD 1042–1432),* ed. Henry Richards Luard, Annales Monastici 3 (Cambridge, 2012), 366.

the subsequent falls of Tripoli and Acre, leaning heavily into the implications of *peccatis exigentibus*. Where the *Annales de Dunstalpia* very much integrate the event into its annalistic account, the *Gesta Boemundi* dedicate two discrete successive chapters to the event, the first dealing with the fall of Tripoli in 1289 and the second with the fall of Acre two years later. While they represent only a short section of the overall chronicle, they are elaborately composed and develop their own self-contained narrative of sin and punishment. Then notion of *peccatis exigentibus* is evoked early on in connection with the fall of Tripoli, which then led to a string of topical atrocities the Christians had to suffer.[57] Quickly the chronicle arrives at the question which *peccatis exigentibus* aims to answer, and indeed the (rhetorical) question is immediately answered in this respect: "Et quare hoc? Quia dereliquerunt fontem sapientie; nam si in via Dei ambulassent, habitassent utique in pace sempiterna." [And for what reason? Because they have abandoned the font of wisdom; for if they had walked in the way of God, they would certainly have lived in eternal peace].

The *Gesta* follows Bernard's shift of culpability for the suffering away from God or his emissaries towards those who have themselves suffered. In the pedagogical logic, this happens due to their inability to follow God's *via*. Had they been able to stay on it, they would not have been punished in this way, as the double subjunctive pluperfect in *ambulassent* and *habitassent* succinctly expresses. The fall of Tripoli is deftly used as a reference-point to be upstaged by the fall of Acre in the next section of the chronicle. Acre is introduced as *soror eius*, Tripoli's sister city. "[H]abens oculos et non videns, aures et non audiens" [Psalms 113:13–14, Having eyes and not seeing, having ears and not hearing]. Acre is unable to learn from the many transgressions of her sister and is herself blinded by the multitude of sinners who dwell in her.[58] This means that Acre deserves to be punished not only because it is sinful, but also because its failure to learn from the example of its sister city Tripoli only two years previously. Drawing on Isaiah 1:2–3[59] and Ezekiel 7:2,[60] the author of the *Gesta* now brings the full force of the Old Testament prophets to bear upon Acre, to frame its destruction as just punishment: "Nunc finis super te, te inmittam furorem meum in te et iudicabo te iuxta vias tuas" [Now the end is upon you, I will send my fury upon you, and I will judge you according to your ways]. The biblical reference to *via* connects back to the chronicle's answer to its own rhetorical question: the Christians of the Holy land have departed from the way of God, and therefore they are now punished as required by their own ways.

An additional example illustrating the *longue durée* of *peccatis exigentibus*, and its resilience as an explanatory template, can be found in Walter of Guisborogh's *Chronicon.* This chronicle of the kings of England since the conquest — but in particular of the three Edwards (since 1239) — abruptly ends in 1346. Referring to the conquest of Acre, the chronicler admonishes that no one should doubt that this happened because Acre was overflowing with sin, even more than usual.[61] These were the *offensionis causas Dei*, and an offended God then quickly initiates the severe chastisement of Acre. The passage shows not only how far-flung the reception of the event was, but also how over fifty years later the pedagogical underpinnings of *peccatis exigentibus* could still serve as a functional explanation.

A final example is provided not by historiography but by moral didactics — written not in Latin, but rather in Middle High German: Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner,* composed in Bamberg around 1300, consists of chapters centred on the seven deadly sins.[62] The chapter on "zorn/nît" [wrath/enmity] puts Acre at the end of a long line of cities destroyed due to their sins: Rome, Troy, Jerusalem, and Sodom and Gomorra.[63] This long string of cities throughout world history comes to exemplify the consistent sinfulness of men. It culminates with Acre, drawing a line from *alte not* [old sorrow] to *niuwen jâmer* [new lament], echoing the point also made in the *Gesta Boemundi* that Acre could have been saved, had it been defended by virtue and not beset by vice.[64]

Sodom in Genesis 18 and the Fall of Cities

It is the connection of Acre and Sodom, as drawn by Hugo and others, that brings us to the main point of this article and connects the two main texts – Ottokar's *Buch von Akkon* and Riccoldo's *epistolae* – whose different use of Sodom with regard to the loss of Acre are explored in the later part of this section. But, since an understanding of the role of Sodom in Genesis 18:17–32 constitutes an important reference point for the rest of the argument, this section will first explore the Genesis passage at some detail before moving on to the analysis of the medieval texts.

Surprisingly, the destruction of Sodom becomes relevant not simply because it is such a powerful and well-established

[57] *Gesta Boemundi archiepiscopi Trevirensis*, MGH SS 24, 474-475: "Qualiter Tripolis destructa est. Anno Domini 1290 Tripolis, civitas nobilissima Terre Sancte, multo sanguine et sudore christianorum conquisita et conservata, in medio perverse nationis sita, peccatis exigentibus, […] capitur et deletur funditus a Sarracenis; loca sancta polluuntur, virgines deflorantur et christianus populus infinitus occiditur, et quibus pepercit gladius, in servitutem rediguntur."

[58] *Gesta Boemundi archiepiscopi Trevirensis*, MGH SS 24, 475.

[59] *Gesta Boemundi archiepiscopi Trevirensis*, MGH SS 24, 475: "Audite, caeli, et auribus percipe, terra, quoniam Dominus locutus est. Filios enutrivi, et exaltavi; ipsi autem spreverunt me. (3) Cognovit bos possessorem suum, et asinus praesepe domini sui; Israel autem me non cognovit, et populus meus non intellexit."

This phrase was also used by Jacob of Vitry in his letters to illustrate his despair over the state of affairs he found when he arrived in Acre: Jacob of Vitry, *Epistolae V*, 113.

[60] Ezekiel 7:2: "Finis venit: venit finis super quatuor plagas terrae."

[61] Walter of Guisborough, *Chronicon*, ed. Hans Claude Hamilton (London, 1848), 22–23.

[62] Hugo von Trimberg, *Der Renner. Mit Einem Nachwort und Ergänzungen von Günther Schweikle*, ed. Gustav Ehrismann (Berlin 1909 repr. 1979).

[63] *Der Renner*, ll. 15,831–15,878.

[64] *Der Renner*, ll 15,879–15,892.

archetypical narrative of God's divine retribution exacted upon a city. Rather, in the context of the fall of Acre in 1291, one particular nuance of the Sodom narrative comes to the fore: Genesis 18:17–32. In this striking passage, God tells Abraham that he intends to destroy Sodom — as he will go on to do in Genesis 19 — as punishment for the sinfulness of the city's inhabitants. Hearing this, Abraham enters a call-and-response negotiation with God, inquiring if he would spare the city if only fifty just people could be found in it. As God confirms this, Abraham starts the next round of negotiation — repeating his query, but this time with only forty just men. Continuing in this vein, step by step, Abraham ultimately brings down the number of just men required to save Sodom until God confirms that if he were to find as few as ten just men in Sodom, he would spare the city.[65] As he does not find the required number of just men in the following chapter (Genesis 19), God still destroys the city, famously raining down fire and brimstone upon it. But, remembering his promise to Abraham, he goes at great lengths to at least save Lot: the one just man in Sodom.

Genesis 18:17–32 is arguably a younger passage than the framing passages of Genesis 18:1–16 and Genesis 19. It was probably inserted later in the compilation process as a reflection or a commentary on the surrounding older parts of the Sodom narrative. In this position it works as a hinge or a pivot between the two sections, so much so that Ed Noort suggested reading it after Genesis 19 as a commentary on it, rather than a prologue.[66]

Abraham begins this passage coming out of his first meeting with God highly-credited as "in all his humanity the historical bearer of God's purposes".[67] When God informs Abraham that he intends to destroy Sodom, he reveals a simplistic, mechanistic and retributive logic of sin and punishment: *clamor Sodomorum et Gomorrae multiplicatus est et peccatum earum adgravatum est nimis* [Gen 18:20, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was multiplied, and their sin was greatly aggravated].

The theology of Abraham's ensuing negotiation with God has been understood in a variety of ways. One aspect is that it serves as confirmation of the justice of what is about to happen: destroying Sodom with fire and brimstone is certainly and necessarily just.[68]

Building on Westermann's analysis, Brueggemann offers a further-reaching interpretation: for him, the passage shows Abraham challenging God's customary reaction to humanity's failing by proposing a more nuanced approach. Brueggemann sees Abraham here in the role of a teacher, a "theological instructor" and "innovative theologian", who is asking God to set aside a closed system of sin and punishment and find a new way — to place valuing of the righteous over the punishment of the sinful. Following Abraham's logic, allowing for the righteous to perish, simply in order to punish the wicked, would be profane to God's holiness.[69]

Abraham therefore compels him to refrain from it: *Absit!*[70] In question is God's righteousness as a divine quality. This is also the essence of Noort's reading of the passage, which argues that it "is highly abstract; in fact it is not concerned with the fate of Sodom and its inhabitants, nor with that of Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family, but focuses entirely on the relationship between the רָשָׁע,"wicked", and the צַדִּיק, "righteous", and their fate in this world with relation to the community, thus leading to the problem of the very righteousness of God."[71]

If God unjustly destroys Sodom, he is no longer holy. This means, in turn, that in order to maintain his holiness, it is in God's own interest to be merciful towards Sodom. Abraham can be understood to propose a more complex approach to God's righteousness than the moralistic simplicity of Genesis 19, where "fire and brimstone" will destroy the sinful city. In Genesis 19 God enacts simplistic retribution; he saves Lot not because of his virtue, but because he remembers Abraham's stance. It is precisely this retributive logic[72] that underlies the *peccatis exigentibus* template laid out above. Genesis 18 challenges this logic; and this particular trait of the Sodom narrative made it interesting for later authors who wanted to respond to, challenge, or at least modify, *peccatis exigentibus* in the face of the loss of a city.

In the aftermath of the sack of Rome by Alaric's Visigoths in 410, it was again Augustine who, in a series of sermons, first explored this connection.[73] Augustine frames his sermons as

[65] Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983) 356.

[66] Ed Noort, "For the Sake of Righteousness. Abraham's Negotiation with YHWH as Prologue to the Sodom Narrative. Genesis 18:16–33," in *Sodom's Sin. Genesis 18–19 and its Interpretations*, eds. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden, 2004), 4.

[67] Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis* (Atlanta, 1982), 169. Noort, *Righteousness*, 5.

[68] Westermann, *Genesis*, 355: "Dem Theologen, der 18,17–32 einfügte, lag die alte Erzählung vor, in der Gott die Vernichtung Sodoms beschlossen hatte und die Vernichtung dann durchführte, wobei aber Lot bewahrt wurde. An diese Tradition ist er gebunden, und er weiß, daß seine Hörer oder Leser sie kennen. Es stand von vornherein fest, daß ein Eintreten Abrahams für die Stadt nichts mehr daran ändern konnte. Sein Ziel war vielmehr, unwiderlegbar zu zeigen, daß die Vernichtung Sodoms und Gomorrhas ein gerechtes Handeln Gottes war. Seine Argumentation richtet sich gegen jeden möglichen Zweifel an der Gerechtigkeit Gottes, die angesichts der Katastrophe einer Stadt aufkommen konnte."

[69] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 168–171.

[70] Westermann, *Genesis*, 355: "Die Bekräftigung kommt zum Ausdruck in dem zweifachen 'fern sei es von dir' ([…]'Profanum tibi sit') am Anfang des ersten und am Ende des zweiten Satzes, das heftig die Möglichkeit abwehrt, Gott könnte den Gerechten zusammen mit dem Frevler vernichten, womit die Frage im Eingang der Worte Abrahams (V. 23b) wiederholt wird. Der zweite Satz zeigt am deutlichsten den Grund dieser Abwehr: 'dass es dem Gerechten erginge wie dem Gottlosen.' Das ist der Kern dessen, was Abraham hier sagen will. Diese Gerechtigkeit Gottes muss sich wirklich zeigen, d.h. man muss sie an dem unterschiedlichen Schicksal der Frommen und des Frevlers erkennen können. Noch stärker wird sie unterstrichen, indem sie im letzten Satz von V. 25 in einen universellen Horizont gestellt wird 'Sollte nicht, der der ganzen Welt Richter ist, recht üben?'"

[71] Noort, *Righteousness*, 5.

[72] Gary Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography.*

[73] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae Tractatus Unus*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, PL 40:715-724.

responses to the rhetorical baiting of pagan detractors who ask, with reference to Genesis 18, whether at least ten just men could not have been found in Rome for the Christian God to spare the city.[74] The implied accusation is, of course, that the newly Christianized Rome had been destroyed because it had turned away from its ancestral gods — and the Christian God did not have the will or the power to save the city, as he had promised in his own holy book.

Augustine was not hard-pressed to respond to this. His argument follows three steps. Firstly, he denies the equivalence of the events in Sodom and Rome: "Perditio enim civitatis ibi facta non est, sicut in Sodomis facta est"[75] [For the destruction of a city, how it happened to Sodom, is not what happened here]. Secondly, he clarifies that God had indeed promised not to destroy the city, but not to leave it unpunished: "Deus autem dixit, Non perdam civitatem: non dixit: Non flagello civitatem."[76] [For God has said: I will not destroy the city. He did not say: I will not punish the city]. What has happened to Rome, therefore, is to be understood as punishment and correction, but not of equal quality to the wholesale destruction visited upon Sodom: "Manu ergo emendantis Dei correpta est potius civitas illa, quam perdita"[77] [Therefore, by the hand of the redeeming God, that city was reproved rather than destroyed]. A final volte of his argument, which would reverberate throughout the Middle Ages, is the mobilisation of the City: as his argument runs, even if Rome had been destroyed entirely, with not even ruins remaining, who would doubt that the city still existed and had been saved.[78] Using the semantic ambiguity of the verb *migrare* — in this sense comparable to the English "to depart" — Augustine argues that not only those who had fled the city alive had escaped, but indeed that also those who had perished during the sack had equally escaped: *Migrarunt qui fugerunt, migrarunt qui de corpore exierunt*[79] [Those who fled migrated, those who left the body migrated too]. For Augustine, both groups together constitute the actual surviving and living city of Rome, a "diasporic entity: detached from place",[80] — and, one would like to add, at least partially detached from life — well on its way towards his concept of *civitas Dei*.[81]

It fell to Augustine's follower Orosius to put the latter's theology of history into historiographical practice. The core mission of his *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII*[82] (written in the years between 416 and 418), which was to become *the* source on ancient history for medieval authors,[83] is to show how — in the greater arc of history — everything is improving under Christian auspices, when compared to the generally dismal state of affairs before the spread of Christianity.[84] In this context, he compares the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 CE to that by the Gauls 800 years earlier (in 390 BCE), emphasising how much more devastating and deadly the latter had been in contrast to the more recent event.[85] The Visigoth sack however, still fresh in memory, seems already to have been overcome without leaving much of a trace on the city or its inhabitants.[86]

By contrast, the destruction of Sodom is framed very differently: after an energetic retelling of the fire and brimstone episode of Genesis 19,[87] Orosius channels Augustine's critical distinction between punishment and destruction. He combatively challenges those among his audience who would spit on Christ, inducing them to ponder how different the causes and the punishments meted out to Rome on the one hand, and to Sodom on the other, are.[88] The fate of Sodom is to be taken as an admonishment: "quos saltem de hoc ipso exitu Sodomorum et Gomorraeorum moneo, ut discere atque intellegere queant, qualiter Deus peccatores punierit, qualiter punire possit, qualiter puniturus sit." [Taking the demise of Sodom and Gomorrah as my example, I warn them that they can learn and understand in what ways God has punished sinners, in what ways

[74] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae* 2.2, 718.

[75] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae* 2.2, 718.

[76] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae*, 2.2, 718.

[77] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae,* 7.8, 723.

[78] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae*, 7.8, 274: "Verumtamen si eo tempore, quo illa derelicta populus universus abscessit, irrueret vastitas loco, totamque urbem sicut Sodomam, nullis saltem ruinis remanentibus, perdidisset; quis etiam sic dubitaret quod Deus pepercisset illi civitati, qua praemonita et territa, et discedente atque migrante, locus ille consumeretur? Sic minime dubitandum est pepercisse Deum Romanae etiam civitati, quae ante hostile incendium in multis ex multa parte migraverat."

[79] Augustine, *De Excidio Urbis Romae,* 7.8, 723

[80] Catherine Conybeare, "How to Lament an Eternal City: the Ambiguous Fall of Rome," in *The Fall of Cities in the Mediterranean: Commemoration in Literature, Folk-Song, and Liturgy* (Cambridge, 2016), 217.

[81] Conybeare, *How to Lament*, 217: "This idea works well for the use that Augustine makes of it in *De Civitate Dei*. The *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*, respectively, are not static, firmly demarcated things, but fluid and intermingled groups of *cives* connected by a 'harmonious bond.'"

[82] Orosius, *Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. Karl Zangmeister (Vienna, 1882).

[83] Marco Formisano, "Grand Finale. Orosius' Historiae adversus paganos. Or the Subversion of History," in *Der Fall Roms und seine Wiederaufer-stehung in Antike und Mittelalter*, eds. Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer and Karla Pollmann, Millennium Studies 40 (2013, Berlin), 153–176, especially 153.

[84] Orosius, *Historiae adversum Paganos*, 7.43.17, 563.

[85] Orosius, *Historiae adversum Paganos*, 2.19.13, 132.

[86] Orosius, *Historiae adversum Paganos*, 7.40.1, 548–549: "Anno itaque ab Vrbe condita MCLXIIII inruptio urbis per Alaricum facta est: cuius rei quamuis recens memoria sit, tamen si quis ipsius populi Romani et multitudinem uideat et uocem audiat, nihil factum, sicut etiam ipsi fatentur, arbitrabitur, nisi aliquantis adhuc existentibus ex incendio ruinis forte doceatur."

[87] Orosius, *Historiae adversum Paganos*, 1.5.6–11, 45–47.

[88] Orosius, *Historiae adversum Paganos*, 1.6.1, 47.

He can punish them, and in what ways He will punish them][89] While the sack of Rome appears as a prime example to illustrate Orosius' case for of universal salvific emendation through Christianity in history, the destruction of Sodom can be levelled as a plain threat against nonbelievers — as the archetype of God's just punishment.

The use of Genesis 18 in Riccoldo da Montecroce's *Epistolae ad ecclesiam triumphantem* and Ottokar aus der Gaal's *Book of Acre*

With their differentiation between punishment and destruction, Augustine and Orosius had shown a way to reconcile Genesis 18 with historical events. Almost 900 years later, however, in the face of the loss of Acre, this differentiation was not so easily plausible: as against Rome in 410, Acre in 1291 had truly been destroyed. Without the physical continuity of the city, any argument that sought to foreground the element of punishment for betterment would have to focus instead beyond the city.

In the following, I will examine two texts specifically written in response to news of the capture of Acre in 1291, and which are therefore primarily concerned with communicating this event's implications to their respective audiences. While the two texts are very different — a German vernacular chronicle *versus*. a set of Latin letters — and while they were written by very different authors — an educated layman from the lower Styrian nobility versus a highly-educated Latinate and Arabic-speaking Dominican missionary based in Baghdad — they share a concern for the soteriological implications of the loss of Acre as a historical event. And, crucially, they use reference to the same passage from the Old Testament (Genesis 18) to work through these implications. Since these authors could not rely on Augustine's crucial differentiation, they had to find innovative ways to interrogate history, and to probe the event they had recently witnessed for a way to find soteriological meaning in it. As observed above, both texts had to go beyond the city limits of Acre to do so.

Riccoldo da Montecroce was a Dominican from Santa Maria Novella in Florence, who travelled to the Holy land as a pilgrim in 1289 and then continued further east as a missionary: his itinerary led him through Anatolia and Armenia, all the way to Tabriz in Persia and then back into Mesopotamia — arriving in Baghdad in 1291, where he probably spent the majority of the following decade. He is only attested back in his native Florence in 1301. He had travelled to the East as a missionary, but also — in order to become better at converting Muslims — to study Arabic language and literature, most importantly the Quran. His writings reveal that he acquired a high level of Arabic and a solid understanding of the Quran and the hadith.[90] When news of the fall of Acre reached him while in Baghdad, he began to draft his letters,[91] addressed *ad ecclesiam triumphantem* [to the triumphant church]: saints, martyrs, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and God. It remains something of a puzzle whether they were ever sent to a recipient, or if they were later circulated to a wider audience; they survive only in one manuscript, and do not seem to have left a significant impression.

At the beginning of his *epistolae*, Riccoldo capitalises on his biblical locality by quoting Ezekiel: "Et factum est cum essem in Baldacto 'in medio pativorum iuxta fluvium Chobar' [Ezekiel 1:1] Tigris" [And it came to pass, when I was in Babylon, 'in the midst of the plains by the river Chobar' the Tigris].[92] Taking on the mantle of the prophet lamenting his lost city at the rivers of Babylon, he puts the loss of Acre in diachronic parallelisation with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile of the people of Israel. This parallelisation already suggests that, contrary to the established discourse, his perspective on Acre will not be a wholly negative one. His use of the *ubi est* motif, when he begins his lament for Acre — [U]*bi est Accon* [Where is Acre] — is of course topical. But since Riccoldo had travelled through Acre in 1298, where he had interacted with the city's inhabitants and spent time with his fellow Dominican friars dwelling there, his lamenting *ubi est*/*sunt* constructions imbue his letter with a more urgent ring: "ubi sunt ecclesie christianorum, que ibi errant, ubi reliquie sanctorum, ubi religiosi et religiose, que Dominum laudabant, quasi astra matutina! Ubi est populi christiani, qui ibi errant?"[93] [where are the Christian churches which were there? Where are the relics of the saints, where are the men and women religious who praised the Lord just like the morning stars? Where are the multitudes of Christian people who were there?]

In this context, it is tempting to read this as more than just the formulation of a literary contrasting device, but as an articulation of genuine personal grief and bewilderment. This is borne out when the first-person voice of the letter later goes on to address God directly: "Is this how you deliver your people, O Lord?"[94] Almost incredulously, the lyrical I questions if this can really be the best way for God to deliver his people. In what follows, Riccoldo clarifies that he does not doubt that the Holy land is worth the sacrifice, or that the souls of those who died in Acre ascend to Heavenly Jerusalem; but

[89] Orosius, *Historiae adversum Paganos*, 1.6.1, 48. English translation from: Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, trans. A. T. Fear, Translated Texts for Historians 54 (Liverpool, 2015), 54.

[90] Rita George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo Da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam*, Medieval Voyaging (Turnhout, 2012), 1–14.

[91] Letters I to IV end with the note: *data in oriente*. Only letter V ends *scripta in oriente*. See Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistolae,* 271, 276, 289, 295, and for letter V 296. This need not signify anything, but could suggest that the first four letters were initially only drafted in Baghdad and properly written down later, maybe when Riccoldo was back in Florence.

[92] Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola I*, 264. "[…] et me ex una parte delectaret amenitas viridarii, in quo eram quod erat quasi paradisus […]. [E]t ex alia parte me urgeret ad tristiciam strages et captura populi christiani atque deiectio post flebilem captionem Accon [.]"

[93] Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola IV*, 291. George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval* Iraq, 167–168.

[94] George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval* Iraq, 144. Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola I*, 270: "Heccene reddis, Domine, populo tuo […]?"

he rejects the method by which God is attaining this. More specifically, it becomes clear that the first-person voice's main qualm is the involvement of the 'infidels'. In an audacious charge, he challenges God directly on this matter: "But you, the all-powerful, have at your disposal a way other than the way by which you brought him [the patriarch of Jerusalem] and all his people in — a way without recourse to the Mahometans".[95] The appeal to God not to use the Muslims as tools for the fulfilment of his divine plan amounts to a de facto challenge of God on the *modus operandi* of his core business: saving christianity. If christianity is indeed deserving of castigation, can it not be chastised by an all-powerful God without recourse to the Muslims? And, conversely, if christianity is indeed deserving of salvation, can it not be saved by an all-powerful God without recourse to the Muslims?

To drive home this point, and to hold God to account, the voice of the letter now turns to Genesis 18:22–33. Riccoldo uses this passage as historical precedent, and has his literary voice pose a simple question to God: "But I am greatly astonished that in the past you wished to spare the entire city of Sodom for ten righteous persons, but is it possible that in all of Tripoli or Acre, among such a multitude of Christians and religious, you could not find ten righteous persons?"[96]

If God had been ready to spare Sodom under this condition, how is possible that He did not apply the same standard to Acre to find ten just men (*iusti*) in it and spare the city? As the first person voice of the letter expounds, there would have been no shortage of just men in Acre — who could have fled, but chose to remain and were subsequently martyred.[97] To the voice of the text, the necessary conclusion from the fact that God did not adhere to the historical standard set in Genesis 18 and did not spare the city is quite radical: "Dare I say that you have changed into a cruel God? Because now you are destroying many of the righteous along with a few of the wicked, you who were in the habit of sparing many of the wicked for a few of the righteous."[98] Just as in Genesis 18, God's righteousness is at stake. And a God who gives priority to the punishment of few over the salvation of many must have changed into a cruel God. For Riccoldo, in the face of the events in Acre, righteousness as a quality of God's character can be questioned. He is now using the very biblical passage used to establish God as unfailingly just — Genesis 18:22–33 — to challenge the righteousness of God as a stable factor throughout history. Riccoldo is not the only learned Christian author, indeed, not even the only Dominican writer of the time, grappling with the vexing theological questions Islam's ascent poses to a world view centred on the centrality of God's salvific plan for his chosen people. But, due to his singular position – as a Dominican missionary he epitomises the peak of Western education and knowledge available at the time, but he combines this with unparalleled access to Arabic sources and unique exposure to Islam in the Muslim heartlands – no-one else is quite so far-reaching and radical in his conclusions.[99]

Over twenty years later, and in a very different context, the Styrian layman Ottokar, a member of the lower aristocratic family *aus der Gaal* from Wasserburg, commits the entire second book of his monumental *Styrian Rhyming Chronicle* to a substantial deviation from his usual chronographical course of Austrian and Styrian politics since 1250, to cover the events that led up to the capture of Acre and the event itself. He begins the account of his second book with a call for collective lament for the loss of the city. As a text explicitly centred on the lament for a city, Ottokar's *Book of Acre* is unique in the corpus of Middle High German text production.[100]

Like the *Gesta Beomundi* quoted above, Ottokar's narrator emphasises that the loss of Acre amounts to a loss of access to the pilgrimage sites of the Holy land.[101] And very much like Riccoldo's voice, he turns directly towards God to ask in disbelief:

> "sag, herre got, sag an,
>
> warumb hâstû daz getân
>
> und warumb hâstûz vertragen,
>
> daz sô verderbet und erslagen
>
> sô manic kristen ist?

[95] George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval* Iraq, 145. Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola I*, 270.

[96] George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval* Iraq, 144. Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola I*, 269: "Sed multum admiror, quia olym toti civitati Zodomice propter decem iustos parcere voluisti [Gen. 18,32]. Set numquid in tota ciuitate Tripolitana vel Acconensi non sunt inventi numero decem iusti in tanta multitudine christianorum et religiosorum?"

[97] Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola I*, 269:"Ego autem non modo unum vel decem, set plures et plures audio remansisse in civitate Accon fratres predicatores, qui poterant exire et fugere et preelegerunt cum populo Dei mori ut essent aliis ad fidei firmamentum, et occisi sunt. An ergo fidem non querit, qui pro fide moritur?"

[98] George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval* Iraq, 144. Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistola I*, 269: "An audeo dicere, quod sis nobis mutatus in crudelem, quia nunc perdidisti multos iustos cum aliquibus impijs, qui consuevisti parcere multis impijs pro aliquibus iustis?"

[99] For example, a couple of decades before Riccoldo, another Dominican living in the East, William of Tripoli composed the *Notitia de Mahometo*, a detailed history of the rise of Islam, grappling with the question how Islam could have been allowed by God to become so successful. While he is unable to come up with an answer, other near-contemporaries like Roger Bacon or Peter Auriol present Muhammad as a precursor to the Antichrist and share a conviction that a divine intervention, which would lead to Islam's eventual demise, was imminent. See George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq*, 90–94.

[100] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Österreichische Reimchronik*. Nach den Abschriften Franz Lichtensteins. Unveränderter Nachdruck der 1. Auflage von 1890, ed. Josef Seemüller, Deutsche Chroniken und andere Geschichtsbücher des Mittelalters 5 (Dublin, 1974). [Again, just check whether italics or not] In the following quoted as: *Book of Acre*. For a recent overview over the manuscript tradition, the more salient themes, and the place of the *Book of Acre* in the context of Middle High German literature see Bernd Bastert, "Enhalp dem mer – Kreuzzüge ins Heilige Land. Das Buch von Akkon im Kontext der deutschen Kreuzzugsliteratur," in *Die Kreuzzugsbewegung im römisch-deutschen Reich (11.–13. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Nikolas Jaspert/Stefan Tebruck (Ostfildern; 2016), 249–267.

[101] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Book of Acre*, ll. 49,422–49,427.

> weder hâstû ir genist
>
> versmaehet durch ir sunde,
>
> sô soltstû zuo der stunde
>
> sô genaedic sîn gewesen
>
> unde hetest ûz gelesen
>
> die guoten von den schuldigen."[102]
>
> [Speak, lord God, speak, why have you done this, and why have you allowed that thus perished and was killed so many a Christian? Certainly, you did not reject their escape because of their sins, because then you should at this time at least have been so merciful as to separate the just from the sinful.]

Thus the context in which Ottokar now turns to Genesis 18:22–33 is quite similar to Riccoldo. Both literary voices find themselves unable to make sense of the events they have just witnessed. There seems no rational place for them in a world whose history is expected to teleologically bend towards the salvation of the Christians as God's chosen people. The confusion engendered by this blatant break with soteriological expectation leads both voices to quarrel with God and to fall back on Genesis 18. But, as will now become clear, Ottokar's narrator does so to very different effect than the first-person voice of Riccoldo's letters. In an inverted understanding, when compared to Riccoldo's letters, Ottokar's narrator makes reference to Genesis 18 to explicitly dismiss the possibility that Acre's destruction could have occurred due to the prior sinfulness of its inhabitants: had the purpose of the destruction of Acre been to punish the wicked, then surely the God whose infallible justice with regard to the destruction of cities is vouchsafed by Genesis 18 would have been righteous enough to save the just first. Thus Ottokar does not use the biblical passage to challenge God's righteousness; rather, by presupposing it as valid, he uses it to exclude a lack of righteousness among the people of the city as a proximate cause for the fall of Acre. This of course necessitates a dramatic deviation from the established motif of Acre as a cesspit of sin and all manner of depravity (as laid out above). This is another point he shares with Riccoldo, who similarly does not present Acre and its inhabitants as characterised by particular proclivity to sin.

For Ottokar this deviation serves to prepare his main interpretation, which turns out to be a deft modification of *peccatis exigentibus.* In contrast to most chronicles, he presumes the presence of many good people in Acre: *sît Akers diu stat | dô manigen menschen hât | sæligen und reinen* [since the city of Acre has so many beatific and pure people].[103]

Having established this — taking it as given that that God is and continues to be righteous — there must be another reason, and the first person voice of the *Book of Acre* claims to have figured out God's intention: *ich verstên wol dîn meinen* [I understand your intention well].[104] And the answer is drawn from eschatology: the souls of the many martyrs produced by the bloody conquest of Acre ascend to Heaven to replenish the heavenly choirs once emptied by the rebellious angels led by Lucifer. This functionally turns the loss of the city into a catalyst for the eschaton.[105] By merit of this twist, the event — which at the factual surface of history appears to be a crushing defeat for God's chosen people and his cause in the Holy land — can be turned into an agency of salvation; this, in the long run, will expedite the arrival of the eschaton and thus the establishment of a perpetually stable Christian order of the world. This is Augustine's differentiation adapted to the specific circumstances of Acre: since there is no one left to be bettered on earth — since indeed there never was a reason for the people of Acre to be bettered to begin with — this aspect has to be shifted into the realm of eschatology: ennobled through martyrdom, the human souls are "bettered" into angelic successors. This movement also follows Augustine's argument about the migration of Rome after 410. If the souls of the martyrs of Acre have now taken their seats in the pews of the celestial choirs, can one really argue that the city was truly destroyed? Does Acre not survive in an elevated, transcended form?

In this way, Ottokar modifies *peccatis exigentibus* to work without framing Acre as a cesspit of vice and iniquity, but rather to rely on it being populated by good people for the production of high-value martyred souls. This works as a exculpative matrix in all directions: it relieves the people of the city, liberating them from the taint of sinfulness; it relieves the other Christians, framing their failure to sufficiently support the city in an eschatological perspective that makes it seem less of a dramatic failure; and of course it relieves God, who can no longer be suspected of being negligent or unjust towards his chosen people. It preserves righteousness as his trait, as vouchsafed in Genesis 18. Rather, in the greater scheme of things, all is going according to his salvific plan, and the fall of Acre merely helped to hasten its fulfilment.

Ottokar's eschatological volte is not created *ex nihilo*; instead, it marks the synchronisation of two related but independent ideas available to him in order to find a literary solution for his narrative problem. The German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach is explicitly mentioned as one of Ottokar's sources.[106] Wolfram's *Willehalm*, an early thirteenth-century Middle High German *chanson de geste,*[107] probably provided the idea of a

[102] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Book of Acre*, ll. 52,359–52,369.

[103] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Book of Acre*, ll. 52,389–52,391.

[104] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Book of Acre*, l. 52,392.

[105] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Book of Acre*, l. 52.397–52.414.

[106] Ottokar aus der Gaal, *Book of Acre*, ll. 45,305–45,314.

[107] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm. Nach der Handschrift 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen. Mittelhochdeutscher Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar. Mit den Miniaturen aus der Wolfenbüttler Handschrift und einem Aufsatz von Peter und Dorothea Diemer*, ed. Joachim Heinzle, Bibliothek des Mittelalters. Texte und Übersetzungen 9, (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).

restorative effect of martyred human souls on empty pews in God's heavenly choir.[108]

The sense that this mechanism might prove fruitful for God's salvific plan, crucial for Ottokar as an eschatological catalyst, is absent from Wolfram's vernacular text, but can be found in a Latin text from a (by now familiar) twelfth-century context: in a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, the Cistercian abbot John of Casamari Abbey in Italy provides consolation to the assailed crusade propagandist.[109] He argues that, despite the crusade's catastrophic failure, the endeavour might still prove fruitful to God: despite having failed as crusaders, many of them might yet reach the Kingdom of Heaven, because they had been purified by God through persecutions and afflictions. In so doing, they would restore the multitude of angels in heaven, previously diminished by Lucifer's fall.[110]

Ottokar's model differs from the one presented in John of Casamari's letter, however, in two important points: in the Cistercian letter, the mechanism is offered as a consolation in the face of failure — an unintended side-effect, emphasised to salvage an otherwise failed endeavour. The letter also states that the salvific mechanism can now work, because the souls of the perished crusaders have been purified and their sinfulness has been turned into grace by God's mercy. Both the notions of failure and of sinfulness are absent from Ottokar's account with respect to Acre and its people. Rather, the transformation of the Christian souls of Acre into martyrs, in order to replenish the heavenly choirs, is presented as having been God's plan all along. For this He has chosen Acre specifically because of the virtue of its inhabitants, and not because they were deserving of punishment. By selecting available concepts about salvation and martyrdom and rearranging them as God's intention from the beginning, while eliminating notions of failure and sinfulness from his new construct, Ottokar creates a unique literary and historiographical solution for the narrative problem posed by the capture of Acre as an event.

Conclusions

In the aftermath of the fall of Acre, two very different texts steeped in the presuppositions of *peccatis exigentibus* turn to Genesis 18:22-33 in response. While they come to the passage for the same reason, they use it to very different effects.

Riccoldo uses it to challenge God over his promises. Unlike the abbot of Clairvaux 150 years earlier, Riccoldo is no longer prepared to give God's justice priority over his promises. He is ready to hold God to account. His first-person voice uses the passage to challenge the very basics of *peccatis exigentibus* espoused by the majority of Christian writings on the crusades until well after the events. These tenets, as formulated by Barnard of Clairvaux and others, are that the Christians are only following the fate of the ancient Israelites as a people of the covenant; that the victories of the heathens are only pedagogical tools used by God to educate his people; and that dying through them is a good way to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. Riccoldo reads Genesis 18:22–33 as a lens to challenge God's righteousness as a quality of his character. And because of the fall of Acre, Riccoldo sees God's character changed and compromised, as being now that of a cruel God who might actually favour the Muslims. This means that because of his peculiar situation and experiences, based in Baghdad and surrounded by Muslims, Riccoldo is — in contrast to the other chroniclers commenting on the event — not asking why the Christians are failing, but rather why the Muslims are winning.[111] Owing to his unique circumstances, his letters show how an historical event can cast into doubt the axiomatic conviction that Riccoldo will have shared with most of medieval Christendom: that they are placed at the centre of a divinely-decreed order of the world.

The Styrian author Ottokar aus der Gaal, on the other hand, uses the Genesis 18 material to reaffirm God's righteousness to himself and his audience. Because of the a priori assumption that Genesis 18 continues to apply a voucher for God's righteousness, God cannot have destroyed Acre for its sins. There must, therefore, have been another reason. With the rejection of sinfulness as a cause for the destruction of Acre, Ottokar opens his work up for a very different, positive characterisation of Acre and its inhabitants, and creates a way for Acre to survive as a transcendental quasi-angelic afterworld. While pulling out the rug from under the standard form of the *peccatis exigentibus* argument, Ottokar is at the same time making use of a modification of the scheme already established earlier: this idea has a long history. But Ottokar gives it a new spin which, by attributing it to the auspices of divine planning, turns it into a powerful explanatory matrix to rationalise loss and defeat: the martyr souls produced in Acre catalyse the *eschaton* by arriving in heaven. The defeat is soteriologically reintegrated into the grater scheme of things, and an explanation is found for the question of why the Christians are not victorious.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.

Acknowledgments

This article is the work of Christoph Pretzer. Colleagues from the University of Bern (Universität Bern), in particular Prof. Dr Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich (Institut für klassische Philologie), Prof. Dr Rene Bloch (Institut für Judaistik),

[108] *Willehalm* 308,1–13, 25–30.

[109] John of Casa Maria: *Epistola ad Bernardum Abbatem*, PL 182, Ep. 386, cols. 590-591.

[110] Unsurprisingly, the core idea of this salvific mechanism can be traced even further back. Augustine writes in *De civitate Dei*, 22.1, 807: "[…] qui de mortali progenie merito iusteque damnata tantum populum gratia sua colligit, ut inde suppleat et instauret partem, quae lapsa est angelorum, ac sic illa dilecta et superna ciuitas non fraudetur suorum numero ciuium, quin etiam fortassis et uberiore laetetur."

[111] George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq*, 104.

Dr Anthony Ellis (Institut für Klassische Philologie), and Dr Carson Bay (then: Institut für Klassische Philologie, now: Kennesaw State University, GA) have provided critical feedback on the full article or on selected passages. Dr Samuel Thompson (Durham University, School of Modern Languages and Cultures) has provided feedback on syntax, spelling, and grammar.

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Summary
This article addresses an intellectual and ideological problem for medieval Christian authors: how could one 'explain' the end of Christian control of the Holy Land without altogether abandoning the idea of God's special care for Christian believers? It traces the development of the idea that crusader losses were part of a divine effort to reprimand Christians, simultaneously chastising and confirming their special status in comparison to other groups. It was linked to a claim that the city of Acre was a place of outstanding depravity and thus received punishment for its sin. This conceptual framework was supported through a reading of the Old Testament and the works of Augustine and Gregory the Great.
The later sections of the article focus on two authors, Riccoldo da Montecroce and Ottokar aus der Gaal. Both came from quite different backgrounds, and both - for strikingly different reasons - rejected the idea that the Christian loss of Acre to the Mamluks should be interpreted as a divine reprimand for sin. They were particularly concerned by the implications of Genesis 18 (the destruction of Sodom), which could be taken as meaning that Acre was lost because no righteous person could be found in the city. Both took the view that lack of righteousness and just divine punishment could not explain Acre's loss. Instead, they offered their own explanatory frameworks to account for 1291. For these two men, the Fall of Acre was such a shattering event that it could not readily be explained, and required the rethinking of existing frameworks. More generally, the article demonstrates the value in examining how, when, and why medieval authors diverge from (or challenge) longstanding intellectual traditions.

Commentary
This essay offers a convincing demonstration of how medieval authors employed biblical and late antique history to account for crusading failures. Though the core of the argument focuses on two authors, one of its strength is in the range of crusading works surveyed, across both Latin and vernacular texts, from the time of the First Crusade to the early fourteenth century. This is valuable. There is also an inherently interesting suggestion about the possibility of medieval comparisons being drawn between the destruction of Sodom, the Fall of Rome, and the Fall of Acre, which (I imagine) may well be intended for further development elsewhere.

My comments mainly focus on the theological context for the discussion of sin and punishment, rather than a crusading context per se. At several points, the article notes that the concept of 'peccatis exigentibus' was not limited to a discussion of crusading losses. Indeed, the idea of instructive/reforming punishment directed by divine power against a chosen group is a phenomenon that can be observed more broadly in medieval Christian writing, not just in writing about crusading. The idea was 'pervasive'. One can see the appeal to medieval authors; it could be used to make sense of losses without losing (all) hope. But, in that sense, it would be beneficial for the article to set out how the idea of a 'pedagogical' punishment for sin in the context of crusading can be compared to other discussions of punishment for sin - i.e. sins that did not take place on crusade or in the Christian-held cities of the Holy Land. These developments in crusading texts take place against a twelfth- and thirteenth-century background in which theological understandings of sin and repentance became ever more complex. As the article notes, Bernard of Clairvaux's discussion of punishment for sin (and the failures of the Second Crusade) is also a reflection on the nature of divine judgment and justice. Comment on how Augustine and Gregory were quoted and transformed by medieval theologians before arriving in crusade texts would strengthen the discussion.

What might also be stated more clearly are the boundaries of a 'peccatis exigentibus' tradition of explanation. The article suggests was a tradition with many strands, and that there were many ways in which the idea could be expressed in a medieval text. No single word, phrase, or reference denotes participation in the tradition - it is more a matter of authorial approach. This implies a very big and broad tradition indeed, and it might perhaps be useful to consider its limits. Are there particular words or phrases that were commonly used specifically in relation to Acre? Is there any meaningful difference between a very brief engagement with the idea (such as in the Annals of Dunstable), or a much more extended treatment, or is treatment fundamentally dependent on the form and genre of the text?

Finally, the essay persuasively demonstrates that the 'logic' of peccatis exigentibus was widely available in twelfth- and thirteenth-century society: to learned theologians, to chroniclers, as well as to educated laymen, even if they chose - like Ottokar - ultimately to reject the idea when it came to Acre. It might then be useful to provide even more detail about intellectual formation and education. Where and how was Ottokar most likely to have encountered this logic - through sermons, through his own reading? Was the idea so pervasive that it could not be avoided? Clearly Ottokar was able to understand the salvific/theological implications of the Genesis narrative, but was also able to reject it with some confidence. This would merit expansion of the discussion of where Ottokar might have taken his eschatological ideas from - i.e. Wolfram von Eschenbach. The same is true, in a slightly different sense, of Riccoldo, whose biography is intriguing. How exactly might his unusual intellectual formation and knowledge of Arabic have shaped his approach to the problem and brought him to his 'radical' solution?

Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?

Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?

Partly

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: theology of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; chronicles and history writing

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 22 May 2024

Christoph Pretzer

Thank you for engaging the constructively with my article. I really appreciate the time and effort that went into writing this review. I will address one by one the points you have raised:

“[...] it would be beneficial for the article to set out how the idea of a 'pedagogical' punishment for sin in the context of crusading can be compared to other discussions of punishment for sin - i.e. sins that did not take place on crusade or in the Christian-held cities of the Holy Land.” Thank you for this suggestion. Not being a theologian this genuinely did not really occur to me. For the revised version of the article I will include a paragraph covering the non-crusade-centric discussion of sin and punishment following the lines you have so helpfully laid out.

2) “What might also be stated more clearly are the boundaries of a 'peccatis exigentibus' tradition of explanation. [..] it might perhaps be useful to consider its limits.” Another very valid theological point I had not really considered. I agree that it would be helpful to acknowledge the limits of peccatis exigentibus and explore them to some extent, but I am slightly concerned that this might overly extend an already lengthy article. Maybe a full exploration of the limits of peccatis exigentibus is best done in an independent study? Maybe I can cover this in connection with the first point you have raised, going from the wider debate on sin and punishment to the limits of the discourse.

3) “Finally, the essay persuasively demonstrates that the 'logic' of peccatis exigentibus was widely available in twelfth- and thirteenth-century society: to learned theologians, to chroniclers, as well as to educated laymen, even if they chose - like Ottokar - ultimately to reject the idea when it came to Acre. It might then be useful to provide even more detail about intellectual formation and education.” A very valid point. Since this point was also raised by the other reviewer, I will make sure to include a section on each author to expand some more on their education, intellectual formation, and where they might have encountered their ideas, going beyond the short summary at the end concerning the sources of Ottokars eschatological construction (Wolfram, Cistercians, Augustine).

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 07 March 2024

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?

Jessalynn Bird
Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Munster, USA

Summary of article:
This article explores Christian authors' application of the peccatis exigentibus motif in new ways to the Mamluk capture of Acre in 1291, particularly their reinterpretation of Genesis' depiction of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as applicable to Acre as a "Sin City." The author examines the origins of the peccatis exigentibus motif with the First Crusade and traces the idea's development and adaptation by Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Tyre, and Jacques de Vitry as an explanation for the military failures faced by Christian armies. The author concludes with an examination of how, after the fall of Acre to Mamluk forces in1291, some Christian sources, including Ottokar and Riccoldo of Montecroce, adapted the peccatis exigentibus rationale and reinterpreted Genesis 18:17-32 to stress the martyrdom of those slain and resituate the disaster within the scope of providential and eschatological history. By tracing the transmission and transformation of the peccatis exigentibus motif across learned theological writings in Latin to vernacular sources with presumably potentially different audiences, it makes a valuable contribution to crusader studies. This article reflects the author's extensive research into the literature, reflected in the publication of three recent and/or forthcoming monographs: When Cities Fall – Cultural Reflections of Loss and Lament; Ottokar aus der Gaal's Book of Acre, Book II of the Styrian Rhyming Chronicle. Translation, Commentary and Analysis; and Writing across Time in the Twelfth Century: Historical Distance and Difference in the Kaiserchronik.

Major points:
The author clearly explains the origins of the ideas reinterpreted by authors after the fall of Acre. However, it might be useful for the author to stress, as a parallel argument strengthening their case, that the usage of peccatis exigentibus as a rationale increased dramatically in Christian sources after Saladin's victory at Hattin and capture of Jerusalem in 1187 (a process described in detail by Matthieu Rajohnson, Cecilia Gaposchkin, Alexander Marx, and Sylvia Schein). Similarly, after the author's discussion of the interpretation of Genesis 18 by Augustine and Orosius, the reader is not entirely certain from which intermediate sources Riccoldo and Ottokar derived their interpretations of Genesis. Perhaps an explanation of which biblical commentaries or moralized Bibles these two authors might have had access to would help the reader see the chain of transmission of ideas over time. Similarly. might prophetic or eschatological works have informed Ottokar's reinterpretation of those killed during the capture of Acre as martyrs ushering in the

eschaton? Perhaps in future articles the author might compare how the Jewish and Islamic sources mentioned in the beginning of the article viewed the capture of Acre in comparison to the Christian sources. The article nonetheless makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how Christian authors attempted to rationalize the Mamluk capture of Acre in 1291.

Minor points: The publication process appears to have introduced some typographical errors, which I have indicated in a separate PDF which can be viewed here.

Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?
Partly

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Crusades, theology, Jacques de Vitry

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 22 May 2024

Christoph Pretzer

Thank you for engaging so constructively with my article. I really appreciate the time and effort that went into writing this review. I will address one by one the points you have raised:

1) " [...] the usage of peccatis exigentibus as a rationale increased dramatically in Christian sources after Saladin's victory at Hattin and capture of Jerusalem in 1187 [...]" This is a very valid point and I will make sure to include it in the revised manuscript. Originally the first half of the article was written with a focus on the peccatis exigentibus debate in the 12th century. For that reason the time between the death of William of Tyre and 1291 can certainly do with a bit more material. Thank you for the bibliographical pointers, I shall certainly have a look at them.

2) " [...] the reader is not entirely certain from which intermediate sources Riccoldo and Ottokar derived their interpretations of Genesis. Perhaps an explanation of which biblical commentaries or moralized Bibles these two authors might have had access to would help

the reader see the chain of transmission of ideas over time." Towards the end of the article I do a engage a bit with where I think Ottokar gets the elements of his eschatological construction from (Wolfram v. Eschenbach, Cistercians, Augustine), but of course I'd be more than happy to include a paragraph on the education and possible sources for each author to shed a bit more light on this question.

3) "Perhaps in future articles the author might compare how the Jewish and Islamic sources mentioned in the beginning of the article viewed the capture of Acre in comparison to the Christian sources." Another article of mine, in which I write about the Hebrew Qinah for Acre by Yosef ben Tanhum Yerushalmi, is currently going through peer review somewhere else, so part of what you are asking has already been done. Concerning the Islamic-Arabic texts: I have so far avoided them for two reasons 1) my knowledge of Arabic is limited 2) my research is centred on texts which use the discursive form of the city lament or – if not that – at least other narrative "coping mechanisms" to respond to the capture of Acre. For obvious reasons the Islamic-Arabic texts referring directly to this event are mostly triumphalist and panegyric in nature. That being said, I am aware that in the future I will have to include two aspects of Arabic literature: 1) There are of course Arabic city laments in the 13th century, most prominently the Ritha' al-Andalus by Abu al-Baqa ar-Rundi. These deal with the loss of the Islamic-Arabic cities of Al-Andalus in the central decades of the 13th century, when they were captured by the Iberian Christians. It will be very interesting to compare the Ritha' to the Christian texts responding to the loss of Acre thirty to forty years later. 2) I have only recently learned of the existence of Christian-Arabic city laments from Syria written after the Mamluk capture of Antioch and Tripolis, only a few years before Acre was also captured. I have only started to explore these texts, but I will definitely include them at a later point.

4) "Minor points: The publication process appears to have introduced some typographical errors, which I have indicated in a separate PDF which can be viewed here." Thank you for this, I will address these errors in the revised article.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.