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Between power and piety: Swiss Catholic Jerusalem Pilgrims and their view of Muslims (1903–1925)

Manuela Specker

At the beginning of the 20th century, journeys to Jerusalem and Palestine¹ were experiencing an extraordinary revival in Europe. The Swiss Catholic pilgrims, who travelled there in organized tours between 1903 and 1925, differed in a crucial point from other travellers. Their purpose was not only to visit the sacred sites. They hoped for a renewal of their faith by immersing themselves in the geographical setting of the Bible. The pilgrimages to Palestine, conducted by the *Verein schweizerischer Jerusalempilger* (hereafter referred to as VSJP)², allowed Catholics to flee their everyday lives and to experience a surrounding where religion still played a central role in the public sphere.

It is against this background that the present article asks how Swiss Catholic pilgrims viewed Islam and Muslims.³ Some of the participants, chiefly erudite travellers such as priests or teachers, wrote down their experiences; these are the main sources that will be analyzed. The focus will lie on both the pilgrims' religiously shaped views and the influence of the modern orientalist discourse. In many cases, these two discourses cannot be regarded separately, but a distinction for analytical purposes will illustrate the unconscious ambivalence of the pilgrims' situation. The crucial point is that they understood themselves as religious exclusively, but this did not hold up once they arrived in Palestine. As a consequence of the encounter with the «Orientals», the pilgrims identified themselves as Swiss, Europeans or «Occidentals». The present article therefore develops the

¹ Strictly speaking, Palestine was a creation of the post-First World War settlement. Under Ottoman rule there had been no Palestine; the region had been divided among three districts. For Muslims, Palestine was only a geographical expression; for Christians it was connected to a historical memory with religious significance. See Malcolm E. Yapp, *The Near East since the First World War: A History to 1995*, Essex ²1996, 116.

² The VSJP was founded in 1901. In 1919 it was renamed *Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein* (SHLV).

³ By the turn of the 20th century, Palestine had a population of around 700'000 to 750'000, 84 per cent of which were Muslim Arabs.

idea that the Swiss Catholic pilgrims' rootedness in religion and their identification with their country of origin and with Europe in general, where the meaning of religion in public sphere was fading away, led to an ambivalent perception of Islam and Muslims. This ambivalence will be the primary reference point of this paper.

Methodological reflections

In September 1908,⁴ when around 500 Catholic pilgrims met at the train station of the Swiss town Goldau early in the morning, they knew precisely what lay in store for them. The journey to Palestine, which lasted for seven days, was imbued with a highly religious impetus. All participants attended a church service before departure. During the train journey to the coast of Italy, they prayed regularly, and soon after the arrival, where they had to embark on a ship in order to reach Jaffa, the pilgrims again attended a church service. Once on the ship, the religious component became even stronger. In his travel account from 1903, the priest Melchior Britschgi evoked the image of a «swimming cathedral»: a high altar was placed in the middle of the ship, surrounded by several other altars and a statue of the Virgin Mary.⁵ Every day at least one hundred masses took place, the first one starting at 4am.⁶ After the arrival in Jaffa, the pilgrims went again straight to church. The arrival in Jerusalem was highly emotional. The pilgrims, full of awe, kissed the ground, prayed the rosary and carried a huge picture of the Virgin Mary on their way to the Franciscan church.⁷

All these procedures inevitably influenced the Catholics' view of Islam and Muslims. It is therefore important to take into account their self-understanding of being pilgrims rather than tourists. The VSJP, in its call for a pilgrimage journey to Palestine in 1908 directed at Swiss Catholics, stressed the idea that a pilgrimage should not be confused with a travel to the Orient; «we want pilgrims, not tourists».⁸

Existing scholarship suggests that these two types cannot be separated.⁹ Indeed, this dichotomy is a construct and often reflects the ecclesiastical authorities' wishful thinking. Identifying pilgrims as religious travellers therefore refers

⁴ The VSJP aimed to bring 500 pilgrims at once to Palestine, a number which first was too high for the new and not yet well known Swiss Association. It therefore conducted its first pilgrimage in 1903 in cooperation with the German counterpart, which existed already since 1855, and with which some of the Swiss initiators had travelled to Palestine before 1903. In both 1908 and 1925, the Swiss Catholics organized their own pilgrimage to Palestine.

⁵ Melchior Britschgi, *Reisebericht über die erste schweizerische Pilgerfahrt nach Palästina im September 1903*, Sarnen 1903, 7.

⁶ Anton Gisler, *In Christi Heimat. Dritte Schweizerische Volkswallfahrt ins Heilige Land, Immensee 1926*, 49.

⁷ Britschgi, *Reisebericht* (see note 5), 47.

⁸ Staatsarchiv Luzern, PA 290 / 126 (*Der Verein schweizerischer Jerusalempilger an das katholische Schweizervolk*, 1908).

⁹ Daniel. H. Olsen/Dallen J. Timothy, *Tourism and religious journeys*, in: Daniel. H. Olsen/Dallen J. Timothy (Ed.), *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, London 2006, 7.

mainly to their motives. Within the present article, the term «pilgrim» needs to be understood in a very narrow religious sense, unlike the prevailing definition that sees pilgrims as travellers with some spiritual aspirations. The term says nothing about the intensity of religious adherence. It is indisputable that the Catholics who joined the organized tours of the VSJP were highly devout and thus different from other travellers to the Orient. The latter might have understood themselves as religious as well, but their travel and stay did not follow such a strict structure defined by religious activities exclusively.

With a regional context – Swiss Catholic pilgrims travelling to the Islamic Orient – it is possible to give more attention to the area surrounding the idealized notion of mutual tolerance between Muslims and Christians, and the prevailing notion of confrontation between Islam and Christianity. Scholars tend to stress a degree of hostility towards Islam that did not exist in such a uniform fashion.¹⁰ The tendency to overemphasize conflict and confrontation is also a consequence of the focus on «Western views». Dealing with Western representations always presupposes an entity called the «West»; this does not imply that heterogeneity is non-existent. It is a methodological consequence of a large-scale view in which differences and varieties in perceptions tend to disappear. However, it is one thing to focus on Western images and to point out that they are not innocent, but have a hegemonic consistency, as Edward Said in his study *Orientalism* did.¹¹ It is quite another to show how individuals create their own meanings within the orientalist discourse. This is the aim of the present article.

The focus will not lie on the orientalist discourse as a precondition of the European encroachment on the Islamic Orient. It is instead considered as a further development of an anti-Islamic discourse rooted in Christianity, but unfolding under different circumstances. This demonstrates how far the ambivalence towards Islam and Muslims was influenced by centuries-old Christian anti-Islamic polemics, which were still present in Catholic consciousness at a time when the power balance had changed in all respects.

Ambivalent admiration

On their arrival in Jerusalem, the Catholics showed great awe and respect, and were full of admiration for the intensity with which Muslims lived their faith. The curate Johann Hildebrand pointed out that Muslims would dedicate themselves to their prayers without any inhibitions.¹² Their zeal for religion was even regarded as a positive example for Christians. When the priest Melchior Britschgi heard the muezzin giving the call for prayer, he was deeply impressed. «What a beautiful, touching exercise of religion!» Muslims would pray much more enthu-

¹⁰ David R. Blanks/Michael Frassetto, Introduction, in: David R. Blanks/Michael Frassetto (Ed.), *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, London 1999, 4.

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London 1978.

¹² Johann Baptist Hildebrand, *Nach Jerusalem*. Erinnerungsblätter, Luzern/Zürich 1907, 160.

siastically than thousands of «our stale Catholics».¹³ The assistant pastor Dominik Kreienbühl felt ashamed when observing a Muslim who focussed fully on his prayer and who did not glance to the side once. It made him aware of his own devotion, which, as he wrote, was paled by comparison.¹⁴

Their admiration for the religious fervour of Muslims was connected with criticism of Europe, where unbelief was spreading everywhere, as the curate Johann Hildebrand stated.¹⁵ The home country was also addressed directly. One of the founders of the VSJP, the priest Albert Karli, noted that even the most distinguished Muslim would not be ashamed to pray in public, whereas in Switzerland many would regard it as a disgrace to hold the rosary in their fingers.¹⁶ During a procession the Catholics held in the streets of Jerusalem, Father Elias Heimgartner observed that no single Muslim laughed maliciously or scoffed at them, and that in Switzerland there were not many places where people of different faiths accepted such demonstrations respectfully.¹⁷ The pilgrims compared what they saw and experienced in Palestine with their situation at home, where they felt mocked when showing religious adherence in public. Accordingly, life in Palestine was regarded as much more natural and freer.¹⁸

The anti-secular attitude of the Catholic pilgrims and their opposition to a society that did not regard religion as central to structuring their lives anymore fostered a positive view of Islam and Muslims. Seeing them as a role model was first and foremost a reaction against the process of privatization of religion and, linked to that, to secularization.

It becomes clear that the admiration of Muslims was connected to the pilgrims' own situation at home. As part of the ultramontane movement, the Swiss Jerusalem pilgrims stood in opposition to the liberal nation-state founded in 1848. The *Kulturkampf* and its confrontation between liberalism and ultramontane Catholicism was brought to an end around the middle of the 1880s, but the after-effects were still present at the beginning of the 20th century. Protestant-Liberal circles regarded the ultramontane Catholics as «second-class Swiss confederates»¹⁹ and as a backward variation of Christendom.²⁰ The public display of their religious belief was judged an oddity in an age that had subscribed to progress and liberalism. In Palestine, where pilgrims from different parts of the world came together, the Catholic pilgrims encountered a world that they per-

¹³ Britschgi, Reisebericht (see note 5), 24.

¹⁴ Archive Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein (SHLV), Dominik Kreienbühl, Eine interessante Pilgerfahrt nach Jerusalem und dessen Umgebung, Wollerau 1903, 120.

¹⁵ Hildebrand, Nach Jerusalem (see note 12), 82.

¹⁶ Archive SHLV, Albert Karli, Aus heiligen Landen. Reiseerinnerungen eines Jerusalem-Pilgers, Baden 1900, 102.

¹⁷ Elias Heimgartner, Ins heilige Land. III. Schweiz. Heiliglandfahrt, Mels 1925, 24.

¹⁸ Hildebrand, Nach Jerusalem (see note 12), 82.

¹⁹ Urs Altermatt, Der Weg der Schweizer Katholiken ins Ghetto, 2nd Zürich 1991, 437.

²⁰ Urs Altermatt, Katholizismus und Moderne. Zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte der Schweizer Katholiken im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Zürich 1989, 53.

ceived as compatible with their religious values. This made them even more aware of their disadvantaged status at home, where religion was becoming a private matter. For the Catholics, this development was connected with worries about the increasing insignificance of religion, a fear which seemed to have replaced the former fear of Islam. Indeed, until the late 17th century, this fear had been all too real in European consciousness, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the precarious position of Vienna in 1683. The Catholic-Conservative politician Georg Baumberger mentioned in his account that the danger was not Islam anymore, but materialistic disbelief.²¹

Romanticized visions of the Orient

The pilgrims, however, shared with other Europeans the ideas of how the Orient should be: timeless and unchanged.²² The search for the unspoilt was part of the general European longing for the Orient; an atavistic reaction to industrialism and its side effects. In an age that underwent rapid change, the Orient and its perceived timelessness promised recovery. Pilgrims, for example, appreciated that in the old town of Jerusalem, there was no «European hurry».²³

Their interest went further than the general desire to escape the rational, modernized West in order to explore the «sensual» Orient, where life seemed to be as it always had been; a vision created also by 19th century Romanticism. As already indicated, pilgrims wanted to be as close as possible to the life of the Bible. Agricultural methods such as wooden ploughs were seen as bearing witness to the times of Abraham.²⁴ Teacher Josef Kellenberger mentioned in his account that the local inhabitants and their living conditions made the Gospel and the Holy Scriptures more comprehensible to the pilgrims.²⁵

Nevertheless, the visions of pilgrims or other travellers rarely corresponded to reality. Pilgrims were particularly prone to disappointment. They had to deal with the conflict between what they had anticipated and imagined from readings of the Bible, and what they finally saw in the Holy Land. The Catholic pilgrims' enthusiasm often evaporated quickly after arrival. Father Elias Heimgartner for example complained about the noise of car horns, which could be heard during the whole day. And all the hotels, shops, and cafes! He was astonished that now, in the land of camels and donkeys, they were to spend so much time in the car.²⁶

²¹ Georg Baumberger, *Im Banne von drei Königinnen*. 1. Band: Palästina, Einsiedeln 1910, 288.

²² Archive SHLV, Kreienbühl, *Eine interessante Pilgerfahrt* (see note 14), 107.

²³ Gisler, *In Christi Heimat* (see note 6), 172.

²⁴ Anton Langmesser, *Eine moderne Orientreise*. Tagebuchblätter, Basel 1901, 88.

²⁵ Archive SHLV, Josef Kellenberger, *Ins heilige Land! Erinnerungen an die III. Schweiz. Volkswallfahrt ins heilige Land*, Ingenbohl 1927, 160.

²⁶ Heimgartner, *Ins heilige Land* (see note 17), 32.

Heimgartner asked himself if this was really the land flowing with milk and honey of which the scriptures spoke. He was extremely disappointed by the barren land and blamed the «neglected landscape» on Turkish mismanagement.²⁷

The Catholic pilgrims agreed that the perceived backwardness was a result of Arab «laziness».²⁸ They portrayed inhabitants, in this context also called «Arabs» or «Turks», as enjoying the «dolce far niente».²⁹ The image the authors provided was highly repetitive: in several accounts, the local inhabitants were described as sitting idly in the alleys and smoking shisha.

The Catholic pilgrims' interpretations clearly took place within the framework of a strict distinction between Orient and Occident. The emphasis on what is «oriental» and what is «occidental» was also made in the guidebook, which was handed out to every pilgrim as preparation for the journey.³⁰ When the curate Johann Hildebrand described beggars and odours, men sitting idly in front of cafes, or a colourful bazaar, he ended his observations with: «That is oriental.»³¹ The use of the word «oriental» alone provided a fixed meaning and implied a value judgement.³² It directed the reader to a specific body of information about the Orient, and it seemed to be of objective validity. No one felt compelled to question these ideas about the Orient, which consisted of fanaticism, backwardness, irrationality, laziness and an aberrant mentality, to name but a few.

An apparent contradiction

In view of the pilgrims' desire to experience an unchanged world that brought them closer to the Bible and in view of their statements about backwardness and laziness, it appears, at first sight, that their attitude towards Islam and Muslims was highly ambivalent. The pilgrims identified themselves with European superiority; a superiority that was rooted in enlightenment, that was based on technical progress and that marginalized the role of religion – elements which were not congruent with the Catholic pilgrims' wish for religion structuring their lives. They judged backwardness negatively, although they were in the search for the unspoilt. This ambivalence appears to be even stronger since the doctrine of the conservative Catholics was characterized by an anti-modern criticism of civilisation and culture: the advance of new technology and rationalization was seen as a serious threat to their religious belief.³³

²⁷ Ibid., 38.

²⁸ Archive SHLV, Karli, Aus heiligen Landen (see note 16), 106.

²⁹ Archive SHLV, Emil Jegge, In geweihten Landen. Heiliglandfahrt vom 29. April bis 21. Mai 1925, Rheinfelden 1925, 22.

³⁰ Archive SHLV, Dominik Kreienbühl, Pilgerführer für die zweite Schweizerische Volkswallfahrt in's Hl. Land, Luzern 1908, 52.

³¹ Hildebrand, Nach Jerusalem (see note 12), 47.

³² Said, Orientalism (see note 11), 205.

³³ Altermatt, Katholizismus und Moderne (see note 20), 58.

However, there are several reasons not to overemphasize this vacillation between a discourse of progressiveness and the search for the unspoilt. First of all, this ambivalence was inherent in Europe's relationship with the Orient. The region served as a place for recovery and on which to project desires that remained unfulfilled in the rationalized West. At the same time, the region was seen as the polar opposite of the «progressive Occident».

Secondly, pilgrims transferred the stigmatization they faced in Switzerland on to the «Orientals». In Jerusalem, they reproached the «Orientals» for laziness and backwardness; in Switzerland, they were themselves confronted with these same accusations. One of the widespread perceptions was that Catholics indulged in their idleness, wasted time with numerous church services, celebrated unnecessary sacred festivals and undertook pilgrimages all the time.³⁴ In an age of liberalism and progress, Protestants and Liberals viewed the Catholics as exotic, alien, and backward. The German historian Manuel Borutta wrote of an «intra-occidental orientalism» in order to characterize anti-Catholicism, which was just as widespread in Germany.³⁵ To put it differently, the Orient came to be the opposite of a rational, rationalizing and superior West, and the Catholics, so to speak, epitomized for the Liberals this Orient's «otherness». With good reason the Swiss historian Urs Altermatt described them as «colonies within their own country».³⁶

After all, the liberal Swiss nation-state from 1848 was founded against the will of the conservative Catholics, who constructed their own concepts of a Swiss nation based on their world view dominated by the religious factor. Liberal circles therefore regarded them not only as backward, but also as «unreliable patriots».³⁷ In view of this situation, it can be said that the Swiss Catholics projected the hostility, with which they were confronted in their own country, on to the «Orientals». This explains to a certain extent why during their stay in the Islamic Orient, they themselves became part of the discourse of progressiveness, from which they were excluded in Switzerland.

The main reason why this ambivalence needs to be relativized is the fact that while the Catholics' doctrine was anti-modern, their practices were not. The idea of conservative Swiss Catholics being opposed to everything that was progressive and modern was a persistent topos of liberal discourse, a consequence also of Swiss Catholics' opposition to the liberal nation-state founded in 1848. The majority of them were less educated and lived in peripheral zones that were disadvantaged when it came to economic growth. Accordingly, the conservative Catholics found it more difficult, both for cultural and economic reasons, to adapt to a secular order than Protestant Liberals. But they were not simply unre-

³⁴ Ibid., 53.

³⁵ Manuel Borutta, *Enemies at the gate: The Moabit Klostersturm and the Kulturkampf: Germany*, in: Christopher Clark/Wolfram Kaiser (Ed.), *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge 2003, 227.

³⁶ Altermatt, *Katholizismus und Moderne* (see note 20), 58.

³⁷ Ibid., 54.

liable patriots, as the Liberals perceived them. They actively took part in the shaping of the future of Switzerland's social and political order.³⁸ The Catholics in Switzerland understood themselves not only as exemplary believers and members of a church community, but also as exemplary citizens of their fatherland.³⁹

This was exemplified in the central role their Swiss identity played during the pilgrimages. Being in an alien world drew them all the more closer to their shared country of origin. Some of the Catholics even brought a Swiss flag with them,⁴⁰ and some suffered from homesickness.⁴¹ From the beginning, pilgrims did not just leave Switzerland behind; the country remained omnipresent in their consciousness.

Not least the organization of such large-scale pilgrimages was a vehicle of modernity.⁴² Clearly the Catholic pilgrims perceived modern developments as a threat to their religion, yet they were also part of these developments. This explains to a certain extent why they obviously adapted to the discourse of progressiveness when they arrived in the Islamic Orient, which was so different to the world they knew. Catholicism, despite its sceptical attitude towards modernity, was never disconnected from modern developments; after all, modernity evolved within Christian culture. Christians were compelled by local circumstances to react to modern ideas, whereas in the Muslim world the different aspects of modernity were perceived as imports.⁴³ In the face of this, Islam could be seen as backward and responsible for poverty – a way of thinking that was only possible in the wake of Europe's modernisation.⁴⁴ Priest Albert Karli even traced the roots of poverty back to the lifestyle of the Arabs, their «incomprehensible inertia and the carelessness with which they live through the day».⁴⁵

«Swiss Standards» as a benchmark

In an essentialist manner Islam was seen as an explanatory factor of living conditions. Catholic pilgrims, like other travellers to the Orient, judged the Orient according to European norms and values, ignorant of the socio-historical situation.

³⁸ Oliver Zimmer, *A Contested Nation. History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761–1891*, Cambridge 2003, 195.

³⁹ Urs Altermatt, *Katholizismus und Nation. Vier Modelle in europäisch-vergleichender Perspektive*, in: Urs Altermatt/Franziska Metzger (Ed.), *Religion und Nation. Katholizismus im Europa des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 2007, 31.

⁴⁰ Hildebrand, *Nach Jerusalem* (see note 12), 33.

⁴¹ Britschgi, *Reisebericht* (see note 5), 24.

⁴² Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion und Gesellschaft: Deutschland um 1900*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 246 (1988), 593.

⁴³ Hugh Goddard, *Christians and Muslims. From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding*, Surrey 1995, 149.

⁴⁴ Thomas Naumann, *Feindbild Islam – Historische und theologische Gründe einer europäischen Angst*, in: Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (ed.), *Islamfeindlichkeit. Wenn die Grenzen der Kritik verschwimmen*, Wiesbaden 2010, 32.

⁴⁵ Archive SHLV, Karli, *Aus heiligen Landen* (see note 16), 106.

It is therefore less surprising that Catholics drew on a discourse of progressiveness when they were confronted with simpler living conditions. The pilgrims took «Swiss standards» as a benchmark when describing «Oriental» conditions. The assistant pastor Dominik Kreienbühl wrote that «the Orientals do not know anything about street cleaning».⁴⁶ Local inhabitants were often portrayed as «dirty» and «ragged».⁴⁷

The Catholic pilgrims saw themselves as primarily religious, but, as was demonstrated, they identified with being Swiss, European or Occidental. They were not mere representatives of Catholicism on the search for spiritual fulfillment, despite their rejection of the liberal nation-state. Since the end of the 19th century, Catholics in other European countries also had become more exclusively Catholic in their social and devotional behaviour, but this did not mean that they had lost their national distinctiveness.⁴⁸

Concerning pilgrims travelling to the Islamic Orient, the idea of national character anyway needs to be extended to European or Western distinctiveness, since this was the central geographical point of reference within the orientalist discourse. When Melchior Britschgi arrived together with other pilgrims in Jaffa, he was surprised about the attention, which «we, the Europeans» received from local inhabitants.⁴⁹ The fact that they identified themselves as being «Swiss» or «European» as a consequence of the encounter with the «Orientals» confirms prevailing ideas in pilgrim research. Thomas Idinopulos argues that Holy Land pilgrimage, ancient or modern, provides little evidence of a neat set of dichotomies called «sacred» and «secular». Pilgrims not only drew close to the «spiritual center», but also confirmed their ethno-national and cultural identity.⁵⁰

«With the faith and enthusiasm of Crusaders»

The conviction of being superior was not only expressed in seeing the «Orientals» as backward and lazy; it was also inherent in the Catholic pilgrims' claim to entitlement to the Holy Land. They expressed their regrets that holy places were in Muslims' possession, since Christians could only visit these places by paying an entrance fee.⁵¹ The Upper Room was clearly seen as «robbed Christian property».⁵² The controversy over the Holy Land, with Muslims regaining their hold

⁴⁶ Archive SHLV, Kreienbühl, Eine interessante Pilgerfahrt (see note 14), 90.

⁴⁷ Britschgi, Reisebericht (see note 5), 11.

⁴⁸ Mary Heimann, Catholic revivalism in worship and devotion, in: Sheridan Gilley/Brian Stanley (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity. World Christianities c. 1815–c. 1914*, Vol. 8, Cambridge 2006, 83.

⁴⁹ Britschgi, Reisebericht (see note 5), 11.

⁵⁰ Thomas A. Idinopulos, *Sacred Space and Profane Power: Victor Turner and the Perspective of Holy Land Pilgrimage*, in: Bryan F. Le Beau/Menachem Mor (Ed.), *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land*, Omaha 1996, 9.

⁵¹ Archive SHLV, Jegge, In geweihten Landen (see note 29), 62.

⁵² Hildebrand, Nach Jerusalem (see note 12), 146.

of Palestine at the end of the 13th century, was omnipresent in the Catholic pilgrims' consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century. They saw Palestine as genuinely Christian, with Muslim seizure as a reversible state of affairs.⁵³

The foundation of the VSJP in 1901, which was renamed *Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein* in 1919 (SHLV, Swiss Holy Land Association), also needs to be seen as a consequence of the desire to demonstrate their entitlement to holy places in Palestine. For Catholics, travelling to the Islamic Orient became an important possibility to prove the strength of their faith. In view of all the procedures conducted during the journey, with constant praying and the numerous altars on the ship, the pilgrimages can even be regarded as a giant procession. They need to be understood in a broader context as a religious demonstration of the Christian faith, they were never simply reducible to an individual experience. In 1914, the assistant pastor Dominik Kreienbühl emphasized in the publication organ *Pilger-Brief*, which was produced by the VSJP and distributed among its members, that Catholics needed to mark their presence in the Holy Land in order to defend their position against other religious groups.⁵⁴

The Catholic pilgrims even compared their journey to Palestine with the Crusaders movement, and they understood themselves as Crusaders. The idea of being successors of the former Crusaders was the official attitude of the VSJP: in an article published in the *Schweizerische Kirchenzeitung*, pilgrims were encouraged to travel to Jerusalem with the faith and enthusiasm of Crusaders.⁵⁵ The priest Anton Gisler made comparisons by stating that where Crusaders wore a red cross on the right shoulder, pilgrims now donned a pretty armband.⁵⁶ It was common among Christians to see the Crusades in a romantic glow, associated with the Christian ideal of chivalry.⁵⁷

To sum up, the notion of European superiority was clearly intertwined with the notion of Christian superiority. Modern Orientalism, whose beginning Said located in Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798,⁵⁸ could build upon a centuries-old Christian anti-Islamic discourse. One crucial element was that the Orient and Islam were not judged anymore on the basis of religion alone. After all, modern Orientalism derived from secularizing elements in European culture.⁵⁹ From the 18th century onwards, theological stereotypes were replaced by politically and morally shaped attitudes. The notion of superiority, previously articulated in a

⁵³ After the end of the Mameluke dominion over Palestine, the Holy Land was from 1516 onwards to remain an Ottoman domain for the next 400 years. By September 1918, when the Ottoman Empire came under British control for the next thirty years, the responsibility for the holy places remained in the hands of Muslims.

⁵⁴ Archive SHLV, *Pilger-Brief*, No. 26, July 1914, 3.

⁵⁵ *Schweizerische Kirchenzeitung*, No. 30, 25. July 1902, 268.

⁵⁶ Gisler, In Christi Heimat (see note 6), 64.

⁵⁷ William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters. Perceptions and Misperceptions*, London/New York 1991, 79.

⁵⁸ Said, *Orientalism* (see note 11), 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

Christian framework, became increasingly seen in a secular context.⁶⁰ At the beginning of the 20th century, Islam posed no theological adversary anymore to Christianity, and the sense of superiority in possessing the truth was now confirmed by political and cultural supremacy.

The present article therefore argues that the Catholics' intense religious adherence even reinforced their sense of superiority towards Muslims. This is a further explanation why Catholic pilgrims could identify so easily with the notion of European superiority; it was always connected to the notion of Christian superiority.

Muslims serving as a mirror image to the Catholics

Notwithstanding these circumstances, travellers to the Orient cannot be regarded as thoroughly imbued with the attitude of Western or Christian superiority. The interpretation of «oriental» laziness and backwardness as negative counterpart to the «Occident» was undoubtedly the dominating view among Catholic pilgrims. However, they also followed own ideas, which were characterized by their attachment to Catholicism. As shown at the beginning, the Catholics took Islam (and Muslims) as a role model when it came to criticize the fact that religion at home was increasingly relegated to the periphery.

Furthermore, the bad condition of some holy sites, shared by different Christian denominations, reminded pilgrims of the internal rift within Christianity.⁶¹ Mainly the Holy Sepulchre disappointed them. Accordingly, they emphasized in their accounts how Muslims look after their holy sites. Given the poor state of the Holy Sepulchre, the Catholics admired and envied even more the beauty of Muslim holy sites. Dominik Kreienbühl was lost for words when he stood in front of the Dome of the Rock; «it is impossible to describe this magnificence».⁶² The Omar Mosque was described as a «masterpiece of Mohammedanic architecture».⁶³ The Catholic pilgrims also went inside the Mosque. Kreienbühl mentioned a Catholic fellow pilgrim who was reprimanded by a Muslim for drinking water right from the bottle. Kreienbühl himself was observed critically by Muslims because he kept his shoes on when entering the Omar Mosque. He accepted their disapproval, since for him this was in any case more acceptable than godlessness: «It is allowed to learn from the Turks. At least they still have a

⁶⁰ Naumann, *Feindbild Islam* (see note 44), 31.

⁶¹ The fisticuffs within the Holy Sepulchre came to an end only in 1852 with an Ottoman decree, called the «Status Quo», describing everyone's proper place in the church and a warning to stay in it. At the beginning of the 20th Century the main difficulty regarding the holy sites still lay within Christianity: rivalries among Christian denominations with respect to religious rites and sacred privileges were legendary. See Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers. Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine*, Stanford 2011, 19.

⁶² Archive SHLV, Kreienbühl, *Eine interessante Pilgerfahrt* (see note 14), 156.

⁶³ Archive SHLV, Jegge, *In geweihten Landen* (see note 29), 54.

faith.»⁶⁴ Muslims obviously fulfilled the function of a mirror image to the Catholics, all the more because Muslims epitomized a unified community; as a whole, Islam managed to retain a greater measure of unity than Christianity.⁶⁵

In this context it should be mentioned that admiration of Islam and Muslims had been possible throughout the centuries, precisely because it served to voice criticism. The vast Muslim expansion during the Middle Ages for example, which had troubled Christians because it could be interpreted as God permitting worldly success to Islam, led to a tendency to elevate Islam as a good example in practice to the shaming of Christians.⁶⁶

Despite a history of admiration and appreciation, Edward Said gave little space to positive statements about Islam in his study *Orientalism*. However, it needs to be reminded that Said dealt with Western representations and therefore with the strongest discursive formation. The pilgrims' way of seeing Islam as a role model did not evolve out of a separate tradition. It is precisely their constant reference to their situation at home that makes it necessary to situate them within Orientalism, since one of its core characteristics is the duality between the Orient and the Occident. This ontological distinction was the framework of the pilgrims' interpretations. It was this comparison that decided how Muslims and Islam were perceived. Depending on the context, this led to a positive or a negative view. The Catholics' positive view of Islam and Muslims was mainly determined by their worries about the decreasing meaning of their religion. This shows that the discourse about Islam is more of a dialogue with the self, revealing much about the subject but little about the object in question.⁶⁷

Rather than being used as a critique to Said's seemingly monolithic conceptualization of Orientalism,⁶⁸ positive statements about Muslims and Islam need to be put into context. Furthermore, Christian anti-Islamic prejudices were still at the forefront of the pilgrims' consciousness. As shown, their pilgrimages were never only spiritual, but also opportunities to demonstrate their entitlement to the Holy Land. Regarding the status of the Islamic faith, Catholic pilgrims were in line with the Vatican, an indication that old Christian prejudices towards Islam influenced the pilgrims' perception, which led to further ambivalences.

⁶⁴ Archive SHLV, Dominik Kreienbühl, Erste Schweizer Heiliglandfahrt, 31. Aug. bis 22. Sep. 1903, Einsiedeln 1903, 194–195.

⁶⁵ Goddard, *Christians and Muslims* (see note 43), 109.

⁶⁶ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West. The Making of an Image*, Oxford 1960, 305–306.

⁶⁷ Edward Said wrote that Orientalism is a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with the West. See Said, *Orientalism* (see note 11), 12.

⁶⁸ Said never denied heterogeneity within the orientalist discourse. He emphasized that these heterogeneities did not disturb the systematic and invariant nature of Orientalism. Said did not examine the sympathetic orientalist tradition; he focused on the discourse as both an instrument and a product in the process of European subjugation of the Islamic Orient. He therefore was interested in the authoritative structure rather than in heterogeneities.

From admiration to denigration

Until the Second Vatican Council, the attitude among Catholics was dominated by foreignness towards Islam. In the publication organ *Pilger-Brief*, Islam was described as an «erroneous religious mixture», compounded by Christian and Jewish elements.⁶⁹ The pilgrims' way of seeing Muslims as role models in terms of religious devotion was accompanied by the idea of Muslims being «fanatic» – a characterization which was made in every pilgrim account examined, and which was a widespread view in other publications as well. Not least the Crusades, still strongly present in the pilgrims' collective memories, both initiated and perpetuated the representation of Muslims as fanatical.

Catholic pilgrims admired Muslims practising their faith, but denied that Islam was a religion of equal standing. Fundamental elements were regarded as either «legends» or «fables». Referring to Mohammed's visionary ascent to heaven from a rock in Judea, the curate Johann Hildebrand stated that it was difficult not to laugh.⁷⁰ Muslim belief was even mocked: when the pilgrims arrived back in Switzerland and some of the participants had to open their suitcases for customs inspections, Melchior Britschgi commented smugly that the suitcases might contain a hair of the prophet's beard.⁷¹ The priest Albert Karli, after he had described the role of baksheesh in the Islamic Orient, wrote that Muslims would even sell their Prophet in order to get baksheesh.⁷²

With regard to their own faith, the Catholics applied other standards. They mentioned explicitly that the authenticity of the Holy Sepulchre for instance could be scientifically proved valid.⁷³ Catholics, as it is a matter of course for every believer, doubted neither the genuineness of their holy localities nor the crucifixion and the resurrection itself; from their perspective, questioning a tradition so old and venerable would be similar to a profanation. The pilgrims were convinced that only their faith was a religion in the proper sense while Islam was no more than a human intervention. In times when biblical criticism and Darwin's evolution theory questioned crucial elements of the Christian belief, it became even more important for Catholics to insist on the truth of the biblical narrative.

The Catholic pilgrims' way of dismissing the belief of Muslims goes back to a specific Christian tradition in judging Islam. Christian apologists in the Middle Ages regarded Mohammed's message as merely human and the Quran as a collection of fables borrowed from the Bible and warped by the author.⁷⁴ Islam was denied as a religion and ethical system, a position constructed in the 12th century, specified in the 13th and 14th century, and remaining practically unchanged until

⁶⁹ Archive SHLV, *Pilger-Brief*, No. 51, November 1922, 5.

⁷⁰ Hildebrand, *Nach Jerusalem* (see note 12), 160.

⁷¹ Britschgi, *Reisebericht über die erste schweizerische Pilgerfahrt nach Palästina* (see note 5), 36.

⁷² Archive SHLV, Karli, *Aus heiligen Landen* (see note 16), 105.

⁷³ Gisler, *In Christi Heimat* (see note 6), 88.

⁷⁴ Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1985, 13.

the 18th century, some of its elements surviving up to the colonial era.⁷⁵ In pilgrim accounts, Muslims were called «infidels» from time to time, mostly in a context of threat, be it when referring to the Crusades or when referring to the fact that the holy sites were still in the hands of Muslims.⁷⁶ The word «infidel», used only in context of a perceived threat, indicates that the Catholics were aware that Islam was a religion as well as theirs, but the centuries-old Christian notion of Muslims being «infidels» influenced this acknowledgement. In references to the Crusades, the image invoked was that of the brave Christian, fighting with the courage of desperation, and that of the cruel, violent Muslim, bathing in the blood of Christians.⁷⁷ The pilgrims' positive view of Islam and Muslims was clearly interrupted by centuries-old Christian polemics.

The pilgrims' rootedness in both modern orientalist discourse and religion was even evident in their choice of words. When the Catholics followed ideas of European superiority, they referred to ethnic categories such as «Oriental», «Turk» or «Arab», three dominant descriptions within the orientalist discourse. When it came to the way of how Muslims lived their faith, or when it came to the idea of Christian superiority, then the «Orientals» were clearly identified as Muslims (or rather as «Mohammedans»).

⁷⁸

Conclusion

The Catholic pilgrims travelling to the Islamic Orient at the beginning of the 20th century showed an ambivalent attitude towards Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, they were full of respect and admiration when it came to the fervour with which Muslims lived their faith and the way they treated their holy sites. On the other hand, central elements of Islam were regarded as «fables» or «legends». Although pilgrims took Islam as a role model, they questioned its validity. The ambivalence in their perception was particularly strong because enduring Christian anti-Islamic images were at the fore of their consciousness. The pilgrims were convinced that only Christians were entitled to the Holy Land; they even regarded themselves as Crusaders since they were now making their own way to Palestine.

The fact that Catholic pilgrims, once in Palestine, immediately identified with Muslims practising their faith, despite this mental front line, had to do with their own situation in Switzerland. The Catholics stood in opposition to a society that was no longer structured by religious activities. In Palestine, at the roots of their

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁶ Hildebrand, *Nach Jerusalem* (see note 12), 76, and Archive SHLV, Karli, *Aus heiligen Landen* (see note 16), 82.

⁷⁷ Archive SHLV, Jegge, *In geweihten Landen* (see note 29), 44.

⁷⁸ In all the pilgrims' accounts, Muslims were called «Mohammedans», a common description for Muslims at that time, but based on a misunderstanding. It reflects the initial Christian idea of those days, when Mohammed's role was seen as comparable to that of Christ in Christianity. But Muslims worship Allah, not their Prophet Mohammed, whom they see as nothing more than a man.

faith, pilgrims consequently appreciated that they were not hindered in practising their religion. The encounter with Muslims also confirmed their own piety, encouraging them to criticise unbelief. The new threat for Catholics was no longer Islam, but the perceived loss of religion's significance in their home country. The rhythm of industrialization and its consequences, for example, did not seem to be compatible with their religious values.

The relatively unspoilt environment of Palestine made the Catholic pilgrims feel even closer to the life of the Bible. Yet they described the local inhabitants as backward and lazy, two major ingredients of the orientalist discourse. The pilgrims clearly identified with the notion of European superiority, although it was based on elements that in their perception posed a threat to their belief.

This ambivalence, nonetheless, shrinks when the Catholics relationship to modernity is taken into account: only in their doctrine did they stand in opposition to it, not in their practice. Not least such large-scale pilgrimages were vehicles of modernity. Furthermore, although the pilgrims depicted themselves as primarily religious, their identification with Switzerland and Europe strengthened; all the more as they travelled to a world alien to them. Their home country remained omnipresent in their consciousness, and they were as equally influenced by the orientalist discourse as other travellers. Moreover, in Switzerland the Catholics themselves were charged of being lazy; it was thus only a small step to project such characteristics on to «Orientals».

Yet, the Catholic pilgrims were not just «prisoners» of this discourse of dominance. First of all, only when they saw themselves opposed to the Orient in their identity as Swiss or Europeans was there little variation regarding the perception of Islam and Muslims. Secondly, it was their religious piety that drew their attention close to the Muslim faith and allowed them to develop a solidarity that undermined the Orient-Occident dichotomy. Even «laziness» could be regarded in a positive light, since the different rhythm of life made it easier for pilgrims to follow religious activities.

Despite their alternative views, the pilgrims' perception needs to be situated within Orientalism. Said's study does not imply that everybody thought of themselves as a united group, which stood in all respects in opposition to the Orient; it is about representations that became so strong that no one questioned their validity. The Catholic pilgrims' positive attitudes toward Muslims did not challenge essential ideas. Fanaticism was such an unquestioned truth regarding Muslims, as shown by the pilgrims' excessive use of the term. Moreover, their interest never lay in the region and in its inhabitants, but in its function as a mirror image. Depending on the context, both the Islamic Orient and Muslims could be admired, criticized or used as a valve in order to criticize Swiss or European society. The pilgrims' perceptions therefore are not reducible to an intentional discourse of dominance, but clearly were influenced by questions of power.

The pilgrimages were even indirectly connected to power. The Holy Land only became an important point of reference for the Catholics again because Europe had increased its influence within the Ottoman Empire. The central place Catholics gave to the admiration of Muslims was supported by the fact that in their consciousness, Islam no longer posed a threat. The former notion of Christian superiority, based on the idea of possessing the truth, was now, at the beginning of the 20th century, confirmed by political and cultural supremacy. It is therefore less surprising that pilgrims identified with European superiority, although they understood themselves as primarily religious in search for the roots of their faith. These pilgrimages, which each brought together up to 500 people, were not simply individual experiences, but an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of the Christian faith and its entitlement to the Holy Land.

Between power and piety: Swiss Jerusalem Pilgrims and their view of Muslims (1903–1925)

At the beginning of the 20th century, an association was founded in Switzerland that brought up to 500 Catholics at once to the Holy Land. The present essay examines how these pilgrims from an ultramontane milieu described their encounters with Muslims. It will be argued that the Swiss Catholic pilgrims' rootedness in religion and their identification with their country of origin and with Europe led to an ambivalent perception of Islam and Muslims. It was the pilgrims' religious identity which played a major role in developing positive views of them. They admired the Muslims' religious fervour and took this as a role model. In their identity as Swiss or Europeans, however, the pilgrims' interpretations clearly took place within the Orient-Occident dichotomy. The fact that the Catholics adhered to the idea of a «progressive Europe» superior to the Orient, although they criticized their society at home, where the meaning of religion in the public sphere was fading away, is a contradiction only at first glance: it was in their doctrine, but not in their practice, where they opposed modern developments. Furthermore, their experience of stigmatization in Switzerland fuelled their own prejudices against Muslims. The pilgrims' perception was particularly ambivalent because the Crusades and other centuries-old Christian anti-Islamic images were still at the forefront of their consciousness and their collective memory. It therefore was a small step to identifying with European superiority.

Pilgrimage – Pilgrims – Palestine – Jerusalem – Orientalism – Crusades – *Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein* (SHLV) – *Verein Schweizerischer Jerusalem-pilger* (VSJP) – Ultramontanism – Islamic Orient.

Zwischen Macht und Frömmigkeit: Schweizerische Jerusalem-pilger und ihre Sicht auf die Muslime (1903–1925)

Zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts wurde in der Schweiz eine Vereinigung gegründet, welche bis zu 500 Katholiken auf einmal ins Heilige Land brachte. Vorliegender Beitrag untersucht, wie diese aus einem ultramontanen Milieu stammenden Pilger die Muslime wahrnahmen. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Verwurzelung der Schweizer Pilger in der Religion und ihre gleichzeitige Identifikation mit dem Herkunftsland und mit Europa zu einer ausgesprochen ambivalenten Haltung führte. So bewunderten die Pilger die Art und Weise, wie Muslime ihre Religion ausübten, und betrachteten sie gar als Vorbild. Das muss vor dem Hintergrund der abnehmenden Bedeutung von Religion im öffentlichen Raum in Europa gesehen werden. Zugleich reihten sich ihre Interpretationen in die Orient-Okzident-Dichotomie ein. Die Bewunderung für die Muslime wurde durchbrochen von der Überzeugung, das Christentum sei dem Islam überlegen; Jahrhunderte alte Christliche Feindbilder und die kollektive Erinnerung an die Kreuzzüge waren omnipräsent in

den Beschreibungen der Schweizer Jerusalempilger. Somit war es für sie ein kleiner Schritt, sich trotz Hochachtung vor der muslimischen Religionsausübung mit dem europäischen Überlegenheitsgefühl zu identifizieren. Das ist nicht nur vor dem Hintergrund des orientalistischen Diskurses zu sehen. Die Pilger selber wurden in ihrer Heimat im Zeitalter von Fortschritt und Liberalismus als faul und rückständig charakterisiert. Es war deshalb für die Katholiken erneut nur ein kleiner Schritt, diese Vorurteile auf die Muslime im Heiligen Land zu projizieren.

Wallfahrt – Wallfahrer – Palästina – Jerusalem – Orientalismus – Kreuzzüge, *Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein* (SHLV) – *Verein Schweizerischer Jerusalempilger* (VSJP) – Ultramontanismus – Islamischer Orient.

Entre pouvoir et piété: Les pèlerins suisses de Jérusalem et leur vision des musulmans (1903–1925)

Au début du 20^{ème} siècle, une association a été fondée en Suisse qui allait emmener jusqu'à 500 catholiques en même temps en Terre Sainte. Dans cet article, l'auteur examine la manière dont ces pèlerins issus d'un milieu ultramontain percevaient les musulmans. L'auteur argumente que l'enracinement des pèlerins suisses dans leur religion et parallèlement leur identification avec leur pays d'origine ainsi qu'avec l'Europe les mettait dans une position ambivalente très prononcée. Ainsi, les pèlerins admiraient la manière dont les musulmans vivaient leur religion et les considéraient même comme exemplaires. Cela est à comprendre dans le contexte de la signification décroissante de la religion dans le domaine public en Europe. En même temps, leurs interprétations s'inscrivaient dans la dichotomie orient-occident. L'admiration pour les musulmans a été rompue par la conviction de la supériorité du christianisme par rapport à l'islam; des préjugés ancestraux et le souvenir collectif des croisades étaient omniprésents dans les descriptions des pèlerins suisses de Jérusalem. Il leur était ainsi peu difficile de s'identifier avec le sentiment de supériorité propre aux Européens, malgré leur haute estime pour la pratique religieuse des musulmans. Ceci ne doit pas uniquement être compris dans le cadre du discours orientaliste. Au temps du progrès et du libéralisme, les pèlerins eux-mêmes étaient considérés comme paresseux et dépassés dans leur patrie. Il était donc encore une fois chose aisée pour les catholiques de projeter ces préjugés sur les musulmans en Terre Sainte.

Pèlerinage – pèlerins – Palestine – Jérusalem – orientalisme – croisades – *Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein* (SHLV) – *Verein Schweizerischer Jerusalempilger* (VSJP) – ultramontanisme – orient islamique.

Tra potere e devozione: Pellegrini svizzeri a Gerusalemme e la loro visione dei Musulmani (1903–1925)

In Svizzera, all'inizio del XX secolo, fu fondata un'associazione che portò in Terra Santa fino a 500 cattolici alla volta. Il presente contributo esamina come questi pellegrini appartenenti a un contesto ultramontano descrivono i loro incontri con i Musulmani. L'argomentazione principale sostiene che il radicamento dei pellegrini svizzeri nella religione e la loro identificazione con il proprio paese d'origine e con l'Europa, fece sì che la loro percezione dell'Islamismo fu ambivalente. L'identità religiosa dei pellegrini ebbe soprattutto il ruolo di favorire una visione positiva dei Musulmani. I pellegrini svizzeri ammirano il fervore religioso dei Musulmani tanto da considerarlo esemplare. Nella loro identità come svizzeri o europei, però, le interpretazioni dei pellegrini si inseriscono chiaramente all'interno della dicotomia «Oriente-Occidente». L'ammirazione per i Musulmani viene frenata dalla convinzione della superiorità del Cristianesimo sull'Islamismo. Immagini nemiche vecchie di secoli e ricordi collettivi di crociate sono onnipresenti nella descrizione dei pellegrini svizzeri a Gerusalemme. Le interpretazioni dei pellegrini devono essere considerate in un contesto di perdita di significato della religione nella sfera pubblica europea. Oltretutto, nella Svizzera all'epoca del progresso e del liberalismo, i pellegrini erano stigmatizzati come pigri e arretrati. Per i cattolici il passo è breve per proiettare sui Musulmani i pregiudizi che loro stessi subiscono nel proprio paese.

Pellegrinaggio – pellegrini – Palestina – Gerusalemme – orientalismo – crociate – Kreuzzüge, Schweizerischer Heiligland-Verein (SHLV) – Verein Schweizerischer Jerusalempilger (VSJP) – Ultramontanismo – oriente islamico.

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