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Research Abstract

CHILDREN IN HOLY WAR c. 1100-1300

This study provides new information about the role of children in high medieval ideological warfare between the years 1100 and 1300. The analysis concentrates on the underage actions in the crusader army, adolescent involvement in combat and the distinct features of crusader children in the sources' descriptions of them.

The second major is to analyze the mechanism of becoming a crusader: the schemes and structures relating medieval childhood to crusading and ideological warfare in the broader context of the popularization of the crusading ideal and the military-ideological indoctrination of children and young adults in the medieval west. While the great majority of medieval Europeans did not personally attend fighting against the enemies of the Church, they were committed to the shared ideas of enmity at an early age, and raised up in an atmosphere strongly supportive of religious warfare. Crusading had a profoundly integrating effect on the developing idea of western Christendom.

Whereas the issue of the use of child soldiers in contemporary warfare has remained the object of vigorous debate and research, its historical background has attracted far less attention. Crusading represents the medieval ideal of meritorious warfare, as well as one of the first popular mass movements in Europe. The phenomenon was exceptionally well documented by contemporaries. While the pontifical effort significantly contributed to the institutional and political interpretation of the First Crusade, the cultural rooting of the phenomenon fused papal instigation and ecclesiastically approved preaching with vernacular epic poetry and medieval folklore. The source material for this research consists of chronicles, letters and charters, penitentials, sermons, canon and secular law and the whole apparatus of texts produced by the papal curia. When available, Islamic historiography will be consulted concerning the presence of children in Syro-Palestine warfare. Between factual and fictional texts, semi-fictional works of hagiography and the polemical lives of Muhammad that were written in the west, as well as crusader genealogies, form an interrelating historiographical connective between the learned and popular sources.

Methodologically, the approach will be based upon critical textual comparison between different source groups, beginning with chronicles and ecclesiastical texts written for didactic purposes from the first decade of the twelfth century until the year 1300. The study considers the variety of writing contexts affecting the production of texts, presenting a context-oriented interpretation of the treated sources. A special emphasis will be laid upon the relation between medieval historiography and other genres.