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The functional dimension of
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Advanced Humanities*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.58256/g9e71x53>**The functional dimension of crusade literature: A comparative perspective**Mahmoud Jaran^{1*}, Asef Khaldi²¹ Department of European Languages, School of Foreign Languages,
University of Jordan.² Amman, Jordan.*Corresponding author e-mail: m.jaran@ju.edu.jo <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3628-2092>**Abstract**

From the late eleventh century to the present, the Crusades had a profound impact on popular culture, politics and imagination. Drawing on recent studies, this article explores the functional dimension of literature regarding the Crusades in both European vernacular and Arabic contexts. It argues that literary representations of the Crusades serve distinct purposes within each cultural sphere while also highlighting shared motifs and themes. These representations vary in their functions from historical documentation to political exhortation, as seen in Arabic medieval poetry, troubadour poems and Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. The study underscores the significance of literature in shaping political consciousness, showing how it transcended artistic boundaries to become social and political instrument. The comparative analysis of these two literary traditions highlights their shared focus on the use of literature as a means of influencing political thought and action, despite their differing cultural contexts.

Keywords: Arabic poetry, comparative literature, Italian literature, Torquato Tasso, Troubadour

Introduction

The idea that literature can transcend its artistic nature and its function in creativity and human expression to directly influence on reality might appear fantastical. However, this notion gains traction when examining the intricate relationship between politics and history, both of which can exert a direct influence on literary content. Given the central focus of this paper on the Crusades, one might observe the significant impact of these campaigns on history and the enduring resonance they have left in the cultural and political spheres, even in the present day. Political figures worldwide have frequently invoked the Crusades on numerous occasions to describe, justify, or actively attempt to shape contemporary realities through various narratives. Consider, for example, the legacy these wars have left in international politics, such as the American propaganda campaign titled “The Crusade for Freedom” launched by General Eisenhower in 1950, or in the sphere of intercultural and interreligious relations, particularly following the “crusade” declared by then-U.S. President George W. Bush against Iraq in 2001. Conversely, there is an aspiration for literature to directly and actively engage with these campaigns, either in texts that were contemporary with the campaigns themselves or in later works that sought to revive them, such as Torquato Tasso’s *Jerusalem Liberated*. How does this aspiration manifest in the context of Arabic and Western literature? Addressing this complex question requires examining key ideas, identifying specific and demonstrably direct literary examples, and emphasizing the functional dimension of these texts. Such an exploration offers vital insights into the complex relationship between the Crusades and their representation in literature, politics, and the broader cultural sphere—a phenomenon worthy of our attention.

This paper will study the functional dimension of literature in relation to the Crusades in both European and Arab contexts by demonstrating that literary representations of the Crusades serve distinct purposes within each cultural field, while also highlighting common motifs and themes. Among the most significant of these themes is historical documentation and political exhortation, which the article focuses on as an effective tool in the active interaction between medieval Arabic and European literature on the one hand and politics on the other. Osman Latiff has extensively covered Arabic poetics during the period of the crusades in his important work *The Cutting Edge of the Poet’s Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades* (2017), alongside the works of Carole Hillenbrand (2000; 2020, most notably the chapter entitled “Jihad of Poetry during the Crusades”, which provided us with an opportunity to engage in debate with Arabic sources regarding the significance of Arabic poetry on the subject of the Crusades - which the author refers to as “*jihad* poetry” - as well as its function and influence during its time and in the later centuries), in addition to many Arab sources (Abd al-Mahdi, 2013; Al-Aṭawi, 1997; Ḥamza, 1984). On the European side, there are also numerous studies covering Western literary writings on the crusades (Bale, 2019; Parson & Paterson, 2018; Paterson, 2018) whose theoretical aspects are of interest to this research. There are also Marcus Bull’s *Eyewitness and Crusade Narrative* (2018) which provides close analysis to the Second, Third, and Fourth Crusades, and Theodore Evergates’ recent book *Geoffroy of Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne* (2023), which traces the life of the French knight and historian who chronicled the Fourth Crusade.

Although the history of crusade literature has been a fruitful field of research in recent years, including works that compare Arab and Frankish sources (see, for example, Van Den Bossche, 2018), this article aims to discuss the specific textual application of themes related to the function of both Arabic and Western poetry and their engagement with the geopolitical events of the Crusades era. While

the Crusades were rarely featured in Arabic poetry from the Ottoman period onward—a phenomenon attributed to the decline of the Arabic poetic genre of *qasida* (epic poem), which, as modern literary scholars observe, deteriorated during the Ottoman period (Sokolov, 2022, p. 337)—the resurgence of poetry calling for their revival reached its peak with Torquato Tasso, a figure to whom the final part of this study is dedicated. Tasso artistically encapsulates all the elements discussed in crusade literature. However, the objectivity of this research and the comparative approach require us to consider Arab sources (including early texts) alongside European ones, in an effort to complete the picture impartially, at least on the theoretical side.

The Crusades in Arabic poetry

Arabic literature—and poetry in particular—has been concerned with the conditions of Arabs for many centuries, starting from pre-Islamic wars, through the Islamic conquests in the Levant and North Africa, encompassing governance affairs within these vast territories, to the social and cultural currents that shaped Arab lives. It is certain that Arabic poetry in the Islamic world associated with wars and the fight against “infidels” did not begin with the Crusader era, but rather it is as old as Islam itself. It is enough to mention the poet Hassan ibn Thabit, who accompanied the Prophet and described his battles against his enemies, as well as Abu Tammam (d. 845), who lived under the patronage of the Abbasid caliph al-Mu‘tasim and provided a remarkable depiction of the Battle of Amorium. We should also not forget the poets al-Mutanabbi (915-965) and Abu Firas al-Hamdani (932-968), two Abbasid poets who were closely associated with the court of Sayf al-Dawla al-Hamdani, praising him for his leadership in the Battle of al-Hadath against the Byzantines. The Crusades offer no exception to this literary preoccupation. According to Abdul Latif Hamza, during the Crusades, Arabic poetry served two crucial functions. Firstly, it served as a constant reminder to leaders of the core objective: the expulsion of the Franks, particularly from Jerusalem. Secondly, it functioned as a means of chronicling significant occurrences and reporting them to the Caliph (Hamza, 1948, p. 19). An illustrative example of this is found in a poem written by Abu al-Muzaffar al-Abīwardī, which provides a vivid and exemplary documentation of the plight of Muslims in Jerusalem during the First Crusade. This poem not only chronicles historical events, but it also serves as a powerful exhortation against forgetting the Levant and the imperative of confronting the Franks, as he says:

To shed tears is a man’s worst weapon when the swords stir up the embers of war/ Sons of Islām,
behind you are battles in which heads rolled at your feet. (Ibn al-Athir, 1987, p. 189-190)

The poem extends to twenty-two verses, and culminates in an enthusiastic call to arms, urging both Arabs and *‘Ajam* (Muslims of other ethnicities) to retaliate against the Franks’ atrocities through combat and decisive victory. The traumatic spectacle of the cruel occupation and looting of Jerusalem sparked a strong sense of shock and indignation among the Muslim population (Maalouf, 1983). However, this shock did not allow writers and poets to transcend reality through more “canonical” literary texts, whether in terms of structural complexity or intellectual depth. In other words, it did not produce great poets like al-Mutanabbi or Abu Tammām. During the Crusades, poetry and prose were limited to texts similar to those composed by al-Abīwardī, including the works of Ibn al-Khayyat, Ibn Munir al-Tarabulsi, Ibn al-Qaysarani, al-‘Imād al-Isfahānī, and Usāmah ibn Munqidh (al-Sarisi, 2011, p. 105-108; al-Atawi, 1997), and others whose poetry is found in Muslim chronicles and anthologies of medieval literature.

In her remarkable essay, Carole Hillenbrand (2022) finds it surprising that despite the significance of poetry written during the Crusader era, “such poetry has not been discussed under the category of religious or political poetry, in any of the standard works of scholarship on classical Arabic literature” (234). This raises a central question that has been tackled by numerous scholars and historians, regarding the expected proportion between the “quantity” and the “quality” of literary function within the specific poetic tradition surrounding the Crusades. Certain Arab historians (Hamza, 1948; Abdul Mahdi, 2013 among others) contend that the poetic response failed to resonate adequately with the magnitude of the event which lasted for a long time and was repeated in successive campaigns for centuries. For example, Abdul Mahdi (2013) discerns neither an abundance nor a distinct standard that sufficiently captures the significance of the historical event. According to the Jordanian researcher, this dearth may be attributed to two potential factors: firstly, the inherent characteristic of Arabic poetry as a celebratory form primarily focused on victories rather than laments for defeats (p. 15). Secondly, the fall of Jerusalem under occupation and the subsequent demise of “a significant number of poets residing there” (p. 26) could have conceivably disadvantaged the creation and transmission of poetic responses to the tragedy. Abdul Mahdi highlights a critical point regarding the weakness in the function of poetry, particularly in its treatment of Jerusalem as the center of the conflict between the Franks and the Muslims. While this observation holds some merit, it is important to acknowledge that the profound significance of Jerusalem as the heart of the struggle only crystallized as propaganda after the Franks seized control of the city. Prior to the occupation, such awareness arguably remained in its early stages within the broader societal consciousness (see the discussion on this issue in Latiff, 2018, p. 31).

In light of the perspectives of many contemporary historians—excluding Masad al-Atawi (1997), who fully agrees with Hillenbrand on the significance and impact of this literary heritage (p. 8)—it becomes clear that Arabic poetry merely accompanied the events of the Crusades and their real-world consequences. It becomes evident that Arabic poetry merely kept pace with the events of the Crusades and their real-world repercussions. In other words, its role was limited to documenting victories, defeats, and various other occurrences, while also articulating the state of affairs of the people in economic, psychological, cultural, and political terms during the Crusades. At its best, and to some extent, Arabic poetry supported the Islamic armies and their leaders, such as Imad al-Din Zengi, Nur ad-Din Zengi, Saladin, and others. According to these historians, this limited role of poetry persisted throughout the Crusades, never transcending its functional boundaries to reach a critical, artistic, or aesthetic stage that would embrace broader intellectual or literary epic dimensions.

Hillenbrand partially agrees with this perspective, identifying political and social reasons for the lack of fighting spirit among the Arabs at the beginning of the First Crusade and the delay of the inhabitants of Palestine and Syria in uniting under a single banner for nearly half a century (p. 235). However, she argues that with the arrival of Nur al-Din Zengi (1118–1174), the Muslim leader who began turning the tide against the Franks, religious books and sermons proliferated and spread rapidly, and the theme of “*fada'il al-Quds*” (the Merits of Jerusalem) became more firmly established (p. 235) (This is true to the extent that entire poetic collections dedicated solely to the city of Jerusalem began to emerge, such as *Diwan al-Mubashirat wal-Qudsiat* by the Andalusian physician Abd al-Mun'im al-Jilani (1136–1206)). Poetry, though primarily composed to laud Nur al-Din's virtues, began to take on a stronger religious and educational tone compared to earlier popular poems. By way of example, Hillenbrand cites the poetry of Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who accompanied Nur al-Din, as well as the

poem by Ibn Jubayr praising Saladin. She culminates these examples with a distinctive analysis of Ibn 'Unayn's poem on the Ayyubid victory over the Franks, demonstrating that it contains all the literary elements necessary to be considered one of the greatest poems in the Arabic language of its kind.

Another point on which historians might not agree on is the extent to which Arabic poetry influenced collective consciousness, whether during the Crusader era or in the subsequent centuries. It should be noted at the outset that the Crusades left an impact on popular memory (including in works such as *One Thousand and One Nights*) as well as on a corpus of prose and documentary literary works. Notable among these are the memoirs of Usama bin Munqidh, the author of *Kitab al-I'tibar*, which focuses on specific details of his life, particularly his experiences during the First, Second, and Third Crusades. Similarly, Baha al-Din ibn Shaddad's *al-Nawādir al-Sultaniyya wa'l-Mahāsīn al-Yūsufiyya* offers instrumental insights drawn from personal observations of Saladin, shedding light on how the Kurdish leader was perceived within the Muslim community (The Italian Arabist Francesco Gabrieli (2009) described the book as "an excellent historical and biographical source, dictated by sincere devotion and admiration unmixed with servile flattery and based for the most part on personal observation". (p. xxiv)). Within this context, it is worth mentioning that the letter exchange between the Qadi al-Fadil and Imad al-Din al-Isfahani holds significance as well as relevance. This correspondence, reflecting their respective positions as officials in Saladin's administrations, illuminates a spectrum of daily social, administrative, and military events during his leadership.

Despite the proliferation of prose writings and religious sermons and books in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, poetry remained closer and more intimate to the public and the popular collective consciousness. This can be attributed to several reasons, the most important of which is that poetry was closely tied to the Arab audience in terms of artistic taste and collective memory. Moreover, the poems composed by professional poets often presented a high-level linguistic model that was more suitable for linguistic and rhetorical education compared to other literary genres. If these poems carried exhortational content, they would certainly be, as Osman Latiff notes (2017), "a popular and traditional way to whip up public fervour, particularly for a people appreciative of the niceties of Arabic grammar and rhetoric". (p. 37). Since much of the Arabic poetry related to the Crusades was composed during critical historical moments, it played a powerful role in influencing Islamic societies by shaping stereotypes of the European Christian as an "infidel" and, therefore, the religious "Other", an image that has persisted to the present day, in addition to constructing a narrative surrounding the recapture of Jerusalem and the glorious victory at the Battle of Hattin (Hillenbrand, 2022, p. 245). Aware of the lasting impact of the stereotypes created by Arabic poetry during the Crusades on later centuries, Hillenbrand concludes her article by tracing this influence:

The selfsame tropes and stereotypical language resurface throughout the Ottoman in prose and poetry alike, from an anonymous Ottoman account of the Turkish victory over the Hungarians at Nicopolis in 1396 to the inflated and vainglorious ode written by al-Budayr to celebrate the victory of Jazzar Pasha over Napoleon near Acre in 1799. These formulae, then, survived in almost unaltered form for almost a millennium - and their day is not yet over. (p. 245)

Scholars and historians who dismiss or downplay the influence of poetry and literature written about the Crusades in the present day often attribute this, firstly, to the fact that this literature remained limited, primarily revolving around the theme of praising leaders and gaining favor through the description of their military achievements. The second reason relates to these works' inability to reach

a level capable of creating contemporary literary models inspired by the historical conflict between Muslims and the Franks. Evidence of this can be seen in the absence of serious Arabic literature on the Crusades that could be compared to European literary output. For instance, renowned scholar and leading researcher in this field, Qasim Abdu Qasim (1987), argues that contemporary Arabic literature in its treatment of the Crusades suffers from many deficiencies, including a lack of awareness of the value of this experience... despite the fact that the Islamic confrontation with Crusader aggression can reveal to Arab audiences a unique set of national symbols that can illuminate our path” (p. 16, our translation).

The author undoubtedly recognizes the significant and disastrous consequences of this deficiency, to the extent that the Arab cultural perspective regarding contemporary literature and history has deteriorated in favor of a European cultural perspective (p. 13).

Although the author is not referring solely to literature but to studies and research in general, his thesis does not necessarily apply only to the Crusades era but to all periods of conflict between the Islamic East and the Christian West, including the Ottoman wars and the European colonial period in the Middle East and North Africa. Regarding the theme of praising leaders, it cannot be ignored that this was closely tied to the fact that the most important poets during the Crusades were intimately connected to centers of power (e.g., al-Abiwardi and Nizam al-Mulk; Imad al-Din al-Isfahani and Nur al-Din Zengi; Ibn Jubayr and Saladin; Ibn Unayn and Sultan al-Kamil, etc.). It is true that the element of praise was sometimes exaggerated to the point that these poems were unable to contribute to constructing a reliable narrative for historical studies. However, their political significance cannot be denied. Were it not for their importance, Muslim leaders would not have sought to draw these poets into their circles. Although these poetic works are often criticized for not receiving significant attention in the scholarship on classical Arabic literature, they were, in their time, of unparalleled interest among both elites and the general public, particularly during the period of Nur al-Din Zengi and beyond. This was when the poems took on a specific and direct purpose related to moral mobilization and propaganda. Regardless of the debate over the artistic value of these works, we fully agree with Hillenbrand that Arabic poetry related to the Crusades was distinct from poetry of any other era, due to its *functional* nature, which was tied to urging combat and the reclaiming of lands occupied by the Franks.

European Crusade literature

What was unfolding in the field of writing on the northern shores of the Mediterranean during the Crusades? Was there a distinct body of literature dedicated to the Crusades with specific functions in Europe? While Arab critics and historians have generally agreed to refer to the group of poems about the Frankish invasion of Jerusalem as “Crusader literature” (acknowledging that it does not form a clear and explicit literary genre), efforts have been made to classify European literary writings on the same subject as an independent literary genre. Noteworthy among these endeavors is that of Kurt Lewent, which led to the creation of the category known as the “Crusade songs” (Kurt 1905, see also Dijkstra, 1995; Routledge, 2002; Golden, 2020). Nevertheless, it is imperative not to disregard texts that, while not directly centered on the Crusades, prominently feature their core theme—the conflict between Christians and the Islamic East. An example of this is the *Chansons de geste*, particularly the *Chanson de Roland*, which is inspired by Charlemagne’s campaign against the Arabs in Spain, culminating in the Battle of Roncevaux on August 15, 778 (Idris, 2022). Additionally, there are the chronicles that

contributed, in later centuries, to the reconstruction of the historical events of the Crusades (Lapina, 2019, p. 11-25). While the boundaries between historical works and literary texts may *seem distinct*, the two genres often overlap in certain respects—particularly regarding notions of “historical truth”—and frequently intersect in their portrayals of Christians and their nobility, in contrast to Muslims, who are often demonized. Consider, for instance, the *Gesta Francorum*, which goes as far as describing Saracens as *excommunicata generatione*, their language as *demoniaca*, with their mosques depicted as *domus diabolica* (Ramey, 2019, p. 137; Cole, 1993, p. 92). This narrative unequivocally suggests that the subject at hand extends beyond *casus belli*, but it also deals with *causa justa* which carries within it the moral and ethical elements that justify and legitimize the conflict, based on the link between the military factor and the religious pilgrimage (Bale, 2019, p. 1).

If the *Chansons de geste*, particularly the *Chanson de Roland* (version 2012), emphasize that “Pagans are wrong and Christians are right” (p. 1015), then this sentiment is echoed in the chronicles and poetry of the troubadours. This resonance manifests in their profound alignment not only with chivalric ideals, but also with the prevailing Christian doctrine, as revealed in their portrayal of the heroic images of the Crusades, celebrating the bravery and determination of its participants. In tracing the work of Cathrynke Dijkstra and Martin Gosman (1995), we find that discerning poetic texts classifiable as “crusade songs” proves challenging. This complexity arises due to the inclusion of poems in the corpus, some of which prominently feature the crusades as their central theme, while others merely reference them to intensify “the emotional situation” (p. 19). Despite the difficulty of definition, it is still possible to distinguish certain preserved poems that are directly or indirectly related to the Crusades, according to their formal structures, linguistic attributes, occasions and historical contexts of composition, or thematic elements. Some of these poems address the theme of separation from the beloved or *chanson de départie* – see for example Conon de Béthune’s *Abi! Amors, com dure departie* -, others explore the theme of love fused with chivalry, and some, which is of interest to us here, focus on the theme of the poet’s exhortation to the leaders to launch crusades, with texts reaching the point of serving as propaganda. Luca Barbieri (2018) distinguishes between these types of crusade songs pointing out that: Among the various types of crusade song, we may at least distinguish between exhortations to take part in a crusade (*Aufrufslieder*) – propaganda texts which often relaunch themes expressed in papal bulls, official documents of kings and lords, and in types of preaching; political *sirventes* containing references to the Holy Land; and love songs of *chansons de départie*” (p. 76).

Consider, for instance, Marcabru’s *Pax in nomine Domini* which was composed during the Second Crusade, probably after the abortive siege of Damascus. In the poem, he calls for the *purification* of Spain and the Holy Land from Muslims. Linda Paterson (2019), commenting this poem, distinguishes appropriately between Occitan songs of exhortation (like the one above), and the French crusade songs of exhortations. She says:

The mixture of praise and blame here anticipates a typical feature of Occitan songs of exhortation which, unlike French ones, in the vast majority of cases target specific noblemen, named or implied. Troubadours extol those leaders who have distinguished themselves in their eagerness to take the cross or by their successes in the field, and chide them for their tardiness or disinterest. (41-42).

This poetic theme does not differ significantly from what we observed in the previous section, regarding Arabic poetry and its *function* in exhorting Muslim leaders and political governors to confront Frankish attacks. By the time of the Third Crusade, poetry related to this function had intensified in

both the East and the West. Just as al-Dimashqi and Imad al-Din al-Isfahani urged Saladin to wage *jihad*, Bertran de Born urged Richard the Lionheart to undertake the crusade against Muslims. It is noteworthy that some poets, in both camps, shared close personal ties with their leaders. This is the case of al-Isfahani, who accompanied Saladin in his life and battles, and of the relationship between de Born and Richard, which experienced fluctuations over many years in the East and the West. This explains, among other things, poets' effective role in exhortation and their calls for immediate action, as well as the variation in tone in response to evolving military events: from mobilization to siege, from fighting to liberation prospects, and ultimately to liberation accompanied, naturally, by the motif of praise.

The crusade song in the period of the Third and Fourth Crusades witnessed a remarkable development in the theme of love mixed with exhortation. The poet Conon de Béthune provides one of the well-known examples in this field in his *Ahi! Amors, com dure departie*:

Ahi! Amors, com dure departie
me convenra faire de la millor
ki onques fust amee ne servie!
Diex me ramaint a li par sa douçour,
si voirement ke m'en part a dolor.
Las! k'ai je dit? Ja ne m'en part je mie!
Se li cors va servir Nostre Signor,
li cuers remaint del tot en sa baillie (Conon RS 1152).

(Ah, Love, how hard it will be for me to part from the best lady who was ever loved and served! May God in his sweetness bring me back to her, as truly as I leave her in sorrow. Alas! What have I said? I am not leaving her at all! If my body goes off to serve our Lord, my heart remains entirely in her service) (RS 1125, See also the analysis of the song provided by Luca Barbieri 2019, p. 77-79) and Linda Paterson (2019, p. 41).

The poet expresses the drama of parting from his beloved and his response to the call to battle in the Near East and the Holy Land. After justifying this sorrowful separation and emphasizing the importance of the religious duty that compels him to participate in the campaign, the poet-knight turns to the theme of exhortation by urging believers to engage in the religious conflict unfolding in the East, even if it costs them their lives.

Ki chi ne velt avoir vie anuieuse
si voist por Dieu morir liés et joieus,
ke cele mors est douce et savereuse
dont on conquiert le resne presieus;
ne ja de mort nen i morra .i. sels,
ains naisteront en vie glorieuse;
ki revenra moult sera eüreus,
a tos jors mais en iert honors s'espeuse. (Conon RS 1152)

(Let anyone who does not wish to lead a discreditable life go and die gladly and joyfully for God, for

that death through which one wins the precious realm is sweet and delectable; and not a single one of them will die there from death, but rather all will be born into glorious life; anyone who returns will be most happy; glory will for evermore be his spouse).

Among the extensive repertoire of Arabic poems advocating for the incitement of leaders or the general public to fight against invaders, well-known verses by Ibn al-Qaysarani emerge bearing notable resemblance to the passage of Conon above. Particularly evident is their shared ideological emphasis on the importance of engaging in conflict and shedding blood in order to cleanse the Holy Land.

Similar to Conon at the beginning of his poem, Ibn al-Qaysarani initially employs the first-person pronoun “I,” but soon shifts to the inclusive “we,” thereby broadening the perspective to encompass others. He says in it:

It's as if my determination knows no limit
Even to its farthest reaches, where matters are decided
And the Holy Land has become pure
Only its stream running with blood *purifies* it

(Ibn al-Qaysarani, PE. Our translation and our italics. Note that poets on both sides use the term “purification” to signify the reclaiming of land from invaders: Marcabru, as we have seen, calls for the purification of Spain from the Muslims, while Ibn al-Qaysarani calls for the purification of Jerusalem from the Crusaders).

The difference between the two poems, and generally between Arabic poetry addressing conflicts with the Franks and European crusade songs, lies in the absence of the theme of love in the former. While Arab poets engaged in conflicts with the Franks occasionally explored the theme of love in their poetry, (see, for instance, the poems of Ibn Al-Qaysarani which depict the presence of European women. One of his poems reads: “A Frankish woman has captivated me/ The scent of perfume wafts from her/ In her dress is a soft branch/ In her crown is a shining moon/ If there is blue in her eye/ Then the spearhead is blue” (PE)), it did not evolve into a distinct and systematic approach within a defined corpus, as is the case with troubadours and trouvères. Among the latter ones, what is particularly intriguing is those who dealt with the theme of *amor de lonh*, such as Cercamon. Others, like Jaufré Rudel, went even further, letting the imagination sail *outramer* to celebrate the beauty of Hodierna, Countess of Tripoli, composing for her one of the most famous troubadour songs: *Lanquan li jorn son lonc en mai*. According to legend, Rudel, captivated by tales of her beauty from European pilgrims, decided to participate in the Crusades and travel east to see her. However, fate had it that the man fell ill during the journey, so people carried him to the shore. Countess Hodierna, upon learning of his plight, descended from her palace and hurried to his side, where the poet died in her arms thereafter (Wolf & Rosenstein, 1983). As for William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, he was not only a pioneer of troubadour poetry but also one of the leaders of the 1101 Crusade. In his *Farai un vers pos mi sonelh*, the poet encounters an Arab woman and quickly becomes captivated by her aura of mystery and exotic allure. This fascination is heightened by the barrier of language, as she speaks in a tongue unfamiliar to him (her “Latin”), further amplifying the mystique.

La una-m diz en son latin:
“O, Deus vos salv, don pelerin;

Mout mi semblatz de belh aizin,
Mon escient;
Mas trop vezem anar pel mond de folla gent”.
Ar auzires qu’ai respondutz;
Anc no li diz ni ba ni butz,
Ni fer ni fust no ai mentagutz,
Mas sol aitan:
“Babariol, babariol, barbarian”. (trobar.org).

(One told me in her tongue: / “God save you, Sir Pilgrim; / you certainly look of high status, / in my opinion, / but we see so many fools going around the world”. // And hear what I answered; / I didn’t say “ah” nor “bah” / (neither did I mention iron nor wood) / but only as much as: / “Babariol, babariol, barbarian”)

Although the poet comprehends the intention behind her words, he tactfully refrains from responding in a straightforward manner. Instead, he deliberately addresses her in a manner that renders the known ambiguous, the evident obscure, and the simple linguistic form a collection of enigmas (Stanescu, 1989). However, this “inability” to express oneself does not necessarily hinder communication between carriers of different cultures. In fact, linking this issue to medieval Orientalism, Lynn Ramey (2019) suggests that this linguistic inability is merely a form of expression of the sexually charged encounter between cultures (141). This interpretation implies that romantic adventures of this nature are a continuation of an Orientalist viewpoint that began with the representation of Eastern women in *Chansons de geste*, moved through troubadour songs, and persisted into later historical periods. This perspective sought to highlight the sensual portrayal of the cultural “Other” in relation to the Western knight’s masculine ideals, while simultaneously symbolizing the desire, conquest, and subjugation of this “Other” and its colonization.

The previous considerations reveal that Western writings during the Crusades are marked by several recurring functional elements. These elements, albeit scattered and dispersed throughout these texts, can be broadly categorized based on how closely they conform to or deviate from historical truth. In both cases, these texts tend to be biased towards Christian Europe (“Pagans are wrong and Christians are right”); exhortation of leaders and the general public to head towards the Holy Land; chivalry and its exploits with a particular emphasis on masculine virtues and values (Mesley, 2019, p. 146-163); the theme of love, which is typically associated with romantic chivalry and Orientalist visions of the religious “Other.”

Torquato Tasso

It was necessary to wait until the sixteenth century – after the opening of the Council of Trent and the beginning of the Catholic Counter-Reformation – for these elements to appear together in a single literary work, namely, *Jerusalem Delivered* by the Italian poet Torquato Tasso.

To what extent is it possible, in the narrative field, to falsify the history of the Crusades, or at least for the author to vacillate between closeness and distance from historical truth? Italian literary historian Francesco De Sanctis provides insight into this question as he discusses the poetry of Tasso:

Tasso aimed to create a genuinely heroic poem, infused with a religious spirit, grounded in

historical events, and as close to truth or plausibility as possible. He sought a marvel that could be naturally explained, and a structure so coherent and simple that it would approach logical perfection. This was his classical ideal, which he endeavored to achieve and articulated in his writings on the heroic poem and poetry (512, our translation).

And few pages later, he returns to the same topic by asserting that Tasso:

He was particularly intent on giving his poem an appearance of credibility and realism. He selected his elements from history, striving for accuracy in names and places, and aimed for a plausible connection in the plot. Like a sculptor, he magnified his characters with such proportionality that they seem to be drawn from reality (518, our translation).

However, Tasso was fully aware of the importance of ‘falsifying’ the facts of the clashes between Christians and Muslims on the walls of Jerusalem, driven by ‘sacred’ religious motives no less significant than the aesthetic necessities articulated by the poet in the form of an official apology to the goddess of epic inspiration in the opening verses of *Jerusalem Liberated*. In the prologue, Tasso explicitly suggests that the events he is about to narrate will not align with historical accuracy. He justified this ideologically, motivated by his intellectual desire to awaken Europeans to the imminent Islamic threat embodied with the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The poet dedicates his epic to the Duke of Ferrara - Cardinal Ippolito d’Este - urging him to mobilize and prepare the armies for a renewed expedition towards Jerusalem, in order to revive the legacy of the Crusades and for Christian Europe to regain control of the Holy City. Apart from the ideological factor, there is also an aesthetic issue that justifies Tasso’s distancing from historical truth regarding the Islamic-Christian clash. Tasso warns the goddess of inspiration that history, if “falsified” within the poetic context, will find greater acceptance among the readership:

Sai che là corre il mondo, ove più versi
Di sue dolcezze il lusinghier Parnaso;
E che ’l vero condito in molli versi,
I più schivi allettando ha persuaso.

(You know how, where Parnassus most proffers / its flattering sweets, the world flocks in delight, / yet how, by charming in mellifluous verse, / Truth has disposed the most depraved to right.) (Tasso, 2029, p. 3).

Regarding the characteristic/theme of chivalry, it is consistently attributed to the knights in the Christian camp and is never associated, even remotely, with the Muslim fighters, who are already bound by qualities of savagery and primitiveness that do not elevate them to the level of Christian chivalric nobility. Reinforcing this dichotomy is the portrayal of female characters, all of whom belong to the Muslim camp. The only difference is that the Muslim woman, in Tasso’s epic, has a sole route to salvation: to fall in love with one of the Christian knights and then convert to Christianity. From this perspective, Tasso’s literary production aligns with the medieval crusade literature paradigm, wherein “Saracens may come close to the Christian ideal, but they can never, from the outset, equal Christians because of their religious flaw. Conversion should provoke a conundrum in this East- West dichotomy, but somehow the stories always seem to end with the moment of conversion, so we are never presented

with a good Saracen Christian”. (Ramey, 2019, p. 143).

Taking a retrospective glance, Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* differs from *Jerusalem Delivered*, particularly concerning the portrayal of chivalry among knights from both sides: Christian and Muslim. Ariosto, in the midst of the Christian-Muslim conflict, focused on the chivalric nobility of both sides of the conflict. It suffices to mention the incident of the Christian Rinaldo during his duel with the Muslim Ferrau and their mutual decision, after a long combat, to shake hands and embark on a journey together in search of the oriental beauty Angelica. It would be valuable to note that the twentieth-century Italian writer Italo Calvino (1996) commented on this incident, emphasizing that the conflict between Muslims and Christians in *Orlando Furioso* cannot be purely ideological, but rather does not go beyond the conflict between the black and white pieces on a chessboard (p. XLIII). This point specifically does not only exclude the ideological dimensions and their impact on the narrative truth, but also establishes a neutral perspective capable of mitigating historical truth on one hand, and transcending the pitfalls of self-praise and demonization of the other on the other hand. In analyzing *Orlando Furioso*, Calvino (1996) explains the gap between historical facts and literary representations of the Christian-Muslim conflict by articulating that:

Among the many wars that Charlemagne fought and won against the Bavarians, Frisians, Slavs, Avars, Bretons, and Lombards, those against the Arabs occupy relatively little space in the history of the emperor of the Franks; however, in literature, they were magnified to the point of involving the entire world and filled the pages of entire libraries. In the imagination of poets—and even earlier in the popular imagination—the events are arranged in a perspective different from that of history: the perspective of myth. (p. XXV. Our translation).

Conclusion

In light of this research, it becomes evident that literature in both the Arab and Western worlds, during crusade era, carried significant political and social functional dimensions, despite the theoretical challenges faced by scholars in categorizing these works within a unified framework. The classification of “Crusade literature” in Europe and *adab al-horoub al-salibiya* (Crusades’ Wars literature) in Arab world proved complex due to the diversity of texts and literary experiences. However, common themes emerge between the two, with literature in both cultures being employed as an effective exhortatory tool. Western literature often focused on glorifying leaders and encouraging expansion, while Arab literature expressed resistance and liberation from Frankish domination, urging people to rise against the occupiers.

In this context, literary utilization stands as the most critical element, as literature transcended its traditional role to become a powerful mobilizing tool, sometimes linked to centers of political power. This research demonstrates that literature played a pivotal role in shaping political and collective consciousness, making it a propagandistic instrument in both resisting and supporting crusade campaigns. Accordingly, the study recommends expanding such research to include contemporary narratives and novels, with the aim of examining how historical events from the crusade era are invoked and reflected in the present. Exploring these narratives can contribute to a deeper understanding of the enduring impact of these events on modern literature and political thought.

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