



ARTICLE

Crusade, Culture, and Conflict: The Evidence of Monastic Miscellanies

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Abstract

“Later” crusading has become a vibrant field in recent years, with a concern for our core theme, “patterns of conflict and negotiation,” at its center. Often, and rightly enough, those patterns have been focused on matters of high politics and diplomacy, military affairs, papal propaganda, and more. The approach adopted here complements these efforts by modulating their perspectives. This article explores patterns of conflict and negotiation as they played out in the realms of crusading experience, culture, and memory in the wake of the fall of Constantinople (1453) and the siege of Belgrade (1456). It does so through the lens of those particularly rich, but also challenging, fifteenth-century manuscript sources known as “miscellanies.”

Keywords: crusade; memory; siege of Belgrade; medieval manuscripts; miscellanies; later middle ages; fall of Constantinople

Until her untimely death five decades ago on 26 December 1973, Dr. Henny Grüneisen was for many years a valued member of a team of scholars dedicated to editing the proceedings of the Holy Roman Empire’s fifteenth-century assemblies. Early on in those efforts, she found herself drawn to widespread late medieval enthusiasm for recovering texts related to the early crusades. Among her most intriguing leads was a purported fifteenth-century copy of Robert the Monk’s *History of the First Crusade*. In pursuit of that text, she soon found herself on a journey that led her from Harburg to Füssing to Salzburg, and then finally to the nearby abbey of Michaelbeuern. The first journey there was a failure—with no good directions or information, no reliable map, only a hunch, Dr. Grüneisen set out from Salzburg by bus, and then found herself hitchhiking, only to arrive after sunset at an inaccessible library. But the second trip, on a sunny Sunday some six months later, was a success. It was then that she properly identified the manuscript and solved the case. Georg Liebenknecht, among the most famous of Michaelbeuern’s medieval abbots, had likely purchased the book, or had it compiled, in the years after 1453. Motivated by the anxieties of the Ottoman threat, he had preserved his own copy of Robert’s famous history.¹

Dr. Grüneisen’s foundational work on the *Reichstagsakten* soon took her focus away from the manuscript she had identified,² but she lingered on it long enough to jot down some vital hypotheses about its significance. In her personal notes—never published—she reflected on a dossier of materials that followed Robert the Monk’s work in the Michaelbeuern manuscript. It was a collection of texts related to a dramatic crusader victory in 1456.³ In July of that year, a massive Turkish army had settled in

¹For a brief overview of Grüneisen’s life and work see the obituary by Herman Heimpel in *Historische Zeitschrift* 218 (1974): 521–22. Gabriella Annas recounts the compelling story of the journey to Michaelbeuern, reconstructed from Grüneisen’s private journal, in a podcast dedicated to the history of the *Reichstagsakten*, Nr. 3: “Die ‘Deutschen Reichstagsakten’: Archiv- und Bibliotheksrecherchen einst und jetzt,” accessed 22 July 2023, <https://www.historischekommission-muenchen.de/podcasts#c446>.

²Helmut Weigel and Henny Grüneisen, eds., *Deutsche Reichstagsakten. Ältere Reihe. XIX/1* (Göttingen, 1969); Johannes Helmraht and Gabriele Annas, eds., *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Friedrich III. Reichsversammlung zu Frankfurt 1454 (=Deutsche Reichstagsakten. Ältere Reihe. XIX/2)* and *Reichsversammlung zu Wiener Neustadt 1455 (=XIX/3)* (Munich, 2013); Duncan Hardy, *Associative Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire: Upper Germany, 1346–1521* (Oxford, 2018).

³I am grateful to Professor Annas for providing these notes from the project archives of the *Reichstagsakten* in Frankfurt, as well as a fresh typescript of certain critical passages.

before the walls of the Hungarian garrison of Nándorfehérvár, now Belgrade in modern Serbia. By the end of the month, incredible stories made their way back from the Danube frontier. Against all odds, the mighty sultan, conqueror of Constantinople, was in full retreat; wounded (as some told the tale) and driven from the walls of Belgrade by a ragtag army of ill-equipped peasants led by a seventy-year-old Italian friar, John of Capistrano, or (as others told the tale) by the clever tactics of John Hunyadi, captain of the Hungarian army and longtime veteran of wars with the Turks.⁴ Across the weeks and months that saw the unfolding of the campaign, in its immediate aftermath, and for years after, Abbot Georg and his monks preserved for themselves some of what they found most useful, meaningful, or memorable from those days: a liturgy for taking the cross, an account of the battle itself, a brief treatise on the comet that had appeared over Europe in the weeks before the battle, and decrees relating to both fundraising and liturgical observances in support of the campaign.

Henny Grüneisen's quest for Abbot Georg's codex is a compelling story in its own right as a witness to the dedication of a pioneering woman working in the postwar European academy. Her unpublished notes on its contents are equally remarkable, insofar as they reveal scholarly instincts far ahead of their time. In recent years, scholars of later-medieval culture have turned to the kinds of manuscripts she discovered for histories of reading, writing, and reception. And scholars of crusading have asked, as she did, how the reception of crusading texts might have shaped and anchored crusading remembrance and identity.⁵ As a tribute to Dr. Grüneisen's early work, this essay follows her lead back into the sources she first identified. There it seeks to recover traces of both the lived experience of crusading as a live religious choice in the middle of the fifteenth century, as well as crusading's cultural resonance in the months, years, and decades after the fall of Constantinople and the battle for Belgrade. In doing so it also aims to speak to the larger themes of conflict and community, networks and agency in Central Europe that are at the heart of this collection of essays.

Literary Crusading and the Challenge of the "Miscellany"

Henny Grüneisen encountered Belgrade's traces in the context of what late medieval manuscript scholars have come to call, somewhat helplessly, a "miscellany."⁶ The scribbly chaos of these books captures a contradiction: On the one hand, their era was a golden age of manuscript production, especially in the empire, characterized by cheap paper; dense networks of readers, writers, and compilers; networks anchored across the region's schools, universities, and religious houses; and an intense exchange of texts and ideas in towns and cities, at councils and assemblies. On the other hand, in the era before print, a reliable copy of a given text or document, or reliable news and information on key events, might still be chronically difficult to come by. Meanwhile, rumor, hearsay, doubt, forgeries, and "fake news" all competed for attention and launched their rival claims against all who tried to make sense of the wider world.⁷

The authors, copyists, compilers, and readers who set to work in that environment thus faced considerable challenges of access and accuracy. They did what they could to find reliable or useful texts and to preserve what they could, often in personal repositories of whatever they might have on hand. The books they left behind thus present modern scholars with a basic question of method: how to make sense of these compilations and their often-inscrutable blend of materials, some

⁴An accessible and updated overview of events in Norman Housley, "Giovanni da Capestrano and the Crusade of 1456," in *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Housley (Basingstoke, 2004), 94–115 and 215–24. See also James D. Mixson, *The Crusade of 1456: Sources and Documents in Translation* (Toronto, 2022).

⁵Among many works see, e.g., Megan Cassidy-Welch, ed., *Remembering the Crusades and Crusading* (London, 2017).

⁶Lucie Doležalová and Kimberly Ann Rivers, eds., *Medieval Manuscript Miscellanies* (Krems, 2013) and Sabrina Corbellini, Giovanna Murano, and Giacomo Signore, eds., *Collecting, Organizing and Transmitting Knowledge* (Turnhout, 2018).

⁷Uwe Neddermeyer, *Von der Handschrift zum gedruckten Buch: Schriftlichkeit und Leseinteresse im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1998); Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia, 2009) and "Hearsay, Belief, and Doubt: The Arrival of Antichrist in Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *Christianity and Culture in the Middle Ages*, eds. Lisa Wolverton and David Mengel (Notre Dame, 2015), 436–67.

seemingly little more than a chaotic curio cabinet or intellectual junk drawer? The best approaches to these problems now posit a spectrum of possibilities and allow for degrees or at least moments of coherence. Without falling into the trap of “ventriloquizing” through a given book, that is, of reading a “guiding intelligence” into a given volume and making unwarranted assumptions about composition or use, scholars might still discern what has been called “local” or “occasional” anthologizing—runs of texts whose booklets or gatherings reflect a recognizable, if passing, focus or purpose.⁸

Grüneisen’s discovery in Salzburg is a strong witness to precisely this kind of phenomenon. As Valentin Portnykh’s careful recent study has shown, the manuscript’s preservation of Robert the Monk reflected a wider demand for crusade texts of all kinds after 1453.⁹ Facing the Ottoman threat, and the threat of the Hussite heresy in Bohemia as well, contemporaries composed, copied, compiled, and read across a wide spectrum of genres in ways that reflected a focus on crusade. And within that general pattern, the moment that Henny Grüneisen focused on, the years that saw the fall of Constantinople and the campaign for Belgrade, seem to have produced a notable corpus of texts. A provisional census of manuscripts containing these kinds of materials suggests nearly fifty manuscripts containing bulls, preaching materials, liturgies, and battlefield dispatches, especially those from the story’s two main protagonists, John Hunyadi and John of Capistrano. Most were produced or preserved in reformed Observant communities across southern Germany and Austria. In some instances, the survivals seem merely serendipitous—a single text, or a very few folios stitched into the front or the back of a book. In others the intent seems to be something more than passing: we encounter long runs of texts on Belgrade, as at Michaelbeuern, or even entire codices that contemporaries identified as “crusading” collections.¹⁰ These patterns are perhaps partly a function of what has survived in a region whose libraries were spared some of the ravages of later centuries, but they are also surely a function of both a general Observant affinity for copying and preserving texts and a particularly catalytic nexus between reform and crusade in a region thick with new Observant networks. In the fifteenth century, once again, the old nexus of reform, preaching, propaganda, and crusade came powerfully to life in this corner of Europe.

Choosing Crusade

On the Feast of the Assumption of Mary (15 August), the Feast of St. Bernard (20 August), and the Feast of St. Bartholomew (24 August) in 1456, nine men took vows of crusade from Abbot Georg Liebknecht at the abbey of Michaelbeuern. Sometime after they took their vows, perhaps very soon after, the abbot himself found a folio that eventually made its way into the final gathering of the crusading anthology noted above, not far from his copy of Robert the Monk’s story of the First Crusade. In the right column of that folio, in his distinctly angular, left-handed scribble, the abbot recorded their names and their story. They had set out, he noted, “toward the city of Belgrade, which is some eighty miles distant from the city of Vienna, on the river which is called Sava, where the war was fought and the Christians, with God’s help, conquered the Turks—in 1456, on the vigil of St. Mary Magdalen, and then toward the city of Constantinople, which—alas!—the Turks took from the Christian faithful around three years ago and killed many Christians.”¹¹

That a proud abbot recorded the names of some local volunteers who responded to the stunning news is, in one sense, not that unusual. By the middle of August, waves of armed contingents,

⁸Derek Pearsall, “The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Miscellanies and Their Modern Interpreters,” in *Imagining the Book*, eds. Stephen M. Kelly and John Jay Johnson (Turnhout, 2005), 17–30, cited here at 18, 25, and 28.

⁹Valentin Portnykh, “Exploring the Rebirth of a Chronicle: Why Robert the Monk’s *Historia Iherosolimitana* Gained New Life in the Fifteenth Century,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 74 (2023): 39–67.

¹⁰Vienna OP 37, for example, bears a cross on its front cover and a contemporary label signaling its contents as “useful for preaching crusade against the Turks,” and an “excellent book” for signing crusaders—and preaching to them.

¹¹Salzburg, St. Peter, B IX 28, fol. 126a; Augustin Jungwirth, *Katalog der Handschriften des Stiftes St. Peter in Salzburg*, [Salzburg 1910–1912], now online, accessed 19 July 2023, <https://manuscripta.at/diglit/jungwirth/0001>. If the reference to “miles” here is roughly equivalent to the premodern “Austrian mile” of 7.5 km, the distance rendered here, of approximately 600 km, is remarkably accurate.

numbering in the thousands, had taken vows and set out from Nuremberg, Passau, and Salzburg. And in Nuremberg, as at Michaelbeuern, the city council dutifully recorded their names for posterity.¹² But this list of names, read carefully, allows us to linger on some of the questions it raises about who these nine might have been, how and why they might have come to take the cross, and why their choice might tie in to the larger themes of conflict and community at the heart of this collection of articles.

One aspect of our story's significance centers on the theme of place and community. The village then known as Beuern, about a half day's journey on foot north from Salzburg, might seem a tiny world whose era had passed it by. The local abbey, under the patronage of the Archangel Michael, the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary, had roots that reached back to the days of Charlemagne. But by the 1450s it had for generations been under the heavy hand of the Schaunberg family, who served as its advocates, and its later centuries seem to have been a time of sustained difficulties. Yet a closer look reveals a more nuanced picture. By the 1430s the archbishop of Salzburg and the Schaunbergs had brought the monastic reforms of Melk to Michaelbeuern. Georg Liebenknecht, whose modest family maintained its local roots, became a monk there in the same years, and his siblings Johannes and Friedrich became lay brothers. Brother Georg served for a time as steward, and as the curate for a nearby incorporated parish, Lamprechtshausen, about an hour or so on foot to the south. The experience and skill earned in those years were enough to earn him election as abbot of Michaelbeuern in 1440, and for three decades after he remained by all accounts a diligent and effective leader who put the community on a firm economic footing, renewed its buildings, and expanded its library. He was also a cultural broker whose horizons extended far beyond his home village. In 1448 and again in the Jubilee year of 1450, he and his companions—among them his sibling Friedrich—made their way to Rome and back, a journey of some six weeks and 1,200 miles. The 1448 journey included the purchase of fine cloth in Florence. The 1450 trip culminated in the purchase of indulgences for the abbey's churches and an audience with Pope Nicholas V.¹³ Observant Reform, pilgrimage, "Renaissance" material culture and commercial exchange, high politics, and the trade in indulgences—Michaelbeuern in Abbot Georg's day was a place alive with these universal energies.

Crusading, too, as the abbot's tersely scribbled list makes clear, was among them. In that list we see, again, historical actors who are perhaps less than central to the story of their era. These were hardly the elites who are so visible in fifteenth-century histories of imperial politics, city life, religious reform, or crusade. They were commoners with close ties to their community and the region, figures who were of at best modest means and status. At least two, Erasmus and George, were from the local village of Beuern. Erasmus was also both a surgeon (*medicus*) and a prebendary (*prebendarius*) of the local abbey. These two words hint at someone who may have been a figure of considerable status in the local community: a skilled practitioner in the art of medicine, someone who would have had some degree of experience and perhaps even formal university training, including surgery; and as a prebendary, someone who would have been entitled to some combination of an endowed cash stipend, regular provision of food and drink, clothing, and perhaps a comfortable room within the monastery precincts—the same kind of material comfort and security afforded to professed monks and nuns.¹⁴ And if this Erasmus was the same figure we know accompanied Abbot Georg on his travels across

¹²Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, ed. R. F. Kerr, 5th ed. (St. Louis, 1923), 2:410–11.

¹³Heinz Dopsch, "Michaelbeuern," in *Germania Benedictina: Die benediktinischen Mönchs- und Nonnenklöster in Österreich und Südtirol*, vol. 2, eds. Ulrich Faust and Waltraud Krassnig. (St. Ottilien, 2001), 655–758, esp. 672–77; Gerald Hirtner and Michael Fröstl, "Die Romreisen des Abts Georg Liebenknecht von Michaelbeuern (1448/1450). Edition, Kommentar und Übersetzung," in *Nach Rom Gehen. Monastische Reisekultur von der Spätantike bis in die Neuzeit*, eds. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (Vienna, 2021), 165–82; Gerald Hirtner and Michael Brauer, "Ablassbriefe aus Rom und Stoffe aus Florenz: Die Romreisen des Abts Georg Liebenknecht von Michaelbeuern in den Jahren 1448 und 1450," in *Vedi Napoli e Poi Muori – Grand Tour der Mönche*, eds. Peter Erhart and Jakob Kuratli Hübli (St. Gall, 2014), 187–95. For the reforms of Melk see now Meta Niederkorn-Bruck and Gottfried Glasner, eds., *600 Jahre Melker Reform 1418–2018* (Melk, 2022).

¹⁴Heinz Flamm, "Bader – Wundarzt – Medicus," in *Bader, Wundarzt, Medicus. Ausstellungskatalog* (Klosterneuburg, 1996), 7–40; Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 2003), 20–22; Helga Schuller, "Dos-Praebenda-Peculium," in *Festschrift für Friedrich Hausmann*, ed. Herwig Ebner (Graz, 1977), 453–87.

the Alps, he was a figure who also enjoyed both personal ties with Abbot Georg, as well as a certain authority grounded in his wider experience of a recent pilgrimage to Rome.¹⁵

Another of the crusaders was Johannes, described as an artisan (*faber*), from the nearby village of Lamprechtshausen. If the last name reflected something of his trade, Johannes may have been a person of at least modest means, and someone who may have had close ties to the monastery and its abbot—Lamprechtshausen was one of the abbey's incorporated parishes, and Abbot Georg had once served as its curate. Still another, Johannes Hebenstreit, is described as a *colonus*. The word described a wide range of farmers across the Middle Ages, but by the fifteenth century in the south German lands it may have described someone who had not only landed interests but who participated in what had long been an extensively monetized economy.¹⁶ And in this case, we encounter someone who was of means and status enough to have brought along a servant (*famulus*) to accompany him on his journey.

If we know barely enough about these figures to speculate on their place in the world around Michaelbeuern, we know even less about the other volunteers whom Abbot Georg signed with the cross: Two we know were named Peter. Another, named George Gunthering, was from the village of Grub, about an hour's walk to the east. And last on the list, we meet a Johannes from the parish of Laufen, some three hours walk from Michaelbeuern, who was all of fourteen years of age.

Abbot Georg's list of names allows little beyond these very limited conclusions, but the abundant scholarship we now have on their religious world suggests, again, how these seemingly marginal actors participated in wider religious energies characteristic of Central Europe in their day. On the one hand, our volunteers lived in a world of religion as obligation, of baptism, yearly confession, of faith as recited creed and prayer, of customs and routines deeply presumed but not necessarily willingly embraced or even fully understood. And yet theirs was also a world of multiple religious options, many fully and consciously chosen. Laymen chose which saints to venerate; they chose confessors, chapels, pilgrimage destinations; they chose chastity, poverty, and the common life in imitation of professed religion; they embraced devotional practices, some by reading and writing. Some chose inversely, embracing critique, satire, resistance, suspicion, and heresy. And some, like our nine, chose to take vows of crusade.¹⁷

Why they might have done so is a notoriously difficult question to answer.¹⁸ Crusader intentions and motivations, in the fifteenth century no less than in earlier eras, were a complex alloy of individual agency, social obligation, and other pressures, and of considerations at once spiritual and worldly. But if generalizations are hazardous, a broad context remains clear enough. To choose crusade brought not only liberation from sin but a dramatic legal and social break from the customary, the routine, the familiar life of the parish. It was a choice whose austerity gave ordinary locals a purchase, however brief, on an age of heroes from centuries past and whose spiritual merits, to the extent they might require martyrdom, could surpass even the vows of the esteemed professed religious of the local abbey.¹⁹ It was also a choice made amid the mundane expectations of family, friends, and followers, and amid tensions between lords and subjects, clergy, and laity.

Our nine must have made their choice amid these kinds of considerations. But just as powerfully, they did so amid a swirl of news, rumor, and marvel whose force was long remembered. In the very days they weighed their options, stories circulated in Nuremberg of a peasant crusader who was struck blind when he openly resisted taking up the cross, but who was then healed when he repented.²⁰ And

¹⁵Hirtner and Fröstl, "Die Romreisen," 168.

¹⁶Shami Ghosh, "Rural Commercialisation in Southern Germany, c.1200–c.1500: Sources, Problems, and Potential," *Mediaeval Studies* 82 (2020): 207–74.

¹⁷Key for these reflections are three essays by John Van Engen: "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77 (2008): 257–84; "Conversion and Conformity in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *Conversion: Old Worlds and New* (Rochester, 2003), 30–65; and "Freedom, Obligation, and Customary Practice: The Pursuit of Religious Life in the Later Medieval and Early Reform Period," in *Über Religion Entscheiden. Religiöse Optionen und Alternativen im Mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Christentum*, eds. Matthias Pohligh and Sita Steckel (Tübingen, 2021), 39–76.

¹⁸Norman Housley, ch. 4, "Intentions and Motivations," in *Contesting the Crusades* (Malden, MA, 2006), 75–98.

¹⁹Melk, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 1799, fol. 168v: "An votum ad martirum sustinendum excedat in perfectionem votum religionis. Respondeo quod sic."

²⁰BAV Cod Pal 368, fol. 283b, also noted in Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 410.

at Michaelbeuern itself, in the same manuscript that recorded the names of our nine crusaders, the monks recorded an anonymous scholastic reflection on the comet that had appeared that summer, and that had drawn the fascination of so many—including the circles around Vienna’s Georg Peuerbach.²¹ Loyalty to the saints of the abbey that anchored the local community; ties of family and friendship to its esteemed abbot; the appeal of living up to the standards of ancient honor and bravery captured in texts like Abbot Georg’s copy of Robert the Monk’s history—all of these may have played their role.²² We know, too, that contemporary preachers played on fears of Turkish atrocities and fostered zealous vengeance for a dishonoured Christ and a fallen Constantinople.

We can only imagine how Abbot Georg and others may have shaped these same themes locally. More concrete are the hints available in the ritual that immediately follows Robert’s *History* in Abbot Georg’s miscellany: a ceremony for the imposition of the cross and for the absolution of the sins “of those going out and returning from the war against the Turks.” If Abbot Georg used this ceremony (or one adapted from it) to send off our nine volunteers, its text brings us reasonably close to the language, gestures, and symbolism that would have clothed their choice in meaning—the blessing of a cross, for example, charged with “power to defend against all diabolical deceit” in a way that for contemporaries might shade over into something like a charm or a spell.²³ We are also close to a moment that would have been long remembered, not only among the nine who took the cross but also for any clergy, family, parishioners, or other locals who might have witnessed or even heard about the ceremony. Abbot Georg was chief among them—he remembered it enough to record their names and to annotate the story of the victory that had inspired the volunteers. And someone, perhaps Abbot Georg himself, also eventually bookmarked the list of names with a metal tab for easy reference—one of only two in this book, the other found among Abbot Georg’s annotations of Robert’s *History*.²⁴ Who, and for how long after, might have wanted to leaf through this book, to find its list of names once more?

Another instance of the intersection of experience, story, and memory survives in a text preserved in the Cistercian abbey of Zwettl, a twelfth-century daughter-house of Heiligenkreuz. At various times across the last decades of the fifteenth century, the monks there copied and compiled the materials now preserved in the library’s Codex 330. The book is an amalgam of formularies, visitation protocols, and other administrative documents stitched together with a range of spiritual treatises and pastoral aids, including excerpts from St. Bridget on the Passion, and from Gerard of Zutphen, a leading theorist of the Modern Devotion, on spiritual progress.²⁵ Several brief entries also anchored the life of the community in its recent history, including a note on the death of Abbot Wolfgang I and the election of the new abbot Koloman in 1490.

²¹Salzburg, B IX 28, fols. 128r-v; Portnykh, “Rebirth,” 22. On the comet of 1456 see Jane Jervis, *Cometary Theory in Fifteenth-Century Europe* (Hingham, MA, 1985), esp. 42–64, and the account appearing in *The Crusade of 1456* (n. 4 above), 137–41; Michael H. Shank, “Academic Consulting in Fifteenth-Century Vienna: The Case of Astrology,” in *Texts and Contexts in Ancient and Medieval Science. Studies on the Occasion of John E. Murdoch’s Seventieth Birthday*, eds. Edith Dudley Sylla and Michael McVaugh (Leiden, 1997), 245–70.

²²Susanna A. Throop, “Zeal, Anger and Vengeance: The Emotional Rhetoric of Crusading,” in *Vengeance in the Middle Ages. Emotion, Religion and Feud*, eds. Susanna Throop and Paul Hyams (Farnham, 2010), 177–202. Cf. Melk Cod. 1799, fols. 160r-v and 162r-169v, noted in Valentin Portnykh, “Le Traité d’Humbert de Romans (OP) ‘De la prédication de la sainte croix’: Une hypothèse sur son utilisation dans les guerres saintes du xv^e siècle,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 109 (2014): 588–624, at 609–11.

²³Michel Andrieu, ed., *Le pontifical romain au Moyen-Âge, vol. 3: Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand* (Vatican City, 1965), 541–43. For broader contexts see M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, “From Pilgrimage to Crusade: The Liturgy of Departure, 1095–1300,” *Speculum* 88 (2013): 44–91 and *Invisible Weapons: Liturgy and the Making of Crusade Ideology* (Ithaca, 2017). For the grey areas between divine power and superstition so often captured in the cross, see Michael D. Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 2013), 175–77.

²⁴The tab visible on the lower left margin of fol. 126a. It is possible to read the tab as marking the verso, but that page contains only a brief formula of absolution for crusaders against the Hussites. The lower margin of the verso is blank. See the description in Portnykh, “Exploring the Rebirth,” 17–19.

²⁵Charlotte Ziegler, *Zisterziensertift Zwettl: Katalog der Handschriften des Mittelalters*. Teil IV. Cod. 301–424 (Zwettl, 1997), 90–98, here at 93, #18.

The text of interest here is, amid so much other seemingly random material, easy to miss. But its scribe signalled its subject clearly, in bright red ink: “Deeds and acts in the land of Austria, in the time of Frederick, emperor of the Romans, duke of Austria, etc. in the year 1477.” For two folios thereafter, the brief, rubricated chapters of the text recount in terse but vivid detail various events over the next years, through 1480. At the end, its scribe then seems to have leafed back a few folios, to what must have been some fresh, blank space.²⁶ There, a new narrative begins even earlier, and links the local world of Zwettl to the momentous events of Belgrade.

The passage opens with a slightly misplaced fall of Constantinople: “In the year of the lord 1455, the city of Constantinople was captured by the Turks.” Then, a striking instance of a first-person voice emerges: “In the same year I, brother Henry, was a crusader against the Turks. In the year 1456 the fortress of Nanderferber, that is, Grieschweissenburk, was besieged and almost entirely destroyed and levelled with cannons and guns.” The narrative then tells of the miraculous victory that followed:

“The lord God worked a great miracle at the same time, when John Capistrano was in the fortress; and there went out from the great multitude of the fortress some eight hundred warlike men who hoped in the Lord God, and they launched an attack against the Turks; and there was such a great multitude of foot soldiers and cavalry, indeed almost 200,000, and by the help of God, and with God himself in the fight, all of the Turks were put to flight, leaving behind tents, horses, cattle, sheep, great guns, and mortars (in the vernacular called *morser*) so large that nothing like them has ever been seen in any kingdom of this world and large ships and innumerable articles of clothing.”

Two subsequent chapters tell briefly of the deaths of both Capistrano and Hunyadi, the murder of the Count of Celje, and the capture and beheading of Hunyadi’s son Ladislaus.²⁷

Who was this brother Henry? An early nineteenth-century record of Zwettl’s professed monks records one compelling possibility. It notes a brother Henry who was professed at the abbey after 1471, who was identified as a senior member of the community in 1496 and who died before 1508. Over his career he also served as both a chaplain and the chief administrator of the abbey’s estate (“grange”) of Weinzierl, near Krems.²⁸ The evidence is circumstantial, but if this Henry is the author of our text, a reasonable reading might imagine him a middle-aged Cistercian, perhaps born in the 1420s or 1430s, who later in life retired to become a monk and a priest at Zwettl, where he also brought some kind of worldly experience as an administrator to bear in helping run the abbey’s estates. In the late 1470s or after, he then sat down to compose this brief chronicle, including a stirring remembrance of the days of his youth and his experience as a crusader.

Within this hypothetical reading there are still more unknowns: was Henry a soldier who survived the battlefield? Someone who, like so many in these years, took the cross but ultimately missed the fighting? Someone whose connection to crusade was conditioned by the wars against the Hussites, which had devastated the region around Zwettl?²⁹ The nature of the text itself only adds to the complexity: marginal corrections and glosses on the page that records his name suggest that several of its lines were in fact a copy of another text; moreover, its separation from the rest of the narrative by an intervening folio suggests that the copyist, Henry or another, wrote it down separately. On this reading, while “brother Henry’s” voice and testimony are compellingly direct, he may have been, like so many others, working with a later narrative of the battle—perhaps one of the many dispatches that continued

²⁶Zwettl Cod. 330, fol. 95v.

²⁷For this sequence of events, which effectively ended any hope of further campaigning, see Johannes Grabmayer, “Das Opfer war der Täter. Das Attentat von Belgrad 1456 – Über Sterben und Tod Ulrichs II. von Cilli,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 111 (2003): 286–316.

²⁸The abbey’s records, above all an early nineteenth-century *Professbuch* (StAZ 2/116), provide evidence of his career from the 1470s to the 1490s. I am grateful to the community’s archivist and librarian, Dr. Andreas Gamerith, who provided this information through an email exchange on 1 Aug. 2022.

²⁹Key context now in Herbert Kramer, “Hussitenkriege in Österreich in den 1420er und 1430er Jahren,” in *Gotteskrieger. Der Kampf um den rechten Glauben rund um Wien im 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. Maria Theisen (Klosterneuburg, 2022), 94–102.

to circulate in books just like the one to which he was contributing. Henry would thus be an “eyewitness,” and yet his testimony would also be a literary flourish, his own reworking of another text, now lost, which he used to flesh out and to validate his own crusading memory and experience.

As with the nine who took the cross at Michaelbeuern, we can never know exactly what happened to a figure like Henry during the battle for Belgrade. We cannot know how his return, or some mix of rumor, report, or written dispatch first brought news of the stunning events of that summer back to the monks of Zwettl and other contemporaries. We can only imagine how countless individual experiences like Henry’s, or the nine of Michaelbeuern, became stories, told and retold, some written down, in ways that allowed the story of the battle to anchor itself in the individual and collective memories of all who lived and experienced those days. But in the evidence as it survives, in copies of texts like Henry’s, we can see how readers, writers, copyists, and compilers captured the energies of the moment, preserving texts they found important, useful, or memorable, in ways that helped form, reform, and reinforce, locally and collectively, a Christian identity anchored in stories of crusade.³⁰

Reading, Writing, and Remembering

Georg Erlbach was a doctor of canon law trained in Bologna who later rose to prominence in the service of the archbishops of Salzburg, above all as *Hofmeister* within the archbishop’s court. He also held the title of vicar in the parish church of the market town St. John in the Leukental in Tirol, under the jurisdiction of the bishops of Chiemsee. In Salzburg, around 3 or 4 p.m. on 4 June 1520, he drew up his last will and testament. Among its many stipulations, Erlbach made explicit his wish that all his books, listed out in detail at the end of the document, were to go to his brother Henry, who was a Benedictine monk at St. Emmeram in Regensburg. Among the many volumes listed is “a book on the canonical hours and various materials.” This is in fact the very book that preserves the text of the will and the inventory itself. Now manuscript Clm 14610 of the Bavarian State Library in Munich, the book bears Erlbach’s name in a large, gothic book hand on the inside of its front cover.³¹ The book indeed begins with a treatise on the canonical hours, but thereafter, over hundreds of folios, it reveals itself as a classic miscellany. A contemporary table of contents, in the same hand as much of what follows, lists over thirty different works. They reveal a certain coherence around works of devotion and worship—treatises on the Passion, on sin and death, on prayer and the Psalms. But toward the back of the book there are runs of other materials, including one that captured many of the energies of the 1450s. It begins with Bernard of Kraiburg’s lament of the fall of Constantinople, followed by a letter of Frederick III “against the Turks,” addressed to Charles VII of France. Hunyadi’s dispatch of 24 July comes next, preserving for our Salzburg lawyer the story of the conqueror’s humiliating defeat before the walls of Belgrade. Callixtus III’s call to prayer on the eve of the battle then follows.

Here once more we encounter the interpretative challenge of the miscellany. On the one hand, Georg Erlbach’s book seems an impossibly serendipitous mix of texts. On the other, within that chaos there seems to be one run of texts that coheres around a discernible concern for crusading and the Turks generally, and the events of Belgrade in particular. And that pattern, in turn, is one that appears in several other manuscripts. In all, some two dozen dispatches from Belgrade survive, including six written in the hours and days after the battle: three from Capistrano, three from Hunyadi. Of those six, five survive in multiple copies, seventeen in total.³² All of the circulation is heavily concentrated in Germany and Austria; and as Henny Grüneisen first noted, copyists tended

³⁰For an overview of theoretical frameworks see Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, 2013), esp. ch. 3.

³¹Herbert Klein and Hans Wagner, “Salzburger Domherren von 1300 Bis 1514,” *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde* 92 (1952): 1–81. For Erlbach’s testament and the other materials noted here see Clm 14610, fols. 206r–211v; Friedrich Helmer and Julia Knödler, eds., *Katalog der lateinischen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München. Die Handschriften aus St. Emmeram in Regensburg Bd. 5: Clm 14542 – 14690* (Wiesbaden, 2019), 278–96, here at 291. Compiled in its final form sometime after the late 1460s, the book came to modern Munich from the collection of the Benedictines of St. Emmeram in Regensburg, the community where George’s brother lived as a monk.

³²Johannes Hofer, *Johannes Capistran. Ein Leben im Kampf um die Reform der Kirche*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Rome-Heidelberg, 1964), 1:472–74 (Exkursus 24).

to preserve various dispatches from Belgrade in the same gatherings and to copy related materials alongside them: Callixtus III's call to prayer from June of 1456, for example, whether as one of the recensions of its full text, as a series of excerpts or summaries, or as a set of fragmented notes.³³

The letters of John of Capistrano from the ruins of Belgrade circulated in similar ways. Observant monks at Salzburg's abbey of St. Peter, for example, preserved copies in two different books. The first, dated to the last two decades of the fifteenth century, preserves in its final gathering copies of Capistrano's second and third letters, together with Callixtus III's call to prayer from June of 1456. The second, dated to 1503, is what a contemporary label on the book's outer cover describes as a "visitors manual." Both the book's physical appearance and its contents speak to its practical use: it is an elongated holster book (29.5 × 11 cm) with a soft, well-worn wrapper binding. Within its folds, the monks of Salzburg preserved a wide range of rules, constitutions, statutes, procedural protocols, moral treatises, and other materials intended to help Benedictine prelates enforce the dictates of reform in their communities. And again, in its final gatherings, in its very last folios, one of the book's copyists preserved a run of three letters by John of Capistrano, including two dispatches from Belgrade. The second of them, his last, was just a bit too long. The final leaf of the gathering, mutilated and unlined, appears to have been unsuitable. The scribe chose instead to run the last twelve lines of Capistrano's letter onto an extra scrap of paper, cut somewhat more widely and properly lined, that he tucked inside the handbook's back cover.³⁴

Beyond a mere catalogue and description of these surviving dispatches from Belgrade, in at least a few compelling instances we also have trace evidence of the eagerness with which some may have copied and read them. At Michaelbeuern, Abbot Georg glossed his community's copy of Ladislaus V's letter to Frederick III in ways that added touches of specificity.³⁵ Beside the letter's assertion that the battle had been fought "in the year 1456," the abbot's angular, left-handed script again asserts itself: "On the day of Mary Magdalene," he noted in one Latin gloss. Shortly after, he added in German another corrective. To the letter's assertion that the Turks' losses "had no number," the abbot responded—perhaps based on the latest news—that the number was 74,000.³⁶

Henny Grüneisen's private notes, in turn, articulate an intriguing hypothesis regarding how this copy of the news may have reached Abbot Georg at Michaelbeuern. Grüneisen suggested that an early enthusiast may have ripped Hunyadi's letter from none other than Georg Erlbach's miscellany and passed it along to others for wider dissemination. The evidence is circumstantial but no less compelling: a manuscript from Beuerberg, Clm 5141, contains a sequence of texts identical to Erlbach's. Missing from Erlbach's manuscript, however, are three texts from the center of the run, including the German letter found at Michaelbeuern. Grüneisen made note of what she discerned as faint physical evidence relevant to the case: the edges of three missing folios, still evident in Erlbach's codex. On her reading, an enthusiast for the news from Belgrade ripped these leaves from Erlbach's book. One copy of the run made its way to the Bavarian abbey of Beuerberg, and from there another copy of the German letter from Belgrade made it to Michaelbeuern.³⁷

But why did figures like Georg Liebenknecht, Georg Erlbach, the monks of Salzburg, and so many other contemporaries copy the letters that they did, and perhaps even rip them from books to pass them along to others? The impulse was hardly new—reaching back to the early Middle Ages, monks, nuns, and schoolmen had gathered and read and circulated letters in ways so diverse that

³³E.g., Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 5141 and 4143.

³⁴Salzburg, St. Peter, Inc. 229 and B XI 19; see Jungwirth, *Katalog der Handschriften*.

³⁵Hirtner and Fröstl, "Die Romreisen," 168.

³⁶Henny Grüneisen first reflected on the significance of these glosses in her private notes. Valentin Portnykh also notes them briefly in his recent treatment (above, n. 9, 56–57).

³⁷A key passage from Grüneisen's notes makes the case this way: "Another, unaltered copy [of the German letter preserved in Salzburg b IX 28] is found in Clm 5141 (provenance, the monastery of Beuerberg), but this copy was likely taken from a Salzburg exemplar that, due to accident or, more probably to contemporary curiosity and enthusiasm, survives only partially. We mean the relevant exemplar of Clm 14610, a copy of the Salzburg Hofmeister Georg Erlbach." I am again grateful to Prof. Gabriella Annas for this transcription.

almost any generalization is hazardous.³⁸ But in the case of Belgrade's letters, a weave of at least three distinct impulses seems to have been at work. Most fundamentally, we encounter here something like what Thomas Smith has called, for an earlier period, "scribal crusading," a broad pattern of participating in the crusade movement "from behind cloister walls" by way of reading, writing, and the circulation of letters and other materials that fostered engagement and devotion. By the fifteenth century, the context was, in one sense, fundamentally different. But the frame remains useful. In the decades after 1456, monks, clerics, and others read, wrote, and remembered Belgrade in ways that signalled a vicarious, literary participation in the crusading ideal and the defense of Christendom.³⁹

The most immediate manifestation of that participation was an enthusiasm for news, for signs, wonders, and prognostication—the same energy that must have led volunteers to take the cross, here captured in a drive to preserve letters from Belgrade. At Michaelbeuern, reflections on the comet of 1456 sat next to Abbot Georg's annotated copy of the Sultan's defeat; and in another miscellany that may have been copied in notarial or clerical circles in Regensburg, Hunyadi's letter from Belgrade survives alongside other epistolary material, texts related to the fall of Constantinople, and an eclectic mix of astrology and prophecy.⁴⁰ A natural short-term enthusiasm for the latest "news" seems in turn to have reflected a concern for the "current affairs" of a generation, in ways that could shade over into the broad ground between history and memory. In Georg Erlbach's manuscript, copyists preserved, after his testament and not far from the run of texts of Belgrade, John of Capistrano's exchanges with his Hussite opponents Borotín and Rokycana in 1451, as well as a copy of the 1468 bull excommunicating Bohemia's King George Poděbrady.⁴¹ The entire dossier captured for its readers the core theological issues at stake in decades of controversy. It captured something of the compelling personalities and transient literary fame of figures like Capistrano and his antagonists. And it captured what may for some have been irresistibly entertaining polemic—in one famous passage, Borotín denounces Capistrano as a friar with a "heart full of melancholy."⁴² Compilers of a similar dossier from the 1470s preserved, in one run, an account of the fall of Constantinople, followed by four reports on the events surrounding Belgrade, among them those of John Goldener and the Prague astronomer Nicholas Gerstman.⁴³ Here, the interest was less in news or polemic and more in preserving something of the story of Belgrade within a collection "on the affairs of the universal Church," as contemporaries labeled the volume. In all these instances, the copyists of these gatherings worked in ways that reflected both personal and collective remembrance and memorialisation, as well as a drive for both preservation and dissemination.⁴⁴

They also worked in ways that reflected dynamics of gender and identity. Figures like Abbot Georg of Michaelbeuern or the canon lawyer Erlbach were, along with their more famous and visible contemporary Capistrano, products of a distinct culture of clerical and scholastic masculinity. As Ruth Karras has shown, theirs was a culture grounded in rigorous intellectual training, competition, and hazing, all reflective of and reproducing a certain kind of manliness, defined in opposition to the knight and yet

³⁸Still foundational is Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout, 1976). See also Walter Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources: Methodological Questions, Reflections, and Research Perspectives (Sixth–Fifteenth Centuries)," in *Medieval Letters. Between Fiction and Document*, eds. Christian Högel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout, 2015), 33–62.

³⁹Thomas W. Smith, "Scribal Crusading: Three New Manuscript Witnesses to the Regional Reception and Transmission of First Crusade Letters," *Traditio* 72 (2017): 133–69; "First Crusade Letters and Medieval Monastic Scribal Cultures," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 71 (2020): 484–501.

⁴⁰See Hirtner and Fröstl "Die Romreisen" and Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 27063, fols. 128r–132r; Karl Halm, ed., *Catalogus codicum manu scriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis, T. 4: Pt. 4: Clm 21406–27268* (Munich, 1881), 238.

⁴¹Pavel Soukup, "The Polemical Letters of John of Capistrano against the Hussites: Remarks on Their Transmission and Context," in *The Grand Tour of John of Capistrano in Central and Eastern Europe (1451–1456)*, eds. Paweł Kras and James Mixson (Warsaw, 2018), 259–74, esp. 268 and n55. See also now Lucie Mazalová and Petra Mutlová, "Melancholy about the Lay Chalice: The Polemic between John of Capistrano and John of Borotín," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 27 (2022): 85–99. The article provides an edition of Borotín's letter of 20 Aug. 1451, and notes the Munich manuscript on p. 90.

⁴²Mazalová and Mutlová, "Melancholy," 87 and 92.

⁴³Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, 1092, fols. 177v–181v. See Rudolf Helssig, *Die lateinischen und deutschen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig. Band 3. Die juristischen Handschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 219–234, here at 225.

⁴⁴For an accessible treatment of the theoretical considerations see Cubitt, *History and Memory*, esp. 142–54.

overlapping with inherited lordly and noble sensibilities.⁴⁵ All were men of logic, disputation, and letters, their status anchored in their positions as clerics, as “lord” priests, monks, canons, and masters. All were trained schoolmen and defenders of Latin Christian orthodoxy. All lived for decades, many through their most formative years, in the shadow of the Turkish threat. And some were active participants in the campaign that ended at Belgrade. For these figures, to read and to copy a letter from a figure like Hunyadi or Capistrano, or any other text preserving the story of 1456, was to defend the faith vicariously, and to remember, individually and collectively, in a way that must have reinforced some sense of their own place in the world as clerics, scholars, and men.

Another compelling example of these reinforcing interests lies tucked away in one of Austria’s more famous fifteenth-century manuscripts. Sometime before 1457, a cleric from Vienna named Jörg Schrott acquired a manuscript from the library of Leonard Eghenvelder. An alumnus of Vienna, Eghenvelder had a long career as a notary, town clerk, and diplomat in Sopron and Pressburg, today’s Bratislava.⁴⁶ He was also an avid copyist and bookman who by the end of his life had amassed a collection of some forty-five volumes. All but two have been lost, but one of them, today in the National Library in Vienna, is the manuscript Schrott acquired.⁴⁷ Schrott himself was likely a student at Vienna in the 1430s, and later a parish priest and chaplain at St. Peter’s in Vienna. He proudly inscribed his name at various places throughout his new manuscript and even added what may have been a fictionalized heraldic emblem to one of its front folios. He also added to its existing materials, among them the famous *Chronicle of the 95 Rulers* and a renowned collection of Middle High German poetry and music—a range of texts once again capturing the energies of the 1450s. Chief among these was a long run of Capistrano’s polemical letters directed against his Hussite nemesis Jan Rokycana, together with a crusading poem composed after the fall of Constantinople, a report on the comet of 1456, letters from the diets of 1454, and Capistrano’s letters of 24 July and 17 August to Callixtus III, reporting on the victory at Belgrade.⁴⁸ Though any specific links between Schrott’s own experience and the events of Belgrade are lost, the gatherings of his book suggest again how contemporaries sought, all at once, to gather the latest news, to monitor public controversy, to remember and memorialize a singular event.

A final example of these same patterns emerges from a gathering of texts preserved in a manuscript from the canonry of Herzogenburg, just west of the river Traisen and south of Krems on the Danube. There, sometime after the later months of 1456, the Augustinian canon Leonard Stalekker copied out Hunyadi’s final letter from Belgrade.⁴⁹ He found space for the text in the opening folios of a book that many other brothers in his community had copied out over previous decades. It was a collection that, like so many others of its kind, preserved preaching and pastoral texts, in both Latin and German, that a canon like brother Leonard must have found useful in his routine work. But the contents and context of the brief gathering offer hints of a wider resonance.

In the wake of the fall of Acre and the emergence of sustained critical reflection on the crusading project, letters emerged in which a “sultan of Babylon” or a “sultan Balthasar,” among other names, addressed a pope, usually “Clement” in fourteenth-century versions, or in the fifteenth-century Nicholas V, Callixtus III, or Pius II. Unmoored from any single time or place, the exchange gave each generation compelling material to reshape for their various purposes. At least seven versions

⁴⁵Ruth Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2002), esp. ch. 3. For broader context see the essays in Jennifer Thibodeaux, ed., *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2010), esp. her introduction, “Rethinking the Medieval Clergy and Masculinity,” 1–15.

⁴⁶Helmut Lomnitzer, “Eghenvelder, Liebhard,” in *Verfasserlexikon*, 2, eds. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin, 1980), cols. 377–79; András Vizkelety, “Die Mobilität der weltlichen Intelligenz im deutschsprachigen Raum des spätmittelalterlichen Europas am Beispiel von Liebhard Eghenvelder, Stadtschreiber in Preßburg,” in *Deutsche Sprache und Kultur im Raum Pressburg*, ed. Wynfrid Krieglleder (Bremen, 2002), 219–30.

⁴⁷Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB), Cod. Ser. n. 3344. See Otto Mazal and Franz Unterkircher, *Katalog der abendländischen Handschriften der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek; “Series Nova” (Neuerwerbungen) 3: Cod. Ser. n. 3201–4000* (Vienna, 1967), 67–84.

⁴⁸ÖNB, Cod. Ser. n. 3344, fols. 238r–243r; Mazal and Unterkircher, *Katalog*, 82–83.

⁴⁹Herzogenburg, Stiftsbibliothek 15, described in Gerhard Winner, “Katalog der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek Herzogenburg” (typescript) (St. Pölten, 1978), 13–20. On fol. 5v: “Frater Leonhardus Stalekker hoc scripsit; orate pro me.”

of the letter, in both Latin and German, circulated in scores of manuscripts through the fifteenth century and into the era of print.⁵⁰ After the fall of Constantinople, the fiction must have proven powerfully adaptable once more. We know little about Leonard Stalekker other than his name. But we know that in one of his books, he recorded a contemporary version of the old exchange, now presented as one between Callixtus III and Mehmed II. He read of a sultan, the conqueror of Constantinople, who styled himself “king of Jerusalem, Africa, and Asia and lord over barbarians from the East to the West, king of kings, prince of princes, lord of lords,” and who warned the pope not to send his sons to certain death in the East. In the text that followed, he then read of a pope who responded, in the name of an incarnate and triune God, that his sons welcomed martyrdom. Hunyadi’s brief but compelling battlefield dispatch then followed, casting the entire exchange in the light of the sultan’s humiliating reversal of fortune at Belgrade. Brother Leonard of Herzogenburg was another in the wider network of readers and copyists we have studied here, vicariously crusading monks and clerics who through their labor as copyists both placed themselves within the events of the day and reinforced something of their Christian, clerical, masculine identity.

Conclusion

Five decades after Henny Grüneisen’s discovery of Abbot Georg’s manuscript at Michaelbeuern, scholars now recognize more fully the vitality of the world she first explored. Studies on the “later” history of the German lands, of crusading, of religious life and culture in the fifteenth century generally are all now vibrant fields in their own right. Yet, we are still only beginning to address the broad question she first raised: how fifteenth-century monks, clerics, and others looked back on a distant crusading past and how they appropriated and redeployed crusading texts in the wake of Constantinople and Belgrade. This article has sought to explore these dynamics more fully, in a way that speaks to the wider themes of this collection of articles. The manuscript miscellanies of Abbot Georg’s era reveal how long ancient links between crusade and reform endured and worked locally.⁵¹ They offer compelling trace evidence of the ways in which crusade remained, in a world of multiple religious options, a vital individual and collective choice. They suggest how, long after the fall of Constantinople and the siege of Belgrade, crusade fostered community and shaped identity—especially among those monks and others who participated vicariously through all of their reading, copying, storytelling, and remembering.

⁵⁰For the tradition and texts see Karoline D. Döring, *Sultansbriefe: Textfassungen, Überlieferung und Einordnung* (Wiesbaden, 2017).

⁵¹See Duncan Hardy’s article in this collection.