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# *The Routledge History of* Terrorism

Edited by RANDALL D. LAW

# THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF TERRORISM

Though the history of terrorism stretches back to the ancient world, today it is often understood as a recent development. Comprehensive enough to serve as a survey for students or newcomers to the field, yet with enough depth to engage the specialist, *The Routledge History of Terrorism* is the first single-volume authoritative reference text to place terrorism firmly into its historical context.

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- the urban guerrilla, terrorism, and state terror in Latin America;
- literary treatments of terrorism.

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# THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF TERRORISM

*Edited by Randall D. Law*

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# 1

# INTRODUCTION

*Randall D. Law*

The history of terrorism is old – as this volume demonstrates – but the study of it and its defining features is relatively young. In this volume, we will look at actors and events stretching back more than 2,000 years and across five continents. We will explore examples of terrorism used in pursuit of secular and religious aims, by states and conspiratorial groups, against humans and property, and against specific targets and randomly chosen ones. Indeed, there are many ways of defining the phenomenon, most of them shaped by our present circumstances. I ask that as you begin to read you set aside your current understanding so that you might gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of terrorism, as it exists now and through history.

One of the great questions is when "modern terrorism" – that is, terrorism as we know it – began. Russia in the 1860s and 1870s is often cited as its birthplace. One of the most articulate commentators on Russian revolutionary terrorism during this era was Sergei Kravchinsky who had himself been a participant in the campaign of targeted assassination against the tsar and his henchmen. In 1878, Kravchinsky stabbed to death General Nikolai Mezentsev, the head of Tsar Alexander II's political police; soon after, he fled to London, where he continued to promote Russian revolutionary terrorism under the nom de plume Stepniak. He admitted that "terrorists cannot overthrow the government" but was adamant that they could "render its position untenable" by forcing the authorities to act out of fear. Moreover, terrorism could produce martyrs and heroes – "proud as Satan rebelling against God" – who could rouse the people against the state, "to render them the arbiters of their own destinies."[1]

Around this time in the United States, terrorism was also being practiced by conspiratorial groups but on a far grander scale, with mass, indiscriminate violence. This was the era of the Ku Klux Klan after the American Civil War, and it constituted a sustained campaign against black emancipation and empowerment in the South. Angry, disenfranchised former Confederates and other white supremacists burned, maimed, and killed African Americans, often under cover of night but sometimes in front of crowds. As an Alabama newspaper reported about one attack (a castration), such violence "has had a salutary influence over [other blacks]. They now feel their inferiority, in every particular, to the white men."[2]

States can and should be understood to be users of terrorism as well. Certainly Stepniak-Kravchinsky and Reconstruction-era Klansmen would have been quick to agree that it was the state that was illegitimate, brutally violent, and ultimately terroristic. Indeed, the term "terrorist" was first used in English to describe state terror when in 1795 Edmund Burke denounced the French revolutionaries of 1793–4 as "those hell-hounds called Terrorists."[3]

He got the term "terror" from the Jacobins themselves who used it – positively at the time – to describe the violence used not only against actual enemies who schemed against the revolution but also against those who, given their backgrounds and worldviews, might merely contemplate it. Shortly after the Jacobins were driven from power, one of the organizers of their fall, Jean-Lambert Tallien, gave a speech in which he adroitly identified the key feature of state terrorism. Unlike a legitimate government that "may limit itself to keeping watch over improper *actions*, threatening and punishing them with appropriate penalties, . . . if the government of terror pursues a few citizens for their presumed intentions, it will frighten all citizens."[4]

The French revolutionaries' vision was secular, but, as we all know today, acts of terrorism can also be motivated by religious extremism. One of the clearest examples of this came in 2006 during the United States' occupation of Iraq when Samara's al-Askari Shrine, one of the holiest sites for Shi'a Muslims, was bombed. The perpetrators were almost certainly Sunni insurgents working through or in alliance with al-Qaeda in Iraq. The terrorists attacked early in the morning, causing no human casualties but almost completely destroying the shrine's golden dome. Over the next few days, Shi'ite militias retaliated, killing well over a thousand Sunnis and destroying scores of their mosques. Thus although the strike itself caused no fatalities, it spurred communal violence, strengthened the hands of militia leaders, and pushed Iraq closer to civil war.[5]

What do these examples tell us? They certainly make clear the difficulties associated with defining terrorism, but they also have one thing in common: the celebration of violent spectacle. These disparate acts of violence were meant to induce change by swaying the behavior of many by targeting the relatively few. Herein is the key to understanding terrorism, since we cannot grasp its significance by looking at only one dimension. Instead, the nature of spectacle – and thus terrorism – demands that we consider three dimensions: the perpetrator, the act against the few, and the reaction of the many. There, at the intersection of those three elements, lies terrorism.

This was long understood by many perpetrators, but overlooked by scholars. Both Tallien and Kravchinsky grasped it, as did the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. Although the latter never fully embraced terrorism and actually came to denounce it late in life, he nonetheless provided one of the clearest articulations of its utility.[6] In 1880, he wrote:

> When a revolutionary situation arises in a country, before the spirit of revolt is sufficiently awakened in the masses to express itself in violent demonstrations in the streets or by rebellions and uprisings, it is through *action* that minorities succeed in awakening that feeling of independence and that spirit of audacity without which no revolution can come to a head.[7]

Kropotkin shied away from identifying what he meant by "action," but elsewhere he implied that he was talking about work stoppages, posters, graffiti, minor acts of sabotage – perhaps closer to what we today might call civil disobedience. But some of his contemporaries understood that violence – arson, bombings, killings – would fit the bill quite nicely. Such violence became known as "propaganda of the deed," and while historians debate who is to be reviled or credited with first coining the term, Kropotkin certainly captured the intent. An act could function primarily as a *message*, one intended to provoke responses from those who witnessed or heard about it, not necessarily – or even – those against whom it was specifically directed. This was the idea behind the "direct actions" or *attentats* ("attempts") of

late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anarchist terrorists.[8] These anarchists chose violent methods of carrying out their attacks – bombings of public venues, the targeting of vilified figures, the use of poisonous chemicals and various "infernal machines" – that promoted the appreciation of their acts as spectacle and insured that they were widely covered in newspapers, illustrated journals, and tabloids.

In the twentieth century, many terrorists explicitly articulated the power of the spectacle and the relationship between perpetrator, act, and response. Ramdane Abane, one of the principal architects of the National Liberation Front's (FLN) campaign of terrorism against France in pursuit of Algerian independence in 1954–62, once asked rhetorically, "Is it preferable for our cause to kill ten enemies in a dry river bed [far from the cities] when no one will talk of it or a single man in Algiers which will be noted the next day by the American press?" As if that needed clarifying, he was fond of saying that "one corpse in a [civilian's] jacket is always worth more than twenty in a uniform."[9] In other words, French military deaths in the hinterland made little difference for the FLN in its pursuit of military victory, but dead French civilians in urban areas could help achieve dramatic gains for the FLN in both the domestic and international courts of opinion.

Some officials charged with countering terrorism have proven adept at analyzing the phenomenon as well, but this was rare before the mid-twentieth century. As Richard Bach Jensen, Thai Jones, and Beatrice de Graaf observe in this volume (Chapters 8, 9, and 27, respectively), during the heyday of anarchist terrorism, state officials rarely showed an interest in describing the essential nature of terrorism. On the contrary, they were interested in describing terrorism as nothing more than a set of destabilizing tactics such as assassination, public violence, or incitement to riot; the pure expression of a single ideology, anarchism; or simply the natural condition of deranged, dirty immigrants or margin-dwellers. Surprisingly little effort seems to have been expended at the international conferences called to combat terrorism around the turn of the century to move beyond these limited – albeit politically useful – descriptions of terrorism. What terrorism fundamentally *was* still seemed a question of little importance to counter-terrorists of this era.

Likewise for academics. To the pioneering Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (d. 1909), terrorism was the product of innate personal defects – he championed the pseudo-science of phrenology, after all – and the weakening hold of the conservative elite on the masses. Most academics and casual observers tended not to see the difference between revolutionary motivations and terroristic practices. And in time, even that sort of interest waned. For instance, an article on terrorism in the 1933 *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* claimed that it had become "outmoded as a revolutionary method," something "irrelevant and unnecessary."[10]

This was not so with authors, playwrights, and poets of the fin de siècle, who displayed a knack for understanding the nature of the terrorist spectacle – small surprise, given that communicating meaning to an audience via the use of provocative symbols is the bailiwick of literature every bit as much as for the terrorist. (For confirmation of this and an analysis of some of the literature of terrorism, see Chapter 31 by Lynn Patyk in this volume.) But, like academics, in time creative writers grew more interested in the size and consequences of great wars, great states, and great disasters.

After World War II, the recognition of terrorism's import began to emerge among jurists and legal scholars but not among academics broadly. Those at the Nuremberg Trials appreciated its existence, as exercised by the Nazis both before and after their rise to power in Germany in 1933. But in keeping with the circumstances, the use of the term by Allied

judges to describe Nazi violence reflected more of an interest in denouncing Nazi criminality than in devising an analytically useful category. At some points during the indictment and the guilty verdicts, judges described the Brownshirts' street violence as part of an effort "to undermine and overthrow the German Government by 'legal' forms supported by terrorism." Elsewhere in the proceedings, however, the word "terrorism" was used vaguely to describe the use of concentration camps or various brutal actions against civilians. The Soviet judge issued the broadest denunciation when he stated that Hitler's entire regime was "terroristic."[11] Alas, such generic uses of the word "terrorism" did not reveal an interest in exploring the various ways in which violent spectacle might be used by sub-state and state groups alike; rather, "terrorism" was simply a convenient way to condemn an enemy that everyone already agreed was beastly.

World War II and its aftermath helped lead to the emergence of de-colonization and the spread of ethno-nationalist movements waged by those who typically had passion but few resources – fertile ground for the adoption of terrorist tactics. Perpetrators of terroristic violence such as Menachem Begin and George Grivas, supporters of it such as Frantz Fanon and Ghassan Kanafani, and counter-insurgents/counter-terrorists such as Harold Briggs and Roger Trinquier all grasped that "terrorism" described a set of tactics to be used in pursuit of a range of ideological goals. While it overlapped with criminality or warfare, it constituted something different, something that hinged on spectacle and that could, alternately, intimidate or empower various audiences – and perhaps several simultaneously. Meanwhile, the few scholars who explored terrorism conceptually, such as Eugene Walter or the host of academics who studied the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany, remained concerned with what is generally regarded as "state terror," the use of terrorizing violence by a state against its own civilians.[12] Valuable, yes, but they failed to recognize the similarity with what is today widely recognized as terrorism.

By the 1970s, international bodies finally began to explore the nature of terrorism as a category of violence and not just as an epithet with which to impugn one's enemies. In response to the advent of international terrorism, particularly the hijacking of airplanes and then the Munich Massacre, the United Nations (UN) began efforts to define terrorism so that its perpetrators and supporters could be stigmatized, isolated, and sanctioned. The core of the definition – the use of any means to "unlawfully and wilfully . . . cause death, injury or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act" – has been effectively agreed upon since at least the 1990s and was used in a UN convention to combat the financing of terrorism.[13] And while it is overly broad and still fails to explicitly capture the notion of seeking results by engaging in violence before an audience, it has proven to be a step forward in international law. A "comprehensive convention" on international terrorism, however, remains to be passed. The definition itself has never been the problem; the stumbling block has been the inability of negotiators to agree on whether such a definition should be applied to sub-state movements pursuing self-determination or, in fact, states themselves. Among members of the international community, the definition of terrorism has still been held hostage to the relativism embedded in the well-worn cliché that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter.

Also in the 1970s, academics began to turn their attention to analyzing the core features of terrorism with more productive results. Western experts such as David Rapoport, Brian

Jenkins, Martha Crenshaw, Walter Laqueur, and Richard Clutterbuck identified key elements of the terrorists' toolbox, including assassination, the mass casualty event, the role of the media, and the importance of provocation. In 1975, lawyer and historian David Fromkin sketched out one of the first brief histories of terrorism and asserted that terrorism is "a form of mass communication," the intent and significance of which hinges more on its representation in the media before an "audience" than on its impact on particular victims. In fact, he wrote, "the uniqueness of the strategy [of terrorism] lies in this: that it achieves its goals not through its acts but through the response to its acts."[14]

By the 1990s, a small subset of terrorism experts, led by important figures such as Alex Schmid and Richard Leeman, were exploring terrorism as a communicative act that while violent, primarily served to function as a message to one or more audiences.[15] As such, terrorism as a message hinged on the symbolic value of the act as perceived by distant targets.

This form of analysis, however, opened the door to perceptive critiques of terrorism studies itself. Some of these critiques amounted to little more than counter-claims concerning the biases inherent in the use of the term "terrorism," but they highlighted the sometimes close relationship between terrorism experts and the state. The implication, made explicit in the 1980s in the works of Edward Herman, Gerry O'Sullivan, and Noam Chomsky, was that most experts restricted their application of the term "terrorism" to sub-state actors, thus providing the government with the means to denounce leftist revolutionaries while turning a blind eye to the reactionary violence of the state.[16]

Such accusations suggested that terrorism still existed as an objective reality and could be productively studied – that is, the space between fact and propaganda could be accurately gauged and bridged – if only a more expansive and balanced definition of terrorism could be deployed. The anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass undermined this proposition in their book *Terror and Taboo* when they applied Foucaultian post-structural analysis to the subject of terrorism – what they tellingly called "terrorism discourse" – and proclaimed that the emperor had no clothes: terrorism was a cultural and linguistic construct with no underlying reality that could be identified as fundamentally "terrorism." An act became "terrorism" when it was called such by an observer, usually a government and usually in accordance with some sort of political agenda. Moreover, Zulaika and Douglass revealed much about how "terrorists" (or those who promote our fear of them) exercise power over the public by creating narratives that individuals can inhabit, thus distorting their ability to assess the true danger of such forms of political violence.

Meanwhile, much of the scholarly – and what might be called sub-scholarly – investigation into the nature of terrorism fell into two traps. The first was the pursuit of definitions that relied on proposing more and more criteria that focused not on the relationship between the perpetrator, the act, and its reception – the triangle described above and in countless terrorist memoirs and manifestos – but rather on various elements in isolation: state or sub-state, the context of war or peace, the pursuit of political or religious change, human or material target, a single action or extended campaign, etc.[17] The second trap was to closely associate terrorism with a particular ideology or worldview, that is, to investigate terrorism with the foregone – and mistaken – conclusion that it could only be employed by a *certain type* of agent working toward a *certain type* of aim. This was what had happened during the era of anarchist terror around the turn of the previous century. The epitome of this approach in the late twentieth century was Claire Sterling's 1981 book, *The Terror Network*, which alleged that virtually all acts of international terrorism in the 1970s were funded and

orchestrated by the Soviet Union as a means of covertly destabilizing the United States and its Cold War allies.[18]

The seminal moment in the emergence of terrorism studies was, of course, September 11, 2001, and the subsequent "War on Terror." Before then, terrorism experts, including those described above, had existed in relatively small numbers, inhabiting the fringes of academia and public consciousness, more frequently identified as consultants or policy experts than true academics. This was the case even in West Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom, countries that had suffered from serious and sustained terrorist campaigns at home or abroad in their empires. But after 9/11, the demand for terrorism expertise quickly grew, and it was met by a rapid expansion in the number of such experts – many of whom were self-styled pundits – who churned out scholarly and popular works, blogs, journals, and opinion pieces. The West's sudden awareness of the threat of terrorism produced horror and puzzlement about this "new" phenomenon, even in countries that had experienced it since the 1960s. Most Americans, for instance, seem to have genuinely forgotten that President Ronald Reagan waged a "war on terrorism" in the 1980s, much less that anarchist terrorists carried out a campaign of violence in the US in the 1910s, culminating in the explosion of a massive bomb on Wall Street in 1920 that killed dozens. Indeed, the present-day obsession with the "new" phenomenon of terrorism has revived the old assumption from the 1890s and the 1980s that terrorism is essentially an ideology. Now, of course, it is expressed in the oddly well-meant refrain that while not all Muslims are terrorists, certainly all terrorists are Muslims. Not many scholarly works maintain this stance, but it is unfortunately widespread among popular commentators.

This leads us to two core assertions of this volume. First, to be appropriately and productively analyzed, terrorism needs to be understood as a means to an end. It is often described as a tactic, but, in fact, terrorism is best understood as a strategy that undergirds other actions. After all, killing, kidnapping, and arson are not "terrorism" per se. They are crimes that might be committed while engaging in terrorism as part of a broad strategy, one that might involve other forms of violent struggle. In other words – and this is the volume's second core assertion – a particular campaign of violence can only be understood as terrorism and its significance appreciated within and because of a particular context.

In terrorism studies, there exists an oft-noted divide between those who work within the social sciences and the humanities. This is often described as a contrast between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, but that captures only some of the difference. Of all the ways that we might characterize it, perhaps the most helpful is to observe that most scholars in the humanities explore the creation over time of a phenomenon that could be called terrorism but are generally obliged to do so while looking at only a particular time and place, while those in the social sciences are adept at analyzing it comparatively across time and place but only through the lens of a particular moment's – i.e., the present's – definition of it. In other words, if historians/humanists are primarily concerned with the development of the definition and thus the pattern, social scientists are focused on analyzing the present-day result of a process of historical change and projecting it back in time. To be even more blunt, historians, at their best, problematize the definition, while social scientists, when carrying out their best work, apply the definition.

Let us be clear: no scholarly discipline has a monopoly on the truth. Rather, each has advantages and disadvantages. As a historian, I am obviously trained and committed to pursue a certain sort of truth-telling. But if there are any doubts as to my conviction that social scientists have much to contribute to our understanding of terrorism, just simply look

at the "notes on contributors." There you will see that of 31 contributors to this volume, five primarily identify themselves as social scientists, and another six describe themselves as humanists from other disciplines besides history. I am confident that readers will agree that the social scientists who have contributed to this book have added immeasurably to its quality, complementing the strengths and mitigating some of the weaknesses of the historical approach.

But the framework of this volume is unmistakably historical, both in its chronological organization and its methodological treatment. As such, another word on the particular strengths and weaknesses of the historical investigation of terrorism is warranted. As I suggested above, the historical study of terrorism suffers from a "forest for the trees" problem. Historians have the skills necessary to make sense of the significance of individual terrorist actors, incidents, and eras since they are highly trained in the art and science of deep investigation and rich contextualization. For that very reason they tend not to venture far outside of their temporal and geographic fields, due also to their use of sometimes difficult-to-reach archival sources that may require specialized language abilities. Thus although there is an increasingly large and sophisticated number of studies that examine the use of and the response to terrorism, unfortunately these studies tend to exist in isolation from one another.

Therefore, one of the main goals of the book you hold in your hands is to strive to indeed see the forest as well as the trees and thus produce a comprehensive history of terrorism that not only captures the particularities of this or that agent or event but also puts them in an expansive context that encourages us to find continuities and distinguish real changes. To do this, we have brought together between two covers some of the world's foremost historians of terrorism and ensured that their contributions speak to each other.

To provide a common starting – if not ending – point for these exchanges, I asked contributors to consider Schmid's "revised academic consensus definition," which appeared in 2011. While I doubt that any "consensus" definition of terrorism can live up to that billing, Schmid's definition comes as close as I believe is possible, at least as it concerns mid to late twentieth-century incarnations of terrorism. Schmid describes terrorism, in part, as a

> doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and . . . a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties.

As noted above, the definition of terrorism risks becoming a string of criteria and caveats designed to counter various protestations based on the peculiar traits of this or that terrorist in this or that particular time and place – and Schmid's definition does include 12 points and is based on responses to two questionnaires distributed to academics regarding the viability of his 1984 and 1988 "academic consensus definitions." But in general, he captures the essential nature of terrorism as it has evolved in the modern era. Namely, he emphasizes that "the *direct victims* [of a terrorist act] *are not the ultimate target* . . . but serve as message generators, more or less unwittingly helped by the news values of the mass media, to reach various audiences and conflict parties that identify either with the victims' plight or the terrorists' professed cause."[19] In this, Schmid endorses several decades of academic work by scholars in terrorism studies that have emphasized that what makes terrorism unique is the centrality of symbolic violence, the performative act, or the communicative act.

Within individual chapters or groups of chapters in this volume, the definition of terrorism can appear fairly stable. Accordingly, a given contributor's primary task might be to describe and analyze the manifestations of terrorism in a specific time and place, which may or may not neatly fit a given definition. But over great sweeps of geography and eras, no single definition can fully capture the meaning and significance of terrorism. Nor should it. In fact, that creeping awareness should come second only to the recognition that *terrorism is old* as a clear point of significance for this volume.

Within and across the contributions to this volume, readers can explore how terrorism emerged from and was in some ways prefigured by pre-modern varieties of violence, including tyrannicide, private violence, and state terror. For the late modern era – that is, since the eighteenth century – readers can compare and contrast sub-state terrorism, state-sponsored terrorism, and state terror(ism). In Chapter 32, Richard Jackson directly challenges historians to broaden our frameworks for understanding state and sub-state violence, despite the ontological challenges. And several authors – de Graaf, Martin A. Miller, Roger Griffin, and, in particular, Paul M. Hagenloh (Chapters 27, 7, 24, and 11, respectively) – have tackled the issue quite directly and productively. Many others, including Jensen, Jones, Jennifer S. Holmes, and Steven Isaac (Chapters 8, 9, 19, and 4, respectively), have approached it more tangentially.

Most of the scholars included here imagine terrorism as objective, historical, generalizable, and stable, at least for short periods of historical time, while a few treat it largely or entirely as linguistically and culturally constructed (here I am thinking of de Graaf and Jackson as well as Patyk [Chapters 27, 32, and 31, respectively]). Generally speaking, the longer the period covered in a chapter, the more the author must recognize the essentially contested and constructed meaning of the term, as well as the ways the meaning of the term evolves from the standpoint of the state, the public, and the perpetrators of violence.

Let us be clear on this point, however: some scholars' belief that terrorism is culturally constructed is not meant to imply that somehow there is no *real* violence present. On the contrary, such an approach accepts that real blood is spilled and that real lives are destroyed. The issue is how we describe such violence and thus how societies react to it. How, such scholars might ask, is our reaction altered when we perceive that "terrorists" are at fault? What then do we demand of our governments and ourselves? Conversely, how do we react when it is our governments, militaries, or police forces spilling the blood? Do we accept the possibility, cultural constructivists might ask, that our governments might be terrorists?

The subject of religiously inspired violence also deserves a word of explanation. At first I was uncomfortable including a chapter focusing on Islamist thought, in addition to one detailing the activities of Islamist-inspired terrorists. In an ideal world, a volume on the history of terrorism would not have to survey the doctrines of a large subset of one of the world's largest and most significant religions just to draw, in part, the conclusion that John Calvert (Chapter 17) does, that Islam's – as well as Islamism's and *salafism*'s – connections to violence are limited, often gravely misunderstood, and primarily driven by specific contexts. In other words, that link is subject to the same caveats and asterisks that are routinely applied to other world religions. I suspect that I have already tipped my hand as to my reason for including Calvert's chapter in suggesting earlier that Islam and terrorism have become linked in the public imagination of much of the West for many reasons that are regrettable or simply wrong. I hope this chapter will set the record straight for some readers. This concern is also expressed in Chapters 8 and 9 by Jensen and Jones, respectively, on anarchism and terrorism; there is a long and storied history of broad movements becoming known to outsiders through the activities of their violent fringe. If readers

need to be reminded that adherents of other religions have found inspiration for violence in their faiths, they can turn to Donathan Taylor's portion of Chapter 3 on pre-modern terrorism that addresses the Sicarii; Isaac's (Chapter 4) on terror in medieval Christian Europe, including the Crusades; Matthew Jennings's (Chapter 6) on the subjugation and terrorization of the New World by European Christians; Eamon Murphy's (Chapter 23) discussion of Hindu extremism; and Susanne Martin's (Chapter 26) discussion of the participation of Christians and Buddhists in suicide attacks in recent decades.

While a historical approach to terrorism provides many advantages, the search for its origins raises its own questions, in particular, how to address the history of terrorism in those eras before the term entered widespread use (which did not happen until the latter part of the nineteenth century). A different concern is how to analyze "terrorism" before the rise of modern conceptions of the state and the individual. This makes the group of chapters that address pre-modern "terrorism" fraught with dangers and conceptually challenging but also tremendously fruitful. As Johannes Dillinger, Taylor and Yannick Gautron, Isaac, and Jennings demonstrate in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6, respectively, most of the elements that constitute modern terrorism existed before "terrorism" was "invented." Or should that be "discovered"? And Mike Rapport, Jennings, and Griffin (in Chapters 5, 6, and 24, respectively) explore those moments of invention/discovery.

As de Graaf proposes in Chapter 27 on counter-terrorism, one way to avoid the possibility of overly imposing the present on the past and thus risking anachronisms is to historicize the debate, striving to restrict ourselves or at least hyper-consciously trace (à la *Begriffsgeschichte*, the German term for the history of concepts) the use of terms in historically accurate ways. Isaac is particularly careful to do this in Chapter 4, in part because he takes on directly the challenge of historicizing violence in an era that lacked our clear modern distinctions between public and private killing.

The questions – as well as some of the possible answers – that I have outlined concerning the nature of terrorism in this introduction make clear the importance of gaining a clearer-eyed understanding of the phenomenon. And while the contributors to this volume might differ in their application of definitions of terrorism – and in their willingness to accept the possibility that the phenomenon we call "terrorism" can even be defined – there would certainly be broad agreement among them that it is incumbent upon all of us to learn from the historical record.

Speaking for myself, I believe that terrorism has often been employed in the past as a strategy that can be comprehended, analyzed, and countered, and that terrorism constitutes a real – if not existential – threat to the national security of the world's states and peoples. As such, I hope that this volume is read, absorbed, and addressed by those in the military, intelligence community, and national security apparatus of the United States and other countries. We should address the real danger posed by modern terrorist movements, but the contributions to this volume are valuable in reminding readers that those who use terrorism are more likely to cause casualties and destabilize states and societies than to achieve the full extent of their goals. And let us add to that the warnings from fiction writers of a century ago and of some academics of more recent decades: that our governments might do grave damage to themselves and to their populations in the name of fighting terrorism. Popular ignorance invites states to act hastily to reassure their peoples and opens the door to abuses of authority, human rights, and civil liberties.

Our concern about terrorism as a national security issue should also be tempered by the awareness that terrorism is indeed a strategy and can be used by those to whom we might

be more favorable. If terrorism is to be a useful analytical category, we should also question the means and ends of terroristic violence when used by those whose aims we endorse.

In the end, the study of terrorism's history probably raises more questions than it provides answers. But if, as suggested throughout this introduction, terrorism is a slippery beast that terrifies most when its very nature is questioned the least, perhaps the asking of better, more informed questions is the first step toward enlightenment.

## Notes

1 Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 41, 42, 257. For more on Kravchinsky and Russian revolutionary terrorism, see Chapter 7 by Martin A. Miller and Chapter 31 by Lynn Patyk in this volume.

2 Quoted in Lisa Cardyn, "Sexual Terror in the Reconstruction South," in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 148. For more on Reconstruction-era white supremacist terrorism, see Chapter 10 by R. Blakeslee Gilpin in this volume.

3 Edmund Burke, "Fourth Letter […] to the Earl Fitzwilliam," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), 6:70.

4 "J.-L. Tallien on the Terror," in *The French Revolution: A Document Collection*, ed. Laura Mason and Tracey Rizzo (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 264, 266. Emphasis in original. For more on terrorism during and immediately after the French Revolution, see Chapter 5 by Mike Rapport in this volume.

5 See Juan Cole, "Iraq's Worst Week – and Bush's," March 1, 2006, www.salon.com/2006/03/01/worst_3/ (accessed September 13, 2014).

6 After many decades of encouraging revolutionary activity, Kropotkin admitted in the 1890s that "a structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives." Quoted in Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 174.

7 Peter Kropotkin, "The Spirit of Revolt," in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed. Roger N. Baldwin (New York: Dover, 1970), 39. Italics in original.

8 For more on the phenomenon, see Chapters 8 and 9 in this volume by Richard Bach Jensen and Thai Jones, respectively.

9 Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 61; and Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 132. For more on terrorism in the Algerian War of Independence, see Chapter 15 by Martin C. Thomas in this volume.

10 Quoted in Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 17.

11 *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg* [The so-called "Blue Series"] (Nuremberg, 1947), 1:31–3, 46, 290, 298, 301, 329, 350.

12 See, for example, E. V. Walter, *Terror and Resistance: A Study of Political Violence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London: Macmillan, 1968); and William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960).

13 "The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism," United Nations, 1999, Article 2.1, https://treaties.un.org/doc/db/Terrorism/english-18-11.pdf (accessed September 20, 2014). The treaty entered into force in 2002, and 185 countries have ratified it.

14 David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* 53, no. 4 (1975): 692.

15 See, for instance, Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage Publications, 1982); Anthony Kubiak, *Stages of Terror: Terrorism, Ideology and Coercion as Theatre History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Richard Leeman, *The Rhetoric of Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

16 Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (Boston: South End Press, 1982); Edward S. Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The "Terrorism" Industry: The Experts and Institutions that Shape Our View of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989); and Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors: International Terrorism in the Real World* (New York: Claremont Research and Publications, 1986). For a valuable analysis of the discipline of "terrorism studies," see Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented "Terrorism"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

17 The opening chapter of a standard work in the field – Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2002) – surveys much of this literature, including many mind-boggling definitions of terrorism that concentrate, in turn, on the motives of the perpetrator, his/her means, target, and, only occasionally, the broader reaction to the violence. Conversely, in *The Lessons of Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), Caleb Carr reveals why resorting to a single-factor definition of terrorism – "warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support either leaders or policies that the agents of such violence find objectionable" (p. 6) – doesn't work in the first place.

18 Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1981). For more information on Sterling, her allegations, and the US government's embrace of her thesis, see Chapter 27 by de Graaf on counter-terrorism and Chapter 30 by Geraint Hughes on international terrorism, both in this volume.

19 Alex P. Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, ed. Alex P. Schmid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 86–7. Italics in original.

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# Part I

# STATE TERROR, TYRANNICIDE, AND TERRORISM IN THE PRE-MODERN WORLD

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# 2

# TYRANNICIDE FROM ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME TO THE CRISIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

*Johannes Dillinger*

This chapter surveys the development of the doctrine of tyrannicide from its earliest beginnings in the ancient world until the early seventeenth century. It will discuss the interrelation between theoretical debates and concrete political violence. Since the loaded terms "tyrant" and "tyrannicide" are not objectifiable and are unsuitable as categories of historical analysis, I will use them only in order to investigate the origins and changes in the concept that an unjust ruler (a "tyrant") could or should be killed legitimately ("tyrannicide"). I will not address the objectivist or moral questions concerning whether some concrete person should be seen as a "tyrant" or if killing any such person could be excusable. The idea of tyrannicide is relevant for a discussion of the history of terrorism, which I define as asymmetrical conflict including the partisan use of media in which an actor without official government mandate employs violence or the threat of violence against some state in order to further political change. At least in the initial stage of their fight, terrorists – in contrast to the organizers of a coup d'état, insurrectionists, or guerrilla fighters – do not yet aim at exercising military control over a certain region.[1] Terrorist tactics include assassinations of rulers, which the terrorists sometimes present as legitimate tyrannicides. This definition implies that terrorism is not necessarily a modern phenomenon. Such a recognition might help us to acquire a deeper understanding of terrorism if we allow that the roots of the phenomenon reach into the remote past.[2] The fact that we tend to see persons who fought pre-modern monarchs in a positive light does not contradict that suggestion: the old and unsolvable problem that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter is, after all, an integral part of the discussion of terrorism.

## Ancient Greece

According to tradition, the first Greek statues paid for out of public funds not depicting a god were those of tyrannicides: in 514 BC, Harmodios and Aristogeiton stabbed to death Hipparchus, a tyrannical ruler of Athens.[3] However, the Greek historians who dealt with the event hesitated to praise the killers. They already voiced some of the criticism that would help to shape the discussion of tyrannicide until the present. According to Herodotus, the killing achieved nothing for it did not end the tyrannical rule of Hipparchus' two surviving brothers.[4] When Thucydides discussed Hipparchus' assassination, he addressed major points of the discussion of tyrannicide that was to come: the motives of the killers, the guilt of the

tyrant, the risks taken, and the eventual outcome. He arrived at the sobering conclusion that a rather lenient tyrant had been killed by persons who had acted not out of love of liberty but out of injured pride and fear for their personal safety. With their ill-planned assassination, they had merely provoked the tyrant's successors to punish the Athenians harshly.[5]

Nevertheless, the democratic faction of Athens not only celebrated the tyrannicides but tried to give the resistance against tyranny a legal basis. Aristotle mentioned that according to an ancient law anyone aspiring to tyrannical rule would be outlawed, as would all his supporters. He might have been alluding to a law by Dracon. Laws enacted under Solon, Cleisthenes, Pericles, and Eucrates – roughly between 600 and 400 BC – obliged the Athenians to fight all attempts to overthrow democracy. In 410 BC, a decree of Demophantos legalized the killing of anybody who overthrew Athens' "constitution" and of anyone who accepted a public office after such an overthrow. Indeed, all Athenian citizens were required to swear an oath to fight tyrants with all possible means. The *polis* promised to honor the memory of anyone – even foreigners – who killed an Athenian tyrant.[6] These laws might serve as good examples of symbolic legislation; rather than playing any practical role in law enforcement, they served as an expression and confirmation of the democratic awareness of Athens.

When Plato studied the state and dealt with tyranny and tyrannicide, he had little time for historical arguments. In *The Republic*, Plato sketched a portrait of the tyrant as a personality type. The tyrannical man comes from democratic stock, but the relative luxury his background allows him corrupts him so that he loses all sense of propriety. The tyrannical man was not necessarily a ruler. However, tyrannical rule was first and foremost the rule of a person of the tyrannical type, and the tyrannical ruler was the worst kind of tyrannical person.[7]

Plato explained that tyranny arose from the lack of structure the democratic society suffered from. The commoners were unable to reconcile liberty with stability and longed for a strong leader who protected them from people of the upper classes. This leader could easily turn into a tyrant. Indeed, any leader who had tasted power over the docile *demos* and had killed in political conflict inevitably became a tyrant. The only way out of this development was to kill that leader before he rose to full tyrannical power. Plato's views here corresponded to the gist of the Athenian laws against tyranny: tyrannicide was pre-emptive in character. It was the last defense of the political system one had to resort to before a would-be tyrant fully solidified his power. According to Plato, after the tyrant had gained full power, he would still feel far from safe. The tyrant lived in fear – that was part of the tyrannical personality – but he was also positively driven by the concrete fear of assassination: all the benefits he ostentatiously bestowed on the population were meant to appease his would-be rebellious subjects. The enemies of the tyrant were clearly the upper classes who would plot his assassination. The tyrant would eventually ask the *demos* for troops for his personal protection. As the tyrant had to fear all people with any moral standards, he had to rely on mercenaries whose loyalty was questionable at best. The tyrant caught himself in vicious circles of distrust that made both his political and physical survival ever more unlikely.[8] Thus, for Plato the fear of tyrannicide was one of the motors that drove tyranny.

Plato's doctrine of tyranny implied a version of terrorism rather different from how the term is usually used today, one understood in the broadest sense of the political use of terror. Terror was a central element of tyranny not because the tyrant used terror as a weapon against would-be rebels but because the tyrant's constant fear of assassins was the structuring principle of his reign. The problem that would play a major role in later centuries – whether the killing of a tyrant was right or lawful – was of hardly any interest for Plato. He simply did not discuss it as a legal problem or a moral dilemma.[9]

Aristotle wrote at length about tyranny. For him, the yardstick of all political systems was the common good. Not only did tyranny not serve the common good, it negated it. Tyranny was not really a form of government. Rather, it was per se a violation of the "constitutional" order: the tyrant was a demagogue, a king, a magistrate, or a member of the oligarchy who created for himself a unique position of power beyond anything allowed by the rule of law or tradition. This construction of tyranny as a kind of pseudo-government that was always in itself unlawful begged the question what exactly lawful government was. For practical purposes, Aristotle seemed prepared to admit that the support of the people made the difference between a king and a tyrant. He might have echoed a suggestion by Socrates here. In this context, Aristotle even envisioned a way in which the tyrant could consolidate – if not legitimate – his rule: if the tyrant played the role of the pious and dignified monarch, he could minimize the risk of attacks on him. Ideally, he gave both the commoners and the upper class the impression that he was all for them and would defend them against the other group. At the same time, as Aristotle remarked ironically, it was best for the tyrant to foster discord and distrust among his subjects, to do everything to keep them from uniting against him, to deprive them of potential leaders, and to surveil them with unceasing vigilance. It was most important for the tyrannical ruler to keep a close watch over everyone who might feel wronged by his regime. Aristotle's sober view of the tyrant corresponded to his detached treatment of tyrannicide. He did not see the assassin as an idealist. As the case of Harmodios and Aristogeiton had shown, tyrannicides had usually some ulterior motive for their attack on the ruler: fear, greed, vengeance, or ambition. The last two might even lead the tyrannicide to attack even though he had hardly any chance to escape after the killing. In this way, Aristotle envisaged the suicide assassin: no enemy of the tyrant was more dangerous than the one who felt he had suffered so much under his rule that he was prepared to die if he could take the tyrant with him. In any case, Aristotle acknowledged that a blatant abuse of power could justify tyrannicide. He, like Plato, expected members of the elites to fight tyrants successfully.[10]

## Ancient Rome

The Roman republic had laws against tyranny roughly corresponding to those of Athens. Given the republic's natural hostility to all things monarchical, the laws were not explicitly directed against tyrants but against people who attempted to re-establish the *regnum*. It was legal to put anyone to death who tried to create a new office without the consent of the people and outside of the ceremonial and political framework, i.e., anyone who wanted to overthrow the republican order. These laws were apparently enacted in the late sixth and fifth centuries BC, and they belonged to the very bedrock of the republican constitution. According to Livius, in 486 BC a consul who appeared to be about to gain permanent rule by bribing the *plebs* with new land grants was executed. Spurius Maelius, a rich plebeian, was killed by the *magister equitum* Ahala when he attempted a similar coup in 439 BC. Ahala went into exile.[11]

On the basis of these traditions and urged on by Caesar's rise to power, Cicero became one of the most outspoken advocates of tyrannicide ever. For Cicero, tyranny spelled the end of law and freedom. Anyone who thought that such a government could be honorable was not just stupid or corrupt but was also clearly mad. The tyrant himself was not even a human being. His life was a burden to him because it was necessarily full not only of intrigue but also of fear. Echoing Plato, Cicero presented the threat of tyrannicide as an integral part

of the tyrant's reign. Killing him was not only just; it was a noble deed and as necessary as the amputation of a diseased limb. Whereas killing a friend was a most heinous crime, killing a former friend who had become a tyrant – that is, abusing the trust of a tyrant in order to kill him – was "the most beautiful of all great deeds."[12]

Cicero demanded the killing of tyrants in power as well as the killing of everybody aspiring to tyrannical rule. He praised tyrannicides emphatically as liberators worthy of ritual worship and claimed that given the opportunity he would kill a tyrant even if it cost his own life.[13] According to Cicero, tyrannicide was justifiable homicide par excellence, for it was really killing in self-defense. As such, it was in accordance with natural law, which was the yardstick of positive law. As such, it would be utterly absurd to question the rightfulness of tyrannicide.[14]

It should be obvious that Cicero's fierce advocacy of tyrannicide reflected the changes in the political structure in Rome he lived through. When he spoke about tyranny, he did not discuss theoretical matters but mounted polemical attacks on his political adversaries who were about to overthrow Roman republicanism. Cicero and Brutus, who famously led the conspiracy to kill Caesar, had been in close contact. Even though Cicero was not part of that conspiracy, the connection between the fact that Brutus owed much of his career to Caesar and Cicero's suggestion that not even personal obligation should keep a conscious citizen from attacking a tyrant seems obvious. However, the Senate failed to celebrate Brutus as a tyrannicide. It merely pardoned him as a murderer. Given the political power of Caesar's faction, Brutus had to flee the city a few days later.[15]

Given the preoccupation of antiquity with the tyrant as a person who wanted to overthrow the "constitutional" order, one might argue that the tyrant rather than the tyrannicide was a precursor of modern-day terrorists. In the modern era, many define terrorism as asymmetrical conflict in which an actor with no official mandate from any government fights a government in order to further political change. If we accept that, we need to see pre-modern tyrants who wanted to overthrow the existing political structures as akin to modern terrorists, not the tyrannicides who aimed at defending that political structure.

## The Middle Ages: John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas

Concerning active resistance and tyrannicide, Biblical traditions were equivocal. Even if we exclude those passages of the Bible in which God demands the killing of some person and focus narrowly on questions of legitimate disobedience against authority, we find a variety of opinions. While the history of the Maccabees, Daniel 7:27, and Acts 5:29 seemed to justify (violent) resistance, Exodus 22:27–28, Proverbs 8:15, Romans 13, and 1 Peter 2:13–18 advocated obedience towards the authorities even if they were pagan. In contrast to Greek and Roman authors, the Bible focused on resistance or non-resistance against actual rulers, not against persons about to overthrow the political order. Some early Christian authors praised tyrannicide. For example, Sozomen enthusiastically reported the (wrong) story that Julian the Apostate had been killed by a Christian as a tyrant because he had fought the Church. There were even legends about a saint who came down from Heaven in order to kill the tyrant Julian.[16] Augustine did acknowledge that if the commonwealth had fallen prey to criminals and persons indulging their personal ambition, it was just to fight them and give the government back to those who would use it rightly. However, his main argument was that Christians should respect the lords of the *civitas terrena* (the City of Man).[17] Augustine more or less set the tone for the Christian discussion of tyrannicide until the High Middle Ages.[18]

John of Salisbury, a protégé of Thomas Becket, was the only theologian of the High Middle Ages who tried to defend tyrannicide vociferously. John, who drew upon Cicero, thought that his time suffered under a number of tyrants, among others the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. For John, the decisive difference between a king and a tyrant was that the king respected the law whereas the tyrant did not. The king was the image of God's majesty that founded and guaranteed all law, while the tyrant was the image of the devil. While John conceded that unjust government was a form of divine punishment, this did not mean that Christians had no right to fight unjust rulers. The abuse and destruction of the law was not to be tolerated and could not go unpunished. Therefore, John allowed tyrannicide as the *ultima ratio* in the conflict with unjust princes, including princes of the Church. He went so far as to suggest that in most cases of unjust government, tyrannicide was rightful because tyranny would not allow the intervention of legitimate authorities. However, John did respect norms of feudal society, for it was illegitimate for a tyrannicide to violate the bonds of honor and mutual trust implied in feudal obligations. In the end, John seemed to be unhappy with his own daring, explaining that prayer was the most effective weapon against tyrants.[19]

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas set out to describe the origins and nature of monarchy, integrating historical experience, Greek philosophy, and Christian tradition. Tyranny, Aquinas explained, might also arise out of the rule of the majority with its factionalism as well as out of monarchy. The latter case was less damaging as it avoided party strife. The main characteristic of tyrannical rule was that it served the interests of those in power and not the common good. If tyranny triumphed over the precautions recommended by Aquinas – such as a limitation of monarchical power – the *doctor angelicus* suggested that it would be best to tolerate it for a while if it was at all tolerable. The dangers arising out of an open fight against a moderate tyrant might be worse than his tyranny itself. If the tyrant prevailed, he might resort to harsh countermeasures against the rebels. If the tyrant lost, a permanent destabilization of the political system could still ensue. A more aggressive tyrant might arise out of the ruin of his predecessor. In case of an intolerable tyranny, Aquinas had as a young theologian defended tyrannicide following Cicero. Later on, Aquinas declared soberly that the deposition of a ruler was a "constitutional" question: elective monarchies might give the subjects a chance to resist. In accordance with Aristotle, but also reflecting the political realities of his time, Aquinas thought that first and foremost powerful elites had the right and the duty to fight tyrants. In other political systems, the subjects could only pray for relief from tyranny. Thus, Aquinas advocated a right to resist that should take its concrete form according to the specific customs of each country. This did not necessarily exclude tyrannicide as the *ultima ratio*, but the direct and adventurous course of tyrannicide should never be the first option. Given the fact that Aquinas was a nephew of emperor Frederick Barbarossa and given his Aristotelian orientation, it is probably not surprising that the theologian was reluctant to praise tyrannicide. Nevertheless, Aquinas' new respect for "constitutional" conditions and his level-headed acknowledgment of the realities of power that saw resistance primarily not so much as the privilege but as the responsibility of rich and influential persons made Aquinas a remarkable theoretician of tyrannicide.[20]

## The Middle Ages: Petit and Gerson

In 1407, John the Fearless, Duke of Bourgogne, had killed his cousin, Louis, Duke of Orléans, who had ruled France de facto as the vicegerent of his feeble-minded brother, King Charles V. The death of Louis sparked a major debate on tyrannicide. John the Fearless

asked one of the protégés of his family, Jean Petit, a priest with a doctorate in theology and a sound knowledge of law and politics, to defend him. John himself assembled a committee of nobles to hear his case. This official hearing was part and parcel of a propaganda campaign launched by John; writings praising his killing of the king's brother were already circulating in Paris. Petit defended John by declaring Louis a tyrant and a traitor whom the duke of Bourgogne had rightly killed. After Petit's speech, John admitted openly that he had killed Louis. The assembly of nobles acquitted him immediately. Two patents issued in the name of the king exculpated him. Thus, John did not only avoid any punishment, he achieved a major propagandistic victory.[21]

Petit revised his speech two times between 1408 and his death in 1411, but he never changed his basic arguments. Petit's defense of his client and sponsor was a piece of propagandistic aggrandizement rather than a legal plea. Petit might have decided to present John's deed as tyrannicide since it allowed him to shower the greatest possible praise on him, drawing on Cicero and John of Salisbury.[22] In Petit's speech, John was a tyrannicide in the classical sense of a man of high standing who intervened in order to stop an ill-suited person's illegitimate rise to power. His pre-emptive strike against Louis had saved the king whom the duke of Orléans had conspired to replace. All of the kingdom had lived in fear of Louis, whom Petit descripted as a typical tyrant, an unprincipled despot who lived to indulge himself. When John ordered his men to kill Louis, he was like the archangel Michael who threw Lucifer into hell. Divine law, natural law, moral law, and positive law all demanded tyrannicide. Therefore, nobody needed an official mandate or an instruction from some superior person in order to kill a tyrant legally. Petit stated that any subject of the king could legitimately kill a tyrant. The supreme obligation to kill the tyrant outweighed all personal or feudal obligations. Thus, Petit removed the last safeguard implied in the chivalrous ideal of feudalism that even John of Salisbury had respected. The assassination was even more honorable when the power of the tyrant was already strong enough to make it impossible for the courts to bring him to justice. Petit explained that if tyrannicide was legitimate, meritorious, and even a positive duty for any subject of the king of France, it was even more so for Duke John because he was an aristocrat of the highest rank.[23]

Jean Gerson, arguably one of the most respected theologians of that time, attacked Petit's very construction of the just tyrannicide. Gerson had Petit's theses condemned by a "Concile de la Foie" (Council of Faith) in Paris in 1414. This small assembly was already under the influence of Emperor Sigismund, an adversary of Duke John.[24] Sigismund was the *spiritus rector* of the Council of Constance; Gerson was one of the Council's leading theologians. It comes as no surprise that in 1415, the Council of Constance anathematized the notion that "any tyrant may and ought to be killed, licitly and meritoriously, by any of his vassals or subjects, even using plots, subtle blandishments or flattery, notwithstanding any oath taken or treaty made with him, and without waiting for a sentence or a mandate given by any judge."[25] The Council's text targeted mainly Petit but also the Dominican monk Johannes Falkenberg who supported the Teutonic Order of Knights against the king of Poland and had called for the king's liquidation.[26] The Council's decision was not the last word of the Catholic Church concerning tyrannicide since the clause about sentences and mandates left some room for debate. In addition to that, the Council's legitimacy was questionable. Gerson later returned to the subject of tyrannicide. He stressed that persons of legitimate authority, not just any disgruntled subject, had to deal with the tyrant. He demanded that the tyrannical ruler should be given the chance to repent for his sins and thus save his soul, i.e., he should not die suddenly in an assassination.[27]

There was a shift of emphasis from antiquity to the Middle Ages concerning tyrannicide. Even though both epochs knew both concepts of tyranny, the tyrant as a person aspiring to unlawful rule was apparently more prominent in the debates of antiquity when tyrannicide was primarily understood as a pre-emptive strike. After Augustine, authors tended to see the tyrant as a person who had already established his rule. Thus, tyrannicide became a way to liberate the people who already suffered from suppression. The influence of the Bible helped to foreground this understanding of tyrannicide. To be sure, there were exceptions from that trend. The killing of Louis, Duke of Orléans, seems to be the most prominent one. Nevertheless, the Council of Constance's decision and the further debate about violence against rulers rather neglected the old concept of the pre-emptive tyrannicide. This relative shift reflected another large-scale development. With the decline of the Roman Empire, government had lost much of its structure. It is a truism that the Middle Ages did not know states in a modern (or Roman) sense of the word. Laws like those of Athens and Rome that positively protected an abstract "constitution" against the tyrant as its enemy would have made little sense. Laws against treason were probably the best equivalent of the old laws against the rise of a tyrant. Treason laws like Edward III's act of 1352 or the German Golden Bull of 1356 punished attacks on the royal dynasty or on the princes who elected the king. Ancient Greece and Rome as well as Europe in the Middle Ages had mostly stressed that tyrannicide – if it was admissible at all – was the duty or rather the privilege of political elites. Given the relatively weak legal structure of medieval monarchies, this aspect became even more crucial. It corresponded to the all-encompassing estates system and the concept of *ordo:* the structure of society, including the privileges of the clergy and the aristocracy, were supposed to be part of the God-given hierarchical order mankind had to live in. It was consistent with this kind of thinking to assume that a political action of the magnitude of tyrannicide must be among the prerogatives of the ruling elites. Thus, all pre-modern authors condemned tyranny and many advocated tyrannicide while they maintained that the actual attack on a tyrant was a privilege reserved for a very small elite. This might alienate the modern democratic mind, but it was totally in keeping with pre-modern ideas of an ordered and structured world. Not even the Reformation would change that basic concept.

## The Reformation and the monarchomachs

The Reformation challenged all traditional structures of power. In Germany, France, and England, denominational controversies led to armed resistance against the king. The legitimacy of a whole cosmos of power, that of the Church of Rome, was called into question. Nevertheless, the reformers' view of tyrannicide was not significantly more positive than that of the medieval Church. Martin Luther explained that Christians should pray for tyrants and not resist them actively. God would punish them eventually. Such an attitude was necessary, given that Luther's rejection of papal rule had obliged him to emphasize the authority of the temporal powers. Even if they neglected their God-given power to order and protect the Christian community, violent resistance – like the German Peasants' War – let alone tyrannicide was out of the question. Luther explained that neither the traditions of the Bible nor those of antiquity could ever justify killing a tyrant. That the Swiss had freed themselves from feudal rule or that the Danish had dethroned King Christian II was for the Wittenberg theologian plainly unjust. Luther only changed his mind to a certain degree, when in 1530, under pressure from Protestant princes, he declared it right for them

to defend themselves with military force against the emperor. Nine years later, he confirmed this view and explained that armed resistance against the pope and those princes fighting Protestants at the beck and call of Rome was essentially self-defense. In rhetorical hyperbole, Luther declared the pope an outlaw who – according to German law – could be killed legally by anyone as if he were a wild beast.[28] The irony of this concept of "papacide" was, of course, that Luther himself had been an outlaw since 1521. It comes as no surprise that the Augsburg Confession embraced the concept of legitimate resistance against ungodly rulers.

In contrast to Luther, John Calvin directly commented on the nature of tyranny. The tyrant was a ruler who used fear not as an instrument of coercion (as it might be done in a well-ordered state) but as an instrument of suppression: fear helped to spread senseless confusion among the subjects. Even though Calvin maintained that the subjects owed obedience to their lords, he too was deeply troubled by the persecution of his own adherents by Catholic authorities. Rulers who did not respect God's will – i.e., who fought Protestantism – did not deserve loyalty. In 1562, early in the French civil wars, Calvin demanded that kings and princes who did not serve God should be arrested. However, he made it very clear that this was not a license to rebel, let alone a call to tyrannicide: persons of authority had to lead the resistance.[29] Calvin did not just echo medieval doctrines about tyrannicide here: it would have been difficult for him to say anything else in the concrete context of civil war.

The so-called monarchomachs of the sixteenth century, some of them Huguenots, essentially shared Calvin's view. The term "monarchomachs" (monarch slayers) is misleading: these authors – most prominently Hotman, Bèze, and Buchanan – stressed the right of rebellion and the estates' prerogative to check the monarch's power. The monarchomachs wanted the old elites of the estates to unite against the monarch that had grown too powerful. Thus they advocated armed resistance and open revolt against a tyrannical system rather than tyrannicide.[30]

In the late sixteenth century, Jean Bodin, one of the fathers of the concept of absolutism, took the opposite view. Bodin claimed that nobody, not even a person from the political elite, had the right even to think about killing his sovereign monarch. Only the intervention of a foreign power to bring down the tyrannical government in another country could be legitimate.[31]

## The Jesuit debate and the assassinations of rulers around 1600

For a number of later authors, Juan de Mariana, a sixteenth-century Spanish historian and Jesuit priest, was the apostle of tyrannicide.[32] Indeed, his 1599 treatise was more aggressive than the Council of Constance's decision seemed to permit, and it did suggest a slightly new perspective. Anyone was allowed to kill a tyrant if the tyrant had been condemned by "*publica vox populi*" (the public voice of the people). One was to assume that such a condemnation took place automatically and silently if the tyrant prevented all meetings of persons of high standing that could have summoned the power to condemn him officially. In a way, a ruler who permanently kept the elite from uniting against him dethroned himself by that very act. This argument might have been derived from canon law: a pope who had evidently lost his Catholic faith automatically lost papal authority. More importantly, Mariana had in mind a concrete tyrant and concrete elites who were potentially dangerous to him. Henry III of France had killed the duke and the cardinal of Guise, both leading figures of the opposition

against him. According to Mariana, this crime against the estates system, the political privileges of the elites, made him a tyrant. Henry's willingness to cooperate with the Protestant Henry of Navarre seemed to be less important for Mariana. Henry III was a tyrant because he violated the basic principles of the French monarchy (and any well-ordered state) that would at least guarantee the prerogatives of the high aristocracy. According to Mariana, the assassination of Henry by the radical Dominican Jacques Clément in 1589 had been justifiable tyrannicide, not murder. Mariana was no champion of popular sovereignty; usually he is not even counted under the monarchomachs. His treatise was an educational book written for the young Philip III of Spain. It was neither a radical political pamphlet nor a theological treatise but an instructive and practical manual for good government. Mariana warned the prince in no uncertain terms and pointed out the limits of his power: between him and potential assassins stood only the magnates of his kingdom among whom the bishops figured prominently.[33]

The most prolific critic of Mariana was probably Francisco Suárez, a fellow Jesuit who discussed tyrannicide in the context of a polemic against Anglicanism.[34] Suárez' tyrants were clearly the Protestant monarchs of England, especially Henry VIII and James I. Suárez reminded his readers of a fundamental distinction between two kinds of tyrants: those who had no legitimate claim to authority and those whose rule was essentially legitimate even if their governmental practices had become questionable, e.g., Nero. A tyrant of the latter kind might be especially dangerous if he supported heresy. Tyrants with no legal claim to rule had no authority, thus no law and no biblical call to obedience could protect them. However, as private persons were not allowed to kill murderers sentenced to death, private persons were not supposed to liquidate unjust rulers, even those whose rule was fundamentally illegitimate. Suárez repeated the basic thought that the fight against a tyrant should be left to persons of authority. This was even more important if the tyrant to be fought had some legitimate claim to authority. However, every ruler who turned his back to Catholicism lost any such claim. According to Suárez, the pope could officially depose heretical rulers because Rome's main responsibility (and prerogative) was the preservation of the Church all over the world. Thus, no resistance, let alone a physical attack on the person of a prince, could be legitimate without the foregoing approval of the pope. As to the concrete and practical role of private persons in a conflict with the tyrant, Suárez stressed explicitly that they should not take any action, no matter if the tyrant had any legitimate claim to power or not. Self-defense was the only exception from this rule as it was a God-given right. Nevertheless, even in self-defense the would-be assassin should ask himself if his own death or that of the tyrant would cause more hardship for the community.

Suárez took the old idea that tyrannicide was a kind of political privilege to extreme heights. This was more than a reflection of the estates system he lived in or a vestige of the medieval concept of *ordo*. Suárez vainly tried to dispel the anti-Catholic and anti-Jesuit odium the debate about Mariana had caused.[35] In addition to that, two attacks on monarchs loomed large over Catholic political theory. The first was the Gunpowder Plot. Eight years before Suárez wrote his treatise on the English monarchy, a small group of radical English Catholics led by Robin Gatsby – and allegedly Jesuit priests – had tried in vain to assassinate James I. The state trials that followed maintained that Jesuit teachings were ultimately responsible for the attempt on the king's life. We know precious little about the plotters, but they might have seen themselves as tyrannicides. A Jesuit apparently tried to dissuade them from their plans.[36] Suárez probably hoped to discourage further attempts on the monarch's life, which might have made the situation of

the Catholic minority in England completely untenable even as he upheld papal authority and the condemnation of the English king as a heretic. The second attack had succeeded: François Ravaillac had stabbed Henry IV – Henry of Navarre, who had succeed Henry III as king of France – to death in 1610. The assassin had been no Jesuit but a radical Catholic disenchanted with Henry who had himself converted to Catholicism but failed to make the other Huguenots fall in line. In addition to that, Ravaillac had feared that Henry would attack the pope. The assassination itself and rumors about Jesuit involvement did not help to improve the situation of the Church and the Jesuit order.[37]

Both Mariana and his Jesuit counterpart Suárez developed their doctrines against the background of concrete attacks against kings. However, they dealt with them in very different ways: whereas Mariana tried to defend the assassination of Henry III as rightful tyrannicide, Suárez cautioned against the very concept of legitimate tyrannicide. Suárez not only feared reprisals against his co-religionists. He apparently saw the justification of tyrannicide as another source of irritation that threatened to destabilize the already explosive political situation even further.

We might call the plotters and assassins of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries terrorists: they were non-state actors who attacked (members of) governments in order to further political change. Their actions were widely publicized and became parts of propaganda wars, much like those of their modern counterparts. Writers in antiquity had stressed that the tyrant was a person who wanted to overthrow the political order. Therefore, he, not the tyrannicide, could be regarded as the equivalent of a modern terrorist. The same analogy does not hold true for the Middle Ages and the early modern period, when writers tended to see the tyrant primarily as an unjust but well-established ruler. Accordingly, it was more difficult to justify a fight against him. The assassin turned from a heroic defender of the political order to its criminal enemy, resembling the modern conception of the terrorist. At any rate, the concepts of tyrannicide we discussed here were hardly revolutionary. Rather, they appeared to be integral parts of cultures that mostly respected the privileges and the political vocation of small elites. The link between the old doctrines of tyrannicide and ideas of popular sovereignty is tenuous: from Greek antiquity onwards, most authors stressed time and again that not just anybody but rather influential people should fight tyrants, be it because it was their privilege to do so or because of practical reasons. The real assassins and plotters of the period around 1600 hardly fitted the image of very high-ranking persons entitled to kill a tyrant; not even the Gunpowder Plotters were high aristocracy. With the exception of the ambiguous text by Mariana, the theorists of tyrannicide were reluctant to praise these terrorist-style regicides.

Later in the seventeenth century, the Thirty Years' War and the English Civil War would challenge monarchical power as it had never been challenged before. The execution of Charles I established a new concept of revolutionary violence against rulers, which the old concepts of tyrannicide were not even fit to describe.[38]

## Notes

1 Johannes Dillinger, *Terrorismus* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 10–18.
2 Dillinger, *Terrorismus*, 21–5.
3 Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen, "Harmodios und Aristogeiton, die Tyrannenmörder von 514 v. Chr," in *Das Attentat in der Geschichte*, ed. Alexander Demandt, 15–38 (Erftstadt: Area, 2003); Mario

Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide* (Paris: PUF, 2001), 46–69, 100–2; and Conal Condren, "The Office of Rule and the Rhetorics of Tyrannicide in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe," in *Murder and Monarchy: Regicide in European History, 1300–1800*, ed. Robert von Friedeburg, 48–72 (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004). Note that the term "tyrannicide" can not only refer to the act but to the person who carries it out.

4 Herodotus, *Hist.* 5, 55–62, www.paxlibrorum.com/books/histories/ (accessed February 27, 2013).

5 Thucydides, *Hist.* 6, 54–59, www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0247 (accessed February 27, 2013). See also Pedro Barceló, "Thukydides und die Tyrannis," *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 39, no. 4 (1990): 401–25.

6 Turchetti, *Tyrannie*, 97–107.

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# 3

# PRE-MODERN TERRORISM

## The cases of the Sicarii and the Assassins

*Donathan Taylor and Yannick Gautron*

Those searching for the pre-modern roots of modern-day terrorism must usually be content with finding the occasional tactical similarity, the rare parallel strategic consideration, or an intriguing rhetorical construction of violence. More often, the analysis of ancient or medieval violence illuminates the character of modern terror by highlighting the presence or absence of critically important elements, what Steven Isaac in Chapter 4 describes as the utility of a photographic negative of our own time. While the chapters directly preceding and following this one demonstrate the timelessness of killing, they reveal the difficulties associated with analyzing violence that induced terror or mimicked modern tactics – such as assassination – but took place in societies that did not possess modern conceptions of the state, the ideological availability of revolutionary political change, or now-common delineations between public and private acts. Two examples stand out in the pre-modern world, however, for their eerie familiarity to our modern modes of violence: the Sicarii of Judaea and the Assassins of Persia and Syria. This chapter analyzes these two movements, explains their uses of violence within the contexts of their times, and explores the appropriateness of describing them as terrorists within both their contexts and ours.[1]

### Romans, Jews, and Sicarii in Judaea

In the Southern Levant, a unique set of circumstances arose by the mid-first century of the Common Era that created an environment conducive to a unique expression of violence among the Jewish population which modern society has subsequently identified as terrorism. In the Roman province of Judaea, decades of foreign rule, together with the collaborative acquiescence of the largely Hellenized Jewish social and religious elite, finally compelled certain radical groups within the local community to oppose both in an expression of self-determination. Among these was a band of violent dissidents called the Sicarii whose identity has generated endless debate among modern scholars of Jewish history.

The circumstances which gave rise to the Sicarii found their origin in the social and political events which unfolded within Judea[2] during the preceding century. In 63 BCE, the Roman general Pompey (106–48 BCE) undertook to resolve a dispute between rival Hasmonean claimants to the high priesthood of the country as part of his efforts to further secure Rome's control over former Seleukid territories in the Levant. This task ultimately necessitated a three-month siege of Jerusalem, followed by the inexorable application of Roman authority. After a fresh round of internal disorder several years later, an additional reorganization of Judea occurred during the tenure of Aulus Gabinius, proconsul to Syria (57–55 BCE). Among other things, this involved a reduction in the political authority of the

high priesthood and the rebuilding of several towns, the latter of which subsequently experienced an influx of colonists from various parts of the Mediterranean.[3]

These and other internal changes administered by Rome, though acceptable to the upper social and economic elite, generated growing agitation within the greater Jewish community. Governed by foreign rulers, subject to the authority of local Hellenized leaders, and surrounded in their ancestral lands by thousands of "Gentiles," many Jews found recourse in their religious teachings. Given the nature of Israelite cultural tradition, derived largely from the Bible, Jewish resistance to objectionable forms of rulership, whether foreign or domestic, inevitably assumed potent religious overtones.[4] And by the latter half of the first century CE, Jewish discontent with Roman rule generated a constant tension that provided a fertile environment from which the Sicarii pursued their goal of liberating the Jewish people from Roman authority.

In 6 CE, Rome formally joined the regions of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria into the Roman Province of Judaea and then moved to further consolidate its authority through the application of a tax census by the governor of Syria, P. Sulpicius Quirinius (6–12 CE). Under the subsequent constraining effects of these new changes, relations further deteriorated between the local Jewish population and their foreign overlords, and resistance to Roman authority hardened. For Rome, the matter was not made easier by the fact that a succession of later procurators, such as Ventidius Cumanus (48–52 CE), Lucceius Albinus (62–64 CE), and Gessius Florus (64–66 CE), who were appointed by the emperor to maintain supervision over the province of Judaea, callously mishandled domestic relations with little care shown for the welfare of the Jewish population. These periodic bouts of maladministration paired with the sometimes indiscriminant application of military force only added fuel to the growing civil unrest.[5]

Among the small minority of extremist groups that emerged at this time to oppose Roman authority in Judaea, the Sicarii stood apart. The ability of current scholarship to unravel the character of this elusive sect is complicated by the fact that almost all extant knowledge is derived from a single biased source – the works of the Jewish historian and former general during the opening stages of the First Roman–Jewish War (66–73 CE), Yosef ben Matityahu, later to be called, after his acquisition of Roman citizenship, Flavius Josephus.[6] Through two of his works, *The Jewish War* and *The Antiquities*, Josephus collectively portrays the Sicarii as an indigenous group of violent religious radicals that emerged in the mid-first century during the governorship of the Roman procurator Antonius Felix (52–60 CE).[7] Their appearance was the result of a confluence of factors that came together at the interface between Roman authority and Jewish culture.

From certain intertextual evidence in Josephus and lesser Talmudic sources, some modern historians have posited a link between the Sicarii and the Zealots (Kanna'im), the most widely identified opposition group to Roman rule in the events ending with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Since the nineteenth century, the potential existence of this relationship between the two sects has fueled passionate discussion among scholars, although no definitive connection can, in fact, be derived from any of the extant works.[8]

## Sicarii violence and terror

In a careful analysis of Josephus, two characteristics can be ascertained that distinguish the sect from all other opposition groups in Judaea: their extreme doctrine of "No lord but God" and their utter commitment to carry out acts of violence against members of the Jewish

community that dared reject this belief.[9] In essence, the targets of their violence were Jews, particularly prominent leaders in the community – such as priests – who cooperated with Roman authorities or otherwise acquiesced to the foreign influences permeating Jewish society.

The terror inspired by the Sicarii was magnified by the manner in which they intimidated their enemies. Josephus says that unlike the rural bandits common to Judaea, the Sicarii originated in Jerusalem and relied on anonymity as an instrument to instill fear. They

> committed murders in broad daylight in the heart of the city. The festivals were their special seasons, when they would mingle with the crowd, carrying short daggers under their clothing, with which they stabbed their enemies. Then, when [the victim] fell, the murderers joined in the cries of indignation and, through this plausible behavior, were never discovered.

Such tactics inevitably resulted in widespread psychological anxiety within the Jewish community.

> The panic created was more alarming than the calamity itself; every one, as on the battlefield, hourly expecting death. Men kept watch at a distance on their enemies and would not trust even their friends when they approached. Yet, even while their suspicions were aroused and they were on guard, they fell; so swift were the conspirators and so crafty in eluding detection.[10]

The first victim of this tactic was the High Priest Jonathan, doubtless selected because he was perceived to be a high profile collaborator with the Romans and his death would serve as a stark warning against such behavior to both the Jewish ruling elite and the common population.[11]

The instability generated in Jerusalem by this and other such sensational incidents quickly captured the attention of Roman authorities in Judaea who almost certainly assigned the name Sicarii, a Latin term derived from the fact that the assassins carried out their attacks with the use of a distinctive weapon whose design most resembled the curved Roman dagger called a *sica*. This term has no other currency in Greek or Jewish literature before Josephus.[12]

In addition to assassination, the Sicarii also resorted to the kidnapping of prominent Jews for purposes of political extortion. They began this practice during the procuratorship of Albinus when they seized Eleazar, secretary of the temple captain and son of the current high priest, Ananias (63 CE). They then offered his release in exchange for the freeing of their fellow Sicarii currently imprisoned by the Romans. Following Ananias' entreaties, Albinus eventually granted the request, but Josephus notes that "this was the beginning of greater troubles."[13] Emboldened by their success, the Sicarii continued to employ the abduction of prominent Jews as a means to secure the freedom of their incarcerated associates.

The activities of the Sicarii likewise extended into the countryside where they proved no less significant. In a less furtive manner, they sought to intimidate and punish the rural Jewish elite for willingly acquiescing to Roman authority. Josephus says that the Sicarii moved against those Jews "who consented to submit to Rome and in every way treated them as enemies."[14] To this end, they plundered and destroyed the estates of the wealthy in select acts of reprisal.

In each instance, the tactics of the Sicarii were specific, violent, and calculated to curtail popular collaboration with Imperial officials through the application of terror. By targeting the Jewish social and religious elite, the Sicarii were carefully selecting individuals who were of high symbolic political value in order to discourage pro-Roman grassroots cooperation from among the wider population. At the same time, an immediate tangible result was to disrupt the unchecked flow of information from Jewish leaders who provided the Romans the means to anticipate and thereby control the course of events in the province. Collectively, these actions served to further isolate Roman forces while simultaneously driving a wedge between the Jewish people and their traditional leadership, whom the Sicarii saw as generally corrupt. Perhaps most notable is the fact that Sicarii attacks of this nature targeted only Jews. Extant evidence indicates that Roman civilians and military personnel suffered few direct reprisals in the form of assassination, kidnapping, or property destruction. That the psychological purpose of these attacks was aimed primarily at the Jewish population is further confirmed by the fact that such incidents occurred at religiously significant times and places, such as pilgrimage festivals and the Temple of Jerusalem.[15]

Yet the Sicarii were in many ways as much a symptom of the unstable social and political conditions present in Judaea as they were a contributor to its further breakdown in the immediate years prior to the outbreak of the first-century revolt. Faced with a protracted inability to exercise self-determination because of the Roman occupation, a growing segment of the Jewish population became increasingly resolved to free their country by violent means.

## The Roman–Jewish War and the end of the Sicarii

When the general uprising finally began in the summer of 66 CE, the Sicarii were only briefly involved in the events in Jerusalem before the tyrannical actions of their leader Menachem, which included the murder of the high priest Ananias, led to his own death by other Jewish rebels who opposed his brutal methods. Because of their perceived extremism, the remainder of the Sicarii in the city were likewise killed in the purge, although a few managed to escape to the isolated Herodian mountain fortress of Masada, roughly 30 miles south-southeast of Jerusalem, overlooking the Dead Sea.[16] There, in the remoteness of the eastern Judaean Desert, the Sicarii continued to stubbornly proclaim their doctrine of "No lord but God."

The occupation of Masada was the last significant chapter in the history of the Sicarii in Judaea, and the site of the final event of the First Roman–Jewish War (66–73 CE). In the seventh year of the conflict, the newly appointed Roman governor of Judaea, L. Flavius Silva (73–81 CE), besieged Masada with a single legion, the Legio X Fretensis, and supporting *auxilia*. His purpose was to overcome this last remaining pocket of resistance in the revolt. The leader of the Sicarii atop Masada was Eleazar ben Yair, an individual whom Josephus claims was a descendant of one Judas the Galilean of Gamala in Gaulanitis, who was instrumental in raising the standard of revolt at the time of Quirinius' census 67 years earlier.[17]

At Masada, the terroristic nature of the Sicarii once again fully manifested itself. During the early stages of the fortress' occupation, they raided neighboring communities for supplies, but in time the manner of their attacks grew more violent. Unlike previous incursions, the Sicarii carried out a vicious assault against the village of Engedi on the shores of the Dead Sea in order to collect needed supplies and foodstuffs. The attack, which occurred on

Passover, ended with the massacre of some 700 villagers, including women and children, and Josephus tells us, "they made similar raids on all the villages around the fortress, and laid waste the whole district."[18]

Josephus does not say why the Sicarii altered their methods from the time of Engedi. The attack may have been nothing more than simple banditry – the exercise of brute violence for personal profit. But given the depth of their ideological convictions which emanated from the doctrine of "No lord but God," it is reasonable to conclude that the Sicarii believed their actions at Engedi were as virtuous as those in Jerusalem that ended in assassination and kidnapping. Fully inculcated in their beliefs, no moral impediment was allowed to detract from their righteous cause, and certain acts of terror, regardless of how heinous, could be justified as helping to sustain their order's fanatical resistance to Roman occupation. If need be, anything and anyone could be sacrificed on behalf of their conviction.

When the 10,000-strong legionary force of Silva finally reached Masada, the Sicarii doubtless saw the inevitability of the situation, a certainty made all the more manifest in subsequent weeks as the Romans systematically enclosed the entire plateau in a wall of circumvallation and constructed a siege ramp on a spur of bedrock on the western side of the rock face. In a speech given by Yair to his fellow Sicarii, as related to Josephus by two survivors of the Masada siege, the dissident leader compelled those around him to freely choose suicide rather than submit to Roman slavery.[19]

Like terrorists centuries later, the fanaticism of their beliefs persuaded Eleazar ben Yair and his followers to perceive each circumstance of their lives in apocalyptic terms. The righteousness of their beliefs justified each violent act throughout their existence, including their own deaths. For the Sicarii, the mass suicide of 960 people that followed Yair's exhortations was seemingly stark validation of their mantra.

From Josephus, it is evident that the actions of the Sicarii were unique among the events of the First Roman–Jewish War. They were intended from their inception to incite panic and fear, through acts of internecine assassination and kidnapping, as instruments to destabilize Jewish–Roman relations and provoke broad popular resistance to foreign rule.

The exceptional nature of the Sicarii is further underscored by the fact that such a highly concentrated application of "terror" tactics, especially against one's own people, is found nowhere else in antiquity. During the first century, other serious Native revolts against Roman authority occurred, most notably in North Africa (17–24 and 45 CE), Britain (60 CE), and Germany (69–70 CE), but any expressions of opposition comparable to that of the Sicarii did not emerge in the midst of these uprisings.[20] Both the African and German struggles at some point included episodes of guerrilla warfare, yet neither uprising involved practices intended to drive a wedge between the indigenous population and Roman authorities through the premeditated use of terror by dissidents against their own people. Josephus' observation in Book 7 of *The Jewish War* emphasizes this overt and unique extremism of the Sicarii. Here he notes that the Sicarii "in every way . . . treated [their Jewish brethren who consented to submit to Rome] as [foreign] enemies."[21] Within the context of Jewish religious and cultural tradition, this statement is revealing. In essence, the Sicarii relegated their Jewish opponents to the status of "foreigners" or non-Jewish enemies of no greater intrinsic worth than Roman adversaries.[22]

In Judaea, the critical component that provided the conditions necessary for the emergence of such an exceptional form of resistance was religious. Josephus' accounts make it clear that by the mid-first century, an active perception existed within certain sectors of the Jewish community that Roman authority infringed upon the otherwise unfettered expression of

Mosaic tradition. The sensitive nature of this situation was further aggravated by the prevalence of apocalyptic and messianic–eschatological influences in Judaism, particularly among some of the emerging revolutionary sects in the immediate years prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. Likewise, the prominent acceptance within Israelite cultural tradition of resistance to foreign domination as a precursor to divine deliverance further energized the vociferous nature of Jewish opposition to Roman rule.[23] In the end, the commingling of distinct social, political, cultural, and religious factors in Judaea generated a volatile environment that inevitably moved the situation to open war, a result achieved, in part, by the violence perpetrated by the Sicarii on their fellow Jews.

That the conditions that brought about the First Roman–Jewish War – and in consequence local terrorism – were unique to the place and moment is perhaps further illuminated by the fact that in 73 CE some Sicarii fled from Judaea to Egypt where they again sought to incite the Jewish community in Alexandria to revolt against Roman authority. Using the same tactics, they initially murdered some of the moderate Jews of social rank in the city, but this time the actions of the Sicarii failed less to inflame the Egyptian Jews than alarm the community out of fear of Roman retribution. In response, hundreds of Sicarii were seized and turned over to the Romans, ending the threat of insurrection. A second incident in Cyrene likewise failed in its original purpose.[24]

Though they were an aberration in their own time, significant parallels can be identified between the character of the Sicarii and more contemporary terrorist movements in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Like many of their modern counterparts, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Sicarii sought both political and religious outcomes through their actions.[25] In order to achieve their ideological goals, the Sicarii deliberately worked to instill fear among the civilian leaders and non-combatant population of Judaea by the application of specific, lethal tactics for the purpose of undermining relations between the general public and their colonial overlords, thereby fomenting broad resistance to Roman rule.

In the end, the ideology of the Sicarii, along with the extreme violence it generated, not only isolated the group from the greater Jewish community but inhibited its exportation. As subsequent events demonstrated, the group's raison d'être was proven to be exclusively the result of the rarified social and political environment created in Judaea by events during the century leading up to 70 CE. Without those preconditions, the Sicarii eventually ceased to exist. But the First Roman–Jewish War was not the last time in the pre-modern era that religious and political circumstance combined to inspire the birth of a dissident group that modern anti-terrorism experts would label as terrorists.

## The Assassins

As made clear above, the Assassins were hardly the first to use political assassination or the first to support such targeted violence with ideological or religious justifications. Nevertheless, they provide a very instructive case to all who want to understand the historical roots of terrorism. Organized in a tight community with precise objectives, they systematically resorted to assassinations that followed specific methods, as much for the strategic effectiveness as for the significant psychological impact. Many authors like Bernard Lewis regard the Assassins as probably the first terrorists in history.[26]

Regardless of the ways in which such an assertion might be qualified and as modern as the notion of terrorism is, the Assassins' deep impact remains incontestable: not only their

name passed into common usage, but they left a lasting impression on the Western collective imagination, from medieval myths concerning the "Old Man of the Mountain" to fictional works such as the *Assassin's Creed* videogaming saga. But this often romantic vision hides much more complex historical, political, religious, and cultural realities.

Those whom the Western Christians referred to as "Assassins" since the twelfth century were in fact the Nizaris, adherents of a radical trend born in Persia from Isma'ili Shi'ism at the end of the tenth century. Although the Nizari movement officially originated in 1094, its identity, religious particularism, and its methods of struggle arose from a process of reflection initiated by the founder Hasan-i Sabbah several years earlier.

## Cornerstones of the Nizari struggle

A Persian from the city of Qum, Hasan was a *da'i* ((pl. *du'at*) literally, in Arabic, "one who summons," that is, an evangelizing missionary), charged, as the authorized representative of the imam, with spreading Isma'ili doctrines. The headquarters of the *da'wa* ("invitation" or "summoning" to the doctrine/mission) was then based with the Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo, the chief political, religious, and military rival of the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad, the "orthodox" Sunni headquarters defended (in reality, ruled) by the Seljuk Turks. Dispatched by the Fatimid Caliphate, Hasan operated in Persia from 1081 onwards. His assignment was within the core of the Seljuk Empire where Sunnism was the official religion, especially in the towns. Due to their remoteness from the Fatimid Caliphate and its own internal difficulties, Isma'ili Persian communities could not rely on effective support from Cairo. The strength and talent of Hasan lay in analyzing and taking advantage of certain aspects of Seljuk rule, plus conceiving tactical schemes that could be adapted to the circumstances of the Seljuk empire. He succeeded in making Persian Isma'ilism, which used to be an underground religious current, into an open and rebellious movement that defied the Seljuks' overwhelming military strength with a deadly reputation.

Isma'ilism had already received a favorable response from the populace in Persia. Its adherents showed fervor and a kind of determination that originated from the very nature of Shi'ism. Deprived of the opportunity to lead the Muslim community by the Sunnis shortly after the death of the prophet Muhammad, the Shi'ite party has since developed a fervor that draws upon themes of martyrdom, suffering, and, above all, struggle against an iniquitous and usurping governing power. Arising from a schism that shook Shi'ism in the eighth century, Isma'ilism was much more radical. It represented both a religious and political opposition movement, coherent and centralized, and secretly spreading even as it was condemned and hounded by Sunni "orthodoxy."

While the Sunni follow the exoteric or apparent meaning (*zahir*) of the Qur'an, Isma'ilism relies on the idea that its texts have esoteric and secret meanings (*batin*) that contain divine truths (the equivalent of what is referred to in Christian tradition as gnostic wisdom). As such, Isma'ilism offered its adherents several degrees of initiation and interpretation, adapting to all levels of popular understanding as well as responding to intellectual questioning. These divine truths were delivered by the figure of the imam and his *du'at*; thus Isma'ilism was based on *ta'lim*, a concept of absolute authority that requires faithfulness and the unquestioned obedience of followers. Claiming to be the legitimate way of Islam, Isma'ilism proposed an alternative to the Sunni establishment, which the Isma'ilis considered liable for the Muslim world's splintering, and it seemed widespread and strong enough to overthrow the existing order.

As a cradle of older dissident traditions, Persia provided a context favorable to Isma'ili preaching. Many Persian dynasties had already opposed the caliphate of Bagdad and rekindled Persian cultural identity then under Arabic domination. The emergence of Turkish dynasties and especially the Seljuk triumph revived both local people's discontent and a Persian sense of identity. The Isma'ili *da'wa* had been well established in Persia since the tenth century, and from the year 1070, Persian Isma'ilis acknowledged only one *da'i* based in Isfahan. When Hasan, who probably shared this sense of Persian identity and enjoyed his autonomy from Cairo, became the main *da'i* in charge of preaching Isma'ilism in Seljuk territories, he could take advantage of the already vibrant Isma'ili momentum to launch an open revolt against the Seljuk empire.

Hasan gave up Isfahan as a base, ill-suited as it was for open activities against Seljuk power, and turned to the mountainous region of Daylam, to the south of the Caspian Sea. Strongly imbued with a sense of their political and religious identity and autonomy, the region's population was already open to Isma'ili preaching. Hasan was searching for his own *dar al-hijra*, a place of refuge according to the Muslim tradition, that he could use as headquarters for the Persian *da'wa*. The seizure of strongholds in mountainous districts to be used as refuges became one of the cornerstones of Hasan's strategy. He selected the famous citadel of Alamut, a veritable eagle's nest reputed to be impregnable. The *da'wa* revealed its effectiveness on this occasion: Hasan sent his *du'at* to Alamut and its hinterland in order to convert the garrison and local people. In the year 1090, when the newly converted Isma'ilis openly revealed themselves, the lord of the place, who held Alamut from the Seljuk sultan, had to give up the stronghold. The seizure of Alamut was the first direct blow against Seljuk authority and essentially marked the foundation of an Isma'ili (and later Nizari) state. The Isma'ilis subsequently captured many strongholds, sometimes by siege, most of the time by conversion of the local people. Some of these places were recaptured by the Seljuks, but the Nizari state was definitely established by the year 1118. Although scattered among the regions of Rudbar and Qumis in Daylam, as well as far to the southeast in Quhistan, near the frontiers of present-day Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, the Isma'ili network of strongholds operated cohesively due to the central leadership of Alamut, seat of the major *da'i*.

Isma'ili preaching and seizure of strongholds proved that there were alternatives to a direct confrontation with the Seljuk empire. With Hasan now acting in broad daylight, the use of assassination soon became one of his tactics. The declaration of the Isma'ili community and the emergence of a state inevitably led to a reaction from the Seljuks. The vizier Nizam al-Mulk had paid attention to the activities of Hasan in the Daylam since 1088 and became the fiercest opponent of the Isma'ilis. It was likely on his advice that the Seljuk sultan Malik Shah engaged in a military campaign against Isma'ili strongholds. Nizam al-Mulk was therefore targeted by the Isma'ili community, and his death in the year 1092 was the first of the many assassinations that mark the history of the Assassins.

Juwayni, a Persian author of the thirteenth century, provided a detailed account of the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk, basing the story on lost Isma'ili sources. According to Juwayni:

> Hasan-i Sabbah spread the snare of artifices in order at the first opportunity to catch some splendid game, such as Nizam-al-Mulk, in the net of destruction and increase thereby his own reputation. With the juggling of deceit and the trickery of falsehood, with absurd preparations and spurious deceptions, he laid the basis of the *fida'is* ("those who sacrifice themselves"). A person called Bu-Tahir, Arrani by

> name and by origin, was afflicted "with the loss both of this world and of the next," and in his misguided striving after bliss in the world to come on the night of Friday the 12th of Ramazan 485 [October 16, 1092] he went up to Nizam-al-Mulk's litter at a stage called Sahna in the region of Nihavand. Nizam-al-Mulk, having broken the fast, was being borne in the litter from the Sultan's audience-place to the tent of his harem. Bu-Tahir who was disguised as a Sufi, stabbed him with a dagger and by that blow Nizam-al-Mulk was martyred. He was the first person to be killed by the *fida'is*.[27]

A further step in the renewal of the Persian Isma'ili movement led to the very birth of the Nizari community. The Fatimid Caliphate experienced a succession crisis in the year 1094: contrary to the provisions laid down by the caliph al-Mansur designating his elder son Abu Mansur Nizar as successor to the caliphate and thus to the Isma'ili imamate, vizier Badr al-Jamali installed Nizar's young brother in power. Hasan upheld the legitimacy of Nizar, however, even as the latter and his supporters were eliminated in Egypt. By refusing to recognize Nizar's brother as the legitimate Isma'ili imam, Hasan consequently split the Fatimid *da'wa*. As undisputed leader of Persian Isma'ilis and, in reality, of all Isma'ilis living in the Seljuk empire, Hasan now spearheaded a new and totally independent Nizari *da'wa*. Since Nizar was executed, Hasan became – according to Isma'ili doctrines – the *hujja* ("proof") of the occulted imam, that is, his legitimate representative on Earth and dispenser of the divine knowledge. The authority of Hasan, buttressed by the notion of *ta'lim*, was naturally accepted and recognized by the whole Persian Isma'ili community. With the founding of Nizarism achieved, the talent of Hasan showed in how he cultivated and directed their fervor and devotion.

## Muslim perceptions of the Nizaris

The Nizari phenomenon was unequivocally and fiercely condemned by the whole Muslim world: by Sunnis and the Fatimid Isma'ilis, as well as other Shi'ite movements. In 1091, the year before he became the Nizaris' first victim, Nizam al-Mulk had written *Siyar al-Muluk* ("Rule for Kings"), a treatise of governance intended for Sultan Malik Shah. Grounded in the history of both Persia and Islam, it vehemently condemned heresies:

> Seceders have existed in all ages, and from the time of Adam (upon him be peace) until now in every country in the world they have risen up in revolt against kings and prophets. Never has there been a more vile, more perverted or more irreligious crowd than these people, who behind walls are plotting harm to this country and seeking to destroy the religion. Their ears are alert for the sounds of sedition and their eyes are open for signs of the evil eye.[28]

Nizam al-Mulk devoted long sections to denouncing Isma'ilis, named Batinis (from *batin*), as he worried about their increasing importance and the danger that they represented: "their whole purpose is only to abolish Islam and to lead mankind astray."[29]

There was no better exemplar of the official view than the treatise of Nizam al-Mulk, and it doubtless guided Sunni religious and political orthodoxy towards the Nizaris. Subsequent Sunni and Shi'ite treatises aggressively denigrated the Nizaris as the *malahida* ("heresy") par excellence, undermining Islam from within. Sunnis already regarded Shi'ism as a religious

error, since it dared to interpret the Qur'an via *batin*. But both Sunni and Shi'ites believed that Isma'ilism threatened religious law and Islam by extending even further the interpretation of the Qur'an and placing exclusive emphasis on *ta'lim*, thereby giving the imam too important a place. One key issue in these treatises was to determine if Nizaris could be regarded as true Muslims – or even Muslims of any sort.

In addition, some texts ascribed licentious habits to the Nizaris in violation of the religious prohibitions. One expression of contempt appeared first in 1123 and then again from time to time: during an ideological dispute, the Fatimid caliph al-Amir described the Nizaris as *hashishiyya* ("hashish users"), without any justification but undoubtedly in a very pejorative way.[30] This fairly rare term was repeated by the Shi'a Zaydis of Persia, in the thirteenth century, when they mention the Nizaris as *hashishis*. Hashish use was severely condemned by Islam, owing to its adverse effects on the integrity and morality of the faithful, to the point that hashish abusers were considered criminals by Muslim society.[31] Characterizing a community as *hashishiyya* was therefore particularly offensive and infamous, a virulent way of casting the Nizaris as outlaws from the Muslim community. However, it is quite doubtful that they used hashish; they practiced, to the contrary, asceticism and moral discipline. Although rare, the use of the term *hashishiyya* seems to have come to the knowledge of Crusaders: the first historical mentions of the Nizaris among Westerners took the form "Al-Hachichine," "Heyssessini," etc., which eventually became "Assassins" over time.

Never was a Muslim community more severely condemned, nor subject to such unanimous feelings of hostility. What most astounded the Muslim world was not so much the dangerous emergence of the Nizaris in the heart of the Seljuk Empire but their systematic use of assassinations. As stated above, the Assassins did not invent this. Physical elimination of an opponent is as old as humanity itself. Ideological, religious, or political justifications of such acts were not the preserve of the Nizaris either: several groups have used it since antiquity, starting with the Sicarii and, in the eighth century, several radical Muslim groups (like the Kharijites) had made it a religious duty, justifying their deeds by an antinomian sense of rectitude.[32] But recurring assassinations played an essential part in the Nizaris' methods of struggle. They used it often enough and in an identifiable manner that medieval sources attributed all similar acts to them.

## The use of assassination

It is virtually impossible to analyze the thinking of Hasan regarding assassination, as most of the Nizaris' sources were destroyed during the fall of Alamut in the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, the use of assassination seems to have come about in a natural and logical way. On the one hand, Isma'ilis and Nizaris, as radical Shi'ite traditions, were nurtured by allied concepts of legitimate revolt and martyrdom. Bernard Lewis goes further, saying that the concept of tyrannicide, as a religious obligation to rid the world of an illegitimate ruler, could have justified these methods.[33] Rashid al-Din, a Persian chronicler of the thirteenth century who, like Juwayni, relied on Nizari sources, thus had Hasan say, about Nizam al-Mulk's assassination, "the murder of this demon is the beginning of bliss."[34] On the other hand, any consideration of the very nature of the Seljuk power must recognize that the unity of the empire was based on personal ties of loyalty. Since direct confrontation with Seljuk military might was virtually impossible, assassinating key characters seemed the best option for keeping opposing forces off-balance. The killing of Nizam al-Mulk, who was an outstanding administrator and a fierce opponent of the Isma'ilis, considerably undermined the

empire. The death soon after of Sultan Malik Shah led to the withdrawal of the troops besieging Alamut and opened a period of civil war among his potential successors.

The ultimate purpose of the assassinations carried out by the Nizaris was therefore strategic, whether in a defensive or a repressive way. Their most symbolically meaningful victims besides Nizam al-Mulk were the Fatimid caliph al-Amir in 1130 and the Sunni Abbasid caliphs al-Mustarshid and al-Rashid, in, respectively, 1135 and 1138. Nizaris mostly targeted political and military dignitaries, such as viziers, emirs, or other officials, and religious figures such as *qadis* (Judges with religious, civil, and judicial functions) involved in ideological campaigns against the Nizaris. They aimed occasionally at civilian officials, such as prefects or jurists, but they never aimed randomly and blindly with terror itself as the sole justification.

While it was not, properly speaking, a religious duty, Lewis notes, "The killing by the Assassin of his victim . . . had a ritual, almost a sacramental quality."[35] Nizaris involved in such deeds were designated by the term *fida'i* (pl. *fida'iyin*), "he who devotes, sacrifices himself," as a signal of their commitment or even their sacrifice in the interests of the community. Kamal al-Din, a Syrian chronicler of the thirteenth century, recounted an anecdote that underlines this exaltation. In 1126, several *fida'iyin* stabbed to death Bursuqi, the *atabeg* (governor) of Mosul, in a mosque; although most of his attackers were slaughtered on the spot, one of these managed to escape. Kamal al-Din then tells us:

> This young man, who managed to escape, had a mother of an advanced old age; when she learned of the death of both Bursuqi and his murderers, and knowing her son was a part of them, she showed great satisfaction and made up her eyes with kohl as a token of gladness. When she saw him back safe and sound a few days later, she was distressed by this and, in her pain, she shaved her hair and blackened her face.[36]

Although it is difficult to assess the veracity of this story, Juwayni and Rashid al-Din do confirm the existence at Alamut of a roll of honor featuring the names of the *fida'iyin* and their victims. A poem written by Hasan Ibn Salah Birjandi, a Nizari historian of the thirteenth century, for the glory of three *fida'iyin* who eliminated Qizil Arslan, governor of Azerbaidjan in 1191, has also come to us: "Praise, glory, and thousands of benedictions be upon the three heroes, the brave swordsmen, capturers of kings!"[37]

Assassinations committed by the Nizaris had their own modus operandi, which, aside from reinforcing the ritual character of these deeds, had a significant psychological impact. Lewis emphasizes that "Assassins always used a dagger; never poison, never missiles."[38] They approached their victims, sometimes disguised as Sufis or beggars, and generally acted in full daylight, in a public place: at the court, in military camps, or, in a more striking way, in the heart of mosques, during the days of prayer or the month of Ramadan. It would be an overstatement to call these suicide missions, as chroniclers often mention *fida'iyin* trying to flee the scene and sometimes succeeding. Although they had little chance to live through their mission in such circumstances, the primary intention was more a display of boldness without any limit than a search for death; they aimed to impress the popular imagination and to discourage the potential adversaries of the community. Birjandi perfectly epitomized this in his poem: "Brothers, when the blessed time arrives, and the good luck of both worlds accompanies us, the king, who possesses more than a hundred thousand cavalry, would be frightened by a single warrior."[39]

Initial reactions to the acts carried out by the *fida'iyin* were the slaughter of Nizari communities in many towns through popular uprisings driven by uncontrollable fear or by orders from authorities. The Damascene al-Dahabi relates that in 1129, the lord of Damas "put to death six thousand people accused of following Nizari doctrines."[40] Mistrust was such that opponents of the Assassins adopted hyper-elaborate protections. The Fatimid vizier al-Afdal was "extremely distrustful and precautious, was always standing on guard and alert, especially against the sect of the Batinis, and surrounded himself against them with weapons of all types, a large number of servants, slaves, and black guards, plus various tools and sharpened sabres."[41] Bursuqi, killed in 1126 by the Nizaris, "kept his mind alert and stood on guard against an attempt on their part [the Batinis]; he surrounded himself with squires and bodyguards, with soldiers armed from head to toe. . . . He wore chain mail in addition which neither the point of the sabre nor the blade of the dagger could penetrate."[42]

## Western perceptions of the Nizaris

The Western medieval reaction to the Nizaris and their assassinations was out of proportion with that of the Muslim world. At the beginning of the twelfth century, Nizari activity spread to Syria. The geographic context, unlike in Iraq, plus its political and religious fragmentation offered advantageous conditions. Isma'ili doctrines had been disseminated by the Fatimid Caliphate since the tenth century and communities with strong religious identities (Druzes, Nosayris) were potentially open to the Nizari *da'wa*. They lived in the mountain range that provided a natural boundary between, on the one hand, the Seljuk governors of Aleppo and Damascus and, on the other, the four Crusader states along the coastline. After settlement attempts in Aleppo and Damascus failed, Nizaris began seizing a network of strongholds in the Jabal Bahra (near the northwestern coast of present-day Syria) after 1130. The Syrian Nizaris originally depended on Alamut, and its leaders were appointed by the Persian headquarters, but they asserted their independence after 1169, under Rashid al-Din Sinan's reign, known through Western sources as the first "Old Man of the Mountain."

The first Western figure assassinated by the Nizaris was Count Raymond of Tripoli in 1152. But Western chroniclers did not mention the community until the last third of the twelfth century. Unaware of the terms "Nizaris," "Batinis," or "Mulahid," they identified the Assassins only with great difficulty as belonging to the Muslim world, sometimes recounting in vivid contrast licentious habits that went against Muslim laws.

Nizari religious practice or identity were not the focus of Western writers. Instead, it was their use of assassination and particularly the recruitment, training, and indoctrination of the *fida'iyin*. As Benjamin of Tudela pointed out in a simple summation: "they are feared everywhere because they kill kings with disregard for their own life."[43] Burchard of Strasbourg, who traveled through the Holy Land around 1175 on behalf of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, reported that the Assassins were brought up from a very young age in palaces cut off from the world, where they learned several languages such as Latin, Greek, and Arabic; once they reached adulthood and were fully imbued with the idea that their salvation depended on their unquestioning obedience to their lord, they were ordered by the latter to kill princes with a golden dagger.[44] At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Arnold of Lübeck was the first to report that the Old Man of the Mountain administered a narcotic beverage to his followers; he afterwards promised them

eternal possession of the delights they had seen in their drug-induced dreams, provided that they fulfilled his command.[45]

"The Old Man of the Mountain" quickly became the central figure of the Western stories about the Assassins. The first mentions of him coincided with the reign of Rashid al-Din Sinan, who played an important role on the Syrian political chessboard, alternating diplomacy and confrontation with neighboring powers, including the Crusaders. The title of "Old Man of the Mountain" had first been a local designation for him before it became a generic title adopted by the Western sources to refer to the successive leaders of the Syrian Nizari community. It seems to have been a purely Western creation, as it is absent from the Arab–Muslim sources. Lewis proposes that Nizaris naturally referred to their leader as *Shaykh* ("wise person" or "elder" with a connotation of intellectual and moral authority). Westerners seem to have only retained the meaning of "elder" and to have combined it with the entrenched mountainous location of the Assassins.[46]

In 1192, near the end of Rashid al-Din Sinan's leadership, Conrad of Montferrat, a claimant to the kingship of Jerusalem, was murdered by two Assassins who had infiltrated his entourage over several months. This event made a deep impression on Westerners and sparked a wave of political anguish built on wild rumors. The English king Richard the Lionheart was accused of having contracted with the Old Man of the Mountain to kill Conrad. French chroniclers even claimed that he sent Assassins into France in order to kill King Philip Augustus, who kept himself protected by sergeants-at-arms, both day and night, in fear for his life. The accusations got so out of hand that the English chancellery forged a letter from the Old Man of the Mountain proclaiming Richard's innocence.[47] And the rumors persisted so long that at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Guillaume Guiart claimed in a poem that Richard the Lionheart himself had raised and indoctrinated young men, aiming to send them to assassinate his opponents.[48]

The disproportionate reaction of Westerners is quite notable, especially in view of the small number of Christians who fell victim to the Assassins: while Nizaris claimed several dozen Muslim victims throughout their history, they only killed five Crusaders (not counting some of the unsuccessful attempts). Indeed, although the Muslim world knew well with whom it was dealing, Westerners were still assessing the Nizari community, along with its murderous reputation, striking behavior, and unheard-of methods, all of which represented a constant threat. Rumors spread throughout the thirteenth century, and Western authors involved the Old Man of the Mountain in many political cases in Europe. While some lords and sovereigns were alleged to have paid tribute to the Old Man so as to be spared by the Assassins' daggers, others were accused of infiltrating Assassins into their opponents' entourages. Whatever the truth, these stories had such an impact that in 1245, during the Council of Lyon, Pope Innocent IV provided provisions in the decree *De sentencia et re iudicata* ("Of Sentencing and Judicial Matters") that anyone who killed another on his own or by sending Assassins was to be sentenced to excommunication and the loss of any dignity, order, office, or benefice.[49]

But in the end, Western fascination outpaced Western fear. Legends built around the Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins fed a fantasized vision of the Middle East and the Holy Land, far exceeding the mundane realities of the Nizari community. The unquestioned loyalty of the Assassins toward the Old Man of the Mountain attracted as much attention from authors as did their methodical use of assassination. One chronicler reported that in 1194, as Henri of Champagne visited him, the Old Man ordered some of his Assassins to throw themselves from the top of a tower to certain death on the rocks below in order