Jnl of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. 71, No. 3, July 2020. © Cambridge University Press 2019 484
doi:10.1017/S0022046919001131

First Crusade Letters and Medieval Monastic Scribal Cultures

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The letters of the First Crusade have traditionally been read as authentic and trustworthy eye-witness accounts of the expedition and they contribute greatly to scholarly understanding of the campaign. But new research on them demonstrates that many of the documents are in fact twelfth-century confections produced in the monastic communities of the West as a means of supporting, participating in and engaging with the crusading movement. This article develops new approaches to the letters and new research questions which account for and accept the problematic authenticity of the corpus, pivoting away from traditional methodologies to explore the monastic scribal cultures that produced and consumed First Crusade letters.

The stunning capture of Jerusalem in 1099 by the army of the First Crusade led to an equally spectacular campaign of literary endeavour by participants and onlookers as contemporaries sought to record the deeds of the pilgrims for posterity, situate the conquest in an explanatory theological framework and recruit support – both military and liturgical – for the newly established Latin polities in the Near East.[1] The attempt to ascertain exactly how these texts were composed, compiled and transmitted, together with their complex interrelationships, has

The research upon which this article is based was generously supported by the award of a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at the University of Leeds (2017–20). I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for helpful and encouraging comments upon this article, as well as to audiences at Aberystwyth, Chapel Hill, NC, Dublin, Exeter and Reading and the many colleagues who have commented upon aspects of this work, especially Julie Barrau, Helen Birkett, Karl Borchardt, Peter Crooks, James Doherty, Susan Edgington, Sarah Hamilton, Graham Loud, Fraser McNair, Alan Murray, Simon Parsons, Nicholas Paul, William Purkis, Levi Roach and Georg Strack.

[1] For an overview see A. V. Murray, 'The siege and capture of Jerusalem in western narrative sources of the First Crusade', in S. B. Edgington and L. García-Guijarro (eds), *Jerusalem the golden: the origins and impact of the First Crusade*, Turnhout 2014, 191–215 at pp. 192–9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046919001131 Published online by Cambridge University Press

furthered greatly understanding of the First Crusade itself and also, more broadly, the writing, or, better, the recording, of history in the twelfth century.[2] Yet while scholars have lavished attention on the full-scale narratives of the First Crusade, the Latin texts that have yet to be factored properly into this discussion – as Marcus Bull has lamented – are the letters from the expedition.[3]

This neglect is hard to explain given that the *corpus* of documentary sources preserved from the First Crusade, which includes twenty-two letters, is impressive for its period.[4] There are letters from the collective

[2] For a small sample of this work see, most recently, S. T. Parsons, 'The letters of Stephen of Blois reconsidered', *Crusades* xvii (2018), 1–29; C. Symes, 'Popular literacies and the first historians of the First Crusade', *Past & Present* no. 235 (May 2017), 37–67; D. Roach, 'Orderic Vitalis and the First Crusade', *Journal of Medieval History* xlii (2016), 177–201; S. John, 'Historical truth and the miraculous past: the use of oral evidence in twelfth-century Latin historical writing on the First Crusade', *EHR* cxxx (2015), 263–301; M. Bull and D. Kempf (eds), *Writing the early crusades: text, transmission and memory*, Woodbridge 2014; *The Historia Iherosolimitana of Robert the Monk*, ed. D. Kempf and M. G. Bull, Woodbridge 2013; M. Bull, 'The historiographical construction of a northern French First Crusade', *Haskins Society Journal* xxv (2013), 35–56, and 'The western narratives of the First Crusade', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds), *Christian-Muslim relations: a bibliographical history*, III: *(1050–1200)*, Leiden 2011, 15–25; N. L. Paul, 'A warlord's wisdom: literacy and propaganda at the time of the First Crusade', *Speculum* lxxxv (2010), 534–66; J. Flori, *Chroniquers et propagandistes: introduction critique aux sources de la première croisade*, Geneva 2010; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana: history of the journey to Jerusalem*, ed. and trans. S. B. Edgington, Oxford 2007; E. Lapina, '"Nec signis nec testibus creditur…": the problem of eyewitnesses in the chronicles of the First Crusade', *Viator* xxxviii (2007), 117–39; J. Rubenstein, 'What is the *Gesta Francorum*, and who was Peter Tudebode?', *Revue Mabillon* n.s. xvi/77 (2005), 179–204; and *Robert the Monk's history of the First Crusade: Historia Iherosolimitana*, trans. C. Sweetenham, Aldershot 2005.

[3] M. Bull, 'The eyewitness accounts of the First Crusade as political scripts', *Reading Medieval Studies* xxxvi (2010), 23–37 at p. 24. Since Bull wrote, see now T. W. Smith, 'Framing the narrative of the First Crusade: the letter given at Laodicea in September 1099', in A. D. Buck and T. W. Smith (eds), *Remembering the crusades in medieval texts and songs* [special issue of the *Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture*], Cardiff 2019; Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois'; T. W. Smith, 'Scribal crusading: three new manuscript witnesses to the regional reception and transmission of First Crusade letters', *Traditio* lxxii (2017), 133–69, and 'The First Crusade letter written at Laodicea: two previously unpublished versions from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 23390 and 28195', *Crusades* xv (2016), 1–25; G. Strack, 'Pope Urban II and Jerusalem: a re-examination of his letters on the First Crusade', *Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* ii (2016), 51–70; and L. García-Guijarro, 'Some considerations on the crusaders' letter to Urban II (September 1098)', in Edgington and García-Guijarro, *Jerusalem the golden*, 151–71. Aspects of particular letters are illuminated in B. Z. Kedar, 'Ein Hilferuf aus Jerusalem vom September 1187', *Deutsches Archiv* xxxviii (1982), 112–22 at pp. 113–14, and Paul, 'Warlord's wisdom', 539–41, 544, 547–50, 554–6.

[4] Most of the letters were published in the *Epistulae et chartae ad historiam primi belli sacri spectantes quae supersunt aevo aequales et genuinae / Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046919001131 Published online by Cambridge University Press

leadership of the crusade host, apparently touching and personal epistles from individual crusaders such as Stephen of Blois and Anselm of Ribemont, triumphant encyclicals announcing the capture of Jerusalem, pleas for reinforcements, and papal letters from Urban II and Paschal II. These are valuable sources for the ways in which contemporaries and participants recorded and responded to the crusade. But scholars have not researched the letters intensively as a *corpus* since Heinrich Hagenmeyer edited and commented upon them at length in 1901. Partly this is because of Hagenmeyer's formidable reputation for thoroughness, but also, one suspects, because of the equally formidable extent of his German commentary. Instead, the letters are often dipped into in order to cherry-pick material not found in the longer narratives. As Simon Parsons points out, since 1901, 'commentary on the letters has continued, while detailed textual and para-textual analysis has not', creating a disconnect between the use of the letters to advance historical analysis and understanding of exactly how, when, where and why the documents were created.[5]

Until recently, the greatest perceived value of the letters was as immediate eyewitness accounts that were not subjected to the corrupting influence of later revision and re-interpretation in the early twelfth century (in the fashion of the longer First Crusade texts, such as the rewriting of 'the Jerusalem history', of which the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* represents one version).[6] Correspondingly, most scholars generally believed the letters to be genuine. But in a case study of the letters of Stephen of Blois to his wife Adela, Parsons argues that it could be problematic to read two of the most famous First Crusade epistles as what they purport to be.[7] As a result of Parsons's findings, we must confront the possibility that some of the 'crusader letters' might in fact be twelfth-century concoctions which utilise the epistolary form as a 'fictitious framing device for the transmission of the crusading narrative'.[8] Although they often preserve unique and valuable information about the crusade, the letters can no

1088–1100: eine Quellensammlung zur Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, Innsbruck 1901. See also the critical inventory in P. Riant, 'Inventaire critique des lettres historiques des croisades', *Archives de l'Orient latin* i (1880), 1–224, which underpinned Hagenmeyer's work. For Hagenmeyer's acknowledgement of Riant's influence see *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, pp. vi–vii. Two letters issued by Urban II unknown to Hagenmeyer, and therefore not included in his edition, are *Papsturkunden für Kirchen im Heiligen Land*, ed. R. Hiestand, Göttingen 1985, no. 2 at pp. 88–9, and *Papsturkunden in Spanien, Vorarbeiten zur Hispania Pontificia*, I: *Katalanien*, ed. P. Kehr, Berlin 1928, no. 23 at pp. 287–8.

[5] Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois', 4.

[6] For this view see, for example, *Letters from the East: crusaders, pilgrims and settlers in the 12th–13th centuries*, ed. and trans. M. Barber and K. Bate, Farnham 2010, 1–2. On the Jerusalem history and the *Gesta Francorum* see Rubenstein, 'What is the *Gesta Francorum*?', 202–3.

[7] Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois'.

[8] Ibid. 21.

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longer be taken at face value as honest sources written without literary agenda. The documentary sources from the First Crusade must be examined with a more critical eye than has hitherto been the case. In many ways, the letters are similar to, and just as problematic as, the longer *Historia Iherosolimitana* texts. It is incumbent upon scholars to subject the letters to the same dedicated, modern analysis as that lavished on the longer narratives. The reassessment of more letters from the *corpus* as 'pseudepigraphal propaganda' – to borrow a term from Giles Constable – forces us to reconsider how we should engage with the letters and how we can use them to research and teach the history of the First Crusade.[9]

Wider changes in the field of manuscript studies since Hagenmeyer edited the letters over a century ago also make the *corpus* ripe for re-evaluation. In crusading studies Hagenmeyer was one of the leading and most prolific exponents of the German scholarly tradition of *Quellenkritik*, or 'source criticism', a forensic approach to the content and authenticity of sources spearheaded for the study of the First Crusade by Leopold von Ranke and Heinrich von Sybel in the middle of the nineteenth century, and for medieval studies more broadly by the editors of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica.[10] The pursuit of *Quellenkritik* as a methodological approach set new standards for the edition of historical texts, to which the longevity of nineteenth-century editions such as Hagenmeyer's *Kreuzzugsbriefe* attest. But while Hagenmeyer devoted enormous energy to identifying what he believed to be the best manuscripts and establishing the best texts (some of which he got wrong), in keeping with contemporary scholarly tradition, he was uninterested in the provenance of the manuscripts that he was using or their regional transmission and reception in the medieval West. Such research interests, which can yield new information on how audiences consumed and engaged with texts, are now mainstays of modern approaches to medieval manuscripts, and recent studies have demonstrated the new insights that they can offer into research on the crusades, but they have yet to be pursued for the whole *corpus* of First Crusade letters.[11]

[9] G. Constable, 'Forged letters in the Middle Ages', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16.–19. September 1986*, V: *Fingierte Briefe, Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschungen*, Hanover 1988, 11–37 at p. 21.

[10] H. von Sybel, *Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzugs*, 1st edn, Dusseldorf 1841, 2nd edn, Leipzig 1881. Von Sybel explained in the prologue (pp. iii–iv) how Leopold von Ranke's seminar course on the sources of the First Crusade in 1837 inspired him to undertake a critical evaluation of the *corpus* .

[11] *Historia Iherosolimitana*, pp. xliii–xlvii; Bull and Kempf, *Writing the early crusades*, introduction 1–8 at pp. 5–6; Smith, 'Scribal crusading', and 'First Crusade letter'; Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois'.

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It may also come as a surprise that Hagenmeyer did not set eyes on many of the manuscripts that he used in preparing his editions. Some of his letter texts derive from copies acquired through his impressive web of contacts spun across Europe, others he reprinted with only minor corrections from the editions made by Paul Riant in 1880 – debts that Hagenmeyer acknowledged in his foreword.[12] Hagenmeyer's dependence upon others was unavoidable given the limitations of nineteenth-century communication and manuscript reproduction, but it created a number of weaknesses in his edition. These are illustrated most vividly by the identification of new witnesses of letters, of which he was unaware, in the very codices that he used to make his edition, but also by errors of citation when the edition is compared with the original manuscripts.[13] These new manuscript witnesses to the letters not only alter understanding of the texts and their transmission, but also call into question the accuracy of some of Hagenmeyer's editions.

Drawing all of these strands together, it is obvious that a fresh exploration of the letters of the First Crusade is long overdue.[14] The *corpus* presents two pressing questions for historians. First, which parts of which letters are 'authentic'? 'The reader of medieval letters', Constable writes, 'should try to distinguish the various versions of the text.'[15] Here the letters of the First Crusade present a quite different problem from letters sent by one author to a single recipient, since they often purport to be the product of collegial drafting and they subsequently acquired textual accretions in the form of postscripts and other modifications during transmission. In seeking to answer Constable's call, then, we must extend his search from revisions made by the authors themselves to the redactions made by third parties in twelfth-century Europe so as to gain a better understanding of their composition, original content and later reception and transmission.

The material poses a second question. If a large section of the *corpus* is made up of impostures, how can these sources be used in a way that illuminates new aspects of medieval engagement with the crusading movement, regardless of the fact that the documents do not stem directly from the First

[12] *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, pp. vi–vii.

[13] For an example of a new manuscript witness in a codex used by Hagenmeyer see Smith, 'Scribal crusading', 140. By way of example of an error of citation, he locates a copy of letter XII to fo. 150 in Bibliothèque municipale, Angers, MS 171, when, in fact, it is (and was at the time that Hagenmeyer was writing, too) on fo. 271v; cf. *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 83 and *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France: départements*, xxxi, Angers–Paris 1898, 245, <http://ccfr.bnf.fr/portailccfr/jsp/index_view_direct_anonymous.jsp?record=eadcgm:EADC:D34100503> [accessed 2 Dec. 2018].

[14] I am currently writing a monograph on *The letters of the First Crusade* which will appear in the *Crusading in Context* series published by The Boydell Press.

[15] G. Constable, *Letters and letter-collections*, Turnhout 1976, 52.

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Crusade?[16] Study of the reception and transmission of the manuscripts of these short crusade texts, both 'genuine' and 'inauthentic' alike, allows us to pivot away from traditional methodologies and use the documents in a different way: as markers of engagement with, and enthusiasm and support for, the crusading movement among the monastic clergy who copied and consumed them as a form of scribal crusading.[17] We must find new ways of using both impostures and authentic letters and asking different questions of them as sources. What can their manuscript traditions tell us about monastic enthusiasm and support for the crusading movement after 1099? Why were they fabricated in the first place and to what purposes were they put? Why did some texts enjoy wider circulation than others? How did audiences receive and interact with them? These are some of the questions that need to be addressed for as broad a range of texts as possible as part of the continuing effort to drive crusading studies forward in the twenty-first century. New archival research is also expanding the source base for the First Crusade by identifying numerous new manuscript witnesses of the Latin letter texts as well as the longer narratives.[18] There is still more left to discover, and we can advance our understanding of the crusades yet further by exploring this archival material, an endeavour mostly dormant since the great scholarly enterprises of the late nineteenth century to discover and edit crusade sources.

This article examines one of the letters in detail as a case study, before moving on to draw out the broader significance of the monastic scribal cultures that produced and consumed such texts. The sample document is the letter supposedly sent by the leaders of the First Crusade, Bohemond of Taranto, Raymond of Toulouse, Godfrey of Bouillon and Hugh the Great to 'all the Catholics of the world' at some point between April and July 1098, that is, after the crusaders had prevailed in the gruelling, grim siege of Antioch, which lasted a little over eight months (Hagenmeyer no. XII).[19] This missive forms part of a cluster of four letters that purport to have been written by leaders of the crusade before the capture of Jerusalem, addressed as open letters to the West or the pope, which sought to transmit crusading narrative and inspire support for the movement in Europe.[20] Letter XII represents an excellent case study because

[16] I follow here the terminology proposed by Constable in 'Forged letters', 20.

[17] See Smith, 'Scribal crusading'.

[18] Ibid., 'First Crusade letter' and 'New manuscripts of the *Gesta francorum*, Albert of Aachen, and Fulcher of Chartres', in A. D. Buck and T. W. Smith (eds), *Chronicle, crusade, and the Latin East: essays in honour of Susan B. Edgington*, Turnhout forthcoming.

[19] *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 79–84 [introduction], 153–5 [edition], 298–308 [commentary]; trans. in *Letters from the East*, 25–6. See also Riant, 'Inventaire critique', 175–6.

[20] They are the letter of Symeon, patriarch of Jerusalem and Adhemar, papal legate and bishop of Le Puy, to the people of the 'north', from October 1097 (Hagenmeyer no. VI), *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 141–2; the letter of Symeon and the other bishops, with the army,

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it illustrates a number of the wider trends in the transmission and reception of crusade letters which transcend the significance of this document alone and which are broadly representative of the rest of the *corpus*.

Like many of the epistles from the First Crusade, letter no. XII is not what it purports to be. For a start, the formulation of the *salutatio*, or greeting clause, is problematic. Two of the three known manuscripts name the crusade leaders before the recipients – witnesses which Hagenmeyer followed in the construction of his edition:

Boemundus, filius Rotberti, atque Raimundus, comes S. Aegidii, simulque Godefridus dux, atque Hugo Magnus maioribus et minoribus totius orbis catholicae fidei cultoribus uitam adipisci perpetuam.

(Bohemond, son of Robert, and Raymond, Count of St Gilles, and also Duke Godfrey and Hugh the Great, to the lords and vassals of the whole world who profess the Catholic faith, may you gain eternal life.)[21]

This order is peculiar, since one might have expected the leaders here to adopt a humility befitting their status as pilgrims and reflective of the enormity of their list of recipients, which would have included the pope and the monarchs of the West.[22] In fact, a variant reading in the twelfth-century copy of the text held in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana – which Hagenmeyer demoted to the footnotes of his edition – actually appears to be the superior one, swapping the order around so the recipients (set here in italic) precede the purported authors:

Maioribus atque minoribus totius orbis catholice fidei cultoribus Boimundus et Raimundus comes Sancta Egidii, dux Godefridus et Hugo Magnus, uitam adipisci perpetuam.[23]

(To the lords and vassals of the whole world who profess the Catholic faith Bohemond and Raymond, Count of St Gilles, duke Godfrey and Hugh the Great, may you gain eternal life.)

This more believable formulation of the *salutatio* is possibly the earlier version. In any case, the variants are evidence of scribes playing around with the word order in the afterglow of the triumph of 1099. Either one scribe shunted the names of Bohemond, Raymond, Godfrey and Hugh to the beginning of the *salutatio* so as to elevate their status, as heroes of the

addressed to the people of the West, from January 1098 (Hagenmeyer no. IX), ibid. 146–9; and the letter of the crusade leaders to Pope Urban II, from 11 September 1098 (Hagenmeyer no. XVI), ibid. 161–5.

[21] Ibid. 153; trans. in *Letters from the East*, 25.

[22] See G. Constable, 'The structure of medieval society according to the *Dictatores* of the twelfth century', in K. Pennington and R. Somerville (eds), *Law, Church, and society: essays in honor of Stephan Kuttner*, Philadelphia, PA 1977, 253–67.

[23] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, reg. lat. 1283, pt A, fo. 73v.

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First Crusade, above the station of those in the West who did not participate; or another scribe corrected the *salutatio* in order to make it adhere to the rules of contemporary epistolography, bringing *Maioribus et minoribus* to the fore. In any case, in following the manuscripts that name the leaders first, Hagenmeyer made a questionable editorial decision.

Turning to the main content of the letter, the document seeks to relate a potted narrative of the crusade from May 1098 up to the success at Antioch and the situation in July of that year. It then calls upon the audience to pray for the crusaders in the great pitched battle that they had supposedly arranged for 1 November. The letter opens with the statement:

> So that everyone should know how peace was established between us and the emperor and how we have fared since we entered Saracen lands, we send you this envoy of ours who will tell you in chronological order what we have accomplished.[24]

The author appears to have been using the envoy as a literary device, to avoid having to narrate details of the crusade (about which the author was probably not well informed or had no wish to relate) and skipping ahead to the focus of interest. The appeal to envoys could have been used as a literary device similar to the pretended existence of earlier letters between named correspondents, which, Parsons writes, allowed 'the author to focus on the intended subject' without getting bogged down in retracing the steps of the whole campaign.[25] Given that the narrative transmitted in letter XII is short, choppy, under-developed and poorly written, the statement that the envoy would recount the events of the expedition 'diligently to you in order' seems to have been inserted with this function in mind.[26] Such mention of envoys and supplementary oral messages should not automatically be taken as a signifier of an imposture, however. It is very common in authentic diplomatic letters from the Middle Ages, being especially favoured when there was a need to transmit secret information that could not be committed to parchment. As Constable writes, the bearer was 'the surest safeguard of epistolary authenticity', who would often 'deliver an oral message' in addition to the written one.[27] It also appears in another letter from the First Crusade that has the hallmarks of authenticity, the epistle from Daibert, patriarch of

[24] *Letters from the East*, 25; 'Ut notum sit omnibus, qualiter inter nos et imperatorem facta sit pax et quomodo in terra Saracenorum nobis, postquam illuc uenimus, euenit, dirigimus ad uos hunc nostrum legatum, qui omnia, quae apud nos facta sunt, uobis per ordinem diligenter edisserat': *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 154.

[25] Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois', 23.

[26] *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 154; *Letters from the East*, 26.

[27] Constable, 'Forged letters', 34. On the common use of oral messages to supplement, or even replace, written letters since ancient times see P. Chaplais, *English diplomatic practice in the Middle Ages*, London 2003, 6–20.

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Jerusalem, to Germany from April 1100 (letter XXI); but there, however, the use of the envoy makes sense in the context of the rest of the letter and is not a clear attempt to skip parts of the narrative as in letter XII.[28] In letter XII, there then follows a simplistic discussion of the political relations between the crusaders and the Byzantine emperor, Alexios I Komnenos, and the battles of the crusade that are, as Hagenmeyer wrote, simultaneously vague, and, where specific details are given, incorrect.[29] These are not strong indicators of authenticity.

One of the three surviving manuscript witnesses of this text preserves a postscript which Hagenmeyer chose to print in the main text of his critical edition:

> I, bishop of Grenoble, send this letter, which was delivered to me at Grenoble, on to you, archbishop of the holy church of Tours and your canons, so that all of you who are present at the Feast should learn of its contents, and when you have returned to your various parts of the world some of you will answer their rightful requests with prayers and alms, while others will hasten to them with arms.[30]

Although Hagenmeyer argued that the main text of the letter was not composed under the aegis of its named authors, he was convinced by the postscript that the bishop of Grenoble did indeed transmit the letter to the archbishop of Tours in 1098, thus making it an 'original' letter from the crusade.[31] But even this postscript must be treated with caution. It is only preserved in one of the three manuscript witnesses, Bibliothèque municipal, Reims, MS 1405, which also preserves another First Crusade letter that is demonstrably inauthentic.[32] The oldest manuscript, which apparently dates from the very end of the eleventh century, Bibliothèque municipale, Angers, MS 171, lacks this passage. The other manuscript, preserved in the Vatican codex, is deficient, having lost the following leaves before the codex was rebound.[33] If it is apparent, at the remove of nearly a millennium, that the main body of the letter is probably fictitious, then it seems unlikely that

[28] Published in a new, critical edition in Smith, 'Scribal crusading', 168–9.

[29] *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 82.

[30] *Letters from the East*, 26; 'Ego Gratianopolitanus episcopus has litteras mihi adlatas Gratianopolim uobis sanctae Turonensis ecclesiae archiepiscopo et canonicis mitto, ut per uos omnibus, qui ad festum conuenerint, innotescant et per eos diuersis partibus orbis, ad quas redituri sunt, alii eorum iustis petitionibus, orationibus et eleemosynis subueniant, alii uero cum armis accurrere festinent': *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 155.

[31] *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 83–4.

[32] Bibliothèque municipal, Reims, MS 1405, fo. 64v. This manuscript also transmits letter VI (see n. 20), which is also a confection.

[33] MS 171, fo. 271v. See *Catalogue général*, 245, <http://ccfr.bnf.fr/portailccfr/jsp/index_view_direct_anonymous.jsp?record=eadcgm:EADC:D34100503> [accessed 2 Dec. 2018]; Reg. lat. 1283 pt A, fo. 73v, digitised at <https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.1283.pt.A/0156> [accessed 2 Dec. 2018]. It also preserves on the same leaf the first letter of Stephen of Blois: Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois'.

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educated churchmen such as the bishop of Grenoble would have been easily hoodwinked by such an amateur effort; as Constable reminds us, 'writers and receivers of letters in … the Middle Ages were worried that their letters might be falsified'.[34] The form that this addition takes, that of a postscript appended to the letter text, is also unusual in terms of diplomatic norms, since bishops who forwarded on copies of letters from third parties were wont to interpolate them into the main text of their own letters, introduced by their own words.[35] That the postscript is missing in the Angers codex suggests either that it was created with the main text specifically in order to lend credibility to the document, but was removed by later copyists, or, more probably, that the letter was already in circulation when a scribe decided to bolster the authenticity of the text by adding it. The addition of a postscript that gives specific details about where and when the letter was received and by whom, but without giving the initials of the bishop or even *gemmipuncti* – that is two dots to stand for the names (which, even taken by itself, would be suspicious) – appears to be an attempt to add verisimilitude to the text, which should set alarm bells ringing.[36] Nine hundred years later, the question of why the bishop of Grenoble and archbishop of Tours were selected is difficult to assess, but it seems most likely that they were simply chosen as powerful figures of authority whose endorsement of the letter's request for liturgical and military reinforcement would increase the impact of the text in France.

The presence alone of such additions, however, does not automatically mark a letter as inauthentic; rather, it is the content and tone of the additions and how they relate to the main text that count. Apparently genuine letters from the leadership of the First Crusade also bear extra sections that were added after their texts began to circulate in the West.[37] But the fact that the postscripts in these documents were added silently, that is, they purport to be part of the main body of the letter and do not seek to cement the authenticity of the text, helps to identify those epistles as genuine. They recommend the interpretation that contemporaries accepted the letters as authentic, and some scribes hung short appendices on the end since they represented good vehicles to transmit their own messages. Letter XII, on the other hand, was probably recognised as suspicious during its medieval transmission, necessitating the creation and addition of extra proof of authenticity. The addition attributed to the bishop of Grenoble, then, makes letter XII even more suspect, since it proclaims, essentially, 'this letter is genuine'.

[34] Constable, 'Forged letters', 12.

[35] See the contemporary example furnished by Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury in a letter of 1109, for example *English episcopal acta*, ed. D. M. Smith and others, London 1980– , xxviii, no. 14 at pp. 14–15.

[36] See also Parsons, 'Letters of Stephen of Blois'.

[37] See Smith, 'First Crusade letter' and also letter no. XVI (see n. 20 above).

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It is the unconvincing style and the content of the main body of the letter, however, that mark this text out as a probable imposture. In addition to the vague descriptions and incorrect details, the most damning section is the unbelievable passage claiming that the crusaders had arranged a pitched battle with the 'king of the Persians' for the Feast of All Saints (1 November 1098) and requesting from their fellow Christians in the West 'many prayers and alms on the third day before the Feast, a Friday, on which we will join battle', a supplication bolstered by the postscript.[38] The notion that the crusaders would pre-book a battle months in advance with the 'king of the Persians' is nonsense. It was probably thought as much in the Middle Ages, which would explain the appeal to authenticity of the 'bishop of Grenoble' in the postscript. The Vatican manuscript might provide the key to unravelling the mystery of letter XII, since it displays variant formulations in the immediately preceding sections.[39] It is frustrating, however, that the Vatican codex cuts off just before the point of interest, meaning that it lacks the final sections of the letter necessary to draw any firm conclusions on this point. It is possible that the lost leaves from this letter contained the same spurious advertisement of the planned battle, just like the others.

Letter XII, at least in the form in which it has come down to us, is almost certainly a fiction. If it can trace its origins back to a genuine original, we can say with absolute certainty that the text was heavily adapted in the twelfth century after it began to circulate in the West. But what was its creator's agenda in composing the missive? Hagenmeyer allowed his imagination free rein in suggesting, extremely creatively but far from convincingly, that the letter could have been written by a forger within the ranks of the crusade army who pretended to be the princes' envoy and used this assumed identity to abandon the crusade and return to the West.[40] The letter thus functioned, according to this far-fetched interpretation, as the deserter's 'passport' and proof of status. Hagenmeyer also noted the possibility that the text was fabricated in the West, possibly, he posited, with the knowledge or assistance of the bishop of Grenoble, who himself preached the crusade.[41] Hagenmeyer was closer to the mark with this latter suggestion, although the involvement of the bishop of Grenoble is most probably a red herring. This text was almost certainly created in the West, probably after, but possibly during, the First Crusade, and was designed to secure liturgical support for the pilgrims through prayers and monetary assistance through the donation of

[38] *Letters from the East*, 26; 'Specialiter autem tertium diem ante festum, qui est dies Veneris, in quo triumphante Christo proelium potenter commissuri sumus': *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 155. [39] For the variant wording see ibid. 154 n. w. [40] Ibid. 82.
[41] Ibid. 82–3, 307–8.

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alms.[42] In this, the letter was entirely typical of other 'First Crusade' missives which called upon their audiences to remember the crusaders in their prayers, to celebrate the capture of Jerusalem, and to pay the debts of returning veterans.[43] There is possibly another agenda at work here, too. The early focus of the letter on the relationship between the Latins and the Byzantines could also locate this text in the immediate aftermath of the anti-Greek crusade recruitment tour of Bohemond.[44] As Nicholas Paul argues, Bohemond spread slander about Alexius during his tour of the West which is reflected in the sources from this period.[45] There may be traces of this in this epistle.

Having examined one letter in detail, it is now time to step back and explore the broader findings that can be drawn from the epistles as a *corpus* of texts. All the letters, even the inauthentic ones, are preserved in late eleventh- or twelfth-century manuscripts, as well as later copies, and the popularity and circulation of the texts was unrelated to their authenticity. Constable argues that such inauthentic letters should not be considered forgeries 'and might have been accepted by contemporaries as authentic, but they had no connection with their ostensible writers'.[46] While it may be true that many believed the impostures to be genuine, it is clear that contemporaries did attribute importance to the authenticity of the letters, else the citation of the bishop of Grenoble to lend verisimilitude to letter XII would be redundant. The primary intention behind their creation was apparently to recruit new crusaders in the West and defenders of the vulnerable Latin polities in the Near East.

The seemingly miraculous capture of Jerusalem created a great demand for information about the crusade. Yet there seems to have been less interest in the enterprise before 1099 and, as a result of this, there seems only to have been a very limited supply of information from the expedition itself in the form of authentic missives. Most of the history of the First Crusade was committed to parchment only after the expedition had ended, and the creation of epistles, or recreation of genuine letters subsequently lost, served to fill in the gaps left by the paucity of material, before the great campaign of rewriting of the *Gesta Francorum* during the first decade of the twelfth century by figures such as Robert the Monk, Baldric of Bourgueil and Guibert of Nogent.[47] The creative process of such gap-filling was quite familiar to contemporary clergy. There was a lively trade in the apocryphal

[42] See C. T. Maier, 'Crisis, liturgy and the crusade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', this JOURNAL xlviii (1997), 628–57 at p. 630. However the analysis therein needs to be reoriented if it is accepted that the letter is an imposture.

[43] Letters nos VI, and XVIII: *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 142, 173–4.

[44] Paul, 'Warlord's wisdom', 565. [45] Ibid. [46] Constable, *Letters*, 50.

[47] Rubenstein, 'What is the *Gesta Francorum*?', 179 and n. 1; Symes, 'Popular literacies', 40–50; Bull and Kempf, *Writing the early crusades*.

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Gospels created in order to shed light on the childhood of Jesus, and the invention of fictional correspondences between rulers, which offered 'skilled clergy a novel way to explore the past', was a widespread scribal practice used both to transmit 'informative history' and also as 'a form of entertainment'.[48] The confected letters from the crusade should be located in these monastic scribal cultures. Epistles were much easier to compose than a full-scale narrative since – as letter XII demonstrates – they did not require extensive knowledge of the First Crusade or access to the sources (although this does not mean that the letters do not preserve elements of crusading narrative distinct from the other textual traditions). They were also easier to copy and transmit. A practised scribe could probably have copied short letters in very little time at all. They did not require large sheets of parchment, which rendered them comparatively cheap in the grand scheme of manuscript production, and one could insert them into the blank folios of existing codices, as with the Reims manuscript, for instance. Many First Crusade letters are preserved in just such a fashion, scratched into the beginning, middle and end of codices that have nothing else to do with the crusading movement. The epistolary form represented the perfect vehicle for attempts to whip up support in the West. They were much more direct in their agenda and they appeared to boast impeccable pedigree, purporting to be the words of heroes of the First Crusade.

By framing calls to crusade as letters from the leaders of the 1096 expedition, both ecclesiastical and secular, or bearing their endorsement, the authors added extra authority to their texts. There is an interesting analogue here with the 'Sunday Letter', a spurious epistle purportedly written by Christ himself ordering the observance of Sunday as a holy day, which was supposed to have fallen from Heaven to the earthly Jerusalem, whence it travelled to Rome and spread throughout the West.[49] The fabricated letters purporting to be from leaders of the crusade tapped into a similar impulse and were the product of the same ecclesiastical scribal culture. This was not an unknown monk from a European cloister calling upon lay people to travel to Outremer, to pray for crusaders or to pay their debts, but some of the most famous figures from the crusade itself. How could one refuse calls for aid made by the patriarch of Jerusalem or Godfrey of Bouillon or Bohemond of Taranto?

[48] See, respectively, M. Dzon, *The quest for the Christ child in the later Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, PA 2017, 3–4, and E. van Houts, 'The writing of history at Le Bec', in B. Pohl and L. L. Gathagan (eds), *A companion to the abbey of Le Bec in the central Middle Ages (11th–13th centuries)*, Leiden 2018, 125–43 at p. 143.

[49] *Sunday observance and the Sunday letter in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. and trans. D. Haines, Cambridge 2010, 36–7.

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But how would the exhortatory messages of the letters have been transmitted, and to whom? Hagenmeyer argued that these letters (or at least parts of them) were intended to function as *excitatoria*, that is, as texts designed to stir recipients into action to support the crusade.[50] There are two problems with the use of this term, however. First, as Nicholas Paul argues, the utility of the term *excitatorium* to describe a category of sources is problematic.[51] No one has attempted to define exactly what they mean by *excitatorium* in the context of crusade sources. It could be applied just as well to letters as to sermons and longer narrative texts, and it can never do justice to the intricacies of these different types of sources or their multifaceted purposes. One might suggest that it fits well the appeals intended to have an immediate impact, to whip up enthusiasm and inspire support for the crusading movement – the desperate call for aid that Patriarch Eraclius sent from Jerusalem to the West in September 1187 when Saladin was overrunning Frankish fortresses in the Holy Land, for example, immediately springs to mind.[52] But such documents outlived the initial context of their composition. '*Excitatoria*' from the First Crusade were copied throughout the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[53] Patriarch Eraclius' appeal for aid was still being copied decades after Saladin had died because it maintained contemporary relevance by virtue of the fact that the struggle to recover Jerusalem was still ongoing.[54] The afterlives of the letters in manuscript are directly comparable to the full-length crusade narratives. Therefore we should be hesitant to apply the term *excitatorium* to a specific category of sources, but it retains its value when used in a more circumspect fashion to describe the agenda of the sources, which can be applied equally to Robert the Monk's famous book-length narrative of the First Crusade, the *Historia Iherosolimitana*, as it can to the letter examined here.

This brings us to the second problem of interpretation. Damien Kempf and Marcus Bull have questioned whether First Crusade 'texts had any material value as aids to the propagating of military campaigns'.[55] It is easy to write about these texts being copied to support crusading outside the cloister walls, but how can it be proved that such exhortatory texts took on any life and meaning outside the monastic *scriptoria* and communities in which they were produced? Clearly some of the monks who fabricated new letters envisaged a purpose for them outside their

[50] *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 27, 38, 39, 81, 83, 100, 111, 120, 209.
[51] Paul, 'Warlord's wisdom', 544 n. 59.
[52] Kedar, 'Ein Hilferuf'.
[53] Smith, 'Scribal crusading', 157–61.
[54] For example the text discovered by Kedar and published in his 'Ein Hilferuf', which can be dated on art historical grounds to the second quarter of the thirteenth century: E. Klemm, *Die illuminierten Handschriften des 13. Jahrhunderts deutscher Herkunft in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, Wiesbaden 1998, 151. See Smith, 'First Crusade letter', 12–13.
[55] *Historia Iherosolimitana*, p. xxxv.

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monasteries, but while the agenda of these calls to arms is transparent, the target audience is not so clear. There were many opportunities for monks to come into contact with the outside world and for the texts to travel outside of the communities in which they were kept – the simple fact that there are so many such manuscripts is evidence of such travel.[56] Different monastic orders are known to have swapped books with each other, so it is possible that crusade letters could cross between Benedictines and Cistercians, for instance.[57] Most directly, such texts could find an outlet through Cistercian crusade preaching.[58] The transmission of the letter texts from monastic libraries and *scriptoria* to lay audiences in this manner is self-explanatory, but there were also other, less direct channels. Monasteries played host to lay visitors and patrons (and buried some of the latter), they engaged in extensive correspondences with figures outside their communities, and they were also permitted to travel outside the walls of their monasteries to attend General Chapter meetings, to undertake necessary administrative business and, for Cistercians from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, to attend university; 'the precinct walls', Janet Burton and Julie Kerr remind us, 'were not impenetrable'.[59]

There were also very close links between the laity and clerical communities as a direct result of crusading activity, both before and after expeditions. Departing pilgrims gifted, sold and mortgaged land and made testamentary bequests to monasteries and churches, and they also arranged for intercessory prayers to be said on their behalf.[60] Those crusaders who survived the campaign and returned to redeem their mortgages would by necessity have had to deal with their local churches and this contact created opportunities for the transmission of crusade narrative in oral and written form. Indeed, it was through interviews and the preservation of oral histories that ecclesiastics such as Albert of Aachen collected the material to write the history of the crusade.[61] The evidence suggests that oral traditions about the crusade were widespread in the West in the

[56] See Smith, 'Scribal crusading', 157–61.

[57] T. Colk, 'Twelfth-century East Anglian canons: a monastic life?', in C. Harper-Bill (ed.), *Medieval East Anglia*, Woodbridge 2005, 209–24 at p. 220.

[58] B. M. Kienzle, *Cistercians, heresy and crusade in Occitania, 1145–1229: preaching in the Lord's vineyard*, Woodbridge 2001, 7.

[59] J. Burton and J. Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge 2011, 190. See also K. A. Smith, *War and the making of medieval monastic culture*, Woodbridge 2011, 3–4; N. L. Paul, *To follow in their footsteps: the crusades and family memory in the high Middle Ages*, Ithaca, NY 2012, 69–74; and A. E. Lester, 'A shared imitation: Cistercian convents and crusader families in thirteenth-century Champagne', *Journal of Medieval History* xxxv (2009), 353–70 at p. 367.

[60] J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the idea of crusading*, 2nd edn, London 2003, 36, 45–6. See also M. Bull, *Knightly piety and the lay response to the First Crusade: the Limousin and Gascony, c. 970–c. 1130*, Oxford 1993.

[61] Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, pp. xxvi–xxvii.

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aftermath of the First Crusade.[62] Returning crusaders also often transferred material artefacts through the donation of relics acquired in the East and, in the words of Jonathan Riley-Smith, veterans of the First Crusade 'showered European churches with them'.[63] Other survivors founded new religious houses and some joined existing communities.[64] All these different forms of contact between veteran crusaders and their local churches facilitated the injection of crusade narratives into those Western religious communities in the form of texts and oral histories. Thus there were many opportunities for religious communities, lay figures and crusade preachers to acquire and transmit crusade texts from and to each other; in essence, churches functioned as sites which facilitated and promoted the memorialisation of the crusades, as Katherine Allen Smith and Megan Cassidy-Welch have illuminated.[65] The letters represented the perfect source material to circulate in these contexts since they were short, which meant that they could be copied quickly and cheaply and then carried away easily as single sheets or copied into blank space in codices that visitors to churches carried at the time. The brevity of epistles compared to full-length narratives also meant that they represented the perfect preaching material. They transmitted, very obviously, an exhortatory message that was direct (much more so than the longer narratives) and easy to understand.

But evidence from the letter *corpus* also suggests that the scribes who created and modified the letters of the First Crusade also envisaged a – perhaps exclusively – monastic audience for their efforts. The very act of copying these texts, together with the liturgical celebration of the capture of Jerusalem, was an act of devotion and a form of scribal crusading in itself, offering cloistered monks a way of participating in the crusading movement on the 'home front'.[66] Unique evidence of the reception of

[62] John, 'Historical truth', 265–9.

[63] J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders, 1095–1131*, Cambridge 1997, 150, and *First Crusade*, 122–3; Paul, *To follow in their footsteps*, 99–103, 111–23; W. J. Purkis, 'Crusading and crusade memory in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*', *Journal of Medieval History* xxxix (2013), 100–27 at p. 122; Lester, 'Shared imitation', 367, and 'What remains: women, relics and remembrance in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade', *Journal of Medieval History* xl (2014), 311–28.

[64] Riley-Smith, *First Crusaders*, 154–5.

[65] K. A. Smith, 'Monastic memories of the early crusading movement', in M. Cassidy-Welch (ed.), *Remembering the crusades and crusading*, Abingdon 2017, 131–44; M. Cassidy-Welch, 'The monastery of São Vicente de Fora in Lisbon as a site of crusading memory', *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* iii (2014), 1–20.

[66] See Smith, 'Scribal crusading'; Lester, 'Shared imitation', 357, 366; M. C. Gaposchkin, *Invisible weapons: liturgy and the making of crusade ideology*, Ithaca, NY 2017, 130–64; Maier, 'Crisis'; R. D. G. Allington, 'Prayer warriors: crusading piety in Rome and the papal states (1187–1291)', unpubl. PhD diss. Saint Louis University 2017.

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the epistles can be found in the witness of the letter announcing the conquest of Jerusalem (letter no. XVIII) that I identified in a Würzburg manuscript, unknown to Hagenmeyer, which is introduced by a Latin verse instructing the readers of the letter to read its text and to celebrate the conquest of Jerusalem in order to magnify the glory of the event on earth.[67] There was clearly an element of the Benedictine practice of *Lectio divina* ('the prayerful study of Scripture') to the use of these letters whereby cloistered clergy appear to have embarked upon a carefully structured and active programme of consumption and spiritual meditation.[68] In short, they were not simply read in a passive process. As Katherine Allen Smith argues, some 'viewed the religious profession as an alternative to going on crusade' and thought of themselves as spiritual warriors, fighting on behalf of Christ through their religious lifestyle.[69] This belief in the efficacy of spiritual warfare was not exclusive to male religious: Anne E. Lester emphasises that, by the early thirteenth century at least, female kin of male crusaders entered nunneries for the duration of military campaigns in the East, simultaneously opening up a new, spiritual front in the West.[70] The copying and consumption of First Crusade letters should be read in this context. Smith also highlights that some members of monastic communities had carried arms in their secular lives before donning the monk's habit, that some of these had even been on crusade, and that this was one way through which crusade memories and traditions 'passed into communal memory and became part of the narrative traditions of individual religious houses'.[71] In his studies of the early thirteenth-century *Dialogus miraculorum* of the Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach, William Purkis demonstrates how the order used crusading narrative to socialise novices and that, rather than representing a distraction from their purpose, the liturgical support of crusading ventures 'may well have been regarded as an intrinsic part of the Order's spiritual *raison d'être*'.[72] It is clear, then, that crusading narratives permeated religious institutions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and infused their scribal cultures

[67] 'Hec qui scire sitis lege de Iherosolimitis | Multiplicant laudes rem si gestam bene gaudes': Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg, M. p. th. q. 17, fo. 90r. See also Smith, 'Scribal crusading', 133.

[68] On *Lectio divina* see E. A. Matter, '*Lectio divina*', in A. Hollywood and P. Z. Beckman (eds), *The Cambridge companion to Christian mysticism*, Cambridge 2012, 147–56, quotation at p. 147.

[69] Smith, *War and the making of medieval monastic culture*, quotation at pp. 53, 71–111. See also Purkis, 'Crusading and crusade memory', 119.

[70] Lester, 'Shared imitation', 356–7, 364–5, 366.

[71] Smith, 'Monastic memories', 135, and *War and the making of medieval monastic culture*, 52–63, 166–76. See also Purkis, 'Crusading and crusade memory', 120–1.

[72] Purkis, 'Crusading and crusade memory', 119, and 'Memories of the preaching for the Fifth Crusade in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*', *Journal of Medieval History* xl (2014), 329–45 at pp. 331, 333, 341, 344.

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and devotional practices. It was a very real possibility, therefore, that some scribes who fabricated and modified First Crusade letters never envisioned these texts leaving the confines of the cloisters, but intended them, in fact, for internal monastic consumption and reflection only, which, in itself, they perceived to be as meritorious as taking up physical arms in defence of Christ's patrimony.

To conclude, these letters, their manuscript traditions and the purposes to which they were put, are more complex than has often been thought. Along with other collective letters from the leadership of the First Crusade, supposedly composed during the campaign, letter XII is inauthentic and bears witness to a challenging manuscript tradition which has been misinterpreted. As Parsons has argued, this does not negate the value of problematic letters as transmitters of crusade narrative, but arguments based upon their supposed authenticity must be reconsidered. New approaches to the material must be developed which account for and accept the problematic authenticity of much of the *corpus* of letters. This can be achieved by exploring how the texts were transmitted and received and what this tells us about monastic scribal cultures and the engagement of clergy with the crusading movement from behind cloister walls as scribal crusaders.

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