Letters from the East

Crusaders, Pilgrims and Settlers in the 12th–13th Centuries

Translated by Malcolm Barber and Keith Bate

CRUSADE TEXTS IN TRANSLATION

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Volume 18

About the volume

No written source is entirely without literary artifice, but the letters sent from Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine in the high middle ages come closest to recording the real feelings of those who lived in and visited the crusader states. They are not, of course, reflective pieces, but they do convey the immediacy of circumstances which were frequently dramatic and often life-threatening.

Those settled in the East faced crises all the time, while crusaders and pilgrims knew they were experiencing defining moments in their lives. There are accounts of all the great events from the triumph of the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 to the disasters of Hattin in 1187 and the loss of Acre in 1291. These had an impact on the lives of all Latin Christians, but at the same time individuals felt impelled to describe both their own personal achievements and disappointments and the wonders and horrors of what they had seen. Moreover, the representatives of the military and monastic orders used letters as a means of maintaining contact with the western houses, providing information about the working of religious orders not found elsewhere.

Some of the letters translated here are famous, other hardly known, but all offer unique insight into the minds of those who took part in the crusading movement.

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Preface

Our original intention was to assemble a collection of letters which had not previously been translated into English, but this soon proved to be both impractical and undesirable, leaving an unbalanced selection which, in several senses, would have given a misleading picture of the situation in Palestine and Syria and the attitudes of those who lived there or visited as crusaders, pilgrims and traders. Moreover, many of the letters which have been translated are not now easily available, often buried in nineteenth-century editions, long out of print, stylistically archaic, and with barely any useful notes. Even so, it does seem superfluous to reproduce new translations of letters which are readily available and fully annotated and, in general, we have omitted these. The presentation is chronological rather than thematic, although we have attempted to convey a sense of the variety of subjects covered. A thematic organisation might have been interesting but would also have been confusing as well as more judgemental than we intend, for everybody will have their own opinions about the use of any given letter as evidence.

Translation and annotation have not always been straightforward. The letters encompass a wide range of styles from the high-flown language of the German imperial chancery to the rough and ready Latin of some of the correspondence of the leaders of the military orders. Sometimes the letters have been composed in a language other than Latin and have already been translated once, producing a distinctly stilted effect by the time they are reproduced in modern English. Although few of the correspondents used their letters as a means of expressing complex ideas, nevertheless the circumstances under which many of them were written and the nature of the authors themselves have sometimes produced obscurities both in the grammatical structure of the sentences and in their identification of names, personal and geographical. Moreover, in some cases, an inadequate command of Latin combined with the pressure and stress of living in a frontier society faced with almost daily threats to its existence was not always conducive to coherent and logical patterns of thought, so at times the letters are not easy to follow. Dating was sometimes haphazard or evidently thought to be inconsequential and, in various cases, we have had no alternative but to enter approximate dates based on events mentioned or omitted, or on persons known from other sources to be alive at the time. Furthermore, although some are originals, many others only survive because they were copied by someone else, not infrequently by chroniclers wishing to add a sense of authenticity to their narratives. They are, nevertheless, essential evidence for the crusading era, for they catch the immediacy of a crisis or the impact of an experience, as well as adding immeasurably to our knowledge of the world in which the writers found themselves.

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Ana Echivarría Arsuaga and José Rodriguez García, no. 70, Peter of Coblenz, Marshal of the Teutonic Knights, to Alfonso X, King of Castile (May, 1254), in 'Alfonso X, la orden Teutónica y Tierra Santa. Una nueva fuente para su estudio', in *Las Órdenes Militares en la Península Ibérica*, vol. 1, *Edad Media*, (ed.) R. Izquierdo Benito and F. Ruiz Gómez (Cuenca, 2000), pp. 507–59. Published by Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.

Emma Falque Rey, no. 13, Warmund of Picquigny, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Gerard, Prior of the Holy Sepulchre, to Diego Gelmírez, Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela (c.1120), in *Historia Compostellana*. Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 70 (Turnhout, 1988), pp. 270–2. Published by Brepols.

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Rudolf Hiestand, no. 20, Amalric of Nesle, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to Pope Alexander III (1160), in *Papsturkunden für Kirchen im Heiligen Lande*. Vorarbeiten zum Oriens Pontificus, 3 (Göttingen, 1985), no. 83, pp. 225–6. Published by Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

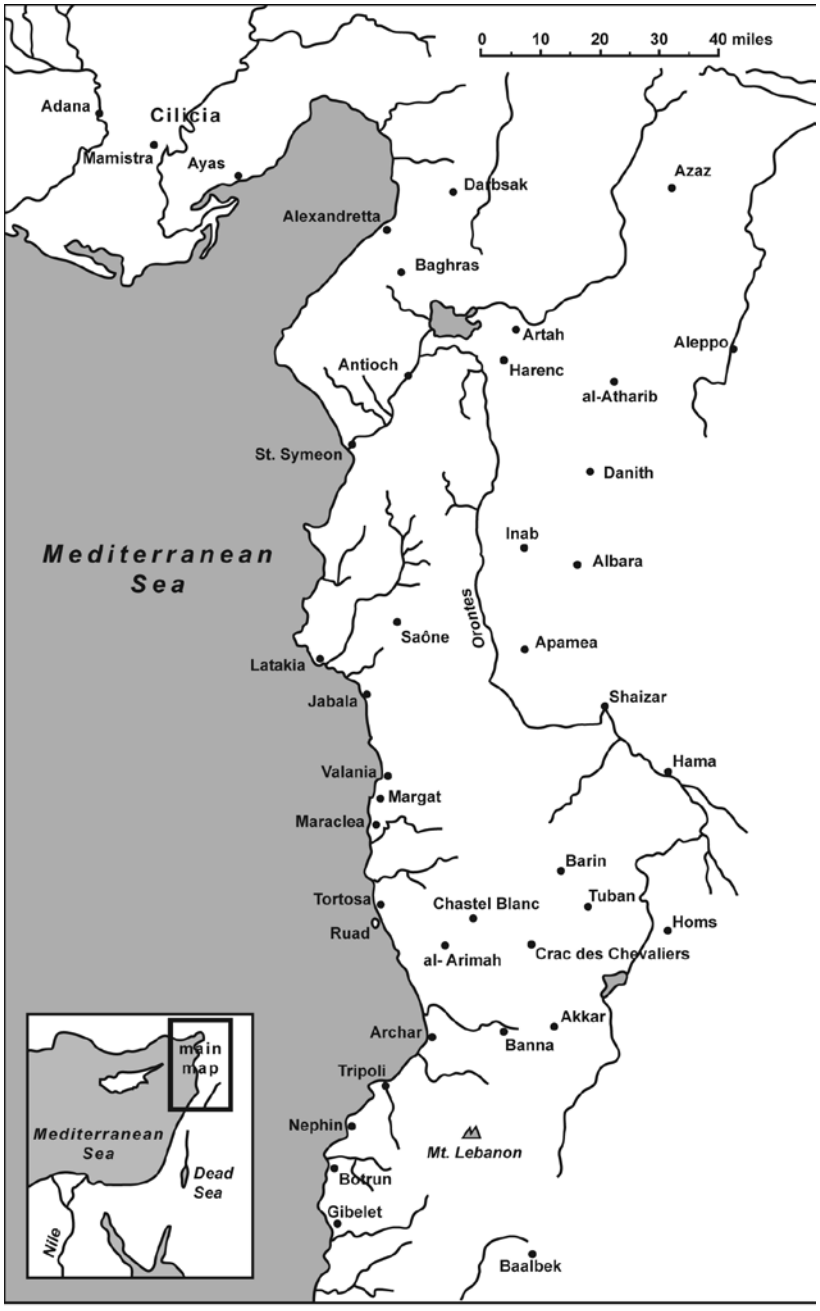
Robert Huygens, no. 57, James of Vitry, Bishop of Acre, to the Parisian masters and to Ligarde of St Trond and the convent of Aywières (1216 or 1217), no. 58, James of Vitry to Pope Honorius III (August, 1218), no. 59, James of Vitry to Pope Honorius III (September, 1218), no. 60, James of Vitry to Pope Honorius III (March, 1220), in *Serta Mediaevalia. Textus varii saeculorum x-xiii in unum collecti*, (ed.) R.B.C. Huygens. Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 171 (Turnhout, 2000), no. 2, pp. 558–78, no. 3, pp. 579–82, no. 4, pp. 583–95, no. 6, pp. 609–23. Published by Brepols.

Nikolas Jaspert, no. 39, Eraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to all prelates, kings, dukes and counts of the West (between 1180 and 1187), no. 43, Eraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to all the secular leaders of the West (September, 1187), in 'Zwei unbekannte Hilfsersuchen des Patriarchen Eraclius vor dem Fall Jerusalems (1187)', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 60 (2004), no. 1, pp. 508–11, no. 2, pp. 511–16. Published by Böhlau Verlag.

Beni Kedar, no. 44, Eraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to Pope Urban III (September, 1187), in 'Ein Hilferuf aus Jerusalem vom September 1187', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 35 (1982), 120–2. Published by Böhlau Verlag.

Paul Meyvaert, no. 72, Hulegu, Mongol Il-Khan of Persia, to Louis IX, King of France (1262), in 'An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-Khan of Persia, to Louis IX of France', *Viator*, 11 (1980), 252–9. Published by University of California Press.

Map 1: The Kingdom of Jerusalem



Map 2: The County of Tripoli and the Principality of Antioch

Chronology

1095	Call to liberate the eastern Christians by Pope Urban II
1096	Armies of the First Crusade depart
1098	Baldwin of Boulogne gains control of Edessa
1098	Capture of Antioch by the crusaders and defeat of Kerbogha of Mosul
1099	Fall of Jerusalem to the Latins
1100	Death of Godfrey of Bouillon, first ruler of Jerusalem
1104	Battle of Harran
1109	Fall of Tripoli to the Latins
1113	Papal recognition of the Hospitallers as a separate Order
1114	Earthquake in northern Syria
1115	Battle of Tell Danith
1118	Death of King Baldwin I of Jerusalem
1119	Battle of 'the Field of Blood', near al-Atharib
c.1119	Foundation of the Templars
1120	Council of Nablus
1131	Death of King Baldwin II of Jerusalem
1132/3	The Assassins establish themselves in the Nusairi Mountains
1143	Death of King Fulk of Jerusalem
1144	Fall of Edessa to Zengi, Atabeg of Mosul
1147–9	Second Crusade
1149	Battle of Inab
1152	Civil war between Queen Melisende and King Baldwin III
1154	Nur al-Din, Zengid ruler of Syria, gains control of Damascus
1159	Entry of Byzantine Emperor Manuel into Antioch
1163	Death of King Baldwin III of Jerusalem
1164	Battle of Artah
1163–9	Attempts to conquer Egypt by King Amalric
1170	Earthquake in Syria
1171	Saladin declares Egyptian allegiance to the Abbasid caliphate
1174	Death of Nur al-Din

1174	Death of King Amalric of Jerusalem
1177	Battle of Mont Gisard
1179	Saladin destroys Chastellet (Jacob's Ford)
c.1181	Maronite union with Rome
1183	Aleppo taken by Saladin
1185	Death of King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem
1186	Death of King Baldwin V of Jerusalem
1187	Battle of Hattin and fall of Jerusalem to Saladin
1189–92	Third Crusade
1191	King Richard I of England captures Cyprus
1193	Death of Saladin
1198	Union of Armenian Church with Rome
1199	Papal recognition of the Teutonic Knights
1202	Earthquake in Syria
1202–4	Fourth Crusade
1217–21	Fifth Crusade
1228–9	Crusade of Emperor Frederick II
1239–40	Crusade of Theobald IV, Count of Champagne
1240–41	Crusade of Richard, Earl of Cornwall
1244	Battle of La Forbie, near Gaza
1248–54	Crusade of King Louis IX of France
1249	Mamluks seize power from the Aiyubids in Egypt
1258	Mongols take Baghdad and kill Abbasid Caliph
1260	Battle of ʻAin Jalut
1268	Fall of Antioch to the Mamluks
1270–72	Crusade of Prince Edward of England
1289	Fall of Tripoli to the Mamluks
1291	Fall of Acre to the Mamluks and Latin evacuation of Palestine
1302	Loss of the island of Ruad to the Mamluks
1312	Suppression of the Templars at the Council of Vienne

Abbreviations

Cart.	*Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem, 1100-1310*, (ed.) J. Delaville Le Roulx, 4 vols. (Paris, 1894–1905)
MGH SS	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, (ed.) J.P. Migne, vols 155, 162, 170, 214
RHG	*Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, (ed.) M. Bouquet et al., vols 15, 16. (Paris, 1878)
RS	Rolls Series

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Introduction

For twelfth-century intellectuals letter writing was an art to be cultivated, a vehicle for fine style and the presentation of ordered learning, which was consciously created as a part of the body of work of that particular author. In these circumstances writers kept copies of their letters and, indeed, might even change their content after they had been sent if they felt it would improve the collection. As Richard Southern puts it: 'A collection of letters is essentially a memorial to the learning of a single man, so it is nearly always very one-sided.' The subject matter was often disparate, but 'what it lacks in logical arrangement is made up by its intellectual and stylistic unity'.[1]

This is not the case with the letters in this volume. The authors here are many and varied, but for the most part they are writing for essentially practical purposes at a time either immediately after, or at least quite close to, the events they are treating. They write to describe their impressions of new circumstances and strange environments, much of which would have been beyond the experience of the recipients, to ask for help in men and resources, to excite enthusiasm for a crusading expedition, to send orders to subordinates in the West, or to express fraternal solidarity with rulers, abbeys or churches which they had known or lived with in the past. Sometimes they sent precious relics or gifts with their letters, which they hoped would stimulate the imaginations of westerners so that they would be remembered in prayers and their needs acknowledged through material help. They are, indeed, the most powerful proof of the unique nature of the crusader states in Palestine and Syria, which were independent political entities, yet at the same time could not have existed without a constant flow of men, money, materials and trade between them and the society of the Latin West which had produced them in the first place. Often they were written in haste in response to emergencies by men whose command of Latin was much more limited than the stylists of the collections, but always they convey something of the human predicament in which the westerners were attempting first to settle and then to defend the acquisitions made during and after the great expedition set in motion at Clermont in 1095 by Pope Urban II. They express pain, fear and panic, as well as pride, boasting and triumphalism, all underpinned by their relationship with a God whose intentions impinge upon them with far greater immediacy and force than anywhere else in the contemporary Christian world.

Nevertheless, although the circumstances in which many of the letters were written could not have been further removed from the quiet of a Burgundian cloister or even the more raucous setting of the cathedral schools, the writers

[1] Southern, R.W., *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 86–7.

were not oblivious to the rules of composition and structure, themselves derived from a Ciceronian past in which a proper presentation was an essential element in achieving the required effect. In the vibrant intellectual environment of the twelfth century, epistolary models proliferated and those who were either educated themselves, or had access to servants with the appropriate skills, were aware of the proper modes of expression. *The Principles of Letter-Writing* was one such manual. Its author came from Bologna and was writing in 1135, but his name is not known.[1] He follows his own advice on the importance of modesty, claiming that he was content to provide 'some basic skills for the untrained'. His ideal letter contains five distinct parts presented in a specific order, but he is flexible enough to appreciate that this was not always possible or desirable, a latitude which is readily exploited in the letters from Palestine and Syria. Usually a letter began with a Salutation followed by the Securing of Goodwill, two elements which were closely connected, although it was possible either to combine the two or to dispense with one or the other. The Salutation was 'an expression of greeting conveying a friendly sentiment not inconsistent with the social rank of the persons involved', to which could be added an emphasis on 'some aspect of the recipient's renown and good character'. The name or names of the recipients should always precede that of the sender, unless a more important man was writing to a less important man, in which case the sender came first 'so that his distinction is demonstrated by the very position of the names'. As so many of the letters from the East were written with the aim of achieving a certain end, it was vital that they did not disregard these rules; there was little point in appealing for help while simultaneously offending those most able to give it. Securing goodwill is defined as 'a certain fit ordering of words effectively influencing the mind of the recipient' which, put more bluntly, meant piling on flattery in quantities which reflected the social status of the putative benefactor. These openings were followed by the Narration which should be 'an orderly account of the matter under discussion', and the Petition ' in which we endeavour to call for something'. In the case of the Latin settlers in the East the Petition was frequently the major point of the letter, often taking the form of supplication, 'when we entreat by prayers that something be done or not done', although this was only one of nine variants on the art of petitioning. All this would be drawn together in the Conclusion, although this was not essential if the point had already been clearly made. Many of the crusader letters do indeed end very abruptly, for they were frequently composed in conditions of imminent danger which precluded an elaborate summary, circumstances fully appreciated by the Bolognese author who acknowledges that, ultimately, the most effective content and order could most readily be acquired by judgement and experience.

The Latin states in Palestine and Syria were established as a direct result of the great expedition to Jerusalem which took place between 1096 and 1099. Armies from Normandy, Flanders, Lorraine, the Paris Basin, Provence and Norman Apulia

[1] *The Principles of Letter-Writing*, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, (ed.) J.J. Murphy (Berkeley, CA, 1971), pp. 5–25.

and Sicily had been set in motion by the preaching of Pope Urban II at Clermont in November 1095, and by the concerted propaganda effort which took place in the following months. Collectively these extraordinary events have been labelled the First Crusade, a construct which gives the false impression that the pope intended to inaugurate a new movement, and thus distorts the context within which the letters should be read. In fact, contemporaries saw the fall of Jerusalem in July, 1099 **[9]**, as an unprecedented demonstration of the will of God, a conviction hardened into certainty when the wood of the True Cross was discovered hidden within the city a month later. The capture of the Holy City was the culmination of three years of struggle and suffering **[1] [2] [3] [5] [7]**, but it was not the only success. In June, 1098, the crusaders had taken Antioch in northern Syria, a city of huge significance not only because of its strategic importance but also because the crusaders fully understood its role in the establishment of Christianity. As the seat of St Peter, seen as the first bishop of a Church ready to expand beyond its Jewish origins into a cult which spread across the Mediterranean and into northern Europe, its emotive significance was second only to Jerusalem itself **[7] [8]**. Even before the capture of Antioch, one of the most enterprising of the crusader lords, Baldwin of Boulogne, the youngest of three brothers from the duchy of Lorraine, had struck out to the north-east and, in March 1098, had established himself in another great landmark city of the Christian faith, that of Edessa, beyond the Euphrates.

Three potential states – the kingdom of Jerusalem, the principality of Antioch and the county of Edessa – were therefore created at the beginning of the twelfth century, and they were soon followed by a fourth, that of the county of Tripoli, carved out by another of the crusade leaders, Raymond IV, Count of Toulouse, in a corridor of land extending from just north of Beirut to Valania. Although the smallest of the states it was a key element in the structure the Latins had managed to implant, since it was not only a vital link between north and south, but also a solid barrier against the Muslim cities of Hama, Homs and Baalbek beyond the Lebanese mountain chain. Although Raymond died in 1105 before the city of Tripoli itself was captured, he had founded a state which would ultimately ensure Christian domination of the coast, without which survival would have been impossible.

As this implies, the Christians needed control of the sea, which they achieved with the capture of the coastal cities, a goal largely attained by 1110, although Tyre did not fall until 1124, and Ascalon held out until 1153. Once access to the Syrian littoral was denied them, Egyptian galley fleets were unable to challenge shipping sailing from the West along the usual northerly routes, since their sea-lanes were beyond Egyptian range.[1] This greatly reduced the risks of enemy attack during the voyages to and from the East, which usually took place in the spring and the autumn, as well as giving much quicker and safer access to the crusader states. Even so, larger armies still continued to take the land route across the Balkans

[1] Pryor, J.H., *Geography, Technology and War. Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649–1571* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 112–34.