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978-0-521-40728-1 - William of Tyre: Historian of the Latin East

Peter W. Edbury and John Gordon Rowe

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTION

Historians are unanimous: the work by William II, archbishop of Tyre, which until recently has been known as the *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, but which might better be entitled *Historia Ierosolymitana*, is important and influential. William flourished in the kingdom of Jerusalem during the reigns of King Amaury (1163–74) and his son, Baldwin IV (1174–85), and he provided the Latin kingdom with an account of its foundation and history, spanning the period from the preaching of the First Crusade in 1095 until the year 1184. The *Historia* begins with a brief survey of the background to the First Crusade, going back to the recovery of the True Cross by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius early in the seventh century, before proceeding to recount the story of the Crusade (Books I–VIII) and the fortunes of the Latins in the lands they conquered (Books IX–XXIII). It is a long work: in the most recent edition William's Latin text fills just under a thousand pages.<sup>1</sup> Its very size makes it difficult to view as a whole, and for this reason scholars have been far more ready to use it as a quarry for historical information than to try to assess its strengths and weaknesses as an example of twelfth-century historiography or to seek to examine the presuppositions and attitudes of its author. As a quarry for historical information it has long been recognized as being of the utmost importance. From the late 1120s until the point at which it ends it is the only contemporary or near-contemporary account of the history of the Latin East written in Latin by a Christian resident

<sup>1</sup> *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi Chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens. Identification des sources historiques et détermination des dates par H. E. Mayer et G. Rösch (Turnhout, 1986). As Huygens demonstrated (*WT*, pp. 33–4), William's own title for his work is unknown; Huygens himself opted to supply the neutral *Chronicon*. We, however, prefer *Historia Ierosolymitana* which, although not William's usage, is indicated as a possible title in the incipits of two English manuscripts. We shall frequently use the shorthand form, *Historia*.

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in that area. For the reigns of Amaury and Baldwin IV it is of particular interest, since at that period its author was a prominent man of affairs, and so might reasonably be expected to have been well informed about his subject-matter.

William's subject, the Crusades to the eastern Mediterranean and the history of the lands conquered by the crusaders, is in any reckoning of major importance for an understanding of the central middle ages. The success of the First Crusade in capturing Jerusalem from the Muslims in 1099, the fact that the Christians could go on to consolidate their achievement and extend the territory under their control, and their continued presence in parts of Syria and Palestine for almost two centuries, have often evoked surprise and admiration. Modern historians may emphasize the importance of the Crusade in things such as the history of the medieval papal monarchy, the beginnings of the systems of national taxation, or the growth of international trade, but William's interests as a contemporary were in political events – battles and the deeds of kings. Other matters, such as the deeds of popes or the activities of traders from the Italian maritime republics, were only incidental to his story. As an archbishop and churchman he allowed himself to digress from time to time and write about the doings of the secular Church in the East, but ecclesiastical history was not his main theme. The *Historia* tells of the successes and achievements of the crusaders and Latin settlers, but, especially towards the end, there is also a sense of foreboding. In William's own day the Muslims under Saladin were posing a serious threat, and the Christians lacked the resources to sustain their resistance. William saw the danger and wrote about it. Within a short time of his death his fears passed in to reality with the defeat of the Christians at Hattin on 4 July 1187 and the subsequent collapse of the Latin kingdom.

William addressed his work to 'his venerable brothers in Christ',<sup>2</sup> in other words, to his fellow-members of the higher clergy, and it goes without saying that the appeal of his lengthy Latin narrative would have been restricted to clerically educated circles. The title as it appears in some manuscripts, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, might be construed as indicating that he was writing for people who regarded the Latin East as being beyond the seas and who were thus themselves living in western Europe, but there are sound textual reasons for supposing that this title is not William's

<sup>2</sup> R. B. C. Huygens, 'La tradition manuscrite de Guillaume de Tyr', *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser., v (1964), 313; *WT*, p. 32.

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own and so proves nothing. More likely, he imagined that his work would be of interest to other Latins resident in the East – he anticipated his readers being able to consult another of his writings in the cathedral archive at Tyre – but after his visit to Europe for the Third Lateran Council of 1179 came to regard it as having a potential readership throughout Christian Europe as well.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that William died soon after laying down his pen suggests that he had little part in the diffusion of his *magnum opus*. Presumably it circulated in the East before finding its way to Europe: two of the surviving manuscripts contain orthographical peculiarities which might perhaps point to their exemplars having been copied in the East, and James of Vitry, bishop of Acre (1216–28), certainly knew the work.<sup>4</sup> In the West, as we know from its colophon, one of the surviving manuscripts was given by Anseau, bishop of Meaux (1197–1207), to the Cistercian abbey of Barbeaux near Melun, and the Cistercian house at Pontigny also apparently acquired a copy in the thirteenth century. A French participant in the Third Crusade, Guy of Bazoches, who died at Châlons-sur-Marne in 1203, had access to the work and copied excerpts from it into his *Cronosgraphia*. He is thus the earliest known person to have made use of the *Historia*.<sup>5</sup> In England the *Historia* was used by the mid-thirteenth-century St Albans chronicler, Matthew Paris. In a marginal note Matthew recorded that Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, brought a manuscript containing one of William's works back from the Crusade – this would have been in 1231 – but it seems that it was probably of his lost work, the *Gesta orientaliū principum*, and that Matthew had used a copy of the *Historia* in a version already in circulation in England before that date.<sup>6</sup> Two manuscripts of the *Historia* copied in England in the thirteenth century survive, one evidently belonging to the first quarter of the century, and there is what could be a reference to a copy in the library of the Priory of St Andrew, Rochester, as early as 1202.<sup>7</sup> But insofar as the number of extant manuscripts can serve

<sup>3</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', p. 315; *WT*, p. 32–3.

<sup>4</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', pp. 322–3, 335; *WT*, pp. 77–8.

<sup>5</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', pp. 290, 291–2; *idem*, 'Pontigny et l'Histoire de Guillaume de Tyr', *Latomus*, xxv (1966), 139–42; *WT*, pp. 15, 16–18, 76–7.

<sup>6</sup> *WT*, pp. 78–87.

<sup>7</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', pp. 287–8; *WT*, pp. 19–21. One manuscript belonged to Waltham Abbey; the provenance of the other is unknown. The 1202 catalogue of the Rochester library (BL MS Royal 5.B.xii, f. 2v) lists a 'Hystoria ierlm' which could denote William's *Historia*, since both the extant thirteenth-century English manuscripts describe the work in their incipits as *Historia Ierosoly-*

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as an indication, William's work was not widely read. Only nine copies and a fragment of a tenth are known; they date from the thirteenth century, or perhaps the very end of the twelfth, to the fifteenth, and a thorough analysis shows that the manuscript tradition they embody was limited in its geographical scope to France and England.<sup>8</sup>

The *Historia* may not have circulated widely in the form in which William wrote it, but translated into French it proved to be a major success. The French translation is said to have been made in France in the years leading up to 1223.<sup>9</sup> The translator followed his Latin text fairly closely but was not above embroidering or making cuts in what he found. The manuscript at the translator's disposal was certainly no nearer William's original than the copies of the Latin text which survive to this day, and, although on occasion he could add informed comment, the translator is unlikely to have had extra information on historical matters, and his embellishments generally need to be treated with reserve.<sup>10</sup> At least fifty-nine manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts survive from the medieval period. Many were produced in the West, others in the East, at Acre or elsewhere. A substantial proportion include continuations, some of which carry the narrative well into the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The French translation would have appealed to laymen as well as to clerics, and in this connection it may be significant that

*mitana* (WT, p. 33). We are indebted to Professor D. E. Luscombe for first drawing our attention to the Rochester entry, but, as Huygens has pointed out (WT, p. 21 note 37), this reference could equally be to another history of the Crusade with the same title.

- <sup>8</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', pp. 282, 284–313 *passim*; WT, pp. 3–31.
- <sup>9</sup> 'L'Estoire de Eracles empeureur et la conqueste de la terre d'Outremer', *RHC Occ*, I–II; M. R. Morgan, *The Chronicle of Ernoul and the Continuations of William of Tyre* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 119, 172.
- <sup>10</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', p. 334. The value of the translator's embellishments is a matter of some debate. Morgan (pp. 185–7) was highly critical of the use made of the translation by J. Prawer (especially in his 'Colonization Activities in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, xxix (1951), 1074). For other examples of a positive attitude to the historical value of the translation, see H. E. Mayer, 'Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xxvi (1972), 107; R. H. C. Davis, 'William of Tyre', in D. Baker (ed.), *Relations between East and West in the Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 72–3; B. Z. Kedar, 'Gerard of Nazareth, a Neglected Twelfth-Century Writer in the Latin East', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xxxvii (1983), 62 and note 36. The date, manuscript tradition and content of the French translation deserve systematic investigation.
- <sup>11</sup> J. Folda, 'Manuscripts of the *History of Outremer* by William of Tyre: A Handlist', *Scriptorium*, xxvii (1973), 90–5. For the complex relationship of the continuations, see Morgan, *Chronicle of Ernoul*.

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some of the passages of purely ecclesiastical interest were omitted or compressed. Its popularity is evident both from the number of manuscripts which have come down to us and also in the influence it had on other writers. An early fourteenth-century compiler at work in Cyprus could refer his readers to the translation and its continuations, calling it the *Livre dou conquete*, and his contemporary, the Armenian Hayton of Gorhigos, also knew it by that name.<sup>12</sup> Another early fourteenth-century writer, Marino Sanudo, used it in his *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*. In the thirteenth century, at the behest of Alphonso X of Castile (1252–84), it was translated from French into Spanish, and in the fourteenth an Italian, Francesco Pipino, even translated parts of it back into Latin. In the fifteenth century William Caxton rendered excerpts into English, and it was probably also then that other excerpts were paraphrased into Italian and incorporated into the compilation known as the *Chronique d'Amadi*.<sup>13</sup>

William's Latin original was first printed in 1549 at Basel, where it was reissued in 1564. In 1611 J. Bongars included an edition of the *Historia*, based on three different manuscripts, in his compendium of chronicles of the Crusades entitled *Gesta Dei per Francos*. Bongars's edition was reprinted in 1855 by J. P. Migne in the *Patrologia Latina* (volume 201), although in 1844 A. Beugnot and A. Le Prévost had made a fresh edition for the project sponsored by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres under the title of *Recueil des historiens des croisades*. The *Recueil* edition established a text which was not markedly better than Bongars's, but it is nevertheless the edition that modern scholars have hitherto normally used.<sup>14</sup> In 1986, however, the distinguished Dutch scholar, Professor R. B. C. Huygens of the University of Leiden, published a splendid new edition which undoubtedly will now become accepted as standard. Thanks to his detailed and painstaking examination of the manuscripts, we now have a dependable text, and the value of his work is further enhanced by the useful historical notes contributed by Professor H. E. Mayer and Dr G. Rösch.

<sup>12</sup> 'Les Gestes des Chiprois', *RHC Arm*, II, 654, 657, 663, 744; Hayton of Gorhigos, 'La Flor des estoires de la terre d'orient', *RHC Arm*, II, 176, 306. In the thirteenth century John of Ibelin may have had some other work in mind when he used this title (John of Ibelin, 'Livre des assises de la haute cour', *RHC Lois*, I, 429).

<sup>13</sup> For Sanudo, Pipino and Caxton, see Morgan, *Chronicle of Ernoul*, pp. 22–5; *La Gran Conquista de Ultramar*, ed. Pascalis de Goyangos (Madrid, 1858); 'Chronique d'Amadi', ed. R. de Mas Latrie, in *Chroniques d'Amadi et de Strambaldi* (Paris, 1891–3), I.

<sup>14</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', pp. 318–22; *WT*, pp. 87–91.

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Modern scholarship on William of Tyre and the *Historia* may fairly be said to have begun with Heinrich von Sybel, who in 1841 published an extended essay on the work in the preface to his *Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges*.<sup>15</sup> Despite his outdated views on certain aspects, von Sybel's discussion can still be read with profit. He has some valuable and sensitive comments on William's handling of his sources and the manner in which he collected his materials. He drew attention to the fact, that despite his belief in the divine ordering of the affairs of men, William could adopt an essentially human-centred approach, and he was critical of the *Historia*, pointing out obscurities in its chronology and stressing its lack of originality as a source for the First Crusade.

Von Sybel's work was continued later in the nineteenth century by Hans Prutz, who made a careful examination of the materials then available which bear on William's career and writings.<sup>16</sup> But after Prutz, although many scholars used the *Historia*, few directed their attention to examining the problems that it presents. T. A. Archer and W. B. Stevenson each attempted to straighten out some of William's misleading statements with regard to chronology; H. Propst looked at his information on Syrian and Palestinian geography; F. Lundgreen wrote an over-critical study on his treatment of the Order of the Temple; R. Grousset discussed the incident recorded in Book xvii, chapter 20.<sup>17</sup> But when in 1941 August C. Krey came to write what he elsewhere described as 'an effort to summarize our present knowledge of the subject', we find a heavy dependence on Prutz with a strong dose of fanciful speculation.<sup>18</sup> Krey's chief contribution to the study of William of Tyre lies in his edition of the English translation made by E. A. Babcock,

<sup>15</sup> We have consulted the English translation by Lady Duff Gordon, *The History and Literature of the Crusades* (London, n.d.), pp. 197–238. Von Sybel (pp. 252–72) also gave a résumé of crusade historiography from the mid-fifteenth century to his own day, with some tart comments on the use made of the *Historia*.

<sup>16</sup> H. Prutz, 'Studien über Wilhelm von Tyrus', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, viii (1883), 91–132. See *idem*, *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 1883), pp. 458–69.

<sup>17</sup> T. A. Archer, 'On the Accession Dates of the Early Kings of Jerusalem', *EHR*, iv (1889), 89–105; W. B. Stevenson, *The Crusaders in the East* (Cambridge, 1907), pp. 361–71; H. Propst, 'Die geographischen Verhältnisse Syriens und Palästinas nach Wilhelm von Tyrus, Geschichte der Kreuzzüge', *Das Land der Bible*, iv:5/6 (1927), 1–83, continued in v:1 (1927), 1–40; F. Lundgreen, *Wilhelm von Tyrus und der Tempelorden* (Berlin, 1911); R. Grousset, 'Sur un passage obscur de Guillaume de Tyr', *Mélanges syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique, 30 (Paris, 1939), II, 937–9.

<sup>18</sup> A. C. Krey, 'William of Tyre: The Making of an Historian in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, xvi (1941), 149–66. See B/K, I, 3–44.

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published in 1943. In the period since Prutz's day study of the Crusades and the Latin East had proceeded by leaps and bounds, but the study of William had not made marked progress.

In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest and some substantial advances have been made. Without doubt the most considerable contribution has been the work of R. B. C. Huygens. It had always been assumed that a chapter in the *Historia* describing William's early career had been lost; the existence of such a chapter was known from the lists of rubrics, but in the text of the manuscripts hitherto used by the various editors it was missing. Huygens rediscovered this chapter (Book XIX, chapter 12) in a previously little used Vatican manuscript and at a stroke solved many of the questions surrounding William's studies in the West.<sup>19</sup> His rediscovery came in the course of the systematic examination, preparatory to his edition, of all the surviving manuscripts of the Latin version of the *Historia*, and his researches into the manuscript tradition have yielded many important insights into its transmission and diffusion.<sup>20</sup>

Discoveries of fresh materials which bear on William's career and writings are rare, and so it came as an agreeable surprise when in 1978 Rudolf Hiestand drew attention to an otherwise unnoticed obit giving the day of the month, but not the year, of William's death.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars who in various ways have added to our understanding of William and the *Historia* in recent years include R. H. C. Davis, who has offered some shrewd comments on the purposes and influence of the *Historia* and on the ways in which it has been misunderstood; D. W. T. C. Vessey, who has contributed an important article on William's use of literary conventions and has challenged his claims to be impartial; Hans Mayer, who, besides examining the problems surrounding the date of William's death, has tried in his study on Queen Melisende of Jerusalem to bring a section of the *Historia* describing events from the 1120s to the 1150s under critical control; W. Giese, who has examined the character sketches and topographical descriptions; and R. C. Schwinges, who has sought to place William in the context of the Twelfth-Century

<sup>19</sup> R. B. C. Huygens, 'Guillaume de Tyr étudiant. Un chapitre (xix, 12) de son "Histoire" retrouvé', *Latomus*, XXI (1962), 811–29.

<sup>20</sup> Huygens, 'Tradition manuscrite', pp. 281–373; *idem*, 'Pontigny', pp. 139–42; *idem*, 'Editing William of Tyre', *Sacris erudiri*, xxvii (1984), 461–73. The substance of these articles is repeated in the introduction to his edition.

<sup>21</sup> R. Hiestand, 'Zum Leben und zur Laufbahn Wilhelms von Tyrus', *Deutsches Archiv*, xxxiv (1978), 345–80.

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Renaissance and to examine his attitude to Islam and his Muslim neighbours.<sup>22</sup>

It might be thought that with so much literature on the subject a further appraisal is unnecessary. A number of the relevant articles, however, have been published in foreign periodicals, and no one has ever attempted a full-scale analysis of William's work in English. More importantly, there are, we believe, many questions about William and his writings which remain either unasked or not answered sufficiently. Our intention is twofold: first we shall explain our views on William's approach to the writing of history and how he used his sources of information, both written and oral, and we shall then examine his attitudes to particular institutions or topics – the monarchy in the Latin East, the relations of Church and State, the papacy in its dealings with the East, the Byzantine empire and, lastly, Christian warfare in the East – trying to gauge his presuppositions and assumptions and so understand his prejudices and beliefs about the past. It is not part of our purpose to make an exhaustive, line-by-line critique of the *Historia* to test the accuracy of each statement contained in it, although we shall have occasion to comment on William's reliability in particular instances. Still less in discussing the work will we use it as a springboard for a reinterpretation of twelfth-century Latin Syrian history. Rather, we hope to provide the groundwork whereby the context of William's information can be better understood and so to make an appreciation of his strengths and weaknesses easier. No one can ever hope to say all there is to be said about this author and his work – certainly not us – and we have chosen to leave on one side a number of topics which might yield interesting conclusions: for example, his view of Islam, which has been discussed by R. C. Schwinges, or his attitude to the indigenous Christian communities in the East or the Italian merchants, about neither of which – and this is no doubt significant in itself – William had much to say. Instead we shall concentrate on

<sup>22</sup> Davis, 'William of Tyre', pp. 64–76; D. W. T. C. Vessey, 'William of Tyre and the Art of Historiography', *Mediaeval Studies*, xxxv (1973), 433–55; *idem*, 'William of Tyre: Apology and Apocalypse', in G. Cambier (ed.), *Hommages à André Boutemy* (Brussels 1976), pp. 390–403; H. E. Mayer, 'Zum Tode Wilhelms von Tyrus', *Archiv für Diplomatik*, v–vi (1959–60), 182–201; *idem*, 'Melisende', pp. 93–182; W. Giese, 'Stadt- und Herrscherbeschreibungen bei Wilhelm von Tyrus', *Deutsches Archiv*, xxxiv (1978), 381–409; R. C. Schwinges, *Kreuzzugs-ideologie und Toleranz. Studien zu Wilhelm von Tyrus* (Stuttgart, 1977); see *idem*, 'Kreuzzugsideologie und Toleranz im Denken Wilhelms von Tyrus', *Saeculum*, xxv (1974), 367–85. Note also P. W. Edbury and J. G. Rowe, 'William of Tyre and the Patriarchal Election of 1180', *EHR*, xciii (1978), 1–25.



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themes which, though not necessarily central to his own interests, do reveal his outlook. No medieval writer of history ever wrote without some axe to grind. So what were William's purposes in writing? And what was his message?

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PART I

WILLIAM OF TYRE AND THE WRITING  
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