Fig. 7.1: The ruin of St Olav's Church of the Premonstratensian monastery in Tønsberg, twelfth century.

Ane L. Bysted

Chapter 7

Historia de Profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam: A Journey to the Lost Jerusalem

The *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* is the tale of a group of Danes and Norwegians who travelled to the Holy Land in order to join the Third Crusade, but arrived too late to take part in the battles.¹ At a first glance, it thus tells the story of a failed crusade and a journey that had been in vain. This was not the message that the anonymous author tried to convey, however. As demonstrated by Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, he presented the journey as a crusade and the travellers as crusaders and martyrs by employing the literary tradition that had established itself since the chronicles of the First Crusade, and Skovgaard-Petersen has found many parallels in twelfth century crusading literature.² In this short chapter, I will point out that the *Profectio* also bears particular witness to the sentiments in Western Europe after Jerusalem had been lost to Saladin in October 1187, and to a changed attitude towards the holy city in crusader sources in the final decades of the twelfth century, expressing lament and sorrow over the lost city.

The Author and the Work

The identity of the author is not known. He calls himself *frater X canonicus*, which possibly means “canon, brother in Christ,” and he reveals that he has lived in Tønsberg, South-Eastern Norway, for some time.³ He shows a good knowledge of affairs in both Norway and Denmark, but renders place-names in Norwegian, and this makes it likely that he was a canon at the Premonstratensian monastery in Tønsberg

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¹ *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, ed. M.C. Geertz, *Scriptores minores historiae Danicæ medii ævi*, II, Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1922, 457–92. I regret that I have not been able to make use of a forthcoming new critical edition by Karen Skovgaard-Petersen.

² Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land: Crusading theology in the Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam (c.1200)* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001).

³ *Historia de profectione*, 457, 473.

and had a connection also to the mother house of this monastery in Børglum in Northern Jutland (Fig. 7.1).⁴

The work was probably written in the late 1190s,⁵ approximately a decade after the Christians' loss of Jerusalem in 1187. It is divided into 27 short chapters, headed by a dedicatory letter and a prologue. About two thirds of it deal with preparations and detours at the beginning of the journey, and only two chapters (24–25) with the time in the Holy Land. However, the prelude and preparations in the beginning are highly interesting because they tell us of how ideas about Jerusalem were disseminated through papal letters and preaching. Chapters 1 and 2 present the theological and historical background for the Third Crusade: because of the general sinfulness of the world, Jerusalem has fallen into pagan hands. Jerusalem is described as the origin of the Christian religion and the native soil [*natale solum*] of the only begotten Son of God, whose human presence and glorious miracles have made it more holy and famous than any other region.⁶ To the common disgrace of all, however, it is now being defiled by the inhabitation of the pagans who have driven out and murdered the Christians. The news of this catastrophe made Pope Gregory VIII (c.1105–1187) write a *lamentabile carmen* to all the regions of the world, exhorting the faithful to a new crusade. The papal letter is paraphrased in chapter 3, and we will return to this below. In chapter 4 we learn that the papal envoys reached the court of the Danish King Knud in Odense at Christmas time, and that they related the pope's message to all. Upon hearing it, all the listeners were completely paralyzed with grief until Esbern Snare (1127–1204), the brother of Archbishop Absalon, reminding them of the deeds of their forefathers, incited them to action in a great speech which is rendered in chapter 5. According to chapter 6, 15 leading magnates vowed to go on the expedition and they began organizing and recruiting. This involved preaching "the word" (of the cross; i.e. crusade preaching) in churches and public places, as well as building new ships.

Apparently, these preparations took a couple of years, and when the expedition finally set out, only five of the magnates remained true to their vows, but together they had vested four ships with an estimate of 150 men all in all.⁷ The *Profectio* does not state when they departed, but it can be surmised that it was in the summer of 1191. First, they set sails for Norway in order to meet up with the magnate Ulf of Lauvnes, who led about 200 Norwegians on the expedition. However, Ulf had some business to attend to before he could leave, and chapters 8 to 15 deal with various

⁴ Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 8.

⁵ Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 9.

⁶ It seems a little peculiar that the author would speak of Jerusalem as the *natale solum* (native soil or birthplace) of Christ. Possibly he was thinking of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, or he was using the name Jerusalem, *Hierosolyma*, to denote a wider region of holy places rather than the actual city in itself.

⁷ Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 7.

obstacles taking place in Konghelle, Tønsberg, and Bergen. The dramatic highpoint of the story is reached in chapters 19 to 22 when our crusaders sail into a storm in the North Sea and many of them drown or lose their possessions. The survivors then decided to travel by land to Venice, from where they sailed to Acre and finally reached the Holy Land. By this time a truce had been signed between the Muslims and Christians,⁸ but this at least allowed them to visit Jerusalem and other holy places before they decided to return home, some via Rome and some via Constantinople.

The Papal Letter

The course of events in chapters 1 to 6 corresponds very well to what is known from other sources on the propagation of crusades in the twelfth century: that crusades were proclaimed by a papal call in the form of an encyclical, that papal envoys were sent to negotiate with the kings and preach at royal assemblies, and that the message was spread further through preaching campaigns with the agreement of the local kings and magnates.⁹

The papal encyclicals or crusading bulls were read aloud and used in crusade preaching, and thus perceptions of Jerusalem were transmitted through Western Europe by means of these letters. The papal bull in the *Profectio* is not an exact rendering of any known crusading bull, and it has been a matter of discussion whether it is a paraphrase of the famous bull *Audita tremendi*, issued by Gregory VIII around 29 October 1187, or if it is in fact a fragment of an otherwise unknown bull. This discussion would take us too far here, but I have argued for its originality and authenticity elsewhere.¹⁰ What matters here, is that the author of the *Profectio* used theological themes that had been developed in papal crusade letters and were changed in the course of the twelfth century, especially after the loss of Jerusalem in 1187.

Pope Urban II, who proclaimed the First Crusade in November 1095, indicated in his letters that the purpose of the crusade was to liberate the churches in the East and the Christians living there from Muslim rule. Jerusalem itself is mentioned only briefly

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⁸ The treaty of Jaffa on 2 September 1192.

⁹ Ane Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence. Spiritual Rewards and the Theology of the Crusades, c.1095–1216* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 246–47; Penny Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095–1270* (Cambridge MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1991), 65–71.

¹⁰ Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 160, 223–31, 290. The discussion is further complicated by the fact that *Audita tremendi* was issued in several versions. The commonly used edition is in *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kreuzzuges Kaiser Friedrichs*, ed. Anton Chroust, MGH SRG, V, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1928, 6–10, but in a recent article Thomas W. Smith has demonstrated that the ed. in Gregory VIII, *Epistolae et privilegia*, PL, 202, cols 1539–42 is based on more reliable textual witnesses. References here are to both editions. See Thomas W. Smith, “Audita Tremendi and the Call for the Third Crusade Reconsidered, 1187–1188.” (*Viator*, 49, 2018): 63–101.

in his letters, but one of them describes it as “the Holy city of Christ, embellished by his passion and resurrection.”¹¹ The same arguments are found in Eugenius III’s call for the Second Crusade from 1145–46, but during the papacy of Alexander III (1159–1181), there was a shift of emphasis from the defence of the Eastern churches in general to the defence of the holy places and the city of Jerusalem in particular. In response to reports about the advances of the Muslim forces upon the crusader states, Alexander emphasized that it was the duty of all Christians to defend the places that Christ had sanctified by his corporeal presence on earth and where he had suffered for man and secured his salvation. The Holy Land rightfully belonged to the Christians because this was the land where Christ had lived and died for man.¹²

The duty to defend and fight for the Holy Land where Christ had worked the salvation for man was further accentuated by Gregory VIII in *Audita tremendi*, in which he also expressed deep emotional distress over the news from the East:

When we heard of the severity of the awesome judgement that the hand of God visited on the land of Jerusalem, we and our brothers were disturbed by such a great horror, afflicted by such sorrows, that we scarcely knew what to do or what we should do, save that the psalmist laments and says, “Oh God, the gentiles have invaded your inheritance, they have sullied your holy temple, they have laid waste Jerusalem.”¹³

The Biblical quotation is from Psalm 78:1–3 and had been used already in Baldric of Bourgeuil’s chronicle of the First Crusade.¹⁴ Gregory VIII was the first pope to use it in a crusading bull. It seemed to fit the situation in 1187 very well, and the word “inheritance” [*hereditas*] also underlined the point that the Holy Land was Christ’s own land, and it was used repeatedly by Gregory’s successors.¹⁵ The quotation also occurs in chapter 2 of the *Profectio*, which forms a prelude to the papal letter in chapter 3. In

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¹¹ Urban’s letters: Heinrich Hagenmeyer, ed. *Epistulae et chartae ad historiam primi belli sacri spectantes. Die Kreuzzugsbriefen aus den Jahren 1088–1100* (Innsbruck – Hildesheim: 1901; reprint, 1973), 136–38; Rudolf Hiestand, ed. *Papsturkunden für Kirchen im Heiligen Lande. Vorarbeiten zum Oriens Pontificius vol. III*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 88–89; Paul Kehr, *Papsturkunden in Spanien. I: Katalanien*, vol. II: Urkunden und Regesten (Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 287–88; Louise Riley-Smith and Jonathan Riley-Smith, eds., *The Crusades: Idea and Reality 1095–1274* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 37–40. See also Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades. A History* (London: Continuum, 2005), 7–8.

¹² Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 206–07; Eugenius III, *Epistolae et privilegia*, PL, 180, cols 1013–614, here cols 1064–66; Alexander III, *Epistolae et privilegia*, PL, 200, cols 69–1320, here cols 384–85, 1294–96.

¹³ Translation in Jessalynn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powell, eds., *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 5–6. Latin text in Gregory VIII, *Epistolae et privilegia*, PL 202: 1539–42; cf. Chroust 1928, *Quellen*: 6–10.

¹⁴ Baldric of Bourgeuil, *Historia Jerusalem*, RHC Occ., IV, Paris, 1879, 9–111, here p. 14.

¹⁵ See Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 207–8; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 21.

fact, both chapter 2 and 3 seem to be inspired by a papal bull and have several similarities with *Audita tremendi*.¹⁶ One of them is the assertion that God is punishing the common sinfulness of Christians by letting them lose the Holy Land. Another is the repeated references to sorrow and tears which are prominent in *Audita tremendi*, but perhaps given a more personal touch in the *Profectio*, which lets the pope declare that while he was writing, the stream of his tears has stained the page of the letter.¹⁷

With *Audita tremendi* the idea of the crusade as *imitatio Christi* was reintroduced and intensified in papal crusade calls.¹⁸ The urgent needs of the Holy Land meant that it was the duty of all Christians to work for the recovery of that land where Christ had died on the cross for man, and moreover to follow the example of Christ, “who taught by his own action that one ought to lay down one’s life for one’s brothers.”¹⁹ This is echoed in the papal letter of the *Profectio*:

let them mourn this misfortune of Christ, let them remember that they are indebted to him for their redemption, and let them not suffer this injury to Christ to stay any longer unavenged. In order to redeem us he surrendered himself unhesitatingly to death, death even on the cross, therefore let us in turn take him as an example and not waver from giving our lives for Christ; because anyone who makes his life dearer than Christ does not deserve Christ.²⁰

The Shipwreck

Our travellers did not get the chance to fight for Christ in battle, but the *Profectio* makes it very clear that the sufferings and deaths they met during the storm in the North Sea were just as worthy of spiritual merit. In the face of certain death,

they exhorted one another incessantly and fearlessly, affirming that, since they had undertaken through divine inspiration to be His ambassadors, they should feel little or no terror when they yielded their lives courageously for Christ on that same mission.²¹

It is also pointed out that they died on the same day and in the same hour as Christ, thus imitating his passion.

¹⁶ See Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 29–36.

¹⁷ *Historia de profectione*, 463.

¹⁸ Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 215–35.

¹⁹ Riley-Smith and Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 66; cf. Chroust 1928, *Quellen*: 9; Gregory VIII, *Epistolae et privilegia*: cols 1541–42.

²⁰ *Historia de profectione*, 464; translation lightly adapted from Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 32.

²¹ Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 57; *Historia de profectione*, 485.

By their sufferings they atoned for all their sins, and the author also calls them martyrs, though perhaps a little cautiously: “these men or, if I may say so, martyrs.”²² While references to martyrdom are frequent in chronicles and sermons, it was never promised to the crusaders in the official papal crusading bulls, and this may be the reason for the careful statement.²³ Apart from this, the author does not seem to have doubted that the dead travellers were martyrs. In the following chapters, the merits of the survivors are pointed out when they are described as re-enacting the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, and as followers of the examples of the apostles and early Christians who shared their possessions in common.²⁴

The Visit to the Holy Places

When at long last the travellers reached the Holy Land, their first reaction according to the chronicle was to cry the tears of joy, because they were finally able to walk around the holy places that they had longed so eagerly to see.²⁵ However, when they came to the holy city itself, their joy was soon turned to sorrow and sobbing, because this was now occupied by “pagans and idolaters.”²⁶ It was especially hard for those of them who had visited the city before and seen it in its former glory and honour, the chronicle adds. Thanks to the truce, the travellers were allowed to visit both the Holy Sepulchre and the river Jordan, but seeing the holy places did not evoke feelings of devotion as they used to, but increased their pain, because the places were now guarded by pagans who treated their Christian prisoners cruelly.

Originally chapter 25 contained a poem lamenting the state of Jerusalem, but this has not been handed down in the preserved copies of the *Profectio*.²⁷ Even without this poem, this part of the story picks up on and elaborates the theme of sorrow over the lost city. The chronicle ends on a more positive note, however, as we hear how the travellers witnessed a miracle in Constantinople on their way home. This story

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²² Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 57; *Historia de profectione*, 485.

²³ See Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 244–245. Examples from the Third Crusade are Henry of Albano, *De peregrinante civitate Dei*, PL, 204, col. 358, and *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Anton Chroust, MGH SRG, V, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1928, 116–172, here p. 163. For further examples and references, see Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 57–60.

²⁴ Chapters 21–22, *Historia de profectione*, 485–7. See also Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 60–3.

²⁵ Chapter 24, *Historia de profectione*, 488.

²⁶ “paganis et idolatria,” Chapter 25, *Historia de profectione*, 489.

²⁷ See the note in *Historia de profectione*, 489.

serves to tell that the travellers did fulfil the spiritual goal of their journey, even though they did not get to fight for the liberation of Jerusalem.²⁸ Those who died on the journey were martyred in the shipwreck, and the survivors not only got to see the holy places in Jerusalem but were blessed by a glorious miracle, and thus, their journey had not been in vain.

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28 As argued convincingly by Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land*, 63, 74.