

Rules of War or War without Rules? – Some Reflections on Conduct and the Treatment of Non-Combatants in Medieval Transcultural Wars

Describing, an engagement fought between King Baldwin II of Jerusalem and the Muslim commander Bursuqi near Ezaz in 1125, the renowned historian of the Latin East, William of Tyre, reflected on the nature of warfare between Christians and Muslims:

Sword clashed against sword with equal ardour, causing terrible carnage and death in many a form. For in conflicts of this nature, resentment and sacrilege and scorn of laws always acts as an incentive to bitter hate and enmity. War is waged differently and less vigorously between men who hold the same law and faith than it is between those of diverse opinions and conflicting traditions. For even if no other cause for hatred exists, the fact that the combatants do not share the same articles of faith is sufficient reason for constant quarrelling and enmity.¹

Few observations could be more pertinent to a discussion of the nature of conduct in trans-cultural warfare. But was Archbishop William right? Was warfare between those of opposing faiths necessarily more vicious than that fought between co-religionists? The judgement of so perceptive an observer, who is among our principal witnesses for the conduct in warfare in the crusader states up to 1184, should not be dismissed lightly.² A strong case, moreover, could be made for suggesting that warfare between William's Frankish contemporaries within their homelands, such as between the

¹ *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi Chronicon*, ed. Robert B. C. Huygens, 2 vols., *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis*, 63-63A (Turnout, 1986), 13: 16, 49-57; trans. Emily A. Babcock and August C. Krey, *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea by William Archbishop of Tyre*, 2 vols. (New York, 1941, repr. New York, 1976), II, pp. 24-5. Earlier, he similarly had noted that the battle of Manzikert in 1071 "was actuated by the fiercer hatred which zealous faith and resentment against sacrilege inspires" (*Chronicon*, I, 9, 26-7; *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, I, p. 78).

² On William see Peter W. Edbury and John G. Rowe, *William of Tyre, Historian of the Latin East* (Cambridge, 1988), and especially pp. 151-66, "The War against the Infidel"; and Rainer C. Schwinges, "William of Tyre, the Muslim Enemy, and the Problem of Tolerance", in *Tolerance and Intolerance. Social Conflict in the Age of the Crusaders*, eds. Michael Gervers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, N.Y., 2001), pp. 124-132.