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Deserters from the First Crusade and Their Ambiguous Portrayal in Twelfth-Century Latin Sources

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Abstract

This paper addresses the reception of desertions from the First Crusade in the Latin West in early twelfth century. As the crusading deserters did not accomplish their crusading vows, they were often targets of criticism and mockery. However, the chronicles do not reflect this social phenomenon entirely. While some authors criticised the deserters, the others were making excuses for their withdrawals. The study proposes the reasons of this incoherence and discusses the attitude of the twelfth-century crusading authorities. It appears that the ambiguous portrayal of crusading apostates might have been caused by pope Paschal II's understanding of the crusading vow, as well as by personal motivations of the French Benedictine chroniclers.

Keywords

First Crusade; deserters; Paschal II; French Benedictine authors; crusading vow

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Although the Crusades to the Holy Land are one of the most researched areas of the Middle Ages, some aspects still deserve more discussion. This can be the case of desertions from the First Crusade which expose the ideological background of the early crusading movement. The First Crusade was announced at the Council of Clermont in November 1095 and by spring 1096, the very first crusaders set off for the liberation of Jerusalem. Despite the inceptive enthusiasm, some of those who departed did not withstand the hardships of the campaign and returned home. As they did not fulfil their crusading vows, they were recognized as deserters, and their contemporaries reproached them with cowardice.

The criticism of crusading apostates appears in various sources. However, the approach of the twelfth-century chroniclers towards them is not coherent. While some authors criticised the deserters, the others were being apologetic about their actions. This observation provokes serious questions: What was the reason for the contradictory tendencies? Were they caused by specific intentions of the chroniclers? Or were they an unexpected side effect of the transformations of the early crusading movement?

The aim of this study is to focus on this interpretative incoherence of the twelfth-century chroniclers. I will address the ambivalent tendencies of French Benedictine authors and compare them with contemporary Latin tradition. Also, I plan to discuss the policy of the crusading authorities, as well as their understanding of the crusading vow.

The Crusading Vow

The desertions from the First Crusade are reflected by numerous Latin sources (and modern literature, as well).¹ Apart from the chronicles dedicated to the very campaign, other clues appear in the sources of local importance, such as charters, letters, or local histories. Yet before focusing on the deserters and their reflection in the sources, we should outline the connection between the crusading movement and the medieval understanding of reputation.

In the 11th century, honour was considered one of the most important attributes of a nobleman, therefore any violation of a promise provoked a loss of prestige. The crusading vow itself represented a commitment of an individual who wanted to undertake the journey to Jerusalem. It represented a treaty with the Church which – in return – promised the forgiveness of all confessed sins, even those remembered from childhood. The pilgrim was then expected to depart for the Holy Sepulchre, wearing a sign of cross sewed on the right shoulder or between the shoulders; while the Church itself promised to protect their property during their absence.² The crusaders were recognized as *militēs*

1 See notably Brundage (1969: pp. 31–39 and 121–133); Brundage (1971: pp. 334–343); Noth (1966: pp. 130–135); Kostick (2013: pp. 32–49); Sutner (2016: pp. 114–132); Housley (2008: pp. 105–108); Siberry (1985: pp. 47–68); Riley-Smith (1998: pp. 147–149); Riley-Smith (2002: pp. 13–28). I have already published some ideas in Sitár (2017: pp. 7–28).

2 Concerning the attributes of the early crusading movement, cf. Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, I.2–4; Robert. Mon., *Hist.*, I.1–2 (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: pp. 727–730); Bald. Dol., *Hist.*, I (Biddlecombe 2014: pp. 6–10); Guib. Nov.,

Christi who in case of death could become Christian martyrs.³ In other words, to vow the journey to Jerusalem meant a great renown.

Naturally, breaking the crusading vow has had consequences. All crusaders who returned home before accomplishing their journey in Jerusalem were identified as untrustworthy people unable to keep their promise. The crusading deserters were labelled with the stigma known as *infamy* (*infamia*) which was a social exclusion resembling secular excommunication.⁴ Especially the deserters, who departed their lands with great pomp, became the obvious targets of mockery and criticism, as they were easily remembered by the masses (as in cases of count Emicho or Hugh of Vermandois).⁵ Even the chroniclers admit that the deserters who abandoned the crusade as early as in 1096 “were greeted with great laughter everywhere” and became “deeply ashamed” for their withdrawals.⁶

However, the laughter was soon replaced by more critical reactions. During the year 1098, the crusade was stricken with famine and faced several military threats. As some crusaders were not able to withstand the constant hardships, they decided to leave the campaign. The more deserting noblemen withdrew from the campaign along their armed retinues, the more these waves of desertions deepened the particular crises.⁷ Although it is impossible to estimate how many troops retired from the crusade, such magnates as Stephen of Blois or Hugh of Vermandois were usually accompanied by

Gesta Dei, II.4; *PL* 159, III.66. Cf. Riley-Smith (1983: pp. 721–736); Bliese (1990: pp. 393–411); Tyerman (2006: pp. 72–89); Flori (2005: pp. 15–36); Gaposchkin (2013: pp. 44–91); Giles (2002: pp. 135–142); Ballard (2001: pp. 38–40); Brundage (1971: pp. 334–343); Siberry (1985: pp. 25–46).

3 See e.g., *Gesta Francorum*, II and VI.

4 See notably Noth (1966: pp. 130–135); Brundage (1969: pp. 36–39); cf. Siberry (1985: pp. 47–68); Price (2005: pp. 14–82); concerning infamy Greenidge (1894: pp. 41–185).

5 Emicho, count of Nahegau (also known as the count of Flonheim) joined the crusade after experiencing convincing visions that he would become “the second Saul” and would conquer new territories in southern Italy. Soon after he departed for the East, he participated in the anti-Jewish massacre in Mainz (2 June 1096), located in the vicinity of his county. *Salomo Bar Simson* (Haverkamp 2005: pp. 604–605); Ekk. Uraug., *Chron.*, AD MXCVIII; cf. Stow (2001: pp. 911–933).

Hugh of Vermandois accepted the cross as early as 11 February 1096, before the departure of the first crusading armies. It is possible that his brother Philip I, the king of France supported him with some troops, as well. The contemporaries suggest that Hugh was considered to become the king of Jerusalem once the Holy Land would be conquered. Hugh’s importance was amplified by the pope Urban II who bestowed him the St. Peter’s standard. Also, Hugh delegated 24 noblemen to announce his intended arrival to the court of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118). Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, II.14 and II. 17; Radulf. Cad., *Gesta Tancredi*, XV (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: p. 616); Robert. Mon., *Hist.*, II.3, VI.12, and VII.11 (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: pp. 740, 813, and 830–831); Anna Komn., *Alex.*, X.7; cf. *Chanson d’Antioche* 279 (6887).

6 Cited Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, II.8 [translated by Levine (1997: p. 46)], see also Ibid. V.15; Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, I.7; Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, X.20.

7 In January (or early February) 1098, William the “Charpenter”, viscount of Melun, abandoned the crusade due to the threat of famine and Ridwan of Aleppo’s troops. In June 1098, Stephen Henry, the count of Blois and Chartres, retreated from Antioch because of the arrival of Kerbogha of Mosul’s alliance. Soon after his withdrawal, a group of so-called “rope-dancers” escaped Antioch and joined Stephen of Blois on their flight. In July 1098, Hugh of Vermandois, brother of the king Philip I of France, departed from the crusade as an emissary to Constantinople, but instead of returning to Antioch once completed his mission, he retired to France.

hundreds of mounted knights and maybe thousands of footmen.⁸ In other words, they were in charge of considerable military bodies.

The departures of crusading princes were not left unnoticed by the supreme authorities who immediately criticised similar weakening of their military power. Driven by the fear of fatal disintegration of the army, in January 1098, the commanders humiliated one of the fleeing counts whom they captured on his flight, trying to discourage other potential deserters. They also decided to threaten with excommunication all those who detached themselves from the army and were postponing their return.⁹

The crusaders could have become even more concerned about the desertions after the arrival of reinforcements from the Holy Roman Empire in July 1098. The new pilgrims could have confirmed that before their departure from Europe, the Church did not penalize any particular deserter.¹⁰ In September 1098, the crusading princes decided to express their disagreement and wrote a letter to pope Urban II (1088–1099), appealing to him to support the campaign personally and to properly address the crusading apostasy. They even suggested that “all who put off their journey ought not to have any advice or privilege” from the pope at all, neither to have “the permission to stay among the Christian people”.¹¹ In other words, the crusaders requested the deserters to be excommunicated unless they accomplish their journey in Jerusalem. The main motivation for such a suggestion was the crusaders’ belief that they would not be able to conquer the Holy Land without the troops that had already abandoned the campaign.¹²

Indeed, the desertions represented a problem that the crusading princes wanted resolved with direct support of the Church representatives. Echoes of their query can be

8 See e.g., Radulf. Cad., *Gesta Tancredi*, XXVII (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: p. 625); Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, VIII.17; cf. Brundage (1960: p. 382, n. 13); Runciman (1951: p. 339). The numbers in medieval texts were often symbolic and far from reliable. However, if Hugh and Stephen departed together with more than 500 knights, their departure certainly weakened the rest of the crusading army. As modern estimates suggest that the crusading cavalry could consist of 4. to 6.000 knights in the very beginning of campaign, similar withdrawals must have had significantly negative impact on the crusaders’ morale. Runciman (1951: pp. 337–340); Riley-Smith (2003: p. 63); Riley-Smith (2002: pp. 13–20), cf. France (1994: pp. 122–142). On the other hand, one must not forget that many of those who departed were poor pilgrims without any military or political power. Even some of the noblemen who temporarily assisted in the siege of Antioch should not be considered crusaders. For example, William of Grandmesnil (one of the famous “rope-dancers”) was most likely emperor Alexios’s minion. It is also questionable whether the Genoese sailors, or the Flemish and English pirates had to “accept the cross” in order to assist the crusaders.

9 *Gesta Francorum*, XV; Petrus Tud., *Hist.*, VI; Radulf. Cad., *Gesta Tancredi*, LX (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: p. 650). The anxiety of crusaders was also amplified by the departure of the Byzantine representative Tatikios. His departure was already discussed in focused studies, see especially France (1971: pp. 137–147); Shepard (1998: pp. 185–277); cf. Černáková (2016: pp. 37–49).

10 Albert of Aachen suggests that in July 1098, 1500 crusaders from the Holy Roman Empire reinforced the exhausted army at Antioch. In case the crusaders were interested in the news from the Latin West, concerning the desertions, the new-comers could have confirmed the persisting *status quo*. Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, V.23.

11 *Epistulae et chartae*, XVI; cited translation of Barber & Bate (2010: p. 33). Concerning the importance of the letter itself, cf. García-Guijarro (2014: pp. 151–171); Frankopan (2013: p. 170); Hurbanič & Hrnčiarová (2017: pp. 114–125).

12 *Epistulae et chartae*, VI, IX, XV, XVI, and XVII.

found in various crusading sources from the late 11th and early 12th centuries, including the eye-witness testimonies.

Desertions in the Eye-Witness Testimonies

The desertions from the First Crusade were first reflected in charters written in 1096.¹³ Although the sources indicate that the apostates were greeted with mockery, the criticism seemed to be spontaneous and possibly depended on local structures.¹⁴ After June 1098, the crusading princes requested the Church to threaten the deserters with excommunication unless they fulfilled their vows.¹⁵ And similar negative attitude infiltrated the eye-witness testimonies written around 1100. For example, Raymond of Aguilers, the chaplain of Raymond of Saint-Gilles admits that one of the reasons why he decided to write down the history of the campaign was the fact that there were many “cowardly deserters who have since tried to spread lies rather than truth”. His disgust resulted in an appeal to his “future readers to avoid the friendship and counsel of such renegades.”¹⁶ Other chronicles indicate that the crusaders used to reproach the deserters with cowardice,¹⁷ dishonesty, and suggested their separation from the Christian society.¹⁸

Even though the crusaders addressed the apostasy since 1097, their criticism was incoherent. Usually, the eye-witnesses distinguished between the particular desertions as in their chronicles, there appeared three categories of deserters: (1) those who were openly shamed as cowards; (2) those whose desertions were mentioned, but neither commented nor criticised; and (3) those whose desertions were ignored by the particular author.¹⁹ Either way, neither of the participants of the crusade tried to excuse any of the withdrawals.

This observation renders interesting as in the French Benedictine chronicles from 1100s, the attitude changed. Those coward, dishonest, and shameful deserters became – interestingly – subject to rehabilitation.

13 Cf. the case of Drogo “*Rediratus*” in Chauvin (1997: CLVIII p. 144).

14 Cited Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, II.8, (translated to English by Levine 1997: p. 46), see also Ibid. V.15; cf. Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, I.7; Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, X.20. However, the sources imply that the deserters were not separated from the society at all. By 1100, Stephen of Blois and Guy of Montlhéry were politically active and even supported local church structures. Another apostate, Geoffrey Burel of Étampes, was married to Corbe of Thorigné in 1099. Therefore the reports concerning the general mockery should be treated carefully as other sources provide counter-evidence. Cf. *Gesta Ambaz.* (Halphen & Poupardin 1913: pp. 99–103); Marion (1879: CLXXIV, p. 166 and CCLVIII, pp. 216–217); Marchegay (1879: X, pp. 28–29); Lépinois & Merlet (1865: XXIV, pp. 106–108).

15 *Epistulae et chartae*, VI, IX, XV, XVI, and XVII.

16 Raim. de Aguil., *Hist. Franc.*, praefatio (translated by Hill & Hill 1968: p. 15).

17 See also *Epistulae et chartae*, XVII; *Gesta Francorum*, XV and XXVII; Raim. de Aguil., *Hist. Franc.*, praefatio and XVIII; Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, I.7–8; Petrus Tud., *Hist.*, VI, X and XI.

18 Cf. *Epistulae et chartae*, VI, IX, and XV.

19 See and compare the particular accounts describing desertions: *Gesta Francorum*, II, XV, XVI, XXIII, XXVII, and XXX; or Raim. de Aguil., *Hist. Franc.*, praefatio, II, VIII, X, XI, and XVIII.

The Portrayal of Desertions in the French Benedictine Chronicles (ca. 1105–1109)

This apparent interpretative transformation concerns three authors: Robert of Rheims, Baudry of Bourgueil and Guibert of Nogent, who reworked the anonymous eye-witness chronicle *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* (ca. 1099–1102) and introduced new motives²⁰ to the narration. Their contribution to the collective memory deserves attention, as all three tended to reduce the criticism of the crusading apostates.

For instance, a crusading deserter William the Carpenter, viscount of Melun, who fled from Antioch in 1098 is depicted in the *Gesta Francorum* as the “wretched and most dishonourable man in all of France, scoundrel and felon of all the Gauls.”²¹ It is also implied that in the past, he withdrew from the Iberian reconquest – therefore his flight from Syria was supposed to confirm his cowardice when facing Moslems.²² However, the Benedictine authors reconcile with William, though they still mention his withdrawal. Both Robert and Baudry omit the motive of William’s flight from the reconquest, while Robert approaches William with dignity, suggesting that he was blood-related to the French royal family (*consanguineus*).²³ Guibert of Nogent repeats the accusation of the reconquest failure, but he also carries on describing William’s fame that he gained during the First Crusade(!).²⁴ Although William is still recognized as a deserter, the criticism is not as obvious as in the original text.

Their approach to Stephen, count of Blois and Chartres, can serve as another example. Stephen withdrew from the crusade in June 1098 under the pretext of illness. In the *Gesta Francorum*, he is described as a “fool” who “pretended to have caught some disease” and “shamefully retreated just like a most miserable scoundrel.”²⁵ The Benedictines, however, were not as much critical of Stephen. Baudry of Bourgueil and Guibert

20 All three authors extended the narrative by the description of the Council of Clermont, or – in Guibert’s and Robert’s case – by anti-Byzantine sentiment. Sweetenham (2005: pp. 1–71); Levine (1997: pp. 8–20); Biddlecombe (2014: pp xi–lxxv); see also Paul (2010: pp. 534–566); Bull & Kempf (2014); Paul & Yeager (2012); Flori (2010); Symes (2017: pp. 37–67); Edgington (1997: pp. 57–77); Edgington (2014: pp. 1–7).

21 *Gesta Francorum*, XV; translated by Dass (2011: p. 56).

22 *Gesta Francorum*, XV. Most likely, it is a reminiscence of the delayed French campaign against Almoravids in 1087, best reflected by *RHGF 12*: p. 2); *MGH SS IX*, XI (1851: p. 390); *Chron. Lusit.*, 1125 (*España Sagrada XIV*: pp. 418–419); for discussion see Hagenmeyer (1890: p. 260, n. 11). Concerning William’s accusation, it seems rather as a tendentious invective adopted by the crusading tradition.

23 Robert. Mon., *Hist.*, IV.12 (*RHC Occ 3* 1866: pp. 781–782); Bald. Dol., *Hist.*, II (Biddlecombe 2014, pp. 42–43). The chroniclers mention only that William was consanguineous of the French prince Hugh of Vermandois. William’s lineage is not specified.

24 Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, IV.7–9.

25 *Gesta Francorum*, XXVII; translated by Dass (2011: pp. 81–82). Stephen’s withdrawal has had unexpected consequences. The count of Blois journeyed home through Anatolia and at Philomelium (Akşehir), he met the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos. Alexios, who was supposed to hurry with an army to assist the crusaders at Antioch, decided after a council with Stephen to return to Constantinople and to cover his retreat with scorched land. Stephen’s role in the crusade, as well as his desertion were already subject to research of modern scholars, cf. Brundage (1960: pp. 380–395); Pryor (1998: pp. 26–74); Völkl (2016: pp. 133–150); Rousset (1963: pp. 183–195).

of Nogent accepted the suggestion of the count's sudden illness and excused his withdrawal emphasising his military experience. Robert of Rheims changed the general tone of the account and omitted some of the invectives introduced by the *Gesta Francorum*.²⁶

Although there are other examples of the reduced criticism,²⁷ there is no need to address each of them directly. The point is that the French chroniclers writing in 1105–1109 tended to rehabilitate the crusading deserters. There are two possible explanations for this approach: (1) the chroniclers' affection either for the deserters or for their families, and (2) the outcome of the Crusade of 1101.

For the Benedictine authors, it seemed natural that they praised the nobility. For instance, Robert of Rheims paid attention to the deeds of Hugh of Vermandois and William of Melun who have descended from the Capetian bloodline. In other words, the chronicler stressed the involvement of the French royal dynasty in the crusade. Guibert of Nogent portrayed a Norman crusading hero Bohemond of Apulia as a French nobleman, trying to present his success as part of the French crusading narrative.²⁸

The Benedictines' praise for the nobility could have been caused by their personal acquaintances. For instance, Guibert and Baudry possibly reduced the criticism of Stephen of Blois and Chartres as they personally knew the count and his vassals. Indeed, their preserved texts (both prosaic and poetic) contain evidence of their positive attitude towards the elites from Chartres.²⁹ Guibert of Nogent even openly admits that he would not comment on failures of the noblemen (of the "rope-dancers" retinue) that he knew personally: "There were other deserters from the Holy Army (...). Some of them we do not know; others we know very well, but we prefer not to humiliate them".³⁰ The chronicler purposely decided not to expose the names of certain deserters.

Yet the Crusade of 1101 played an important role in the chroniclers' apologetics of deserters, too. This campaign was joined by many renegades from the First Crusade who wished to accomplish their crusading vows. It appeared that during the years 1101–1102, many crusading deserters reached Jerusalem, or died trying. Such were the cases of Stephen of Blois, Hugh of Vermandois, William the Carpenter, and others.³¹ Either way, they redeemed themselves, having paid their debts both to the Church and to their

26 Robert. Mon., *Hist.*, VI.14–16 (*RHC Occ. 3* 1866: pp. 814–817); Bald. Dol., *Hist.*, III (Biddlecombe 2014: pp. 74–77); Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, V.25–26.

27 E.g., the case of the French prince Hugh of Vermandois whose desertion was (intentionally) unsaid by various chroniclers: Robert. Mon., *Hist.*, VII.20 (*RHC Occ. 3* 1866: p. 837); Radulf. Cad., *Gesta Tancredi*, CV (*RHC Occ. 3* 1866: p. 680) or Petrus Tud., *Hist.*, XII (cf. *Gesta Francorum*, XXX).

28 Robert. Mon., *Hist.*, II.1, VII.11 and VII.20 (*RHC Occ. 3* 1866: p. 739, pp. 830–831 and p. 837); Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, I.5; cf. Bull (1996: pp. 25–46).

29 Bald. Dol., *Hist.*, III (Biddlecombe 2014: p. 74); Bald. Dol., *Carm.*, CXXIX and CXXXIV–CXXXV; Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, II.15; *PL* 156, I.16.

30 Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, V.15; translated by Levine (1997: p. 91).

31 According to the sources, there were nine known deserters who reached Jerusalem (or died trying): (1) Stephen, count of Blois; (2) Alexander, his chaplain; (3) Hugh of Vermandois, brother to French king Philip I; (4) Hugh of Toucy; (5) Simon of Boissy; (6) William of Boissy; (7) Milo of Monthéry; (8) Geoffrey Burel of Étampes and (9) William the Carpenter, viscount of Melun.

secular fame.³² After 1102, the chroniclers could not criticise them as those who still did not accomplish their crusading journey.

However, the chroniclers' sympathy towards nobility and the Crusade of 1101 seem to be only a part of the explanation. If both reasons were generally acceptable, one could expect similar reducing of criticism to appear across the whole Latin tradition. Apart from France, contemporary chroniclers from the Levant or the Holy Roman Empire did not tend to excuse the crusading desertions at all.³³ And what is even more interesting, after 1110, similar tendencies vanish from the French tradition as well.³⁴ For instance, after 1130, Stephen of Blois, who redeemed himself in the Holy Land in 1102, is portrayed by Orderic Vitalis (ca. 1135) as a coward, driven "by fear as well as shame", who needed to be encouraged by his own wife during the "conjugal caresses" to recover his "courage and strength".³⁵ In the anonymous *Historia peregrinorum euntium Jerusalem* (ca. 1131), Stephen is shamed in a similar way as he was in the first eye-witness accounts.³⁶

The interpretative uniqueness of the French Benedictines from the 1100s is even more apparent when compared to the oral tradition. Although it is difficult to reconstruct the development of popular vernacular narratives, according to the sketchy allusions that appear in the sources, the deserters were never forgiven. Quite the contrary, some of their flights were exaggerated, which means that in the collective memory, they were remembered rather as incompetent cowards.³⁷ This should not come as a surprise as several contemporary authorities agreed on the obligation for crusaders to accomplish their journey in Jerusalem.³⁸ The general loss of deserters' prestige can also be demonstrated by the cases when the French and English kings took chance and deprived some of the *infamous* apostates of their lands.³⁹

32 See e. g., Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, VIII.6–17; Bald. Dol., *Hist.*, III (Biddlecombe 2014: p. 76); Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, II.16; Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, V.25.

33 Frut. Mich., *Chron.*, XIII. XL.; Bern. Const., *Chron.*, ad annum MXCVI; *MGH, SS VIII*, II (1848: pp. 484, 487); Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, I–VI; Bart. Nan., *Gesta*, I–LXXII (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: pp. 491–543).

34 In the 1110s, there originated only few crusading chronicles: Peter Tudebode's *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere* (which follows the text of the *Gesta Francorum* almost *verbatim*), Ralph of Caen's *Gesta Tancredi in expeditione Hierosolymitana* (full of criticism reserved for the deserters from Normandy), and a poem of Gilo of Paris and the anonymous Charleville Poet *Historia vie Hierosolimitane* (criticising desertions on various occasions). The rejection of the Benedictines' excuses was more than obvious.

35 Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, X.20 (translation Chibnall 5 1968–1978: p. 325).

36 *Historia peregrinorum*, LXXVI, 12.23. The chronicle emphasises on the *Gesta Francorum* and Peter Tudebode's *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere* almost *verbatim*. However, academic debates concerning the relationship of the *Gesta Francorum*, Raymond of Aguilers, Peter Tudebode and *Historia peregrinorum euntium Jerusalem* are far from over. Cf. Hill & Hill (1974: pp. 1–12); Oehler (1970: pp. 58–97); France (1998: pp. 39–69); Rubenstein (2005: pp. 179–204); France (1968: pp. 413–416).

37 Some allusions appear in Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, V.15, VII.24 and VII.38; Bart. Nan., *Gesta*, LVIII (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: p. 533); Gilo Paris., *Hist.*, I.213–228 and VII.500–503. In the *Chanson d'Antioche*, written down in the second half of the twelfth century, Stephen became a prototype of a coward who was able to faint in sight of an enemy army. *Chanson d'Antioche* 62–64 (1028–1079); 67–72 (1527–1625); 233–234 (5595–5649).

38 Cf. *Epist. Boemundi* (Holtzmann 1935: p. 280); *PL* 159, III.116.

39 Philip I of France deprived Guy II Trousseau, count of Monthéry of his castle (1103?), while Henry I of

With regard to the above, one should conclude that Baudry's, Robert's and Guibert's tendencies did not reflect the general attitude of the Western society. Necessarily, such suggestion evokes the questions: What was the general attitude of the Western society in the 1100s? How did the crusading authorities perceive the crusading apostasy, especially after the criticism raised in 1098?

The Response of the Papacy

According to the sources, the first reactions to the desertions were rather spontaneous than organised. The lack of the Church's response, as well as several waves of desertions provoked the crusaders' queries which were openly addressed to the Western authorities. After October 1098, when the crusaders' concerns were interpreted to the Church,⁴⁰ the pope and his prelates could not ignore the issue any longer. As of April 1099, pope Urban II began to address the apostasy publicly, though his agenda was scattered by his death in July 1099.⁴¹ In 1099/1100, in a letter to the French clergy, Urban's successor Paschal II (1099–1118) confirmed the stigmatization of the deserters with infamy.⁴² The new pope also suggested that "all those who cowardly withdrew from Antioch should be subject to excommunication unless they promised to return" to the journey to Jerusalem.⁴³ This appeal was accepted by the French and Anglo-Norman prelates who in 1100 threatened all crusading deserters with excommunication (except for the poor and the ill who could not attend another journey).⁴⁴ This focused criticism, amplified by the threats of social and spiritual exclusion, expelled the deserters from their homes so that in 1101, they departed within the ranks of the new crusade. Although the aim of the new campaign was to reinforce the weak defences of the Latin Overseas, the deserters sought first of all their own rehabilitation.⁴⁵

England dispossessed Ivo of Grandmesnil after his participation in Robert of Normandy's rebellion (1102), cf. *PL* 186, VIII; Marion (1879: CXCVII, pp. 181–182); Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, XI.2.

- 40 The crusaders' criticism of the Church prelates' passivity reached Europe in October 1098 (*Epistulae et chartae*, XVII), and soon was confirmed by other letters (*Epistulae et chartae*, XV and XVI).
- 41 Unfortunately, there are only second-hand testimonies suggesting Urban's concerns with the crusading apostasy. According to the preserved documents, the pope himself did not address the crusading desertions in any of his letters. Cf. Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei*, II.5; Bern. Const., *Chron.*, ad annum MXCIX; Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, X.12.
- 42 *Epistulae et chartae*, XIX: "Qui huius militiae uoto crucis signa sumpserunt, illuc properare compellite, nisi paupertatis retineantur obstaculo: alioquin eos *infames* haberi decernimus."
- 43 *Epistulae et chartae*, XIX: "Qui uero de Antiochena obsidione fide pusillanimitate et ambigua recesserunt, in excommunicatione permaneant, nisi se redituros certis securitatibus confirmauerint."
- 44 *Epistulae et chartae*, XIX and XX; *MGH, SS VIII*, II (1848: p. 487); Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, X.20.
- 45 Cate (1969: pp. 343–367); Riley-Smith (2003: pp. 120–134); Andenna & Salvarani (2003); Mulinder (1996); Tyerman (2006: pp. 170–175). Concerning the deserters' lack of motivation, the sources are explicit: Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, VIII.6; Bald. Dol., *Hist.*, III (Biddlecombe 2014: p. 76); Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, II.16; Willelm. Malm., *Gesta regum*, IV.383; Willelm. Tyr., *Hist. rerum*, X.12 (*RHC Occ. I* 1844: p. 416).

Interestingly, some of the apostates (including noblemen)⁴⁶ rendered immune to the criticism and settled in the West. Nevertheless, their lingering was not addressed by any Church agenda at all, neither it was mentioned at the synodes of Rome and London (both 1102), nor later.⁴⁷ This sudden ignorance clearly contrasts with the Church's rhetorics of the precedent years (1100–1). The lack of interest almost indicates that after the departure of the Crusade of 1101, the pope *de facto* pardoned (or postponed the completion of) the unfulfilled crusading vows. But was this the case? Was the pope trying to transform the attributes of crusading?

Paschal II inherited Urban II's policy concerning the Investiture Controversy, East-West Schism, and the Norman policy in Southern Italy. Compared to those, the pope could never address the crusading desertions with such priority. Therefore, when he was approached by the crusaders to penalize the apostates, he accepted their arguments and expelled the deserters to the East.⁴⁸ As their departure in 1101 appeased the victorious crusaders, Paschal possibly considered the issue to be solved for good.

However, the pope and his prelates contravened the crusader's obligation to reach the Holy Sepulchre by any means necessary, as they accepted unfulfilled crusading vow if illness or poverty prevented the pilgrim to accomplish the journey. Such attitude seemed reasonable, though there was not any tool established to recognize who was ill or poor enough to be excused.

Meanwhile, pope Paschal II refused to accept the crusading vows of the noblemen from the Iberian Peninsula and forbade them any participation in a crusade to the Holy Land. Instead of fighting Turks or Fatimids, he expected them to fight Almoravids within their own borders.⁴⁹ Either way, those crusaders were not expected to reach Jerusalem.

Few years later (ca. 1103), Paschal discouraged another potential crusader. Bertrand of Toulouse, son of a crusading hero Raymond of Saint-Gilles, confirmed his wish to visit the Holy Land. However, as Bertrand was subject to excommunication due to continuous looting of the Church property in Saint-Gilles, Paschal wrote him a letter to prevent him from journeying East as the pilgrimage "would not grant his soul any benefit at all".⁵⁰ Paschal

46 Those were the cases of Ivo of Grandmesnil, Norgeot of Toucy, Emicho of Nahegau (Flonheim) and others. For example, their desertions are mentioned in: Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, I.29 and IV.13; Petrus Tud., *Hist.*, X; Laurent (1911: LXXVIII, p. 84).

47 Ekk. Uraug., *Chron.*, AD MCII; *PL* 179, I (1855: pp. 1501–1503); Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, VIII.27; *PL* 159, III.62.

48 The obligation to reach Jerusalem affected even the course of the Crusade of 1101 when many exhausted noblemen refused to return home unless they reached the Holy Sepulchre. The most apparent case was the death of Welf of Bawaria, cf. Ekk. Uraug., *Chron.*, AD MCI. Indeed, the crusaders in 1101 seem to have been inspired by Stephen of Blois and other deserters from the first campaign who simply could not return home unless they reached the Holy Sepulchre. Their very example served as a reminder of what awaited the apostates in the West.

49 *PL* 163, XXV–XXVI. Peter I, king of Navarre and Aragon was one of the inflicted noblemen. *Chron. S. Max. Pict.*, ad annum MC (Marchegay & Mabille 1869: p. 420); Ubieto Arteta (1951: p. 113 n. 6). Cf. Tyerman (2006: p. 662); O'Callaghan (2003: p. 33).

50 *PL* 163, CVII and CXXVIII; the query did not solve until 1108, cf. *Ibid.* CCI, CCVII, CCXXVII, and CCLVII–CCLVIII.

did his best to avoid a precedent that an excommunicated person could redeem themselves by a pilgrimage to Jerusalem without any actual act of satisfaction. Possibly for the same reason, Paschal ignored the crusading vow of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (1056/84–1105) who accepted the cross in 1103.⁵¹ As Henry was excommunicated due to the Investiture Controversy, Paschal did not react to his lingering until his death in 1106. Although Paschal's approach was theologically and politically justified, he was making distinctions among those who considered the journey. Discouraging Bertrand and ignoring Henry's commitment implied that the crusading vow did not necessarily mean the obligation to journey to Jerusalem for everyone.

It seems that this incoherent argumentation of the Church influenced the French Benedictines, as well. As the crusader's requirement to reach the Holy Sepulchre was in question, the chroniclers could not consider it prohibited to praise the particular deserters. But why did the apologies appear only in the French sources from the 1100s?

The Context of the Campaign of Bohemond of Antioch

In late 1104, a crusading hero Bohemond of Antioch returned to the West to rally an army for a new crusade. After a short visit of pope Paschal II in Rome, Bohemond moved to France where he married king Philip's daughter, Constance. His very presence in France, as well as his preaching for a new journey to Jerusalem, attracted a lot of attention to the crusading movement.⁵² As the Crusade of 1101 brought more casualties than success, the inspiration for the new pilgrimage was sought in the First Crusade. Therefore, Bohemond's propagandists reworked the general narrative to deliver the plausible crusading experience to the audience supposed to support the new pilgrimage. Indeed, the echoes of this transition inspired the French Benedictine authors whose writing seems to have been influenced by Bohemond's very presence in France.⁵³

Yet concerning the reduced criticism of deserters, the authors seem to have known them or their families personally. However, as the deserters were publicly known, the chroniclers did not suppress their withdrawals, but rather tried to misinterpret them. Although they described the particular desertions, they approached them as flawed decisions of rather noble men.

The Latin West authorities' fading interest in the penalization of crusading deserters became apparent after the Bohemond's failed Crusade of 1107–8. After 1108, a significant part of Bohemond's army disengaged from the rest and returned to Apulia. Although the pope must not have necessarily considered the campaign to be a crusade

51 Henry IV declared his will to journey East in a letter to Hugh of Cluny, see *Die Briefe Heinrichs IV*, XXXI.

52 Although Bohemond claimed that the goal of the campaign would be Jerusalem, later he led his crusading army against Byzantine Dyrrachion (Durazzo, Durrës) in the Adriatic. In 1104/5, pope Paschal granted the crusading hero a new legate (Bruno of Segni) and conferred St. Peter's standard to him. *PL 186*, IX; Bart. Nan., *Gesta*, LXV (*RHC Occ.* 3 1866: p. 538); Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, II.38; *Historia peregrinorum*, CXL–CXLI, 21.28–33; *Narratio Floriacensis*, XII.

53 Sweetenham (2005: pp. 4–15); Paul (2010: pp. 534–566); Biddlecombe (2014: pp. lv–lx).

(due to the siege of Byzantine Dyrrachion), the point is that many of those who “accepted the cross” did not ever reach Jerusalem. Despite numerous desertions, the papacy did not criticise any of the renegades for their unfulfilled vows. Therefore, the expressions of disgrace appeared only in the works of later crusading chroniclers.⁵⁴

Conclusion

As demonstrated by this paper, the literary portrayal of deserters from the First Crusade is incoherent and ambiguous. Although the reactions of crusaders were full of spite and criticism, in the beginning of the 12th century, the Benedictine authors tended to excuse the crusading apostates. This approach could have been caused by their affection for the families of the particular deserters or by the outcome of the Crusade of 1101. However, this can be only a part of the explanation.

Taking into account the historical period, the Benedictines were writing in time of incoherent argumentation of the Church. To the pope and the prelates, the desertions meant everything but priority, therefore they only reacted to the actual situation: in 1101, they were willing to threaten the deserters with excommunication due to their unfulfilled vows; while in 1105, they kept ignoring this reduced, yet persisting issue. This ambivalence infiltrated the Benedictine chronicles especially when they were meant to propagate the very idea of crusading in order to support the recruitment of Bohemond's army. Although later tradition rejected these apologetic tendencies, the ambiguous portrayal of renegades remains as a reminder of the ideological incoherence of the early crusading movement.

List of Abbreviations

Alb. Aquen., *Hist.* – *Albertus Aquensis, Historia Ierosolimitana*

Anna Komn., *Alex.* – *Anna Komnene, Alexias*

Bald. Dol., *Carm.* – *Baldricus Dolensis, Carmina*

Bald. Dol., *Hist.* – *Baldricus Dolensis, Historia Ierosolimitana* (Biddlecombe 2014)

Bart. Nan., *Gesta* – *Bartolfus de Nangis, Gesta Francorum Iherusalem expugnantium* (RHC Occ. 3 1866)

Bern. Const., *Chron.* – *Bernoldus Constantiensis, Chronicon*

Chauvin 1997 – *Cartulaires de l'abbaye Saint-Serge et Saint-Bach d'Angers*

Chron. Lusit. – *Chronicon Lusitanum* (seu *Chronica Gothorum*) (*España Sagrada XIV*)

Chron. S. Max. Pict. – *Chronicon Sancti Maxentii Pictavensis* (Marchegay & Mabille 1869)

Ekk. Uraug., *Chron.* – *Ekkehardus Uraugiensis, Chronicon universale*

Epist. Boemundi – *Epistula Boemundi principis Antiochie Sanctissimo patri et domno atque universali pape Paschali* (Holtzmann 1935)

⁵⁴ Concerning the crusading vows preceding the campaign of 1107–1108, see Fulch. Car., *Hist.*, II.39; Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.*, V.19 and XI.12; *Narratio Floriacensis*, XIV. Concerning the criticism, consult Alb. Aquen., *Hist.*, X.44–45; *Narratio Floriacensis*, XV.

- Epistulae et chartae – Epistulae et chartae ad historiam primi belli sacri spectantes quae supersunt aevo aequales ac genuinae*, Hagenmeyer (1901)
- Frut. Mich., *Chron.* – *Frutolfus Michelsbergensis, Chronicon universale*
- Fulch. Car., *Hist.* – *Fulcherius Carnotensis, Historia Hierosolymitana*
- Gesta Ambaz.* – *Gesta Ambaziensium dominorum* (Halphen & Poupardin 1913)
- Gesta Francorum* – *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*
- Gilo Paris., *Hist.* – *Gilo Parisiensis et Anonymus de Charleville, Historia vie Hierosolimitane*
- Guib. Nov., *Gesta Dei* – *Guibertus Novigentis, Gesta Dei per Francos*
- Historia peregrinorum* – *Historia peregrinorum euntium Jerusalem ad liberandum sanctum Sepulcrum de postate ethnicorum (vel Historia belli sacri)* (D'Angelo 2009)
- Laurent – *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Molesme, ancien diocèse de Langres 916–1250*
- Lépinos & Merlet – *Cartulaire de Notre-Dame de Chartres I*
- Marchegay – *Cartulaire du prieuré bénédictine de Saint-Gondon-sur-Loire*
- Marion – *Le Cartulaire (du prieuré de Notre-Dame) de Longpont*
- MGH, SS VIII – *Hugo Flaviniacensis, Chronicon*
- MGH, SS IX – *Hugo Floriacensis, Liber qui modernorum regum Francorum continet actus*
- Narratio Floriacensis – Narratio Floriacensis de captis Antiochia et Hierosolyma et obsesso Dyrrachio (RHC Occidentaux 5 1895)*
- Orderic. Vit., *Hist. Ecc.* – *Ordericus Vitalis, Historia Ecclesiastica*
- Petrus Tud., *Hist.* – *Petrus Tudebodus, Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere*
- PL 156 – *Guibertus Novigentis, De vita sua*
- PL 159 – *Epistolae Anselmi Cantuariensis, III–IV*
- PL 163 – *Epistolae et privilegia Paschalis II papae*
- PL 179 – *Willelmus Malmesbiriensis, Gesta pontificum Anglorum*
- PL 186 – *Sugerius S. Dionysii, Vita Ludovici regis VI., qui Grossus dictus*
- Radulf. Cad., *Gesta Tancredi* – *Radulfus Cadomensis, Gesta Tancredi in expeditione Hierosolymitana (RHC Occidentaux 3 1866)*
- Raim. de Aguil., *Hist. Franc.* – *Raimundus de Aguilers, Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem*
- RHGF 12 – *Ex Historiae Francicae fragmento*
- Robert. Mon., *Hist.* – *Robertus Monachus, Historia Iherosolimitana (RHC Occidentaux 3 1866)*
- Salomo Bar Simson (Haverkamp 2005)
- Ubieto Arteta (1951) – *Collectión diplomática de Pedro I de Aragón y Navarra*
- Willelm. Malm., *Gesta regum* – *Willelmus Malmesbiriensis, Gesta regum Anglorum*
- Willelm. Tyr., *Hist. rerum* – *Willelmus Tyrensis, Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum (RHC Occidentaux 1 1844)*

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