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Contemporary Letters and Texts concerning the Second Crusade

These letters, hitherto untranslated, illustrate important aspects of the Second Crusade. Letter (a) shows clearly that the decision of Conrad III to take the cross was taken without the knowledge or agreement of the pope.¹ Letters (b) and (c) reveal the problems encountered on route, the aims of the Crusade leaders, and the very different attitudes towards the Byzantines of the German and French rulers. The last two letters are important evidence for the failure of the siege of Damascus [letter (d)] and the legacy of bad feelings that left behind, and the hostility towards Byzantium that resulted from the Crusade [letter (e)]. This last letter was part of the attempt to create a new expedition after the Crusade's failure.

(a) King Conrad III writes to Pope Eugenius III from the Diet of Frankfurt to inform him of his plans for the Crusade (March 1147)

Conrad by the grace of God King of the Romans and always Augustus to his father in Christ Eugenius, supreme pontiff of the Holy Roman Church, [expressing to him] filial love and due reverence in the Lord.

We have gratefully received the letter from your holiness sent with your legate Bishop Theodwin of Santa Rufina, a man who has been received by us with love and honour, and we have carried out the suggestions contained within it with filial and cordial charity. Hence we have with God's assistance taken careful and effective steps for the government of our kingdom, which has been granted to us by God, a matter about which you advised and exhorted us with paternal affection. This was discussed with great attention and thoroughness at a gathering of the princes at Frankfurt, where we held a general court. A lasting peace has been confirmed throughout every part of our kingdom, and our son Henry has been chosen with the unanimous agreement of the princes and the eager acclamation of the whole kingdom as king and as the successor to our sceptre. We have ordered that in accordance with Divine mercy he should be crowned in the palace at Aachen in the middle of Lent.² Indeed, the matter which was of concern to your good self, that we have assumed such a great task, namely the holy and life-giving cross and the intention of [making] so great and lengthy an expedition, without your knowledge, proceeds from a strong feeling of true love. But the Holy Spirit, which 'bloweth where it listeth',³ and is accustomed to 'coming suddenly',⁴ allowed us to make no delay to take counsel with you or anybody else; and immediately He

¹ The interpretation of this letter by J. Phillips, 'Papacy, Empire and the Second Crusade', in *The Second Crusade. Scope and Consequences*, ed. J. Phillips & M. Hoch (Manchester 2001), pp. 20-1, is based on a singularly inaccurate translation.

² The fourth Sunday in Lent would have been 30th March 1147.

³ *John*, iii.8.

⁴ *Mark*, xiii.36.

touched our heart with His wondrous finger, He commanded our absolute obedience without there being any opportunity for delay interposing. Since we understand both from your letter and from the legate that you will come to Gaul, we request, venerable father, and advise you with the utmost respect and thought, that you seek to cross the Rhine so that we can meet together so that we may be able both to discuss and to plan how, with [the help of] God's compassion, the peace of the churches and the ordering of the Christian religion may be augmented with appropriate measures and the well-being of the kingdom which has been granted to us by God, and the enhancement of our honour, may be confirmed through necessary decisions. And since there is very little time available for preparing our journey, we would very much like to have a face-to-face meeting with you at Strassburg on the sixth day of Easter Week.⁵ We commend to your sincerity our envoys, men who are especially prudent and discreet, lovers of the Holy Roman Church and of the kingdom, and who are most dear to us, namely Bishop Bucco of Worms, Bishop Anselm of Havelburg and Abbot Wibald of Korvey, so that you may hear those things that they say as though [they were] from our own mouth, and you will not refuse to discuss and arrange the affairs of the Holy Roman Church and the kingdom with them in a friendly fashion.

[*MGH Diplomatum Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae*, ix, ed. F. Hausmann (Vienna 1969), 332-3 no. 184; or *Wibaldi Epistola*, no. 33, in *Monumenta Corbeiensia*, ed. P. Jaffé (Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum 1, Berlin 1864), pp. 111-112].

(b) King Conrad III writes to Abbot Wibald of Korvey describing his journey to the east and his future plans (January/February 1148)

Conrad by the grace of God King of the Romans to the venerable Abbot Wibald of Korvey and Stavelot [wishing him] his grace and all good things.

Since we have had proof of your loyalty towards us and our kingdom shown on many occasions, we do not doubt that you will greatly rejoice now that you hear of the favourable state of our affairs. We therefore bring news to you, our loyal subject. After we had arrived at Nicea with a numerous and untouched army, we wanted to complete our expedition in good time. So we set off towards Iconium on the direct route, accompanied by guides to show us the way, and carrying with us as many supplies as we could. But however, after ten days on the road, and with a similar march still left, the supplies began to run short for everyone, particularly for the cavalry, while the Turks unceasingly harried and inflicted death upon the

⁵ 18th April 1147.

crowd of people on foot, who were unable to keep up. Pitying the fate of the suffering people, who were dying both from famine and from the arrows fired by the enemy, and on the request of all the princes and barons, we led the army away from that wasteland towards the sea, so as to regroup; preferring to keep it unharmed for greater things [in future] rather than to win a bloody victory over the archers. When we arrived at the sea coast and pitched camp, much to our surprise the king of France arrived at our tents in the midst of a great storm, not wanting to wait for better weather in his joy. He was distressed that our army had been worn down by hunger and toil, but showing no little joy in our company. Indeed he and all his princes faithfully and devotedly offered us their service [*obsequium suum*]. They provided us with money and whatever else they had which we wanted. They then joined forces with us and our princes, although indeed some of our people were left behind, being unable to follow either because of illness or through lack of money, and because of this they became separated from the army. We then went without difficulty as far as St. John [*Ephesus*], where the Saint's tomb is, from which Manna is believed to gush forth, and there we celebrated the Lord's Nativity. We stopped there for some days, since both we and many of our men had fallen ill. We wanted to go on when we had recovered our health, but were so ill that we were quite unable to proceed. Hence, after waiting for us as long as they could, the king and his army set off regretfully, but we remained racked by illness for a considerable time. When our brother the Emperor of the Greeks heard of this he was much upset, and he and our most beloved daughter the empress came to us in haste, and generously provided us and our princes with everything that we needed for our journey from his own resources. He brought us back almost by force to his palace in Constantinople, so that we might be speedily restored to health by his doctors. There he showed us greater honour, so we have heard, than had ever been demonstrated to any of our predecessors. We now plan to set off for Jerusalem on Quadragesima Sunday, ⁶ we shall muster a new army there over Easter, and then travel on to Rohas [*Edessa*]. We ask that you yourself pray, and have your brothers also pray, that God should indeed deign to make our journey a success; and commend us to [the prayers of] all the faithful. We ourselves commend our son to your faithful care.

[*MGH Diplomatum*, ix.354-5 no. 195; or *Wibaldi Epistola*, no. 78, in *Monumenta Corbeiensia*, pp. 152-3].

⁶ 7th March 1148.

(c) King Louis VII gives news of the Crusade to his regent, Abbot Suger (March/April 1148)

Louis, by the grace of God King of the French and Duke of the Aquitanians, to Suger, venerable Abbot of St. Denis, greeting and [his] grace. It is our duty to send news of our affairs in the East as quickly we can to you, who are dear to us. For we know that you have a heartfelt desire to hear about them, and nothing can make us happier than for you to receive good news about us.

After we had departed the frontiers of our kingdom, the Lord favoured our journey, and He brought us in good health and unharmed as far as Constantinople, and by Divine mercy with our whole army safe and in excellent spirits. There we were joyfully and honourably received by the emperor. After remaining there for a little while to gather the supplies that seemed to be needed, we sailed across the Bosphorus and commenced our march through Romania. However, we suffered great damage in these regions, both through the treachery of the emperor and through our own fault, and we were indeed threatened by many and grave perils. For we were spared neither the vicious ambush of robbers nor the serious difficulties of the route, and faced daily battles with the Turks who with the emperor's permission entered his lands to harry the soldiery of Christ, and who strove with all their might to harm us. Since in many places it was impossible to find food, the people were soon suffering from hunger. And on one particular day Divine judgement exacted punishment for our sins, and a number of our barons were killed. For among those who died on the climb into the mountains of Laodicea the Lesser and in the region round about were our blood-relation the Count of Warenne, Rainald of Tonnerre, Manasses de Bulles, Walter de Montjay, Everard of Breteuil, and many more, the list of whom will be announced at a more favourable moment than the present, since our grief does not allow us to speak further about them now. We ourselves frequently risked death, but on each occasion were saved by Divine grace. We escaped the attacks of the Turks and, protected by the Lord, arrived at Attalia with our army safe. There we had frequent and prolonged discussions as to the best way to continue our journey, and the general opinion of the bishops and princes was that, since our horses had for a long time been worn down by hunger and the hardships of the journey, and the way forward was beset with great difficulty, we should hurry on to Antioch by ship. We followed their advice, and on the Friday after the middle of Lent ⁷ we and the majority of our princes arrived safely by sea at the aforesaid city, and it is from there that we have had this letter despatched

⁷ 10th March 1148.

to you. As for the rest, all our work is in the hand of God, who, as we trust in him, will not abandon us who have our hopes in him, but will guide His enterprise to a glorious conclusion. For you should most certainly know that we shall either return in glory or we shall never return at all. It remains therefore for you to think frequently of us, and always commend us most sincerely to the prayers of religious men everywhere. And since our money has been in no small way diminished by many and various expenses, all of which have been entirely necessary to us, you should devote your energy to raising cash, and hasten to send what has been collected to us by trustworthy envoys. We shall only be able to further Christ's business without much expense and great labour. Farewell.

[*Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. J-J. Brial and L. Delisle, xv (Paris 1878), 495-6].

(d) Conrad III informs Abbot Wibald of his imminent return home (September 1148)

Conrad by the grace of God august King of the Romans to the venerable Abbot Wibald of Korvey [wishing him] his grace and all good things.

Because we know that you very much want to hear from us and to learn how we are prospering, we take this opportunity to tell you first of this. By God's mercy we are in good health, and we have gone on board ship to return on the festival of the Blessed Mary in September,⁸ after having accomplished all that God allowed us to do in these regions, and the men of the land permitted.

Let us speak of these men. We arrived by general agreement at Damascus, and we pitched camp by the city gate, albeit with our men facing considerable resistance. There can be no doubt that we came very close to capturing the city. But then certain people whom we had no reason to distrust treacherously alleged that the city was impregnable on that side, and they led us to another position where there was neither water for the army nor could anyone gain entry. Everyone was annoyed, and also upset by this, and we retreated, abandoning the enterprise as a failure. However, they all without exception promised to undertake another expedition against Ascalon, and fixed a place and a day for this. But when we arrived there as had been agreed, we found scarcely anybody else present. After we had waited in vain for the rest to arrive for some eight days, and been deceived by these people a second time, we consulted our own interests. In short therefore, we shall with God's aid return to you. We

⁸ 8th September.

render our thanks to you, as you deserve, for the care that you have shown to our son, and for all the loyalty that you shown us. With regard to other matters, we ask that you continue in the same vein, and all your kindness will be suitably rewarded.

[*MGH Diplomatum*, ix.356-7 no. 197; or *Wibaldi Epistola*, no. 144, *Monumenta Corbeiensia*, pp. 225-6]

(e) Abbot Peter of Cluny writes to King Roger of Sicily, offering to act as a mediator between the king and Conrad III, and urging him to attack Byzantium in punishment for the empire's 'betrayal' of the Second Crusade (c. 1150)

... Furthermore, we make known to your royal majesty that we greatly lament the conflicts that are going on between you and the lord King of the Germans (or Emperor of the Romans). Both I and many others are strongly of the opinion that this discord is harmful to the Latin kingdoms and to the Christian Faith. For we have heard many times and often how your military power has brought benefits to the Church of God in the lands of his enemies, that is those of the Saracens. Moreover, we believe that greater advantages would accrue if you and the aforesaid king were united in a lasting peace and concord. There is also another matter which has long been of concern to us, and to almost all of our fellow countrymen in France, in seeking such a peace for you; namely the wicked, unheard of and disgraceful betrayal by the Greeks and their miserable king of our pilgrims, that is those in the army of God.

I shall speak of what I have in mind. If it should be necessary, insofar as is appropriate for a monk, I would not refuse to perish, if the justice of God would, through the death of one of his servants, revenge that of so many men, both nobles and commoners, indeed the flower of almost the whole of France and Germany, destroyed by wretched treason. Moreover, I can see no Christian prince under Heaven through whom this work can be carried out who is better, more suitable nor more effective than yourself, nor so acceptable to Heaven and earth. For, by the grace of God, I say this not in flattery but on account of your outstanding deeds and from the general opinion about you. You are wiser of mind, better endowed with riches, and more practised in courage than other princes, and furthermore you are physically closer to this place. So therefore, rise up, good prince, to fulfil what not just I with my voice am saying, but what is the wishes both of myself and of everyone else. Rise up to help the people of God, zealously to uphold the law of God like the

Maccabees, to revenge so many insults, injuries and deaths, and such effusion of blood in the army of God, shed so impiously.

I myself am ready, should an opportunity present itself, to go immediately to the aforesaid emperor, along with anybody else I can recruit, to secure the peace of which I spoke above. I shall try with all my strength and all my care to restore and confirm between you and him a peace that is so pleasing to God.

[*The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. Giles Constable (2 vols. Cambridge, Mass., 1967), i.394-5 no. 162]

(f) The Account of the Second Crusade in the Würzburg Annals

Although very brief, this extract reveals the disappointment and disillusionment caused by the failure of the Crusade to the east.

(1147) Because of our sins, God permitted the western Church to be afflicted. For there arose certain pseudo-prophets, sons of Belial, witnesses of the anti-Christ, who seduced Christians with foolish words, and with false preaching forced all the human race to march against the Saracens for the liberation of Jerusalem. Their preaching was so effective that almost all the inhabitants of these regions freely offered themselves to the common disaster, and not only ordinary men, but even kings, dukes, margraves and other powerful men of this world, thinking that they were taking up the service of God, with bishops, archbishops, abbots and other servants and prelates of the Church joining them in this error, acting in such a way that they placed both their souls and bodies in mortal danger. Nor is this to be wondered at since (I know not for what secret reason) the Lord Eugenius, pontiff of the Roman See, persuaded into this by Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, wrote to Conrad, the most pious king of the Romans and of the whole empire, to the kings of France and England, and indeed to all the kings of Christian faith and religion, and also to their great men and subjects, advising them in these letters to prepare for this journey, and giving and allowing to them all equally, by the Apostolic authority granted to him by God, indulgence of [their] sins.

[*Annales Herbipolenses*, MGH SS xvi.3]

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