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A Letter of Jacques de Vitry

Jacques de Vitry, the newly appointed Bishop of Acre, describes his journey out to the Holy Land in 1216 and his impressions of the society that he found there. The first part of the letter was written between his arrival in the East early in November 1216 and February 1217, the second part probably in March 1217, and before Easter, which is not mentioned (Easter in 1217 fell on 26th March). Jacques was a Frenchman, educated at Paris, who was Bishop of Acre from 1216 until 1228, and subsequently Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum. He died in 1240. This letter has been translated by Iris Rau, who completed an M.A. in Medieval History at Leeds in 2001, with assistance from I.S. Moxon and G.A. Loud, from Lettres de Jacques de Vitry, *ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Leiden 1960), pp. 79-97 no. 2.*

a] To the venerable men and most dear in Christ, the Parisian masters [*lacunae*] William du Pont de l'Arche and Raoul de Namur and Alexander de Courçon and Philip Archdeacon of Noyon, with Divine mercy permitting, James, the humble minister of the Church of Acre, in order to help the Holy Land of the promise of the Lord with [*lacunae*] execution.

b] To the Lady Lutgard of Saint Trond, his most spiritual friend, and to the convent of Aywières, James, by the mercy of God, the humble minister of the Church of Acre, in order that they may go up from excellence into excellence until they see the God of Gods in Sion.

Minds which the Holy Spirit has joined cannot be divided by being in different places, but they are impressed upon the minds of friends by the seal of love. They do not slide away easily from the memory because of the interval of time. 'The Lord is my witness' [1] that I am afflicted by constant suffering on behalf of his grace, [and that] I am exposed to daily dangers on behalf of his name, that I hold the memory of thee without intermission, with burning desire and intense affection, desiring to see you again in this world. But if God arranges [things] in another manner, I often beg him that I shall see

[1] *Romans*, i.9.

you after death in the splendour of the saints and in the council and congregation of the just. I desire that, as long as you live, you should have a fresh memory of my humble self, just as I always have the memory of you. By means of [this] letter, when I am able to obtain a messenger, I willingly impose myself upon your memory and I wish to inform you about my situation. Therefore, let your love know that I am through the grace of God safe and unharmed, as are all the people who are with me, and I wish to hear the same thing about you.

After we left the harbour of the city of Genoa to set out across the sea, we toiled for five weeks at sea with many hardships and underwent many difficulties in different places. When we had sailed past Sardinia, we found an island surrounded by the sea on every side, in which a hermit was living alone amid snakes and wild beasts without any companion or servant. He never ate bread, except for a biscuit given to him once or twice a year by those passing by. Before we went past, he complained that winter was already approaching and so far no one had passed who would give him bread. To him it was replied by the Holy Spirit that ships would soon pass from whom he would receive biscuit and other necessities. When our ships were passing near the island of the said hermit, we passed straight by at speed with no intention of looking back at the island or of visiting the hermit. But after we had sailed many miles past the island, a strong wind suddenly rose up against us, the force of which drove us and our ships back to the hermit's island. Seeing out arrival the hermit, a very old man and 'full of days', [2] came to us and presented cabbages and a bunch of berries to me, while near his cell we found wild cattle and rams and many deer, of which we received fourteen, which we ate. Leaving behind bread, oil and some clothes for the hermit we departed.

Not long after this a great and very fearful danger threatened us. Another ship was heading towards our ship at great speed. If it had collided with our own ship, we could hardly have escaped without one or both [of us] being dashed to pieces, nor could we turn aside in the opposite direction because there was a rock that was dangerously close; thus we would be forced either to undergo ramming by the other ship or to drive

[2] *Genesis*, xxv.8.

our ship onto the rock. Then 'there arose a great cry' [3] [and] in both ships people were heard weeping tears and confessing their sins. People jumped from one ship into the other or vice versa, depending on whether someone believed that one ship was stronger or if another believed that the other ship was. Others took off their clothes and bound what they had in terms of gold and silver to themselves in case they might be able to escape by swimming. Some of the sailors, feeling sorry for me and showing their respect, tried to persuade me to enter a little boat that had been attached to the great ship, but I absolutely refused to comply because of the bad example [that this would set], for I wanted to experience the common danger with the others. But 'the Lord had seen our affliction', [4] for while we were pushing away the ship which was pressing upon us with lances and staffs, neither one of ships was broken into pieces, even though they were banging into each other. However, as the result of the violence of the collision our ship was turned some way to the left and left the rock behind on the right hand side. The other ship was already near to the rock and was about to be holed and sunk, but with its sails furled and anchors cast out it stood still and as if by a miracle escaped unharmed through God's grace. Indeed, some people threw their gold and silver out of this ship into ours.

Although we had a most unfavourable wind when we sailed from there, we gained harbour as best we could on another island where we stayed for some fifteen days. Since the weather was continuously unfavourable and winter was very close, we now almost gave up [the idea of] crossing over the sea, greatly fearing that we would have to winter on this other island. The captain of our ship wished make all the poor people from our ship disembark and leave them behind on the island, for he lacked sufficient provisions. I entreated him that he should await the mercy of God for a little longer and should not expose these poor people to the danger of death. While the captain was by no means willing to agree, the Lord suddenly sent upon us such a mighty storm that the fifteen anchors which we cast in the sea could scarcely hold our ship fast and save us from perishing. The fore part of our ship was now lifted up towards the stars, the next moment it was sunk into the depths. The storm lasted continuously for two days and nights; so that some of our people could hardly bear the violence of the

[3] *Acts*, xxiii.9.

winds, which laid low the forecastle of our ship, and broke down [in panic], while others did not eat nor drink for the fear of death. Indeed, I did not eat anything cooked for no one dared to light a fire on our ship. When I drank, I held the cup with one hand and held on for dear life with the other hand for fear that I might fall or spill the cup. Because we feared that our water would run out, we stretched out our linen clothes to the rain, and so consequently we gained a double advantage - we were both washing our clothes and drinking the water which washed them.

This storm did however cast out a storm from the minds of many sinners, for a number of people came to me in tears to make their confession, even though they had for many years remained immured in their sins. [Both] merchants and powerful men received the sign of cross from my hand. With them 'crying unto the Lord', [5] and He sent us calm weather and bestowed a suitable wind from astern upon us, 'as a help after our distress'. [6] Thus within a few days we sailed past Sicily and Crete, leaving behind Scylla and Charybdis to the left and Malta, where Saint Paul spent the winter after his ship had been wrecked and where a snake bit him while he was collecting twigs, [7] on our right, [and] coming close to the island of Cyprus. The sailors realised that we were not very far from land because of the great fish that both followed and swam in front of our ship, and played around it, leaping [out of the water].

On the sixth day after the feast of All-Saints we approached the port of the city of Acre. [8] The whole city ran out to meet us with great joy, yet I found the town of Acre, like a monster or a beast, having nine heads, each fighting the other. There were at that place Jacobites with their archbishop, who in the manner of Jews were circumcising their children and revealed their sins in confession to no one except to God. Though some of them were uncircumcised and confessed their sins to priests, both the latter and the former when making the sign of cross signed themselves with one finger. I gave a sermon to them in their church through an interpreter who knew how to speak the language of the Saracens, explaining to them that if they were circumcised

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[4] *Genesis*, xxxi.42; cf. *Exodus*, iv.31.
[5] Cf. *Psalm*, iii.4, lxxvii.1, cxli.1
[6] *Psalm*, cvii.13.
[7] *Acts*, xxviii.1-6.
[8] Friday 4th November 1216.

Christ would not profit them and that they had to be cured from the leprosy of sins through priests, whose duty was to discriminate between leprosy and leprosy, [9] as the Lord said in the Gospel, 'go and show yourselves unto the priests'. [10] Listening to the word of God, which they had not been accustomed to hearing, they were through the grace of God strongly pierced by the stings of conscience, with the result that they earnestly promised to me that they would not circumcise themselves in the future and that from now on they would make their confessions to priests. Concealing, so to speak, my true thoughts I allowed them to sign themselves with one finger, because of the unity of the Essence and the Trinity of the Person, for in one finger there are three parts, and thus we too sign ourselves with three fingers joined in one hand in the name of the Trinity and Unity. But someone afterwards secretly pointed out to me that they signed themselves with one finger because they believed that there was in Christ only one will, although the will of the Divinity was one thing and the will of humanity was another; and one of them was put under the other, just as has been written in the Gospel, ' not as I will, but as thou wilt'. [11]

Moreover, I found the Syrians to be traitors and very corrupt men, for having been brought up among the Saracens, they had adopted their bad character, and some of them, who had been bribed, revealed the secrets of Christianity to the Saracens. Because they administered the sacraments with leavened bread according to the Greek manner, they scorned our sacraments which we administered with unleavened bread, to such extent that they refused to respect them or [even] to bow their heads towards them when the Holy Body of the Lord was brought by our priests for the sick. Furthermore they were unwilling to celebrate [the mass] on our altars unless they had first washed them down. Although their priests wore [clerical] headgear, they dressed their hair in the manner of lay people. These priests took wives after the fashion of the Greeks, and they did not allow their lay people to marry for a third time. The daughters of these Syrians went about with their faces veiled so that no one could recognise them, not even those to whom they were betrothed until they were joined in marriage. I arranged for both men and women to be assembled on the instructions of their bishop, and through

[9] *Deuteronomy*, xviii.8.
[10] *Luke*, xvii.14.
[11] *Matthew*, xxvi.39.

the interpreter I presented to them 'the Word of life'. [12] Through the grace of God they were so struck by conscience that both their bishop and his followers manifested their obedience to me and promised me faithfully that they would live according to my recommendations.

Some of them, so I heard, baptised themselves on the day of the Epiphany every year. I also came across Nestorians, Georgians and Armenians, but because they did not have bishops or any other official leader, I have as yet been unable to assemble them. The Armenians administer [the sacrament] with unleavened bread, but they do not put water into the wine for the sacrament. Furthermore, I found that there were men who were disobedient to our church but on their own authority installed chaplains in their own chapels and did what they liked with impunity. These people, from the communes of the Genoese, Pisans and Venetians, were contemptuous of a sentence of excommunication that we imposed. They rarely if ever listened to the Word of God. They even refused to come to my sermon. However, I went to them and presented the Word of God to them on the street in front of their houses. Making the sign of the cross and having said their confession, they piously received the Word of God. After that, they willingly listened to the Word of God on Sundays outside the city, where was accustomed to preach, 'with repentant and humble heart'. [13]

In addition, I found that the men born in this land were called *Pullani*, which in French is translated as *Poulains*. They alone acknowledged that they were under my concern and jurisdiction. It was hard to find one in a thousand who was willing to keep his marriage lawfully for they did not believe that fornication was a mortal sin. They have been spoiled from childhood and they are utterly devoted to the pleasures of flesh. They were unaccustomed to listening to the Word of God and seemed to regard it as worthless. I found, moreover, foreigners who had fled from their own lands as outlaws because of various appalling crimes. Having cast aside their fear of the Lord, they were corrupting the whole city by their wicked deeds and evil example. The last type of people I found, worse than all others, more intransigent and completely blinded, are the 'scribes and

[12] *John*, vi.69.
[13] *Psalm*, L.19

Pharisees'. [14] Taking only 'milk and wool' [15] from the sheep and not looking after their own souls, they corrupted the lay people by word and by example. While other people had been pricked by the sting of conscience and turned towards the Lord, these people alone resisted the Word of God and all that is good. As a result what is written [in the Gospel] will be fulfilled: 'the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of Heaven in front of you'. [16]

When I entered this horrible city and had found it full of countless disgraceful acts and evil deeds, I was very confused in my mind. 'Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me and horror hath overwhelmed me, [17] because I had received such 'a heavy burden and grievous to be borne' [18] and I was about to give an account for these people to the stern Judge. Murders took place, both in public and private almost every day and night. Husbands strangled their wives by night when they displeased them. Women murdered their husbands with poisons and potions in accordance to ancient custom so that they might marry someone else. There were people selling deadly potions and poisons in the city. Hardly anyone dared to entrust himself to somebody else, 'and a man's foes shall be they of his own house'. [19] One man admitted to us that he was feeding certain animals in his house. From the dung of the animals he mixed the potions in such a skilful manner that the person who wanted to destroy his enemy found there the means through which he could kill him in the way he wanted. Thus his enemy might, if he wished, be weak for a year, or a month, or if he wanted to hasten his death then his enemy would not live for more than a day. The city was everywhere filled with prostitutes, and because these prostitutes paid higher rents for their lodgings than did other people, not only laymen but even churchmen and some members of the regular clergy rented out their lodgings to public prostitutes through the whole city. Who would be able to list all the crimes of this second Babylon, where Christians refused baptism to their Saracen servants, even though these Saracens earnestly and tear fully begged for it?

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[14] *Matthew*, xxiii.13 &15.
[15] Cf. *Ezekiel*, xxxiv.3.
[16] *Matthew*, xxi.31
[17] *Psalm*, liv.6 (Vulgate), lv.5 (AV).
[18] *Matthew*, xxiii.4.
[19] *Matthew*, x.36.

For their masters used to say – 'Oh my soul come not into their counsel! [20] – 'if those people should be Christians, we shall not be able to exploit them as we would like'.

Being put in such great and unhappy confusion I took refuge in the unique and singular help of the Divine piety, 'who has no pleasure in the death of a sinner but that he should turn from his way and live'. [21] And since the grace of the Holy Spirit does not work slowly, once they began willingly and eagerly to hear the word of God, 'that cures all', [22] 'where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly'. [23] For within a short time they had turned towards the Lord, so that both by day and night they ran unceasingly to me with tears and groans and confessed their sins to me with contrition. I gave the sign of the holy cross to almost everyone, enjoining upon them that they should prepare arms and the other things needed for the rescue of the Holy Land. I gave orders to the women who had been signed by the cross that they give money to the army according to their own resources. Nevertheless I imposed a moderate penitence upon them for their sins. Some of Saracens, hearing how the Lord worked, 'flowed together to baptism'. [24] Many of them, so they claimed, had been warned in a dream, either by Lord Jesus Christ or by the Blessed Virgin or by some other saint, that they should bring themselves over from the error of Mohammed to the grace of Christ. They declared that the Blessed Virgin had said to them that if they did not become Christians, they would soon die an unhappy death when the Christians arrived and obtained victory.

Through what happened in the city of Acre the Lord 'opened a great door unto me', [25] for the remaining cities of our land in which Christians live desired to follow the example of Acre and to hear the word of Divine preaching. After receiving the sign of the cross, they wanted to hand over themselves and their own property to the Lord for the defence of the Holy Land, on account of their sins. These places were Tyre, Beirut, Gibelet, the town of Crac, Tortosa, Margab, Chastel Blanc, Tripoli, Antioch, and the island of Cyprus – it had an archbishopric with three bishoprics – as well as Jaffa and

[20] *Genesis*, xlix.6.
[21] *Ezekiel*, xxxiii.11.
[22] *Wisdom*, xvi.12.
[23] *Romans*, vi.20.
[24] Sulpicius Severus, *Life of St. Martin*, III.5.
[25] *I Corinthians*, xvi.9

Caesarea. These are the cities and towns which the Lord has left to us. They were very much in need of preaching [there].

The Saracens were very afraid of the arrival of the pilgrims, whereas with joy and with longing we looked forward to the help of the Holy One and the early arrival of the faithful pilgrims to succour Holy Land. Thus the 'heritage of the Lord' [26] might be liberated from the infidel, the Church of God might be rebuilt in the East, and the Saracens, who were still held back by the fear of other people, might be securely converted to the Lord, while our Christians in the East who were oppressed under the lordship of pagans might be set free. I believe, as I learned by report from many people, that there are almost as many Christians among the Saracens as there are Saracens themselves and that they are every day waiting tearfully for the assistance of God and the help of the pilgrims. Yet I did not enter the promised land, the holy and 'pleasant land', [27] although the city of Acre is not far away from the land where Jesus Christ lived – where he was conceived and brought up and [where] the Angel Gabriel announced the unique joy to the Virgin – that is no more than eight miles from Nazareth, and no more than three miles from Mount Carmel, where the Prophet Elias led the life of a hermit, which I looked at with deep sighs every time that I opened the windows of my house. Through fear of the Saracens I have not yet visited the Holy places; it is as if I have water at my chin but have not yet drunk it. However, I am waiting for the help of God, which He will send to us at an appropriate time.

Just as the bond of Christ's love joins our minds together, I want to link our names by means of the present letter and to write to you jointly in order that there may be shared joy about my success and shared suffering about my failures. You are to write back about your situation and about these matters from which my soul may derive some consolation.

Before the army arrived I arranged my life in the following way. After mass was celebrated at daybreak I receive sinners right through until after midday. Finally, once I have with some difficulty taken food - for I have lost my appetite for eating and drinking since I entered this land beyond the sea – it is my duty to visit the sick throughout the city

[26] *Psalm*, cxxvi.3 (Vulgate), xxvii.3 (AV).

up until nones or vespers. After this there is an upsetting and most anxious matter, for I receive the pleas of orphans, widows and other people upon whom the injustice of men had brought such great evil that I am unable to describe it. As a result I do not have leisure time for reading unless I hide myself at mass or at matins or some other moment for a very short period of time. I have indeed reserved time for prayer and contemplation at the dead of night. Yet there were moments when I was upset that I could not have time either for prayer or for the consideration of my weakness. You, my dearest friends, pray for me that God should give me true humility and patience to endure suffering for the salvation of my soul and to assist the Holy Land, that the good Lord should deem to lighten the darkness in the East, that he should advance the affairs of the Holy Land and that he should grant me and all my friends a good life and a happy end, in order that in this way we may pass through good things in this world and that we may not lose the eternal things [to come].

After I had 'sown the Word' [28] of God by Divine grace among the people of Acre throughout the entire winter period and [after] a great multitude from this totally depraved city had been converted to the Lord, other cities heard how the Lord was working and inspired by the example of the people of Acre sent frequent messengers to me, begging that, moved by charity, I should visit them. I realised that 'a great door had been opened unto me' [29] – since Lent was approaching – even though the route was very difficult and dangerous, for I had to go through the land of Saracens, and in particular through the land of the people who were called the Assassins. Trusting in the help of the Lord, I set out on my journey, with many people lamenting and weeping.

On my arrival in the city of Tyre I was received with joy and love both by clerics and by the laity, to whom I preached the word of God for several days. The seed 'fell on good ground' [30] because of Divine grace; for almost all of them, after making confession of their sins and receiving the sign of the cross, presented themselves and their property to the Lord. I saw the well of waters upon which it is said that the Lord rested when he

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[27] *Psalm*, cv.24 (Vulgate), cvi.24 (AV).
[28] *Mark*, iv.14.
[29] *I Corinthians*, xvi.9 (cf. above).
[30] *Mark*, iv.8.

came to the districts of Tyre and Sidon. Solomon described it literally in the Song of Songs, as 'a well of living waters, which flows with a rush from Lebanon'. [31] Mount Lebanon is not far away from that place. Through underground channels the abundant waters flow all the way down to that place where they form a great well, almost like a small lake, which does not have, as I believe, anything like it in the whole world. The knights of Tyre led me all the way to Sarepta [Zarephath], which belongs to the people of Sidon, where I made a delay over night, preaching to the Christians whom I found there. I made it clear to them how they ought to live properly among the Saracens, 'that the name of the Lord should not be blasphemed' [32] among the Gentiles because of them; for they were very corrupted [living] in the city of Saracens. I uncovered to them to the best of my ability the deceit of Mohammed and his damnable teaching, because some of them were limping along, as if hesitating between the law of the Christians and that of the Saracens. I visited a small chapel that lies abandoned in the field outside the city, where Elias came to a widow who was collecting firewood in Zarephath. [33]

When I was about to go from there to Beirut, past the city of Sidon, which the Saracens hold, I sent messengers in advance so that the knights of that city might come to meet me. Meeting me with a large number of armed men, they escorted me and my companions through the territory of the Saracens. The archbishop of the Syrians, who was living in Sidon among the Saracens, rushed out to me on foot outside the city. I passed through the place where the woman of Canaan shouting after the Lord ran [towards him] and declared with all humility that 'the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' tables'. [34] I passed by two springs at the foot of Mount Lebanon, namely Jor and Dan, from which the River Jordan has its source and from these the name 'Jordan' is drawn. When the heat is very great in summer, snow is brought forth from Mount Lebanon and kept safe under straw and sold at great price so that it may be mixed with wine to cool it and make the wine chill.

After I had stayed for several days in the city of Beirut and preached the Word of

[31] *Song of Solomon*, iv.15.
[32] *I Timothy*, vi.1.
[33] *I Kings*, xvii.10.
[34] *Matthew*, xv.27.

God to its inhabitants, with both women and men and even children all having been marked with the sign [of the cross] and having given this sign [also] to the lord of the city along with his knights, [35] I passed on to the city of Biblos. It is said in the Book of Kings that the elders of Biblos used to send wood from Lebanon for the building of the temple of the Lord. [36] The people of the city, from the most humble to the greatest, received me with great joy. Having heard the word of God, they were contrite and moved their to penitence. This city was most corrupt and the bishop of this place was extremely poor but generous and humble. He received the sign of the cross along with the lord of the city and all its people. I then set off for Tripoli, and I found vineyards which were harvested twice a year and a spring irrigating a large number of vineyards, which fulfils to the letter what the Song of Songs says about 'a fountain of gardens'. [37] As I approached Tripoli, the count of the city and prince of Antioch came out to meet me with many knights. [38] In this city I had to fight 'with beasts at Ephesus'. [39] Seeing that everyone was turned towards the Lord, I stayed in the city for a month. Because the general language of the city was the Saracen tongue, I often used interpreters to preach and listen to confessions.

From there I passed on to a town which was called Crac. This was next to the land of those people who were called the Assassins. Everywhere men and women and little children hastened to me with great devotion. Since we did not dare to send the messengers in advance, we despatched pigeons which carried our letters under the wings to the effect that the men of the city should run to meet us because of our fear of the pagans. From there we came to a certain town of the Templars, which is called Chastel Blanc. After I had preached the word of God for several days there, the brothers of the Military Order of the Temple escorted me with an armed troop all the way to the city which was called Antaradus [Tortosa], so called because it was situated opposite the island of Aruad. On this island there used to be pillars made of glass. [And] in the island the blessed Peter found a woman of noble birth – the mother of Saint Clement, who was begging for alms on that island – and brought her back to her son, who had lost her for many years. In that city there was a certain small and very holy chapel, which Saint

[35] John of Ibelin (died 1236).
[36] Cf. *I Kings*, v.6-10.
[37] *Song of Solomon*, iv.15 (cf. above).
[38] Bohemond IV (1201-33).
[39] *I Corinthians*, xv.32.

Peter – while passing through to Antioch – built in honour of the blessed Virgin, [and] which was the first church built in honour of the blessed Virgin, so it is said. The Lord performs so many miracles in the chapel that not only Christians but also Saracens came to it for the sake of pilgrimage. After I had celebrated mass in this church and had given a sermon to the people, I baptised two Saracens. When I had returned to my lodging, one of the Assassins, who had followed me over both sea and land in order to kill me, was caught after he was denounced by those who had converted to the Faith. He was put into prison, and thus the Lord delivered me from his hands.

From there I travelled with an armed guard to a city that had a most strongly fortified citadel. This castle was called Margab. There I preached the word of God for several days. I had intended to go on to Antioch by sea, for the lord of the city along with the clergy and people were eagerly expecting my arrival. But the Patriarch of Jerusalem [40] sent a letter telling me to return because the fleet had been announced and we were expecting the arrival of the pilgrims. I then returned to Tripoli, intending to sail to Cyprus. Because the king of Cyprus sent a letter to me along with his messengers, I had a galley prepared. However, I waited for fifteen days and could not get a favourable wind. Then I heard that one of hermits of the Black Mountain – which is called *Nero* in Greek – had crossed to Cyprus; he, so he claimed, having a cross branded on his flesh which the blessed Virgin had indented onto his breast, and that she had sent him to Cyprus. I was reluctant to go there since this hermit had [already] given the sign of the cross to the king, the clergy and people. Therefore, through the grace of God and avoiding the many deadly dangers, I returned to our city.

The people of Acre had been annoyed my absence and they frequently went out of the city when they had been told that I was about to return. After they had been going out to meet me for several days, they received reliable news of my arrival. They rushed out to meet me with their women and little children. Now in the city of Acre I usually look out to the sea with tears and great longing, expecting the arrival of the pilgrims, for I believe that if through the grace of God we had four thousand armed knights, we would not find anyone able to stand against us, for there is great division among the Saracens. Many of

[40] Ralph of Merencourt, Patriarch 1215-24.

them, indeed, realising the error of their ways, would be converted to the Lord, if they dared and had the help of the Christians. I believe too that Christians who live among the Saracens are more numerous than the Saracens. Many Christian kings living in the regions of the East as far as to the land of Prester John, hearing of the arrival of the crusaders, would come to help them and make war on the Saracens.

Because they have many different sects, the Saracens are very much divided among themselves. Some observe the law of Mohammed, [while] others treat it with little respect and so they drink wine and eat pork contrary to the teaching of Mohammed, nor do they circumcise themselves after the manner of other Saracens. The old abbot of the mountain belongs to the cult of Brothers of the knife, who do not uphold any law except that they believe they will be safe by obedience [to him], no matter what instruction is given to them. These people are called the Assassins. They kill both Christians and Saracens. There are other Saracens who are called members of the Hidden Law. They observe a law which they reveal to no one except for their sons when the latter are already of advanced age, with the result that their wives know nothing about what their husbands believe. They allow themselves to be killed before they reveal the secret of their law to anyone except to their sons. There are other people, miserable and without any law, who say that on the Day of Judgement when the Lord will ask: 'why have not you uphold the law of Jews?', they will respond: 'Lord, we were not bound to follow it, because we have not accepted it and we were not Jews'. 'Why have you not upheld the law of the Christians?' 'Oh, Lord, we were not bound to uphold it, because we have not been Christians; similarly, we have been under no obligation to uphold the law of Saracens, because we have not been Saracens.' In this way they believe to escape on the Day of Judgement by separating themselves off from others. Nevertheless, the Lord says 'He that is not with me is against me'. [41] I found other people who say that their souls die along with their body. Hence they follow their worst instincts and do anything they want to, just like beasts.

Because I could not preach in the land of the Saracens, I preached whenever I could on the frontier between the lands of the Christians and the Saracens. Through a

[41] *Matthew*, xii.30

letter written in the Saracen language, which I sent to them, I showed them their faults and the truth of our law. Many Saracens had their sons baptised by Syrian priests with the sole purpose of them living longer. Among those who are reckoned by the name of Christians I found many who through a lack of sound teaching were erring greatly in our faith. They are divided into four principal groups. The Syrians, just like Greeks, say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. The Nestorians assert that there are two persons in Christ, just as there are two natures and two wills in Him. Hence, although Christ is God, they say that Mary was the mother of Christ, but not the mother of God. All the inhabitants who live in the land of Prester John used to be of this denomination, or so I was told by a merchant who had recently come from there. They recently all became Jacobites, who say that there is only one nature and one will, just as [there is] one person in Christ. For His human nature was taken away, as they wrongly assert, by the Divine nature, just as a drop of water which is poured into wine will be absorbed by the wine. However, the Patriarch of the Maronites, along with his archbishops and bishops as well as people of the Maronites who are subject to him, has abandoned all his errors and placed himself under obedience to the holy and catholic Roman Church. In my opinion, many people, both from the heretics remaining in the Eastern regions and from the Saracens, would be easily converted to the Lord if they heard sound doctrine. [I ask] you [to] pray to the Lord, who 'hates nothing of those that he has made' and 'who will have all men to come unto knowledge of the truth', [42] that He should see fit to enlighten the darkness of the East in these days. Amen.

Pray for me and for my companions and especially for my chaplain and most faithful friend, John of Cambrai.

[42] *Wisdom*, xi.25; *I Timothy*, ii.4.