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ANDREA RIZZI

TRANSLATING THE CRUSADES. WILLIAM OF TYRE AND MATTEO MARIA BOIARDO

This article considers Matteo Maria Boiardo's contribution to the vernacular appropriation and transmission of William of Tyre's late twelfth-century *Chronicon* in Renaissance Italy. It takes a necessarily long view of the source for Boiardo's digression on the Crusades in his translation of the *Historia Imperiale*. Such a view allows us to better understand the intricate, multi-lingual, and surprising textual heritage essential to his translation.

In Italy and Europe, interest in the Crusades persisted during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Despite the losses of Crusader holdings in Antioch in 1268, Acre in 1297, Constantinople in 1453, and Negroponte in 1470, preachers and historians continued to promote the expeditions to the East undertaken during the 1450s and 1460s. They also continued to stir crusading sentiments amongst their audiences.¹ Such sentiments were kept

¹ There is a recent and growing literature on crusades and their reception between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. See N. Ben-Aryeh Debby, *Crusade*

alive through three different types of texts: the sermons of preachers such as Bernardino da Siena and Michele Carcano of Milan, which strongly advocated the need for more crusading in the East; pilgrims' books, which attracted the interest of pious and travel-oriented readers who were seeking up-to-date information on geography, itineraries, customs, accommodation; histories, which served to rekindle the memory of the success of the First Crusade, or to expose the cruelty and violence of the infidels. In this case, the category 'histories' does not refer solely to more or less historical texts, but also literature and pseudo-epics, such as the twelfth-century *Chanson de Roland*, or *Li Fet Des Romains* (1213-1214). The inventories of ducal libraries in fifteenth-century Ferrara and Mantua indicate without doubt the relevance accorded to French, franco-provençal, and vernacular poems and stories of the Crusades.

Propaganda in Word and Image in Early Modern Italy: Niccolò Guidalotto's Panorama of Constantinople (1662), in "Renaissance Quarterly", 67, 2014, pp. 503-543; J. A. Cavallo, *The World Beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013; Id., *Nur ad-Din to Norandino: The Middle East in Boiardo's "Orlando Innamorato"*, in *Global Perspectives on Italian Literature, Cinema, and Culture*, edited by T. Riviello, Salerno, Edisud, 2012, pp. 17-33; *Writing the Early Crusades: Text, and Memory*, edited by M. Bull and D. Kempf, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2014; P. E. Chevedden, *Crusade Creationism 'versus' Pope Urban II's Conceptualization of the Crusades*, in "The Historian", 75, 2013, pp. 1-46; F. delle Donne, *Tradizioni testuali e (ri)scrittura della storia: Il caso del "Breve chronicon de rebus Siculis"*, in "Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken", 96, 2017, pp. 174-190; N. R. Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2007; *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century: Message and Impact*, edited by N. Housley, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; N. S. Lambert, *Reframing the Crusade in the Piccolomini Library: Pinturicchio's "Standing Turk" in Siena Cathedral, 1502-1508*, in *The Crusades and Visual Culture*, edited by E. Lapina, A. Jehan Morris, S. A. Throop, L. J. Whatley, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, pp. 223-240; T. F. Madden, *The Venetian Version of the Fourth Crusade: Memory and the Conquest of Constantinople in Medieval Venice*, in "Speculum", 87, 2012, pp. 311-344, and A. Moudarres, *Crusade and Conversion: Islam as Schism in Pius II and Nicholas of Cusa*, in "Modern Language Notes", 128, 2013, pp. 40-52. I wish to thank Cynthia Troup for her invaluable suggestions while drafting this work.

The first and second types of texts – the sermons and travel writing about pilgrimages – have received plenty of scholarly attention in the last few decades.² By contrast, much less consideration has been given to the Italian reception and transmission of historical and literary writings on Crusades over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. To be fair, an overview of Humanistic literature on the Crusades can demonstrate how humanists – from Petrarch to Benedetto Accolti – promoted the political cause of a new Crusade before Italian princes and rulers such as Federico da Montefeltro, Borso d’Este, Francesco Sforza, and Doge of Venice Cristoforo Moro.³ Most of the texts that the humanists produced in this vein are orations, poems, dialogues, and short essays.

Still needed, however, is a thorough study of the vernacularisation of Crusade histories in the Italian peninsula. Of course, as both practice and process vernacularisation tended to involve creative appropriation as well as quotation. Yet very little is known about which specific texts concerning the Crusades were translated and circulated amongst Italian medieval and early modern chroniclers and historians. Such circulation has merely been acknowledged in contemporary scholars’ passing remarks about the use of a principal Latin source for the history of the first two Crusades, William of Tyre’s late twelfth-century *Chronicon*. In mentioning this Latin source, scholars agree that William of Tyre’s work and its continuations circulated widely.⁴ They also imply that, where the *Chronicon* was known, such

² See F. Cardini, *In Terrasanta. Pellegrini italiani tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2002, p. 194.

³ See R. Black, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁴ See, notably, F. Cardini, *In Terrasanta. Pellegrini italiani tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, cit., p. 194, and B. Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2002, p. 49. For William of Tyre’s life and work see R. B. C. Huygens, *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi “Chronicon”*. *Identification des sources historiques et détermination des dates par H. E. Mayer et G.*

knowledge may have been indirect, through one of the several vernacular versions that circulated from the early thirteenth century onwards, or through works by Matthew Paris and Jacques of Vitry.⁵

Any reference ‘various continuations’ understates the tremendously complex tradition of abridged and vernacular versions of William of Tyre’s *Chronicon*. Such a tradition has occupied medievalists and Crusade scholars ever since Louis de Mas Latrie produced his chronologically-based recension of texts stemming from William of Tyre’s Latin work. Still, to date the textual heritage of the *Chronicon* has not received adequate attention from studies concerning Italian histories of the Crusades.⁶

This article sheds new light on the nature of texts used by Italian translators such as Boiardo to evoke the first two Crusades during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. My focus is the role of vernacular translation in the broader promotion of crusading ventures across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Whether French or Italian, vernacular versions of William of Tyre’s Latin text offered a malleable narrative that

Rosch, Turnhout, Brepols, 1986; P. W. Edbury and J. G. Rowe, *William of Tyre: Historian of the Latin East*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁵ Regarding the indirect transmission by Matthew Paris (in the *Historia Minor*, 1231) and Jacques of Vitry, see B. Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient*, cit., p. 49.

⁶ See *La Chronique d’Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, publiée pour la première fois d’après les manuscrits de Bruxelles, de Paris et de Berne, avec un Essai de classification des continuateurs de Guillaume de Tyr, pour la Société de l’histoire de France, par M. L. de Mas Latrie, Paris, chez M.me V^e Jules Renouard, 1871. Paul Riant also produced a slightly revised version of Mas Latrie’s recension: see P. Riant, *Inventaire sommaires des manuscrits de l’Eracles*, in “Archives de l’Orient latin”, I, 1881, pp. 247-256 and pp. 716-718. Both works have been subsequently improved by Jaroslav Folda (see J. Folda, *Manuscripts of the History of Outremer by William of Tyre: A Handlist*, in “Scriptorium”, 27, 1973, pp. 90-95), and Margaret Ruth Morgan (see M. R. Morgan, *The Chronicle of Ernoul and the Continuations of William of Tyre*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 3-7, pp. 13-16 and pp. 25-26). The latter exposes the problems inherent to classifying the versions according to the date at which the continuations of the *Chronicon* ended: such an approach has very little to say about the content of the texts and the relationship between the works.

could be constantly modernised and updated. The source narrative furnished by William of Tyre was, in fact, the inspiration for translative *enargeia* –producing clarity and vividness of representation.⁷ The Latin source became, in the vernacular, a series of multi-layered texts subjected to constant rewriting.

1. *William of Tyre's "Chronicon" in Renaissance Italy*

William of Tyre (circa 1130-1184) wrote the *Chronicon* between 1170-1184.⁸ There appear to survive now in European library collections only nine copies of his Latin text, a number that contrasts starkly with the seventy-three documented vernacular versions.⁹ In all, only two copies of William of Tyre's *Chronicon* – made between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and owned in the Italian peninsula – survive today. This is hardly surprising, given that only seven other manuscript copies of the Latin text are still known (three are located in the United Kingdom, and four in France). The earliest testimony in the Italian peninsula is an early thirteenth-century copy long held in the Vatican Library – ms. Vat. Lat. 2002, probably acquired after the 1439 Council of Florence and recorded in the inventory of Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447).¹⁰ There are reasons to

⁷ On translative *enargeia*, and its effects, see Y. Lindeman, *Translation in the Renaissance: A Context and a Map*, in "Canadian Review of Comparative Literature - Special Issue: Translation in the Renaissance", 8, 2, Spring 1981, pp. 204-216.

⁸ See R. B. C. Huygens, *La tradition manuscrite de Guillaume de Tyr*, in "Studi Medievali", 5, 1964, pp. 318-321.

⁹ See Id., *Introduction*, in *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi "Chronicon"*, Édition critique par R. B. C. Huygens, Identification des sources historiques et détermination des dates par H. E. Mayer et G. Rösch, Turnholti, Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1986, vol. I, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ See Id., *La tradition manuscrite de Guillaume de Tyr*, cit., p. 285. The oldest inventory of the Vatican Library describes Vat. Lat. 2002 thus: "Liber istoriarum Syrie et Passagii, in pergameno, optima littera, cohopterus rubeo, cum clavis magnis ereis, et incipit: Periculosum" (R. B. C. Huygens, *Introduction*, cit., p. 7).

believe that this version was written in France. It belongs to a separate branch of the *Chronicon's stemma codicum*, since it contains the otherwise unknown Chapter XIX, 12, bearing important details about the life of William of Tyre.¹¹ Another Latin copy of the *Chronicon* is held in the Vatican Library, Reg. Lat. 690, made during the second half of the thirteenth century. This copy omits several chapters from the *Chronicon*, to the extent that it should be described as a collection of extracts.¹² The Latin text seems to have been mostly ignored or unknown until its sixteenth-century *editio princeps* (Basileae, apud Nicolaum Brylingerum et Ioannem Oporinum, 1549). The first printed translation into Italian vernacular of William of Tyre's history was probably based on this edition: published in Venice, by Valgrisi, in 1562, it was titled *Historia della guerra sacra di Gierusalemme, della terra di promissione, e quasi di tutta la Soria recuperata da' Christiani*.

Numerous French renderings of the *Chronicon* circulated in France and Italy only a few decades after the Latin work was written. Several French versions and continuations of the work were compiled and copied almost incessantly in Acre, Antioch, France, and Italy throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Some of these versions modernised and updated the Latin text by bringing the chronology of the original narrative from 1184 to the end of the thirteenth century – just before the 1291 capitulation of Acre, and the ensuing end of the first Crusades, until the Crusade revival following the fall of Constantinople in

¹¹ *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi "Chronicon"*, cit., vol. I, p. 313 (XIX, 12): "ego Willelmus domini patientia sancte Tyrensis ecclesie minister indignus". On the importance of chapter XIX for the biography of William of Tyre see R. B. C. Huygens, *Guillaume de Tyr étudiant. Un chapitre (XIX. 12) de son "Histoire" retrouvé*, in "Latomus", 1962, pp. 811-829.

¹² See Id., *La tradition manuscrite de Guillaume de Tyr*, cit., pp. 289-300 and Id., *Introduction*, cit., pp. 6-7.

1453. The five known French translations were made or kept in the Italian peninsula during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; these are as follows. The codex Pal. Lat. 1963 (Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), was produced in Antioch between 1260 and 1268 by what appears to have been an artist from the south of the Italian peninsula.¹³ The codex Plut. LXI. 10 (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana) includes a French continuation of the *Chronicon* – the only version stretching to the year 1277;¹⁴ Ms. Fr. 9082 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale) was written in Rome circa 1295, and is known as the “Noailles Manuscript” because it belonged to Jean-Baptiste Louis Gaston of Noailles (1669-1720).¹⁵ The Ms. Fr. 2631 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale), produced in Lombardy between 1291 and 1295, was owned by the Visconti family in the fifteenth century and kept in their library at Pavia until Louis XII seized Milan in 1499 and transported the library to Blois.¹⁶ And the Ms. Reg. Lat. 737 (Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), is a codex produced in Paris during the early fourteenth century.¹⁷

Except for Pal. Lat. 1963, all of the French translations described above contain a rubric describing the work as the “Book(s) of the

¹³ See J. Folda, *A Crusader Manuscript from Antioch*, in “Rendiconti. Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia”, s. III, 42, 1969-1970, pp. 283-298; Id., *The Crusader Art in the Holy Land, From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 350.

¹⁴ See Id., *Crusader Manuscript Illumination at Saint-Jean d’Acre 1275-1291*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 192-196.

¹⁵ See Id., *Manuscripts of the History of Outremer by William of Tyre: A Handlist*, cit., p. 95.

¹⁶ See Id., *Crusader Manuscript Illumination at Saint-Jean d’Acre 1275-1291*, cit., p. 213.

¹⁷ See *ibidem*. There are other testimonies of the Old French continuations in Italy (Turin. Biblioteca Nazionale) but these are partial copies only and are yet to be studied in detail: ms. L II 1, France, fifteenth century; ms. L III 32, North France, possibly fourteenth century; ms. L.I.5, North France, fifteenth century; ms. L.II.17, early fourteenth century. See J. Folda, *Manuscripts of the History of Outremer by William of Tyre: A Handlist*, cit., p. 92 and p. 95.

Conquest” [of the Holy Land or Jerusalem]. This title accompanies the *incipit* in the form of a rubric attached to the first historiated initial in the text. Evidently, this is how the French versions of William of Tyre’s work were known in the Italian peninsula.¹⁸

Tracing the transmission and transformation of the *Chronicon* in Renaissance Italy is also complicated by modern medievalists’ use of different titles for the main group of continuations of William of Tyre’s works, causing unnecessary confusion. For English-language readers, it is not difficult to encounter the title *History of Outremer*, for example. Another variant for the translations of the Latin work, and the continuations, centre on the French name Eracles, whether in the title *Estoires d’Eracles*, *Livre d’Eracles*, or *Roman d’Eracles*.¹⁹ Yet the only surviving thirteenth-century French and fourteenth-century Tuscan translations of the *Chronicon*, and the continuations, provide no title for the text.²⁰ In other words, the titles used by modern scholars are arbitrary, and

¹⁸ Further evidence of the fact that the French translations and continuations were, in the fourteenth century, described as the “livre dou conquest” comes from the following texts: *La flor des estoires de la terre d’orient* by the Armenian Hayton of Gorhigos (early fourteenth century): “Si comme se contient plenerement eu livre de la conqueste de la Terre Sainte” (in *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Documents Arméniens*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, vol. II, 1906, p. 176), whereas the Latin version of this text has “sicut plenius continetur in libro conquestus Godofredi de Boliono”; and the anonymous *Les Gestes des Chiprois*: “Mcxlvii [the Saracens are defeated by the Christians by the French king] et bien eüssent prissee la cité, se ne fust une layde achaisson quy se parle au Livre dou Conquest, mais escurément le dit” (in *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Documents Arméniens*, cit., p. 654)

¹⁹ M. R. Morgan, *The Chronicle of Ernoul and the Continuations of William of Tyre*, cit., p. 2, gives the latter titles in italics.

²⁰ It is worth pointing out that the following Latin copies of William’s text do not have a title: Bibliothèque Nationale France (BNF), Lat. 17801 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 95. Instead, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Médecine de Montpellier 91 and BNF, Lat. 6066 bear the following title: “Incipit hystoria (historia) rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum a tempore sucessorum Mahumeth usque ad annum domini M.C.LXXXIII, edita a venerabili Guillelmo (Willelmo) Tyrensi archiepiscopo” (f. 1r). Two other manuscripts – British Library, Royal C. X and Cambridge, Magdalene College, F.4.22 – reveal the authorship both in the *incipit* and *explicit*, “Incipit Prologus Domini Guillelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi in Hystoriam

mislead readers into thinking that *Eracles* or *Estoires d'Eracles* are the names generally used for the Old French continuations of William of Tyre's work. Instead, the titles that refer to Eracles are derived from the first sentence in Book I of these vernacular versions, as given here in both the Latin and Old French *incipit*:

“Docent veteres Historiae, et id ipsum etiam habent Orientalium traditiones, quod, tempore quo Heraclius Augustus Romanum administrabat imperium, Mahomet primogeniti Sathanae, qui se prophetam a domino missum mentiundo Orientalium regiones, et maxime Arabiam seduxerat.”

“Les anciennes estoires dient que Eracles qui mout fu bons Crestiens, governa l'empire de Rome. Mes on son tens Mahomez avoit ja este qui fu message au dable, et il fist entendant que il estoit propehetes envoiez de Dam le Dieu. El tens Eracles estoit ja la desloiautez et la fausse loi que il sema, espandue par toutes les terres d'Oriant et nomeement en Arrabe.”²¹

Be it a translation of the Latin text, or both a translation and continuation, the manuscripts for William of Tyre's *Chronicon* that were available in Italy from the early 1300s do not make the name of William of Tyre explicit. This is also the case with two manuscripts containing an image of the nameless author of the “livres”. This suggests that the author's name was unknown to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian historians and readers. The only example in which William of Tyre's name is mentioned openly is found in the manuscript Reg. Lat. 690, which contains

Ierosolimitanam” (f. 3v), and “Expliciunt libri de terra Ierosolimitana editi a venerabili viro Willelmo archiepiscopo Tyrensi” (f. 244v). Finally, only two manuscripts – BNF, Lat. 17801 and Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 690 – contain the following salutations: “Willelmus domini pacientia sancte Tyrensis ecclesie minister indignus vernerabilibus in Christo fratribus, ad quos presens opus pervenerit, eternam in domino salute” and “Omnibus Christi fidelibus Guillelmus Tyrensis ecclesie archidiaconus salute”.

²¹ *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi “Chronicon”*, cit., vol. I, p. 105 (I, 1) and *Estoires d'Eracles Empereur et la conquete de la terre d'outremer*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, publié par les soins de l'Académie Impériale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1844, t. I, p. I, p. 9 (I, 1).

an abridged version of the Latin *Chronicon*. The French versions and the continuations of William of Tyre's work seem to have taken over the Latin: this is confirmed by the paucity of evidence for the Latin version in Italy and Europe.²²

2. Matteo Maria Boiardo's Rewriting of the History of the Crusades

Crusade narratives that were translated and circulated in Italy from the thirteenth century onwards, most notably through the work of Matteo Maria Boiardo, indicate that the French and Italian vernacular materials were generated in good part through an oblique relationship to William of Tyre's *Chronicon*: a relationship that was only very faintly acknowledged.

Boiardo's commitment to vernacularisation of histories is now well appreciated, as is his tendency to have used and refashioned such works to elicit not merely the interest of dedicatees, but their favourable appreciation of a translation's political relevance and narrative colour. Boiardo's practice as a translator – including his choice and treatment of available sources – is the wider frame of reference for the key text about the Crusades I discuss, namely, Boiardo's vernacular version of the *Historia Imperiale* (1471-1473) by the early fourteenth-century historian Riccobaldo of Ferrara.²³ This text contains a digression on the Crusades that is perplexing for its inaccurate data, and for its dissimilarity from the other extant works by Riccobaldo.²⁴ The digression occupies most of Book Four,

²² See P. W. Edbury and J. G. Rowe, *William of Tyre: Historian of the Latin East*, cit., pp. 4-5.

²³ See T. A. Hankey, *Riccobaldo of Ferrara: His Life, Works and Influence*, Rome, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1996.

²⁴ See "*Historia Imperiale*" attribuita a Riccobaldo tradotta da Matteo Maria Boiardo, edited by A. Rizzi and A. Tissoni Benvenuti, Novara, Interlinea, 2019. On Boiardo as translator see D. Looney, *Fragil arte. Tradurre e governare nei volgarizzamenti boiardeschi ad Ercole I d'Este*, in *Il Principe e la storia*, a cura di S.

and relates a highly unreliable and dramatised version of the first three Crusades. Among the countless inaccuracies, I mention only two here: first, the *Historia Imperiale* relates the news that Pope “Alexandro secundo”,²⁵ not Urban II, summoned the Christian lords to Clermont, and the list of knights sailing from Europe to the Holy Land is highly inexact. Second, the most notable lords who joined the first Crusade are named as “Philippo, fratello di Carlo re di Francia, cum molti signori di quella provincia, fra’ quali il conte de la Rocia, il conte de la Mancia e il conte de Campagna e molti altri”.²⁶ I am at loss to explain who Philip, brother of King Charles, might be in this context. Most sources mention instead Hugh of Vermandois, brother of the King Philip, and the King himself, who promised to repent after committing adultery.

By the same token, throughout the *Historia Imperiale* references to the sources on Crusades used for this excursus reveal great perplexity. William of Tyre is variously named “Arnaldo vescovo di Tyro”, “Rainaldo vescovo di Tyro”, “Ranaldo lo arcivescovo di Tyro” or “arcivescovo di Tyro”,²⁷ confirming the confusion of interpolators and translators of William of Tyre’s work when naming the author of the Latin source. Instead, the thirteenth-century figure known as Bernard the Treasurer (who extended a succinct Old French translation of the *Chronicon*) is more consistently called “Bernardo Thesorieri” or “Thesurieri”, “il Thesorieri” or

Matarrese e C. Montagnani, Novara, Interlinea, 2005, pp. 117-130; R. M. Tristano, *The “Historia imperiale” of Matteo Maria Boiardo and Fifteenth-Century Ferrarese Courtly Culture*, in *Phaethon’s Children: The Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, edited by D. Looney and D. Shemek, Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005, pp. 129-168; Id., *History ‘Without Scruple’: The Enlightenment Confronts the Middle Ages in Renaissance Ferrara*, in “*Medievalia et Humanistica*”, 38, 2013, pp. 79-120; T. Zanato, *Boiardo*, Roma, Salerno, 2015, pp. 84-144.

²⁵ “*Historia Imperiale*” attribuita a Ricobaldo tradotta da Matteo Maria Boiardo, cit. p. 506.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 507.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 506, p. 525 and p. 673.

simply “Bernardo”.²⁸ These references suggest that Riccobaldo and Boiardo did not have direct access to or knowledge of William of Tyre’s *Chronicon*, and used instead one of the numerous continuations of this work. More specifically, it can be inferred that the author of the *Historia Imperiale* knew that an archbishop of Tyre had written a major account of the Crusades but did not have the work to hand, despite claiming to have it right in front of him:

“Arnaldo vescovo di Tyro, il quale ne li ultimi tempi a molte di quelle cose se trovò presente, cum pocha elegancia ma cum molta dichiarazione e fidelitate questa istoria scrive. E da esso habian nui summariamente ritratto questo de che facciamo mencione.”²⁹

Is Boiardo translating a work that draws directly from William of Tyre’s *Chronicon*? Let us consider the narrative of one of the most crucial episodes of the first Crusade, as described in the *Historia Imperiale* – namely, the siege of Antioch on 21 October 1097 until the fall of the city on 5 June 1098, when the wealthy Armenian Christian known as Firuz allowed the Christians to enter the city walls and thus take the city by surprise. Here is the passage in Boiardo’s text:

“Ma Idio, el qual riguarda a’ soi devoti, possse rimedio opportuno al grandissimo bisogno in questo modo. Erano in Antiochia molti Cristiani e’ quali, subietti al dominio de’ Saracini, ne le opere e ne la difesa de la terra loro obediano a quanto li era comandato». Tra questi doi fratelli per vicenda, a certo determinato giorno guardavano una de le torre de la città, da quella parte dove Boamondo soa gente tenea. Costui, tirato a maraviglia da le odite virtute di quel principe, le quale anchor dentro da la terra e’ Saracini il faceano amare, deliberò, quanto in lui fosse, di farlo suo signore. «E scritto un picholo breve in Greche littere, de le quale era esso instructo, e ligatolo ad una sagitta, lo trette fora in maniera che a Boamundo fu portato». Esso, cum poche parole, in minutissime littere dimostrava come per una fune da la torre gitata riceveria ne la torre quelle gente che a lui piacesse; ma tale beneficio non volere lui fare a tuto l’hoste comunamente, né a tutti li baroni insieme, ma ad esso solo e, quando da li altri

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 599, pp. 678-681, p. 691 and p. 702.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 506.

non li fosse il dominio de la terra conceduto, non volere tal opera mandare ad effetto. [...] Boamundo, acceptando le cessione de altrui per solemne decreto, la sequente notte che per ventura era sortita a la guardia de lo amico suo, pose ordine a quello che far dovea. Ne la quinta hora de la notte il Cristiano, intrato sopra a la torre cum il fratello, sì come far solia, entrò cum esso suo frate in parlamento per comprendere qual fosse il pensiero suo in questo che lui, sancia sua saputa, trattato havea. Ma però non li scopria haverne fatta conclusione, ma solo de il suo parere il dimandava. E, trovando in tutto a questo pensiero contrario, oppresso da incredibile melinconia non sapea quello che se fare. Alfine deliberato de occiderlo, aspettava che quello se adromentasse. E già la quinta e la sexta hora de la notte passata era e quello pur non dormia; et essendo stato cum le armate gente Boamonte gran pecio aspettante, credendosi gabato, de ira e de vergogna insieme era tuto confuso. E quasi di partirssi dal consignato loco deliberava, quando colui, havendo il fratello occiso, li dete il convenuto segno tra loro e, fattossi il principe al saxo vicino, al quale sopra è fondato il forte muro, lo amico suo, per una scalla di corde che quivi suso cum uno filo havea tirata, <discese et, excusandosi de il tempo oltro al dovuto prolungato, li narra come il fratello occiso havea. Alhora fu più che prima la cosa sospetosa, non parendo verisimile ad alchuno che costui contro al proprio fratello per lo amore de uno apena da lui cognosciuto se fosse incrudelito. Esso, rimontato subitamente la torre, spiccò la testa al morto fratello e, gittola tra loro a terra, pregandoli cum bassa voce che non volesseno che invano tanto male avesse fatto per conseguir grandissimo bene. La incisa testa non era da persona cognosciuta, né a le sue parole era alcuna fede prestata e qualunque in compagnia di Boamundo era il più arditto negava di volere a la torre montare>. Esso a la fine, <trata la spata, signato de la croce>, volsse essere il primo a salire suso.³⁰

These passages loosely follow William of Tyre's *Chronicon*:

“Erant autem ex eis in civitate familiae valde nobiles, antiquam ducentes ex generosis proavis sanguinis dignitatem: [...] Erantque in ea familia duo fratres, quorum major, et qui contribulium suorum et familiae princeps erat, dicebatur Emirfeirus. [...] Hic autem, quoniam vir erat valde industrius et vafer, audiens quod dominus Boamundus princeps magnificus esset et illustris [...] per fideles internuntios ejus sibi conciliavit gratiam [...] Accidit autem eadem die, dum nostrae circa horam nonam egrederentur legiones, quod ambo fratres juncti adinvicem per cancellos murorum castra prospicerent, et egredienda contuerentur agmina: laborabat autem frater senior junioris nosse propositum, et ejus voluntatem diligenter indagare; unde exorsus ad fratrem dixit [...] Sic ergo qui prius dubitaverat an fratri suo communicaret propositum, nunc tanquam pestem declinans, abhorret animo, execratur in conscientia, et, ne Christi obsequium per eum praepediretur, de ejus coepit morte, charitati fraternae publicam fidelium praeponens salutem, tractare. [...] Interea ille vir praedictus turrim eamdem ingressus, fratrem reperit somno gravatum, cujus quia mentem noverat alienam a suo proposito, timens ne per eum rei jam pene consummatae ministraretur impedimentum, gladio transverberat, facto pius et sceleratus eodem. Post haec rediens ad cancellos, et quos evocari praeceperat praesentes conspiciens, dato et resumpto mutuae salvationis affatu, funem demittit inferius, quo scalam ad se pertrahat sublevatam. Erecta igitur

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 516-519.

scala, et tam a superiore parte, quam ab inferiore firmitus annexa, nemo repertus est qui ad vocem superioris vel domini Boamundi mandatum praesumeret ascendere et in se hujusmodi experimentum facere. Quod dominus Boamundus videns, conscendit ipse prior intrepidus. Cumque jam muri propugnaculo, transcurta scala, manum adhibuisset, comprehendens eam qui erat interior, sciens quia Boamundi esset manus, dixisse fertur: ‘Vivat haec manus’. Et ut ejus et omnium fidelium sibi majorem conciliaret gratiam, eo quod fratrem uterinum in opere tam sancto non consentientem transverberaverat, inducit eum in turrinam; et fratrem ostendit exanimem proprio sanguine cruentatum. Deosculatus igitur dominus Boamundus viri constantiam et fidei sinceritatem, ad murum rediens, emisso paulisper per cancellum capite, voce suppressa suos ad ascensum coepit invitare: cumque adhuc dubitarent, nec erat aliquis ausus ascendere, totum reputantes sophisticum, quidquid de muro dicebatur: quo cognito, ad suos per eandem scalam rediens, suae incolumitatis evidens dedit argumentum.”³¹

For context, it is worth looking closely at the opening of the excursus on the history of the Crusades in the *Historia Imperiale*:

“Ma grandissima historia se ne opone, ne lo anno secundo del suo imperio incomenciata, la quale indegna de la nostra brevitare meritarebe un Salustio, un Livio a sua narratione. Questo è il *conquisto de la Sancta Terra di oriente*, da’ principi Cristiani, veramente magnanimi e gloriosi, cum longa guerra tratto a fine.”³²

The reference to Sallust and Livy is not new: less than ten years before Boiardo embarked on the translation of the *Historia Imperiale*, Aretine humanist Benedetto Accolti (1415-1464) criticised his sources for failing to imitate Livy and Sallust in the preface to his *Dialogus* (1461-1463).³³ In the above quotation, however, is the phrase “conquisto de la

³¹ *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi “Chronicon”*, cit., vol. I, pp. 286-287 (V, 11), pp. 297-298 (V, 20) and pp. 299-300 (V, 21).

³² “*Historia Imperiale*” attribuita a Ricobaldo tradotta da Matteo Maria Boiardo, cit. pp. 505-506. Italics added.

³³ R. Black, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance*, cit., p. 299. The passage in Accolti’s preface does not refer explicitly to Sallust and Livy, as in his *Dialogus*, but to the inadequacy of the source used: “Ideo nuper libros legens, gesta eorum continentes, qui Christi sepulchrum, Judaeamque omnem recuperarunt, inepte scriptos absque ornatu orationis, atque ideo paucis notos, aegre tuli, ejusmodi viros illis non impares, quorum gesta prisca tradunt rerum scriptores, ita oscuros factos esse, ut qui fuerint, quae gesserint, pene ab omnibus ignorentur” (B. Accolti, *De Bello a Christianis Contra Barbaros Gesto pro Christi Sepulcro et Judea Recuperandis Libri IV*, Th. Dempsterus... notis non vulgaribus illustravit, nunc denuo ad exemplar florentino 1623

Sancta Terra di oriente” a direct reference to the title of the main source for the *Historia Imperiale*? A review of the medieval sources bearing a similar title seems to suggest that this is, indeed, the case. In their respective histories both Ricordano Malespini (d. 1292) and Giovanni Villani (ca. 1277-1344) mention a *Libro del conquisto di Oltramare*.³⁴ Unfortunately, the details given by Malespini and Villani on the Crusades are too scarce to corroborate the use of William of Tyre’s work or any of its derivatives. Yet in each case the title of the work used seems to confirm that “il libro del conquisto” was how the French version and continuations of William of Tyre’s texts – as they are described by the Italian manuscripts – were known.

Two further versions of William of Tyre’s *Chronicon* are known to have been available in Renaissance Italy, dated to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century respectively: the anonymous *Libro de la Gran Conquista de Ultramar*, and Francesco Pipino of Bologna’s *Historia de acquisitione Terrae Sanctae*. The *Libro de la Gran Conquista* is a Castilian translation of the French version of William of Tyre’s work written between 1295-1312. Importantly, this Spanish text contains two lengthy excursus that do not feature in Boiardo’s *Historia Imperiale*. These are: an account of the mythological ancestry of Geoffrey of Bouillon – a version of *La naissance du Chevalier au Cigne* – and the legend of Charlemagne and his repudiated wife Sibilla (generally known as the *Chanson de Sebile*).³⁵ Pipino’s early fourteenth-century *Historia de acquisitione Terrae Sanctae*

ab innumeris et foedissimis mendis expurgatum, emaculatus recundandus curavit H. Hofsnider, Groningae, Typis Jacobi Sipkes, 1731, p. 4).

³⁴ See R. Malespini, *Istoria fiorentina di Ricordano Malespini*, Florence, Tartini and Franchi, 1718, p. 80 (XCI) and G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, a cura di G. Porta, Parma, Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1990, vol. I, p. 90 (VI, xxviii).

³⁵ See G. Paris, *Compte-rendu de “La naissance du Chevalier au Cigne, ou les Enfants changeés en cygnet”...*, in “Romania”, 19, 1890, pp. 314-340.

is also a translation of the *Chronicon* from the French, but a retranslation into Latin.³⁶

The foregoing discussion suggests that, in Renaissance Italy, William of Tyre's work was not known directly, but rather through the French versions and continuations that are generically, if not collectively, described by Italian authors as the "book" or "history" "of the Conquest of the Holy Land". Further evidence for this means of transmission comes from Benedetto Accolti and Flavio Biondo. For his *De Bello a Christianis contra Barbaros Gesto Libri IV* Accolti preferred to resort to the eloquent narratives by Robert of St Remy (1055-1122) and Marin Sanudo (ca. 1270 - ca. 1343).³⁷ In his *Historiarum Decades ab Inclinationem Romanorum Imperii*, Biondo used Pipino's Latin version for the Crusades.³⁸ The use of derivative and translated versions of William of Tyre's work by both Accolti and Biondo imply that the original Latin text was not known to these fifteenth-century scholars. This certainly seems to be corroborated by Biondo's incorrect claim in his *Decades* that William of Tyre was a French author.³⁹

As discussed in this article, several versions of the *Chronicon* circulated in the Italian peninsula during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In several cases, they are also independent works – continuations, adaptations, displacements – of the 'original' text. Whether by accident or choice, the transference of crusade narratives by Italian

³⁶ See M. R. Morgan, *The Chronicle of Ernoul and the Continuations of William of Tyre*, cit., pp. 23-24.

³⁷ See C. Sweetenham, *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade: Historia Iherosolimitana*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005; M. Sanudo, *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis super Terrae Sanctae recuperatione et conservatione*, edited by J. Prawer, Toronto and Buffalo, Toronto University Press, 1972.

³⁸ See P. Buchholz, *Die Quellen der Historiarum Decades des Flavius Blondus*, Naumburg, Heinrich Sieling, 1881, p. 81.

³⁹ See Flavius Biondus, *Historiarum Decades ab Inclinationem Romanorum Imperii*, Basileae, in Officina Frobeniana, 1531, p. 216.

translators and historians appears to have been informed by the need to improve and modernise these texts, as part of quoting from them. Such historical narratives became even more poignant after the 1453 fall of Constantinople, rekindling the widespread interest in a new Crusade and pilgrimage to the Holy Land through considered rewriting of medieval sources. As much as scholars refer to the Carolingian cycle as an extremely complex and vibrant tradition of chivalric poems concerning the deeds of the Franks against the infidels, so we could refer to a ‘Tyrian cycle’, in which vernacular versions conflate one another or add to the original narrative in an intricate modernisation of Crusade narratives. Matteo Maria Boiardo had recourse to this ‘Tyrian cycle’ as part of making a northern Italian vernacular translation that would arguably reflect the power and praiseworthy qualities of the Este family in the 1470s.

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