

Dissertation module: The representation of heroism in the First Crusade 1095-1099: An analysis of heroism in *The Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* and *The Gesta Tancredi*

A Just war, one that satisfies the following conditions, 'a just war requires a just cause its aim must be defensive or for the recovery of rightful possession; legitimate authority must sanction it; those who fight must be motivated by right intent. Thus, war, by nature sinful, could be a vehicle for the promotion of righteousness; war that is violent could, as some later medieval apologists maintained that war could act as a form of charitable love to help the victims of injustice.'¹ Clearly laid out by Christopher Tyerman, these were the teachings of St Augustine of Hippo. They were later developed further by St Thomas Aquinas which would lead to the birth of the Just War theory. This ideology gave credence to a Christian holy war, an ideology seized upon by Pope Urban II. The pontiff roused the crowds at Clermont with the following words in 1095,

'A race absolutely alien to God has invaded the lands of the Christians, has reduced the people with sword rapine and flame. These men have destroyed the altars polluted by their foul practices. They have circumcised the Christians, either spreading the blood from circumcisions on the altars or pouring it onto the baptismal fonts. And they cut open the navels of those whom they choose to torment with loathsome death, tear out the most vital organs, and tie them to a stake, drag them around and then flog them,'² The description of the atrocities were very visceral intended to provoke strong emotions amongst the Christian populous and destined to unite the warring European factions against one common enemy, the Muslims.

Thomas Asbridge claims the ambitions behind the Popes preaching of a crusade were that Pope Urban II sought to re-establish a friendly connection with the Greek Church in the Byzantine as well as to expand and consolidate papal power and sphere of influence.³ Nevertheless, regardless of the underlying motives, the response to the Popes calling was extraordinary. Historians such as Asbridge believe between 60,000 and 100,000 Latin Christians took part in the First Crusade with around 7000 to 10,000 of that number being knights, 35,000 to 50,000 were infantry troops and the remainder non-combatants, women and children.⁴ Part of this vast contingent were the Italo-Norman lords Bohemond I of Taranto and his Nephew Tancred, later the Prince of Galilee of whom this essay will focus upon. This essay will analyse their actions during the First Crusade and how they were portrayed regarding heroism and compare and contrast the various ways these heroic deeds were conveyed to the reader in the two primary source documents. The primary source material being used is that of the *Gesta Tancredi* authored by Ralph of Caen and the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* by author(s) unknown but kindly translated by Professor Marcus Bull. The *Gesta Tancredi* primarily focuses upon the actions of Tancred of Hauteville and the *Gesta Francorum* focuses on the actions of Bohemond although interestingly in the *Gesta Francorum* the central character is left out almost entirely after the conquest of Antioch as the author carries on the journey with the rest of the Crusader contingent on towards Jerusalem. This essay will also utilise secondary source material to establish the historiographical debate surrounding the two documents and to support the arguments made.

¹ Tyerman Christopher, 'God's War', Penguin Group, (2007), p.34

² Robert the Monk, 'Historia Iherosolimitana', RHM Occ. III, pp 727-8

³ Asbridge Thomas, 'The First Crusade a New History', Simon and Schuster, (2005), pp 19-20

⁴ Asbridge Thomas, 'The Crusades: The War for the Holy Land', Simon and Schuster, (2012), p. 6

a real, limited sense the *Gesta Francorum* is a *chanson de geste*⁸ his evidence 'Like a good *Chanson* too, the *Gesta* has a hero in Bohemond. He is very frequently Dominus, the Lord Bohemond and the heroic epithets are rarely ascribed to other leaders, Bohemond is richly endowed with them. Tributes are delivered in his praise'. This idea will be explored later as a *chanson de geste* implies a great number of heroic deeds occurred which were romanticised which is the case and the focus of this essay on how these acts of heroism were portrayed. It is known that the *Gesta Francorum* has been rewritten or revised on at least three separate occasions all by Benedictine monks. The logic behind the rewriting of the *Gesta Francorum* is that the monks deemed the original too rudimentary and improperly written for such a noble cause, the monks in question were Robert of Reims, Guibert of Nogent, and Baudri of Bourgueil. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Baudri of Bourgueil actually states 'Some compiler or other, suppressing his name, produced a crude little book (*labellum ... nimis rusticanum*) on this subject' **Error! Bookmark not defined.** an obvious insult towards the author of the *Gesta Francorum* and his style of writing. There is also a secondary debate about whether or not Peter Tudebode's (a Poitevan priest) writing the *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere* which is extremely similar to that of the *Gesta Francorum* was, in fact, the original text from which the *Gesta Francorum* was inspired or if it was in fact alternatively the medieval practice of validation rather than plagiarism¹³. The authorship of the *Gesta Francorum* is an entirely different debate that this essay will not get pulled into but it is important to address the issue although even if it is rather briefly in order to identify the sources integrity. By identifying its integrity, it lets one understand how valuable the source is in its duty in accurately recreating the past. Regarding the narrative of these two idiosyncratic documents, firstly the *Gesta Francorum* as briefly touched upon Colin Morris writes 'The narrative is close to that of a vernacular culture. In a real and limited sense the *Gesta Francorum* is a *Chanson de Geste*.' **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Bohemond is the hero of this story, he holds all the characteristics of a good Christian man. He is brave, which is illustrated by his actions on the battlefield, a motivator illustrated by his rousing speeches to his troops and he is fair and just illustrated by the way he deals with the emperor Alexius I and the way he deals with certain captured prisoners of war. Morris analyses the grammatical devices and the literary components the authors uses to identify his occupation. Kenneth Baxter Wolf argues that the *Gesta Francorum*'s narrative suggests that the anonymous author had meant to portray Bohemond as a 'miles Christi par excellence dedicated to the success of the pilgrimage' 'whether or not this is the case will be explored in chapter one. Chapter two will explore the actions of Tancred in the first crusade and how the author tries to portray his main character by the heroic characteristic he ascribes to him.

Chapter one: The *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* and Bohemond I of Taranto's actions in the First Crusade

Early on in the *Gesta Francorum* prior to his arrival in the Levant Bohemond is given praise through epithets he is considered 'warlike' **Error! Bookmark not defined.** and described as 'moved by the Holy spirit'¹⁴ very much a soldier of God he is always ready to fight and serve God much like the Holy warriors of the biblical past. He is shown to be just and fair as he encourages his army to be 'good and humble'¹⁵ and 'not to pillage that land as it belonged to Christians'¹⁵ and not to take anything unless it was a sufficient amount to eat'¹⁵ the author

relationship between the primary sources for the First Crusade [in] *The crusades and their sources: essays presented to Bernard Hamilton*, (1998), p. 59

¹³ Kostick Connor, 'Courage and Cowardice on the First Crusade 1096-1099', *Sage Journals*, 20, pp. 32-49

¹⁴ Authors Unknown (Translated by Prof. Marcus Bull), 'Gesta Francorum The Deeds of the Franks and other Jerusalemmites', p. 5 (later references will be footnoted as GF with the corresponding page number)

¹⁵ GF, p. 6

endorsed by William Aird 'Generally acknowledged as the most effective general on the expedition, at least as far as Antioch, Bohemond seems to embody the martial qualities most associated with the gens Normannorum'³³.³⁴ Here Bohemond's Machiavellian characteristics are considered quintessentially Norman. It is interesting as according to these interpretations it would seem to be impossible to both display Norman characteristics and live an inherently miles Christi perfectly pious Christian lifestyle.

Bohemond's military skills as a commander are portrayed by his use of tactics and the organisation of his forces when after the 'desertion' of Tacticius a 'countless host of Turks'²⁸ was charging towards the crusader army. Bohemond commands his army delivering a set of orders to his fellow princes, the author documents Bohemond words 'Lords and most prudent Knights, what are we going to do? For there is not enough of us to be able to fight on two fronts, then again do you know what we should do? Let's split into two forces. The force made up of foot soldiers can stay to keep a close watch on the tents and resist those inside the city as far as they are able. The other force the Knights, can advance to confront our enemies who are camped here close to us in the castle of Aregh beyond the iron bridge'²⁸ The author portrays Bohemond as the supreme commander of the Christian forces who is well respected by his contemporaries and subordinates and they look to him to come up with a plan that will lead them to victory. This is supported by the fellow princes stating "You are wise and prudent, you are great and magnificent, you are strong and victorious, you arbiter of wars and judge of battles, let all command be yours, whatever seems good to you, see to it and get it done for us and for you"²⁸ they are keen to relinquish command to Bohemond and serve under him as they are well aware that he possesses far greater skills in command and has a proven track record in the field of battle. Again evidence that supports the argument that the crusader forces looked to Bohemond as a source of salvation a perception the author was trying to create. His skills as a motivating orator are also displayed shortly after the delivering of Bohemond's orders. As the battle commenced and Bohemond witnessed a portion of his army retreating in response to a Turkish charge he orders his constable Robert Fitz Girard to aid the retreating forces by giving him a rousing speech. 'Go as fast as you can, like a brave fellow, and be vigorous in bringing help for God and the Holy Sepulchre. And know for sure that this war is not one of the flesh but of the spirit. So be a brave athlete of Christ go in peace may the Lord be with you everywhere'³⁵ These motivating words were a catalyst for what transpired next a true representation of Bohemond's great military skill in the art of inspiring the hearts of those who heard his words and witnessed his actions. Robert Fitz Girard carried out his orders and Bohemond charged into battle, the author recounts he 'was like a lion suffering from hunger for three or four days who, quitting his caves and roaring and thirsting for the blood of cattle, races almost rashly amidst the massed flocks, savaging the sheep as the fly hither and thither. This was how he conducted himself in the midst of the Turkish formations. He pressed so strongly upon them that the tongues of his banner were flapping over the Turks heads.'³⁵ Bohemond had performed to a great standard in battle leading the push against the Turkish formations. Bohemond had pushed so deep into the Turkish formations and threw himself into a state of rampage which resulted in a lot of Turks being slain. The Gesta Francorum reads 'when the other columns saw Bohemond's banner had been borne so stoutly ahead of the others, they immediately turned around, and

³³ Aird William M, 'Many others, whose names I do not know, fled with them': *Norman Courage and Cowardice on the First Crusade*, edited by Kathryn Hurlock and Paul Oldfield, Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, p. 20

³⁴ Hodgson Natasha, 'Normans and Competing Masculinities on Crusade' in *Crusading and Pilgrimage in the Norman World* edited by Kathryn Hurlock and Paul Oldfield, Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, (2015), p. 196

³⁵ GF, p. 32

later the author offers Bohemond redemption and writes about how the princes have changed their mind and accept Bohemond's offer. The princes according to the author state 'If Bohemond can acquire the city, either through his own efforts or those of others, with one accord we will willingly grant it to him, on the condition the author comes to our assistance and intends to fulfil his side of the agreement with us as he promised and swore, we will render it to him as of right. If not Bohemond may have it in his power'³⁸ A sharp turnaround in decision diminishes the embarrassment of the previous dismissal regarding Bohemond's offer. It is a testament to Bohemond's cunning nature and clear now why Bohemond wanted to get rid of the Greek general Tacticius so greatly, if Tacticius was present the offer could never have been made or accepted due to the previous oaths sworn to the Byzantine emperor and Tacticius would have overseen that the oath would have been fulfilled which the offer negates.

Bohemond's diplomacy skills regarding his relationship with Pirrus are now seen in full effect now that his offer on Antioch was accepted. The author documents that 'Bohemond began to humbly beseech his friend with daily requests, making promises in the most humble, sweeping, and appealing terms, in this fashion 'Look we now have the perfect opportunity to achieve whatever good goal we want to so let my good friend Pirrus help me now'³⁸ Bohemond had secured the arrangement when Pirrus sent Bohemond his own son as a pledge Pirrus had replied asking Bohemond to 'have all the Frankish host summoned and pretend that it was setting out to forage in the land of the Saracens, and then quickly return by way on the mountain on the right side. For my part I will keep a keen eye out for these columns, and I will receive them into the towers that I have in my power and control'³⁸ When the plan was carried out Pirrus began to 'grow afraid, fearful for himself and for our people, lest they fall into the Turks hand and he said 'micros Francos echome (that is, we have few Franks) 'where is the most keen-witted Bohemond? Where is that unfeared man.'³⁹ The authors portrayal of events shows Bohemond's diplomatic success and wise use of words and cunning nature using pressure and bribery to secure Pirrus's trust and thus his betrayal of Antioch. Pirrus was reliant on Bohemond to the very end using terms of praise when asking where to find him. The plan resulted in the capture of Antioch (bar the citadel) on the third of June in the year 1098.⁴⁰ Without Bohemond's actions at the siege of Antioch would have undoubtedly took much longer or even possibly failed either through exhaustion of supplies or military conquest. Supplies were still low and a Muslim relief force was on the way which could have pinned the Crusaders between two Muslim forces thus forcing them to fight on two fronts. This would have surely resulted in a crusader defeat, so the effect of Bohemond's successful actions affected the crusade on a huge scale possibly saving the entire campaign from the clutches of defeat. This passage is an indirect portrayal of heroism, Bohemond's ability to use words and craft rather than the sword to chink the enemies armour and turn one of their own against them to secure a method to deliver a Christian victory.

The capture of Antioch is not the end of Bohemond's story in the *Gesta Francorum*, The Crusader forces now had to defeat the relief force led by the commander Kerbogha that was still approaching and the eradicate the remnants of the Turkish forces who remained besieged in the cities citadel. The next mention of Bohemond in the *Gesta Francorum* is in a bizarre passage in which the relief force commander is conversing with his mother. Per Kenneth Baxter Wolf writings, the *Gesta Francorum's* author had completely fabricated this

³⁸ GF, p. 40

³⁹ GF, p. 41

⁴⁰ GF, p. 42