An experiment in extremity: the portrayal of violence in Robert the Monk’s narrative of the First Crusade

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It is argued that Robert made a conscious decision to amplify crusader violence, detailing Latin brutality in unusually graphic and extreme terms, not least through the extensive use of blood imagery and the suggestion that crusader savagery could inspire sensations of horror. By exploring the portrayal of violence beyond the context of the apocalypticism associated with Jerusalem, a broader range of influences and impulses shaping Robert’s authorial interventions are posited – notably his echoing of chansons de geste tropes and his desire to assert Frankish martial indomitability.

Robert the Monk’s distinctive approach to the portrayal of violence also provides us with a means to reassess the dissemination and impact of his Historia, which to date has been presented as medieval Europe’s ‘bestselling’ account of the First Crusade. Potential links to a range of medieval Latin narratives are newly identified in this article, but it is suggested that the Robert the Monk’s representation of violence did not demonstrably influence later crusade narratives.
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This article examines the portrayal of physical violence enacted by Latin Christians during the First Crusade in Robert the Monk’s *Historia Iherosolimitana*, with particular reference to the fighting witnessed outside Antioch in early 1098. The narrative techniques and effects used by Robert are established by employing the tools of narratological analysis. Comparisons are drawn with other Latin accounts of the First Crusade, alongside Latin sources detailing the Norman conquests of England and Sicily, and, in methodological terms, a case is made against strictly intra-textual narratology.

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Historians have long sought to advance our understanding of human violence, including that enacted in religious, interfaith and/or transcultural settings. Needless to say, the medieval crusades to the Holy Land involved sustained periods of military engagement between Latin Christians and Near Eastern Muslims, and among the many studies of crusading warfare there have been some attempts to examine the nature of crusader violence, not least because the crusades might appear to represent a particularly significant and resonant example of an encounter between Islam and the West.

This article seeks to contribute to the study of both the nature and portrayal of crusader violence. It contends that modern and contemporary attempts to assess the actuality of crusader violence have often been coloured by questionable assumptions about the supposedly extreme, and unusually bloodthirsty, nature of crusader warfare. Likewise, it argues that some historians working in this field have also been tempted to present incautious and overly definite reconstructions of the lived experience of crusader violence. Elsewhere,

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scholarship focusing instead upon the depiction of crusader violence in medieval sources has tended to concentrate on events centred on the Holy City of Jerusalem, but, it is here argued, this limited approach may have skewed our appreciation of how and why contemporary authors sought to describe crusader warfare.

Therefore, this article examines the portrayal of violence in a different geographical setting, namely that of the northern Syrian city of Antioch, which was besieged by the First Crusaders between October 1097 and June 1098. It concentrates on an under-studied phase of that siege, between February and March 1098, that saw repeated episodes of intense fighting between crusaders and Near Eastern Muslims, and dissects the representation of these events in contemporary Latin narrative accounts of the First Crusade. In this regard, particular attention is paid to the most widely disseminated of these texts – Robert the Monk’s *Historia Iherosolimitana* – a work that, it is here suggested, experimented with a range of notable narrative effects to present a novel, highly amplified and exceptionally brutal record of crusader violence.

**Characterising the actuality of crusader violence**

The character of crusader warfare – the quality, extent and relative extremity of the violence and brutality witnessed during the crusades – has long been debated. During the Enlightenment, some of the first scholars to assess and analyse the crusades promoted the notion that these medieval wars were marked out by distinctive levels of savagery. The Scottish historian David Hume famously declared the crusades to be an enduring ‘monument of human folly’ and an exemplar of the ‘fiercest barbarity’, while presenting the crusaders as ‘ferocious conquerors’ who ‘butchered in cold blood’. A tacit assumption endures in both popular imagination and some strands of scholarly discourse that these medieval conflagrations were waged in a manner that was especially extreme, barbaric and destructive.

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Recent meta-historical studies, seeking to position the history of the crusades in a much broader context and authored by non-specialists, have insisted on particularising these wars. Steven Pinker, for example, characterised the crusades as a form of genocide in his influential 2011 study of the history of violence and humanity, concluding that these medieval conflicts were ‘equivalent to the Nazis’ genocide of the Jews’. Elsewhere, entrenched views about crusading warfare have shaped approaches to the history of Latin Christian settlement in the Levant after the First Crusade. Brian Catlos argued in 2014 that the unusually violent and ‘interruptive’ nature of the crusader conquests influenced the character of Latin-Muslim contacts in the Near East for the next two centuries.

Crusader violence remains a sensitive topic, and any attempts to downplay the brutality and savagery of the crusades, or to recalibrate our understanding of these holy wars, might be cast as efforts to diminish the inherent horror of such events, or even to legitimate the crusaders’ actions. There can be no doubt that the crusades waged in the Holy Land in the course of the Middle Ages were violent and, from a twenty-first-century perspective, barbaric. Nonetheless, the imperative task is to historicise the crusades and thus the apposite question is not whether the crusades were brutal conflicts, but whether the violence enacted during these holy wars was extreme by medieval standards.

Scholars remain divided on this issue. Yvonne Friedman observed in 2002 that the ‘comparison of the conduct of war in the East and West by no means proves’ that clashes between Latin Christians and Levantine Muslims were more embittered and extreme. In a 2006 article exploring the nature of transcultural wars, Matthew Strickland maintained that, although the violence enacted in the Holy Land might have been distinct from that witnessed during western European conflicts between the Angevins and Capetians up to the 1190s, when the crusades are compared to medieval wars waged across the totality of Latin Europe (including its frontier regions), any distinctions in approach and engagement were far less clear cut. In contrast, John France affirmed in a 2011 article that ‘the crusades precipitated a

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period of ideological warfare in the Middle East ... the temper [of which] was something special and different from that experienced elsewhere’.  

Arguably, the lived experience of crusader warfare cannot be precisely reconstructed because of the flawed and fragmentary nature of our surviving primary source material. Notably, for many critical episodes we lack an appropriate range of close contemporary testimony emanating from multiple independent viewpoints. Significant problems also remain with attempts to define ‘normative’ medieval violence – that is to say, violence enacted in the context of internecine warfare either between Latin Christian foes, or between Near Eastern Muslim opponents, not least because, as Strickland’s comment rightly suggests, military practice and custom could vary significantly over both space and time. As a result, all comments about the actual character of crusader violence should be made with caution and presented in the form of suggestive analysis rather than categorical assertion.

In terms of the prosecution of sieges, raiding and skirmishing, and the waging of full-scale battles, the conduct of crusade warfare appears in most instances to have been largely normative. Nonetheless, from the start, the crusades were marked out by at least one distinct expression of violence that was not commonplace in European inter-Latin warfare and thus might be accurately characterised as extreme – namely, the post-mortem abuse of the dead, either through the decapitation of slain Muslims or the purposeful desecration of Muslim burial sites.

The portrayal of crusader violence

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11 For a full discussion of this topic see: Thomas Asbridge, ‘Desecrating the dead: the role and function of post-mortem decapitation in crusader warfare’, forthcoming article. It is also unquestionably the case that some First Crusaders engaged in acts of cannibalism in early 1099 after the fall of the northern Syrian town of Marrat an-Numan, though this seems to have been prompted by desperation and starvation, rather than any calculated desire to carry out an atrocity. On the cannibalism at Marrat see: Jay Rubenstein, ‘Cannibals and Crusaders’, *French Historical Studies*, vol. 31 (2008), pp. 525-52.
Partly in response to the difficulties attendant upon the empirical reconstruction of crusader violence, a number of historians have chosen instead to focus upon the portrayal of bloodshed and brutality in the surviving corpus of primary sources. To date, the majority of this work has focused on the First Crusade and, more specifically still, on the sack of Jerusalem by the surviving members of that Latin expedition on 15 July 1099. The crusaders’ conquest of the Holy City culminated in the massacre of a significant proportion of its Muslim and Jewish populace, and has long been presented as one of the most notorious and emblematic acts of crusader violence. According to one of the earliest and most influential Latin narratives to recount this event, the *Gesta Francorum* – composed it would seem by a southern Italian Norman crusader who participated in Jerusalem’s capture – the scale of the carnage was such ‘that our men were wading up to their ankles in enemy blood’.

In a seminal 2004 article, Benjamin Kedar tracked the portrayal of the Jerusalem massacre through successive generations of western historiography. This longitudinal study exposed a notable phenomenon in western crusade sources that had previously only been remarked upon in passing by subject specialists. At first glance, one might expect partisan crusade narratives to downplay any violence enacted by Latin Christians during the conquest or defence of the Holy Land, while actively highlighting instances of Muslim barbarity. In fact, as Kedar demonstrated, the desire by contemporary and near-contemporary chroniclers to stress the ‘exceptionality’ and ‘extraordinary nature’ of the First Crusaders’ conquest of the Holy City meant that western sources almost always adopted the opposite strategy, with initial accounts presenting what appear to be exaggerated descriptions of crusader violence during the sack of Jerusalem, and subsequent narratives further amplifying the extent of the bloodshed and brutality enacted by the Christians.

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12 This is one facet of a broader move to focus on the portrayal and memorialisation of crusading. On theme, see for example: Marcus Bull and Damien Kempf (eds), *Writing the Early Crusades: Text, Transmission and Memory* (Woodbridge, 2014); Megan Cassidy-Welch (ed.), *Remembering the Crusades and Crusading* (Abingdon, 2017).
Phillipe Buc advanced a partially satisfactory explanation for this process of apparent distortion and inflation in 2015. Buc suggested that because most authors of western crusade narratives sought to position the sack of sacred Jerusalem within the broader context of Christian apocalypticism and eschatology, they readily embraced opportunities to intensify the representation of violence and horror, believing that extreme levels of carnage and destruction were appropriate – and perhaps even necessary – components of the crusaders’ triumphant purification of the Holy City.15

However, the persistent focus upon the conquest of Jerusalem in most modern studies of the violence enacted during the First Crusade means that we currently possess only a partial, and perhaps not wholly representative, impression of this phenomenon. It may well be that the authors of western crusade narratives elected to amplify the depiction of crusader violence in part because of the profound spiritual significance of Jerusalem and its chief holy places – the Temple Mount or Haram as-Sharif, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.16 But far less attention has been paid to the portrayal in these same sources of bloodshed perpetrated away from the devotional epicentre of the Christian cosmos.17

In order to better understand the representation of violence in the Latin narratives of the First Crusade, this article sets out to reassess the approach adopted in one particularly prominent account: the Historia Iherosolimitana attributed to Robert the Monk. By adopting some of the tools of narratological analysis – including the assessment of lexical usage, textual imagery and narrative effects – Robert’s distinctive approach to the portrayal of violence will be explicated.18 However, methodologically, this study will not be confined to

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15 Buc, Holy War, pp. 261-272. Less convincingly, Buc went on to argue that at least some First Crusaders embraced or pursued the lived reality of an extreme, barbarous and deliberately vicious massacre precisely because they were trying to usher in the Last Days. However, Buc’s argument is largely dependent on the assumption that the First Crusaders’ mentality and behaviour was shaped by an intimate familiarity with a distinct range of medieval Christian exegesis. While historians can today trace particular currents in late eleventh-century apocalyptic and exegetical thought through surviving texts, there is far less evidence that categorically demonstrates the transmission and reception of these complex theological concepts among crusade participants. See also: Penny Cole, ‘O God, the heathen have come into your inheritance (Ps. 78.1): The theme of religious pollution in crusade documents, 1095-1188’, in Maya Shatzmiller (ed.) Crusaders and Muslims in twelfth-century Syria (Leiden, 1993), pp. 84-111; Jay Rubenstein, Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse (New York, 2011), pp. 273-92.
17 Buc, Holy War, pp. 262-3, did briefly pause to consider some aspects of the cannibalism at Marrat an-Numan.
strictly intra-textual narratology. Where necessary, an understanding of the chronology and lived experience of the First Crusade may also inform the analysis of Robert’s authorial approach. Comparisons will also be drawn with other Latin accounts of the First Crusade, alongside Latin sources for the Norman conquests of England and Sicily.

In order to move beyond the context of Jerusalem, this work will focus on an earlier phase of the First Crusade – one that played out some 300 miles north of Jerusalem, in the environs of the Syrian city of Antioch. The crusaders’ eight-month siege of this heavily fortified metropolis began in October 1097 and was only concluded when a renegade tower commander helped the Latin Christians, or Franks, to storm the city on 3 June 1098. Antioch’s protracted investment was one of the crusade’s critical turning points – a gruelling episode that sorely tested the Franks’ determination, religious devotion and martial skill – and its progress was recorded, often in minute detail, in all the contemporary Latin narratives of the crusade.\(^{19}\)

This article will concentrate on the depiction of events that played out around the midpoint of this siege, in early 1098. By this stage, the crusaders had endured a harsh winter camped outside Antioch, wracked by starvation and debilitated by disease. Thousands of crusaders died. Many others elected to desert. However, the Franks survived this trial and went on to achieve a series of significant military victories in February and March 1098 that rejuvenated their expedition’s fortunes.\(^{20}\) To date, the events of February and March have received only limited attention in modern historiography, even though participants and contemporaries identified these months as marking an important watershed.\(^{21}\) Those Latin Christians who sought to record and describe these episodes seem to have paid particular attention to the portrayal of the fighting and bloodshed witnessed in this period. This is especially true of the Latin account attributed to Robert the Monk.

**The case for studying Robert the Monk’s *Historia Iherosolomitana***

\(^{19}\) Over the next two centuries, the siege of Antioch also came to be memorialised and romanticised as the crusade’s defining episode. See: Andrew D. Buck, “‘Weighed by such a great calamity, they were cleansed for their sins’: Remembering the Siege and Capture of Antioch’, in Andrew D. Buck and Tom W. Smith (eds), *Remembering the Crusades in Medieval Texts and Songs* (Cardiff, 2019), pp. 1-16. It should be noted that the city of Antioch was also spiritually significant, given its supposed connections with St Peter and the founding of the first Christian church, but its devotional resonance did not match that of Jerusalem. Thomas Asbridge, *The Creation of the principality of Antioch 1098-1130* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 211-2.


The medieval Latin prose narrative of the First Crusade text known as the *Historia Iherosolimitana* appears to have been composed between c. 1106 and c. 1110 by an individual named Robert. This at least is the claim of the ‘apologeticus sermo’ with which the account began, where the author declared that, ‘if there is any interest in the name of the author who composed [this text], he is called Robert’. The author also noted that the work was written in ‘a cloister of a certain monastery of St-Rémi founded in the bishopric of Reims’. Thus, it has long been the tradition to style the author of this narrative as either Robert the Monk or to associate him with the city of Reims.

However, beyond the indications that he came from a monastic – and likely Benedictine – background, little else is known of Robert’s life. The evidence supporting his identification with a Robert who had formerly been a monk of Marmoutier and abbot of St Remi is circumstantial. Robert did state explicitly that he was present at the Council of Clermont in November 1095 when Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade, but there is no indication that Robert participated in the subsequent expedition to the Holy Land or witnessed any of its events firsthand.

In terms of purpose and context of writing, Robert himself noted (in the *apologeticus sermo*) that he was given a copy of a narrative of the First Crusade and tasked with revising this text, partly because it lacked a detailed account of the pope’s sermon at Clermont and ‘partly because it did not make the best of the sequence of wonderful events it contained and the composition was uncertain and unsophisticated in its style and expression’. It has long been assumed that the narrative to which Robert referred was a version of the Latin account now known as the *Gesta Francorum*. As previously noted, this was perhaps the earliest description of the First Crusade authored by a participant, and it is also thought that a version of this text was circulating in western Europe around 1106, when Robert seems to have begun writing.

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23 RM, pp. xvii-xli; Sweetenham, Robert the Monk, pp. 1-4.

24 RM, p. 3. Nonetheless, Robert may have visited the Near East at a later stage, as there are some hints of personal experience of the Levant in his text.

25 RM, p. 3.

26 The nature and significance of the *Gesta Francorum* continues to be debated. Given that there is no surviving copy of an earlier First Crusade narrative or Ur-*Gesta*, this current study proceeds on the assumption that our closest possible contact with the base text employed by Robert the Monk remains the current manuscript tradition from which the text now known as the *Gesta Francorum* derives. A selection of key works on this issue includes: Colin Morris, ‘The *Gesta Francorum* as narrative history’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, vol. 19 (1993), pp. 55-71; John France, ‘The Anonymous *Gesta Francorum* and the *Historia Francorum qui ceperrunt*...
Therefore, it would appear that Robert the Monk’s objective was to reshape the *Gesta Francorum* and, in his own words, ‘improve its style for future readers’ by composing a revised Latin narrative of the First Crusade which Carol Sweetenham has suggested ‘seamlessly combines three perspectives’ – that of the theologian, the historian and the storyteller.\(^{27}\) Robert may have had access to another extant Latin narrative of the expedition authored by the participant Raymond of Aguilers, chaplain of the southern French crusade leader Raymond of St-Gilles, count of Toulouse, which itself appears to have drawn upon a version of the *Gesta Francorum*.\(^{28}\) However, the notion that Robert also made use of another now-lost account of the crusade, and that this work might have been the source for his extensive departures from the description of events presented in either the *Gesta* or Raymond of Aguiler’s *Liber*, has now been convincingly overturned.\(^{29}\)

The possibility that other fragmentary narratives or oral traditions related to the crusade were circulating in Latin Europe at the start of the twelfth century cannot be wholly discounted. Carol Symes contended in a 2017 article that many unofficial or ‘popular’ written accounts describing elements of the crusade and presented in ‘small booklets’ or ‘other ephemeral media’ were created in this period, but her argument was largely based on supposition given that none of this material survives.\(^{30}\) However, an early or ‘primitive’ version of the vernacular verse song describing the crusader siege of Antioch, later known as the *Chanson d’Antioche*, may already have been widely performed at the time Robert the

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\(^{29}\) RM, p. xiii; Marcus Bull, ‘Robert the Monk and his Source(s)’, in *Writing the Early Crusades*, pp. 127-39. Here, a persuasive case is made for rejecting the theory that Robert the Monk and Gilo of Paris both drew upon a lost text, and the argument is advanced that Gilo instead used Robert’s account as a base text. It should also be noted that, although the first six books of Albert of Aachen’s *Historia* covering the First Crusade may have been completed by the time Robert started composing his own account, there is no indication that he had access to Albert’s text. Albert of Aachen, *Historia Iherosolimitana*, ed. and trans. Susan B. Edgington (Oxford, 2007). Hereafter cited as AA.

Monk was writing. It is worth noting that one of Robert’s contemporaries, Guibert of Nogent, who was also based in northern France, referred to hearing a song describing the deeds of the crusade leader Godfrey of Bouillon outside Antioch.\(^{31}\)

Nonetheless, in the absence of other surviving textual evidence, the modern editors of Robert’s *Historia*, Marcus Bull and Damien Kempf, have persuasively argued that Robert’s frequent ‘expansions and departures from the storyworld supplied by the *Gesta Francorum*’ can most securely be understood ‘as exercises in creative and imaginative engagement with his source material’. Thus, they can be regarded as examples of Robert making active authorial interventions into his account of the crusade, in part with the objective of foregrounding the role and impact of the Franks or the ‘French’, especially those with connections to the French Capetian royal line.\(^{32}\) Bull and Kempf acknowledged that at least some of Robert’s ‘creative’ interventions appear to have been inspired by scriptural, classical, historical or literary precedents, noting quotations from, or allusions to, the likes of the Book of Isaiah, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*.\(^{33}\) They also noted the potential stylistic influence of ‘contemporary vernacular epic songs’, the *chansons de geste* or ‘Songs of Deeds’, that seem to have become an increasingly popular form of entertainment around the year 1100, particularly among the emerging knightly class. This form of literary-historical storytelling was epitomised by the *Chanson de Roland*, a semi-mythical account of an eighth-century Carolingian war against Iberian Muslims, the first written manuscript of which likely dates from this period.\(^{34}\)

The close study of Robert’s account affords us a number of important – and arguably unique – opportunities. His *Historia* stands as an influential exemplar of the newly emerging approach to the recording of human experience and history that took hold in the Latin West in the early twelfth century, and seems, at least in part, to have been inspired by the challenge of recounting and commemorating the First Crusade’s apparently miraculous successes. As

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\(^{33}\)RM, pp. lx-lxiv.

such, a clearer appreciation of the construction of Robert’s text can help to clarify how authors of his ilk sought to move beyond the established forms of historical writing, such as annalistic chronicles or biographies focused on a single protagonist, to present works that successfully narrativised the extended and collective experience that was the crusade, and that offered what might be deemed appropriate celebrations of the interlocking martial and spiritual impulses that seemed to have empowered this expedition. In Robert’s case, this led him to compose a work of hybridised genre – one that embellished the chronicle form, embraced scriptural allusion and popular theology, and reflected chansons de geste tropes.35

It is the contention of this article that Robert the Monk also made particularly intensive and significant interventions into the portrayal of crusader violence and, indeed, that he did so to an especially notable extent when narrating events at the siege of Antioch in early 1098. This process involved reconfiguring an extant Latin narrative of the First Crusade – the Gesta Francorum – in part by altering and amplifying the depiction of crusader violence. The nature of Robert’s Historia means that we are in a position to present an unusually precise dissection of his approach to this process. We possess a relatively high degree of certainty about the sources of knowledge at Robert’s disposal and we know that his account was not informed by any firsthand knowledge of events in Syria and Palestine. Thus, any move on Robert’s part to exaggerate and accentuate the presentation of crusader violence cannot be explained as a mimetic response to, or reflection of, his own distinct and personal lived experience. Robert did not compose a more bloody and brutal account of the First Crusade – and in particular of the events outside Antioch in early 1098 – because that was what he himself witnessed. Instead, his graphic depiction of crusader violence seems to represent a deliberate act of authorial intervention and could be classed as an example of conscious narrative construction that was both purposeful and programmatic.36

Importantly, the distinct extent and significance of Robert’s interventions are thrown in even sharper relief by the survival of two contemporaneous Latin narrative texts that cover the same events: Baldric of Bourgeuil’s Historia Hierosolymitana and Guibert of Nogent’s aforementioned Gesta Dei Per Francos. In terms of the context of composition, these works were strikingly similar to Robert’s Historia. Both were written in the same timeframe, in the

same northern French locale, by men that possessed the same Benedictine monastic background. Like Robert, neither Baldric nor Guibert participated in the crusade, and they too appear to have used the *Gesta Francorum* as a base text. Yet, despite this shared heritage, Baldric and Guibert adopted starkly different approaches to the portrayal of violence in comparison to Robert, showing far less interest in presenting amplified images of crusader bloodshed and brutality. These differences of approach mean that the scale and depth of Robert the Monk’s interventions are perhaps uniquely apparent.

Even so, some historians have presented Robert’s account as an accurate depiction of lived experience. In his 2011 monograph on the First Crusade, Jay Rubenstein presented a detailed account of the fighting that took place outside Antioch on 7 March 1098, including almost all of Robert’s amplifications and embellishments as facts. Rubenstein probably elected to present this heightened version of events because it served his broader purpose of envisaging the crusade as an exercise in apocalypticism. Given the subtlety and precision of much of his other published work on the crusades, this may well have been a conscious manipulation. Nonetheless, it remains a grave distortion – one that serves only to perpetuate a caricature of the crusades by casually exoticising or sensationalising these wars.

It should also be noted that, in terms of its capacity both to shape contemporary perceptions and memories of the First Crusade, and to influence the writing of history, Robert the Monk’s *Historia* would seem to be in a class of its own. Medieval historians generally seek to gauge the extent to which a given text was disseminated and read by its manuscript tradition. Most major Latin narratives of the First Crusade tend to survive in a limited number of manuscripts – the influential *Gesta Francorum* survives in eight, Raymond of Aguilers’ account in seven and Albert of Aachen’s *Historia* in thirteen. To date, however, more than one hundred medieval manuscripts of Robert’s *Historia* have been identified. On the grounds of this admittedly imperfect metric, his text has been described as ‘the most

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38 J. Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (New York, 2011), pp. 177-80. According to Rubenstein, Godfrey of Bouillon did slice ‘one mounted Saracen warrior in two through the waist’, the Muslim dead were left ‘standing upright ... amid the press’, and the River Orontes was actually ‘turned blood-red’ and filled with ‘so many bodies ... that it ceased to flow’.

39 As already noted, Rubenstein has produced seminal studies of other aspects of the First Crusade, including the incidence of cannibalism at Marrat and the nature of the *Gesta Francorum*.

40 RM, pp. xlii-xlvi, indicated a total of eighty-four manuscripts at the time of the Latin edition’s publication, but Marcus Bull has since stated in conversation that the number of identified manuscripts now exceeds one hundred. *GF*, pp. xxxviii-xl, identified seven manuscripts, to which the manuscript identified by Niskanen might be added. RA, pp. 20-30; AA, pp. xxxvii-liv; BB, pp. lxxv-ci, indicates that Baldric’s *Historia* survives in twenty-four manuscripts.
successful’ history of the First Crusade ‘whose popularity far outstripped [the work of] other chroniclers’. 41

The amplification of crusader violence in Robert the Monk’s Historia

Over the course of his Historia, Robert vividly recounted numerous instances of crusader violence, though, interestingly, he did not seize upon every possible opportunity to amplify Frankish bloodshed. 42 His narrative seems to have been punctuated by three distinct peaks when it came to focusing upon and narrativizing brutality: the fighting outside Antioch in early 1098; the sack of Marrat an-Numan in late 1098; and the conquest of Jerusalem in July 1099. Of these, Antioch stands out in terms of the scale and significance of Robert’s active authorial interventions – that is to say, the degree to which he reshaped his basic source material.

A close narratalogical analysis of Robert the Monk’s text reveals that he deployed a range of potent narrative devices and effects to amplify, accentuate and dramatise the violence enacted by the crusaders in early 1098. Robert significantly embroidered his portrayal of the bloodshed witnessed in this period, pushing far beyond the version of events recorded in the Gesta Francorum or Raymond of Aguiler’s Liber, or indeed that presented by his contemporaries, Baldric of Bourgueil and Guibert of Nogent. Some of Robert’s interventions can be traced back to scriptural or classical precedents (and resonate with other near-contemporary Latin accounts of non-crusade-related warfare between Christians), others appear to mirror storytelling techniques popularised in the chansons de geste tradition, but some are more innovative and may be attributed to Robert’s authorial imagination.

i) exaggerating the numbers of Muslim dead

The most basic technique employed by Robert the Monk to amplify the extent of the violence enacted by the Franks on 7 March 1098 was to exaggerate the number of Muslims slain in this encounter. His apparent primary sources of information for these events provided some clear guidance on this matter. The Gesta Francorum noted that ‘twelve emirs of the Turkish

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41 RM, pp. xlv-xlvi; Sweetenham, Robert the Monk, p. 68.
42 Drawing upon our best understanding of the chronology and lived experience of the First Crusade, it is apparent that Robert could, for example, have presented more vivid and bloody accounts of both the crusader sack of Antioch on 2-3 June 1098 and the subsequent battle fought against Kerbogha of Mosul on 28 June. As it is, his account of these events was relatively matter-of-fact and made no particular use of the narrative techniques discussed in this article to amplify the portrayal of violence. RM, pp. 56, 74-9. Asbridge, The First Crusade, pp. 206-11, 232-40.
army’ died ‘in the course of that battle’, alongside 1,500 ‘of their bravest and most resolute warriors’. Raymond of Aguilers apparently ‘heard from many participants’ that ‘twenty or more Turks’ were ‘knocked into the river’ in the thick of the fighting on the Orontes Bridge, but observed that once the Muslim dead were eventually counted they ‘numbered around 1,500’, while adding that this total did not include ‘those buried in the city and those dragged under the waters of the river’.  

Three contemporary letters written by Latins present at the siege of Antioch provided numerical estimates that broadly corroborate the scale of the losses, though their details differed quite considerably. The earliest of these, authored by crusade leader Stephen of Blois in March 1098, referred to the death of thirty Muslim emirs alongside ‘300 other Turkish noble horsemen as well as other Turks and pagans’, and concluded that ‘the Turkish and Saracen dead numbered 1,230’ in total. The letter composed by the Frankish knight Anselm of Ribemont in July 1098 stated that ‘the enemy lost almost 1,400 men who died in battle or drowned in the river swollen by winter rains’, while the letter attributed to Bruno of Lucca – who appears to have arrived with the English and Italian fleet that made landfall at St Simeon in early 1098 – noted that ‘in an attack of the Turks ... we killed 800 of the enemy’ though this figure may well relate to the skirmish on the road back from coast.

In spite of these variances, most early-twelfth-century narrative accounts of these events composed in western Europe echoed the numbers cited in the Gesta Francorum and Raymond of Aguilers’ Liber. Although Albert of Aachen does not appear to have drawn from any texts connected to the Gesta Francorum tradition, he nonetheless estimated the number of Muslim dead at 1,500, ‘counting those who fell in battle and those who perished in the waters’, and observed that twelve of the ‘most powerful emirs’ were also slain in this encounter. Guibert of Nogent and Baldric of Bourgueil both noted the deaths of twelve Muslim emirs and an additional 1,500 enemy troops.

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43 GF, p. 41.
44 RA, pp. 59-61; Fulcher of Chartres, Historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127), ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), pp. 228-9, who was absent from Antioch at this time provided only the brief comment that: ‘Once it happened that many of the fleeing Turks fell into the Orontes River, and being submerged in it, they drowned’.
45 Heinrich Hagenmeyer, Die Kreuzzugssbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100 (Innsbruck, 1901), pp. 151-2, 158, 165-7. Stephen of Blois recorded that more than 500 Latin infantrymen and at least two knights were killed during the initial ambush of Bohmond’s and Raymond’s troops, but added that during the fierce fighting in front of Antioch’s Bridge Gate ‘we did not lose a single man’. The Lucca letter recorded that ‘2,055 of our men’ were killed in the fighting on 7 March 1098.
46 AA, p. 246.
47 GN, p. 192, wrote of the death of 1,500 other ‘important people’. BB, p. 51, recorded that 1,500 Muslim ‘knights, energetic and very courageous men who for a long time had expertly watched over the city for its defence’ were slain.
Although Robert the Monk drew upon the same body of texts and, perhaps, the same currents of oral tradition circulating in the first decade of the twelfth century, he alone elected to inflate the number of Muslims killed outside Antioch on 7 March 1098. Where the Gesta Francorum had described 1,500 dead, Robert wrote of 5,000 Muslims being killed, while also asserting that a further 7,000 were taken prisoner. Robert did follow the tradition of specifying that twelve ‘emirs’ were slain, but took the unusual step of claiming that these notables were ‘emirs of the king of Babylon, whom he had sent with his armies to help the king of Antioch’ – that is to say, commanders in service to the Shi’a Fatimid caliph of Egypt.

**ii) managing movement through time**

Historians studying the construction of narrative texts have long noted that interventions into the order and duration of events represent one of the most significant authorial techniques deployed to shape the effect and meaning of an account. Indeed, when seeking to establish a framework for narratological readings of crusade texts, Marcus Bull recently described studying the presentation of ‘movement through time’ as one of the ‘signature concerns’ of classical narratology. Robert the Monk appears to have carefully managed his portrayal of the passing of time when narrating the events of early 1098, accelerating or decelerating his coverage in order, it would seem, to achieve specific effects in service of an overarching narrative strategy.

In actuality, the First Crusaders lived through two quite distinct events at the start of 1098. First, an approaching Muslim relief army under the command of Ridwan of Aleppo was successfully repelled by the Franks at the so-called Lake Battle, fought some twelve kilometres northeast of Antioch on 9 February. Then, one month later, a party of crusaders returning from the port of St Simeon under the command of Bohemond of Taranto and Raymond of St Gilles was ambushed and badly mauled by Muslim troops to the southwest of Antioch on 7 March. This encounter was then followed on the same day by the outbreak of a secondary phase of fighting in the immediate environs of Antioch – concentrated in and

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48 RM, p. 46. Robert also claimed that 10,000 Muslims were put to flight in the course of this fighting and that the Muslim dead included the son of Yaghi Siyan, Antioch’s Turkish ruler. This latter statement, which cannot be traced to any earlier source, appears to have been an additional error or invention designed to further accentuate the significance of the crusaders’ victory, as Yaghi Siyan is only known to have had one son – Shams ad-Daula – and it is apparent from multiple sources that he survived until at least June 1098.

49 RM, p. 46. This appears to be a deliberate misrepresentation on Robert’s part. A wide range of primary sources, including the Gesta Francorum and Raymond of Aguilers’ Liber, make it clear that Fatimid troops were present at the siege of Antioch, but not as allies of Antioch’s Sunni Turkish garrison.

around the city’s main bridge over the River Orontes and the associated entryway known as the Bridge Gate – in which the Franks achieved a notable victory.\footnote{France, \textit{Victory in the East}, pp. 236-56; Asbridge, \textit{The First Crusade}, pp. 181-96.}

The \textit{Gesta Francorum} described the interlude between these two distinct events in some detail. This included an account of a debate among the crusade’s leading participants as to how their investment of Antioch might be strengthened. Their conclusion was that a new siege fort might be developed in front of the Bridge Gate if craftsmen and building materials could be brought to Antioch from the nearby port of St Simeon, where a fleet of English and Italian ships had recently made landfall. In medieval Latin this passage ran to a total of 164 words.\footnote{GF, pp. 39-40; RA, pp. 57-9, also described these discussions in an extended passage of text.}

Some western European contemporaries who drew upon the \textit{Gesta Francorum} tradition actually chose to expand and embellish this portion of their account, with Baldric of Bourgueil detailing this same process of Frankish deliberation and reflection in an extended passage running to 401 words.\footnote{BB, pp. 44-6.} In contrast, Robert the Monk chose to cover the transition between the 9 February Lake Battle and the 7 March encounters, which he characterised as ‘the great battle that was fought before Antioch’, in just thirty-five words.\footnote{RM, p. 43, ‘De Magno prelio quod commissum est ante Antiochiam.’} This had the effect of blurring the line between these two events – each of which resulted in a Frankish victory and culminated in fighting on a bridge – thereby raising the narrative pulse of his account. Robert seems to have been intent upon conveying the sense that, after the darks days of starvation and desertion witnessed through December 1097 and January 1098, the crusade was now building unassailable momentum through continuous and almost repetitive success. A desire to maintain an aura of overwhelming Frankish martial superiority may also help to explain why Robert then went on to provide a highly abbreviated account of the losses initially sustained on 7 March by the forces returning from St Simeon. He did not excise this event entirely, acknowledging that, when the Franks were surprised by a Muslim ambush, those Latins on horseback fled ‘into the mountains’, while among the infantry, ‘who could not run away’, nearly 1,000 ‘suffered a dreadful death’ – adding the unusual comment that their fate was supposedly rendered ‘more glorious by the fact of it being so severe’.\footnote{RM, p. 43, ‘diram necem perpessi sunt; sed quanto fuit acrior, tanto et gloriosior’.

However, Robert immediately moved on to re-establish a sense of Latin military dominance by stating that the Muslim ‘killers did not rejoice for long’ because, as soon as news of these events reached the siege at Antioch, the Frankish ‘princes and lords’ leapt into...
action and ‘swept out to revenge the death of their men’.\textsuperscript{56} From this point onwards, Robert focused on the chaotic Muslim retreat towards Antioch’s Orontes Bridge and the subsequent Latin victory.

The extent of Robert the Monk’s authorial intervention here becomes apparent when his narrative is compared to other Latin accounts. Where Robert utilised just fifty-eight Latin words to describe the Frank’s initial defeat, the \textit{Gesta Francorum} used 157 and paused to insist that those who were killed ‘suffered martyrdom ... went to heaven and were clad in white robes and received the martyr’s palm’.\textsuperscript{57} In his \textit{Liber}, the crusader Raymond of Aguilers went even further, recording a detailed and explicit account of the fear and chaos that gripped the Latin ranks. Raymond related that ‘we, like cattle in the mountains and crags, were being dashed down’, bluntly acknowledged that in this engagement the Franks were ‘overcome and vanquished’, and then stopped to ask the question: ‘Lord God, why these tribulations?’ Raymond went on to argue that the Franks might even have considered wholesale flight from the siege of Antioch had the full severity of the setback been known.\textsuperscript{58}

Baldric of Bourgueil pursued a similar approach, devoting no fewer than 242 Latin words to the fate of the St Simeon expeditionary force. The Muslims were portrayed in graphic terms, ‘cutting [the Franks] down mercilessly’, and Baldric indicated that the ‘Christians, being few, could not endure the savagery of the raving enemy any longer, and since they could not fight back they were forced to snatch themselves away in flight’. This sustained passage seems to have served two functions. It allowed Baldric to pause to consider the capricious nature of human experience. ‘Such are the outcomes of battles’, he declared, ‘such are the vicissitudes of both men and times. There is never a happy outcome for anyone always; no one ever has rejoiced or will rejoice in perpetual success’.\textsuperscript{59} At the same time, Baldric’s explicit, but innately value-negative, depiction of Muslim violence in this encounter allowed him to then present the crusaders as righteously vengeful aggressors in the brutal fighting that followed around the Orontes Bridge. Thus, in Baldric’s account, there is a relative balance between the scale and the severity of the bloodshed enacted by Muslims and crusaders. In contrast, Robert the Monk’s narrative presented a very different image – one in which the eliding of events and the minimalising of the Franks’ initial defeat on 7 March

\textsuperscript{56} RM, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{57} GF, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{58} RA, pp. 59-60.
\textsuperscript{59} BB, pp. 49-50.
helped to foreground an impression of Latin indomitability, but also served to downplay the extent of Muslim violence. It was only when Robert came at last to describe the crusader-dominated fighting that played out on and around Antioch’s Orontes Bridge that the focus of his narrative deepened and intensified. Having accelerated through the preceding events, his Historia suddenly slowed down to luxuriate in detail, employing a range of narrative techniques to create a vivid and compelling storyworld in which the crusaders could achieve a telling and blood-drenched victory. As a result, the relationship between his account and his probable base text was dramatically inverted. Having persistently abbreviated the Gesta Francorum’s account up to this point, Robert here significantly expanded upon the 249 words employed by the Gesta, using no fewer than 748 Latin words to describe the same events.

Thus, it is apparent that in this section of his account, Robert the Monk made the seemingly conscious decision to employ three interlocking, but nonetheless distinct, effects related to the issue of ‘movement through time’ in service of a broader narrative strategy: the compression of time to connect two separate Frankish victories; the acceleration of time to diminish the significance of a Latin military setback; and the subsequent deceleration of time to expand greatly the coverage of crusader violence and victory.

iii) focusing on violence
By training his account’s narrative focus on the fighting outside Antioch on 7 March, Robert afforded himself more space in which to vividly portray crusader violence. When describing these events, the Gesta Francorum noted that Muslim troops were slain as they made a desperate attempt to cross the crowded bridge over the Orontes and re-enter the city through the Bridge Gate:

Those who did not succeed in crossing the bridge alive, because of the great press of men and horses, suffered there everlasting death with the devil and his imps; for we came after them, driving them into the river or throwing them down.60

Meanwhile, in recounting the same incident, Raymond of Aguilers simply recorded that, in the confined space of the bridge, ‘the panicky Turks were either smashed to the ground and slaughtered or crushed with stones in the river for flight lay open to no one’.61

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60 GF, p. 41.
61 RA, pp. 60-1.
Guibert of Nogent’s account followed the *Gesta* tradition quite closely, but actually took a more passive approach in some respects – noting, for example, that in their ‘hasty flight’ over the Orontes Bridge, the Muslims were ‘struggling to pass each other’ such that ‘men knocked each other down’. Rather than depicting the Franks in hot pursuit, Guibert asserted that ‘our men watched all this very carefully’ because a fall into the swift flowing waters of the Orontes ‘was more effective than a wound’. 62 Baldric of Bourgueil extended some elements of the *Gesta*’s account while developing his theme of vengeance, writing that because the Franks were ‘most avid avengers of the blood the enemy had shed, eager for victory, and concerned about conquering the city’, they pursued the fleeing Muslims ‘close on [their] heels and wielding both lances and swords against them in hand to hand combat. Whomever they could, they would either throw headlong into the river or stab with their deadly blades.’ 63

In contrast, Robert the Monk sought to evoke a more powerful image of chaotic slaughter. Confronted by the Frankish counterattack, ‘the Turks’ supposedly ‘turned tail and fled towards the bridge’ where the great press of men meant that ‘they could neither escape nor turn around’. Here, he introduced the idea that in this initial onslaught, ‘the infantry were responsible for more of the carnage than those on horseback’ as they were ‘going through cutting off heads like the harvester with his scythe in meadows’. 64 Turning from this grim metaphor, Robert then inserted a mixture of clausal repetition and classical allusion to affirm the Latins’ martial dominance, writing that:

Our men fought ferociously and their opponents suffered; our men struck and the enemy died. No matter how much tireless hands slashed they did not come to the end of what was there to slash. The dead remained standing upright amongst the living because, supported by the thick crowd of living people, they could not fall down dead. 65

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62 GN, p. 192.
63 BB, p. 51.
64 RM, p. 44. ‘Ibi maiorem stragem pedites egerunt, quam qui equis presidebant, quoniam seriatim, ut falcator prata vel messem, detruncabant.’ In Robert’s narrative it is suggested, in contrast to other accounts, that this first phase of action actually took place while the Muslims were fleeing along narrow paths towards the Orontes Bridge, rather than on the bridge itself. It is not clear whether presentation of events was the result of a deliberate adjustment on Robert’s part to prolong this scene, or a consequence of Robert’s lack of detailed knowledge regarding the topography and hydrology of Antioch’s environs.
65 RM, p. 44. ‘Nostri tantum pugnabant, illi patiebantur; nostri percutiebant, illi moriebantur. Nec tantum infatigata manus dilaniare poterat, quantum quod dilaniaret reperrerbat. Inter vivos mortui stabant, quia suffulti densitate vivorum cadere non poterant.’
As Carol Sweetenham observed, this latter image of the dead being held up by the packed ranks of the living echoed one deployed in the first century CE by the Roman poet Lucan, when describing the crushing defeat of a Roman force by north African troops. Here, however, it was Lucan’s ill-fated protagonists, the doomed Roman contingent commanded by Curio, whose ‘dead were held upright by the throng’. It should be noted that similar imagery was employed in the so-called Carmen de Hastingae Proelio – a Latin poem attributed to Guy of Ponthieu and likely completed by 1068 – when describing the Battle of Hastings. However, the author of the Carmen reversed the impact of this supposed phenomenon (just as Robert the Monk did some forty years later), by showing the antagonists of his account – in this case, the Anglo-Saxons led by Harold Godwinson – being pressed into such a dense pack that the dead were ‘unable to fall’ and ‘every corpse, although lifeless’ remained standing. It may be that the Carmen’s author and Robert the Monk were each separately influenced by Lucan, or that the image of the dead held in place amid a crowded throng had simply become a common literary topos by this point. Nonetheless, the possibility that Robert had read a copy of the Carmen de Hastingae Proelio cannot be wholly discounted, not least because, as we shall see, there are other lexical and narratological similarities between the two texts.

More broadly, it is of course the case that Robert the Monk was not the only Latin author of this era to enliven a battle description by employing vivid metaphors. Geoffrey Malaterra’s contemporary account of the Norman conquest of southern Italy and Sicily, for example, also made frequent use of such literary flourishes, while echoing the epic drama style of the chansons. In one episode, Geoffrey depicted Roger Bosso (the future Count Roger I of Sicily and uncle to the First Crusade leader Bohemond of Taranto) fighting manfully on foot against a large group of Muslim assailants. Roger was said to have wielded his sword ‘as though he was cutting a grassy meadow with a scythe, swinging it vigorously all around him’. With ‘the help of God and his own right arm’, Roger apparently ‘made such a slaughter of his enemies that the bodies of the men he had slain lay round about him like trees in a thick forest uprooted by the wind’. Here the supposed impact of Roger’s martial ferocity is highlighted, but there is arguably less emphasis on raw brutality.

66 Lucan, Pharsalia, IV. 787, ‘no corpse had even the space to fall’.
Returning to Robert the Monk, he went on in the same section of his account to reinforce the sense of Frankish indomitability by introducing the notion that the crusaders’ weapons possessed an anthropomorphic quality. ‘Other swords and other types of weapon could be satiated with the blood of Turks’, Robert maintained, ‘but because these were of Frankish manufacture, they could not be blunted and could not tire of blood.’

This image of insatiable, semi-anthropomorphised swords did not appear in any of Robert’s known sources, but it did resonate with some aspects of earlier Germanic warrior culture, such as the personification of weapons and the practice of sword blessing. Such sentiments were certainly current in lay aristocratic martial culture at the time Robert was writing, as the popular *Chanson de Roland* featured frequent references to the ferocity of particular swords, not least Roland’s own famous blade, Durendal.

**iv) a focalising protagonist as an agent of violence**

Having described a collective Frankish assault on the Muslims fleeing back to Antioch, Robert the Monk proceeded to echo another trope of both *chansons de geste* and contemporary biographies: focusing on the epic martial feats of a heroic individual protagonist. Robert selected the First Crusader Godfrey of Bouillon – duke of Lower Lotharingia and leader of a substantial crusader contingent – to fulfil this role. Why he did so remains open to question. The *Gesta Francorum* made no specific mention of Godfrey in relation to these events, while Raymond of Aguilers did note that ‘Godfrey distinguished himself greatly’ during this specific encounter, but went on to focus more on the individual prowess demonstrated by the otherwise obscure Provençal crusader, Isoard of Ganges.

In all likelihood, Robert the Monk was at least partially inspired to highlight Godfrey of Bouillon’s supposed achievements on 7 March by an emerging oral tradition, evidently circulating in the Latin West during the first decade of the twelfth century. This seems to have centred upon the duke’s role in battling the Muslims on the Orontes Bridge – most

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69 RM, p. 44. ‘Illic satiari possent enses et tela aliarum gentium Turcorum sanguine, sed quia Francigenarum erant, nec obtunditer poterant, nec repleri cruore.’

70 BB, p. 51, did include a comment on the insatiability of Franks for bloodshed, but this was not linked to their weapons, but presented as a strictly human impulse, with Baldric stating that the crusaders were ‘insatiabile killers’ (‘insaciati peremptores’). On sword blessings see: M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, ‘From Pilgrimage to Crusade: The Liturgy of Departure, 1095-1300’, *Speculum*, vol. 88.1 (2013), pp. 44-91 [here p. 51].

71 *CdR*, l. 1966, which also portrayed warriors as having an insatiable appetite for war, such as Oliver’s ‘thirst for revenge will never be sated’.

72 *GF*, pp. 40-1; RA, p. 61. For further discussion of Raymond’s account and the historiography of this episode see: Simon Johns, ““Claruit ibi multum dux Lotharingiae”: The development of the epic tradition of Godfrey the Bouillon and the bisected Muslim”, in Simon Parsons and Linda Paterson (eds), *Literature of the Crusades* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 7-24.
notably the ‘fact’ that he cut one opponent in half with a single stroke of his sword. The emergence and evolution of this story has been widely discussed in modern historiography, with Duke Godfrey’s most recent biographer, Simon Johns, characterising it as the most powerful micro narrative to emerge from the First Crusade. Nonetheless, Robert the Monk’s portrayal of Godfrey’s putative feats of arms – and the graphic violence associated with them – deserve closer attention.

Robert seems to have shaped his presentation of this story partly to further accentuate the extent of the bloodshed enacted by the Franks, but also to foreshadow Godfrey of Bouillon’s subsequent elevation to become the first Latin ruler of Jerusalem in the summer of 1099. Robert recorded that Godfrey, the ‘outstanding ornament of knighthood’, spearheaded the crusader attack once the fighting actually reached the Orontes Bridge, asking ‘what language could explain how much carnage the duke alone inflicted on the bodies of the wicked people’. Godfrey was said to have despatched the tremulous Muslims without mercy, ‘slicing through their necks’. Up to this point, Robert’s portrayal of Godfrey bore some similarity to the Carmen de Hastingae Proelio’s depiction of William the Conqueror’s behaviour at Hastings, where he was said to have fought ‘with the strength of a Hercules’. ‘Some he beheaded’, according to the Carmen, ‘some he dismembered, and some he devoured with his sword’.

However, at Antioch, Godfrey was then supposedly confronted on the bridge by a Turkish emir – a champion, ‘bolder than the rest, unusually heavily built and of greater strength’. Robert likened this figure to ‘another Goliath’, probably in recognition of the fact that Godfrey would go on, like the Old Testament King David, to rule over Jerusalem.

Having survived a single, mighty sword blow to his shield, Godfrey, apparently ‘ablaze with

73 AA, p. 244, seized upon this opportunity to present Godfrey, the prime protagonist of his entire account of the First Crusade, as a fearsome warrior, but even within Albert’s own text it is apparent that this may have been a manipulation. BB, p. 51, Godfrey’s putative feats of arms did not feature in the first recension of Baldric of Bourgueil’s narrative, but a brief version was added in a subsequent manuscript, Paris, BNF MS Latin 5513, that stated: ‘Moreover, when they wanted to defend the bridge, Duke Godfrey so demolished one of them that half fell in the water; his horse carried the other half among the Turks, and greatly terrified them with it.’ GN, pp. 190-3, made no reference to this episode when actually describing events at Antioch, but then, towards the end of his narrative (p. 284-5) noted that he had heard someone sing the story of Godfrey’s ‘remarkable deed’.
75 RM, p. 44, ‘militie decus egregium’, ‘Et que lingua valet explicare quantas strages dux solus illic dederit super corporibus gentis inique?’
76 RM, p. 44, ‘videret ducem sic supra suos inmisericorditer sevientem’, ‘Ille exertis brachiis ense nudato eorum cervices amputat.’
77 CdHP, p. 28.
78 RM, pp. 44-5, ‘Cumque unus ex eis audacior ceteris, et mole corporis prestantior, et viribus, ut alter Golias, robustior’.

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furious anger, prepared to return the blow’ and thus ‘aimed for his neck’. Robert went on to describe how:

He raised the sword and plunged it into the left side of his shoulder-blades with such force that it split the chest down the middle, slashed through the spine and vital organs and, slippery with blood, came out unbroken above the right leg. As a result the whole head and the right side slipped down into the water, whilst the part remaining on the horse was carried back into the city.79

The bisection of an enemy by a heroic protagonist was another trope of the chansons de geste genre. Both of the Chanson de Roland’s leading figures, Roland and Oliver, were said to have slain numerous foes by chopping them in half. Roland, for example, supposedly killed the mounted Saracen emir Chernuble with a sword strike that sliced ‘through his entire body [from his head] down to his groin’; indeed, so titanic was the force of this attack that the blade went on to ‘cut through [Chernuble’s] gilded saddle [and ]only came to a halt in the horse’s flesh’.80 In chansons, however, such epic, bisecting blows were almost always delivered vertically, from the head downwards, whereas most early Latin crusade narratives that included this episode described Godfrey delivering a lateral cut, separating the top half of his enemy’s body from the bottom.81 For reasons that remain unclear, Robert the Monk elected to describe a diagonal strike from left to right. It is apparent, however, that Robert intended Godfrey’s deeds to be perceived as thoroughly meritorious and divinely mandated, as he took care to note that the duke was sheltered from harm because ‘God looked after his soldier and defended him under a protective shield’.82

v) blood imagery

Robert the Monk was the first crusade chronicler to extensively develop the use of blood imagery in his account – indeed, his employment of this imagery represents the most active

79 RM, p. 45. ‘Dux, ira vehementi succensus, parat rependere vicem, eiusque tali modo appetit cervicem. Ensem elevat, eumque a sinistra parte scapularum tanta virtute intorsit, quod pectus medium disiunxit, spinam et vitalia interruptit, et sic lubricus ensis super crus dextrum integer exivit; sicque caput integrum cum dextra parte corporis immersit gurgiti, partemque que equo presidebat remisit civitati.’
80 CdR, ll. 1325-32. Geoffrey of Malaterra, pp. 255-7 also described Roger Bosso bisecting a Muslim opponent near Messina, noting that ‘he killed him with a single blow, cutting him in half [such that] the body lay in two pieces’. Geoffrey evidently sought to heighten the drama of this event because he carefully emphasised that Roger was in particular danger as he was un-armoured, but no close attention was paid to the brutality of the episode.
81 AA, p. 244, see also n. 117.
82 RM, p. 45.
and innovative facet of his approach to the amplification of violence. There were precedents
for many of the techniques Robert employed in this regard. Classical texts such as Virgil’s
_Aeneid_ often featured references to human blood that heightened the descriptive force and
drama of violent episodes. Here a great effusion of blood might pour forth from a slain
enemy like ‘a river’ or ‘a wave’. This cruor might be ‘warm’, ‘dark’ or ‘fresh’, and might
stain hands, drench armour or clothing, or fill ditches and streams.\(^\text{83}\) By the ninth century,
Christian writers were employing blood imagery to accentuate the portrayal of violent
conflict with Muslims. When describing the Muslim sack of Syracuse in 878, the monk
Theodosius recorded that he was confronted by a Muslim warrior ‘armed with a naked sword
which smoked and dripped still-warm blood’.\(^\text{84}\) Near-contemporary works composed before
Robert began his account, such as the _Carmen de Hastingae Proelio_ and the _Chanson de
Roland_, also made use of graphic blood imagery when describing both inter-Latin and Latin-
Muslim violence. Arguably, however, in seeking to enliven his own narrative, Robert
pioneered new approaches to the portrayal of blood.

In Robert’s _Historia_, references to human blood functioned as signifiers of extreme
violence; as cues to the reader or audience that this was a moment of dramatic and
momentous carnage. Robert appears to have made a conscious decision to harness the
capacity of blood imagery to heighten the diegetic power of text – that is to say, the ability of
the written word to inspire an imaginative response, such that the reader or audience member
might picture the scene or storyworld being described in their own mind’s eye. Robert seems
to have recognised that the visual and physical qualities of human blood – its colour, texture
and smell – meant that references to blood could prompt a sensory reaction in the reader /
audience, intensifying their experience of the depicted moment and, most importantly,
deepening their awareness of the potency of this violence.

Robert made significant use of blood imagery when recording the events of early
1098 outside Antioch. When Godfrey of Bouillon felled the Turkish emir on the Orontes
Bridge, the duke’s sword was noted to have been left ‘slick’ or ‘slippery’ (_lubricus_) with his
enemy’s blood.\(^\text{85}\) As we have seen, Robert earlier sought to underscore the crusaders’
indomitability by affirming that their swords had an insatiable thirst for blood.\(^\text{86}\) Perhaps most
importantly, he focused on the manner in which blood might alter the natural world to

\(^{83}\) Virgil, _Aeneid_, II. 532, X. 908, VI. 248, III. 28, VII. 555.
\(^{85}\) RM, p. 45. _CdHP_, pp. 28-30, similarly related how, in the midst of battle, Duke William’s sword ‘was defiled
by brains and streams of blood’.
\(^{86}\) RM, p. 44, ‘nec repleri cruore’.
highlight moments of violence that transcended normality.\textsuperscript{87} When describing the outcome of the 9 February Lake Battle, the \textit{Gesta Francorum} recorded that ‘our men pursued them and massacred them right up to the Iron Bridge’, while Raymond of Aguilers simply noted that God ‘cast down the pagans’.\textsuperscript{88} In contrast, when describing this same event, Robert reported that: ‘The road was strewn with the bodies of the dying; the air was full of groaning voices; the earth, soaked with the blood of the dying, was pitted with the hooves of trampling horses.’ Here, the image of blood-soaked terrain was paired with horse-trampled ground, and augmented by the aural cue of ‘groaning voices’ to engender a clear sense that the crusaders had achieved a scouring victory.\textsuperscript{89}

Robert made a notable authorial intervention of this same type when portraying the fierce fighting on the Orontes Bridge on 7 March 1098. In relating these events, the anonymous author of the \textit{Gesta Francorum} deployed an element of blood imagery, recording that, as a result of intense skirmish on the bridge, ‘the water of [the Orontes below] seemed to be running red with the blood of Turks’.\textsuperscript{90} Guibert of Nogent followed this lead, noting that ‘the signs of carnage were so great that the Orontes seemed to flow with blood, not water’, as did Baldric of Bourgueil, who wrote that ‘the very river seemed to be both flowing with blood’.\textsuperscript{91} However, Robert intensified this image, through the use of more active and definite language. In his account, the Orontes no longer simply ‘seemed to be running red’, it was wholly transformed, such that he claimed ‘the effusion of blood turned the river crimson’. The impression of exceptional brutality was then butressed by Robert’s additional suggestion that so many bodies fell into the Orontes that they actually ‘stopped the current and forced it

\textsuperscript{87} This was, to an extent, a topos of medieval writing about warfare. \textit{CdHP}, p. 30, noted that Duke William ‘bloodied the field of battle with the gore of the slain’. \textit{CdR}, l. 1341, referred to ‘bright [Saracen] blood lying everywhere on the ground’. The ubiquity of this imagery is also demonstrated by the fact that, decades later, the Persian writer Imad al-Din al-Isfahani described the aftermath of the Muslim victory in the battle of Hattin in 1187 by affirming that the ‘field of battle had become a sea of blood; the dust was stained red, rivers of blood ran freely’, Francesco Gabrieli, \textit{Arab Historians of the Crusades} (London, 1969), p. 135. Nonetheless, Robert the Monk seems to have employed this technique with a more purposeful focus on its narrative impact.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{GF}, p. 37. \textit{RA}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{RM}, p. 42, ‘\textit{Sternitur via corporibus morientium, impletur aer vocibus heilantium; tellus, madefacta cruore morientium, perforatur pedibus conculcantium equorum.}’ On same events: \textit{GN}, p. 188, ‘we did not cease cutting them down and decapitating their bodies until the narrow bridges of the Pharpahr’; \textit{BB}, p. 47, the crusaders ‘smashed wounds against wounds and the plains were red with the quantity of blood. You would have seen intestines hanging, and you would have seen heads cut off and scattered, mutilated bodies dying. Moreover, the Turks were seized by a very great fear, and suddenly their battle lines fell apart and they took flight. So the Christians pursued them beyond the Iron Bridge, bringing them down, trampling them underfoot, slaughtering them.’

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{GF}, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{GN}, p. 192; \textit{BB}, p. 51.
to flow back the other way’. Here was violence of such severity that it supposedly prompted an interruption of the natural order. This may well have been another echo of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, in which Sulla’s proscriptions reportedly led to so much carnage that Rome’s River Tiber was ‘damned by a barrier of corpses’, but if so, Robert has repurposed Lucan’s value-negative depiction of what might be termed unnatural violence into a supposedly meritorious image.  

Robert employed a similar palette of imagery in other sections of his account, though as we shall see, arguably no other violent episode was as thoroughly reworked or extensively amplified as the events outside Antioch in early 1098. When recording the crusaders’ earlier victory over the Seljuq Turks of Anatolia at the battle of Dorylaeum on 1 July 1097, Robert depicted Muslims’ fate in a section of verse: ‘The soldiers of Christ inflict a terrible death on them. / The earth is crimson with blood, every fold of the mountain is red, / And the river is swollen with flowing blood. / So many dead bodies were strewn over the battlefield, / that horses struggled to find somewhere to put their feet.’ Then during fighting near the Muslim-held coastal city of Tripoli, Robert asserted that ‘so much human blood was spilt there that the water supplies for the city flowed red and their cisterns were full of it.’ Most famously of all, in recording the Frankish sack of Jerusalem on 15 July 1099, Robert wrote of an ‘indescribable slaughter’ within the Aqsa Mosque, where: ‘So much human blood was spilt there that the bodies of the slain were revolving on the floor on a current of blood; and arms and hands which had been cut off floated on the blood ... Even the soldiers carrying out the massacre could hardly bear the vapours rising from the warm blood.’

**vi) human responses to violence**

As this last extract demonstrates, Robert the Monk took the original and highly distinctive step of moving beyond the mere depiction of violence to relate details of the human

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92 RM, pp. 45-6, ‘Cruor effusus sanguineum flumini dabit colorem, cunctisque cernentibus magnum incutiebat horrorem. Quippe densitas corporum fluminis impediit cursum, et retrogrado inessu ire cogebat retrorsum.’ BB, p. 51, did observe that the river was ‘covered with corpses’ (cadaveribus supertegeretur), but made no indication that this affected the flow of the river.


94 RM, p. 27, ‘Sed miles Christi posternit eos nece tristi / Sanguine terra madet, monites rubet undique clivus, / completurque simul fluitanti sanguine rivus. / Corpora cesorum tot erant prostrata per agrum, / quod nisi nisi xix nullus curret quibat equus.’

95 RM, p. 93, ‘Tantum ibi humani sanguinis fusum est, quia aqua rubicunda facta est, que in civitate fluebat, et eorum cisternas replebat.’

96 RM, p. 99, ‘Tantum ibi humani sanguinis effusum est, quia cesorum corpora, unda sanguinis impellente, volvebantur per pavimentum, et brachia sive tuncate manus super cruorem fluitabant ... Ipsi etiam milites qui hoc carnificium operabantur, exhalentes calidi cruoris nebulas vix patiebantur.’
responses to bloodshed and brutality, seemingly with the intention of further amplifying and
exceptionalising these events.\(^\text{97}\) In Jerusalem, he suggested that the crusaders themselves
struggled to tolerate the physical consequences of their own barbarity. At Antioch, in 1098,
he concentrated instead on the Muslims’ reactions to carnage, focusing on sensations of fear
and horror.

Thus, Robert recorded that, in the chaotic stampede towards Antioch’s Orontes
Bridge on 7 March 1098, the Muslims ‘were so desperate with fear that they crushed each
other to death. So great was their terror that those behind trampled those in front to get away’.
Then, when Godfrey of Bouillon waded into the fray on the bridge itself, his enemies
supposedly fled before him because ‘they feared the Duke’s sword like death but could not
avoid it’.\(^\text{98}\) Robert took particular care to frame the reaction to Godfrey’s subsequent defeat
of the Goliath-like Turkish emir. Having described how the duke bisected the emir with one
mighty sword blow, Robert claimed that while ‘the whole head and the right side slipped
down into the water ... the part remaining on the horse was carried back into the city.’ There,
this gruesome spectacle apparently evoked a visceral response: ‘All those inside rushed
together to see this horrible sight, and were struck with amazement, panic and fear, overcome
with terror; here there were screams like those of a woman in labour, there voices raised in
misery.’ Similarly, the sight of the Orontes turning red with human blood was said to have
‘filled all those watching with great horror’.\(^\text{99}\)

The notion that an audience might have observed the fighting on 7 March did not
originate with Robert the Monk. The anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum* made what
appears to have been an authorial intervention of his own, seemingly designed to heighten the
drama of this passage, by recording that as the bloodshed on Orontes Bridge reached its peak,
‘Christian women who were in the city came to the windows in the walls’. These female
eastern Christian citizens of Antioch supposedly looked on ‘and when they saw the wretched
fate of the Turks they clapped their hands secretly’.\(^\text{100}\) Here, the author of the *Gesta seemed

\(^{97}\) For a discussion of Raymond of Aguilers’ use of ‘horror’ in a different context and the suggestion that this
represented an example of depicting ‘the sublime’ as a form of ‘hyperbolic symbolism’ see: Buc, *Holy War*, pp.
262-74.

\(^{98}\) RM, p. 44, ‘Et tanta calamitas eos oppresserat, quia alter alterum ad mortem opprimebat. Tantus illos timor
invaserat, quia subsequens precedentem, ut fugere posset, prosternebat.’; ‘gladius ducis ut mortem
expavescerat, et tamen vitare non poterant.’

\(^{99}\) RM, p. 45, ‘partemque que equo presidebat remisit civitati. Ad quod horrendum spectaculum omnes qui erant
in civitate confluunt, et videntes sic admirati sunt, conturbati sunt, commoti sunt, tremor apprehendit eos. Ibi
dolores ut parturientis, ibi voces heulatium, quia ille unas fuerat ex admiraldis eorum.

\(^{100}\) *GF*, p. 41. GN, p. 192, largely followed the *Gesta’s* lead, but embroidered his account somewhat, writing:
‘The women of the city who were Christian stood on the ramparts of the wall, feeding upon the sight; as they
watched the Turks perish and submit to calamity they groaned openly, but then turned their faces away and
to be inviting his readers or audience to join in the act of picturing the crusaders’ victory – visualising their achievements and, perhaps, sharing in a sense of celebration as the Muslim enemy suffered defeat.

Robert the Monk significantly reshaped and intensified this narrative cue. In his account, the idea that the watchers were all women was jettisoned, though the Gesta’s lead may have prompted Robert to draw out the reference to screams ‘like those of a woman in labour’ from the Book of Psalms. Instead, Robert referred on two occasions to a more generic group of spectators, presumably made up of Antiochene Muslim citizens, and tied their experience of watching to two specific events – the grisly fate of the bisected emir and the literal transformation of the Orontes into a river of blood. In these passages it would appear that, in contrast to the Gesta’s author, Robert was prompting his readers or audience to focus upon the sensations of abject dread and horror suffered by the enemy; a shift that further accentuated the brutality of the violence supposedly enacted on 7 March.

vii) alterity and the justification of violence
Robert the Monk seems to have intended that the audience for his Historia would consider the crusaders’ merciless brutality to be justified in part by the fact that their Muslim opponents were themselves supposedly savage and almost sub-human. At the very start of his account, when relating the details of Pope Urban II’s sermon at Clermont on 27 November 1095 announcing what would become known as the First Crusade, Robert catalogued a series of appalling crimes that he claimed had been committed by ‘a people alien to God’. He maintained that these Muslims had ‘invaded the lands of the Christians ... reduced the people with sword, rapine and flame’, and engaged in shocking acts of sadistic cruelty and ritualised mutilation. Robert deployed an element of blood imagery to intensify this violence when describing how Muslims reportedly ‘circumcise Christians and pour the resulting blood either on the altars or into the baptismal vessels’ in despoiled Christian churches – a description that had strong echoes of Sallust’s account of the Sullan proscriptions in Republican Rome, where ‘altars .. were fouled with the blood of supplicants’.

Interestingly, after this first intensive salvo of accusations, Robert did not consistently prioritise the theme of dehumanisation in his depiction of Muslims across the course of his

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102 RM, pp. 5-7. Sallust, Historiarum Fragmenta, l. 38.
Historia – perhaps assuming that his readers or audience would readily accept the notion that the crusaders’ Muslim enemies were innately malign and brutish. Nonetheless, when recording the events of early 1098, Robert made a subtle but significant adjustment of the account presented in the Gesta Francorum so as to impute a bestial quality to the Turks. In describing the Muslim ambush of the Latin party returning from St Simeon on 7 March, the Gesta noted that: ‘The Turks began to gnash their teeth and chatter and howl with very loud cries, wheeling round our men, throwing darts and loosing arrows, wounding and slaughtering them most brutally.’103 This sudden, disorientating assault was shown to have prompted the fearful Latins to take flight. In the Gesta Francorum then, the Muslims’ unfamiliar war-cries served to accentuate their ferocity.

Robert the Monk repositioned and repurposed this incident. In his account of the earlier Lake Battle on 9 February 1098, Robert wrote that the Muslims ‘grind their teeth and bark like dogs, believing that terrifies their enemies’, but added that ‘our men laughed at this’.104 Here these sounds were no longer intimidating, but rather intended as evidence of the enemy’s lowly, animalistic nature. Robert returned to this theme after the crusaders’ victory on Antioch’s Orontes Bridge on 7 March. Drawing this section of his narrative towards its conclusion, Robert declared: ‘That was how the Turks were gloriously defeated by the Franks; their jabbering voices, the grinding of their teeth and the noise of their daily insults were no longer heard.’105 In the Historia, Robert seems to have intended that this silencing would serve as a sensory or aural affirmation of the Muslims’ abject defeat. He went on to observe that the distraught enemy were left ‘weeping bitterly, tearing their cheeks and pulling out their hair’. In a stark affirmation of the crusaders’ supposed spiritual and martial dominance, and the divine sanction underpinning their actions, Robert closed Book IV of his narrative by stating that the Antiochene Muslims ‘started to beg for the help of Mahommed, their master; but Mahommad could not bring back those Christ had decided to destroy through his soldiers.’106

Forensic analysis of Robert the Monk’s Historia proves that early Latin narratives of the First Crusade embellished and exaggerated their descriptions of the bloodshed enacted by the Franks during their journey through the Holy Land. By considering Robert the Monk’s likely

103 GF, p. 40.
104 RM, p. 42, ‘Strident dentibus et more canum latrant, quia sic terrere suos adversarios putant. Sed hec nostri irredeabant.’
105 RM, p. 46, ‘Sic itaque superati sunt Turci magnanimiter a Francis, siluitque deinceps garrula vox eorum, stridor dentium, et cotidianorum clamositas convitiorum.’ In this passage, Robert closely followed the GF, p. 41.
106 RM, p. 46, ‘quos Christus per suos milites voluit exterminare’.
sources of information and comparing his narrative strategies with those adopted by his peers, Guibert of Nogent and Baldric of Bourgueil, it is possible to clearly demonstrate the extent to which Robert amplified the portrayal of violence in his *Historia*, and to elucidate the narrative techniques and effects he employed to this end.

To date, modern scholarship has primarily associated the heightened portrayal of crusader violence with the spiritual and apocalyptic resonance of Jerusalem and, more specifically, with the Frankish sack of that city in 1099. However, it is apparent that Robert the Monk employed a complex array of narrative techniques to accentuate violence enacted during a much earlier phase of the First Crusade. Robert’s *Historia* significantly amplified and exaggerated the carnage witnessed outside Antioch in early 1098, even to the extent of suggesting that the crusaders’ brutal feats of arms might inspire sensations of horror.

In all likelihood, Robert made a conscious and purposeful decision to shape his account in this manner, but in this instance the impressions he sought to convey do not appear to have been tied, first and foremost, to images of ritual purification or impending Armageddon. Instead, Robert’s priority seems to have been to celebrate the Latins’ martial ferocity and indomitability, thereby affirming their supposedly incontrovertible and God-given superiority over their Muslim opponents. At the same time, Robert evidently sought to downplay any instances of Latin defeat, fear or weakness when describing the events of early 1098. As a result, the amplification of violence in this portion of his *Historia* allowed him to fulfil a broader narrative strategy. Robert was able to present a clearer and cleaner image of the crusaders emerging decisively from the divinely ordained crisis of December 1097 and January 1098. He was also able to highlight the wider significance of the events that then played out in the environs of Antioch in February and March, when, fighting as God’s own weapon, the crusaders achieved a series of momentous victories that, in his account at least, set them surely on the path towards Antioch’s conquest.

**The wider influence of Robert the Monk’s portrayal of violence**

It has been argued that Robert the Monk adopted a distinctive, and to some degree novel, approach to the portrayal of violence in his *Historia*, recording a history of the First Crusade that combined theological sentiment and epic military drama, revelling in the depiction of violence.

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107 RM, p. 40, when describing the crisis of December 1097 and January 1098, Robert declared: ‘Hanc itaque famis acerbitatem ut suos probaret evenire permisit Deus, et ut terror suus fieret in universis nationibus’, ‘God allowed this suffering from hunger to come about so that he might test his people and strike terror of himself into all nations.’
extreme crusader violence so as to validate, valorise and celebrate the Franks’ divinely ordained successes. Robert amplified the extent and severity of crusader brutality by making particular use of diegetic imagery (particularly that associated with human blood), by highlighting the capacity of bloodthirsty violence to alter, or even interrupt, the natural order, and by celebrating the fact that killing and carnage could prompt sensations of revulsion or horror. By these means, Robert presented what was arguably the most exaggerated early-twelfth-century Latin account of the violence enacted by the First Crusaders.108

How influential was this experiment in extremity? Given the Historia’s remarkably extensive manuscript tradition, it might be expected that Robert’s narrative would have had a major impact on both contemporary perceptions of crusading and the approach of subsequent generations of historians seeking to compose their own accounts, either of the First Crusade, or of later crusades, or indeed of non-crusade related warfare. Within the confines of this present study, it is not possible to go beyond a few indicative suggestions related to this issue. These are designed to highlight the possible range of influences at work, while also highlighting the potential methodological value of a thematically-keyed close textual study that might be applied much more widely. This initial survey seems to indicate that Robert’s wider influence was relatively muted.

Neil Wright has demonstrated that the language used to describe Levantine First Crusade warfare could be repurposed to depict inter-Latin conflict in Europe.109 In this respect, it may be possible to detect an otherwise unremarked connection between Robert’s Historia and Abbot Suger of St Denis’ biography of King Louis VI of France, completed c. 1143.110 In recording a brutal example of internecine rivalry in the Norman Vexin – the gruesome murder of Guy of La Roche-Guyon and his family by his own brother-in-law, William, in c. 1109 – Suger employed many of the same narrative cues seen in Robert’s Historia, though Suger shifted between value-negative and value-positive portrayal of violence.

108 Albert of Aachen also revelled in the depiction of bloodshed and violence, for example, pp. 428-36. Ralph of Caen, Tancredus, ed. Edoard D’Angelo (Turnhout, 2011), also accentuated the calculated brutality of the crusaders, perhaps most notably at Marrat an-Numan, pp. 85-6.
Blood imagery was used to accentuate the initial murderous carnage, with Suger intimating that, as Guy’s grief-stricken and mortally wounded widow clambered onto his body to deliver a final embrace, ‘she slid along like a snake, dragging her own blood-soaked body’ onto his. William of La Roche-Guyon and his followers were also depicted through the language of alterity as bestial sub-humans, not dissimilar to the Muslims at Antioch. These were killers who supposedly ‘raged and roamed about gnashing their teeth’, while William himself was said to have hungered for ‘human blood’ like ‘a wild beast’.¹¹¹

According to Suger, this ‘monstrous crime’ was soon avenged by forces loyal to King Louis VI. In describing William of La Roche-Guyon’s subsequent punishment and death, Suger adjusted his approach so as to valorise, rather than condemn, extreme violence. William was thus attacked by righteous troops, inspired ‘by the hand of God’, who ‘piously slaughtered the impious, mutilated the limbs of some, dis-emboweled others with great pleasure, and tortured them with every kind of cruelty, still thinking themselves too kind’. Suger even suggested that, in some respects, this carnage transgressed the natural order, noting that ‘the living and the dead were thrown through the windows. Bristling with countless arrows like hedgehogs, their bodies stopped short in the air, vibrating on the sharp points of lances as if the ground itself rejected them.’¹¹² It is, of course, possible that Suger of St Denis was independently inspired by classical and scriptural precedents when rendering this account, but he may also have been exposed to, and influenced by, Robert’s Historia.¹¹³

In terms of influencing subsequent Latin accounts of the First Crusade, Robert’s narrative appears to have been eclipsed by that composed Baldric of Bourgueil.¹¹⁴ To date, it has been argued that, in writing his monumental account of the First Crusade and the history of the Latin settlements in the East (completed in the mid-1180s), William of Tyre drew

¹¹¹ Suger of St Denis, pp. 112-22.
¹¹² Suger of St Denis, p. 120.
¹¹³ Damien Kempf, ‘A textual archaeology of the First Crusade’, pp. 116-26, has explored the significant transmission of Robert the Monk’s narrative in Germany, noting the production a copy of his Historia that was presented to the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1189 as he was preparing to embark on the Third Crusade, also putative connections to the historian Otto of Freising. It is worth noting that Otto made repeated use of blood imagery to accentuate inter-Latin warfare and also made reference to ‘a horrible spectacle of pursuit, flight, slaughter and capture’ when Henry of Austria fought near Milan. Otto of Freising and Rahewin, Gesta Frederici seu rectius Cronica, ed. Franz-Josef Schmale, trans. Adolf Schmidt (Darmstadt, 1965), pp. 378, 491.
¹¹⁴ Baldric’s account was almost certainly used as a base text by Orderic Vitalis. Roach, ‘Orderic Vitalis and the First Crusade’, pp. 179-80. Robert the Monk’s Historia may also have exerted an otherwise unnoticed influence over Henry of Huntingdon’s Historia Anglorum. Although almost all of Robert’s narrative imagery amplifying violence is absent in Henry’s account of the events at Antioch in March 1098, there are some other unusual and suggestive similarities. Like Robert, Henry recorded that Fatimid troops actually entered Antioch and indicated that the Orontes ‘flowed with blood’. Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford, 1996), pp. 432-4.
heavily on Baldric’s text. Nonetheless, a number of distinct lexical and narrative similarities between William’s Chronicon and Robert the Monk’s Historia suggest another possible, and previously unrecognised, connection. William followed Robert’s lead more closely when describing the effects of the 7 March Orontes Bridge skirmish. Going beyond Baldric’s suggestion that the river ‘seemed to be flowing with blood’, William echoed Robert’s more direct assertion that the ‘effusion of blood turned the river crimson’, by recording that ‘the very colour of the water became changed’, as the Orontes became ‘a torrent of blood’. William also made a number of references to extreme violence, accentuated with blood imagery, prompting sensations of horror, though these were not associated with the siege of Antioch.

Traditionally, Robert the Monk’s most significant impact upon the memorialisation of the First Crusade has been deemed to be the incorporation of elements of his Historia into later version of the vernacular epic, La Chanson d’Antioche. In this regard, however, it should be noted that, although the Chanson’s many elaborate and detailed descriptions of the violence supposedly enacted by the crusaders’ during the siege of Antioch may have built upon portions of Robert’s text, they did not directly follow the Historia’s lead in terms of narrative construction, use of metaphor or diegetic effect. Indeed, where Robert might be deemed to have subtly encouraged his audience to picture events in their minds’ eye through a lingering focus on scenes of blood-strewn carnage, the Chanson embraced the more direct, recurrent trope of orally performed works in repeatedly stating ‘had you been there you would have’ either seen or heard what was then described.

Robert the Monk’s Historia does not appear to have significantly influenced the portrayal of crusader violence in accounts of either the subsequent history of the Latin East or of later crusades. A recent study of the depiction of violence in Walter the Chancellor’s Bella Antiochena has suggested a potential connection with Robert’s work, while noting the distinction that Walter employed similar narrative techniques, but did so with the aim of

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116 William of Tyre, p. 279.
117 William of Tyre, pp. 411-12, 471-2, employed the theme of horror on two particular occasions: the 1099 sack of Jerusalem and, interestingly, the Latin capture of Caesarea in 1101.
119 La Chanson d’Antioche, pp. 478-80.
accentuated Muslim, rather than Latin, violence. Elsewhere, Robert’s experimentation did not prompt the authors of successive waves of crusade narratives to embrace or imitate the techniques he utilised when amplifying crusader brutality. A case in point would be Ambroise’s *Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, a medieval French verse narrative of the Third Crusade composed around 1196, that itself fused elements of royal biography, historical narrative and *chansons* epic. Ambroise had ample opportunities to revel in the depiction of his protagonist, Richard the Lionheart, butchering Muslim opponents. Ambroise consistently embellished his descriptions of Richard’s martial feats: affirming that, at the battle of Arsuf, this ‘valiant king of England’ left a trail of Muslim dead in his wake that stretched ‘for half a league’; suggesting that in early August 1192, Richard fought off thousands of Muslim opponents almost single-handedly, battling ‘from morning till night’. Nonetheless, Ambroise did not choose to linger on the graphic or heightened depiction of crusader bloodshed, even when recounting the execution of some 2,700 Muslim captives outside Acre. In common with most Latin Christian authors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he does not appear to have been inspired by Robert the Monk’s experiment in extremity.

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122 Ambroise, pp. 105, 186-8.
123 Ambroise, p. 89.