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News, history, and narrative: remembering the fall of Jerusalem c. 1200

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ABSTRACT

In late 1187, letters and envoys from the East alerted audiences in the West to the defeat of Christian forces at Hattin in July, the subsequent capture of various major Christian strongholds, and, finally, the siege of Jerusalem beginning in late September. However, news of Jerusalem's fall on 2 October does not seem to have reached Western Europe until spring 1188. This extended delay is particularly surprising because chronicles tend to treat the defeat at Hattin, the loss of Jerusalem, and the launch of the Third Crusade in late October 1187 as a sequence of directly related events. It is easy to understand why: this was the chronological order of events; in hindsight, the encyclical that launched the crusade could be read in this way; and it made for a simpler, more compelling historical account. However, it also represents a re-ordering and re-shaping of the past. This article explores how contemporary writers tackled the chronology of events in late 1187. It examines six late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century histories and chronicles, dividing them into two main groups based on the 'global' or 'local' perspective taken by each author. In theory, those writing from a 'local' perspective were more likely to structure their accounts according to when information was received compared to those taking a 'global' perspective, whose authors emphasised the date of events. However, analysis shows that both groups chose to obscure the complicated realities of communication and action in 1187 in favour of a more streamlined narrative.

KEYWORDS

News; history; chronicles;
Third Crusade; Jerusalem

In late 1187, a stream of letters and envoys from the East alerted Western Europe to an unfolding disaster in the Holy Land. They brought news of the defeat of the Christian army at Hattin in July, the subsequent capture of various major Christian strongholds, and, finally, the siege of Jerusalem, which began in late September. Jerusalem fell shortly afterwards on 2 October; however, my recent research into communications in this period indicates that news of the city's capture did not reach the West until spring 1188 – not November 1187, as previously thought.¹ The extended delay in the reception of this news is particularly surprising because contemporary historiographical

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texts tend to treat the defeat at Hattin, the loss of Jerusalem, and the launch of the Third Crusade in late October 1187 as a sequence of directly related events. It is easy to understand why they did so: this was the chronological order of events; in hindsight, the encyclical that launched the crusade and other documents from the time could be read in this way; and it made for a simpler, more compelling historical account. Instead, this paper is concerned with the 'how'. It examines the ways in which six chronicles and histories written c. 1200 dealt with the historiographical problem posed by late 1187, when intersecting events occurred in multiple locations over an extended period of time. It focuses particularly on how news relating to the fall of Jerusalem is portrayed. Although our sources tackle this material from different perspectives and in different ways, they all tend to tell the same story: news of the loss of the Holy City arrived in autumn 1187 and was the main motivating factor in the launch of the crusade. By both drawing attention to this inaccurate claim and analysing the ways in which it is presented, this study reveals the underlying temporal and spatial frameworks that shaped these texts. It also indicates how, within a decade, the historical memory of the fall of Jerusalem had been recast around the dates of its loss, i.e. when it happened, rather than when this news actually reached audiences in the West.

In 1187, Christians in the Holy Land suffered a series of major setbacks that, by the end of the year, left Saladin in control of the kingdom of Jerusalem. At the battle of Hattin on 4 July, Saladin's forces routed the army led by Guy, king of Jerusalem. The relic of the True Cross, present on the battlefield to help ensure victory, was captured, as was Guy and almost all of those who had fought alongside him. The contingents of Templars and Hospitallers who had been taken captive were then killed on Saladin's orders. The defeat at Hattin proved catastrophic for the defence of the kingdom. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, almost all the major cities and fortresses of the territory fell to Saladin's army, including Acre in July and Ascalon in September. By 20 September, Jerusalem itself was under siege and on 2 October it surrendered to Saladin.²

News of the unfolding events in the East reached Western Europe through a series of staggered reports. An initial wave of communications, which brought news of Hattin and the strongholds that had fallen between July and early September, seems to have arrived on Western shores in late September and early October. Messengers bearing these reports subsequently converged on the papal court in Ferrara, where Pope Urban received the news around mid-October.³ Soon afterwards, on 20 October, Urban died. The curia, now in crisis mode, moved quickly. A new pope, Gregory VIII, was elected the next day and just over a week later, on 29 October, the encyclical *Audita Tremendi* was issued. This was the Church's formal response to the disaster, and it initiated both a liturgical campaign of penitence and a new crusade.⁴ Close reading of *Audita Tremendi*, alongside other letters and documents from this time, indicates that only the defeat at

¹Helen Birkett, 'News in the Middle Ages: News, Communications, and the Launch of the Third Crusade in 1187–88', *Viator* 49, no. 3 (2018): 23–61; Alexander Cartellieri, *Philipp II. August, König von Frankreich: Band II. Der Kreuzzug (1187–1191)* (Leipzig, 1906), 42.

²For a succinct account of Hattin and its aftermath see: Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 366–74.

³Birkett, 'News in the Middle Ages', 37–42.

⁴For Urban's death and the papal succession see: Gregory VIII, *Inter divinae*, in PL 202: 1537; *Regesta pontificum romanorum ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum 1198*, ed. Philipp Jaffé, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1885–88), no. 16014. For *Audita Tremendi* see: Thomas W. Smith, 'Audita Tremendi and the Call for the Third Crusade Reconsidered, 1187–1188', *Viator* 49, no. 3 (2018): 63–101.

Hattin and the loss of major strongholds up to early September were known at the curia. At this point, the pope and his court were aware of the general threat posed to the city of Jerusalem: this is mentioned in a brief report sent to the king of England, Henry II, by Peter of Blois, who was present at the curia when the news broke.⁵ However, the pope and his cardinals do not seem to have known about the siege of the city, let alone its fall: *Audita Tremendi* refers to Jerusalem only in allegorical terms. Reports of the siege seem to have arrived a little later. References in letters sent by Henry II to the prince of Antioch, the patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch, and to the king of Hungary in early 1188 suggest that the siege, but not loss, of the city was known in Angevin lands.⁶ News of the city's fall only seems to have reached Western Europe in the spring: a Jewish source suggests that it arrived in Germany during Lent (2 March – 16 April 1188).⁷ The intermittent arrival of reports from the East meant that the events of late 1187 continued to circulate as news stories in Western Europe well into 1188 – and months after the initial launch of the Third Crusade.

Paying attention to the transmission of news offers modern historians key insights into the information environment in which decisions were made, and helps us to understand and to explain the actions of people in the past. However, the transmission of news was of less interest to medieval historians, who tended not to record detailed timelines of events, communications, and responses. In the case of 1187, this is partly because the staggered communication of news had little impact on the overall historical narrative. Following the launch of the crusade via *Audita Tremendi* and the Church's envoys, both Western leaders and the laity responded to its call. Count Richard of Poitou (later Richard I) took the cross in early November, Henry II and Philip Augustus of France made joint crusade vows in January, and Frederick Barbarossa announced his intended crusade expedition in March – which probably reflects a decision made weeks or months earlier.⁸ It was the general timeline of events in both the East and West, rather than who knew what when, that provided the framework for historiographical texts. The fall of Jerusalem is particularly interesting in this regard as, although it occurred in October 1187, news of the city's capture does not appear to have reached Western Europe until spring 1188. For chronicles and histories that began their years at Christmas or on 1 January, this meant that the fall of Jerusalem and knowledge of its loss fell in separate years. That almost none of these accounts acknowledge this highlights how authors chose to structure their information: the fall was listed under the year it occurred.⁹ This was the logical way to commemorate such a momentous event and particularly so for those noting that the Holy City was conquered and lost under two popes

⁵[Roger of Howden], *Gesta regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti abbatis. The Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I A.D. 1169–1192, Vol. II*, ed. William Stubbs, RS 49 (London: 1867), sub anno 1187, 15 [henceforth cited as Roger of Howden, *Gesta*].

⁶Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, sub anno 1188, 38–9; Roger of Howden, *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene, Vol. II*, ed. William Stubbs, RS 51 (London, 1869), sub anno 1188, 342–3 [henceforth cited as Roger of Howden, *Chronica*]; *Die lateinische Fortsetzung Wilhelms von Tyrus*, ed. Marianne Salloch (Leipzig, 1934), II.xiii, 93–4; Ralph de Diceto, *Ymagines historiarum*, in *Radulfi de Diceto decani Landoniensis opera historica: The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto, Dean of London, Vol. II*, ed. William Stubbs, RS 68 (London, 1876), sub anno 1188, 53–4; Birkett, 'News in the Middle Ages', 51–3.

⁷Eleazar ben Judah, 'Bericht des Elasar bar Juda', in *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge*, ed. A. Neubauer and M. Stern, trans. S. Baer, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland 2* (Berlin, 1892), 215; Birkett, 'News in the Middle Ages', 56.

⁸Birkett, 'News in the Middle Ages', 45–6, 47, 56–7.

⁹Possible exceptions are the related group of Middle Welsh chronicles, the *Brut y Tywysogyon*, which record the capture of the city of Jerusalem and the True Cross as a single incident around or on Ash Wednesday 1188. The date of Ash

named Urban, the latter of whom died shortly after the city's fall.¹⁰ Hindsight also encouraged contemporary historians to simplify the historical narrative. Once the fall of Jerusalem became known in the West, regaining the city became the overriding aim of the crusade. This, combined with the prescient allusion to Psalm 78 and a despoiled Jerusalem at the start of *Audita Tremendi* – 'O God, the heathens are come into thy inheritance, they have polluted thy holy temple: they have made Jerusalem as a place to keep fruit [...]' (Ps. 78:1-2) – made it tempting to frame the relationship between the loss of the city and the launch of the crusade as causal.¹¹ Matters were further complicated by the use of 'Jerusalem' to refer to both the kingdom and the Holy City in documents from the time. Recognising exactly which location was intended requires a close reading of texts and, even then, it is not always clear – and may well have misled those who drew on these documents for their accounts.¹² It is, therefore, easy to understand why contemporary historians offered simplified versions of the events of late 1187.

However, it is instructive to consider how as well as why the past was portrayed in this way. The following discussion explores how writers of historiographical texts approached the temporal dilemma provided by the fall of Jerusalem. Our examples come from works of varying scope and ambition, which – as even contemporaries found – are not easy to categorise.¹³ They include traditional annalistic chronicles and more discursive histories; universal, national, and regional accounts; works structured by year, episode, and theme. For our purposes, they can be divided into two main groups: those written from 'local' and 'global' perspectives. Previously, the term 'local' has been used to indicate historiographical texts of limited scope, i.e. those that focus on the history of a particular place such as a monastic house.¹⁴ Here, however, 'local' refers to something slightly different: the viewpoint from which material is presented. Authors taking a 'local' approach viewed the past from the perspective of a particular location, individual, or group. Here distant events might be included when they became known and had an impact on the area or

Wednesday may be related to the arrival of this news in Wales, i.e. when members of the Welsh elite were summoned to meet Archbishop Baldwin at New Radnor ahead of his tour of Wales to preach the crusade. However, these chronicles are translations of a lost Latin chronicle from the late thirteenth century, which make them both late and indirect witnesses. *Brut y Tywysogyon, Peniarth Ms. 20*, ed. Thomas Jones, Board of Celtic Studies of the University of Wales History and Law Series [henceforth cited as BCSHLS] 6 (Cardiff, 1941), 131; *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes, Peniarth Ms. 20 Version*, trans. Thomas Jones, BCSHLS 11 (Cardiff, 1952), 73; *Brenhinedd y Saesson or The Kings of the Saxons, BM Cotton Ms. Cleopatra B v and The Black Book of Basingwerk NLW Ms. 7006*, ed. and trans. Thomas Jones, BCSHLS 25 (Cardiff, 1971), 186, 187; *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes, Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. and trans. Thomas Jones, BCSHLS 16 (Cardiff, 1955), lviii-lx, 170, 171; Owain Wyn Jones and Huw Pryce, 'Historical Writing in Medieval Wales', in *Medieval Historical Writing: Britain and Ireland, 500–1500*, ed. Jennifer Jahner, Emily Steiner, and Elizabeth M. Tyler (Cambridge, 2019), 214–8; Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis opera, Vol. VI*, ed. James F. Dimock, RS 21 (London, 1868), li, 13–14.

¹⁰William of Newburgh, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I, Vol. I: Containing the First Four Books of the Historia rerum Anglicarum of William of Newburgh*, ed. Richard Howlett, RS 82 (London, 1884), III.xv, 254–5 [henceforth cited as William of Newburgh, *Historia*]; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, sub anno 1187, 323; Robert of Auxerre, *Roberti Autissiodorensis chronicon*, in [Ex rerum Francogallicarum scriptoribus. Ex historiis auctorum Flandrensium Franco-gallica lingua scriptis. Supplementum tomi XXIV], ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 26 (Hanover, 1882), sub anno 1187, 252 [henceforth cited as Robert of Auxerre, *Chronicon*].

¹¹Smith, 'Audita Tremendi', 89.

¹²For example, the opening statement of Peter of Blois's report that 'Jerusalem has been destroyed' must refer to the kingdom since he subsequently says 'all the cities and strongholds except Ascalon and Tripoli have been captured; and it is as yet uncertain whether Jerusalem will be able to withstand the foul dogs', which indicates the threat to the city ('Jerusalem destructa est [...] Omnes civitates et munitiones praeter Ascalonem et Tripolim captae sunt; et adhuc utrum Jerusalem poterit canibus immundis resistere, dabitur'): Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, sub anno 1187, 15.

¹³See: Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), xix; Michael Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford, 2017), 114–7.

¹⁴See Antonia Crossden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), 68, 269–95.

person(s) that were the main focus of the narrative.¹⁵ In theory, this made these texts more likely to note the arrival of news or delays in its transmission in 1187 and 1188. However, while these texts tend to provide more information about communications, they are not necessarily more accurate than their 'global' counterparts. Authors taking a 'global' approach viewed events as if from above and emphasised the date of their occurrence. These texts tended to be less interested in the communication of information, except when it prompted action and created further events worthy of record.

A good example of the global approach to the events of late 1187 is seen in the *Chronicon* written by Robert of Auxerre c. 1200. It begins with the Creation and is intended as a universal history, although its coverage, of course, reflects the limits of Robert's source material and his own socio-political horizons. From 1181 his work is largely independent.¹⁶ He gives a detailed account of events in the Holy Land in 1187, which is interspersed with other notable events in the West according to the date at which they occurred. He begins with the lead-up to the battle of Cresson on 1 May; he notes the activities of the Sicilian fleet against the Byzantine emperor; and the discord between the kings of England and France. He then moves back to the Holy Land, where, during this period, Saladin had amassed his forces and invaded: this is followed by an account of the battle of Hattin, incorrectly dated to June.¹⁷ He then notes Saladin's capture of Acre, which is undated in the text but occurred on 9 July. After this, he records the arrival of Conrad of Montferrat in the Holy Land who, landing first at Acre, diverted to Tyre when he realised that the city had fallen. Next he recounts two departures from Tyre and an arrival: the departure and death of the count of Tripoli; the departure of Archbishop Joscius of Tyre on his mission to take news to the West; and the arrival of Conrad, who took charge of the city's defences. At this point, an external event is inserted into the narrative: the birth of Philip Augustus's son, Louis VIII. This is undated in the text but occurred on 5 September. Robert then notes the capture of Ascalon and a solar eclipse, which he dates, correctly, to the same day: 4 September. After this, he records the taking of Jerusalem, dated correctly to Friday 2 October, which he states was fourteen days after the siege began. He then notes the impact of 'the story of the disaster overseas' on the West: it was greeted with sorrow; Urban died of grief; Gregory was elected as his successor; he then launched the crusade 'for the assistance of Jerusalem'.¹⁸ The entry for 1187 ends with Gregory's death two months into his reign, the succession of Pope Clement III, and an agreement made between the Byzantine emperor and the king of Sicily.¹⁹ After this, Robert begins the entry for 1188 with reference to the spread of the 'lamentable news from Outremer' and how it prompted many to atone for their sins and to take the cross, including Henry and Philip at Gisors.²⁰

This is a largely accurate account of late 1187. Robert tends to cover events in the Holy Land before shifting his focus to Europe and, generally, he lists events in order of

¹⁵Cf. Michael Staunton's approach to Gervase of Canterbury's *Chronica*: Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 115–7.

¹⁶For Robert of Auxerre's *Chronicon* see Carol Neel, 'Man's Restoration: Robert of Auxerre and the Writing of History in the Early Thirteenth Century', *Traditio* 44 (1988): 256–7. For universal histories see Michele Campopiano, 'Introduction: New Perspectives on Universal Chronicles in the High Middle Ages', in *Universal Chronicles in the High Middle Ages*, ed. Michele Campopiano and Henry Bainton, *Writing History in the Middle Ages* 4 (Woodbridge, 2017), 1–18.

¹⁷He gives it the nonsense date of seventh nones of June: Robert of Auxerre, *Chronicon*, sub anno 1187, 249.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 252: 'Transmarine calamitatis hystoria'; 'ad subventionem Iherusalem'.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 249–53.

²⁰*Ibid.*, sub anno 1188, 253: 'rumor lamentabilis de partibus transmarinis'.

occurrence. The chronological framework underpinning this structure is indicated by the birth of Louis VIII, which interrupts Robert's discussion of events in the East: it is inserted, roughly, in its correct position. Other scholars have commented on Robert's critical approach to chronology and history, particularly his debunking of St Helena's legendary discovery of the True Cross, and this seems to be an example of similar attention to detail.²¹ The overall effect of this chronological approach is significant. By listing events in the order in which they happened, Robert implies that Urban's death and the crusade were responses to the most recent events in the East, i.e. the fall of Jerusalem.

Other writers who took a global approach, such as the contemporary English historians, Roger of Howden and William of Newburgh, dealt with this material more thematically. Roger's texts are particularly important witnesses to a shift in the perception of the fall of Jerusalem. Roger is now recognised as the author of two detailed national histories: the *Gesta regis Henrici II* and the *Chronica*. The *Gesta* covers the years 1169–1192 and was completed c. 1192. At around this time, Roger embarked on the *Chronica*, which revised and extended the *Gesta* to take in events from 732 to 1201. Both are annalistic in structure and both place England within its broader European and extra-European context.²² Roger's texts offer a rare chance to study a contemporary historian at work. As Henry Bainton has shown in relation to other entries in these two texts, Roger took the opportunity to revise sections that had been written contemporaneously in the *Gesta* with the benefit of hindsight in the *Chronica*.²³ Comparison of the entries for 1187 in the two works provides a further example of how he cut, added, and rearranged material according to his reassessment of its significance.²⁴ In each text, Roger provides a detailed account of events in the East and their impact in the West. The changes he makes to this material in the *Chronica* highlight the repetitive and disjointed nature of his initial attempt in the *Gesta*. In his earlier work, Roger summarises Saladin's activities from spring to autumn as supported by the testimony of several documents copied into the text: the letters from the Genoese consuls to Urban and from the Templar Terricus to other members of his order, both concerning Hattin; the report sent by Peter of Blois to Henry II on the reception of news from the East at the curia; and *Audita Tremendi* and its accompanying encyclical, *Nunquam melius superni*, which instructed Western Christians to undertake a penitential fast. These documents take Roger's text beyond Hattin to the launch of the crusade, but do not cover the siege and fall of Jerusalem. This is tackled in the first of the following subsections, after which Roger loops back to earlier events: Cresson; Hattin; Hattin's aftermath, including a list of 41 cities and fortresses taken by Saladin (which does not include Jerusalem); a battle at Antioch prior to the siege of Jerusalem (this is inaccurate and omitted in the *Chronica*), the fall of Jerusalem and the defence of Tyre; and a crusade lament by Berter of Orleans. The account of 1187 ends with a compilation of

²¹Neel, 'Man's Restoration', 268–9; Mireille Chazan, 'La méthode critique des historiens dans les chroniques universelles médiévales', in *La méthode critique au Moyen Âge*, ed. Mireille Chazan and Gilbert Dahan, Bibliothèque d'histoire culturelle du Moyen Âge 3 (Turnhout, 2006), 223–56.

²²See Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 51–66.

²³Henry Bainton, *History and the Written Word: Documents, Literacy, and Language in the Age of the Angevins* (Philadelphia, 2020), 30–7.

²⁴For example, the *Gesta's* detailed account of William the Lion's campaign against Domnall mac Uilleim was reduced to a single sentence in the *Chronica*. New material was also added, such as that relating to King Alphonso of Portugal at the end of the entry. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, sub anno 1187, 7–9; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, sub anno 1187, 318, 333–4.

further general notes, including the statement that Richard, count of Poitou, took the cross.²⁵

The restructuring of this material in the *Chronica* reduces the repetition by rationalising this information, attempting a more chronological structure, and providing a clearer distinction between events in the East and the response in the West. In the section on events in the East found in the *Chronica*, Roger gives a more detailed narrative from the outset, moving from Cresson to Hattin and Saladin's subsequent advance. He also removes two documents, the letter from the Genoese consuls and the report sent by Peter of Blois, and incorporates information from them at relevant chronological points in his narrative. In addition, he brings forward the list of cities and strongholds taken, to which he adds the city of Jerusalem. He then comments on the actions of Sibylla, queen of Jerusalem, looks ahead briefly to Guy's release in 1188, and then notes the death of the count of Tripoli. Next he turns to the impact of the news from the East, including the fall of Jerusalem, at the curia: Urban's death; Gregory's succession; and the response of the cardinals (which is taken from Peter of Blois's report). After this, Roger comments on coincidences in the names of rulers at the conquest and fall of Jerusalem, followed by the letter from Terricus and brief notes on those captured or killed at Hattin. He then inserts some of the notes which ended the *Gesta's* entry for 1187, as well as some additional material on the quarrel between Archbishop Baldwin and the monks of Canterbury. The final note concerns Richard's crusade vow, which is then followed by *Audita Tremendi* and its accompanying encyclical, *Nunquam melius superni*. Next Roger discusses the response to the crusade, including Berter's lament. He then inserts a new letter from Gregory confirming the judgements made by his predecessor, Urban, in the three months before his death, before turning to Gregory's death in December and the succession of Clement. Other miscellaneous material completes the entry for 1187, including a brief summary of the siege and fall of Jerusalem.²⁶ The position of the summary here, rather than in the section containing events in the East, is curious and difficult to explain – it looks very much like an afterthought.

Roger's revision of material relating to events in the East in 1187 suggests a change in the way the fall of Jerusalem was perceived. In the *Gesta*, the narrative of events in the East and the accompanying documents up to *Nunquam melius superni* seem to mirror the limits of knowledge at the time and probably reflect the contemporaneous drafting of this section: there is no reference to the fall of Jerusalem here.²⁷ In the *Chronica*, Roger's revision and re-ordering of material inserts references to the loss of the city earlier in the text. Jerusalem has been added to the list of the cities and fortresses taken by Saladin and the capture of the city is explicitly included in the news received by Urban. That the discussion of events in the East and their initial reception is completed by comments on historical coincidences between Jerusalem's conquest and fall reinforces the pivotal role now assigned to the loss of the city. In the *Chronica's* revised version of events, news of Jerusalem's fall accompanies the initial wave of communications concerning Hattin etc. that arrived in the autumn. Roger's revision of his

²⁵Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, sub anno 1187, 10–29; *Numquam melius superni*: in *Regesta pontificum romanorum*, ed. Jaffé, 16018.

²⁶Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, sub anno 1187, 319–34.

²⁷Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, sub anno 1187, 10–20.

earlier text, particularly in terms of structure and deployment of documents, has literally rewritten the past.²⁸

William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum* is a more nuanced account of events in late 1187, which suggests stages in the dissemination of news from the East that are not immediately apparent from the general thrust of his narrative. William composed his text between 1196 and 1198. It is a discursive and reflective commentary on English history following the Norman Conquest and, although focusing on England, it also records international events of relevance to English affairs. The narrative advances broadly chronologically, but is structured thematically: William's chapters concern particular episodes, sequences of events, or the activities of individuals, some of which are simultaneous or overlapping.²⁹ He opens the section on the events surrounding Hattin with a summary of the situation: in 1187, during the reigns of Barbarossa, Philip, and Henry, and the pontificate of Urban, Jerusalem and the Holy Land were taken by Saladin. He then discusses why the inhabitants of these lands have repeatedly suffered, offering a scriptural and theological explanation.³⁰ The following five chapters provide a temporally extended account of events in the Holy Land under an overarching narrative relating to Guy, beginning with his succession as king (in 1186) and ending with his release from captivity and conflict with Conrad of Montferrat (in 1188). Within this arc, William covers Cresson, Hattin, the capture of Jerusalem, and the successful defence of Tyre. After this he returns to late 1187 and the arrival of the news from the East in the curia. Although the events of 1187 happened during the reign of Urban – as William had stated in the opening summary – he says that the news was actually received by Gregory, who issued an encyclical. This is followed by an abridged copy of *Audita Tremendi* and comments on Gregory's death and the succession of Clement. Next he turns to the wider dissemination of news from the East in northwestern Europe and responses to the call for crusade. This includes the almost immediate crusade vow made by Richard, count of Poitou, upon hearing news of these events from a messenger; the arrival of the archbishop of Tyre, Joscius, bringing news of 'worse things'; and, prompted by Joscius's preaching, the joint crusade vow made by Henry and Philip at Gisors 'for the liberation of the lands of Jerusalem from its enemies'.³¹

William approaches this material as a set of interrelated narrative strands, which are pursued separately but overlap temporally. This and his statement that the news of events in the East 'spread throughout the world in a short time' suggest the fast, near-instantaneous dissemination of information.³² However, he also notes specific moments of communication that prompt action, such as Richard's crusade vow, the arrival and preaching of the archbishop of Tyre, and, more significantly, the issuing of *Audita Tremendi*. William is recognised by modern scholars as a more critical historian than his contemporaries and, here, it seems his access to *Audita Tremendi* caused him to question the exact timeline of events at the curia.³³ William knew that 'the expulsion of Christians

²⁸For Howden's approach to historical writing and his use of documents, see Bainton, *History and the Written Word*, 11–55.

²⁹See: Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago and London, 1977), 58–60; Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 82–94.

³⁰See Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 225–7.

³¹William of Newburgh, *Historia*, III.xv–xxiii, 249–72 (at 272): 'duriora nuntians'; 'terrae Ierosolymitanae ab hostibus liberandae'.

³²Ibid. III.xxiii, 271: 'Sane tristis ille rumor rerum in Oriente male gestarum orbem in brevi pervagatus'.

in the East and the capture of the Holy City had happened under Urban's pontificate'.³⁴ Yet the opening of *Audita Tremendi*, which expressed shock at hearing the news of events in the East, seemed to suggest that this news had been received by its issuer, Gregory. To make sense of this, William claims that the news arrived around the feast of St Luke (18 October), shortly after Urban's death and following Gregory's succession. The date given is approximate and similar in style to the date he assigns to the fall of Jerusalem: 'around the solemnities of blessed Michael the Archangel' (29 September).³⁵ The claim that Urban died before the news arrived is significant and sets William apart from other commentators, including Roger of Howden. This is particularly notable since William drew on a copy of Roger's *Chronica* for his text.³⁶ William's careful reading of the evidence also informs other parts of his narrative. His comment that the news received by Gregory concerned events which took place 'within the octave of SS Peter and Paul' (29 June-6 July), i.e. Hattin, reflects the contents of *Audita Tremendi*.³⁷ Likewise, William's comment that Henry and Philip took the cross to aid 'the lands of Jerusalem' ('terrae Ierosolymitanae') mirrors phrasing in the statutes of the Saladin Tithe, which was levied to fund their joint expedition – and a copy of which he included immediately afterwards in the text.³⁸ The statement that Archbishop Joscius brought additional news also acknowledges the staggered reporting of events in the East. However, despite the careful inclusion of these details, the emphasis on the fall of Jerusalem at the start of this section and the structure of the narrative, which covers events in the Holy Land and then the response in Europe, implies that the crusade was a response to the loss of the Holy City.

Whereas texts taking a global perspective seemed to view events from above, works written from a local perspective discussed events as they appeared to those on the ground. These works recorded international events when they intersected with a particular locality, individual or group. An example of this is a set of annals, the *Chronica*, written by Magnus of Reichersberg (d. 1195). This covers events in the East through two letters containing accounts of Hattin and a subsequent statement that Jerusalem fell on 2 October in the same year. Both the topic and the letters are introduced with the comment 'In the same year [i.e. 1187], letters came from the city of Jerusalem to this effect', which frames events in relation to the reception of news in the West.³⁹

The *Chronicon Hanoniense* offers a more detailed example of a local perspective. The *Chronicon* was composed by Gislebert of Mons during 1195 and 1196. It recounts the activities of his patron, Count Baldwin V of Hainaut, and other events relating to

³³See: Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 51–68; Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 84–5.

³⁴William of Newburgh, *Historia*, III.xxi, 266: 'Sane in Oriente illud Christianae plebis exterminium atque irruptio Sanctae Civitatis sub pontificatu Urbani contigerint'.

³⁵Ibid., III.xviii, 261: 'circa sollempnia beati archangeli Michaelis facta est deditio Sanctae Civitatis'.

³⁶John Gillingham, 'Two Yorkshire Historians Compared: Roger of Howden and William of Newburgh', in *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, Vol. 12, 2002, ed. Stephen Morillo (Woodbridge, 2003), 15–38; Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 85–6.

³⁷William of Newburgh, *Historia*, III.xxi, 266: 'Rerum quippe infra octavas apostolorum Petri et Pauli infeliciter gestarum nuntii circa festivitatem beati Lucae evangelistae ad Apostolicam sedem venerunt'.

³⁸This document refers to the news received by the papacy as 'the destruction of the lands of Jerusalem and the capture of the Lord's Cross' ('rumor ille miserabilis destructione terrae Ierosolymitanae et captione Dominicae crucis') – there is no explicit reference to the Holy City itself: *ibid.*, 273.

³⁹Magnus of Reichersberg, *Chronica collecta a Magno presbytero – 1195*, ed. W. Wattenbach, [*Annales aevi Suevici*], MGH SS 17 (Hanover, 1861), sub anno 1187, 441, 507–9 (at 507): 'Eodem anno venerunt litterae ab urbe Ierosolomitana hunc modum continentes'.

Hainaut and the Flanders region. Gislebert structures his work according to calendar years beginning at Easter.⁴⁰ Material is tackled in themed sections, largely chronologically, although his account of crusade preaching and crusade vows in 1187 covers Barbarossa's Court of Christ (27 March) before returning to Henry and Philip's joint vows at Gisors (c. 21 January) and includes comments on the delayed fulfilment or rejection of crusade vows over the following years.⁴¹ Much of Gislebert's account for 1187 concerns local or regional political affairs. He introduces events in the Holy Land midway through the account and in relation to the reports that arrived in northwestern Europe:

In autumn of the same year, news reached the French and all those located on this side of the Alps that, with the Christians in Outremer defeated and the king of Jerusalem captured with many others, the Holy City of Jerusalem was seized by the enemies of the catholic faith.⁴²

This very succinct summary refers to the two most significant events, the battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem, but does not situate them in time. Instead, emphasis is placed on their reception in the West. We are then told that this prompted Gregory to appoint Henry of Albano as legate to preach the crusade – a comment complemented by a detailed account of Henry's preaching in Hainaut later in the entry. The chronicle then looks ahead: this preaching was needed to send reinforcements to Conrad of Montferrat, who 'alone saved Acre and Tyre'.⁴³ After this, the chronicle returns to the West and to the reaction of Richard and others to the news from the East: they immediately took the cross. This section is dated to autumn and placed between the knighting of Albert, son of Duke Godfrey of Louvain, on 28 October and a meeting between Philip and Barbarossa in Advent.⁴⁴ This implies a date around November, which corresponds to the date assigned to Richard's vow by Gerald of Wales, who specifies the start of the month.⁴⁵ What is most significant here is the inclusion of the fall of Jerusalem among the news circulating in France in autumn 1187. As the *Chronicle* began the year at Easter, it was possible for Gislebert to claim that news of the Holy City's capture reached France during 1187 – yet he claims that it arrived in autumn. Despite the emphasis placed on the local reception of news, he still states that news of the loss of Jerusalem arrived earlier than it probably did.

Another example of history told from a local perspective is the *De profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam*, written c. 1200. This is a discursive account of the Danish-Norwegian contribution to the Third Crusade, written from a Danish-Norwegian point of view.⁴⁶ The narrative follows a chronological order, but is divided into chapters concerning particular episodes. In the chapters relating to late 1187, the emphasis is not on the details of what happened in the East, but the communication of these

⁴⁰Gilbert of Mons, *Chronicle of Hainaut*, trans. Laura Napran (Woodbridge, 2005), xxviii, xxxvii.

⁴¹Gislebert of Mons, *La Chronique de Gislebert de Mons*, ed. Léon Vanderkindere, Recueil de textes pour servir à l'étude de l'histoire de Belgique (Brussels, 1904), sub anno 1187, §138, 204–7.

⁴²*Ibid.*, §135, 199–200: 'Tempore autumpnali eodem anno, rumores ad Francos et universos ex hac parte Alpium constitutos pervenerunt, quod victis in transmarinis partibus christianis, et rege Jherosolimitano capto cum multis, civitas sancta Jherusalem ab inimicis fidei catholice occupata sit'. NB. The use of quod and the subjunctive indicates indirect speech in medieval Latin.

⁴³*Ibid.*, §135, 200: 'qui solus Acram et Tyrum conservabat'.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, §§135–36, §138, 199–201, 204–6.

⁴⁵Gerald of Wales, *Instruction for a Ruler (De Principis Instructione)*, ed. and trans. Robert Bartlett, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 2018), III.v, 586.

⁴⁶See Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land: Crusading Theology in the Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam (c.1200)* (Copenhagen, 2001), 8–9.

events and the impact they had on the Danish court. At the start, the text refers in general terms to the invasion of the Holy Land and notes that reports of this reached the papacy. It then includes an otherwise unknown papal letter stating that the Holy City has been taken. This is a suspicious document and is, most probably, a remembered approximation of *Audita Tremendi* rather than an original text.⁴⁷ The account states that papal messengers presented the contents of this letter to King Knud VI and the Danish elite gathered at his Christmas court. It then records their shocked response to this news, i.e. the loss of Jerusalem.⁴⁸ There is no need to doubt that papal messengers visited the Danish court at Christmas 1187. However, that they brought news of the Jerusalem's fall is improbable. The author seems to have recast events – and, indeed, created a document – with the benefit of hindsight to make a more compelling narrative.

A final example is Rigord's *Gesta Philippi Augusti*. The initial version of the *Gesta*, covering the years 1179–1190, was probably completed by 1192.⁴⁹ The work is a national history written from a local perspective: the text records events, largely, as they relate to Philip Augustus. Although Rigord cited three different temporal frameworks in his entry for 1187 – Philip's regnal year, his age, and the calendar year – he structured his work according to the calendar year, beginning on the Annunciation (25 March).⁵⁰ Within these annual accounts, material is arranged thematically and largely chronologically: the narrative moves forward in overlapping sections that cover different episodes or sequences of events. In 1187, Rigord records the conflict playing out in France between Philip, Henry, and his son Richard, count of Poitou. He then includes a short section 'On the messengers from Jerusalem sent to the king of France'.⁵¹ Messengers are said to have brought news of Saladin's activities in the East, with a particular emphasis on Hattin, but also including the fall of the Holy City and most of the Holy Land 'after a few days'.⁵² This section is followed by references to the eclipse on 4 September and an account of the birth of Philip's son, Louis, on 5 September. Rigord then includes a section on the quick succession of popes in 1187, beginning with Urban's death, which he dates, incorrectly, to the feast of St Luke (18 October). Finally, he records the meeting between Henry II and Philip at Gisors, which he dates to 13 January (which is possible).⁵³ Here, he tells us, the kings took the cross 'for the liberation of the Lord's Holy Sepulchre and of the holy city of Jerusalem'.⁵⁴

Rigord frames the discussion of events in the East from a local perspective: they are included in the account as news that is delivered to the French court. However, the placing of this section at this point in the narrative suggests that a different framework underlies his text. This section comes immediately before that concerning the eclipse and birth of Philip's son at the beginning of September, even though both of these predate the probable arrival of news from the East as well as the fall of Jerusalem. This

⁴⁷See Birkett, 'News in the Middle Ages', 54.

⁴⁸*De profectone Danorum in Hierosolymam*, in *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi*, Vol. II, ed. M. Cl. Gertz (Copenhagen, 1918–1920), §§2–5, 461–7.

⁴⁹Rigord, *Histoire de Philippe Auguste*, ed. and trans. Élisabeth Carpentier, Georges Pon, and Yves Chauvin, Sources d'histoire médiévale publiées par l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Texts 33 (Paris, 2006), 60–1.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, §57, 53, 69–70, 234.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, §59, 240: 'De nuntiis Jherosolimitanis ad regem Francie missis'.

⁵²*Ibid.*: 'post paucis revolutis diebus'.

⁵³I am grateful to Nicholas Vincent for sharing the revised version of Henry II's itinerary with me prior to its publication in the introductory volume to *The Letters and Charters of Henry II, King of England 1154–1189* [forthcoming].

⁵⁴Rigord, *Histoire*, §§57–62, 234–46 (at 244): 'pro liberatione Sancti Sepulcri Domini et sancte civitatis Jerusalem'.

implies that the section on the messengers has been dated according to its earliest events: Saladin's invasion and the battle of Hattin in the summer. Rigord's presentation of this material uses a superficial framing device in a similar way to his citation of the king's regnal year and age at the beginning of the account. The quiet insistence that news of the loss of Jerusalem arrived at this point is also notable. Like Gislebert, Rigord's calendar year extended into what we would view as spring 1188, which meant it was possible for Rigord to claim that news of the Holy City's capture reached France in 1187. However, Rigord's statement that this news was transmitted alongside that of Hattin smacks of hindsight. This subtle reshaping of the past is also seen in the claim that Henry and Philip joined the crusade to liberate the city of Jerusalem. Although the phrasing of this statement might apply to a city under siege, Rigord probably meant a captive one – information that does not seem to have been available at this point. Again, we have a text which has simplified the timeline of events in late 1187 and 1188, despite an apparent emphasis on communications on the ground.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates the ways in which contemporary historiographical texts recorded – and recast – the events of late 1187. The extended delay in the communication of news relating to the fall of Jerusalem indicated by documents from the time is not reflected in the historiographical accounts written within a decade or so of events. Here we see an almost unanimous insistence that news of the city's capture arrived in late 1187. But, despite the collective strength of these claims, this does not seem to have been the case. Indeed, the texts of both Roger of Howden and William of Newburgh contain documents which suggest otherwise, while William himself is careful to note the staggered arrival of news from the East. This study also reveals the narrative and structural challenges that the transnational context and episodic nature of events in late 1187 posed for our authors. This is particularly clear in the works of Roger of Howden and the ways in which he adapted material from the *Gesta* to form the revised narrative of the *Chronica*.

The temporal dilemma posed by the communication of the fall of Jerusalem to the West is not unique: extended delays in the transmission of information across large distances remained a feature of life until the advent of telecommunications in the nineteenth century. This example is, however, exceptional in its potential visibility in the sources, particularly those historiographical texts written from a local perspective which were more likely to record the reception of news. That almost none of our sources mention this delay is both striking and informative. The shock that accompanied the arrival of initial reports from the East in the autumn was real enough – the unusually expressive opening statement of *Audita Tremendi* offers eloquent testimony of this.⁵⁵ Our evidence shows that these reports signalled the threat to Jerusalem and, as Christians in the West waited anxiously for updates over the weeks and months that followed, many must have imagined the worst. This, perhaps, conditioned them for the arrival of news that confirmed the loss of the city. Either this or the fact that Jerusalem had fallen *even before they knew it was endangered* may have made the news something of an anti-

⁵⁵Smith, 'Audita Tremendi', 88–9.

climax. It is possible that, as time passed, this allowed emotional memory of the disaster in the East to coalesce around that crucial period in late 1187 when Jerusalem actually fell and the initial reports of Hattin arrived. For contemporary historians looking back on these events, this was viewed as the critical moment to be remembered and recorded for posterity. As such, it also provides a useful reminder of the constructed nature of our historiographical sources – as is being increasingly emphasised in recent work on the crusades.⁵⁶ Although medieval chroniclers and historians were concerned to tell the truth, narrative expediency, the fallibility of memory, and shifting perceptions of the significance of events meant that they produced plausible, rather than strictly accurate, accounts.⁵⁷ Put simply, writers told the story of the past not necessarily as it was, but as it appeared to them at the time of writing.

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⁵⁶See Jessalynn Bird, 'Review Article: Historiographical Trends and Crusader Narratives', *Crusades* 21 (2022): 159–67.

⁵⁷See Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 1–6.