
Crusading for Peace? The Idea of Peace in the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (c. 1200)

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Crusading for Peace? The Idea of Peace in the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (c. 1200)

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Near the end of the 12th century an anonymous canon at the Premonstratensian monastery in Tønsberg, in South-East Norway, wrote a text in Latin known as the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (hereafter *Profectio*¹). The text tells the story of a joint Danish-Norwegian crusade to the Holy Land in the early 1190s in the wake of the Third Crusade (1187-1192). It is a relatively short text, consisting of 27 small chapters, in addition to a dedicatory letter and the author's prologue, that covers around twenty pages in modern printed editions². The *Profectio* is little known outside Scandinavia but has also received little attention by scholars working within medieval Scandinavian studies. This short text, however, is unique for several reasons. First, while not written in the vernacular, it belongs to the earliest group of historical writing known from medieval Norway, even predating the more famous Norse sagas by a generation. Second, while Scandinavian involvement in the Crusades is attested in different Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian sources, the *Profectio* is the only known crusade chronicle to have been written in Scandinavia during the 12th century³. In fact, the *Profectio*'s survival is unique as it is only known from one single codex manuscript discovered in Lübeck in the 17th century.

A crusade chronicle might not seem as the most obvious place to look for medieval ideas or attitudes regarding peace. However, as war and peace are unavoidably linked concepts the chronicles are not only a source to ecclesiastical ideas and understandings about warfare, but also peace and peace-making⁴. As a phenomenon, despite its obvious military character, crusading was viewed by contemporaries as an instrument of peace and grew out of the earlier Peace of God

¹ The text was first printed in 1684 by Bernhard Kaspar Kirchmann. It is quoted after the latest modern edition of Martinus Clarentius Gertz (1922).

² The *Profectio* has been translated twice in Norwegian (1934 and 1990), once in Danish (1900-1901). As far as I know no English translation has been published, however, a new critical edition by Karen Skovgaard-Petersen is said to be forthcoming including an English translation of the text by Peter Fischer.

³ A possible exception might be a short text known as *Itinerarium in Terram Sanctam*. This is an itinerary of a pilgrimage, or possibly a crusade, undertaken to the Holy Land in the early thirteenth century. However, the text is incomplete with the first pages are missing and the motive for the journey is not known.

⁴ For different attitudes to peace and peace-making, see Benham, 2017; Malegam, 2013. For an overview of the crusade literature, see Bale, 2019.

movement in the 10th and 11th centuries⁵. It was also a devotional act that appealed to a cross-section of European society and involving all social groups, both ecclesiastics and laymen alike⁶. Different groups both interpreted and influenced the concept of crusading, reading into it their own ideas, motives and emotions⁷. Another important factor was the precondition for a successful crusade campaign in the East was peace within Europe and unity in Christendom. Hence, the need for truces and peace were regularly underlined in papal crusade bulls and in the papacy's diplomatic relations with other European monarchs and rulers during the 12th and 13th centuries. This has even led some modern historians to call the crusaders 'medieval peacekeepers', comparing them with modern international peacekeeping operations⁸.

Scholars who have worked on the *Profectio* have often viewed the text rather unfavourably and seen it as a piece of failed crusade propaganda, with the most common criticism being the little emphasis placed on Jerusalem in the narrative⁹. This understanding of the crusades falls within the traditional interpretation of the crusades as campaigns fought to either conquer or support Jerusalem. However, within modern crusade studies the leading definition, the so-called pluralistic approach, emphasises more the presence of papal authority rather than geography¹⁰. This has greatly expanded the scope of crusading, both in time and place. Already by the mid-12th century, the crusades were expanded to include other arenas, such as the campaigns against Muslims in Iberia or heathen Slavic tribes around the Baltic. By the late 12th century, Scandinavians had a long-established tradition of participation in different crusades, both to the Holy Land and other crusade arenas, such as Iberia and the Baltic¹¹.

Nothing is known about the Danish-Norwegian crusade of the 1190s outside information provided in the *Profectio*, which have led some historians to question whether it depicts a real crusade at all¹². There is little reason to believe the crusade described in the text did not take place, as it includes named Danish and Norwegian nobles known from other sources, although it did not register in any other sources or documents in the period¹³. But despite the challenges this poses for modern scholars, the *Profectio* is by no means the story of a failed crusade, nor is the lack of

⁵ Riley-Smith, 2009, p. 35-37. See also Cowdrey, 1970. For the Peace of God Movement, see Koziol, 2018.

⁶ Riley-Smith, 2009.

⁷ Throop, 2011.

⁸ Urban, 1998.

⁹ Bysted, 2021, p. 133-135; Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 11-14; Kraggerud, 1985, p. 87.

¹⁰ Riley-Smith, 2009.

¹¹ For the Danish involvement in the crusades, see Bysted, 2012. For Norwegian involvement, see Svenungsen, 2017.

¹² Tyerman, 2003, p. 1407-1408.

emphasis on Jerusalem exceptional¹⁴. Instead, it should be placed in context with similar crusade chronicles from Northern Europe, such as the *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi* a generation earlier¹⁵. The following chapter will analyse the idea of peace as a theme in the *Profectio* by looking closer at certain parts of the narrative. However, as the *Profectio* is little known outside Scandinavia it might be necessary to discuss some central questions regarding the text, the author and narrative, as well as ideas about peace and crusading.

The Codex Manuscript – from Tønsberg to Lübeck

In the early 1620s, the librarian and leader of the newly established *Stadtbibliothek* in Lübeck, Johannes Kirchmann (1575-1643), was compiling a catalogue of the library's book collection¹⁶. Among the books delivered from the town council to the new library was a medieval parchment codex. The manuscript proved to contain a medieval edition of *The Jewish War* (*Bellum Judaicum*), by the first-century Roman-Jewish historian Josephus. But on closer inspection, Kirchmann discovered that the codex also contained three other works: firstly, an otherwise unknown Latin history of the kings of Norway, *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, by Theodoricus monachus; secondly, an unknown version of the life of Saint Geneviève (patron saint of Paris); and, thirdly, a hitherto unknown Latin text that Kirchmann listed in his catalogue as *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*¹⁷. Unfortunately, the original codex was later lost and has never been recovered, but both the text by Theodoricus and the *Profectio* survives in three separate transcriptions from the 17th century¹⁸. Kirchmann seems to have understood the importance of these two histories and started preparing a printed edition. This proved to be a tedious process and it was ultimately Kirchmann's grandson, Bernhard Caspar Kirchmann († 1724), who published the *edition princeps* in 1684.

¹³ Eirik Vandvik (1954, p. 4-5) suggests that the Danish-Norwegian expedition might be referred to in a contemporary English source, the *Itinerarium peregrinorum*. Simultaneously, however, he notes strong chronological arguments against the identification.

¹⁴ An exception is a brief and cryptic reference near the end of the story, where the author alludes to some fighting underway; right before they arrive in the Holy Land, the author lists the many sufferings and tribulations the crusaders had endured on the way, where he among other things mentions "pirates traps [*piratarum insidiis*]" (*Profectio*, ch. xxiv). However, nothing is further mentioned about this.

¹⁵ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 14-18; Bale, 2019.

¹⁶ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 7. See also Skovgaard-Petersen, 2002.

¹⁷ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2002, p. 111.

¹⁸ Gertz, 1922, p. 444-456.

It is not known exactly when the chronicle was written. In the introduction it is stated that the expedition took place “some years ago [*ante aliquot annos*]”, indicating that it was a short span between events and when it was written. According to the *Profectio*, the Danish and Norwegian crusaders arrived in the Levant shortly after the peace agreement had been concluded between King Richard and Sultan Saladin in September 1192. Due to this, it is generally believed that the *Profectio* was written shortly after the crusaders arrived back home in the mid to late 1190s, but before 1202, based on internal textual evidence¹⁹. Nothing is known about the manuscript in the period between the time of composition in the late 1190s and its discovery in Lübeck in the 1620s. So, how did the manuscript travel from Tønsberg to Lübeck? Nothing is known for certain, but it most likely occurred at one point during the later Middle Ages. This was a period of strong ties between Scandinavia and the Northern German towns due to the activities of the Hanseatic League²⁰. It is possible that a Hanseatic merchant brought the manuscript to Germany, but a more likely candidate is a papal legate sent to Scandinavia in the mid-15th century.

The Renaissance led to renewed interest in classical literature. Many Italian humanists travelled all over Europe searching for lost books and manuscripts in the hope of discovering unknown Greek or Roman masterpieces. One such humanist was the Italian Marinus de Fregeno († 1482), who was sent as a papal nuncio to Scandinavia in the reign of Pope Calixtus III (1455-1458) and Pope Pius II (1458-1464)²¹. As papal legate, Marinus was tasked with the preaching and collecting of crusade funds from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway for a planned crusade against the Turks following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Not all these funds reached the papal camera at Rome, instead, parts were shipped off to Lübeck. In 1464, Marinus was transferred to Poland and soon after complaints started to be raised against him. By the following year Marinus had fallen out of favour and all his estates and properties in Lübeck were confiscated. This revealed that it was not only money that had caught the papal legate’s eye during his time in Scandinavia. Among the things confiscated, were several manuscripts – including three manuscripts containing Josephus’s text. These manuscripts were later sold to the city council of Lübeck, probably containing the codex manuscript that was found by Kirchmann. In a stroke of luck, as they were attached to the Josephus-manuscript

¹⁹ *Profectio, epistola auctoris*. Some scholars argue the text was written after the death of the Norwegian King Sverrir in 1202 (Kålund, 1896, p. 88; Vandvik, 1954, p. 34). Current consensus is on an earlier date as there is no suggestion in the text that important people in both Denmark and Norway were dead at the time of composition, such as King Knud VI (1182–1202) and Archbishop Absalon († 1201), or the Norwegian King Sverrir (1177-1202), see Johnsen, 1976, p. 507.

²⁰ Nedkvitne, 2014.

²¹ The German historian Paul Lehmann (1937, p. 261-286) first drew attention to Marinus. See also Skovgaard-Petersen, 2002, p. 112-114.

that had caught Marinus' attention, both the texts of Theodoricus monachus and the *Profectio* were saved from oblivion.

Scholarship on the *Profectio*

The *Profectio* has been the subject of several studies²². Much of the older studies, centred on debates regarding the author's nationality and whether he was Norwegian or Danish, with historians from both countries claiming him for their own. After the question was settled in favour of a Norwegian origin, the focus shifted to establish a possible identity of the author and his patron. A tendency in the Norwegian historiography is a rather unfavourable view of the text, with some scholars calling it a practice piece or "student assignment"²³. Ironically, less attention has been given to the European context and the crusading elements in the text, or, according to one historian, even the text itself²⁴. The few studies who have discussed the character of the crusade in the *Profectio* have largely been negative, with some questioning the motives of the Norwegian protagonist or whether the expedition was a crusade at all²⁵. Representative of this negative assessment is philologist Egil Kraggerud, who remarks: "as a crusade it seems to have been something of a monstrosity"²⁶. Against this it could be argued that it seems highly unlikely that the expedition was viewed as a failure by medieval contemporaries. The author explicitly states in his prologue that he had been approached by several "venerable persons [*uenerabilium personarum*]", including some of the participants, to write a narrative about the expedition and that he had undertaken the task, "so that their [i. e., the crusaders] deeds should be handed down to the memory of posterity as worthy of praise"²⁷.

More recent studies have been far more positive in the evaluation of the *Profectio*, placing it firmly within a wider context of European crusading literature of the 12th century. This is largely due to the work of the Danish Latinist Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, who has compared the text with other contemporary crusade literature in Europe²⁸. According to Skovgaard-Petersen, many of the themes presented in the

²² Bysted, 2021; Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, 2001; Kværndrup, 1993; Kraggerud, 1985; Johnsen, 1976; Skånland, 1968; Vandvik, 1954; Holm-Olsen, 1949-1951; Midbøe, 1949; Lehmann, 1937; Kålund, 1896; Munch, 1857.

²³ Vandvik, 1954, p. 34.

²⁴ Møller Jensen, 2018, p. 51.

²⁵ Holm-Olsen, 1949-1951, especially p. 471-477, where he draws attention to a reference to the Books of Samuel (book 2, chapters 15-17), and sees Ulf as a parallel to Husai, who orchestrated the downfall of Absalom with giving intentional bad advice.

²⁶ Kraggerud, 1985, p. 87: "Sett som en jorsalferd virker det som noe av et misfoster".

²⁷ "*Vt ergo eorum gesta memorie posterorum digna laude traderentur*" (*Profectio, epistola avctoris*). My translation here and afterwards if nothing else is mentioned.

²⁸ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000; 2001; 2002.

Profectio can be linked to the crusade discourse found in much of the contemporary crusade literature in the mid-12th century. In this, the *Profectio* shares many characteristics with contemporary crusade narratives, which had developed into a literary genre by the late 12th century²⁹. Skovgaard-Petersen points out that the *Profectio* shares “an emphasis on the singular greatness of the subject and on the fact that the events took place ‘in our time’³⁰”. Danish historian Ane Bysted points out that the *Profectio* encompasses many contemporary attitudes of grief and sorrow over the loss of Jerusalem, but also echoes theological themes found in papal crusade letters in the period³¹. Scholars have especially questioned the authenticity of the papal letter in the *Profectio*. Skovgaard-Petersen draws attention to the fact that the author himself explicitly states that he is merely rendering “the substance of his appeal” and not an accurate version of the entire papal letter³². Bysted, however, suggests that the author either was paraphrasing the crusade bull *Audita tremendi*, issued by Gregory VIII on 29 October 1187, or an otherwise unknown bull³³. Whether the author rendered an authentic papal letter or not, he was aware of theological themes and phrases commonly used in papal crusade bulls during the 12th century. Despite these efforts to re-evaluate the *Profectio*, aspects with the text remain unexplored. For instance, while the absence of warfare has been noted by several scholars, the author’s attitude towards peace has widely been neglected. This also makes it relevant to look closer on the author’s identity and background.

The *Profectio* and its author

Nothing is known about the author outside information he gives in the text. In the heading of the dedicatory letter, he presents himself as “*frater X Canonicus*”. This means that we only know that he was a canon, but we don’t know where nor even his full name. Scholars have for a long time speculated what the X might stand for. One suggestion is that it is an abbreviation for the name *Christianus*, while others have suggested that it might be the phrase *in Christo* or something entirely else³⁴. Much ink has also been spilled debating the author’s national identity, but consensus now is that he most likely was Norwegian on account of his renderings of place names and Old Norse proverbs³⁵. The author further mentions that he has

²⁹ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 9.

³⁰ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2002, p. 20.

³¹ Bysted, 2021.

³² Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 28, “*verba hanc summan continentia*” (*Profectio*, ch. iii).

³³ Bysted, 2021, p. 135, note 10.

³⁴ For a summary, see Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 8, especially note 4.

been living for some time in the Norwegian town of Tønsberg, situated on the western side of the Oslo Fjord. It is believed based on this information that he was a canon in the city's Premonstratensian monastery, St. Olav's Abbey, as this institution is singled out for special mention in the text (chapter 9). The author, however, possessed a firm knowledge of Danish affairs, which makes it reasonable to believe that he had a connection to the Danish Premonstratensian monastery in Børglum, in Jutland, as this was the 'mother institution' for the monastery in Tønsberg³⁶. It seems reasonable that he had some sort of connection to Børglum, which could explain his knowledge of Danish affairs, but the nature of this relationship remains unknown.³⁷ The author had evidently received some degree of education; besides quoting Scripture, he also demonstrates a rudimentary knowledge of Classic literature, adding in quotes from Seneca, Vergil, and Juvenal. He also had some knowledge of contemporary crusade literature or at least themes within this type of literature, if not a particular text³⁸.

In the dedicatory letter, the author addresses himself to a superior cleric, a "*Dominus K*", on whose exhortation (besides some of the participants) the author claims to have written the account. The identity of this mysterious K is not known, but several suggestions have been put forward: The Icelandic philologist Finnur Jónsson argued that K was probably neither Norwegian nor Danish, but most likely a French cleric at Prémontre³⁹. A more complex theory was presented by the Danish philologist Martin Clarentius Gertz, the publisher of the first critical edition of the text, who argued that the K is actually a C (as found in one of the transcriptions), which originally is a misspelling of a G⁴⁰. This would be very convenient, as a G could indicate both the French name *Guillaume*, which would fit perfectly with the influential French abbot William (1190-1202) at the Augustinian monastery at Æbelholt in Denmark, but also several other candidates⁴¹. The problem with this theory, beside it being a bit *too* perfect, is that it requires a lot of tweaking of the sources to fall in place. A third theory, presented by the Norwegian philologist Ludvig Holm-Olsen, is that *dominius K* might be the Icelandic abbot Karl Jónsson at

³⁵ As was first suggested by the Norwegian historian Peter Andreas Munch in 1857 (p. 223) and independently later by the Danish philologist Kristian Kålund (1896, p. 79-96). Both also mistakenly identified Theodoricus monachus as the author. For a critic, see Midbøe, 1949, p. 8-9.

³⁶ It was long believed that the author was probably a member of the group of Norwegian exiled clergymen who accompanied the Norwegian Archbishop, Eirik Ivarsson (1188-1205), during his exile in Denmark in the 1190s, see Kålund, 1896, p. 91; Vandvik, 1954, p. 17-18; Skånland, 1968. Against this it has been argued that the general positive attitude towards King Sverrir in the text makes it unlikely that the author was part of any opposition against the king, Johnsen, 1976, p. 512-513.

³⁷ Johnsen, 1976, p. 520.

³⁸ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 14-18.

³⁹ Here after Vandvik, 1954, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Gertz, 1922, p. 455, Gertz also speculated that G could stand for *Gunnerus*, referring to abbot Gunnar at Øm monastery at Jutland.

⁴¹ Vandvik, 1954, p. 24-25.

Pingeyrar, the author of *Sverris saga*⁴². Despite all these theories, it would seem we are no closer in establishing anything with certainty regarding either the author or his high-ranking patron, as both their identity remains a mystery. As important as the author, is the text itself.

Content and structure

The *Profectio*'s narrative of the crusade can be divided into three main parts: the background and preparations, the obstacles before departure, and the journey itself⁴³. The first part – the dedicatory letter, preface, and chapters 1-6 – starts with the author presenting the background for the crusade. The prologue makes clear the author's intent to write an account of events that has recently taken place and were worthy of remembrance. The crusaders are then associated with the disciples; denouncing their homes and families, placing themselves in mortal danger so that they "might gain Christ"⁴⁴. This is underlined with a reference to Jesus' exhortation in the Gospel of Luke that "those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples"⁴⁵. This idea of imitating Christ, with references to taking the Cross, was a common *topos* in much of the contemporary crusade literature⁴⁶.

There is an apocalyptic undercurrent in the *Profectio* where recent events are placed within an eschatological framework; the author laments the moral decline of his day and links the capture of Jerusalem by the pagans [i. e., Muslims] because of sinfulness within Christendom (chapter 1-2). This is interpreted as a sign that the end of the world draws near as peace is far away. The author then renders an alleged letter from Pope Gregory VIII (reigned 1187); the Pope laments the loss of Jerusalem and a consequence of "our sins [*peccatis nostris*]", a moral failure within the Christian community. The letter ends with a call for a crusade to "avenge the injustice done to Christ"⁴⁷. The theme of vengeance would have struck a chord with an aristocratic audience as Jerusalem is here interpreted within a feudal context as Christ's inheritance. The author then turns to describe the response of the letter at the court of the Danish King Knud VI (reigned 1182-1202), as the king and his nobles are gathered for Christmas celebrations (chapter 4). The initial response of the

⁴² Holm-Olsen, 1949-1951.

⁴³ Here I follow Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 11-14.

⁴⁴ "ut Christum lucrifacerent" (*Profectio*, prologus).

⁴⁵ "Sic ergo omnis ex vobis, qui non renuntiat omnibus quæ possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus" (*Profectio*, prologus). Cf. Luke 14, 33.

⁴⁶ By the late 12th century, the cross had also been firmly established as an identifying marker of a crusaders who were collectively referred to as *crucesignati* ('those who are signed with the cross'), see Constable, 2016.

⁴⁷ "[...] nec paliantur iniuriam christi fore diutius inultam" (*Profectio*, ch. iii).

papal letter is one of shock and sorrow, with all the nobles falling completely silent. This lasts until one of the great nobles, Esbern Snare (1127-1204), rise and give a long and eloquent speech where he calls the Danes to action (chapter 5). I will come back to Esbern's speech later. Initially, fifteen nobles take the cross and start the preparations, but underway many recant their vows – due to the “the malice of the Old Enemy” (i. e., the Devil)⁴⁸ – and in the end only five remain.

Accordingly, the crusade was preached all over Denmark, at all law assemblies and in all churches, “so that what few had been informed about would reach the ears of everybody by public announcement⁴⁹”. This gives a rare glimpse into how a crusade call was disseminated in medieval Scandinavia.⁵⁰ It might have included public readings of the papal crusade bull as these were often formed as a sort of ‘mini sermon’ for the preaching of the crusade.⁵¹ After years of preparations the Danish crusaders could finally set out in the summer of 1191, with a fleet of four ships and an estimated 150 participants⁵². First stop, however, was Norway where a Norwegian contingent joined the crusade.

The second part of the narrative – chapters 7-17 – involves the obstacles and tribulations the crusaders face in Norway. The first stop was in Konghelle, a small town located near the Göta River (near modern Gothenburg), which at the time formed the border between the three kingdoms of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Here the Danes were joined by two hundred Norwegian crusaders under the leadership of a chieftain named Ulf of Lauvnes (chapter 7-9). Like some of the high-ranking Danish nobles, Ulf is known from other contemporary sources and was an important chieftain under King Sverrir (reigned 1177-1202)⁵³. At this point the story breaks off as Ulf tells his companions he has business to attend before he can depart. This is the beginning of a series of events in Norway (chapter 9-15). After a stop in the town of Tønsberg (chapter 9), the crusaders sail to Bergen to meet King Sverrir (chapter 10). Bergen was at this time the largest city in Norway and an international trade hub. Some of the Danish crusaders fall victim to temptation, which almost leads to a catastrophe when drunken crusaders get into a conflict with the locals (chapter 11). The situation almost leads to a riot, but they're saved by the intervention of the Norwegian king. This episode includes a named Danish noble,

⁴⁸ “*malignitas hostis antique*” (*Profectio*, ch. iv).

⁴⁹ “*Decreuerunt igitur uerbum istud diuulgandum in placitis, predicandum in ecclesiis, ut, quod iam pauci perceperant, clamore publicato ad aures uulgi procederet*” (*Profectio*, ch. vi).

⁵⁰ Jensen, 2022, p. 147.

⁵¹ The introductions would often describe in vivid details the pagans' cruel and blasphemous behaviour towards innocent Christians, holy sites and churches, or “biblical prophesies of the signs of God's wrath and the approaching end of the world, or they could stress the mercy and forgiveness of the Saviour and the possibilities of gaining indulgence”, Jensen 2022, p. 144.

⁵² Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 7.

⁵³ For Ulf's background, see Kraggerud, 1985; Johnsen, 1976; Holm-Olsen, 1949-1951; Midbøe, 1949.

who had previously taken part in a rebellion against King Sverrir (chapter 12-14). This is a key scene in the narrative, and I will come back to it later.

The third part – chapters 18-27 – concerns the journey from Norway to the Holy Land and back home again. This is the shortest part of the narrative. It includes the dramatic highpoint, when part of the crusade fleet is shipwrecked in a terrible storm during the crossing of the North Sea (chapters 19-22). Those who drown are hailed as martyrs (chapter 20), while some are miraculously saved and compared with the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea (chapter 21). The crusaders make it to the Frisian coast and travel by land to Venice (chapters 22-23), where they board ships to the Holy Land (chapter 24). Upon arriving in the Holy Land, the Northern crusaders discover that the official crusade is already over after a peace treaty had been signed by King Richard I of England and Sultan Saladin of Egypt and Syria in September 1192 (chapter 25). They then visit the holy sites in Jerusalem as the treaty gave Christian pilgrims access to the city, before travelling home in two groups; one by way of Rome and the other by way of Constantinople, where the crusaders witness a miracle involving an image of the Virgin Mary (called *Eudoxa* or *Odigitria*). The crusaders then travel back home via Hungary and Germany.

Crusading for Peace?

To understand the *Profectio's* ideas about peace it is relevant to briefly discuss how the idea of peace fitted within the wider frame of crusade ideology. The medieval Church was no pacifist, but peace was central to its mission and politics. In the monastic tradition that emerged within the reform movement in the period before the crusades in the late 11th century the concept of peace was understood as a multifaceted term; peace was not simply the absence of war. In fact, the pursuit of peace for mere tranquillity was regarded as a dangerous and 'false' peace⁵⁴. For reformist churchmen in the 11th and 12th centuries, the distinction between true and false peace became a matter of the right order of the world. The flexible understanding of peace always meant the Church had an ambivalent relationship with the concepts of war and violence. As historian Ernst Dieter-Hehl points out, the Church made no attempt in the Middle Ages to prohibit war in general but saw peace as something that "had to be defended by military means, even under the ever-present threat of ecclesiastical punishment⁵⁵". From a modern perspective this might seem contradictory. However, modern sentiments were not necessarily

⁵⁴ Malegam, 2013, p. 1-12.

⁵⁵ Hehl, 2004, p. 185-228.

shared by medieval contemporaries, who did not regard war and peace as diametric concepts, but rather intertwined and complementary.

The coming of the crusades in the late 11th century was in many ways the logical extension of earlier attempts by Church authorities to regulate warfare within Christendom. This had resulted in the so-called 'Peace of God' movement that emerged in Southern France in the late 10th century⁵⁶. The Church tried to restrict the use of force on certain dates and to get the warrior elite to swear oaths, but this proved difficult to implement in practice. By the late 12th century, the reform-Papacy tried a new strategy; instead of restriction, the church sought to direct the violence. This process culminated in 1095, with Pope Urban II's speech at the council of Clermont and the proclamation of what would later be known as the First Crusade⁵⁷. Pope Urban II had primarily been interested in recruiting people from the warrior elite, but it soon became clear that on a local and regional level, the absence of leading magnates in the society could jeopardize political stability at home. Peace within Europe and unity in Christendom were seen as essential preconditions for any successful crusade campaign right from the First crusade. Hence the preaching of any crusade was accompanied by a renewal of peace decrees at church councils⁵⁸. The two concepts of peace and crusading also became central to the new monastic orders that emerged during the 12th century, such as the Premonstratensians, the order to which the anonymous author most likely belonged.

The Premonstratensian order was established at Prémontré by Norbert of Xanten († 1134), an itinerant preacher and peacemaker active in the Low Countries, Northern France, and the imperial borderlands. Norbert's early hagiographers were eager to underline his many attempts to make peace between warring factions and building a coherent Christendom⁵⁹. This part of Norbert's personal model became of special importance to the Premonstratensians. However, like the Cistercians, the order also became strong advocates for crusading and by the end of the 12th century, the Premonstratensians were frequently entrusted with the task of preaching new crusades by the Pope⁶⁰. This duality of peace and crusading that so heavily influenced the order on the continent, would in no doubt also influence the anonymous canon who wrote the *Profectio* as he sat in the Premonstratensian monastery in Tønsberg. The narrative in the *Profectio* seems at times to have been

⁵⁶ Koziol, 2018.

⁵⁷ Riley-Smith, 1986; Erdmann, 1977.

⁵⁸ Riley-Smith, 2001, p. 72.

⁵⁹ Neel, 2020, p. 211.

⁶⁰ Around 1200 the Premonstratensian abbot Radner of Rommersdorf compiled a manual for preaching the crusade, see Powell, 1986, p. 24.

influenced by Premonstratensian spirituality, as is perhaps most evident in the author's inclusion of the miracle story during the crusaders visit to Constantinople (chapter 26). Accordingly, the northern crusades witnessed a procession headed by an image of the Virgin Mary, which the Greeks referred to as *Eudoxa* (or *Odigitria*), that included a miracle. This story seems to demonstrate a strain of Premonstratensian spirituality, where a vibrant and idiosyncratic Marian devotion was a central part of the order's spiritual life⁶¹.

In general, much of the monastic culture in the 12th century was steeped in images of war and (spiritual) warfare⁶². This was often linked to an eschatological undercurrent, also evident in much of the crusade literature in the same period⁶³. These two aspects are also present in the *Profectio*, where the author places the crusade within a wider eschatological framework; initially he laments the "decline and vices [*labes et uitia*]" of his own day and adds a clear eschatological understating of the events as they all occurred at a time when "the end of the world draws near⁶⁴". The present is thus understood as a state of war, with the author quoting the Gospels of how "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom⁶⁵". He further adds that all signs, both at home and in foreign lands, point to how "God's Judgment [*iudicium dei*]" is at hand and that "all peace is far away [*omni pace remota*]⁶⁶". During the 12th century, the need for unity and peace within Christendom was continuously repeated in papal crusade bulls, something that culminated with the crusade encyclicals of Pope Innocent III (reigned 1198-1216). The intertwined theme of peace within Christendom and reconciliation, are present in the *Profectio* in two key scenes of the narrative; first with the speech attributed to the Danish nobleman Esbern Snare and, secondly, during the reconciliation scene between one of the crusade leaders and the Norwegian King Sverrir in Bergen.

Peace and reconciliation

The initial reaction to the news of the fall of Jerusalem among the nobles gathered to celebrate Christmas at the Danish court is one of shock and sorrow, but also a paralyzing sense of defeatism as they react "with tears and sighs, so that they were all completely silent⁶⁷". The mood is only broken by the intervention of one of the

⁶¹ Neel, 2020, p. 213-215.

⁶² Smith, 2011.

⁶³ Cf. Rubenstein, 2019.

⁶⁴ "*Mundi fine uergente*" (*Profectio*, ch. i).

⁶⁵ "*Gentem surgere contra gentem et regnum regno preualere*" (Matt 24, 7 and Luke 21, 10).

⁶⁶ *Profectio*, ch. i.

⁶⁷ "*lachrymarum et suspiria resoluuntur, ut penitus omnes obmutescerent*" (*Profectio*, ch. iv).

nobles, Esbern Snare, a high-ranking noble and brother of Archbishop Absalon of Lund (1177–1201), who holds a moving speech where he calls the Danes to action⁶⁸. The speech intertwines both ecclesiastic and secular elements, which might indicate that the *Profectio*'s indented audience was both clerics and members of the secular aristocracy alike. After first acknowledging the Pope's superior position, Esbern calls the loss of Jerusalem an "insult against Christ"⁶⁹. The speech then moves on to contrast a glorious Danish past – "Our forefathers saw better times, with fertility and tranquillity, as justice and truth obeyed them"⁷⁰ – with a present state of decline – "indeed, in our time fraud and violence reign supreme"⁷¹. He then elaborates the numerous conquests and valiant deeds done by the Danes in the past, such as in Greece, Italy, Normandy, Britain, and Wendland. All these deeds were performed at a time when the Danes were still heathens and hence only fought for personal honour. Now, however, the Danes are called to participate in a war with a more beneficial purpose. Esbern then exhorts his listeners and tells them that it's time to stop all infighting: "We must move from civil discord to greater and more beneficial conflicts"⁷². He then further emphasises the Christo-mimetic nature of the expedition: "Let us partake of the inheritance of the saints and join in their ordeals"⁷³. Before he finally calls on everyone, also those not able to participate in person, to contribute: "If anyone is physically infirm, he may give assistance from his property to those who struggle, so that all who cherish the same wish may share in the prize"⁷⁴.

Esbern's speech contains several elements that were familiar within contemporary crusade rhetoric. For one, the reference to the theme of 'the deeds of the forefathers', seems to echo Pope Eugenius III's crusade bull, *Quantum Praedecessores* (1145), published in connection with the Second Crusade (1145-1149)⁷⁵. In the bull the pope uses the image of fathers and sons – underpinning crusading as a legacy handed down through the generations – to appeal to the Frankish nobility to imitate the deeds of their famous forefathers in connection with the First Crusade⁷⁶. In other words, Eugenius III's call relied heavily on the fact that a crusading tradition was established within certain Frankish noble

⁶⁸ Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 37-43.

⁶⁹ "Jesu Christi contumelia" (*Profectio*, ch. v).

⁷⁰ "Patres nostri priores meruere tempora meliora, fertilitatis scilicet ac tranquillitatis, quia in eis iustitia et ueritas obuauerunt sibi" (*Profectio*, ch. v).

⁷¹ "Horum uero dierum uoulimine fraus et uiolentia regna moderantur" (*Profectio*, ch. v).

⁷² "Moueamur a seditione ciuium ad maiora et utiliora certamina" (*Profectio*, ch. v).

⁷³ "Simus in sorte sanctorum et communione laborum" (*Profectio*, ch. v).

⁷⁴ "qui non ualet corpore, rebus opem conferat laborantibus, ut participes sint in premio, qui non sunt dispares in uoto" (*Profectio*, ch. v). For a discussion of Esbern's speech in relation to contemporary crusade literature, see Skovgaard-Petersen, 2001, p. 42-43.

⁷⁵ Phillips, 2007.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51-52.

families, but also counting on the new crusaders' sense of honour and pride to live up to the deeds of their predecessors. In the same way, Esbern emphasises the deeds the Danes had done in the past as an example for his contemporaries, but since this occurred before the Danes were Christians the present crusade is regarded as a far more worthy cause.

A crucial part of the speech is Esbern's emphasis on the need for internal peace and how the Danes should stop fighting each other. This could in some ways perhaps also be read as a sort of 'social commentary', as it relates to the fact that both the kingdoms of Denmark and Norway witnessed periods of internal strife and conflict during the 12th century. The focus on the need for internal peace has a long tradition within the crusade movement. In 1095, Pope Urban II had in his Clermont address specifically called on the Frankish nobility to stop fighting each other and liberate Jerusalem. Internal peace within Christendom was seen as a prerequisite for any successful crusade campaign and as mentioned, regularly emphasised in papal crusade bulls throughout the 12th century. The theme of internal peace is also central in other key sections of the *Profectio*, especially in connection to Danish-Norwegian relations (chapters 11-14). This contains the crusaders' visit to Bergen and the dealings with the Norwegian King Sverrir.

Compared to the emphasis on events in the Holy Land – which covers about one twentieth of the text – the visit to Bergen receives at least four to five times as much space. The episode in Bergen has often been seen as an unnecessary detour from the main narrative. However, given the amount of attention the author gives to these events, it was clearly understood as an important part of the story, not simply a random digression. This part of the narrative deserves a closer analysis. The section starts with a description of Bergen, "the most glorious city in this region"⁷⁷. The town has indeed many churches and monasteries, housing the relics of the patron saint of Western Norway, Saint Sunniva, but as it is also a busy trading hub it is also a place of temptations. The author then goes on to give a temperance speech; Bergen is compared to a sort of northern Sodom and Gomorra, where wine and vice is plentiful. A widespread problem in all Norwegian towns, is drunkenness, something that easily breaks the peace and drives even the meek to acts of brutality and violence. The author laments that not even pagan people are this depraved! On their arrival, the crusaders are informed that King Sverrir is away on business and asked to wait for his arrival. This has almost catastrophic consequences as some of the Danish crusaders are led into temptation. After a night of heavy drinking, the Danes get into conflict with some locals after a high-ranking woman is assaulted. This almost results in an armed confrontation between the Danish crusaders and the local inhabitants but is ultimately prevented by the intervention of respectable

⁷⁷ "hec est ciuitas regionis illius eminentiori potentia gloriosior" (*Profectio*, ch. xi).

men on both sides. The following morning, the Danes regret their bad behaviour and agree to pay heavy fines. Upon his arrival, King Sverrir inspects the crusader fleet in secret to learn of their intentions. The chronicle then explains the reason for the king's behaviour with a short retrospective chapter regarding a failed rebellion against King Sverrir just a few years earlier⁷⁸. It is then revealed that one of the leading Danish nobles on the crusade, Sven Torkilsson, played a central role in this rebellion.

Returning to the present, the author mentions how Sven becomes worried that the king's anger with him might damage the crusade – perhaps an analogy to the sinner fearing God's wrath. The situation is defused through the action of mediators, where Ulf of Lauvnes is particularly singled out as a leading actor. Ulf and some of other leaders decides to go visit King Sverrir and appeal to the king's "royal grace" on behalf of their travel companion⁷⁹. This act of mediation is a success, with the leaders being able to "return back having received the desired peace⁸⁰". The next day, Sven approach the king and is welcomed with "a kiss of peace⁸¹", then the two men are reconciled after Sverrir gives a speech, where he refers to the injustice Sven has committed: "But because of the incomparable goodness of God, which cannot be deprived of His piety, has raised you, unworthy, to repent the crime you have committed, We also forgive you⁸²". The section ends with King Sverrir giving the crusaders advice on sailing routes (which they don't follow to dire consequences), bestowing them with gifts and giving them all the "kiss of peace⁸³", and permission to travel as they please. Despite his later excommunication and bitter conflict with the Church, the *Profectio* paints a very positive image of King Sverrir as an ideal Christian king. As demonstrated, the main theme of this episode is reconciliation; for the sinner to repent and be forgiven, thereby receiving the desired peace.

Concluding remarks

A closer study of the narrative in the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* reveals that a main motive in – and with – the text, was to emphasise

⁷⁸ The so-called rebellion of the 'Vårbelgene' (literally 'spring fur', referring to fur of a low quality), is known from other contemporary Norse sources, such as the *Sverris saga*.

⁷⁹ "regis gratiam" (*Profectio*, ch. xiv).

⁸⁰ "et redeunt desideratam pacem reportantes" (*Profectio*, ch. xiv).

⁸¹ "suscipitur osculo" (*Profectio*, ch. xiv).

⁸² "sed quia incomparabilis diuina bonitas, que sua pietate priuari nequit, licet indignum te de patrato scelere suscitauit ad penitentiam, ignoscimus et nos tibi" (*Profectio*, ch. xiv).

⁸³ "pacis osculo" (*Profectio*, ch. xiv).

the need for peace within Christendom. Internal peace was seen as a prerequisite for any successful crusade both by the Papacy and monastic reformers, as it also formed part of the struggle for the right order of the world. The text demonstrates the author's knowledge of ideas and themes found in much of the contemporary crusade literature. On the one hand, the author rooted his description of the crusade in ecclesiastical ideas, Scripture, and the papal crusade letters to exhort his audience of the duty of all Christians to revenge the injury done to Christ, but also the need for peace within Christendom⁸⁴. On the other hand, he also included secular themes of honour and memory, especially through the emphasis on the theme of the 'deeds of the forefathers', which formed the core of the speech attributed to Esbern Snare⁸⁵.

The reconciliation scene in Bergen ties in with the emphasis on the need for internal peace in the speech. From Esbern's focus on the need for the Danes to stop their infighting, this is then expanded to a national level with a reconciliation between Danes and Norwegians. Because the Danes confessed their sins and reconciled with their enemies, the author could assure that the Danish crusaders who later died in the shipwreck were deemed not only worthy of salvation, but indeed martyrdom. While the author of the *Profectio* was challenged with the fact that the Northern crusaders were not able to fight the enemies of God in the Holy Land, he could still praise the crusade as a vessel for creating peace among Christians. The crusade in the *Profectio* is not only evidence that crusading fever also made its mark on this part of Northern Europe, but also that it could be interpreted as a uniting project⁸⁶. In the end, the *Profectio*'s narrative demonstrates an idea of the peace within the crusade.

⁸⁴ "Nec patiantur iniuriam Christi fore diutius inultam" (*Profectio*, ch. iii).

⁸⁵ *Profectio*, ch. v.

⁸⁶ Backmund, 1972, p. 247.

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PLAN

- The Codex Manuscript – from Tønsberg to Lübeck
- Scholarship on the Profectio
- The Profectio and its author
- Content and structure
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- Peace and reconciliation
- Concluding remarks

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