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***Holy men in a Holy land: Christian, Muslim and Jewish Religiosity  
in the Near East at the Time of the Crusades***

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The time is June 1119; twenty years have passed since the warriors of the First Crusade conquered Jerusalem and established the Frankish – or Latin, or crusader – kingdom of Jerusalem. The place is Hebron, about 25 miles south of Jerusalem. A huge rectangular shrine, built by King Herod the Great a few years before the birth of Jesus, dominates the small, hilly town. According to Jewish, Christian and Muslim tradition, the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their wives, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, are buried in the Cave of Machpela, the Double Cave of the Book of Genesis situated somewhere underneath the massively walled shrine, but no one knows the cave's location. The Byzantines, who ruled the area until 638, endeavored to discover it, but failed to do so. The Muslims, who ruled Hebron from 638 until the arrival of the crusaders, or Franks in 1099, erected a mosque within the shrine and allowed Jews to build a synagogue in front of it; but neither Muslims nor Jews knew the burial places of the patriarchs and their wives. Pilgrims were shown six cenotaphs, each dedicated to a patriarch or matriarch, but these were just commemorative monuments, not the actual tombs. Now, in June 1119, the shrine is served by Frankish clerics – Austin canons from Europe who have turned the shrine into their convent and the mosque into a church. They are eager to succeed where their predecessors failed.

It is a hot June day. After noontime, the canons are asleep on their beds, according to local custom. The chapter's scribe seeks to evade the heat and lies down on the stone floor in a corner of the church, near the cenotaph of Isaac (see Fig. 1). Before long he becomes aware of a puff of cool air coming up through a crack between two large stones of the pavement. He throws down small stones, hears them landing far below and concludes that there must be a cistern or cave underneath. He then fetches a long, strong rope, fastens a plumb to one end, lowers it through the crack and establishes that the hollow is 11 cubits – that is, about 6 yards – deep. He chooses to divulge his discovery only after his fellow canons rouse themselves to celebrate Nones. Therewith the anonymous scribe disappears from our story<sup>1</sup>. He may have fared better had he, less truthfully but more conventionally, claimed to have fallen asleep while at prayer in the church and to have had a vision of the patriarch Abraham divulging to him the relics' location. This indeed is how a later author retold the story, casting the anonymous canon as the main protagonist alongside a repeatedly intervening Abraham<sup>2</sup>.

But let us return to the original account. As the prior, Rainer, is away on business in Jerusalem, the canons decide to wait two or three days. In the meantime they beseech God to let them find the patriarchs' cave; also, they prepare the iron tools needed to cut the pavement's large stones. Then, having obtained the permission of Hebron's castellan, Baldwin, they set to work, with priests celebrating Mass, clerics reading psalms and laymen praying. After working hard for several days they manage to cut an aperture in the floor. The oldest priest of the chapter, Odo, is lowered through it by rope to the hollow's dark bottom, but, unable to find any passage, he begs to be hauled up.

On the following day the canons lower down the next-ranking priest, Arnulf, who is to become our story's hero and, alongside Odo, an informant of the unnamed author who wrote it down. Equipped with a light, Arnulf discovers walls built so well they appear to consist of a single stone. Unable to

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<sup>1</sup> A critical edition of the anonymous Latin account about the discovery of the patriarchs' remains will be published by R.B.C. Huygens in *Crusades 4* (2005). My commentary on the text is scheduled to appear in *Crusades 5* (2006). In the meantime see Kaspar Elm, “Nec minori celebritate a catholicis cultoribus observatur et colitur.’ Zwei Berichte über die 1119/20 erfolgte Auffindung und Erhebung der Gebeine der Patriarchen Abraham, Isaak und Jakob,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 94 (1997), 318-44.

<sup>2</sup> Huygens' critical edition of this account, too, will be published in *Crusades 4* (2005).

locate any opening, his spirits flag; but after a while he plucks up courage, asks that a hammer be lowered to him, and uses it to strike the walls, hoping to hear a hollow sound that would point to a cavity on the far side. At the western wall he meets with success and, cheered up, he orders several men to descend the rope. They toil for about four days to dislodge the large stone at the far side of which Arnulf has presumed a cavity; and indeed, upon the removal of that stone, there appears a dry, aqueduct-like passage 3.5 feet high, 2 feet wide, and 17 yards long, whose walls and ceiling consist of square, smooth stones.

The entrance to that aqueduct-like passage had been blocked several centuries before our own age. Modern scholars who were familiar with Arnulf's story could only guess its whereabouts<sup>3</sup>. But in 1981 an Israeli archaeological team, accompanied by officials of the Muslim *waqf*, was able to follow in Arnulf's footsteps. Thereafter the entrance was sealed once again. Yet the measurements made by the archaeologists have allowed for the preparation of a plan (see Fig. 2)<sup>4</sup>. It proves that the passage's height, width and length given in the medieval account as preserved in a neglected manuscript of the early thirteenth century<sup>5</sup>, match precisely the measurements made in 1981. The plan allows us also to understand Arnulf's progress.

The aqueduct-like passage Arnulf has discovered appears to lead nowhere and a great sadness falls on the canons. But Arnulf, with his hammer, saves the situation once again when he locates another stone that promises to conceal a cavity. After another four days of hard work a hole is cut and a round, subterranean chamber can be seen, large enough to accommodate 30 people. The canons, sure that they are about to find the patriarchs' relics within, give glory to God but, as their prior has not yet returned from Jerusalem, refrain from removing the stone blocking the entrance.

When the prior finally returns, the canons resolve to enter the chamber after their afternoon sleep: evidently the customary repose cannot be forgone even with the discovery so near to hand. The stone is pushed aside, the canons marvel at the round, subterranean edifice, but once again there is no sign of the patriarchs' cave. Arnulf resumes his probing. Closely examining the area near the chamber's entrance, he discovers a wedge-shaped stone inserted in the natural rock. He orders that it be removed, and the entrance to the patriarchs' burial cave becomes at long last visible. The date is 25 June 1119.

Prior Rainer entreats Arnulf to be the first to enter the cave. Arnulf fears that Baldwin, Hebron's castellan, may claim that a treasure of gold or silver has been found and insists therefore that he should accompany him. Holding a candle in each hand, making the sign of the cross and chanting the *Kyrie eleison*, Arnulf enters the cave, with Baldwin at his heels. However, Baldwin is overcome by fear and recoils in a hurry and Arnulf remains in the cave alone. (Our anonymous author evidently cherishes to depict Arnulf the cleric braver than Baldwin the knight, and his designation of Baldwin, a few lines earlier, as Hebron's defender acquires a somewhat farcical quality). But Arnulf finds in the cave nothing but earth that appears to be spattered with blood. Again a great sadness falls on the brothers.

The next day the prior urges Arnulf to examine the cave more thoroughly. Arnulf's second entry is less ceremonious; but with the stick he is carrying he pokes the ground and soon comes upon a skeleton. Near its head he discerns a blocked entrance to another cave. He forces it open and finds there the marked body of Abraham<sup>6</sup>, with the bones of Isaac at his feet. He now comprehends that the skeleton he found in the first, outer cave was that of Jacob.

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Louis H. Vincent, Ernest J.H. Mackay, Félix M. Abel, *Hébron: Le Haram el-Khalil, sépulture des patriarches* (Paris, 1923), p. 186, fig. 72.

<sup>4</sup> See Ze'ev Yevin, "The underground disposition of the Cave of Machpela," *Israel – `Am va-Aretz (Ha-Aretz Museum Yearbook)*, NS 2-3 (1985-86), 53-62 (in Hebrew); Doron Chen, "Measuring the Cave of Abraham in Hebron," *Liber Annus Studii Biblici Franciscani* 37 (1987), 291-94.

<sup>5</sup> Douai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 851, fol. 93v-103v. Huygens' edition (see above, note 1) is the first to utilize this oldest and most important rendition of the account.

<sup>6</sup> "sacratissimum corpus sancti Abrahe patriarche signatum." The author does not spell out the manner in which Abraham's body was marked.

When Arnulf emerges from the double cave and announces that he has found the patriarchs' relics, his jubilant confreres burst out in hymns and canticles glorifying God. Arnulf now washes the bones with water and wine and places them on wooden boards; the prior seals the cave's entrance. A day later some brothers who to pray in the cave notice on the right side of the entrance some letters carved on a stone but neither they nor others are capable of deciphering them. They remove the stone but find nothing behind it. A month later, on 27 July, they decide to pierce the wall opposite to the letters and find behind it 15 earthenware vessels full of bones. Our anonymous author assumes that these are the remains of some leaders of the Children of Israel<sup>7</sup>.

Exultation is soon followed by disappointment, yet our author, so remarkably meticulous in describing the discovery of the patriarchs' relics, becomes close-lipped and cryptic in his account of the ensuing setback. Prior Rainer, he writes, traveled to Jerusalem to announce the discovery to Patriarch Warmund and to ask him to preside at the ceremony at which the relics were to be transferred from the cave to the church above it. The patriarch gladly agreed to come to Hebron, but then "made use of a counsel that was not good" and went back on his promise. Consequently the prior decided to perform the ceremony on his own on 6 October, more than three months after the discovery. In the presence of a multitude of people from Jerusalem and elsewhere, with the clerics chanting the *Te Deum*, Rainer brought up the relics to the festively illuminated cloister for all to see, and the Franks joyfully kissed the bones which no people before them were privileged even to behold. After the ceremony, the relics were suitably placed in the church.

They were not to stay there. Two years later, Warmund ordered to return them to the cave. Apparently he was not interested in elevating the church of Hebron into a major shrine in which the relics of all three patriarchs would be prominently exhibited. Rainer, sad but obedient, complied. Still, 6 October – the day on which Rainer raised the relics from the cave – became, in the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, the feast day of Saints Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This story is exceptional on several counts. It is probably the most detailed account of a search for relics anywhere in medieval times; unlike many medieval accounts, it is utterly devoid of supernatural guidance through visions or dreams; and it has been remarkably corroborated by a recent archaeological examination. But I chose to relate it primarily because it highlights the preoccupation, even obsession, with sanctity that characterizes so many Frankish clerics of the kingdom of Jerusalem. It is not a preoccupation with sanctity in the abstract, but with the sanctity of palpable objects and tangible sites, be it a specific relic or an individual shrine, or the country in its entirety. Hence the search for, discovery, and custody of relics; the regulation of the two-way flow of believers to relics and of relics to believers; the evolution of an appropriate liturgy for the celebration of Christendom's most hallowed events at the very locations where they were believed to have occurred; the scripturalization of the country; the presentation of the Easter Fire as an annually recurrent miracle – the fire was believed to descend from heaven each Holy Saturday onto the Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; the adoption of the True Cross (a piece of wood believed to have formed part of the cross on which Jesus suffered in agony) as the kingdom's supreme symbol, habitually carried into battle as a visible, material link between Christ and the Christians fighting to defend the country sanctified by his ministry and passion.

Of course, in the Catholic West, too, there were clerics whose thinking revolved around sacred sites and relics. But in the West such clerics represented just one cultural tendency out of many, a tendency that some leading intellectual figures of the age tended to regard as low-brow. In the Frankish Levant, in contrast, this tendency predominated among the clergy and assumed the dimensions of a sweeping preoccupation, with other interests largely dormant. The tendency may be regarded as a specific case of a wider phenomenon. At least in the three monotheistic religions,

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, the Jewish traveler from Spain who visited Hebron in about 1170 writes that in the Cave of Machpela there are "many jars filled with bones of Israelites," for Jews used to deposit there their fathers' remains: *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. Marcus N. Adler (London, 1907), pp. 27 (text), 26 (translation).

an elective affinity appears to prevail between sacred space and sacredness-centered, sacredness-related, rather pedestrian intellectual concerns, whereas more demanding intellectual endeavors are flourishing elsewhere. A systematic comparative history of holy centers may enlighten us as to the determinants, variations and limits of such a nexus. Yet it is a fact that neither Philo nor Maimonides lived in Jerusalem; that Baghdad, not Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem, was the great center of Islamic science and philosophy; that Florence, Milan and Venice, not Rome, were the hubs of the Italian Renaissance<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to clerics keen on the husbanding of sanctity, the kingdom of Jerusalem attracted religious enthusiasts seeking spiritual perfection by practicing severe austerity, self-mortification and flagellation. A generation ago we knew virtually nothing about these enthusiasts; but, in 1982, Latin-written summaries of the biographies of two dozen such men were identified in the volume which Matthias Flacius Illyricus and his fellow Centuriators of Magdeburg devoted to the twelfth century and which was published in Basel in 1569. The full biographies formed part of a lost Latin work by Gerard of Nazareth, bishop of Laodicea between c. 1140 and c. 1161, whose title was *De conversacione virorum Dei in Terra Sancta morancium*, that is, *The Way of life of the Men of God dwelling in the Holy Land*<sup>9</sup>.

The picture that emerges from the sixteenth-century summaries of these twelfth-century biographies is that of enthusiasts who have withdrawn to caves on the slopes of Mount Tabor or are wandering in Galilee and along the Black Mountain near Antioch. One shuts himself in a cell atop the walls of Jerusalem. Some shun all human contact. One hides for years, almost nude, emaciated and sun-scorched, in the forest of Mount Tabor. One builds himself a hut in a remote valley, communicating with other humans only by signs. Renunciation of meat and wine, rough, scant clothing and bare feet recur in the portrayals of these Frankish ascetics, as do frequent fasts, self-flagellation and feats of prayer. Others seek perfection by serving the lepers who live in a house outside the walls of Jerusalem. One of them, Alberic, takes care of the lepers' daily needs, kisses each of them every day after Mass, and carries the feeble among them on his shoulders. Once, as he is washing a leper's feet, the water mixed with corrupted blood makes him sick, yet he forces himself to plunge his face into the foul liquid and to draw in some part of it. In his case, however, self-mortification does not entail a meekness of the spirit, and he hurls biting, disparaging remarks at people who come his way.

Some enthusiasts choose communal life. Several live for some time in a large cave near Jerusalem; others form communities on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and near Antioch. Some oscillate between an eremitical and a communal way of life. Reinald, a monk of the Tabor monastery, would leave at the beginning of Lent for the wilderness along the Jordan, taking with him a few loaves of bread and a tool to dig up roots. There he would struggle with hunger until the coming of Easter. The Burgundian knight Valerius comes to Jerusalem as a pilgrim, joins the Black Mountain community of Jubin but, unsatisfied with life there, spends twelve years in the wilderness until, maltreated with life there, returns to die in Jubin. Radulf, too goes on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, is captured by pirates on his way home, returns to the Holy Land, becomes a shepherd, then a member of another Black Mountain community, Carraria, and finally leaves for the wilderness, where he fasts every day and beseeches God that he should be never devoid of "fevers" – evidently, frenzied revelations. His wish is granted, and he acquires the reputation of being capable of foretelling the future. After his death in 1142, many sick people find a cure at his tomb.

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<sup>8</sup> See Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Intellectual activities in a holy city: Jerusalem in the twelfth century," in *Sacred space: Shrine, city, land. Proceedings of the international conference in memory of Joshua Prawer*, ed. B.Z. Kedar and R.J.Z. Werblowsky (London and Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 127-39.

<sup>9</sup> The summaries have been collected, re-arranged according to their original order, and discussed in Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Gerard of Nazareth, a neglected twelfth-century writer in the Latin East: a contribution to the intellectual and monastic history of the crusader states," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983), 55-77; repr. in idem, *The Franks in the Levant, 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Aldershot, 1993), Article IV. See also Andrew Jotischky, *The perfection of solitude: hermits and monks in the crusader states* (University Park, PA, 1995).

All these enthusiasts form a slightly belated variant of the new eremitical movement that in Catholic Europe came into being in the eleventh century, reached its apogee between 1075 and 1125, and combined eremitical and communal life in various ways<sup>10</sup>. But, unlike the new hermits in Europe, many enthusiasts in the Frankish Levant insisted not only on living in seclusion from secular society but on doing so in secluded areas through which Jesus passed during his ministry.

While our information about the “Men of God dwelling in the Holy Land” is fragmentary, filtered through Protestant, sixteenth-century lenses, we possess a full-fledged, detailed biography of their somewhat younger contemporary, Ranieri of Pisa, written a few years after his death in 1160 by his disciple Benincasa. Historians of the crusades were made aware just a decade ago of this work<sup>11</sup> which, unlike the summaries of Gerard’s biographies, allows Ranieri’s astounding spiritual progress to be followed step by step<sup>12</sup>.

The bon-vivant, lyre-playing son of a wealthy Pisan merchant, young Ranieri comes under the influence of the saintly Albert of Corsica, undergoes an intense conversion that leaves him temporarily blind, and then adopts a life of great austerity. While still a merchant, he sails to the kingdom of Jerusalem with some fellow Pisans, has a vision of the Lord, who tells him to give away his possessions and strip himself naked on the day he, the Lord, was stripped naked at Calvary. Ranieri gives instructions that the goods his partners had entrusted to him be carried back to them, and he writes his sister to do with his patrimony whatever she likes. Now portents and visions start to follow swiftly one upon another. In Tyre, Ranieri hears the bishop declare on Christmas 1138 that God “is now among us and has assumed the flesh of one of you for the salvation of all Christians.” The many Pisans present are greatly amazed by these words and, as they look around, their eyes come to rest on Ranieri. In the same church, Ranieri later has a nocturnal vision of the Virgin. Then he proceeds to Jerusalem. On Good Friday he distributes his clothes to the poor and then, “nude and without trousers,” offers his hairshirt and psalter on the altar at Calvary; the priest returns both to him. Ranieri, clad solely in his hairshirt, spends the following night in the Lord’s Temple – that is, the christianized Dome of the Rock – and soon its priest learns through a thrice-repeated vision that “God who was stripped at Calvary is now stripped in this Temple for the salvation of the Christian people.” For Ranieri, what the bishop hinted at in Tyre at Christmas, the priest of the Lord’s Temple spells out at Easter. He flees the Temple to avoid being recognized and hides among the hermits who dwell in cells atop the walls of Jerusalem until his fellow Pisans leave town.

Upon their departure, Ranieri returns to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for vigils and prayers day and night. He goes on pilgrimage to Hebron and Nazareth, where he contends at night with the Devil; he fasts during Lent at Quarantana, the traditional site of Jesus’ forty-day fast. While saying the verse of the psalter: “You made Man little less than the angels” (Psalms 8:6), his voice is stifled and, despite all efforts, he cannot utter a word. Then the smell of incense comes out of his mouth and nostrils, and with it a resonant voice, much different from his own, that tells him: “I made myself less than my angels, I crowned you with glory and honor, and I made you master over all creature.” Soon afterwards Ranieri’s exalted standing is revealed still more explicitly when the voice tells him: “Glory to the Father in you, glory to the Son in you, glory to the Holy Spirit in you.” The time of visions is over; from now on Ranieri hears God’s voice speaking through himself.

Subsequently, Ranieri hears God telling him that he has been chosen to lead the Christian people and that the Virgin, the angels, the patriarchs, the prophets, Peter and Paul, the martyrs and confessors – all should adore God in him, Ranieri. The first miracle follows: Ranieri invites a pauper to share his bread; the pauper leaves sated and grateful, but the bread remains almost whole. This is repeated

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<sup>10</sup> See Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the new monasticism* (New York, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> See Jotischky, *The perfection of solitude*, pp. 169, 171-73.

<sup>12</sup> Benincasa, “Vita sancti Rainerii confessoris de civitate pisana,” ed. Réginald Grégoire, *San Ranieri di Pisa (1117-1160) in un ritratto agiografico inedito del secolo XIII*, Biblioteca del Bollettino Storico Pisano, Collana Storica 36 (Ospedaletto, 1990), pp. 99-254.

nine times, and God tells the thankful Ranieri: “As I sated five thousand people from five loaves, and some bread was left over, so did you sate today, from me, ten men by a single loaf which you preserved almost in its entirety. Therefore today I have made you like me.”

Later, Ranieri hears God saying, again through Ranieri’s own mouth: “I have given the priests into the hands of the Devil.” A thunderstruck Ranieri is told to do penance for the Christian people, which he does with great zeal for seven years. On the following Christmas Ranieri is miraculously transposed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The most startling revelation takes place some time later, when God tells him: “I have made you like me; as I made myself the son of my [Jewish] people for the salvation of the human race, assuming flesh of my maid and as I carried that flesh to Heaven, where it is now with me, so I am made now the son of my Christian people, for its salvation, by putting on your flesh. And I shall make this flesh remain on earth, to be adored by all the peoples that are on it.” What had been implied and alluded to before, God proclaims now in so many words: Ranieri is nothing less than his, God’s, second incarnation! Thus Ranieri, whose first act in Jerusalem was to follow in his nakedness the naked Jesus, goes far beyond a mere imitation of Christ and comes to believe that he is Christ’s equal, the Father’s second Son.

Evidently, the stay at the holy places exerted on this twelfth-century hermit a soul-shattering impact. It resembles the overwhelming impression today’s Jerusalem makes on some highly strung tourists, who feel called upon to proffer pretentious claims. A recent study on the psychiatric hospitalization of tourists in Jerusalem reveals that out of 36 patients hospitalized in 1986-87, 22 thought they were the Messiah and four that they were God; three identified with Satan and seven with Moses, King David, the Virgin Mary or St John the Baptist. The overwhelming majority reported mystical experiences<sup>13</sup>.

Ranieri’s claim to be God’s second incarnation is truly extraordinary. It is no less astonishing that Benincasa, Ranieri’s disciple, explicitly mentioned this claim in the biography he wrote sometime after Ranieri’s death in his native Pisa, to which he returned in 1154, and that despite this flagrantly heretical claim, Ranieri could become the patron saint of Pisa to this very day. Perhaps no less remarkable is the attempt of several present-day historians to leave Ranieri’s claim unmentioned, or to substantially water it down and present him as just another conventional saint<sup>14</sup>.

Ranieri and the other “Men of God dwelling in the Holy Land” are not the only extraordinary figures of the twelfth-century kingdom of Jerusalem. A glimpse into the thinking of one king of Jerusalem exposes an astonishingly independent mind, evidently influenced by his Oriental environment; a query attributed to a patriarch of Jerusalem suggests that the head of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the Latin East harbored doubts about nothing less than whether crusading was justifiable<sup>15</sup>! But let us stick to the kingdom’s holy men.

Holy men were to be found not only among the Franks, that is, the ruling class of the kingdom of Jerusalem, but also among their Muslim subjects. Until recently, the existence of such Muslim holy men in the Frankish kingdom was totally unknown, but of late there has come to light, in a manuscript now preserved in al-Asad Library in Damascus, one-third of an Arabic-written treatise entitled *Al-Hikāyāt al-muqtabasa fī karāmāt mashāyikh al-ard al-muqaddasa*, that is, *The cited tales of the wondrous doings of the holy men of the Holy Land*<sup>16</sup>. It contains descriptions of twelve holy men and one holy woman of the Frankish and Ayyubid period, most of whom were active in

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<sup>13</sup> Moshe Kalian and Eliezer Witztum, “Facing a holy space: psychiatric hospitalization of tourists in Jerusalem,” in *Sacred space* (see above, note 9), pp. 316-30.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Ranieri’s life and its modern appraisals see Benjamin Z. Kedar, “A Second incarnation in Frankish Jerusalem,” in *The experience of crusading*, vol. 2: *Defining the crusader kingdom*, ed. Peter Edbury and Jonathan Phillips (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 79-92.

<sup>15</sup> King Amaury’s thinking will be discussed in the book on the culture of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem I am working on; for the patriarch’s query see Jean Leclercq, “Gratien, Pierre de Troyes et la seconde croisade,” *Studia Gratiana* 2 (1954), 589-93.

<sup>16</sup> The treatise has been edited and translated by Daniella Talmon-Heller in *Crusades* 1 (2002), 111-54

villages of the Nablus region some 40 miles north of Jerusalem. The treatise was written by Diyā' al-Dīn al-Maḡdisī (1173-1245), whose parents fled in 1156 from Jamma`il, a Frankish-ruled village near Nablus, to Muslim-ruled Damascus<sup>17</sup>.

The tales about these Muslim holy men of the Holy Land brim with scenes of everyday village life in central Palestine under Frankish rule. Here a small child cries out in the evening, craving roasted meat, there people go to their vineyards, or trespass at night on other people's vineyards; here they draw water from a well, there they reap harvests. Unlike the Frankish holy men, who live in seclusion or in eremitical communities, their Muslim counterparts live in villages or towns: one of them is depicted as working in the fields alongside two other villagers. These holy men stand out for their piety, virtue and asceticism. They are considered to be closer to God than simple believers, whom they protect and guide to repentance. Their wondrous doings, or *karāmāt*, include the multiplication of food or its temporary disappearance, creation of water, taming of fire, communication with animals, reading of thoughts, preternatural perception of concealed or distant occurrences, foretelling future events, crossing great distances in no time and protecting people by rendering them invisible<sup>18</sup>.

To cite just two telling examples. In the first, the shepherd Sa`d tells about Shaykh Sālim of the village of Mardā:

I saw in Sālim's vineyard two vines covered with excellent fruit.... so I told someone, and we went there at night. But all we found on these vines was one pecked grape. I took one of the branches and passed my hand over it, hoping to find something on it. My friend said: "May God punish you! There's nothing on them!" I said: "At suppertime the fruit was still there. It may have been picked after supper." Then we left. On the next day I returned to the vineyard to check the vines again, and there they were, overloaded with fruit. I said: "By God, this is a wondrous doing [*karāma*] of Shaykh Sālim!" I went to the well to water the flock and on my way I met Sālim. I was very much afraid of him. He said to me: "O Sa`d, you came to the vineyard yesterday, but all you have found was one pecked grape! Isn't it so?" I said: "Yes. I repent through your good offices, O Shaykh"<sup>19</sup>.

The second example involves a rather risqué story. Shaykh `Abd Allāh, a holy man of the village Dayr Istiya, relates:

I was sitting one day, when I suddenly burst out laughing. My wife, who was next to me, said: "What are you laughing at?" I said: "Something." She said: "Maybe you are laughing at me." I said: "No." She said: "You must tell me what made you laugh," and she made me swear that I tell her. So I said: "I am marveling at `Abd al-`Azīz who slept yesterday with his wife and then went out to wash himself. He drew water from the pit of a cistern and washed himself, but it did not suffice. He went to another. Mud showed on his body and adhered to his skin, so he took his clothes in his hand, and naked as he was, started looking for more water." My wife said: "You can't be laughing because of that!" or as she said it. So I went to `Abd al-`Azīz's house and said to him: "O So-and-so, surely you will not repeat what you have done?!" `Abd al-

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<sup>17</sup> On this exodus of Hanbalī Muslims from the Nablus area to Damascus, led by Diyā' al-Dīn's grandfather Muhammad b. Qudāma, see Emmanuel Sivan, "Réfugiés syro-palestiniens au temps des Croisades," *Revue des études islamiques* 35 (1967), 138-39; Joseph Drory, "Hanbalīs of the Nablus region in the eleventh and twelfth centuries," *Asian and African Studies* 22(1988), 93-12; Benjamin Z. Kedar and Muhammad al-Hajjūj, "Muslim villagers of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem: some demographic and onomastic data," in *Itinéraires d'Orient: hommages à Claude Cahen*, ed. Raoul Curriel and Rika Gyselen, *Res Orientales* 6 (Bures-sur-Yvette, 1994), pp. 147-56.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the social roles of these holy men see Daniella Talmon-Heller, "The shaykh and the community: popular Hanbalite Islam in 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Jabal Nablus and Jabal Qasyūn," *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994), 103-20.

<sup>19</sup> "Wondrous doings," ed. Talmon-Heller (above, note 16), pp. 118-19 (text), 131 (translation).

`Azīz replied: “O Shaykh, what am I to do? God reveals all our secrets to you.” And my wife went to him and asked: “Is what the shaykh told me about you true?” and he said: “Yes, true,” or something like that<sup>20</sup>.

Did the Frankish holy men, Gerard of Nazareth’s Men of God, ever encounter the Muslim holy men, the shaykhs of Diyā’ al-Dīn al-Maḡdisī? Most probably, not. In the Latin accounts, the Muslims, who appear but rarely, connote some threat. Gerard mentions a hermit of Mount Tabor who hastily fled into the woods after a beautiful Muslim girl had chanced upon his cave and set his lust ablaze<sup>21</sup>. Ranieri of Pisa, so relates his biographer Benincasa, took the road from Jerusalem to Hebron, endangered though it was by Muslims of Ascalon<sup>22</sup>. In Diyā’ al-Dīn’s Arabic account, Franks appear more frequently, always connoting oppression: one holy man foresees that Franks are about to capture a load of silk and silver bowls on the way to Ascalon<sup>23</sup>; on two occasions Muslim holy men make villagers invisible to Franks who are about to harm them<sup>24</sup>; a holy man whose son is held captive in Jerusalem turns down the offer to ransom him from the Franks as he refuses to support them in any way<sup>25</sup>; still another holy man foretells that the Muslims will be liberated from the Frankish yoke before the year 600 AH, that is, before 1203 AD<sup>26</sup>. (As we know, the prophecy came true 16 years earlier, in 1187). In short, for the holy men of each community, the other community denoted peril; while active in the same small kingdom of Jerusalem, the Frankish and the Muslim holy men lived in worlds apart. Only a latter-day observer is able to study them synoptically, and to be struck by the arresting similarity between the titles of the Latin and Arabic works that describe them. Both refer to holy men; both underline that they were active in a holy land.

And what about Jewish holy men? Very recently two short, Hebrew-written stories were discovered in a manuscript preserved in the Ginzburg Collection in Moscow, which became accessible after the breakup of the Soviet Union<sup>27</sup>. One of these stories takes place in the village of `Alma in Upper Galilee, under Frankish rule until 1187<sup>28</sup>. The villagers are Jewish and Muslim; the lord is, evidently, Frankish. The village is famous for the tomb of Rabbi Eleazar ben `Arakh, a first-century sage regarded as a *zaddiq* – that is, a Righteous One, or holy man. Branches of a beautiful tree bend over the tomb on all sides. The anonymous storyteller relates that on every Sabbath Eve (that is, on Friday before nightfall), Jews and Muslims use to light candles at the tomb, the Jews to honor the Sabbath as well as the holy man, the Muslims to honor the holy man as well as Friday, “which is their holy day, like Sunday is that of the Christians”<sup>29</sup>. And it came to pass that on one Friday, shortly before nightfall, a great flame sprang up from the many candles and set the tree’s branches on fire. The village was abuzz over the conflagration, which threatened to reduce the tree to ashes. The Jews, forbidden to extinguish it on the Sabbath, beseeched the Muslims to do so, but the Muslims, afraid to act without the permission of the Frankish lord, asked him what to do. The lord asked: “Why do not the Israelites, men of Eleazar’s people, extinguish it?” The Muslims explained: “They cannot do so, because today is the Sabbath.” Thereupon the lord told them: “Since God wished that the tree of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 125 (text), 146 (translation).

<sup>21</sup> Gerard of Nazareth, *De conversacione virorum Dei in Terra Sancta morancium*, c. 2, in Kedar, “Gerard of Nazareth” (above, note 9), p. 71. Bernard of Blois valiantly preached the Christian faith to a “Turkish tyrant,” most probably Nūr al-Dawla of Aleppo; Elias of Palmaria played with the idea of offering himself and his followers to the Muslims of Ascalon in order to obtain the release of Christian captives: *De conversacione virorum Dei*, c. 20, p. 73 and *Vita abbatis Eliae*, *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> Benincasa, “Vita sancti Rainerii” (above, note 12), p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> “Wondrous doings,” ed. Talmon-Heller (above, note 16), pp. 118 (text), 130-1 (translation).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 120, 127 (text), 134, 149 (translation).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 126 (text), 147 (translation).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-23 (text), 140-1 (translation).

<sup>27</sup> The stories were discovered by Professor Elchanan Reiner of Tel Aviv University, who is to edit them in *Crusades 5* (2006). My thanks to Professor Reiner for having placed their transcription at my disposal.

<sup>28</sup> On the Jews of `Alma see Joshua Prawer, *The history of the Jews in the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 56, 117, 121.

<sup>29</sup> Rabbi Samuel b. Samson, who visited `Alma in 1210, mentions a charmed tree near a tomb, “and nobody is allowed to take a leaf from it and it is venerated by the Muslims:” Ibid., p. 220.



the holy man should burn in the night during which the Jews cannot put out the fire, you should not extinguish it. If this holy man wishes to let his tree be consumed by this fire, beware not to touch it. And do not disobey my order, lest you lose your heads.” So all went home and left the tree burning. But when they came in the morning to see whether a single branch remained unscorched, they found the tree in its pristine beauty, just as it had been before the fire. “And God allowed the tomb of this holy man to reveal this openly to them.”

The similarity between the burning tree in the village of `Alma, resurrected on account of the Jewish *zaddīq* Eleazar ben `Arakh, and the grapes in the village of Mardā, vanishing and re-materializing at the behest of the Muslim Shaykh Sālim, is obvious<sup>30</sup>. Yet we encounter here not only a miracle wrought on behalf of a revered Jewish holy man, but also a case of Jewish-Muslim popular syncretism, with Jewish and Muslim villagers together venerating the same object. Such syncretism was not limited to the village of `Alma. On ossuaries in a large cave in Tiberias “people of all nations light candles, and sick people and barren women come and are cured:” so relates the Jewish traveler Jacob b. Nethanel sometime

between 1153 and 1187. In the same town, the tomb of a *zaddīq* was venerated by both Jews and Franks; the local Frankish clergy purportedly allowed this cult on the grounds that the Jewish holy man in question was the teacher of Jesus<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, Oriental Christians, Muslims and Franks together worshipped the miracle-working icon of the Virgin in Saydnaya, about 15 miles northeast of Damascus, that is, deep in Muslim territory. The Knights Templar appear to have played a major role both in the diffusion of the story of Saydnaya’s icon and in the distribution of the thaumaturgic liquid emanating from its breasts. Within the kingdom of Jerusalem, Franks and Muslims would converge in some instances at the same sacred places, with each group offering its distinctive prayers<sup>32</sup>. Thus while Frankish and Muslim holy men may not ever have met, Frankish and Muslim worshippers did so, at least occasionally.

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What does all this add up to? First, to the modification of a widespread image. We are all too familiar with the picture of the crusades and the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem that emerges from Hollywood movies and from popular books – occasionally even from a popular work penned by an eminent historian. It is a picture peopled by gallant, heroic knights of two competing faiths, by beautiful and occasionally much-married damsels, perhaps also by some invariably greedy merchants and sailors. I hope that the above stories may modify this picture. Evidently the kingdom of Jerusalem attracted also religious enthusiasts from Western Europe who experienced intense, sometimes truly amazing sensations, and Frankish society was more variegated and vivacious than hitherto assumed. In parallel, Muslim villagers living under Frankish rule maintained a remarkably vibrant religious life.

Second, the above stories demonstrate that, contrary to the view common among many laymen, the history of the crusades is not restricted to the rehashing of existing materials, to a string of reiterations and recapitulations. No, it is a history chock full o’ discoveries that shed light on unknown, unexpected phenomena and time and again significantly expand our understanding.

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<sup>30</sup> The second story Reiner discovered in the Ginzburg Collection manuscript relates how Jonathan b. `Uziel, another first-century *zaddīq*, appears in a dream to the Muslim king of Egypt who is about to abandon his siege of Christian Safed, and promises that, with his help, the king’s men will succeed in conquering the place on the coming day. Evidently the story refers to the 1266 siege of Templar Safed by the Mamluk sultan Baybars and attempts to ascribe the *zaddīq* a paramount role in its conquest.

<sup>31</sup> See Prawer, *The history of the Jews* (above, note 28), pp. 187-88.

<sup>32</sup> For details see Bernard Hamilton, “Our Lady of Saidnaiya: an Orthodox shrine revered by Muslims and Knights Templar at the time of the crusades,” in *The Holy Land, holy lands, and Christian history*, ed. R.N. Swanson, Studies in church history 36 (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 207-15; Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim and Frankish worshippers: the case of Saydnaya and the Knights Templar,” in *The crusades and the military orders: expanding the frontiers of medieval Latin Christianity*, ed. Zsolt Hunyadi and József Laszlovsy (Budapest, 2001), pp. 89-100.

Twenty-five years ago we knew next to nothing about Frankish holy men; fifteen years ago – about the Muslim ones; still more recently – about the tree of the *zaddīq* at `Alma.

Third, in this time of ours in which ecstatic religiosity and an intoxication with holy places are once again on the rise on both sides of more than one divide, it may be instructive to contemplate past, variant, manifestations of these experiences. They may help us to comprehend, for instance, that phenomena which an outsider readily recognizes as belonging to the same class are perceived but rarely as such by people whose horizons have taken shape within, and are permanently limited to, their distinctive cultural settings. Holy men of different religions, though spatially close, may be mutually unintelligible or even imperceptible. It would appear that only after his death does the holy man of one creed stand a chance to be venerated by adherents of other religions, who have come to share the belief in his preternatural powers.

Finally, some historical phenomena may be brought close by presenting a string of interconnected stories, with the dull language of analysis largely left out.