

Antioch falls to the crusaders 1098



The Hague, Konink. Biblio. MS XX, f.253v

By October 1097 the army of Christ, under the leadership of prince Bohemond of Sicily, had reached what we today would call Southern Turkey near the border with Syria. For the majority of the Western crusaders, however, this must have been simply Outremer, a hot and hostile, faraway country somewhere overseas with many months' march still ahead before they can reach Jerusalem, their ultimate destination. They had in fact arrived at the great walled fortress of Antioch, only to find this previously Christian city in Moslem hands. It was going to take several months' bitter fighting before they could liberate Antioch, which they eventually did on June 3rd 1098. The battle seems, by all accounts, to have been one of epic proportions, in some ways reminiscent of those so vividly portrayed in the contemporary *Chanson de Roland*:

Christians and Moslems clash, their angry ranks collide,
Combat is fierce and close on each and either side.
With wondrous strength the pagan forces strike.
Dear God, how spear shafts snap and how they shatter,
How shields are pierced, how chain-mails split and shred!
You would have seen the ground with corpses spread,
And fresh green grass by spurting blood stained red.

Supposedly an eye-witness to the fall of Antioch, one Richard le Pèlerin is said to have composed a narrative poem describing this dramatic event in the French vernacular. While his text

has not, alas, survived the passage of time, it is not completely lost to us if it is true that it was one of the sources used by Graindor de Douai when, in or around the 1170s, he wrote *La Chanson d'Antioche*. This historically themed *chanson de geste* stretches to an epic 9821 twelve-syllable lines in monorhymed *laissez*. Its extant manuscript tradition shows that it was drawn in to a cycle of Medieval French crusading texts which evidently enjoyed a certain popularity during the 13th and 14th centuries. This is not, of course, historiography in any meaningful sense of the term, but its narrative does succeed in giving the poetic flavour of a variety of popular piety cultivated in the years leading up to the 3rd and 4th crusades.

Less formulaic than the first-generation French epics, and lacking their iconic discourse and structure, the alexandrines of the *Chanson d'Antioche* are nevertheless infused with a characteristic heroic, male-centred ethos of bravery, treason and vengeance in a setting of unbridled violence. The balance that it achieves between the realism of the 1090s and the timeless traditions of epic narrative is especially interesting. Though repetitive and occasionally tiresome in its length, and despite its unrelenting religiosity, some of its set pieces have definite literary qualities. The vivid and theatrical depiction of the fall of Antioch is a model case in point.

In 2011 this *chanson de geste* underwent a revival of sorts when a new edition and translation of it by Bernard Guidot was published in Paris. This is the text, from BnF fr. 12558, copied in the middle of the 13th century, that is the basis of the following English version of lines 5650-6520 (*laissez* 235-265). By deliberately avoiding a word-for-word translation, I have attempted to produce a fluent and accurate version that remains faithful to the tone as well as the sense of the original.

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Prince Bohemond of Sicily lay sleeping in his tent. He was exhausted, having that very day just travelled back from the port of Saint-Symeon, and he had fallen into the deepest of sleeps. He dreamed a dream that caused him great alarm. He saw the heavens open before him and felt the ground quake beneath his feet. An aura of golden light appeared within his tent, from where it radiated out to light up all the city walls of Antioch. It bathed the city's defences in a brilliant glow. Muhammad was dead, so the Saracens told him. Sun and moon seemed to draw him upwards, and soon the whole of the planet lay covered beneath the skirts of Bohemond's coat of mail. The city's mightiest palace first bowed down at his feet, then lowered its head all the way to the foot of the walls. He saw one of the crusader army's leaders clambering up the wall, with all the others following on behind. They had almost reached the top and gained entry when the scaling ladder began to come apart. Those who were above the broken rungs and still climbing looked down with dismay. (5666)

At this point in his dream, Bohemond woke up. He had slept long enough. He related his dream in a prayer to God, requesting that what the vision foretold should redound to his honour. Turning his eyes to the walls of Antioch still proudly standing erect, he said: 'What

bad fortune it was for you, oh walls, that the Turks put a curse on you by occupying this city! God grant that I live long enough to see Antioch once more serving the Christian faith, to see the body of Jesus Christ worshipped there again, and his saints blessed!' (5672)

High are the walls at Antioch, and its defences of exceptional strength. Fifty fortress towers it possesses, all marble and granite, under the command of twelve emirs, all men held in the highest respect. Four towers were assigned to each governor, one of whom, being in overall control, was master of six. This was king Garsion's (Yaghi-Siyan) second in command, and he enjoyed all the authority that this rank entailed. (5678)

One morning all twelve of the emirs left their beds and processed with king Garsion to the mosque of God's arch enemy, where they each took their turn in addressing him in the following terms: 'What are we to do, my lord? We are in urgent need of reinforcements. Sansadoine and our envoys have still not arrived. I fear that the assistance they were meant to secure for us may not get here in time. Soudan will already have left for Nubia where his army is due to fight. Why don't we ask the French here to call a month's truce – a formal pause in hostilities duly confirmed by oaths sworn on both sides? Otherwise the Christian army will launch an attack against our city, and we would pay a heavy price for that. We must do everything we can to outwit the French one way or another.' In reply, Garsion said: 'I am happy to agree to this.' (5690)

He entrusted the mission to two interpreters from his own retinue, one Greek and the other Armenian, both of them experienced negotiators. He sent them off to the French camp to deliver the message. Bohemond's tent was their first stop. Being skilled in the use of words, they greeted him appropriately. 'Bohemond of Sicily, please hear what we have to say and do not be angry. We are spokesmen for king Garsion and have come to request a forty-day truce to be confirmed by solemn pledges and the exchange of hostages. Let anyone found breaking such a truce face execution! Once the truce is in operation, you will be able to buy food and drink from the city. We can even start discussions, if you are willing, about our surrendering the city to you without any damage being done or even a single bow being shot.' 'Gentlemen,' replied Bohemond, 'let me take advice.' He summoned his counsellors – all men beloved of God – and laid before them what the Saracens were proposing and the exact terms of the truce. With one voice everyone there, from the rich to the poor, shouted out: 'Lord, for God's sake grant them their truce! There is not a moment to lose.' (5707)

When Bohemond heard our crusaders unanimously and without exception speak up in favour of granting the forty-day truce, he came back to the envoys, demanding assurances that their side intended to observe the terms as agreed. At which point, having no wish to spend any more time there, the Saracens left. They came before Garsion of Antioch to report that they had succeeded in obtaining the truce, and that they had given the necessary assurances on oath. The king immediately gave thanks to Muhammad. (5715)

As for the Christian army – may Jesus keep them safe! – they welcome the truce with unrestrained joy. But unless all-powerful Jesus does indeed take them under his care,

the price they are going to have to pay will be a high one. The newly arrived armies from Persia that they are going to have to face are fearsome in the extreme, and so numerous that no man alive has ever seen so many. And if the Turks inside Antioch are capable of mounting a proper defence, then things might well prove calamitous for our men. (5723)

The whole of Antioch was occupied by Saracens and various other pagans. There were twelve highly respected emirs, each one governor of four towers. One of them, the highest ranking member of the army, had authority over all the others. He was in command of six towers as well as the main gate into the city. Every night he would have the same dream: God himself would have him baptized with holy water at the font and thus reborn in spirit. He would then surrender Antioch to the Franks and make peace with them. He was anxious to keep his feelings hidden from all the members of his family line, including his wife whom he dutifully loved. As he lay in bed, this Turk took the decision to pray to Jesus – but under his breath, out of earshot of his wife – in the hope that it was still possible for him to convert to Christianity. (5736)

The Turk in question, the one lying on his regal bed, was the same person whose young son had been captured earlier, then released by the Christians. But just look! There suddenly appears before him a messenger from almighty God: ‘Are you asleep or awake, my friend? Listen what I’m ordering you to do.’ On hearing these words, the Turk sits bolt upright: ‘My lord, who are you? What is it that you have to say to me?’ ‘My friend, I am a messenger sent by Jesus of Bethlehem. Through me, you are summoned by God, our father and redeemer, whom those Jewish unbelievers made suffer on the cross, to allow the crusaders to gain entry into the city. Out there they are being battered by rains and gales, and are experiencing great suffering.’ With that, God’s messenger left and went back to where he had come from. Left alone, the Turk felt a deep unease in his heart. He thought long and hard before eventually falling asleep again. But just hear what happened next! The messenger from God was back and standing there before him. ‘Are you asleep or awake, my friend? You are causing me a lot of trouble, you know. Our Lord orders you to stop dithering and give this city back to the crusaders. Do so by constructing a strong leather ladder, a solid one that they can use to scale this wall. I’m leaving. Now’s the time for you to stop delaying and to take action.’ The angel made his exit, leaving the Turk in tears. For the rest of the night until sunrise he found no sleep. (5759)

The Turk rose as day dawned. He got ready and dressed in his pagan robes. He made his way to a vaulted crypt where he found more than a thousand stag hides. The pagan then locked himself in before taking out the two strong steel-bladed knives he had brought along. He had thought things out carefully, and had also brought some awls and bradawls with him. He cut the hides into long wide strips. Having rejected the leathers from the stags’ bellies and put them to one side, he selected those cut from the animals’ backs and then sewed them securely together. From each of these lengths, he estimated, he could make twenty-eight leather straps. Then, having calculated that the rungs should be set precisely two feet apart, he bound each one in place by means of double-stitched knots. Each of the rungs was wide enough and strong enough to support the weight of three fully armed knights. When, however, he was halfway through constructing his ladder, the Turk momentarily lost concentration. One of the strips he was using had been badly trimmed and

was faulty. God, what dire consequences this was to have for our men! What wringing of hands would it lead to, what tearing of hair! (5779)

By the time the ladder was finished, it had grown exceptionally long, easily one hundred and fourteen feet tall. The Turk rose to his feet and made the sign of the cross. Leaving the crypt, he climbed to the top of the city walls and looked down on the French camp below. In a very low voice he let the crusaders know what was on his mind: 'Ah, noble knights, just to think that you have no idea what my intentions are and how much you are in my thoughts. I am going to surrender this city to you, to do with it what you will.' (5787)

When night fell, the Turk came down and stealthily made his way into the Christian camp to seek out Bohemond whom he knew to be well disposed towards him. As soon as Bohemond saw him, he welcomed him warmly. The Turk said: 'Listen to me, Bohemond of Sicily, before tomorrow evening, the city will be yours. Make sure you are ready and prepared tomorrow at nightfall.' 'My lord,' replied Bohemond, 'I will follow your instructions. If you are willing to believe in our God and to worship him, I can assure you that you can yet be saved.' (5797)

'Bohemond,' said the Turk, 'tell me in all good faith what reward someone who surrenders the city to you could expect.' 'I tell you straight, here and now,' replied the prince, 'that such a person would continue to govern his land and hold his property free of any obligation, and would receive, in addition, an income of one thousand gold bezants to do with it what he will. And as long as I live, I would see to it that he never suffers any wrong.' Their discussions finally came to an end with each pledging his faith to the other. Bohemond gave his word as a Christian, and the Turk swore an oath by his own god. (5805)

The Turk swore to Bohemond by all that he held holy that he would surrender the city to him the following evening. He left his son with him that night as a hostage, while Bohemond simply swore an oath to seal their agreement. Stealthily so as not to be seen, the Turk went back into the city. It could never have occurred to any of our men who caught sight of him that he had come to arrange the surrender of the city and was now on his way back. They assumed in any case that the truce guaranteed that they were safe from any intruder. (5813)

Bohemond, meanwhile, had already devised a clever strategy. He summoned all the barons in his army and addressed them: 'My lords, listen to what I have been thinking. Antioch has already caused us hardship enough, and if it were finally to be surrendered to me, I would ask you, in the name of God, to agree to it being made over to me personally – provided, of course, that you would all be happy to do so as a token of your affection.' The overwhelming majority replied: 'No one would ever refuse such a request.' The count of Saint-Gilles, however, spoke up for himself: 'That is something I could never agree to. All I have suffered here would have been in vain – all those weeks of starvation and thirst I have had to endure, all that exhaustion. It will have been too high a price for me to pay if I fail to get my fair share.' (5824)

There followed two whole days of fighting that so exhausted the crusaders that they were finally unable to take the city. They were at the end of their tether. What is more,

they were quite unaware of the great cataclysm that was about to engulf them in the shape of the huge and vicious Saracen army that was making its way towards them. No man in Christendom ever saw so many troops amassed together. Corbaran of Oliferne (Kerbogha) summoned a messenger and sent him to announce to Garsion that he would have the reinforcements he had asked for within the next three days. He was bringing him the entire military manpower of Persia, he claimed. The messenger returned, avoiding the main highways. He drove his dromedary so hard and spurred it on with such urgency that he arrived at Antioch as the sun was setting, and dismounted at the foot of the palace steps. (5838)

The messenger from Persia climbed down from the saddle at the mounting block, and hurried up the steps into the royal palace. He informed mighty king Garsion that Corbaran was on his way at the head of an army of Turks and Saracens, together with thirty kings and the Red Lion himself. On hearing this, Garsion gave thanks to Muhammad. He gave Bohemond notice that he would cease observing the truce the following day. (5845)

This news sent shivers down the spines of the French army, and the barons laid all the blame for it at the door of the count of Saint-Gilles. 'My lord,' they said, 'all your brave deeds will have got us nowhere. Had it not been for your self-serving defiance, the city would already be ours. From now on we will have to pay a heavy price if we are ever to take it.' From the castle keep where Garsion of Antioch sat in state, he called together the twelve highly respected emirs, and once they were all present, he addressed them as follows: 'See to it that our city is well defended, and let everyone stay alert. Reinforcements are on their way. Never has so huge an army been seen before.' (5855)

'My lords,' said Garsion, 'be sure to put up a strong defence. I have rescinded the truce we made with the French. Now anyone they manage to capture can expect to lose his life.' The twelve peers leave the royal residence and ride off each to his own palace. As for the Turk – God bless him! – who had earlier come to an agreement with Bohemond, he had not been idle. He saw to it that his men could get their sleep, but stayed awake himself all night. He requested Robert Guiscard's son to come to see him discreetly, with which Bohemond complied courteously and without demur. (5865)

'Bohemond,' said the Turk, 'you are delaying far too long. I fully intend, here and now, to keep the promise I made you and that we agreed to. You in turn should either take the city immediately or return my hostage to me. If you wait until dawn tomorrow, you will all be beyond redemption: dead and done for. By tomorrow the massed armies of the Orient will have arrived here.' (5871)

'Bohemond,' says the Turk, 'keep your promise and act now, otherwise you will never take Antioch for as long as you live. Mighty king Corbaran and Red Lion will be here before sunset tomorrow, and with them two hundred thousand ruthless and fearless warriors. No man alive has ever seen an army bigger than the one they are bringing. Unless you occupy the city tonight, you will spend tomorrow in grievous suffering and bitter regret.' Bohemond responds: 'Most noble sire, go to it! Make what preparations you need. I won't hold things up anymore. I will go and muster my barons just as fast as my horse can carry me.' The Turk agrees and urges him to make all haste. Each goes his own way, and off they

ride without a moment to lose. As fast as he can, Bohemond re-joins his troops, while the Saracen, deep in thought, returns to his palace. He comes across his wife, and she begins to harangue him. (5886)

‘So, your majesty,’ says the pagan queen, ‘tell me where have you been. I swear by Muhammad, I can see for sure that you are up to something, spending so much time talking with those crusaders. Tell me what you are trying to do. You’re for ever in conversation with them, all day long. My guess is that you either want to convert to Christianity or you are plotting some treachery or other with them. I tell you, as a true and faithful Moslem, that if I live to see the sun rise tomorrow, I will go and tell my father and eldest brothers, and you will lose your head in Garsion’s palace.’ ‘My lady,’ said Datien (Firouz), ‘you are completely mistaken. I would never do such a thing even if I were threatened with maiming and castration. Come up to the top of the city wall with me, and I’ll show you the French camp, their tents and the huge number of knights they have. What you will see also is our son, a popular figure among the French, fully equipped and proudly bearing arms.’ ‘My lord,’ replies the lady, ‘I will do as you ask.’ They climb the stairs up onto the wall and reach the highest point from where they can look out. You can see them there, leaning forward at one of the windows. ‘My lady, listen to me for a moment,’ says Datien. ‘I am asking you to believe in Jesus who was made to suffer on the cross, and in the Holy Virgin who bore him in her womb.’ (5910)

When the pagan lady heard these words, she flared up in anger: ‘Ah, treacherous scoundrel that you are,’ she said, ‘I suspected as much all along. You can’t keep your evil design hidden any longer. You’ll come to regret that this ever passed your lips. You are going to be torn limb from limb.’ When Datien heard her speak like this, he turned and in his fury grabbed hold of her and hurled her down over the edge. She broke her neck and her body was crushed and shattered into twenty pieces. Her body lies spent, and demons come and carry off her soul. (5919)

The Turk came down to his vaulted crypt and seized the ladder. He strapped himself to one end of it, and attached the other end to two dogs. With the aid of his canine helpers he somehow succeeded in dragging it up to top of the city wall. There he firmly secured one end to one of the strongest of the battlements, then tipped the other end up and over the wall. It came to rest a mere four feet from the ground. Bohemond of Sicily did not stay idle. In a high state of excitement, he comes to Godfrey of Bouillon’s tent. ‘My lord,’ he says, ‘make haste, for God’s sake, the city and all its palaces are about to fall into our hands.’ ‘Oh God above,’ said the duke, ‘glory to you!’ (5932)

When the duke of Bouillon heard what Bohemond had to report, he stretched his hands heavenwards and dutifully gave thanks to God. He and his company immediately took up their arms, and the duke lost no time in riding round the camp, urging on the barons, the other knights and all the courageous foot soldiers. God help them! In all there were over a thousand of them. They had no idea where the duke was taking them, and they supposed they were going into battle against those cursed Turks who were due to arrive from Persia. Bohemond and duke Godfrey set out together. (5943)

The foot soldiers were in a sorry state, with their footwear falling to pieces and their greaves hanging in shreds. They marched in close formation under the pale light of the moon, their progress made more painful still by the knights' horses trampling all over their feet. Some of them shed silent tears which fell unheard and murmured prayers to Jesus, son of the Virgin Mary. 'My lords,' said Godfrey, 'brave and noble warriors, why are you losing heart? There is nothing for you to be worried about. If these base and hateful Turks attack us, let every man defend himself valiantly with furbished sword!' To this the Christians reply: 'It would be wrong of you to be in any doubt, for as long as there is breath in our bodies, we will never fail you.' Good duke Godfrey thanked them graciously. He brought the army to a halt in a meadow set in a valley and from here sent Robert of Normandy on ahead together with count Robert of fertile Flanders, Tancred and Bohemond in whom he had total confidence, and the other barons who headed the crusading army. (5961)

Good duke Bouillon had stopped in a valley with a company of many noble vassals armed and wearing hauberks and helmets adorned with enamel set in gold. The other armed barons who had left now returned. Those present included the loyal-hearted Hugues le Maine, Robert of Flanders fully armoured on his steed, the commander of the Normans carrying the silken standard, Bohemond of Sicily bearing the royal ensign. They were accompanied by numerous other barons. May God prevent harm from befalling any of them! They set off for the city along the slope of a hill. May God, our heavenly father, be their guide! (5972)

Our barons gallop all the way to the city walls, and arrive silently and without being seen. They found the ladder at the foot of the wall, and also the corpse of the Turk's wife sprawled on the ground. The Turk himself was standing on top of the wall with a lighted lantern in his hand. He took care to shield the light from shining onto the city and directed it instead onto the ladder. He was extremely happy to see our barons arrive, and lost no time in calling out to Bohemond: 'Noble duke of Sicily, you are very late indeed. It is well past midnight, and daybreak is not far off. If the Saracens catch sight of me, they will execute me, and your army will be massacred in the morning. Come, capture the city that I am offering up to you! If not, give me my son back and honour your word. Otherwise the French will be seen as weaklings who take fright at the slightest opportunity.' When Robert of Flanders heard this, his face flushed with fury, and he said to Bohemond: 'The ladder is ready and waiting. Be the first to climb it, as it was you who planned all this.' 'My lord,' Bohemond replied, 'you are wasting your breath. I wouldn't climb up there, I swear, even if the fortress were full to the brim with gold, because it wouldn't take long for you to see me come hurtling back down again.' (5994)

From up on top of the wall holding his lantern, the Turk said to Bohemond: 'Keep your word! You either take the city or you give me my child back. By God in glory, what a cowardly lot the French are! They are valiant and courageous only when things are going well. Bohemond, what are you waiting for?,' said the Turk, 'It is well past midnight, and daybreak is not far off. One thing you can be sure of: if I am seen, I will lose my head in the emir's palace tomorrow. Make sure you do not lose faith in me. By the God born to the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, I would not lose faith in you, even if it were to cost me my life.' The barons were greatly perturbed when they heard this, but not one of them was brave,

courageous or daring enough to accept the challenge of climbing the ladder and living to boast of it. (6009)

Seeing how faint-hearted the French were, with not a single one of them being brave or daring enough to climb the ladder, count Robert of Flanders was so distressed that he began to weep. He decided to ride back to good duke Bouillon whom he had left in the valley to guard the rest of the army. When he saw him arriving, the duke called out: 'My lord cousin, you are very late, I swear. It is well past midnight, and daybreak is not far off. Who have you left behind you to take command of the city? Bohemond perhaps, as he is the one destined to rule over it? We should already have occupied Antioch by now. Once the Turks see what is happening, they are going to give us a very hard time, and they will murder all of our troops they find lying sick in their tents. Not to mention the army coming from Persia that is almost on us by now. Quick! Quick! We should already have occupied the city.' 'My lord,' said count Robert, 'stop talking like this! This is all the fault of our knights: they are standing there in front of the scaling ladder and none of them dares climb it.' This news made the duke extremely angry, and he said to the count: 'In that case, let me go there myself!' 'No, fair cousin, you cannot go. You have to stay here to prevent the pagans from coming out and routing our army.' When the good duke heard this, he turned to pray to God: 'Holy Father, Lord of Glory, who let yourself be crucified on the holy cross to save your people – oh God, this is the truth and this I truly believe – grant that we may this night conquer the city!' 'This does you great credit,' said count Robert. 'I know of no one more valiant than you when it comes to bearing arms. Either you yourself are the first to climb the ladder or you let me do so.' Having said this, count Robert rode back to the city. (6040)

Count Robert of Flanders rides as fast as he can, urgently spurring his horse on to reach the city. He arrives at the foot of the ladder to find our barons distraught and dejected, for each and every one of them is terrified. Equally frightened is the Turk, still standing at the top of the wall. He tugs the ladder to attract Bohemond's attention. 'Hey, noble duke, come on! See how easy it is for you to climb up here! The first to reach the top, be it you or someone else, will be lord and master of the whole of the city.' The French fall silent, but all look on intently. (6050)

Count Robert of Flanders calls out to the barons: 'My lords, there is no need to be afraid. In order to come here I had to give up the whole of Flanders and all the lands that go with it; I had to leave behind Clemence, my wife, who loved me with all her heart, and my two young sons who will be under God's protection. Yet I will be the first to climb the wall, in honour of our Lord God, Creator of the world.' Whereupon he pulls the neck-straps of his shield round so that it covers his back, then takes hold of the ladder in both hands, ready to start climbing. (6060)

At that precise moment, Fouchier the Orphan, a native of Flanders and an accomplished knight, seizes count Robert by his legs and says: 'My lord, listen to me! You were given the name of son of St George. If we were to lose you now, it would be a disaster. If, on the other hand, I were to die, there would not be a tear shed by anyone. I'll do the climb, fair lord, and Jesus will be my help.' On hearing this, count Robert stretches his hand

up and catches hold of the first rung. At the same time he pushes Fouchier out of the way. As he makes the sign of the cross, he is already reaching the second rung. (6070)

Count Robert of Flanders is a man of great vigour, and he climbs the first two rungs of the ladder comfortably and at a leisurely rate. But Fouchier the Orphan is holding onto his legs: 'Lord Robert of Flanders, honourable sir, do not take offence. There is no braver man than you when it comes to taking up arms. It would be a great disaster if you had to lay down your life here. You, fair lord, are governor of an important part of the country and have a wife and children. May God grant that you see them again! In my case, if I were to die, no harm would come of it. I have nothing to give and nothing to take away with me. In the name of the Holy Spirit, let me be the first to climb! It would matter little if I were to die, and it would be my way of serving God. There are a thousand better and more valuable men than me in this army.' 'My lord Robert,' the barons say, 'please give your consent and allow Fouchier to go first!' (6085)

'Lord Robert of Flanders,' say the barons, 'we beg you, for the love of God and in his name, to let Fouchier go first!' 'My lords,' replies the count, 'I grant your request. Let him now go first, and I commend him to Simeon the blessed who carried the infant Jesus on the right of his lap.' The Turk, Datien, keeping his voice low, called down to them: 'For God's sake hurry up! You can see the first glimmers of dawn.' Fouchier prepared to climb. He moved his shield, embellished with a painted lion, onto the back of his shoulders, and as he climbed onto the ladder, he said a prayer: (6096)

'Lord God, almighty Father, blessed be your name! You who were born of the Virgin Mary, who rescued holy Jonah from the belly of the whale, who raised saintly Lazarus from the dead, who pardoned Mary Magdalene her sins when she wept at your feet in Simon's house. So many heartfelt tears did she shed that they washed your feet and the ground around. Then in all innocence she anointed them with myrrh, deserving thereby the rich reward that her act of kindness brought her. God, you who suffered passion on the cross, you who felt the sting of Longinus's lance. The blood flowed freely down the lance onto his hands. He was blinded, that we know for a fact, but when he wiped his eyes with the blood, his sight immediately returned. "Lord," he cried from the depth of his heart, "have pity on me!" You pardoned him and forgave him all his sins. Your body was placed in the sepulchre under secret guard. On the third day, you rose again from the dead and descended willingly into Hell, from where you released your beloved Noah and Aaron. On Ascension Day you mounted into Heaven, after having confided your last wishes to your apostles. Through them you made the Holy Gospel known over all the world. In their sight you entered into your Father's house in Heaven where nothing evil can exist. This is the truth, oh God, and in this we firmly believe. Allow me, I beg, to remain safe as I climb. May you also be willing to save the French from being captured or killed, and grant that we might take this city and its fortresses.' (6126)

With these words, Fouchier raised his hand to make the sign of the cross before taking hold of the ladder and starting his ascent. Close behind him came Tancred and then Bohemond, and following these first three, Raimbaut Creton, Rotrou du Perche, Yvon, Gonthier d'Aire, the squire from Frisia, Thomas de La Fère, Droon de Monchy, Everard du

Puisac, Hugues nephew of Gui, Enguerran de Saint-Pol, Fouchier d'Alençon, Robert of Normandy, the sworn enemy of all base scoundrels, and count Robert of Flanders, whose sins may God forgive! After him came Eustache de Boulogne, brother of duke Godfrey of Bouillon. Soon they are all climbing with increasing speed, each trying to outdo the other. (6139)

Soon there are as many as thirty-five Frenchmen hastening up the ladder. God, what a disaster it was when the ladder broke, killing two of the knights, and causing great distress among the French. Those higher up the ladder looked down in great trepidation to where it had broken, but their courage was quickly restored, and they felt no fear. (6146)

The ladder breaking caused great consternation and grief. Two of the knights of the army of Christ had been killed, and their souls returned to their Creator. Those above them on the ladder were terrified. They looked at each other in fear and horror, but God quickly restored their courage and resilience. 'My lords,' said Datien, 'give proof of your valour, be fearless and crush the enemy! Let each of you remember your brave forefathers! I have long believed in Christ our Saviour, and surrender you my fortress and my palace to help advance your cause. I am going to turn down my lantern. Its light can too easily be seen, and day will shortly light your way.' (6159)

'My lords,' said Datien, 'fear not, I truly believe in the Son of the Virgin Mary, and for as long as I live I will remain loyal to you.' Count Robert of Flanders graciously thanks him. 'My lords,' he says, 'noble band of knights, how many of us are there in our company?' 'There are thirty-five of us,' replied Robert count of Normandy. 'A modest body of men, I do declare,' says Tancred. 'My lords,' says Datien, 'put on a brave face! The God in whom you believe will come to your aid. Half of you should make your way to the old fortress, and the other half go that city gate immediately below. You will make short work of it with your steel hatchets and can then let our cavalry into the city. Afterwards we can tackle the mosque gate. It will take no time at all, I'm certain, for the whole of the city to be taken by storm. Let each man strike with furbished sword, and anyone coming up against a pagan should be sure to kill him!' Our barons reply: 'A curse on anyone who disagrees with that!' They immediately spread out and take up position. The Turk, who has long since prepared for this, gives each of them a hatchet. Off the Christians run, eager for the fight. The Turk – blessed may he be! – shows them the way down. (6183)

Our Christians scatter all over the city. Twenty of them go to the gate immediately below them, hatchets in their hands, and smash the beam holding it shut. The Turk has provided them with strong oak stakes, and these they use to clear the earthwork from the entrance. Calling out to the French, the Turk – bless him! – humbly ventured a suggestion: 'Barons, I have a brother very dear to me, and he is in that ancient palace over there. Come with me to see him, and we will hear what he decides to do. If he is willing, he can earn salvation by believing in God, but if he is unwilling to embrace the true religion, let him face execution on the spot. It would be a grave error for us to let him escape, and that would lead to the death and destruction of us all. I personally would prefer to die rather than see you fail to seize this city.' (6199)

Count Robert of Flanders called on the Turk to come forward, and they went up to the palace together. He took Bohemond and Tancred along with him, not forgetting Richard of Normandy as well. These four barons made their way to the palace, each one with his sword hanging from his left hip. They came up to the door of the great hall and entered. When the Turk's brother saw them, he let out a cry: 'The person who brought you here has committed treason. Ah Garsion my lord, today you are going to lose your city.' When the knights heard this, they were furious. They rushed up and laid hands on him, then placed a cloth over his eyes to blindfold him. They brought him out to his brother who was waiting on the stairs. When they came to remove his blindfold, his brother called out his name and spoke to him. (6215)

Datien, on seeing his brother, felt great compassion and made this appeal to him: 'You must, I beg you, dear brother, believe in God, son of the Virgin Mary, and renounce Muhammad and all his black magic. His so-called power is an illusion and not worth a fig. It is sheer madness for you to serve and worship him.' To this the Saracen replied: 'What you're saying is contemptible. Even if you were to offer me the whole of the Islamic world, I would not forsake Muhammad. It's you, treacherous rogue that you are, you criminal, who set this whole thing up! Ah, my lord Garsion, your city has been betrayed.' Datien's only reply is to shout out to our Christian barons: 'What are you waiting for, my lords? Don't let him live a moment longer!' Count Robert of Flanders draws his furbished sword and strikes the Saracen just below the ear, sending his head tumbling to the floor behind him. (6229)

Our men are now in control of the heavily fortified city. The good duke of Bouillon meanwhile was waiting in the fields down in the valley. He had taken up position there in order to keep watch over the wide desert wastes to ensure that the enemy did not launch an attack on our men from that direction. Not having had any news from the knights at the walls of Antioch, hearing no shouting or crying, and seeing no standard fluttering in victory, he lost no time in ordering his men to mount their horses. His fear was that our French knights had been killed, and so he came galloping up to the ancient city walls. There he found a number of our men looking chastened and dejected, standing in front of the broken and dismembered ladder, with the rest of it still dangling from the hard stone wall. (6241)

The duke's face fell in frustration when he saw this. 'For God's sake, my lords,' he said, 'where are Robert of Normandy and my cousin Robert lord of Flanders, Tancred, Bohemond and all the others?' 'Noble duke, they all climbed the ladder and got into the city's fortress. We think there were thirty or more of them – God help them all! There were so many of our men together on the ladder at one time that the weight of them and their arms caused it to snap and break. Some Turk or other was waiting for them at the top, and he showed our men which way to go. Since then, we've heard nothing.' 'Oh God,' said the duke, 'they've met a violent end and are dead. Alas, why am I not there at their side? I had such trust in God that I never thought they would die, unless it were in the heat of a battle and costing twenty thousand Turks their lives.' The duke, feeling nothing but a profound sorrow, wept and sobbed. (6256)

Distraught, Godfrey of Bouillon joined in the lamentation. He then immediately ordered the men who had come with him to put their armour on and take up their weapons.

But he urgently needed reinforcements because he had already incurred heavy losses. He dispatched a messenger to the main army of Christ with news of the latest developments. Fearing for their safety, each of the troops seized what weapons he could find. (6263)

Let me tell you now about those barons who had, thanks to God's loving help, succeeded in scaling the stone-clad walls and entering Antioch, where they were presently battering down the city gate with their steel-tipped stakes. Their Turkish ally was at the top of the wall, urging on those who were still outside: 'Hurry up, my lords! Head for the gate, you can get in that way now! Your companions are safe and sound and unharmed.' 'We are right, God, to worship such a Lord as you!', cried the duke as he directed all his men towards the gate. At which point our friend the Turk came down from the top of the wall. (6273)

Enguerran de Saint-Pol, together with thirteen noble and loyal companions, made his way up to the palace with Datien leading the way. They discovered a hundred Turks fast asleep and proceeded to massacre them all. Soon flying from a flag-staff was a pennant bearing a golden cross on bands, Bohemond's arms, indicating that the city had been taken. The other barons were labouring away at clearing the earthwork and demolishing the gate's cross beams. By the time day dawned and it was light, all the beams holding the main gate had been cut away, and both doors stood wide open. The first to enter was duke Godfrey of Bouillon with all his companions and other barons. By the time it was fully day, ten thousand men had come in through the gate. The Turks were still sleeping peacefully when Datien had already finished stationing multiple guards at each of the six towers. (6291)

By the time the sun rose and daylight returned, more than thirteen thousand Frenchmen had already entered the city. The first thing they did was to occupy the pagans' six towers, garrison them and fix their silken pennants to the top of each one. When the men outside in the camp saw this, they were jubilant. You should have heard their trumpets and bugles blare, and seen the barons preparing for combat and taking up their arms! In close formation they came riding out ahead of the rest of the army. Lord Raymond of Saint-Gilles brought up the rear-guard and saw to transporting the wounded who were in sore need of help. (6301)

Without losing a moment, they stormed directly up to the city and all came rushing in. May God preserve them from harm! You should have heard the calls and cries of 'Monjoie!' as they woke the sleeping Saracens and charged at them! 'Desert! Desert!', was the pagans' war-cry, 'Muhammad, what a disaster! Ah lord Garsion, sire, you cannot get here soon enough. Your city has been taken without a single arrow being shot or a single weapon raised!' There was uproar everywhere, and the air was thick with screams. You should have seen our knights rampaging through Antioch, slaying and maiming the pagans, flinging them to the ground and leaving them lying there in heaps! They stained and tarnished their swords with blood and brains. Streams of blood gushed from the corpses and flooded the paths. You would have seen crowds of fine pagan women in despair, tearing their hair and wringing their hands, crying out and praying to Muhammad and Apollyon to curse the French for the havoc they were wreaking on their menfolk: 'What a scourge it is to see these devils still occupying our land!' (6319)

Saracens and pagans proceeded to join forces. There were as many as thirty thousand of them when the attack began. Had you been there, you would have seen the most ferocious of battles, with thick spear-shafts splintering and shields shattering, hauberks split open and chain-mail in shreds, Saracen hoards shooting off their dogwood bows, and slashing with their blades and spears, launching and hurling their javelins, brandishing their maces and hammering with their heavy, lead-lined clubs. The dead and wounded lay littering the ground as the battle raged for the whole of the day, then through the evening and on through the following day until nightfall. Believe me: it was a clash of truly unbelievable violence. (6332)

It was an incredible battle that came to an end only after two whole days and two nights. Garsion came down from the city's main castle at the head of ten thousand Turks to join the battle, each man armed with his Turkish bow and arrows. He came to a halt in the main street, ferociously fighting off any Frenchmen he encountered on the way. All the Turks battled as bravely as they knew how, and succeeded in driving our French fighters back, down into a narrow roadway. From the towers above, the Turks managed to inflict serious injuries on the crusaders. Godfrey of Bouillon shouted out to them: 'Christians, my noble lords, we need now to withdraw, for at this very moment huge reinforcements are arriving to strengthen the enemy.' (6345)

But just look! Here comes Robert of Flanders riding down, accompanied by count Hugues de Saint-Pol, the pagans' sworn enemy, and his courageous son Enguerran, together with Tancred and Bohemond at the head of his troops. In no time at all they had taken control of four of the city's main thoroughfares by slaughtering the Turks, not one of whom managed to escape. On seeing this fightback, each of the Franks felt invigorated and all began shouting: 'Holy Sepulchre! Barons, now we'll see what true bravery is! Shame on anyone who fails to do his best! Let each one keep the booty that he wins. The more pagans you smite, the more the barons will respect you.' (6356)

Losing no time, Enguerran de Saint-Pol spurred his horse on and galloped forward. He had soon overtaken the massed troops of our army, and directed his attack straight at the most heavily armed of the Turkish divisions. He made the best possible use of the spear he was carrying by killing Garsion's nephew in front of the king's eyes. Before his spear finally fell to pieces, he had sent five Turks crashing to the ground. Snatching it from its scabbard, he drew his sword, and when he caught up with Bredalant, severed his head from his body with it. Garsion of Antioch then aimed a well sharpened pike at him which pierced right through his horse's flank. The animal fell to the ground dead, but Enguerran survived and leapt to his feet. Grasping his sword and taking up his shield, he fearlessly ran straight into the pagan lines. He lashed out at the enemy with his furbished blade of steel. Had Jesus our Creator not protected him, he had advanced so deep into the pagan throng that there would have been no way back for him. When our barons saw what had happened to him, I can tell you they were greatly dismayed. Shouting 'Holy Sepulchre', they all began to advance towards the enemy. Unless they succeed in rescuing Enguerran, he will be in very serious trouble. (6375)

The rescue mission resulted in great bloodshed, with so many spear shafts shattered and shields crushed, chain-mail ripped and hauberks mangled, so many Saracens killed or cut to shreds. This encounter cost them over a thousand lives. Hunger the German drew his gleaming sword and charged at Corbanel lord of Lutis. He split his skull in two, and the blade came to rest embedded in his neck. When Garsion saw this, he was overcome with exasperation. How he would have preferred, at that moment, to have been up there in his vaulted palace. He turned his horse round and abandoned the battlefield, taking all his troops with him. Just picture the look of defeat on their faces! (6387)

There were no goodbyes as Saracen wives and husbands separated and lovers parted. The Franks herded them roughly into the innermost palisade, and it was there that the pagans were slain in an act of prodigious slaughter. From the top of the towers, the Turks shot down arrows from their bows of arched horn, and on every side they inflicted considerable injuries on all our troops. You should have seen what uproar this caused and how furious it made our men. (6394)

It was at this point that their ally, king of the Tafurs, suddenly arrived on the scene, an angry scowl darkening his face. With him was the well respected, white-haired Peter the Hermit together with a rabble of more than ten thousand fearless fighters. Raising his voice so that everyone could hear, the Tafur shouted: 'Bohemond of Sicily, noble knight of high renown, and all you other blessed barons fighting for Christ, make sure that not a single one of the Turks you are attacking escapes. As for those raining down arrows on you from up in the vaulted palace, I will see to it that they are all handed over to you – dead or alive.' You should have seen the frenzy with which the Tafur rabble launched their attack, how they battered the palace walls with huge heavy rocks hurled from their siege engines, how they hammered on the castle gates with their elegantly fashioned clubs, and swarmed up onto the ramparts on their ladders. In more than thirty separate places they broke into the palace. Apart from the dead and wounded, not one of them encountered any resistance from the pagans. (6411)

The Tafurs now occupy the towers, walls and palisades, having killed one-and-a-half thousand pagans in the process. Much to the displeasure of Jesus king of Paradise, they take their reward by ravishing the beautiful Saracen girls they find. The few Turks who managed to escape did so by way of a side gate that led to the city's most secure stronghold where the walls were still intact. (6416)

Under the leadership of their king, the Tafurs performed admirably in first seizing control of eight of the most secure of the towers. Our barons, meanwhile, had not been idle: they continued to fight the Turks with great ferocity and with no thought of sparing a single one. Duke Godfrey of Bouillon said: 'As long as these heretical swine are able to hold out against us, we cannot be proud of how we are performing. I for one would prefer to lose my life in the heat of battle rather than fail to oust each and every one of these pagans from this fortress.' He rallied the French by shouting 'Holy Sepulchre', then, steel sword in hand, hurled himself at the foe. He struck king Bricebalt a mighty blow on his banded helmet. Its golden headband gave the king no more protection than a flimsy olive branch, and Godfrey's blade sliced the helmet in two before embedding itself in the horse's back. The other

pagans could only look on in dismay, and from that moment on there was not a single one of them daring enough to take a stand against the Franks. (6431)

There was no alternative for them but to turn and flee. Such was their fear of dying that many a man found himself obliged to leave his lover, his sister or his wife behind. The Christians, beloved of God and under divine protection, set off in pursuit and followed them right up to the main fortress, littering the ground behind them with the wounded and the dead. You should have seen all those beautiful Saracen girls break down in tears, wring their hands and tear their hair, shouting out and invoking Muhammad and Apollyon: 'Oh, Muhammad our lord, come to our aid!' (6441)

Garsion fled for his life and took refuge up in the lofty castle, built on the top of a rock. There was a sheer drop from here down to the diabolical Escivant gate, a whole bow shot below. Devils had the gate built there well over a thousand years ago – I exaggerate not – with stone hewn from the rock above used to construct its tower, the handiwork of a single mason. This was Cerberus, porter of the underworld, who was rewarded for his labour by being nominated gatekeeper of Hell. Turks who come hurtling down the cliff from above onto this tower can expect the worst; there are no two ways about it. It is just like being thrown straight into the jaws of Hell. (6452)

The rock on which Garsion's fortress was constructed was huge, and, seen from the ground, was as high as a shot from a military bow. It had a surface of hard stone untouched by human hand. Below, at the foot of the steep, precipitous cliff, stood the Escivant gate, the handiwork of that diabolical magician Nero. The stone used to build the castle keep had been excavated from there. From the summit of the rock great crowds of Turks were launching a deluge of arrows, thick and fast. They were afraid they were going to die, so were looking for a way to save their skins. It was pointless, however, for anyone jumping over the edge of the cliff to call for help; soon their voices would never again be heard in this world. (6463)

Garsion was in his palace up there on the summit, together with ten thousand Turks and various other Saracens. The castle had all the provisions necessary and an inexhaustible supply of arms. They had no fear of being attacked, no more than as if a single child were threatening them. In addition they had ample means of retreat, across town or country, whichever way they chose to go. May God take the French under his care! The Saracens are as safe there as they could possibly be. (6471)

Our barons occupy all the rest of Antioch, but are able to find only a very small amount of food, the Turks having consumed it all in the course of the siege. 'For God's sake, my lords,' said duke Godfrey of Bouillon, 'let us send word to where our army is camped outside. Just think, my lords, of all the many tents there that are well stocked with provisions for all our wounded. In God's name, let us consider having that food brought here.' Duke Bohemond replied: 'An excellent idea, my lord. Let us nominate Robert of Normandy to go, along with the count of Flanders and his men, and also bishop Adémar of Le Puy, whose sermons we enjoy so much, and lion-hearted Hugues de Saint-Pol, as well.' With one voice the barons reply: 'God bless this venture of ours!' (6486)

Off the barons rode without a moment's delay and reached the tents directly. They had all the wounded that they found there transported carefully into Antioch. They then loaded up all the food and provisions they could get hold of, bringing along tents and weapons as well. They saw to the burial of those Christians who had died in the fighting, and the bishop commended their souls to God. (6495)

When the Turks back in the castle saw what was happening, it would have been easy for them to come out and attack the crusaders, if only they had dared. But they took no action and let the French come and go as they pleased. 'My lords,' said Garsion, 'I am furious that the reinforcements that we are expecting have still not arrived.' 'Sire,' replied Crucados, 'there is nothing to fear. I can see a huge cloud of dust rising over there towards the mountains. I can tell you that it's an enormous and fearsome army, and tomorrow before midday they will be here and already setting up their camp, you will see.' (6504)

This turned out to be true. The pagan reinforcements – God confound them all! – had already reached the valley of the Escoler (Orontes). An estimate of their numbers would be in the hundreds of thousands. The noble Christians, meanwhile, – God keep them safe from harm! – had disposed of all the Saracen corpses they found throughout the town, stacking them in the charnel houses outside the city walls. Because of the stench, they covered the whole site with earth. (6510)

A large number of pagan women, those willing to believe in God and worship him with sincerity, were baptized at the font. The Turk Datien fulfilled his promise to convert and had the bishop receive him into holy Church by baptism. He arranged for his much loved son to be baptized at the same time. The Christians celebrated mass in church, blessing and consecrating the holy body of Christ. But peace was short-lived, and much hardship and suffering was still to come. The pagans were to continue their attacks, forcing the Christians to take up arms against them. (6520)

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