

Christopher Tinmouth, *The Significance of the First Crusade to the Institutional Memory of Orderic Vitalis' Ecclesiastical History*

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The *Ecclesiastical History* (c.1141), written by Orderic Vitalis, a monk of St. Evroul in Normandy, is a narrative history of the Latin Church and of St. Evroul monastery up to his time. It has long been valued by historians of the First Crusade as both a history of the expedition and an account of how the crusade itself was perceived by contemporaries.¹ The First Crusade (1095-1099) was the first mediaeval military expedition launched to claim ownership over Christian holy sites in modern-day Israel for Latin Christendom, which successfully conquered Jerusalem in 1099.² The success of the Crusade in conquering Jerusalem in 1099 led contemporaries to believe that it was blessed by God, and the event was widely interpreted as an especially holy expedition, even an 'armed pilgrimage'.³

With his monastery of St. Evroul well positioned to receive news of the expedition from participants and from Orderic's contacts with the wider world, the *Ecclesiastical History* incorporated significant oral historical

¹ Daniel Roach, 'Orderic Vitalis and the First Crusade', *Journal of Medieval History*, vol.42, no.2 (2016), pp.177-179

² Jonathan Phillips, *The Crusades, 1095-1197* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), pp.14-25

³ Jonathan S.C. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), p.37

elements in informing its account of the First Crusade.⁴ However, the First Crusade took on a much wider significance within the *Ecclesiastical History* beyond providing a historical account, not least because of the magnitude of the event itself in the world historical consciousness of Orderic, but also because of what it meant within the context of the monastic community of St. Evroul.⁵

This paper shall propose that the First Crusade was used by Orderic Vitalis as a key component in forging an institutional memory for St. Evroul. This is defined as a selective process of what and how such events should be remembered, to render an historical narrative conducive to reinforcing a collective understanding of the history of the monastic institution.⁶ Whilst the potential of the *Ecclesiastical History* has been recognised by historians as a device for selective remembrance of past events relating to St. Evroul, this has not necessarily been applied in the case of the First Crusade insofar as it directly relates to the institutional memory being created for St. Evroul.⁷ After demonstrating how this process was promoted in select examples of 12th-century monastic cartularies and chronicles, this paper shall investigate the *Ecclesiastical History* itself, focusing in particular upon the version of the

⁴ Marjorie Chibnall, 'Introduction', in Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book IX (c.1135), ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis, Volume V: Books IX and X* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), pp.xiii-xiv

⁵ Roach, 'Orderic Vitalis and the First Crusade', p.178

⁶ Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.9, pp.16-17

⁷ Daniel Roach, 'The Material and the Visual: Objects and Memories in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Orderic Vitalis', *Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, vol.24 (2013), pp.63-64

speech by Pope Urban II delivered at the Council of Clermont (1095) credited with launching the First Crusade.

The drive to create an institutional memory for monastic establishments has invariably been attributed to an anxiety to preserve for posterity perishable memories of past events relating to the monastery in an age with a paucity of written records.⁸ However, especially since the seminal work of Patrick Geary in relation to 9th-10th century Carolingian monasteries, there has been a greater appreciation of the dexterity of monasteries to selectively rework the oral and written historical dimensions of their material for their own purposes.⁹

In the case of Anglo-Norman historical accounts, many of which were produced by or for monasteries, chronicles were often used to generate an institutional memory for establishments coming to terms with the Norman Conquest.¹⁰ This is particularly apparent in the Chronicle of William of Malmesbury (c.1150), which incorporated a chronicle of Malmesbury Abbey itself in addition to the world historical endeavour which constitutes the Chronicle.¹¹ As an Anglo-Norman himself, William of Malmesbury was keen to stress peaceful interaction between English and Normans within the monastic community.¹² Yet he was also eager to draw distinctions between

⁸ Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), pp.185-187

⁹ Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, pp.11-14; Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.90-91

¹⁰ Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (Hambledon: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.2-4

¹¹ Antonia Gramsden, *Historical Writing in England, c.550-c.1307* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p.167

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.166-167

the two peoples at key points in his Chronicle.¹³ This preoccupation with this difference influenced the consequent development of the Chronicle itself, as links between Malmesbury and the Continent as well as the particular antiquity of Malmesbury Abbey were simultaneously promoted as key elements of the institutional memory promoted by William of Malmesbury.¹⁴ Orderic Vitalis was committed to St. Evroul as a child of English parents, yet was raised within a distinctively Norman environment.¹⁵ Such a dichotomy may well have influenced the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, as he sought to connect the English and Norman elements together in the institutional memory of his adopted monastery.

A similar phenomenon may perhaps be seen in the development of the Worcester Abbey Chronicle and the *Historia Novarum* of Eadmer of Canterbury. The Worcester Chronicle drew heavily upon the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to bring out a particular English bias.¹⁶ This was perhaps in testimony to the contribution of Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester in maintaining the integrity of the monastic community at Worcester, who loomed very large within the institutional memory of Worcester Cathedral Priory.¹⁷ The Worcester Chronicle was arguably supplemented by the Worcester Cathedral Priory Cartulary, better known as Hemming's Cartulary, produced in the

¹³ Ibid., pp.173-174

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.177-178

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.151-153

¹⁶ Gramsden, *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England*, p.116, p.118

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.114-115; Julia Barrow, 'How the Twelfth-Century Monks of Worcester Perceived their Past', in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. by Paul Magdalino (London: The Hambledon Press, 1992), pp.73-74

early-11th century to assert the primacy of the monastic community interests against that of the bishop.¹⁸ In a similar vein, Eadmer of Canterbury reproduced documents verbatim within the *Historia Novarum*, explicitly to ensure that the institutional memory of Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, seen as a firm supporter of the privileges of the Canterbury monks, would be preserved on terms conducive to Canterbury Cathedral Priory.¹⁹ It can therefore be seen that the development of institutional memories were an inherent feature of early-12th century Anglo-Norman chronicles and cartularies, and Orderic Vitalis' *Ecclesiastical History* was typical of its type.

Book IX of Orderic Vitalis' *Ecclesiastical History*, completed between 1135-1139, derived its account of the First Crusade considerably from the *Historia Ierosolimitana* of Baudri of Bourgueil, Archbishop of Dol.²⁰ According to Marjorie Chibnall, this reliance 'reduces its value as a historical source'.²¹ Nevertheless, Orderic adds oral historical detail to his account of the First Crusade not found elsewhere and provided a significant literary flourish to the *Gesta Francorum* upon which he and Baudri of Bourgueil based their histories.²² This third-hand perspective in relation to prevailing chronicles on the First Crusade permitted Orderic to make dynamic use of the material he had at hand to render it meaningful to the monastic community at St. Evroul. In so doing, he enabled the First Crusade to become an important component of the institutional memory of St. Evroul that formed

¹⁸ David Walker, 'The Organization of Material in Medieval Cartularies', in *The Study of Medieval Records: Essays in honour of Kathleen Major*, ed. by D.A. Bullough & R.L. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.147-148

¹⁹ Ibid. p.139

²⁰ Chibnall, 'Introduction', pp.xi-xiii

²¹ Ibid., p.xiii

²² Ibid., p.xiii; Roach, 'Orderic Vitalis and the First Crusade', p.182

the basis of the *Ecclesiastical History*. He displayed a particular familiarity with the sources at his disposal, as with his close rendering of the text from the *Historia Ierosolimitana*, while haphazardly substituting word changes at key intervals that indicate a casual adaptation of the words from the *Gesta Francorum* and thus a good acquaintance with both chronicles.²³ Despite the varying quality of accuracy found throughout the chronicle, the account of the speech by Pope Urban II (1095-1099) at the Council of Clermont (1095) contains details found nowhere else, and which may be authentic.²⁴ Yet, even the reproduction of authentic detail served the same end for Orderic, namely, to render the events of the First Crusade relevant to the monastic community of St. Evroul, and none were perhaps so charged with lasting resonance as the Church council that launched the crusade.

According to the *Ecclesiastical History*, the occasion of Urban II's visit to France in 1095 was to dedicate the altar of St. Peter at Cluny Abbey.²⁵ This is juxtaposed with a reproach of the adulterous behaviour of King Philip I of France, so it may be implied that the significance of the Council of Clermont, for Orderic, lay in its commitment to enacting Church reform more than in launching the First Crusade.²⁶ Church reform in the late-11th century

²³ Chibnall, 'Introduction', pp.xiii-xiv

²⁴ Ibid., p.xv

²⁵ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book IX (c.1135), ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis, Volume V: Books IX and X* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.11

²⁶ Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.11; cf. Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book III (c.1123-1125), ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis, Volume II: Books III and IV* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), pp.98-101, concerning details of Philip I's adultery

consisted primarily in advocating for lay investiture of clergy, clerical celibacy and elimination of simony, or payment for church offices, essentially seeking to delineate the boundaries between lay and spiritual dimensions more firmly.²⁷ By framing the advent of the pope as a reformer, the monks of St. Evroul arguably sought to associate their own role in terms of Church reform and, by extension, their ability to influence the habits of their benefactors and neighbours. This association may well have influenced Orderic Vitalis' framing of the text of the Urban II speech in the *Ecclesiastical History*, as he catered to a monastic community seeking to make its presence felt under often hostile circumstances.²⁸

Reports of Urban II's speech at Clermont differed greatly even among eyewitnesses, with different points selected for elaboration. For example, Fulcher of Chartres emphasised the reforming credentials of Urban II, in his exhortation to 'those who, for a long time, have been robbers, now become knights', to redirect their martial energies towards a just cause.²⁹ Meanwhile, both Baldric of Bourgueil and Robert the Monk emphasised the barbarity of Turkish mistreatment of Christian pilgrims in their accounts more than the reforming imperative.³⁰ Munro suggested that Orderic's account was

²⁷ R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), pp.122-124, pp.127-130

²⁸ William M. Aird, 'Orderic's Secular Rulers and Representations of Personality and Power in the *Historia ecclesiastica*', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, ed. by Charles C. Rozier, Daniel Roach, Giles E.M. Gasper & Elisabeth Van Houts (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), pp.191-192

²⁹ Fulcher of Chartres, *Gesta Francorum Ierosolem Expugnantium* (c.1101-c.1128), trans. by Oliver J. Thatcher, ed. by Edgar Holmes McNeal, *A Source Book for Medieval History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp.516-517

³⁰ Baldric of Bourgueil, *Historia Ierosolimitana* (c.1105), trans. and ed. by August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), pp.33-34; Robert the Monk, *Historia Hierosolymitana* (d.1122),

dependent on that of Baldric's, insofar as it was entirely 'copied' from the work of his friend.³¹ This may be the case, given the great similarity between both accounts.³² Yet, Orderic may well have heard at first or second hand a report from one of the Norman bishops at the Council, not least because of his detailed rendition of the canons of the Council that include detail not found in the *Historia Ierosolimitana*.³³ Of particular note are those ordering that no one shall be a bishop and abbot at the same time, or that each church shall receive its own tithes and not be granted by anyone to another church.³⁴

The account of Urban II's speech most peculiar to Orderic Vitalis is found in his allusion to the enslavement of Christians in the East by the Turks. Orderic relates how the Turks, once they had conquered Palestine and Syria and confiscated properties for the livelihood of holy men, '*multos iam in longinquam barbariem captivos abduxerunt*' and into slavery.³⁵ The tone of atrocities recounted in Robert the Monk's account is conspicuously absent.³⁶ Instead, the Turkish behaviour described in the speech is incorporated within a vocabulary of aristocratic relationships from the speech to accord with the institutional memory of St. Evroul as a monastery beset by adversaries trying

trans. by Oliver J. Thatcher, ed. by Edgar Holmes McNeal, *A Source Book for Medieval History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp.518-519

³¹ Dana Carleton Munro, 'The Speech of Pope Urban II at Clermont, 1095', *The American Historical Review*, vol.11, no.2 (1906), p.234

³² Chibnall, 'Introduction', p.xiv; Keith Kempenich, *The Milites of Orderic Vitalis and the Problem of Knights*, Master's Thesis (Durham: University of New Hampshire, 2016), p.32

³³ See footnote 10 in Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.15

³⁴ Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.13, p.15

³⁵ 'Carried off many prisoners into exile in distant lands', *ibid.*, p.16

³⁶ Robert the Monk, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, pp.519-520

to hold onto its property and people as best it could.³⁷ From this perspective, embellishment of details of atrocities was secondary to ensuring that title to property was safe, at least from the perspective of St. Evroul, where the monks were familiar with the violent ways recalled at length by Orderic throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*.³⁸ The focus of the text was very much on reasserting claims to the patrimony of Christ, prioritising the destruction of property among the deprivations inflicted by the Turks, to render it in terms familiar to the monks of St. Evroul dealing with the propertied interests of ambivalent aristocrats.³⁹ Orderic was shown to have misinterpreted the source of his information on this aspect of the speech, when he incorrectly claimed the destruction of African bishoprics which had in fact occurred in the 7th century.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the nature of this misinterpretation perhaps implies that Orderic relied more on oral historical input than has hitherto been appreciated and made active use of this information in informing the institutional memory of St. Evroul in terms familiar to the monks there.

The final point of distinction in Orderic's account of Urban II's speech concerns his treatment of the crusading indulgence. The imperative to undertake the Crusade followed on from the injunction of '*scelerosi*' to put away their sins and '*pro culpis suis Deo satisficientes*'.⁴¹ Similar terms are presented in the chronicles of Fulcher of Chartres and Baldric of Bourgueil.⁴² The idea of warriors of Christ was presented as a powerful component of the

³⁷ Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp.24-28

³⁸ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, pp.118-119

³⁹ Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.17

⁴⁰ See footnote 10 in Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.16

⁴¹ 'Evildoers', 'To make expiation acceptable to God', *ibid.*, p.16

⁴² Munro, 'The Speech of Pope Urban II at Clermont, 1095', p.234

Urban II speech, much as it figured prominently in Baldric of Bourgeuil's version.⁴³ This is because it overlapped with the concerns of the St. Evroul monastic community to keep their possessions safe from lay encroachment, and the cause of the First Crusade resonated with Orderic's desire to see the crusade as part of the Church reform enterprise. In this way, the preaching of the First Crusade was rendered meaningful to the monks of St. Evroul, by reinforcing the reforming credentials so highly valued there. Where Orderic's account differs is his mention of crusaders being excused from '*omni gravedine fit in ieiuniis aliisque macerationibus carnis pie relaxavit*'.⁴⁴ His awareness of the dangers associated with going on pilgrimage as reported of Urban II indicates that Orderic was aware, through his frequent contact with lay benefactors who went on crusade, of the risks associated with the enterprise.⁴⁵

The institutional memory of the First Crusade was therefore marked by a deep appreciation of the sacrifice required by benefactors of St. Evroul, and by extension the monastery itself, if they were to be '*a cunctis culparum sordibus expiarentur*'.⁴⁶ The precise understanding of the crusading indulgence, whether remission of penance for sins committed or plenary remission of sin, seems to have been reinterpreted by Orderic and his sources

⁴³ Connor Kostick, *The Social Structure of the First Crusade* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p.56

⁴⁴ 'Any obligation to fast or mortify the flesh', Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.18

⁴⁵ Chibnall, 'Introduction', pp.xvi-xvii

⁴⁶ 'Cleansed from all the guilt of their sins', Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.18

by the time Book IX of the *Ecclesiastical History* had been written.⁴⁷ The indulgence itself is described as ‘*poenitentes cunctos ex illa hora qua crucem Domini sumerent ex auctoritate Dei ab omnibus peccatis suis absoluit*’.⁴⁸ This reinterpretation likely served the interests of a monastic community that needed to reconcile the sacrifices it had made to the Crusade and those of its benefactors.

From this investigation, it appears as though Orderic Vitalis’ narrative of the First Crusade formed a significant component in the institutional memory of St. Evroul, by the close connections between the monastery and developments during the crusade. Orderic helped to render the memory of events such as the Council of Clermont relevant to the contemporary concerns of his monastic community. At the same time, the First Crusade was held up as a salutary episode of piety that would stand the test of time beyond the cloister of St. Evroul.

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⁴⁷ Paul E. Chevedden, ‘Canon 2 of the Council of Clermont (1095) and the Crusade Indulgence’, *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum*, vol.37, no.2 (2005), p.304

⁴⁸ ‘By the will of God he absolved all penitents from their sins from the moment that they took the cross’, Vitalis, *HE*, Book IX, p.16

Robert the Monk, *Historia Hierosolymitana* (d.1122), trans. by Oliver J. Thatcher, ed. by Edgar Holmes McNeal, *A Source Book for Medieval History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp.518

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