




Zdzisław Pentek (Poznań)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6500-6559>

THE CLERGY DURING THE FOURTH CRUSADE AS PORTRAYED IN ROBERT OF CLARI'S CHRONICLE

Abstract. This article deals with the view of clerical participants in the Fourth Crusade found in Robert of Clari's Old-French chronicle *La conquête de Constantinople*. The author has analysed the chronicler's references to members of the clergy, specifying three different types of clergymen who took part in the expedition to Constantinople.

Keywords: clergy of the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople, Robert of Clari

Robert of Clari is among the authors who offered Old-French accounts of the Fourth Crusade, an event that resulted in the fall of Byzantium¹. The redaction of Robert's chronicle was prepared in 1924 by the French medievalist and palaeographer, Philippe Lauer (1874–1953). Relying on Lauer's critical edition of the chronicle in question, I will analyse Robert's representation of the clergy who participated in the Crusade to Constantinople, just as I did with the chronicle by Geoffrey of Villehardouin².

The work by the Picardy crusader is of lesser literary and historical value than that of Villehardouin. Written from the perspective of a rank-and-file participant in the Crusade, Robert's chronicle seems quite spontaneous and sometimes

¹ ROBERT DE CLARI, *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Ph. LAUER, Paris 1924 (cetera: ROBERT DE CLARI); The work has been translated into a number of contemporary languages. For the bibliography of its editions, see ROBERT DE CLARI, *Zdobycie Konstantynopola*, trans. from Old French, praef. et comm. Z. PENTEK, Poznań 2017, p. XXX–XXXI, there is also the list of the most important secondary literature, p. XXXI–XXXIII.

² Z. PENTEK, *The Clergy during the Fourth Crusade as Portrayed in Geoffrey de Villehardouin's Chronicle*, SCer 13, 2023, p. 643–641.



chaotic. It can be viewed as a somewhat naïve account by a man who found himself thrown into the midst of a religious war in which the traditional infidels were replaced by the Christians of Byzantium. However, the unusual position he had been put in did not prevent him from persuading himself that he was participating in a just war.

Although the chronicler did not devote as much attention to the Crusade's clerical participants as Villehardouin did, he also gave them some space in his work. (His account regarding the clergy is limited probably because he himself had limited access to the information regarding the events that took place in the course of the Crusade).

However, the number of clergymen whom Robert of Clari mentioned in his chronicle is quite similar to that mentioned by Villehardouin. The latter made references to nine members of the clergy who participated in the Crusade (not all of whom are mentioned by name), excluding Pope Innocent III, and the propagator of the Crusade, Fulk of Neuilly. Robert of Clari, in turn, mentioned eight clergymen (with the pope and Fulk excluded).

The first clergyman to appear in Robert's account is Pope Innocent III (sec. I, XIV, XV, LXV). Taking no direct part in the expedition, the pope is known to have been paying close attention to the actions carried out by the crusaders. His role as head of the Church is clearly underlined in the preface to the chronicle and he is occasionally mentioned further on in the text. References to the remaining members of the clergy in question start with those to **Fulk of Neuilly** whom Robert of Clari portrays as the most ardent proponent of the Crusade and whom he views as his master, providing a number of biographical details from his life: *maistres Foukes avoit a non, qui estoit de Neully, une parroisse qui est en l'evesquié de Paris*³. The chronicler means here Neuilly-sur-Seine located north-west of Paris⁴. The account of Fulk's attitude is filled with references to qualities typical of a warrior and a priest (*Ichis prestres estoit molt preudons et molt boins clercs*). Fulk is also presented as an itinerant apostle travelling with a cross (*et aloit preeschant par les teres des crois*) who attracted crowds of men seduced by his words. Robert is thus led to conclude that God made numerous wonders through Fulk's valour: [...] *estoit si preudons que Damedieus faisoit molt grans miracles pour lui*. These wonders were estimated to be of quite a tangible value ([...] *et molt conquest chis prestres d'avoir a porter en la sainte tere d'oultre mer*), as tangible as to become a substantial contribution to an expedition to Palestine. The chronicler returned to Fulk after presenting the most distinguished knights. It was because of his unexpected death during the organization of the Crusade that Fulk reappeared in Robert's account. Unaware of when Fulk died, the chronicler linked his death with

³ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I.

⁴ Fulk came from Neuilly near Paris. He was an itinerant preacher, as also confirmed by GEOFFROY DE VILLEHARDOUIN, *La conquête de Constantinople*, vol. I–II, ed. E. FARAL, Paris 1938–1939, sec. I.

that of Count Tibald of Champagne, who passed away on 24 May 1201⁵. Thus, the phrase that appears in Chapter III regarding sorrow and sadness arising from someone's death pertains to both men: [...] *leur sires, fu mort, et maistres Foukes ausi, si en furent molt dolent et molt corchié. et molt esmari [...]*⁶. The qualities of a warrior and a priest are also mentioned in relation to other clergymen to whom Robert referred elsewhere in his work.

The group of clergymen going on the Crusade and mentioned in Robert's chronicle included dignitaries wearing episcopal and abbatial robes, some of whom remain anonymous. The first among them to be identified by name is **Nivelon of Cherisi** (died in 1207), the bishop of Soissons (1175–1207)⁷, whom Robert of Clari mentioned four times (chapters: I, LXXIII, LXXIV, XCV), ascribing to him (just as he did to Fulk) qualities of a warrior: [...] *qui molt y fu preudons et vallans en tous commans et en tout besoins [...]*⁸. It seems that the chronicler was witness to Nivelon's sermon (on Sunday, 11 April 1204) in the course of which the clergyman, accompanied by others, cheered those gathered on to attack Constantinople, justifying the idea of fighting against the Greeks, who were [...] *traiteur et mordrisseur et qu'il estoient desloial [...]*. Then, even more abusive words followed: [...] *quant il avoient leur seigneur droiturier mordi, et q'il estoient pieur que Juis*⁹. As a way of lending credence to these words, crusaders were granted absolution. It was supposed to make them feel no fear in attacking the Greeks, the enemies of God. Some conditions were also customarily attached to it. The soldiers were ordered to confess their sins and to accept holy communion: *Et disent li vesque qu'il assolioient de par Dieu et de par l'apostoile tous chiaus qui les asaurroient, et quemandarent li vesque as pelerins qu'il se confessaissent et kermeniaissent tout molt bien, et qu'il ne doutaissent mie a assalir les Griens, car il estoient enemi Damedieu*¹⁰. This appears to have been a reaction to the sins that had already been committed by the pilgrims, as Robert revealed in the conclusion of this sequence of events that *toutes les foles femmes de l'ost* were forced to leave¹¹, meaning that the troops were separated from the prostitutes who were plying their trade in the camp. In describing the tensions and disagreements that arose in the course of organizing the election of a new Latin emperor, Robert indicated that in view of the impasse

⁵ For a discussion of the date of Tibald's death, see Z. PENTEK, *Geoffroy de Villehardouin. Rycerz i kronikarz IV wyprawy krzyżowej*, Poznań 1996, p. 94, 289.

⁶ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. III.

⁷ *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, vol. I, ed. C. EUBEL, Monasterium 1913, p. 493 [cetera: *Hierarchia catholica*]; P. GAMS, *Series episcoporum Ecclesiae catholicae*, Graz 1957, p. 633, 9 VIII 1175 – 14 IX 1207 [cetera: GAMS]; J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin. Recherches sur les croisés de la quatrième croisade*, Genève 1978, p. 115–116.

⁸ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I.

⁹ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII. The sermon is also confirmed by ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIV.

¹⁰ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII.

¹¹ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII.

regarding the selection of electors from the camp of the lords who did not represent the Venetians, it was approved to entrust the task of carrying out the election to bishops and abbots¹². Unfortunately, Robert provided no details about the group of the clerical electors; he focused only on Nivelon who was in fact a leading figure in this group. His key position was made clear in the next chapter in which the chronicler cast him in the role of representing the electoral college announcing the outcome of the debate: *Si comme il estoient si coi, si se leva li vesques de Sessons em pié [...]*¹³. There is no doubt that Nivelon participated in the imperial coronation of Baldwin I (1204–1205), but there is no mention of his presence at the enthronement in Robert's chronicle.

Another bishop mentioned by Robert of Clari in his chronicle is **Garnier** (1149–1205), the bishop of Troyes: [...] *et li vesques Warniers de Troyes [...]*¹⁴. The chronicler refers to him in the account of a skirmish between Alexios V Doukas and Henry of Flanders, which took place near Constantinople, at the beginning of February, 1204. Although Alexios later maintained that he emerged victorious from this engagement, he actually suffered a humiliating defeat and lost Hodegetria¹⁵. Robert claimed that the icon ended up in the hands of the bishop of Troyes ([...] *et balla on au vesque de Troies*¹⁶) who was asked to hide it in a church: *si l'emporta li vesques en l'ost, a une eglise ou il repairoent, et canterent li vesque, et fisent ent molt grant feste, et tres chu jour qu'ele fu conquise, otrierent tout li baron que ele seroit donnée s Chistiax, et puis i fu ele portee*¹⁷. The bishop was also one of the participants in the aforementioned sermon delivered on 11 April 1204¹⁸.

The third bishop who took part in the expedition was, according to the chronicler, **Conrad of Krosigk** (deceased on 21 June 1225), the bishop of Halberstadt (1201–1209). In August of 1202, Conrad joined the crusaders in Venice, which may be why Robert did not know much about him¹⁹. At that time, the chronicler

¹² ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. XCIV.

¹³ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. XCV.

¹⁴ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I; J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons...*, p. 13–15.

¹⁵ This fact is attested to by V. sec. 226–228; *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, ed. L. WEILAND, Hannover 1874 [= *MGH.SS*, 23], p. 833, v. 13–24; *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, rec. I.A. VAN DIETEN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1971, p. 567.

¹⁶ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXVI.

¹⁷ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXVI. Worth noting here is a still important article P. DE Riant, *Des dépouilles religieuses enlevées à Constantinople au XIII^e siècle par les Latins et documents historiques nés de leur transport en Orient*, *MSNAF sér. IV*, 6, 1875, especially p. 41–42, 190–191, but there is no evidence to argue that it was brought to Cîteaux, where no relic stolen in Constantinople was found. For information regarding the relics collected by the bishop Nivelon during the expedition to Constantinople, see *Exuviae sacrae Constantinopolitanae. Fasciculus documentorum minorum ad Byzantina Lipsana in Occidentem saeculo XIII^o translata, spectantium et historiam quarti belli sacri imperii gallo-graeci illustrantium*, vol. I, ed. P. DE Riant, Genevae 1877, p. 6–8 (ANONYMI SUESSIONENSIS' account) [cetera: Riant, *Exuviae*].

¹⁸ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII.

¹⁹ D.E. QUELLER, *The Fourth Crusade. Conquest of Constantinople 1201–1204*, Philadelphia 1977, p. 11, claimed that it had taken place on 29 June 1202, although Anonymous of Halberstadt re-

was staying with other pilgrims on the island of St. Nicholas in Lido. The bishop of Halberstadt is mentioned twice in the chronicle, but not by name, which suggests that it must have been unknown to the chronicler. He first appears in the list of the crusaders in Chapter I (*et li vesques de Hanetaist en Alemaingne [...]*²⁰) and then once more in Chapter 73 (*li veskes de Hanestaist*²¹).

Robert had some trouble dealing with **John of Noyon** (deceased in 1204). A clerk and chancellor to Baldwin, Count of Flanders (*maistres Jehans de Noion*²²), John held the position of the bishop of Acre (*qui estoit eslis a cestre evesques d'Acre*), a fact reported by the chronicler. In Chapter 73, however, he is referred to as John of Faicete, which is consistent with the findings of Charles du Cange²³.

Among the abbots appearing in Robert's chronicle is Simon (not mentioned by name), a Cistercian from Loos, located near Lille in the north of France (*Et si y fu li abbes de Los en Flandres, qui estoit de maisons de l'ordre de Chistiax*). In a way typical of the literary scheme that Robert followed in characterizing other clergymen, Simon was ascribed qualities of wisdom and bravery (*ichis abbes estoit molt sages hons et molt preudons*)²⁴. He is also reported to have been among the contributors to the sermon delivered by Nivelon on 11 April 1204. Referring to the abbot's participation in the sermon was supposed to lend credence to Robert's account and to emphasise the gravity of the situation described²⁵.

As one of the subjects of the lords of Amiens, Robert found himself obliged to mention **Thomas** – a brother of Peter of Amiens (deceased in 1204). As a clerk and canon of Amiens, Thomas joined the Crusade along with Robert (*et Thumas, uns clers, ses freres, qui canoines estotit d'Amiens*²⁶).

In addition to the clergymen mentioned above, Robert's chronicle enumerates a number of prominent brothers of Boves, three of whom are mentioned by name, while the fourth, a clergyman, remains anonymous (*et uns clers leur freres*²⁷).

ported that it had happened on 13 August 1202 – *Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium*, ed. L. WEILAND, Leipzig 1925 [= *MGH.SS*, 23], p. 116. In the second edition of this book: D.E. QUELLER, Th. MADDEN, *The Fourth Crusade. Conquest of Constantinople*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia 1997, p. 50, the authors revised their previous views. On Conrad's life and career see the article by A. ANDREA, *Conrad of Krosigk. Bishop of Halberstadt, Crusader and Monk of Sittichenbach his Ecclesiastical Career, 1184–1225*, *ACi* 43, 1987, p. 11–91; *HC*, vol. I, p. 270; J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons...*, p. 242–243.

²⁰ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I.

²¹ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII.

²² ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I; B. HENDRICKX, *Les institutions de l'Empire Latin de Constantinople (1204–1261). La chancellerie*, *AClas* 19, 1976, p. 123–131. *Hierarchia catholica*, vol. I, p. 68; GAMS, p. 434.

²³ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII; Ch. DU CANGE, *Les familles d'Outre-Mer*, Paris 1869, p. 779, which is confirmed by Gunther's account: *magister Johannes Parisiensis homo francigena, nobiliter eruditus et sermone affabilis* – Riant, *Exuviae*, vol. I, p. 74; J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons...*, p. 165–166.

²⁴ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I; J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons...*, p. 165.

²⁵ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXIII.

²⁶ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I; J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons...*, p. 204.

²⁷ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I. J. LONGNON, *Les compagnons...*, does not mention this character.

The chronicler did not miss the chance to mention his younger brother, **Alaum** (Aleaumes de Clari), a clerk who also decided to embark on the Crusade. It cannot be ruled out that Alaum provided Robert with information regarding those (not only clergymen) who took part in the expedition to Constantinople. The chronicler offered a detailed description of his brother (*Aleaumes de Clari en Aminois li clers, qui molt y fu preus et molt y fist de hardement et de proeschies* [...] ²⁸), endowing him with qualities expected more of a knight (bravery, pride, boldness) than of a clergyman. In giving an account of the second assault on the city, which took place in April of 1204, Robert highlighted his brother's exceptional bravery, juxtaposing his deeds with those of the knight, Peter of Bracheux. According to the chronicler, Alaum did not hesitate to risk his life, displaying great courage in all of the storms of Constantinople, especially during the capture of the tower of Galata: [...] *un clerc, Aliaume* [sic] *de Clari avoit a non* [sic], *qui si estoit preus en tous besoins que ch'estoit li premiers a tous les assaus ou il estoit, et a le tor de Galatha prendre fist chis clers plus de proeches par sen cors, un pour un, que tout chil de l'ost, fors seigneur Pierron de Braiechioel* ²⁹. In the account devoted to Alaum, the chronicler also referred to his own involvement in the fighting, mentioning the admonitions he gave to his brother, who was itching to throw himself into battle:

Quant Aliaumes [sic] li clers vit que nus n'i osoit entrer, si sali avant et dist qu'il i enterroit. Si avoit illuec un chevalier, un sien frere, Robers de Clari avoit a non [sic], qui li desfendi et qui dist qu'il n'i enterroit mie; et li clers dist que si feroit, si se met ens a piés et a mains; et quant ses freres vit chou, si le prent par le pié, si commenche a sakier a lui, et tant que maugré sen frere, vausist ou ne dengnast, que li clers i entra. [...] Quant li clers vit chou, si sake le coutel, si leur keurt sus, si les faisoit aussi fuir devant lui comme beste. ³⁰

In Robert's opinion, the impetuosity, courage, and determination displayed by Alaum were worthy of great admiration, hence all the praise that he lavished on his brother's conduct. However, Alaum was a clergyman, not a secular pilgrim. The chronicler last referred to him in his account of the division of the spoils from the plunder of Constantinople. We are told that Alaum demanded as great a share of the spoils as the other knights because he fought on horseback just like they did and was wearing chainmail armour. It is reported that Hugo, Count of Saint-Pol, testified to Alaum's heroic deeds ³¹.

²⁸ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. I.

²⁹ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXV.

³⁰ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. LXXVI.

³¹ ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. XCVIII.

Robert decided to devote the entire chapter to an account of his brother's bravery due to his indignation that the share of the spoils set aside for his brother was only half that given to the other knights. Only after the intervention of another significant participant in the Crusade, Hugo, Count of Saint-Pol, was Alaum allotted the same share of the spoils as the rest of the knightly crusaders (*La si desraisma li clers que li clerc partiroient tout aussi comme li chevalier*³²).

Conclusions

The account by Robert of Clari can be taken to supplement that by Villehardouin. Similarly to the latter, Robert offered only an outline of the clergymen's participation in the Fourth Crusade. He presented it as forming the religious and moral backbone of the expedition. Such a perspective certainly arose from his pious attitude, which bordered on an unreflective naivety. It is interesting to note that the small number of clergymen who took part in the Crusade were schematically endowed with qualities typical of warriors. Except for Alaum, all the other clergymen – especially the bishops and abbots – must have been viewed by the chronicler as distant figures. Consequently, he ascribed to them traits which they were expected to possess, but did not actually have. Robert's focus was only on those clergymen who were known to all, including to other crusaders. His knowledge of the roles they played apparently went no further than the account offered in his chronicle. Unlike Villehardouin, he provided no information regarding the dilemma that arose among the clergy in connection with the expedition's change of direction. Robert's account can be juxtaposed with the meaning of sermons delivered on the eve of important events, a meaning well-reflected in Villehardouin's account. The picture of clerical participants in the Crusade to Constantinople, as created by Robert of Clari, can thus be argued as vague and encumbered by the idea of their qualities that seem inconsistent with reality. He set out on the Crusade holding this view of the clergy, and he gave expression to it in his account of it.

Translated by Artur MękarSKI

³² ROBERT DE CLARI, sec. XCVIII.

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Zdzisław Pentek

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Faculty of History
ul. Uniwersytetu Poznańskiego 7
61-614 Poznań, Polska/Poland
zp26@amu.edu.pl

