

Cannibals and Crusaders

Jay Rubenstein

The First Crusade began in 1096 with massacres of Jews along the Rhine, and its penultimate act in 1099 was the killing of nearly all of Jerusalem's inhabitants—men, women, and children. The events sparked serious discussion among contemporary witnesses and continue to do so among scholars today.¹ Most twelfth-century observers condemned the killing of the Jews and distinguished its perpetrators from the real crusaders.² The killings at Jerusalem, on the other hand, they accepted

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¹ The interpretation of these events remains a vexed question. On the pogroms, Robert Chazan provides translations of the Hebrew accounts and argues for their veracity in *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, CA, 1987). Jeremy Cohen has suggested that there is much artifice in the Hebrew narratives in *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Philadelphia, 2004). Cohen does not question the scale or brutality of the pogroms, concluding that the accounts expressed the utter horror and guilt felt by the survivors. As for 1099, there has been some attempt to minimize the scale of the killing, e.g., David Hay, "Gender Bias and Religious Intolerance in Accounts of the 'Massacres' of the First Crusade," in *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of the Crusades*, ed. Michael Gervers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, NY, 2001), 3–10. Benjamin Z. Kedar's excellent article "The Jerusalem Massacres of July 1099 in the Western Historiography of the Crusades," *Crusades* 3 (2004): 15–75, ought to settle the question. While there were survivors, Kedar concludes that sources point toward "the massacre's extraordinariness" and that evidence for the existence of survivors, either as slaves or as hostages, is scarce (74).

² Chazan, *European Jewry*, provides the best interpretation of massacres as results of mob violence. Matthew Gabriele offers an eschatological interpretation in "Against the Enemies of Christ: The Role of Count Emicho in the Anti-Jewish Violence of the First Crusade," in *Christian Attitudes*

either as a glorious cleansing of pagan contamination or else as a strategic necessity to hold the city against immediate counterattack.³ The events were troublesome, but for medieval observers comprehensible within the framework of the crusade story. One incident, however, resisted any attempt at integration into this celebratory narrative: the cannibalism committed around the siege of Ma'arra in 1098.

Almost all the dozen chroniclers who wrote books about the Crusade in the twenty years following Jerusalem's capture acknowledge it, sometimes with disbelief or disgust or denial, but always with discomfort.⁴ The broad details of the story are clear. On November 28, 1098, Count Raymond of Saint-Gilles laid siege to Ma'arra (today the Syrian town Ma'arrat al-Numan). Two weeks later, on December 11, with the help of other Crusade leaders, Raymond's army broke down the city's defenses and took possession of it the next day. The various armies then waited for a month as their leaders debated how to settle proprietary claims born of their conquests. Finally, on January 13, 1099, under intense pressure from his followers, Raymond gathered his forces and continued the march to Jerusalem.⁵ At some point during this activity—as we shall see, the sources diverge significantly—an indeterminate number of soldiers ate from the flesh of enemy dead.

Crusade historians have largely confined this cannibalism to the fringes of the main narrative, treating it at times inconsistently, at times incoherently.⁶ Its most sustained analysis remains a 1959 article by Lewis A. M. Sumberg, who blamed the cannibalism on a subgroup

toward the Jews in the Middle Ages: A Casebook, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York, 2006), 84–111. The presence of nobility in the mob has long been attested, including in Frederic Duncalf's mistitled "The Peasants' Crusade," *American Historical Review* 26 (1921): 440–53. See also John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge, 1994), 88–95.

³ France, *Victory in the East*, 355–56.

⁴ The only chroniclers who do not mention the cannibalism are Bartolph de Nangis, *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem expugnantium*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Historiens occidentaux* (hereafter RHC Oc.) (Paris, 1844–95), 3:491–543; and Ekkehard of Aura, *Hierosolymita: De oppresione, liberatione ac restauratione Jerosolymitanae Ecclesiae*, RHC Oc. 5:7–40. Ekkehard does mention the cannibalism in the universal chronicle attributed to him (published as *Frutolfs und Ekkhards Chroniken und die anonyme Kaiserchronik*, ed. Franz-Josef Schmale and Irene Schmale-Ott [Darmstadt, 1972], 151–52) using an abbreviated passage from another source; see n. 68 below.

⁵ Heinrich Hagenmeyer, *Chronologie de la Première Croisade, 1094–1100* (1898–1901; rpt. Hildesheim, 1973), 197–210. Thomas Asbridge's recent *First Crusade: A New History* (Oxford, 2004), 262–76, contains a fine account of the details of the siege and of its aftermath. Asbridge's description of the cannibalism follows the *Gesta* and Raymond of Aguilers's accounts, discussed below, since the writers would have been present at the siege. He acknowledges as well that the cannibalism was, in contemporary observers' eyes, the Crusade's greatest moral outrage, but "we must remember," he cautions, "that in the Middle Ages, an era of endemic savagery, warfare was regulated by a particular, medieval sense of morality" (274).

⁶ In his generally superb military history France writes that there were accusations of cannibalism at Ma'arra, that there was actual cannibalism among the poor, and that a group of poor pilgrims called the Tafurs committed it (*Victory in the East*, 22, 139, 315); he describes the Tafurs on 286–87.

of impoverished crusaders called the Tafurs, whose origins he sought to locate.⁷ An article by Michel Rouche attributes a sacral character to the cannibalism, comparing the flesh picked from Muslim corpses to the manna sent to the children of Israel as they wandered those same deserts,⁸ an argument that, according to Jonathan Riley-Smith, asks the evidence to carry more weight than it can bear.⁹ Riley-Smith himself sees the cannibalism as a response to famine and does not blame it all on the Tafurs, whom he still archly describes as “very hungry.”¹⁰ Other scholars continue to associate the cannibalism with the Tafurs.¹¹ Few, however, would go as far as Amin Maalouf, who in his often incendiary book, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, titles his chapter on the capture of Jerusalem “The Cannibals of Ma’arra.” He observes, “The memory of these atrocities, preserved and transmitted by local poets and oral tradition, shaped an image of the Franj that would not easily fade”; and, “The Turks would never forget the cannibalism of the Occidentals.”¹² Maalouf’s reference to “oral tradition” is probably an argumentative sleight of hand, since, in fact, no medieval Arab chronicler does recall the cannibalism. The writers who could not forget what happened at Ma’arra, and who are our only sources for it, are, in Maalouf’s terms, Occidentals.¹³

⁷ Lewis A. M. Sumberg, “The ‘Tafurs’ and the First Crusade,” *Mediaeval Studies* 21 (1959): 222–46.

⁸ Michel Rouche, “Cannibalisme sacré chez les Croisés Populaires,” in *Religion populaire: Aspects du christianisme populaire à travers l’histoire*, ed. Yves-Marie Hilaire (Lille, 1981), 31–41. Apart from the frequent comparisons between the Franks and the Israelites, Rouche’s idea receives little support from the sources. To travel really far afield, some of the relatives of the famous Andes plane crash developed a similar thesis, reversing the symbolic reading here and suggesting that manna in the Bible was a code word for cannibalized flesh, which God had allowed the children of Israel to eat (Piers Paul Read, *Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors*, rev. ed. [New York, 2002], 390–91).

⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 1986), 189n230. Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*, trans. John Gillingham, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1990), 297n25, says that Rouche “absurdly” suggests that cannibalism helped the Crusade succeed, perhaps forgetting that some contemporary chroniclers support that assessment.

¹⁰ Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, 88. He discusses the cannibalism on 66.

¹¹ E.g., Christopher Tyerman, *God’s War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 150; and Mayer, *Crusades*, 51.

¹² Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York, 1985), 39.

¹³ Arab historians do remember Ma’arra as the scene of a horrific massacre, numerically worse than that in Jerusalem. Ibn al-Athir gives the exaggerated figure of one hundred thousand dead in his history, printed as *Extrait de la chronique intitulée Kamel-Alteverkykh par Ibn-Alatyr*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Historiens orientaux* (hereafter RHC Or.) (Paris, 1872–1906), 1, with accompanying French translation, and in English as *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period*, trans. D. S. Richards, vol. 1 (Aldershot, 1988), 196. The *Damascus Chronicle of Ibn al-Qalanisi*, published as Roger le Tourneau, trans., *Damas de 1075 à 1154* (Damascus, 1952), 42–43, refers to the treachery of the Franks, said to have killed the citizens of Ma’arra after promising them safety. See also the Aleppo chronicle, in RHC Or. 3:579, which recalls the massacre and desecration at Ma’arra but not cannibalism. Ibn al-Athir does speak of poor Franks at Antioch

Literary critics, more akin to Maalouf than to Riley-Smith, have begun to spotlight the cannibals.¹⁴ Most subversively, Geraldine Heng, in *Empire of Magic*, has found in Ma'arra the beginnings of modern literature. The twelfth-century invention of romance, she says, and particularly of the Arthurian romance, grew out of the anxieties of remembering Christian warriors as they feasted on Saracen dead.¹⁵ Because of medieval notions of pollution and purity, "it is virtually impossible for moderns to grasp the precise horror and dimensions of abhorrence, the trauma to the cultural imaginary of medieval Christendom caused by crusader cannibalism of the Muslim enemy."¹⁶ Perhaps paradoxically, cannibalism is also, in Heng's analysis, a way to make literal the language of military conquest, with colonizers swallowing the lands and possessions of conquered peoples. Ma'arra is thus both an ugly memory in need of repression and a symbol of cultural superiority. This last step brings Ma'arra into the purview of postcolonial theory,¹⁷ making it a precursor to the mind-set fully realized with Christopher Columbus and the reported discovery of widespread cannibalism in the New World.¹⁸

Seen from this theoretical angle, cannibalism can express both an individual neurosis and a broader social disorder.¹⁹ According to Peter Hulme, the European desire for incorporation is the "psychosis" that drove its interactions with New World cultures.²⁰ In the more measured terms of Maggie Kilgour, this "strategy of self-definition against a projected alien group is a version of 'colonial discourse,' the construction of the savage cannibal as antithesis of civilized man used as a justification for cultural cannibalism, that emerged with the discoveries of the New World."²¹ The argument in its most extreme form would call into the question the very existence of "ritual cannibalism" outside the

eating carrion, interpreted as cannibalism by other commentators but just as likely to refer to dead animals (*Extrait*, 194).

¹⁴ Most recently, Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York, 2007), which time did not permit me to integrate into this article.

¹⁵ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York, 2003), esp. 17–35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

¹⁷ Heng clearly interprets the Crusades as a colonial venture, a controversial historical interpretation (e.g., *ibid.*, 31–32, 186–93).

¹⁸ On Columbus and cannibals, see Philip P. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492–1763* (Baltimore, 1992), 15–25; and Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London, 1986), 32–53.

¹⁹ Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 5–11, defines cannibalism as an outgrowth of the fundamental binary of "outside" and "inside" and a nostalgic longing for a time when all experience was internal.

²⁰ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 194.

²¹ Kilgour, *From Communion*, 83.

European imagination.²² Indeed, skilled early modern observers like Michel de Montaigne or the Protestant missionary Jean de Léry could deliberately use cannibalism as much to critique European society as to depict exotic, unknown worlds.²³ But whatever the ultimate rhetorical goal, cannibals were alien and fundamentally inhuman, their existence alone justifying conquest.²⁴

Applying such an interpretive framework to Ma'arra raises difficulties. Above all, the Franks are, nonmetaphorically, conquerors and cannibals. They are themselves "the other." These contradictory identities help justify Heng's reading of Ma'arra as a point of cultural neurosis, resolved subconsciously through the production of romance literature. But the literature directly about Ma'arra, when taken together, is varied, nuanced, and extensive. Far from repressing the memory, medieval people wrote and thought about it at length and often. They also had access to a variety of interpretive filters—in the form of scriptural reference and historical precedent—to apply to the problem, filters that would have shaped how both confessors and chroniclers would assign meaning to the soldiers' actions. The most serious difficulty in interpreting Ma'arra, however, hinges on the question of pollution, and it points as well to arguably the story's most troubling aspect: In the abstract it is perfectly sensible to observe that eating Muslim bodies would be especially unnerving for medieval Christians, creating for the eaters a real sense of horror and pollution. But in practice chroniclers stress that the crusaders ate only Muslims—when there would have been, presumably, many dead Franks, and possibly Armenian and Syrian Christians, to choose from. That decision alone indicates that the crusaders and their storytellers inscribed a meaning onto these acts beyond the simple need to survive.

In the following pages I will undertake two tasks. First, I will review all the contemporary evidence connected to crusader cannibalism to

²² The classic anthropological attack against the belief in widespread cannibalism is William Arens, *Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford, 1979); see also Arens, "Rethinking Anthropophagy," in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge, 1998), 39–62. Peggy Reeves Sanday rebuts Arens, seeing real cannibalism as part of a symbolic system rooted in Freudian theory, in *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge, 1986), x–xii. Lawrence Osborne provides an overview of the debate in "Does Man Eat Man? Inside the Great Cannibalism Controversy," *Lingua Franca* 7 (1997): 28–38.

²³ On Montaigne's use of cannibalism to critique "feudal customs" in France, see David Quint, "A Reconsideration of Montaigne's *Des Cannibales*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990): 459–89. On Jean de Léry (who compares European usurers to Brazilian cannibals), see Frank Lestringant, *Jean de Léry ou l'invention du sauvage: Essai sur l'histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 2005), esp. 101–3.

²⁴ In this conjunction, see Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 83: "Anthropology is seen, in other words, as merely the institutional manifestation of a more widespread desire for the existence of some touchstone of the absolutely 'other,' frequently represented by 'cannibalism.'"

highlight its tensions and contradictions. Taken together, our sources suggest that the cannibalism was not confined to a single incident of famine and that it was not always a response to hunger. Second, I will examine how later chroniclers and one poet attempted to resolve these inconsistencies. Two contradictory ideas motivated writers in this second group. They wanted both to blame the poor for the cannibalism (which led them to create the Tafur mythology) and to deny that the event ever occurred. But behind each narrative direction lies a common impulse: the recognition of cannibalism not as an aberration from the ethos of holy war but as an aspect of it. As an epilogue I will offer a (necessarily speculative) reconstruction of the events at Ma'arra and of their connection to possible earlier moments of crusader cannibalism.

Crusader Cannibalism: The Evidence and Its Discontents

The model text for many later sources is the *Gesta Francorum*, an anonymous recounting of the campaign's major events begun, apparently, during the march.²⁵ Of the cannibalism at Ma'arra it makes only terse mention. The author notes great deprivations suffered there and then says, "Some cut the flesh of dead bodies into strips and cooked them for eating."²⁶ Based on this testimony the cannibalism would appear to be a brief, discrete problem, all but forgotten six months later after the triumph at Jerusalem.

The chronicle attributed to Peter Tudebode confirms this reading. Tudebode, like the *Gesta* author, was a participant in the Crusade, and his book is largely a word-for-word copy of the *Gesta*, with occasional additions and revisions.²⁷ In the description of Ma'arra, Tudebode

²⁵ The usual historiographical approach is to see the *Gesta Francorum* as the original source upon which later texts depend or from which they borrow. The literature here is immense. One might refer to two articles by John France, "The Anonymous *Gesta Francorum* and the *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem* of Raymond of Aguilers and the *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere* of Peter Tudebode: An Analysis of the Textual Relationship between Primary Sources for the First Crusade," in *The Crusades and Their Sources: Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton*, ed. John France and William G. Zang (Brookfield, VT, 1998), 39–69; and France, "The Use of the Anonymous *Gesta Francorum*," in *From Clermont to Jerusalem: The Crusades and Crusader Societies, 1095–1500*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Turnhout, 1998), 29–42. See also Colin Morris, "The *Gesta Francorum* as Narrative History," *Reading Medieval Studies* 19 (1993): 55–71; and H. Oehler, "Studien zu den *Gesta Francorum*," *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch* 6 (1970): 58–97. I propose a more complex relationship among the sources, particularly between the *Gesta* and Tudebode, in "What Is the *Gesta Francorum*, and Who Is Peter Tudebode?" *Revue Mabillon* 16 (2005): 179–204.

²⁶ *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, ed. Rosalind Hill (London, 1962), 10.33.80.

²⁷ In "What Is the *Gesta Francorum*?" I argue that the surviving copy of the *Gesta* is a flawed text with several lacunae and that Tudebode's edition actually preserves the original compiler's work more accurately on some occasions. I suspect that this may be one of those occasions, though the point is not essential for my argument.

reiterates his source and then adds that the army's leaders grew concerned: "After our leaders had seen this [the eating of the dead], they had the pagans moved outside the city gates. There they piled them into a mound and later set fire to them."²⁸ Besides specifying that the Franks were eating Muslims, this new information gives the cannibalism a secretive, anarchical quality, performed without the knowledge of the leaders and immediately suppressed on discovery.

Phrased in these terms, what happened at Ma'arra seems comprehensible: shocking, sad, but easily explicable, especially from a medieval perspective. For eleventh-century Europe was not a society free of homegrown cannibalism. In 1069, according to John of Worcester, as a result of William the Conqueror's harrying of the north, "famine so prevailed that men ate the flesh of horses, dogs, cats and human beings."²⁹ Rodulfus Glaber, in greater and grislier detail, describes two eleventh-century famines so severe that cannibalism resulted. In the first, around the millennium, "the famine had become so savage that grown sons ate their mothers while women did the same to their babies, lost to all maternal love."³⁰ In the second, around 1032, "ravening hunger drove men to devour human flesh. . . . In many places the bodies of the dead were dragged from the earth, also to appease hunger. This raging madness rose to such proportions that brigands were more likely to attack men than solitary animals. The custom of eating human flesh had grown so common that one fellow sold it ready cooked in the market-place of Tournus like that of some beast."³¹ In this passage Glaber clearly wishes to communicate not just scarcity but inhumanity. He is also drawing upon well-established traditions, discussed below, but the final image, of human bodies sold in the marketplace, is especially noteworthy on two counts. It occurs in another revision of the *Gesta Francorum*, the so-called *Historia belli sacri*, assembled at Monte Cassino in the mid-twelfth century: "Some took it [the flesh] into the streets to sell it."³² Because the Monte Cassino writer had access to an extensive archive of now lost material, we cannot be certain if this final detail represents his imagination or the recollection of a crusader. If

²⁸ Peter Tudebode, *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere*, ed. J. H. Hill and L. L. Hill, intro. and notes trans. Philippe Wolff (Paris, 1977), 124–25.

²⁹ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. and trans. P. McGurk, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1998), 11.

³⁰ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque*, ed. John France (Oxford, 1989), 2.17.82–83.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.10.188–89. The *Miracles of St. Benedict* also mentions cannibalism during this famine, which it situates in the aftermath of Robert the Pious's death in 1031. The imagery used to depict the cannibalism resembles Glaber's, with parents suddenly turning on children (*Les miracles de Saint Benoît écrits par Adrevald, Aimoin, André, Raoul Tortaire, et Hugues de Sainte Marie moines de Fleury*, ed. E. De Certain [Paris, 1858], 235).

³² Published under the title *Historia peregrinorum euntium Jerusalem*, RHC Oc. 3:92, 209.

the image is a literary device only, it is remarkable that a writer from an entirely different tradition, the thirteenth-century Arab doctor Abd al-Latif, uses the same language to describe conditions in Cairo during the famine of 1200–1201.³³ We have therefore either a common pool of images or else a reminder of how willingly premodern societies, ravaged by war and famine, abandoned this fundamental taboo.

Three other monks famously rewrote the *Gesta Francorum*—Guibert of Nogent, Robert the Monk, and Baudry of Bourgueil—all of them around 1107.³⁴ They undertook their projects, each says, out of a sense of dissatisfaction with the literary merits of the *Gesta*, and they all supplemented their narratives with whatever other evidence they had been able to gather, including stories heard from Crusade veterans. Each of them, more directly than the *Gesta*, Tudebode, or the Monte Cassino writer, expresses a sense of horror at the cannibalism.³⁵ Of the three, Guibert's reaction was the most complicated and will be considered separately and in detail below. Robert the Monk's revisions are the briefest and the most straightforward. It is indeed remarkable that he would mention the cannibalism at all, for Robert is the most disingenuous of chroniclers.³⁶ He felt no compunction about reimagining events if it improved the reputations of his heroes. About the complex negotiations, rivalries, and internal betrayals that underlay the crusaders' capture of Antioch, for example, Robert has almost nothing to say; and he similarly glosses over the bitter feud between Godfrey of Bouillon and Raymond of Saint-Gilles over the possession of Jerusalem. The famous challenge to the authenticity of the Holy Lance he does not acknowledge.³⁷ But even Robert felt obligated to mention the eating of

³³ Reay Tannahill, *Flesh and Blood: A History of the Cannibal Complex* (New York, 1975), 47–51.

³⁴ Treated by Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, 135–52.

³⁵ Baudry of Bourgueil, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, RHC Oc. 4:3.26.86–3.27.87; Guibert of Nogent, *Dei gesta per Francos*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (hereafter CCCM) 127A (Turnhout, 1996), 6.9.241; and Robert the Monk, *Historia Hierosolimitana*, RHC Oc. 3:8.8.850. I return to each of these passages below.

³⁶ In the case of Robert, as well as more generally, I do not find persuasive Heng's off-hand observation that the historians recorded the events to satisfy their "obligations to the truth" (*Empire of Magic*, 29). Medieval historians had a variety of obligations and motives when writing history. See, e.g., Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes, eds., *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000); and Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary, eds., *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (Washington, DC, 2002). See also Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiévale* (Paris, 1980); and Hans-Werner Goetz, *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewußtsein im hohen Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1999).

³⁷ Robert acknowledges a brief debate among the army's leaders at Antioch about whether Bohemond should control the city alone or whether they ought to share it equally; Bohemond dismisses the argument with an easy joke: "Vae civitati quae tot dominis subjecta!" (Woe to the city subjected to so many lords!) (Robert, *Historia*, 5.10.798). On the key scenes at Jerusalem, see *ibid.*, 9.9.869–9.15.873. On the Lance, see Colin Morris, "Policy and Visions: The Case of the Holy Lance at Antioch," in *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, ed. J. Gillingham and J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1984), 33–45.

flesh at Ma'arra and to express revulsion at it: "Nothing could be found that they might eat or capture. And so, with hunger and suffering driving them, horrible to say, they cut the bodies of the gentiles into strips and cooked and ate them."³⁸

The third writer in this group, Baudry of Bourgueil, acknowledges occurrences of cannibalism somewhat reluctantly. "It is said, and has been confirmed, that many ate Turkish flesh, that is, human flesh."³⁹ Presumably, the phrase "it has been confirmed" indicates that he took the time to consult with eyewitnesses, perhaps hoping that his information was wrong. But his sources not only confirmed but also supplemented the *Gesta*. Baudry writes that the bodies were cut up and cooked in hiding, away from the camp, in "wicked banquets."⁴⁰ The leaders regretted the actions but suspended all punishment, recognizing that the army's survival depended on extreme measures: "They performed unlawful acts, but inescapable necessities demanded the law's violation."⁴¹ The language is legalistic, approaching the technical jargon of sin and penance. And it is indeed possible that Baudry echoes a judgment made on the spot by the Crusade's clerical leaders, who, due to Urban II's promise of indulgence at Clermont in 1095, would very much have had on their minds questions of forgiveness and redemption.⁴²

So far the chroniclers agree on the essential facts of the cannibalism: that it occurred after the siege and that it was born of despair and famine. They disagree about its relative secrecy, with most writers implying that it happened in dark corners of the city, but with the Monte Cassino compiler saying that human flesh was being traded openly. They also disagree on the response, with Tudebode saying that the leadership immediately put a stop to it and with Baudry, again in the opposition, saying that the leaders tolerated the practice as a regrettable necessity.

³⁸ Robert, *Historia*, 8.8.850.

³⁹ "Relatum est enim et compertum, quod multi carnes Turcinas, carnes scilicet humanas" (Baudry, *Historia*, 3.27.86).

⁴⁰ "Nefandis dapibus" (*ibid.*, 3.27.86).

⁴¹ "Patrabant equidem illicita, sed legem violari compellebat angustiosa necessitas" (*ibid.*, 3.27.86).

⁴² The issues raised by what Urban II promised at Clermont, and what he meant when he promised it, are far too complex for the scope of this article. The classic discussion remains Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart (Princeton, NJ, 1977), 306–54. See also Alfons Becker, *Der Papst, die griechische Christenheit und der Kreuzzug: Papst Urban II. (1088–1099)*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1988), 376–413, with important revisions, esp. Paul Rousset, *Les origines et les caractères de la Première Croisade* (Neuchâtel, 1945), 53–62; Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, 9–20; H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Pope Urban II and the Idea of Crusade," *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser., 36 (1995): 721–42; and Sylvia Schein, *Gateway to the Heavenly City: Crusader Jerusalem and the Catholic West (1099–1187)* (Burlington, VT, 2005), 9–20.

The first really discordant note comes from another eyewitness chronicler, Fulcher of Chartres. Fulcher was absent from Ma'arra, having broken off from the main army in 1097 with Baldwin, the future count of Edessa.⁴³ He seems to have known of the *Gesta*, but he struck a narrative course largely independent from it. When he discusses the cannibalism, he attaches to it something like a cry of distress: "I tremble to say it, but many of our men, seized by the madness of hunger, cut pieces from the buttocks of the Saracens, who were dead at the time, which they cooked and ate, and even if they were barely warmed over, they savagely filled their mouths and devoured them."⁴⁴ Fulcher also disagrees with other texts on chronology, for he situates the cannibalism during the siege, not in its aftermath.⁴⁵ The distinction is not minor: cannibalism committed in shame and secrecy after a victory and cannibalism committed aggressively in the midst of combat are very different phenomena indeed.

We have one other eyewitness chronicler, Raymond of Aguilers, who, like Fulcher, is a largely independent voice and who, like the *Gesta* author, seems to have been at Ma'arra. Raymond agrees with the latter on chronology, situating the cannibalism after the siege and in the midst of famine. Many of the bodies, he says, had been decaying for as long as two weeks.⁴⁶ But his description of the eating sounds closer to Fulcher's. It is not shameful and secretive. Rather, crusaders ate flesh in public squares, and they did so *avidissime*, "with gusto."⁴⁷ The spectacle, he adds, struck fear in the hearts of both "our men and the foreigners."⁴⁸ Some of the pilgrims actually deserted because of the cannibalism, despairing of future success, and perhaps about the validity of their mission, too.⁴⁹ It is not impossible that these events were at the heart of Raymond's decision to write a book, since he announces in his introduction that he wishes to contradict lies being spread by certain deserters.⁵⁰

⁴³ On Fulcher generally, see Verena Epp, *Fulcher von Chartres: Studien zur Geschichtsschreibung des ersten Kreuzzuges* (Düsseldorf, 1990), as well as the notes in the standard edition, Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913).

⁴⁴ Fulcher, *Historia*, 1.25, S. 2.

⁴⁵ Fulcher situates the capture of Ma'arra in the sentence after the cannibalism, at *ibid.*, 1.25, S. 3.

⁴⁶ Raymond of Aguilers, *Liber*, ed. J. H. Hill and L. L. Hill, intro. and notes trans. Philippe Wolff (Paris, 1969), 101.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "Terrebant ista multos tam nostre gentis homines quam extraneos" (*ibid.*).

⁴⁹ Raymond says that Provençal soldiers were deserting, formally blaming the Franks for not providing supplies (*ibid.*).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 35. Raymond began his book during the Crusade, with a coauthor who died shortly after the siege of Ma'arra (see 35, 107).

What most intrigues Raymond, however, is how the Muslims reacted to these stories. “Indeed the Saracens and the Turks said among themselves, ‘Who is able to stand against this people, who are so resolute and cruel that—after a whole year of not being driven away from the siege of Antioch, either by hunger or sword or by any other danger—they now eat human flesh?’”⁵¹ It is doubtful that any Frankish writer, even one as perceptive as Raymond, saw into a Muslim soul, but this soliloquy is particularly unlikely. For after the conquest of Ma’arra its citizens were either killed or enslaved. Presumably corpses were the only enemy witnesses to Frankish activity. Raymond himself may have spotted the difficulty, since he adds that the Franks only learned much later of their actions’ psychological impact.⁵² If one were, like Fulcher, to situate the cannibalism during the siege, there would be no narrative inconsistency: the city would have been full of hostile and fearful witnesses. In any case, Raymond confirms the implications of Fulcher’s description: not all crusaders slipped into the shadows to cannibalize the enemy dead. Some did so publicly, with boldness and aplomb.

Two other writers whom we might describe as independent of earlier traditions produced Crusade chronicles within two decades of 1099. Neither was a participant in the campaign, though each had ample opportunity to consult with people who were. And both of them, like Fulcher, placed the cannibalism at Ma’arra during the siege, rather than in its aftermath. The first of them, Albert of Aachen, wrote in Germany, beginning his book perhaps as early as 1102 but probably somewhat later.⁵³ The cannibalism during the siege, he says, prompted Count Raymond to work with renewed energy and desperation to capture the city. About the cannibalism itself, Albert observes with apparent coldness, “Such suffering from hunger grew up around these cities that the Christians, in the face of the scarcity about which you have heard, did not fear to eat—wicked to say, much less to do—the bodies, cooked in fire, not only of the Saracens or Turks they had killed, but also of the dogs that they had caught.”⁵⁴ It is a surprisingly cruel epi-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵² “Etenim dederat Deus timorem nostrum cunctis gentibus sed nos nesciebamus” (*ibid.*).

⁵³ On Albert’s significance as a historian, see Susan B. Edgington, “Albert of Aachen Reappraised,” in Murray, *From Clermont to Jerusalem*, 55–67; Jean Flori, *Pierre l’Ermite et la Première Croisade* (Paris, 1999), 51–66; Peter Knoch, *Studien zu Albert von Aachen: Der erste Kreuzzug in der deutschen Chronistik* (Stuttgart, 1966); Colin Morris, “The Aims and Spirituality of the First Crusade as Seen through the Eyes of Albert of Aachen,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 16 (1990): 97–117; and, of course, Edgington’s recent edition of Albert, *Historia Ierosolimitana: History of the Journey to Jerusalem* (Oxford, 2007).

⁵⁴ Albert, *Historia*, 5.29.374.

thet from Albert, whose general sympathy toward “marginal groups” including Jews, women, and Muslims has earned him the praise of his most recent editor.⁵⁵ It is possible, as we shall see, to contextualize his comments somewhat, but the simplest explanation may be that his tone indicates a real discomfort at what he described.

The other independent source, Ralph of Caen, traveled to the East after the Crusade and met two of its heroes, the Italian Norman warriors Bohemond and Tancred. About the latter he wrote a biography, *The Deeds of Tancred*, completed sometime between 1112 and 1118.⁵⁶ When Ralph recalls the cannibalism of Ma'arra, he transforms it into a grisly public spectacle: “I have heard them say that a lack of food compelled them to make a meal of human flesh, that adults were put in the stewpot, and that boys were skewered on spits. Both were cooked and eaten.”⁵⁷ These details, the stewpots and spits, sound like the stuff of epic fiction. And indeed they are paralleled in the nearly contemporary metrical account of the Crusade, the *Historia vie Hierosolimitane* of Gilo of Paris. Gilo draws most heavily on Robert the Monk's chronicle, and like Robert, he places the cannibalism after the capture of Ma'arra.⁵⁸ Yet he further comments that the Franks did “what law forbids and—for shame! what a crime!—they put the fresh flesh of Turks on spits and wore their teeth out on cadavers.”⁵⁹ We can only speculate what inspired Gilo to add these details. Ralph, however, identifies his sources as actual participants in the feasting, which is to say, cannibals: “The bread failed, and hunger grew strong. I am ashamed now to tell what I have heard and what I have learned from the very perpetrators of this shame.”⁶⁰ Ralph concludes that the pilgrims, by cooking their food, behaved as men; but because they were eating people, they behaved like figures from the medieval Alexander legend, exotic, cynocephalic

⁵⁵ For the account of the massacre, see *ibid.*, 6.30.440–42. On Albert's attitude toward marginal groups, see Edgington, “Albert of Aachen Reappraised,” 61–63.

⁵⁶ Ralph of Caen, *Gesta Tancredi*, RHC Oc. 3:587–710. Ralph speaks of his relationship to both men on 603. On the text's date, see the introductory comments in RHC Oc. 3:xxxviii–xl; Ralph or another scribe did make subsequent revisions to text. It has been translated as *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen*, trans. Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach (Brookfield, VT, 2005).

⁵⁷ Ralph, *Gesta Tancredi*, 97.675.

⁵⁸ Published as *The Historia Vie Hierosolimitae of Gilo of Paris*, ed. and trans. C. W. Grocock and J. E. Siberry (Oxford, 1997). Unlike the editors here (lviii–lx) and unlike Robert's recent translator, Carol Sweetenham (*Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade* [Aldershot, 2006], 33–35), I suspect that Gilo did make use of Robert's chronicle as a source for his poem. On Robert's connections with vernacular traditions, see Grocock and Siberry in their introduction to Gilo, *Historia Vie*, xli–xlii.

⁵⁹ Gilo, *Historia Vie*, 8, ll. 278–80.

⁶⁰ Ralph, *Gesta Tancredi*, 97.675.

racés, “dog-men.”⁶¹ As with Albert, cannibalism caused Ralph to think of dogs.⁶²

Tensions among the sources thus far have involved two different questions: when did the cannibalism happen, and with what (for lack of a better word) demeanor did the crusaders approach their cannibalism? A majority of the sources, seven of the ten examined so far, place the cannibalism after the siege of Ma'arra. But when one considers that all but one of those sources derive from the *Gesta*, and that the three sources placing the cannibalism during the siege are largely independent of one another, we are left with a much narrower margin: two traditions say it happened after the fighting had ended and three say that it happened in the midst of it.⁶³ We might appeal to the superiority of the author of the *Gesta* and of Raymond as probable eyewitnesses, but eyewitness status does not guarantee veracity. And eyewitnesses inform all of our sources to varying degrees.

The fullest accounting of the evidence, moreover, raises another difficulty: whether Ma'arra was the only time when the Franks ate from the dead. The problematic *Chanson d'Antioche*—a late-twelfth-century vernacular epic that combines literary panache with unusual historical precision—locates the original site of cannibalism a few months earlier during the siege of Antioch, as does the normally well-regarded late-twelfth-century historian William of Tyre.⁶⁴ William of Malmesbury, an early-twelfth-century English writer, similarly mentions cannibalism at Antioch: “And there were some who nourished bodies with bodies, feeding on human flesh, but far away and in the mountains, lest others take offense at the smell of cooked meat.”⁶⁵ The army's leaders them-

⁶¹ On the dog-men, see Merrall Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2003), 5–7. The tradition goes back at least to Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1942). Pliny twice tells readers of cannibalistic Scythian tribes in the East (6.20.53, 376–77; 7.2.9, 512–13) and then mentions, farther east still, that there are tribes of men with dogs' heads (7.2.23, 520–21).

⁶² Recalling also the proverb “Dog does not eat dog,” cited by Varro, *De lingua latina*, ed. and trans. Roland G. Kent (Cambridge, MA, 1938), 7.32.298–99: “Canis caninam non est”—according to conventional wisdom, the origin of the modern “dog-eat-dog world.” Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 15–16, notes that around 1520 a Spanish observer opined, erroneously, that the term *cannibal* originated from the Latin *canis*, “dog.”

⁶³ The sources that place the cannibalism during the siege are the *Gesta*, Tudebode, the Monte Cassino chronicle, Robert, Baudry, Gilo, and Raymond. Raymond is largely independent of the *Gesta*, though he probably read it or even knew the author. The writers who place the cannibalism during the siege are Fulcher, Albert, and Ralph.

⁶⁴ William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, CCCM 63, 63a (Turnhout, 1986); *La chanson d'Antioche*, ed. Suzanne Duparc-Quoioc, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977–78), with vol. 1 containing the text. I discuss cannibalism in both sources below.

⁶⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1998), 4.361.634. William does not discuss Ma'arra at all, moving

selves hinted at possible cannibalism at Antioch in a letter from September 1099, addressed to the pope but clearly intended for a wide audience: "Hunger in the city had grown to such an extent that some were hardly able to keep themselves from making banquets of men."⁶⁶ This excerpt from the letter, likely written by Raymond of Aguilers,⁶⁷ was to reappear with German chroniclers, one of whom found the expression "banquets of men," *humanis dapibus*, so disturbing that he transformed it into *inhumanis dapibus*.⁶⁸ The visionary priest Peter Bartholomew similarly offered an admonition about cannibalism during the final stages of the siege at Antioch: Do not delay attacking the enemy, he pronounced, speaking with the voice of the apostle Andrew,⁶⁹ otherwise you will reach such a point of deprivation "that some of you will eat the rest of you."⁷⁰ The sentiment, if not the language, echoes Paul's letter to the Galatians: "If you bite and eat one another, see that you are not altogether consumed, one by another" (Gal. 5:15).⁷¹ There is, however, a significant difference between these hints of earlier cannibalism and what happened at Ma'arra. The letter to the pope and the warning from Peter Bartholomew both refer to Christians eating Christians, not Muslims. And William of Malmesbury does not indicate whom the soldiers ate—only that they cooked dead bodies. In these three instances, all from Antioch, cannibalism is a punishment for the army, not a feeding upon the enemy.⁷²

The Byzantine princess Anna Comnena places the cannibalism

almost directly from Antioch to Jerusalem. As William notes (4.374.660), he derives much of his account from Fulcher, but with revisions.

⁶⁶ "Praeterea fames in ciuitate conualerat, ut uix ab humanis dapibus se continerent aliqui" (Heinrich Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088–1100* [1901; rpt. Hildesheim, 1973], 169).

⁶⁷ Hagenmeyer makes several notes of textual overlap between Raymond's *Liber* and this letter (cosigned by Count Raymond, whose chaplain Raymond was) (*ibid.*, 374–97). The letter contains a brief description of Ma'arra, lifted from Raymond: cf. Raymond, *Liber*, 101; and Hagenmeyer, *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 170. On the letter's composition, see John France, "The Election and Title of Godfrey de Bouillon," *Canadian Journal of History* 18 (1983): 326–27; and Alan V. Murray, "The Title of Godfrey of Bouillon as Ruler of Jerusalem," *Collegium medievale* 3 (1990): 163–64.

⁶⁸ E.g., the *Annales Hildesheimenses*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae*, *Scriptores* (hereafter MGH SS) 3, ed. G. H. Pertz (Hanover, 1839), echo this letter that the Franks could hardly restrain themselves from *humanis dapibus* (106). The chronicle that prefers "inhuman banquets" is *Frutolfs und Ekkhards Chroniken*, 152.

⁶⁹ Saint Andrew, according to a pre-Crusade legend, evangelized a land of cannibals in the East: Robert Boening, ed. and trans., *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals: Translations from the Greek, Latin, and Old English* (New York, 1991); see also Boening, *Saint and Hero: Andreas and Medieval Doctrine* (Lewistown, PA, 1991).

⁷⁰ Raymond, *Liber*, 78.

⁷¹ All scriptural quotations are my own translations from the Vulgate, in consultation with the New Revised Standard Version.

⁷² As Janet Whatley observes, "Biblical anthropophagy appears to be less a crime than a punishment" ("Food and the Limits of Civility: The Testimony of Jean de Léry," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 [1984]: 396).

earlier still, during the People's Crusade led by Peter the Hermit. As this ragtag army devastated the lands around Nicea, she writes in language reminiscent of Ralph's and Gilo's, "they cut in pieces some of the babies, impaled others on wooden spits, and roasted them over a fire; old people were subjected to every kind of torture."⁷³ Setting aside questions of poetic license, we might indeed wonder whether cannibalism occurred during the exigencies of the People's Crusade, or else at Antioch, where, as Sumberg points out in his article on the Tafurs, "the famine was infinitely worse and of longer duration" than at Ma'arra.⁷⁴ Whatever the answer, the evidence thus far allows two radically different interpretations: cannibalism was a minor affair involving a few of the poor at Ma'arra, or else it was a continuing and sometimes public act committed from the campaign's earliest stages up until the armies approached Jerusalem's shadow.

Medieval Approaches to Cannibalism

To describe an event is to ascribe meaning to it—a truism that medieval authors would have well understood, trained as they were in biblical exegesis and in its overlapping levels of literal and allegorical meaning.⁷⁵ For them the cannibalism at Ma'arra would have been heavily loaded with symbolic implication, even if it were merely an act of necessity. And to determine these meanings was not wholly a textual exercise. The cannibalism was real enough, and part of what complicated the writers' task was that the cannibals themselves had found their own meanings. Perhaps as a way of coping with what they had done, perhaps in earnest aggression, some crusaders—and then chroniclers, reluctantly—understood the cannibalism as an act of holy war: not necessarily as a colonial gesture, but truly as an aspect of the crusade enterprise.

Of all our writers, none struggles more mightily with these issues of motive and meaning than does Guibert of Nogent. As mentioned,

⁷³ *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (London, 1969), 10.6.311.

⁷⁴ Sumberg, "The 'Tafurs,'" 242. Baudry almost seems to anticipate this objection when he observes that the hunger at Ma'arra did surpass that at Antioch (*Historia*, 3.26.86). One wonders if Baudry might have been referring to rumors of cannibalism at Antioch when he wrote that Christians ate their horses and asses and whatever impure things they might find (*ibid.*, 3.6.65).

⁷⁵ The best overviews of medieval exegetical tradition are H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1954–64); and Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN, 1964); see also Guy Lobrichon and Pierre Riché, eds., *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible* (Paris, 1984). I have made one attempt to draw connections between exegesis and history for one of the chroniclers in *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind* (New York, 2002), 87–110. By contrast, Jacques Chaurand, "La conception de l'histoire de Guibert de Nogent (1053–1124)," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 8 (1965): 381–95, argues that Guibert's training as an exegete impeded his ability to write effective and accurate history.

Guibert was one of the monks who rewrote the *Gesta*. He knew Fulcher of Chartres's book and used it to revise his original draft. He also spoke with Crusade participants and presumably asked them, among other things, what had happened at Ma'arra.⁷⁶ For events there so troubled him that he tried to explain them twice, initially with extreme caution, referencing the *Gesta* but encouraging his readers not to believe everything they had heard: "Some are said to have cut pieces from [Saracen bodies] and to have cooked and eaten them; but this happened rarely and in secret, to such an extent that no one can be sure if it really happened at all."⁷⁷ He returns to the subject near the end of the chronicle, where he associates the cannibalism with a special type of crusader, the Tafurs, poor men who traveled barefoot and without weapons and who performed manual labor for the army's leaders, living off whatever common, barely edible plants they could find. Sometimes, Guibert adds, paraphrasing his earlier remark, strips of flesh were found missing from Saracen bodies at Ma'arra and elsewhere—yet another sign that Ma'arra was not the only site of cannibalism—but, he stresses again, this happened most rarely. But when it did happen, rumor spread among the Saracens that "these same men," that is to say the Tafurs, were eating human flesh, an idea that their own religious sensibilities could not bear. On one occasion, in order to encourage the rumors, the Tafurs and their "king"—a Norman knight who had lost his horse and hence his aristocratic status—took the battered body of a Saracen and, in full view of the enemy, roasted it as if it were meat to be eaten.⁷⁸

The anecdote is a tour de force in misdirection. By the end of it, we still do not know if any cannibalism took place. We know only that a few Saracen bodies had been suspiciously cut up. Contrary to the usual readings of the passage, Guibert does not even accuse the Tafurs. He only says that these helpful volunteers—servants more than soldiers—cleverly faked an act of cannibalism to frighten the enemy. At a stroke he has simultaneously cast doubt on the event and blamed it on the poor. He has also connected it to a recognized, if rare, military strategy: staged cannibalism. Around 1020 in Spain, according to Ademar of Chabannes, the Norman Roger de Tosny used a similar tactic to frighten Muslims. Roger cut up a Saracen prisoner, "as if a pig," in front of his fellow captives, boiled the body parts, and then pretended to feast on them with his comrades. Feigning carelessness, he allowed the

⁷⁶ On the value and character of Guibert's history, see Huygens's introductory remarks in his edition of Guibert, *Dei gesta*, 7–17.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.18.254.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.23.310.

other captives to escape and to spread the word among their terrified coreligionists.⁷⁹ It is possible that one of the Normans or the Provençals in the crusader army could have heard Ademar's story and advised employing a version of it during their own campaign. But the imagery is also noticeably close to Ralph of Caen's and Anna Comnena's, who had heard of similar spectacles and had thought them real.⁸⁰

William of Tyre gives us almost exactly the same scene, only at Antioch, and with Bohemond taking the place of the Tafur king. In his version, Bohemond had promised the other leaders that he would do something to drive out the spies who had penetrated their camp. After some careful thought he ordered executioners to cut the throats of a few of their prisoners and then to have their bodies roasted on spits and "prepared"—probably meaning "cut and seasoned"—as if for a feast. Should anyone ask what was happening, Bohemond ordered his men to reply that the army's leaders had decided to dine on their prisoners.⁸¹ Not only does William, like Guibert, deny the reality of the cannibalism—it is all playacting—but he even separates it from the issue of hunger. For he has Bohemond roast the enemy corpses during the early days at Antioch, well before the worst of the famine had struck. That the strategy solved the spy problem seems an afterthought to the story's real lesson: that the Saracens learned to believe that Christians surpassed in savagery every other nation of men, and wild beasts too.⁸²

All of these themes surface in the *Chanson d'Antioche*, where the Tafurs roast Saracen bodies on spits just outside Antioch's walls, causing the defenders to cry out in fear: "Oh, lord Mahomet! What great cruelty! Take vengeance on those who have shamed you, those who have eaten your people are truly not human. They are no longer Frenchmen but instead are living demons."⁸³ The Muslim reaction recalls another comment made by Baudry of Bourgueil to explain why the cannibalism

⁷⁹ Ademar of Chabannes, *Chronicon*, ed. P. Bourgain, R. Landes, and G. Pon, CCCM 129 (Turnhout, 1999), 3.55.174. See also France, *Victory in the East*, 12.

⁸⁰ One would expect Anna Comnena in particular to describe the elaborate cooking scenes as exercises in fakery: Emily Albu, "Bohemond and the Rooster: Byzantines, Normans, and the Artful Ruse," in *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson (New York, 2000), 157–68.

⁸¹ William, *Chronicon*, 4.23.266. The story appears to be an elaboration of a simpler story in the *Gesta Francorum*, 5.12.29, which states that Bohemond executed prisoners before the gates of the city to frighten its defenders.

⁸² William mentions that the *exploratorum pestis* grew quiet after this incident in *Chronicon*, 4.23.267. On 266 he imagines the spies reporting to their lords in the farthest capitals of the East that the Franks' savagery surpassed that of man and beast: "Populus hic quarumlibet nationum, sed et ferarum exuperat seviciam."

⁸³ "Ahi! Mahomet sire, come grande cruelté! / Quar prent de cels venjance qui si t'ont vergondé, / Quant il te gent manjuent, tot t'ont despersoné, / Ço ne sont pas François, ançois song vif malfé" (*Chanson d'Antioche*, 219, ll. 4060–63).

constituted no sin: “because they [the crusaders] suffered such hunger for God, and because they were fighting their enemies with their hands and with their teeth.”⁸⁴ Cannibalism did not only quiet the stomach and frighten the enemy; it also struck out against Saracens in a direct and physical way. The behavior is not altogether different from the desecration of graves and of exhumed bodies, which the crusaders practiced outside the walls of Antioch.⁸⁵ It is indeed easy to imagine one tactic leading to the other.

What we have in these three accounts, of Guibert, William, and the *Chanson*, is cannibalism, pretended or otherwise, not because of necessity but as an aspect of psychological warfare. *Psychological warfare*, however, is too polite a term for what the writers describe: tearing and gnawing at corpses as a form of combat. A description more appropriate, and less anachronistic, would be, simply, *holy war*. If this suggestion is correct—that the cannibalism was intended to strike fear in the enemy, and literally to strike at them with Christian teeth, as Baudry frames it—then the eating could not have occurred only after the siege at Ma’arra, where Raymond and most writers of the *Gesta* tradition situate it, but during the siege itself, while there were still Muslims alive to witness it and to feel the horror that was its intended by-product. And as we have seen, a surprising number of writers do exactly that, especially if we add to the list of Fulcher, Ralph, and Albert the somewhat problematic testimony of Anna Comnena, William of Tyre, and the *Chanson d’Antioche*—all of whom describe theatrical cannibalism at sieges other than Ma’arra—and of Raymond and Guibert, who acknowledge the effectiveness of cannibalism in terrifying the enemy, with Guibert implying the occurrence of other similar but unspecified incidents.

Most readers would recoil at the notion of deliberate, purposeful cannibalism, but the existence of the idea in the eleventh-century warrior’s mind-set should not surprise us. One account of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1064 has an Arab warrior threaten Christians by saying that he would first take everything they had and that he would then “eat their flesh and drink their blood.”⁸⁶ Ralph explains the risks run by

⁸⁴ Baudry, *Historia*, 3.27.86.

⁸⁵ The *Gesta Francorum* relates the story, saying that the bodies were unearthed to obtain an accurate count of the dead, as well as to send severed heads as gifts to legates of the emir of Egypt (6.17.42). Baudry, working from his imagination or from his eyewitnesses, attributes different motives to the grave robbers, saying that some were motivated by greed, since the bodies had been buried with valuables, or by aggression, in that they wanted to demoralize their enemies through the public mistreatment of their dead: “Ut dolorem super dolorem Turcis apponerent, incitati, sepultos desepelierunt, et corporibus satis ignominose insultaverunt” (Baudry, *Historia*, 2.17.51).

⁸⁶ Lambert of Hersfeld, *Annales*, ed. O. Holder-Egger (Berlin, 1958), 98–100. The *Annales*

his hero Tancred by saying that if the Saracens had captured him, they would surely have eaten him.⁸⁷ Albert, on the other hand, tells us that Tancred was a ferocious knight who could never quench his thirst for Saracen blood.⁸⁸ Such metaphors—swords becoming drunk on human blood,⁸⁹ enemies devoured by the mouth of hell⁹⁰—are part of the normal parlance of warfare. And of course, on the eve of battle warriors would have fortified themselves with the body and blood of their Lord. As a result of the ongoing Eucharistic controversy, inaugurated in the 1050s by Berengar of Tours, priests would have only recently learned to stress the absolute reality of this otherwise abstract ceremony. And most clerics in 1095, even the better-educated ones, lacked the Aristotelian training necessary to explain transubstantiation.⁹¹ The possibility that they could communicate a nuanced, theological summary of eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood to a lay audience well accustomed to the sight of very real blood seems remote.

Even without the Eucharist, Christianity has a surprising number of things to say about cannibalism. The Pentateuch offers two stern warnings from the Lord that if the children of Israel do not obey his commands, they shall be reduced to eating their own children. "You will eat the flesh of your sons and your daughters," Leviticus 26:29 threatens. Deuteronomy 28:53–57 elaborates, couching these threats in the now familiar language of shame and of siege warfare:

Altahense maiores, ed. William de Giesebrecht and Edmund L. B. ab Oefele, MGH SS 20 (Hanover, 1868), 816, describing the same scene, attribute a slightly less cannibalistic speech to the leader, though in fact the text earlier describes the Arabs as "thirsting for human blood" (815). The best general account of this pilgrimage remains Einar Joranson, "The Great German Pilgrimage of 1064–1065," in *The Crusades and Other Historical Essays, Presented to Dana C. Munro by His Former Students*, ed. Louis J. Paetow (New York, 1928), 3–56.

⁸⁷ See Ralph, *Gesta Tancredi*, 50.643.

⁸⁸ "Nunquam Turcorum sanguine satiatus" (Albert, *Historia*, 4.32.296).

⁸⁹ Baudry uses precisely this image: "Sed omnis Christianus gladium suum occisorum sanguine inebriabat" (*Historia*, 2.17.51). The implied Eucharistic metaphor here of blood as wine barely deserves mention.

⁹⁰ The idea of the entry to hell as a mouth is a commonplace in Western art, literature, and language: Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1996), 148 and n. 102; 293–94.

⁹¹ Berengar began the debate on the real presence of Christ in the sacrament in the 1050s. Definitions were settled on at the time of the Crusade, but the mechanisms for explaining them remained elusive: Jean de Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérengar: La controverse eucharistique du XI^e siècle* (Leuven, 1971); see also Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991). Prominent contemporary thinkers whose careers nearly ended over Eucharistic missteps include Rupert of Deutz and Guibert of Nogent: John H. Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), 158–68; Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 132–72. Frank Lestringant finds a similar Eucharistic neurosis behind anti-Catholic rhetoric during the French Wars of Religion: "Catholiques et cannibales: Le thème du cannibalisme dans le discours protestant au temps des Guerres de religion," in *Pratiques et discours alimentaires à la Renaissance*, ed. J.-C. Margolin and R. Sauzet (Paris, 1982), 233–45.

And you will eat the fruit of your womb and the flesh of your sons and your daughters, whom the Lord gave to you, in the midst of the anguish and devastation with which your enemy shall oppress you. The most refined and wealthy man will look evilly toward his brother and toward the wife of his bosom, and he will not give them any of the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he shall possess nothing else in the midst of siege and loss, as your enemies lay waste to you within your gates. The gentle and refined woman, who on account of her great softness and delicacy would not allow the sole of her foot to touch the ground as she walked, will look evilly toward the husband of her bosom, about the flesh of their sons and daughters and about the afterbirth which comes from her between her legs and the children born at that hour. They will eat them secretly because of the great shortages of everything during the siege and the devastation with which your enemies will oppress you within your gates.

These warnings reappear in several of the Old Testament prophets. Continuing with the theme of intrafamilial cannibalism, Ezekiel 5:10 states, "Surely the fathers in your midst shall eat the flesh of their sons, and the sons shall eat their fathers." Zechariah 11:9 increases the level of violence, proclaiming a general cannibalism of all against all: "And let those who are left eat the flesh, everyone of his neighbor." Micah 3:3 adds explicit detail, to be revisited in the language both of Ralph of Caen and of Anna Comnena: "They will eat the flesh of my people, they will flay their skin and break their bones and chop them into pieces for the pot, with flesh as if in the midst of the cauldron."⁹² The historical books of the Bible make frequent use of the image of dogs satiating themselves on the blood of the enemy, which again helps situate Albert of Aachen's association of cannibalized Turkish bodies with dead dogs.⁹³ In the New Testament, as noted, a cannibalistic reference in the letter to the Galatians finds an echo in Raymond of Aguilers's chronicle, when the Apostle Andrew warns the Frankish host not to delay its attack against the enemy. The book of the Apocalypse similarly describes a call from an angel atop the sun to the birds of the air telling them to feed themselves on the kings of the earth, their servants, and their horses. The imagery is reminiscent of a vision, related by Albert, about Godfrey, the future ruler of Jerusalem, also seated upon the sun, surrounded by birds, who then disperse.⁹⁴

⁹² One might add that Jer. 19:9 describes more familial cannibalism. Isaiah twice refers to self-cannibalism (9:19–20, 49:26). Lam. 4:10 refers to mothers eating their children. Ps. 26:2 and 52:5 (following the Vulgate numbering system) make use of cannibalistic imagery.

⁹³ See 3 Kings 14:11, 16:4, 21:9, 21:23–24, 22:38; 4 Kings 9:10, 9:36.

⁹⁴ See Apoc. 19:17–18; and Albert, *Historia*, 6.37.450. The Apocalypse twice shows us a beast poised to eat a newborn child (12:4, 17:15–16).

The context for most of these passages is siege warfare, a frequent phenomenon in the Old Testament and in medieval life. The most spectacular incident of cannibalism in the Bible, in fact—the only confirmed instance of practiced rather than threatened or prophesied cannibalism—involves the siege of Samaria, described in 4 Kings 6:24–33. The siege, and the accompanying scarcity, became unusually brutal, and in this passage a woman cries to the King of Israel for help. She explains, “A woman said to me, ‘Give up your son so that we might cook him today, and tomorrow we shall cook mine.’ We cooked my son, and we ate him. The next day I said to her, ‘Give up your son so that we might cook him.’ But she had hidden him.”⁹⁵ Josephus relates a similar story about the final stages of the Romans’ siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. In this well-known incident, a Jewish woman named Maria so despaired of her plight and the city’s, and was so overcome by hunger, that she, too, killed and cooked her son.⁹⁶ Some of the leaders of the rebellion caught the scent of roasted meat and immediately demanded that she hand over whatever meal she had prepared. Maria showed them the remains of her child, which she had set aside for later consumption, and said, “This is my son, truly my son. Now, eat of my crime. Don’t be softer than a woman, or more merciful than a mother.”⁹⁷ This scene in turn became one of the climactic moments in the thirteenth-century vernacular saga *La vengeance de Notre-Seigneur*, which adapts Josephus’s story of Titus and Vespasian’s destruction of Jerusalem to stress the theme of Christian vengeance. In one version, Maria’s character becomes an African queen and a Christian convert who eats her daughter and her servant’s son, but only at the command of an angel. Such actions are necessary, the angel explains to her, to fulfill prophecy and to bring about Jerusalem’s divinely sanctioned destruction.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁵ The verses quoted here are 4 Kings 6:28–29. The king is Jehoram or Joram, referred to here consistently as “the king.”

⁹⁶ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1927–28). This passage appears as 6.3–4, 434–39. Latin translations of Josephus’s works circulated widely in the Middle Ages. For this essay I have consulted a manuscript of *De bello Iudaeo* copied around 1100 in the Vatican: Cod. Vat. lat. 1992, with references to the Loeb Greek edition. The story of Maria and her son appears on fols. 148–148v. Jean de Léry, writing of cannibals in Brazil, used this Josephan imagery to describe his own experience of the siege at Sancerre; see also Lestringant, “Catholiques et cannibales,” 237–38.

⁹⁷ “‘Et hic meus’ inquit ‘est. vere filius: et facinus meum comedite. Nam et ego comedi. Nolo sitis aut femina moliores aut matre misericordiores’” (Vat. lat. 1992, fol. 148; in the Loeb edition, 436–37).

⁹⁸ The different versions of this saga are collected in Alvin E. Ford, ed., *La vengeance de Notre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions*, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1984–93). Vol. 1 contains the longest and latest version of the story, chaps. 52–55, where the angel orders the cannibalism and Pontius Pilate himself discovers the cooked child. In vol. 2 the “F” and “H” families contain briefer mentions of the cannibalism, in chaps. 22 and 37, respectively.

text obviously postdates the First Crusade, but it shows how an audience raised on vengeance could imaginatively transform cannibalism into an act of sacred violence.⁹⁹

It would not have been lost on our chroniclers that the Franks were conducting siege warfare in the same territory, and sometimes around the same cities, where these nightmarish scenes had occurred. If the crusaders themselves had bothered to seek out information about what to expect while on campaign, the Old Testament and Josephus would have been their likeliest sources.¹⁰⁰ It would have been easier still for theologians—and even for the moderately educated clerics in the army—to draw connections among the cannibalism of prophecy, the sufferings of the Jews, the specific events reported by Josephus, and the conditions that they themselves were experiencing on the march. To see such links by 1099 had indeed become intellectual habit, particularly for biblical exegetes who necessarily had to explain incidents of scriptural cannibalism.

Saint Jerome helped set the pattern in, among other places, his commentary on Micah 3:2–3, where he elides the Babylonian captivity and the Roman war against the Jews: “They are in the midst of a stew-pot, as if in the city of Jerusalem, where they afflict those miserable people; and on account of these [sins], they are borne away to punishment on the day of captivity, either by Nebuchadnezzar or by Titus and Vespasian.”¹⁰¹ In commenting on Ezekiel 5:10, Jerome refers explicitly to Josephus: “We read in the book of Kings how, compelled by hunger, a mother consumed her own son. Josephus memorializes many similar events during the siege of Jerusalem.”¹⁰² Josephus, in fact, only commemorates one such event—the story of Maria and her son—which represents uncharacteristic carelessness on Jerome’s part. Jerome does add for precision’s sake that we have no instances of fathers and sons eating one another, as opposed to mothers eating sons, though we might presume that necessity had on occasion compelled such action.¹⁰³ Raba-

⁹⁹ On vengeance and Crusade thought, see Philippe Buc, “La vengeance de Dieu: De l’exégèse patristique à la réforme ecclésiastique et à la Première Croisade,” in *La vengeance, 400–1200*, ed. Dominique Barthélemy, François Bougard, and Régine Le Jan (Rome, 2006), 451–86.

¹⁰⁰ Bartolph of Nangis appeals to Old Testament precedent (3 Kings 15) to explain the massacre in Jerusalem. The Franks, he says, did not wish to be like Saul, who had spared Agag against God’s orders to destroy all of the Amalekites (*Gesta Francorum Iherusalem expugnantium*, 35.513). The most common strategy in the *Gesta* for illustrating the severity of the famine was to list the prices of food; the same strategy is used in 4 Kings 6.

¹⁰¹ Jerome, *Commentarii in Prophetas minores*, ed. M. Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (hereafter CCL) 76 (Turnhout, 1969), 457.

¹⁰² Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem libri xiv*, ed. Franciscus Gloria, CCL 75 (Turnhout, 1964), 58.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

nus Maurus follows Jerome's lead in associating the Leviticus passage with Josephus, but he is unconcerned with the niceties of gender. He observes simply that, based on Josephus, the Jews have sustained all of the things threatened in the Pentateuch.¹⁰⁴ So ingrained had this model become by the time of the First Crusade that the contemporary exegete Bruno of Segni could observe about the passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that their meanings were literal and obvious.¹⁰⁵ Rupert of Deutz, another contemporary exegete, always in search of novelty, takes time to wonder why Micah foresees the Jews cooked both in stewpots and in cauldrons. He concludes that it is easier to remove something from a stewpot, because of the wider opening, than from a cauldron. The stewpot, therefore, refers to the Roman siege, which some of the Jews did survive. The cauldron, on the other hand, is the fire of hell, from which "it is far more difficult, nay, truly impossible, to escape."¹⁰⁶

These associative leaps recur in a general way in the chronicles, where we learn that the Franks are the new Chosen People fighting for the spiritual Jerusalem as well as for its more mundane, earthly counterpart. Guibert of Nogent further specifies, with clear reference to Josephus, that the First Crusade was, "if I may say so, worthy of being told in a more dignified style than all the *Histories of the Jewish War*."¹⁰⁷ Baudry directly cites Josephus in the introduction to his chronicle, saying that Josephus's history demonstrates the accuracy of Christ's prophecy about the destruction of the temple.¹⁰⁸ In the historians' minds, the Franks competed in every sense with the ancient Jews and fulfilled their destiny more completely. It seems unlikely that, when faced with new stories of cannibalism, these same historians would not have thought of those famous incidents from Josephus's narrative and from the books

¹⁰⁴ Rabanus Maurus, *Expositiones in Leviticum*, Patrologia Latina (hereafter PL) 108, col. 563B, commenting on Lev. 26:29.

¹⁰⁵ About the Deuteronomy passage Bruno of Segni writes, "Quae vero sequuntur, ideo non exponimus, quia facilia sunt, et maxima ex parte secundum litteram intelliguntur" (We have not expounded upon what follows, since it is obvious enough and mostly to be understood according to the letter) (*Expositio in Deuteronom*, in PL 164, col. 535C). See also 459A–B, where Bruno demurs to comment on the comparable passage in Lev. 26.

¹⁰⁶ "Et de Romana quidem obsidione quasi de lebete nonnulli quamvis difficile superferunt, de gehennae autem angustiis [correcting the PL reading of 'augustiis'] quasi de ollae interioribus, ut evadant difficilius, imo omnino impossibile est" (Rupert of Deutz, *Commentaria in xii prophetas minores*, in PL 168, col. 466D). On the innovative character of Rupert's thought, see Robert E. Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," *Speculum* 67 (1992): 33–57; and, more generally, Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*.

¹⁰⁷ Guibert, *Dei gesta*, preface, 81. I have discussed these aspects of Guibert's thought in Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 97–101.

¹⁰⁸ "Lectionem vir eloquentissimus Josephus stilo celebri consecravit"; Baudry, *Historia*, 1.1.11. Fulcher also cites Josephus when describing his pilgrimage from Edessa to Jerusalem with then Count Baldwin (*Historia*, 1.34, S. 3).

of Kings. They were within easy intellectual reach. Andrew of Fleury, in *The Miracles of St. Benedict*, when describing the famine of 1032, makes the connection: “You would have seen in those times,” he writes of France, “the destruction of the siege of Jerusalem.” But, he adds, there was a difference: in 70 AD the whole city felt horror at the crimes of one troubled woman, whereas in France this crime was committed again and again.¹⁰⁹

But for the Crusade, of course, this typology is imperfect. In the stories of Josephus and of Kings, the cannibalism was kept not only within the Jewish people—which is to say that the Jews ate of one another, not of their attackers—but even within particular families. The survivors experienced unthinkable loss and remorse, and their leaders responded with authentic horror. When the Jewish king heard what the woman had done, he rent his garments in despair. When Titus heard the story of Maria, he decided that he could no longer offer mercy to the Jews. Their temple and their city had to be destroyed. The crusaders’ cannibalism, by contrast, was a prelude to victory. They either ate their enemies as an act of aggression or else they learned to celebrate it as such after the fact.

For that is the uncomfortable memory at the heart of the stories of Ma’arra and sometimes of Antioch, indicated in a surprising number of our sources. The city is a stewpot in which the enemy is cooked alive and consumed by God’s warriors, just as the Arameans and the Romans had once forced the Jews to eat of themselves. And in the symbolic language of the First Crusade, there was very little distinction between Jews and Muslims.¹¹⁰ In the words of Baudry, the Frankish army held “Jews, heretics, and Saracens equally detestable, in that they were all enemies of God.”¹¹¹ Some, like Saint Jerome, might protest that God himself was not a cannibal, that God never condoned, let alone ordered, cannibalism: “He does not say, ‘I myself am going to make fathers eat their sons in your midst, and sons their fathers.’”¹¹² But at the siege of Ma’arra such distinctions between God permitting evil and God willing evil had become pointless. The Franks were vessels of God’s

¹⁰⁹ “Cerneret temporibus illis Hierosolimitanae cladem obsidionis. . . . Illic nefas unius mulieris calamitosa plebs horruit; hic, quodam legitimo jure, clam et in propatulo mortuis nullo modo miserabatur, vivis insidiabatur, sepultis effosio ingerebatur” (*Miraculi S. Benedicti*, 6.11.236).

¹¹⁰ Sigebert of Gembloux, Guibert of Nogent, and the Jewish chroniclers give similar explanations for crusaders’ motives in killing Jews: it seemed foolish to travel so far to kill Christ’s enemies (Saracens) when so many of them (Jews) lay close to hand. See Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronica*, MGH SS 6 (Hanover, 1844), 367; Guibert of Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. and trans. Edmond René Labande (Paris, 1981), 2.5.246–48; and Chazan, *European Jewry*, 76–78.

¹¹¹ Baudry, *Historia*, 1.17.23.

¹¹² Jerome, *In Hiezechielem*, 58.

will and God's wrath not in spite of brutalities such as cannibalism but because of them. And if someone were to have cited to the crusaders Jerome's dictum that God does not cause evil, a learned cleric might well have responded with Isaiah 49:26, where God does directly bring about cannibalism: "I will feed your enemies with their own flesh, and like new wine, they shall be drunk with their own blood. And all flesh will know that I am the Lord who saves you, your redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob."

What I am suggesting is that we cannot presume that all of the warriors felt an unbearable trauma at what must have been sometimes willful, aggressive, deliberate cannibalism. The shame at this memory is the shame of the historians, both of the eyewitness writers who brought home the tales of what had happened at Ma'arra and of the monastic theologians who felt compelled to repeat their stories. One suspects—or, perhaps more accurately, one hopes—that the cannibals themselves would have later wondered about their own acts, when or if they returned to the more tranquil climes of western Europe, which would explain the denial and displacement apparent in most of the chronicles. But it appears that some of the settlers whom Ralph of Caen met in the East felt no such qualms, as they told him leeringly of adults cooked on spits and children boiled in pots.

The vernacular *Chanson d'Antioche*, a text aimed squarely at a secular audience, preserves the celebratory tone implied in Ralph's descriptions, even if, like Guibert, the *Chanson* attempts to displace the violence onto the Tafurs. At the command of their leader, who in the *Chanson* is Peter the Hermit, the Tafurs cook Saracen bodies in theatrical fashion, enticing Antioch's defenders to peer over its walls, their appetites drawn by the sweet smell of roasting meat, just as the smell of Maria's frightful dinner had once drawn to her house the Zealots of Jerusalem. The pilgrims ate with pleasure, without bread and without salt, saying as they did, "This is most tasty, better than any pork or even cured ham. Cursed be anyone who would die now where there is such abundance!"¹¹³ When Duke Godfrey, the central figure of the Crusade song cycle, learns of this cannibalism, he responds not with anger or shame, but with a joke, offering the King of the Tafurs wine with which to wash down his Saracen meat.¹¹⁴ The poet leaves to his audience the task of drawing a likely Eucharistic joke.

¹¹³ "Molt est cis savourés, / Mius vaut que cars de porc ne que bacons ullés, / Dehés ait qui morra tant com en ai assés" (*Chanson d'Antioche*, 219, ll. 4073–75).

¹¹⁴ "Par foi, ce dist li rois [Tafur], 'giers sui bien asasés, / Se jou avoie a boire, a mangier ai asés.' / Dist li dus de Buillon: 'Certes, vos en arés.' / De son bon vin il fu uns botels presentés, / Li rois Tafurs en but, as autres fu livrés" (*ibid.*, 220, ll. 4102–6). Pierre Aubé provides a helpful dis-

Epilogue: An Interpretation of the Cannibalism at Ma'arra

Because of the contradictions among the sources, we cannot reconstruct exactly all of the circumstances, let alone the particular meanings, of this cannibalism. The chroniclers' contradictory impulses—general agreement as to the reality of the cannibalism and thoroughgoing disagreement as to its details—suggest that they were dealing with an ugly reality, one beyond poor and hungry people eating from the dead. A possible and plausible reconstruction is that the first acts of cannibalism happened during the Crusade's initial experiences of scarcity and siege near Nicea, where Anna Comnena places it. It almost certainly recurred at Antioch, where William of Malmesbury, William of Tyre, and the *Chanson d'Antioche* have it. By the time a similar desperation had spread among the army at Ma'arra, some of the soldiers must have recognized its potential utility and, hoping to drive the defenders into a quick surrender, made a spectacle of the eating, and made sure that Muslims were the only ones eaten.

That is probably why, for the earliest chroniclers, the cannibalism at Ma'arra was the most memorable instance of what was likely a periodic response to famine: it was the most public, the most deliberate, the most celebratory instance, not at all secretive as was the cannibalism at Antioch described by William of Malmesbury. None of the writers, however, wanted to celebrate Ma'arra, and they adopted a variety of strategies for dealing with their discomfort. Raymond did so by placing the cannibalism explicitly after the siege, anxious to counter the rumors spread by men who had deserted the army. The author of the *Gesta* placed the cannibalism after the siege, too, acknowledging it quickly and then moving on. The writers in the *Gesta* tradition largely followed this strategy, though Baudry and Guibert, on asking questions of returning soldiers, realized that they had more explaining to do and altered their texts accordingly. Other writers simply placed the cannibalism during the siege and, to varying degrees, acknowledged its effectiveness at terrifying the enemy, with later sources borrowing another aspect of Guibert's solution and transforming the cannibalism into an elaborate fakery.

Whether the cannibalism succeeded in frightening the Muslims is an open question. The failure of any Arab historian to mention it indicates either that the Franks greatly overestimated their tactics' effective-

cussion of Godfrey's roles in the *Chanson* cycle in his biography, *Godfrey de Bouillon* (Paris, 1985), 361–74.

ness or that they thoroughly succeeded, that Islamic writers preferred to suppress altogether the shameful memory of how their enemies had devoured them. Such a reconstruction is necessarily speculative, but it is compatible with the sources and not unlikely in the context of sacred warfare.¹¹⁵

For the time ought long ago to have passed when we would feel obligated to ask whether the crusaders had failed to “do honor to the noble idea which had prompted them to sew on the Cross.”¹¹⁶ We ought to observe instead, simply, that they were fighting a holy war, whose rules of combat were inherently different from normal warfare. Marvin Harris, in his book *Cannibals and Kings*, observes that “holy wars among states are a dime a dozen.”¹¹⁷ That aphorism may be true, but the First Crusade was something unusual, perhaps because no state was involved. The soldiers could eat their enemies because they, the Franks, were not seekers after God’s justice but were the embodiment of God’s will—the wrathful God described in the Apocalypse and portrayed above church doors throughout Europe. They were the new Chosen People, engaged in combat against an undifferentiated, unbelieving adversary—Saracen, Jew, or heretic—in a series of battles fought on an appropriately prophetic, Old Testament scale. A few years later in the twelfth century, at home in Europe, with the creation of increasingly sophisticated central governments and with the simultaneous crafting of refined, humane, and courtly sentiments, such behavior looked aberrational and in need of explanation or repression. The simple excuse of famine was not enough, leaving open too many questions, such as the one raised near the beginning of this essay: why did the Franks at Ma’arra eat only Saracens?

Appropriately, it would be the forward-thinking Guibert of Nogent who pointed the way toward both preserving the story and denying it, through displacement of the deed onto an ill-defined army of the poor. It is indeed remarkable that historians have continued to embrace his rather cynical solution. In truth the Tafurs survived in the historical imagination only because they made such convenient scapegoats: peasants who held no place in the nascent chivalric culture that the First

¹¹⁵ For comparison, to take a recent, arguably nonsacral, case, U.S. troops in Afghanistan were reported to have used the cremation of Muslim bodies as an opportunity to taunt a besieged enemy with the desecration of their dead. The military described the cremation as undertaken for hygienic reasons. Whatever the motive, a pressing need (hygiene/hunger) led to a sacrilegious act (cremation/cannibalism), whose utility as a tool for psychological warfare quickly became apparent. Reported by Eric Schmitt, “Army Examining Report of Abuse,” *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Sumberg, “The ‘Tafurs,’” 246.

¹¹⁷ Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures* (New York, 1977), 107.

Crusade had helped inaugurate. When the Tafurs made their more famous appearance in the *Chanson d'Antioche*, a courtly audience could safely laugh at them, their reaction not dissimilar to that of the title character in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, who, upon seeing a peasant make a rare intrusion into romance, crosses himself one hundred times and says that he has never seen such an ugly creature.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Using *Le chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Mario Roques, vol. 4 of *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris, 1960): Yvain's cousin Calogrenant first encounters the peasant, described as looking somewhat like a Moor: "Uns vilains, qui resanbloit Mor, / leiz et hideus a desmesure, / ainsi tres leide criature / qu'an ne porroit dire de boche, / assis s'estoit sor une çoche, / une grant maçue en sa main" (9–10, ll. 286–91). Yvain later marvels that nature could have ever made such an ugly creature: "Si vit les tors et le vilain / qui la voie li anseigna; / mes plus de çent foiz se seigna / de la mervoille que il ot, / comant Nature feire sot / oevre si leide et si vilainne" (25, ll. 794–99).

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