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Monks and the Muslim Enemy: Conversion, Polemic and Resistance in Monastic Hagiography in the Age of the Crusades, *c.* 1000–1250

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Abstract

Although most accounts of Christian encounters with Muslims in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries pay particular attention to conflict and violence, a body of hagiographical texts emanating from monastic circles points to a different kind of approach. In this article I foreground three examples of Italo-Greek saints' lives from the tenth and early eleventh centuries in which the saints in question treat Muslims whom they encounter as potential converts, and explain to them the tenets of Christian theology. These texts are examined as precursors of the Cluniac 'dossier' compiled about Abbot Maiolus's encounter with Muslims in the 990s. Two of the three saints' lives were translated from Greek into Latin, one in the late eleventh, the other in the late twelfth century. The motives for and circumstances of these translations are discussed in light of growing hostility towards the Islamic world during the period of the crusades.

Keywords: monasticism; Italo-Greek; Islam; conversion; polemic

Conventionally, historians writing about the relations between Christians and the Islamic world in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries have thought more about war, particularly holy war, than about dialogue and conversion. We tend to think of the Christian world – at least, outside the Iberian peninsula – as having little knowledge or understanding of, and little interest in, the Islamic world before the first crusade (1095–9) and the settlement of western Europeans in the eastern Mediterranean in its wake.[1] This lack

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[1] The classic statement of this is R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 1–33, esp. 14; see also Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of*

of knowledge has often been seen by historians as a characteristic feature of the western approach to the target enemy. As has often been said, most crusading narratives referred to the crusaders' adversaries either as Turks or by deploying labels drawn from the Old Testament, focusing on their ethnic rather than religious identity. Where religious identity is invoked, crusade narratives are just as likely to draw attention to the Turks as pagans, barbarians or indeed as heretics. This apparent lack of interest can sometimes seem odd on the part of participants in what is usually characterised – in current historiography, at least - as a religious war, fought for spiritual reasons. The spirituality of contemporary narratives of crusading appears to be invested less in a clash between different religious systems – still less a 'clash of civilisations'[2] – than in the holiness of the sites to be reconquered from an enemy in possession, and the purity of intent on the part of those dedicated to their recovery.

This consideration made the question of dialogic exchange, polemic and conversion bulk less large than we might expect in a 'holy war', especially given that so many of the contemporary narratives originated in monasteries. Until the middle of the thirteenth century, remarkably little attention was paid to the potential of crusading for the conversion of Muslims, or indeed to the prospect of using conquest of territory as a means of enforcing conversion.[3] Indeed, in the mid-thirteenth century a papal legate to the East complained that Frankish landowners in the kingdom of Jerusalem were passing up opportunities to bring Muslim peasants on their estates to Christianity. The reason for this lack of interest in conversion – paralleled in other regions, notably Sicily – has been well explained by historians in terms of economic advantage, in light of the *consuetudo terre* in operation in the kingdom of Jerusalem that Muslim slaves who sought baptism could thereby evade servile status.[4] But

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an Image (Edinburgh, 1960), 11–23; John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York, 2002), 12–20, 69–104. For the first crusade specifically, see Svetlana Luchitskaja, 'Barbarae nationes: Les peuples musulmans dans les chroniques de la première croisade', in *Autour de la Première Croisade: Actes du Colloque de la Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East, Clermont-Ferrand, 22–25 juin, 1995*, ed. Michel Balard (Paris, 1996), 99–107; Tom Asbridge, 'Knowing the Enemy: Latin Relations with Islam at the Time of the First Crusade', in *Knighthoods of Christ*, ed. Norman Housley (Aldershot, 2007), 18–19. On the development of these themes in the twelfth century, see Sini Kangas, '*Inimicus Dei et sanctae Christianitatis*? Saracens and their Prophet in Twelfth-Century Crusade Propaganda and Western Travesties of Muhammad's Life', in *The Crusades and the Near East: Cultural Histories*, ed. Conor Kostick (2011), 131–60; Margaret Jubb, 'The Crusaders' Perception of Their Opponents', in *Palgrave Advances in the Crusades*, ed. Helen Nicholson (Basingstoke, 2005), 225–44.

[2] Kurt Villads Jensen, 'Cultural Encounters and Clash of Civilisations: Huntingdon and Modern Crusading Studies', in *Cultural Encounters during the Crusades*, ed. Kurt Villads Jensen, Kirsi Salonen and Helle Vogt (Odense, 2013), 15–26.

[3] Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches towards the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984), 57–74, argues that while conversion was barely discernible as an avowed aim of crusading before the middle of the twelfth century, thereafter it was increasingly cited as a desirable potential outcome of crusades by some writers. The consensus among canon lawyers was that Muslims should not be forced into conversion as an outcome of war, though conversions thus obtained were to be regarded as valid.

[4] *Ibid.*, 151, citing the threat by Odo of Chateauroux in 1253 to excommunicate those who obstructed the baptism of Muslims. In 1216/17 Jacques de Vitry, newly installed as bishop of

acceptance of this reason has perhaps made historians reluctant to consider more fully questions of polemic and conversion in encounters between Christians and Muslims. There are, of course, exceptions, most notably Benjamin Kedar's seminal *Crusade and Mission*. William Chester Jordan has shown in a recent book, *The Apple of His Eye*, that Louis IX not only took conversion of Muslims seriously as a potential outcome of his crusade, but brought Muslim converts – in some cases, whole families – back to France with him in 1254.[5] But Louis, after all, was a saint, and perhaps his saintliness consisted partly in his understanding of holy war precisely as an opportunity for evangelism.

Louis IX's sanctity is invoked here with only a tinge of irony, because this paper will explore some earlier instances of polemic and conversion in encounters with Muslims in hagiographical texts emanating from monasteries, and suggest that, in some parts of the Christian world at least, confrontation with Muslims was already an important feature of the construction of Christian sanctity for at least 100 years before the crusades. At the heart of this discussion are examples from three early medieval Italo-Greek hagiographies: in other words, saints' lives written in Greek and about Greek-speaking monks whose careers played out in southern Italy in the ninth and tenth centuries. The significance of these texts lies not only in the encounters with Muslims narrated in them, but also in the rediscovery and reuse of these texts in the period of the crusades, from the late eleventh century onwards.

These episodes of Italo-Greek monastic encounters with Muslims are not unusual in Greek hagiographical texts from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, but they have not yet been absorbed into the putative landscape of Christian–Islamic interactions before the first crusade. So far as I am aware, they have not been mentioned by any historian discussing Christian attitudes to Muslims in the pre-crusade period. Inevitably, much – though not all – of that landscape has been sketched by historians of the crusades, and perhaps for that reason the discussion can have a rather deterministic character, appearing as a search for the roots of a phenomenon that came to characterise western views of the Islamic world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In recent years, for example, we have seen renewed appeals to see the Norman conquest of Sicily in the late eleventh century as 'a crusade' before the fact, as though the conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean initiated by the papacy

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Acre, complained that Christians refused baptism to their Muslim servants even when it was asked for, on the grounds that they would then be unable to exploit them as they wished (*Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden, 1960), 79–97, no. 2). Such obstruction evidently persisted despite the ruling by Pope Gregory IX in 1237 that baptised slaves could continue to be held in servile status. See now Benjamin Z. Kedar, 'Muslim Conversion in Canon Law', in *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law: Berkeley, California, 28 July–2 August 1980*, Monumenta Iuris Canonici, Series C, Subsidia, VII, ed. Stephan Kuttner and Kenneth Pennington (Vatican City, 1985), 321–32.

[5] William Chester Jordan, *The Apple of His Eye: Converts from Islam in the Reign of Louis IX* (Princeton, 2019), 61–96.

in 1095 formed a normative framework within which a global set of relationships was formulated and can be tested.[6]

In one sense this approach to Christian views of Muslims is not surprising. Reading the words of Thomas Madden – 'The Crusades were in every way a defensive war. They were the West's belated response to the Muslim conquest of fully two-thirds of the Christian world' – we might be reminded of the opening chapter of Guibert de Nogent's *Dei gesta per Francos.* Here, in a theological retelling of the first crusade written in *c.* 1108/9, Guibert talks about 'Europe' as an isolated corner of Christian civilisation, assailed on three sides by 'enemies'.[7] This view from a northern French monastery places the 'defence of civilisation' as a feature of the cultural *habitus* of reform monasticism. Historians of monasticism have also picked up on this theme; and there has been considerable interest in exploring the role of the monastery of Cluny in the construction of a matrix of 'Christendom on the defensive'. The classic exposition of this theme was proposed by Dominique Iogna-Prat, who saw the twelfth-century abbot of Cluny Peter the Venerable, the commissioner of the first Latin translation of the Qur'an and compiler of a dossier of anti-Islamic polemic, as the guiding figure behind the construction of a 'Cluniac identity' in which the monastery formed the intellectual and spiritual engine-room of the defence of Christendom against the challenges posed by heresy and unbelief.[8] Peter invokes the same siege mentality as Guibert. In his long letter to Bernard of Clairvaux in 1144 about the Latin translations of the Qur'an and other Arabic works, he pointed out that the Arab conquests of 'the greater part of Asia, the whole of Africa and part of Spain' mimicked the 'infection' of those same regions by heresy.[9]

More recently, Scott Bruce has explored the origins of this theme in earlier generations of Cluniac writers. Starting with the notable episode of the capture of Abbot Maiolus of Cluny in 972 by Muslim raiders based in Fraxinetum, in southern France, Bruce traces the retelling of this story by subsequent Cluniac writers from the late tenth century to the twelfth. Bruce's model sees Peter the Venerable as the culminating point of a project that had begun in the 990s, with a series of hagiographical studies of Abbot Maiolus that explored the significance of his kidnapping, his confrontation with the Muslim raiders and his eventual release on payment of a ransom, and the final outcome, the destruction of the raiders' base of Fraxinetum by William I of Provence.[10] Cluniacs were not alone in reflecting these interests.

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[6] Paul Chevedden, 'A Crusade from the First: The Norman Conquest of Islamic Sicily, 1060–1091', *Al Masaq*, 22 (2010), 190–210.

[7] Guibert de Nogent, *Dei gesta per Francos*, ii, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis (CCCM) 127A, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Turnhout, 1996), 89–90.

[8] Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaisme et à l'islam, 1000–1150* (Paris, 1998).

[9] *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. Giles Constable (2 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1967), cxi, at i, 298, and ii, 275–84 for discussion; James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, Princeton Oriental Studies 23 (Princeton, 1964), 220.

[10] Scott G. Bruce, *Cluny and the Muslims of La Garde-Fraxinet* (Ithaca, 2015), esp. 10–62; see also M. Meickle, 'Wolves and Saracens in Odilo's *Life of Mayeul*', in *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century*, ed. M. W. Herven, C. McDonagh and R. Arthur (Turnhout, 2002), ii, 116–28.

Other hagiographical texts from the eleventh century appear to corroborate a growing concern with the need for defence against Muslims. The Provençal knight Bobo devoted much of his life to fighting the Muslims of Fraxinetum, and was venerated as a saint at Voghera, in the Po Valley near Pavia; a *Life* of Bobo from the early eleventh century makes clear that his sanctity lay in the use to which he put his arms in defending Christendom.[11]

Bruce's study challenges an accepted model of western Europe in the period before the crusades largely – outside the Hispanic peninsula – ignorant of and oblivious to the Muslim world and Islamic beliefs. He finds the second *Life* of Abbot Maiolus (BHL5177/9),[12] written by 1010 by the Cluniac monk Syrus, particularly significant in this respect. In this version of the story, the captive Maiolus is subjected to attacks by his kidnappers not only on his person but on Christian doctrines. He defends himself by seizing the initiative and preaching to them. 'He seized the shield of faith and, making the case for the Christian religion, pierced the enemies of Christ with the blade of God's word.' More specifically, Maiolus argued that his captors' conception of God was false, that they were worshipping a human construct and that their God did not have the power to free himself from punishment, let alone to help his worshippers.[13] By the time the story was retold by the Cluniac monk Ralph Glaber in *c.* 1040, further details had been added. In this version, there is an exchange among the raiders over how to treat Maiolus: was he a genuine man of God, and should he be shown reverence as such? In Glaber's version, some of the Muslims examined the Bible Maiolus had with him, and recognised the prophets of the Old Testament as the same venerated by them. The interchange then becomes charged with a sharper glimmer of mutual recognition between the Muslims and the Christian.[14] It has been suggested – first, to my knowledge, by a past president of the Royal Historical Society, Sir Richard Southern – that this exchange contains the first mention of the Prophet Muhammad by any writer north of the Alps. And, according to Scott Bruce, 'the debate between the abbot of Cluny and his Muslim captors about the principles of the Christian faith in Syrus's *Life* was unprecedented in Latin literature composed north of the Pyrenees in the early Middle Ages'.[15] Southern and Bruce were both conscious of the necessary exemption from their claims for texts produced in regions where Christians were more likely to come into actual contact with Muslims – notably the Iberian peninsula after the Arab

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[11] *De S. Bobone seu Bovo*, Acta Sanctorum Augusti ... Collecta [hereafter AASS] (68 vols., Antwerp, 1643–1940) May II, 184–91; C. Carozzi, 'La *Vita boboni*, un jalon vers une mentalité de croisade', *Publications du Centre Européen d'Etudes Bourguignonees*, 11 (1969), 30–5; M. A. Casagrande Mazzoli, 'La tradizione testuale della Vita Sancti Bobonis', *Annali di storia pavese*, 16–17 (1988), 21–6; see now Adrian Cornell du Houx, 'Journeys to Holiness: Lay Sanctity in the Central Middle Ages, *c.*970–*c.*1120' (Ph.D. thesis, Lancaster University, 2015), 73–106.

[12] Syrus, *Vita sancti Maioli*, in *Agni Immaculati: Recherches sur les sources hagiographiques relatives à saint Maieul de Cluny (954-994)*, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat (Paris, 1988), 163–285.

[13] Syrus, *Vita sancti Maioli*, III, 2, *ibid.*, 249–50.

[14] Rodolfus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, ed. and trans. John France (Oxford, 1989), I.19, pp. 20–2.

[15] Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 28 n. 25; Bruce, *Cluny and the Muslims*, 54.

conquest and settlement of the eighth century, and southern Italy after the Arab conquest of Sicily in the ninth century. Iberian sources will not be addressed directly in this discussion, but I offer, by way of further contribution to the studies of Iogna-Prat and Bruce, the Italo-Greek hagiographical tradition as a means of shedding further light on Christian–Islamic interchange in the West.

Although the primary purpose of these texts was to establish the sanctity of the protagonists of the *Lives* within the set parameters of the genre, and thereby to provide liturgical material for the celebration of the saints' feast days and exemplary material for monastic reading, the human landscape in which that sanctity was earned was one in which the saints had to show their mettle in different ways in dealing with challenges from Muslims. The saints' lives under discussion therefore feature set-piece encounters between Muslims and Christians in which polemical dialogue – and, in one case at least, conversion – play important roles. Such an encounter can be understood as a feature of the construction of sanctity in this tradition.

These three Italo-Greek *vitae* from the tenth and eleventh centuries are the *Life* of Elias the Younger (Elias of Enna), the *Life* of Elias Speleota (Elias the Troglodyte) and the *Life* of Vitalis of Castronuovo.[16] All three derive from the orbit of Calabrian monasticism and reflect a period of disruption and political turmoil during the aftermath of the conquest of Sicily from Ifriqiya in the ninth century.[17] All three are set within a context of conquest, raids and continual insecurity in Sicily and Calabria. The ever-present threat of raids and violence against Christian communities is a theme, indeed the narrative backcloth, in all three *Lives*. Italo-Greek hagiographical traditions were strongly coloured by the ninth-century Aghlabid conquest of Sicily and the subsequent Byzantine attempts at reconquest, which seem, at least in so far as the hagiographical texts present the situation, to have caused widespread migration of Greek-speaking Christians from urban centres in Sicily to rural Calabria and Apulia.[18] This is a feature of other Italo-Greek saints, such as St John Theristes, or St Sabas the Younger. More broadly, Byzantine hagiography of the period often deploys suffering at the hands of Arab raiders as a stage in the journey to sanctity. Three ninth-century female saints, Theodora of Thessaloniki, Athanasia of Aegina and Theoktiste of Lesbos, all suffered at the hands of Arab raiders. Theodora and Athanasia were forced to flee their

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[16] *Vita sancti Eliae junioris*, AASS Aug. III, cols. 489–509; *Vita di sant'Elia il giovane*, ed. M. Taibi (Palermo, 1962); M. V. Strattezeri, 'Una traduzione dal Greco ad uso dei normanni: la *vita latina* di sant'Elia lo Speleota', *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania*, 59 (1992), 1–108, with edition at 42–86; *Vita sancti Vitalis Siculi*, AASS Mar II, cols. 26–34.

[17] For a brief overview of these events, see Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily: Arabic Speakers and the End of Islam* (Edinburgh, 2003), 8–29.

[18] Léon-Robert Ménager, 'La "Byzantinisation religieuse de l'Italie méridionale (IXe – XIIe siècles) et la politique monastique des Normands de l'Italie', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 53 (1958), 747–74; but see now the scepticism expressed by André Guillou (ed.), *Les actes grecs de S. Maria di Messina*, Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici 8 (Palermo, 1963), 19–33, over the usefulness of these texts. Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians*, 14, suggests that onomastic evidence for Sicilian refugees is limited, and that the period of flight may have been quite short.

native island of Aegina as a consequence of the Arab conquest of the 820s, and both subsequently became nuns. Theoktiste was captured by Arab pirates and escaped to lead a life of solitary asceticism.[19] St Euthymius the Younger, a ninth-century monk of Mount Athos, was captured by Arab raiders but returned to his hermitage unharmed when the kidnappers realised his holiness.[20]

The Italo-Greek *vitae* are linked in other ways that indicate shared traditions and probably shared textual knowledge; for example, the *Life* of Elias Speleota contains an account of the death of Elias of Enna, and Elias Speleota is directed in the eremitic life by Daniel, a monastic disciple of Elias of Enna. Vitalis of Castronuovo is said to have been related to Elias of Enna, perhaps his nephew. Spiritual kinship is a characteristic feature of Greek Orthodox monasticism, and the network drawn by the *vitae* encompasses many of the notable Italo-Greek monastic figures of the period: Luke of Armentum, Phantino the Younger, Nilus of Rossano and Nikephorus the Nude.[21] But there are also links to the major monastic figures and trends in the orbit of Constantinople; thus Nikephorus the Nude, who through discipleship from Phantino is linked to Elias Speleota, was also the disciple of Athanasius the Athonite, the founder of cenobitic monasticism on Mount Athos. This distinctive networking character reminds us of the gravitational pull of Constantinople in Italo-Greek monasticism. Annick Peters-Custot has argued that the ideals of eremitism and personal austerity so characteristic of Italo-Greek hagiography should be seen not only as a response to remote rural settlement in the mainland, but also as a sign of connections with contemporary monastic reform in Constantinople.[22] And as Agostino Pertusi observed, in Apulia in particular, the influence of the Studite reform of the ninth century in Constantinople can be seen in the manuscripts of Studite ascetic texts copied in Greek monasteries in the region.[23]

In this light it is striking to note textual influences on the *Life* of Elias of Enna not only from what we might call 'universal' early texts known widely across the monastic world, such as Athanasius' *Life* of Anthony, but also from texts specific to Syria and the Holy Land: the fifth-century accounts of Syrian monks in Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Historia Religiosa*, and Cyril of Scythopolis's sixth-century *Lives* of Euthymius and Sabas.[24] Cyril in particular

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[19] *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in Translation*, Byzantine Saints Lives in Translation 1, ed. and trans Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC, 1996), 110–16, 143, 168.

[20] *Life of Euthymios the Younger*, XXIV–XXV, ed. Alexander Alexakis, trans. Alice-Mary Talbot, in *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, ed. Richard P. Greenfield and Alice-Mary Talbot, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 68–77. Not all relocations from Sicily to the mainland were attributed to Muslim incursions. SS Sabas and Macarios were induced to leave Sicily because of famine (Metcalfe, *Muslims of Sicily*, 14).

[21] Annick Peters-Custot, *Les Grecs de l'Italie méridionale post-Byzantine* (Paris, 2009), 177.

[22] Ibid., 176.

[23] Agostino Pertusi, 'La spiritualite gréco-byzantine en Italie meridionale', in Pertusi, *Scritti sulla Calabria greca medieval*, 99–116, at 103.

[24] Theoderet of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris, 1977–9); English translation: *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. Richard M. Price (Kalamazoo, 1985); *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwarz (Leipzig, 1939); English translation: Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. Richard M. Price (Kalamazoo, 1991).

provided models for the kinds of fluidity between settled and wandering monasticism so typical of Italo-Greek hagiography – and, of course, so inimical to Benedictine monasticism. Typical spiritual traits in Italo-Greek hagiography are the master–disciple relationship; hesychasm; fasting; the gift of tears; nudity or sparse clothing; and the practice of 'grazing' – in imitation of the *boschoi* of Palestine and Syria – that is, living off vegetation that grew in the wild.[25] In the *Lives* of these three saints, we also find a streak of prophecy, particularly in relation to the threat of Arab raids, sometimes tinged with eschatological concerns. Pertusi has characterised Italo-Greek monasticism of the period before the eleventh century as 'a perpetual oscillation between a type of anchoritism or hesychastic eremitism and a lavra or cenobitic community'.[26]

In all three of these *Lives*, encounters with Muslims of the kind under discussion – exchanges of views about their faith – although they are fleeting and brief, nonetheless form significant points within the narrative. The whole course of Elias of Enna's life was shaped by the experience of the Aghlabid conquest of his homeland, Sicily. Captured as a boy of twelve during the conquest, he was enslaved but sold to a Christian family in North Africa; he was eventually able to buy his freedom and set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he adopted the habit of a monk at the Holy Sepulchre, before continuing his pilgrimage to the Jordan, Galilee and Mount Sinai. He subsequently returned to Sicily, but his career was characterised by mobility: from Palermo to Taormina; then to Greece; a pilgrimage to Rome (885/91); then Calabria, where he founded a monastery at Reggio; finally dying at Thessaloniki en route to a meeting with the emperor. The encounter with Muslims occurs during his pilgrimage in the Holy Land. He comes across twelve Agarenes who, in a threatening manner, ask him to explain the principles of the Christian religion, and especially the Trinity. Elias delivers a lengthy sermon that includes a statement of faith drawn from the Nicene creed. He then goes on to explain that the false belief of the Ishmaelites has no coherence, drawn as it is from different sects. Their view of Christ as only a pure human and not God makes them Arians; their practices, such as circumcision, make them followers of the Jewish law. There follows an attack on the Prophet, who has simply cobbled together the worst of different sects, and for whose revelation there is no verifiable authority. The outcome of this encounter is the conversion and baptism of the twelve Muslims, before Elias completes his pilgrimage and returns to Sicily.[27]

The encounters with Muslims in the two other texts are briefer; more ephemeral perhaps, but nonetheless significant in the context of polemical exchanges. Elias the Troglodyte was a Calabrian by birth, who lived as a hermit after the woman his parents had tried to make him marry was killed in an Aghlabid raid, before taking the habit under the senior monk Arsenius at Reggio; both Elias and Arsenius fled to Greece to escape Muslim raids and

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[25] John Wortley, '"Grazers" (βοσχοι) in the Judaean Desert', in *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 98, ed. Joseph Patrich (Louvain, 2001), 37–48.

[26] Pertusi, 'La spiritualité', 102.

[27] *Vita sancti Eliae*, XXI–XXII, col. 494.

lived for eight years in an abandoned tower at Patras where they disposed of a demon who had been tormenting the populace. They returned to Calabria after attracting too much of the attention of the powerful. First the wife of the archon tried to seduce Elias, then a bishop made advances towards Arsenius. When they tried to leave Patras, the bishop detained them with a false accusation of the theft of liturgical books.[28] Eventually they were able to return to Calabria, but Arsenius died soon thereafter, and Elias re-entered the monastery of S. Eustratius. On a further raid by Muslims from Sicily, Arsenius's tomb at S. Eustratius was attacked. The raiders broke it open, thinking they might find lucrative precious metals inside, but what they found instead was the incorrupt body of the monk; his body and clothing in exactly the state in which they had been when he was buried. The point of interest for us comes in the words put in the mouths of the Muslims when they come upon the body of Arsenius. 'Look, here is one of those who stupid Christians say will, at the day of judgement, judge the living and the dead.'[29]

The earliest manuscript of the text compresses the episode into a concise couple of sentences. Nevertheless, there is enough to hear mockery on the part of the Muslims both of Christian ideas of sanctity and of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Having initially opened the tomb to rob it of any treasure, they decide to burn the body because Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, and if it is burned it will presumably not be raised. For them, the body of the dead monk represents the body of Christ – 'the deceiver' – and the attempt to destroy it by fire is a deliberate act of repudiation of Christian beliefs.[30] The attempt at burning the body of Arsenius is a trope of early Christian monastic martyrology; a parallel is found, though without the mockery of the resurrection, in the sixth-century *Life* of Chariton, where Arab raiders attempt to burn the bodies of Chariton and his monastic followers.[31] Elias himself had further adventures – including one with a levitating Ethiopian demoniac – but that is the extent of the involvement with Muslims. He eventually founded the cave monastery from which he took his name.[32]

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[28] *Vita sancti Helye*, VIII, ed. Strattezeri, 52–4.

[29] *Ibid.,* XV, 59: 'Ecce hic de illis est de quibus stulti aiunt Christiani iudicaturos ad iudicium vivos et mortuos.'

[30] *Ibid.,* XV, 59: 'Igitur illis servientibus et plurimum ignis super sanctam glebam accendentibus nec etiam vestimenti eius ustus fuit pilus. Videntes itaque suam perfidiam ad id quod temptabant nichil valere admirantes et stupentes nimium a loco recessere.'

[31] 'La vie prémétaphrastique de St Chariton', ed. G. Garitte, *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, 21 (1940–1), II–XXIII, 17–33, at 30–1. For western medieval knowledge of this tradition, *Descriptio locorum* (1131–43), XXXIV, *Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucesignatorum* (*IHC*), ed. Sabino de Sandoli (4 vols., Jerusalem, 1987–94), II, 100; *Rorgo Fretellus de Nazareth et sa description de la Terre Sainte*, ed. P. C. Boeren (Amsterdam, 1980), 30; John of Würzburg, *Descriptio locorum*, CCCM 139, 137, *Anon VI*, *IHC*, III, 68; Eugesippus, *Tractatus de distantiis locorum Terrae Sanctae*, Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca (161 vols., Paris, 1857–66), CXXXIII, 996. The legend of the founder's incorruptible body was also known by Peter de Pennis in the 1330s (Charles Kohler, 'Libellus de Pierre de Pennis de locis ultramarinis', *Revue de l'Orient latin*, 9 (1902), 367).

[32] *Vita sancti Helye*, XIX, ed. Strattezeri, 69; Agostino Pertusi, 'Soprarvivenze pagane e pietà religiosa nella società bizantina dell' Italia meridionale', in *Calabria bizantina: Tradizione di pietà e tradizione scrittoria nella Calabria greca medievale*, Mezzogiorno e democrazia 11 (Reggio Calabria, 1983), 17–46.

The third *Life*, that of Vitalis of Castronuovo, follows a broadly similar pattern. Vitalis, a Sicilian, became a monk in youth, made a pilgrimage to Rome, then became an eremitical monk in Calabria before settling in Apulia. He built a monastery, but withdrew into the wilderness again; he tamed wild animals, mortified his flesh and diverted a flood that threatened to destroy crops. He was visited by the great abbot Luke of Armentum, whom he cured of stomach complaints after he had fed him wild mushrooms. He attracted eremitical followers; restored a ruined church which he then refounded as a *coenobium*; performed miracles and healings; and spared Bari from a violent storm.[33] Back in Calabria, he was captured in a raid from Sicily. The Muslims – who are interchangeably referred to as *barbarians*, *Agarenes* and *Saracens* – were initially interested in the material wealth of the monastery before realising that Vitalis had no livestock, no barn full of crops, vineyards or moveable treasures. They tried instead to kill Vitalis, but the 'barbarian' who laid hands on him was struck by a lightning bolt and fell on his face. The other raiders saw a column of fire in front of Vitalis stretching into the heavens, and while they were in this terrified state Vitalis took the opportunity to deliver a short homily:

'Cease from shedding the blood of Christians, and stop wanting to capture their homes; almighty God will not permit you to do this … he wants you, like wise and well-taught men, to leave behind these bad ways, to convert and live according to his holy precepts; he does not will the death of the sinner, but that he should convert and live in knowledge of him and in penance. For it was for this that the Son of God came down from heaven to earth; and although he was truly God, through his immense goodness he became truly man. You, however, are ignorant of all contrition, and you do not want to know that holy and life-giving destiny. For he will come again from heaven, to where he ascended, and destroy all pride, and all those who blaspheme his name.'[34]

Vitalis continued by drawing parallels between the Saracens and the Egyptians of the Old Testament who were drowned in the Red Sea, warning that they will

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[33] Ibid., I–IV, AASS Mar II, cols. 26–32.

[34] *Vita S. Vitalis*, III, 14, AASS Mar II, col. 30: 'Cessate vlterius ab effusione sanguinis Christianorum, & nolite eorum habitacula captiuare: nam Deus omnipotens non vobis permittet hoc facere, vt illos videlicet destruatis, sed vult, vt, sicut bene eruditi & docti, derelinquant vias suas malas, & conuertantur & viuant in sanctis præceptis eius; non enim vult mortem peccatoris, sed vt conuertatur & viuat in ipso secundum cognitionem & pœnitentiam. Nam propter hoc Dei Filius inclinauit cælos & descendit in terram, atque; cum esset verus Deus, per immensam bonitatem suæ magnitudinis verus homo factus est: quæ quidem vos omnia penitus ignoratis, nolentes scire sacram & salutiferam illius præordinationem. Venturus est enim e cælo, quo ascendit, ad destruendam omnem superbiam, & elatos & blasphemantes sanctum nomen eius. Hic profecto deponet in breui, & ad nihilum valde rediget vestræ gentis elationem & audaciam: demerget vos ipsos infelices & miseros in abyssum, cum brachio quoque virtutis suæ, vtpote sanctus & fortis Dominus & excelsus & insuperabilis, vos dispergere non cessabit. Sicut olim vestrum Principem cum suo equitatu in mari rubro demersit, Tyrannum scilicet illum & duri cordis Pharaonem: similiter ira Dei subito veniet super vos, nisi recesseritis a populo Christiano.'

similarly suffer the anger of God, unless they desist from persecuting the Christian people.

In all three texts, then, there is an encounter with Muslims that features some explanation of or reference to the central tenets of Christian teaching. In all three, Muslims are a people associated with violence, robbery and murder of Christians; although in the *Life* of Elias of Enna, the encounter in which Christianity is explained turns out despite Elias's foreboding to be entirely peaceful; indeed the exchange with them is at the invitation of the Muslims. In two of the texts, a violent attempt is made by the Muslims against a saint, in one case living, in another dead; in both, the violence is overcome by miraculous power. In two of the texts, Elias of Enna and Vitalis of Castronuovo, the encounter becomes an occasion of conversion or attempted conversion. In all three, the encounter is a constituent element, even if a relatively minor one, in the construction of sanctity (in the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte, not so much his own but that of the dead Arsenius).

Attention has already been drawn to some elements in the *Lives* that indicate the influence of Palestinian, to some extent Syrian, monastic traditions. The polemical nature of the encounters with Muslims also suggests this milieu. It may be significant, for example, that Elias of Enna's conversion of the Muslims occurs not in his homeland but in the Holy Land, a location that may consciously recall the corpus of about sixty Christian Arabic hagiographical and polemic texts from the mid-ninth to the end of the tenth centuries studied by Sidney Griffith. The exchange between Elias and the Muslims has something in common with an episode retold in the *Life* of Theodore of Edessa, featuring a set-piece debate about the merits of Christianity over Islam. The text survives in both a Greek and Arabic version, and probably dates from the early tenth century.[35] We might also be reminded of the ninth-century *Passio* of the monk of St Sabas, George, and the martyrs of Cordoba, in which George tells the qadi before whom he is arraigned:

'Do you think I could believe anything good of your master, the disciple of Satan? I believe that he who had appeared to him in the guise of an angel had in reality been a demon. He is in fact a perfidious and worthless believer in the Devil, a minister of Antichrist and a labyrinth of all the vices.'[36]

The striking difference between these examples and the *Life* of Elias lies in the irenic quality of the Italo-Greek *Life* in contrast with the *Life* of Theodore, in

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[35] Sidney H. Griffith, 'The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*: History, Hagiography and Religious Apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in Early Abbasid Times', in *The Sabaite Heritage*, ed. Patrich, 147–70

[36] Cited from the *Memoriale sanctorum* by Milka Levy-Rubin and Benjamin Z. Kedar, 'A Spanish Source on the Mid-Ninth Century Mar Saba and a Neglected Sabaite Martyr', in *The Sabaite Heritage*, ed. Patrich, 63–72, at 69; see also R. J. Pedrajas, 'San Eulogio de Córdoba, autor de la Pasión Francesca de los mártires mozárabes cordobeses Jotge, Aurelio y Natalia', *Anthologica Annua*, 17 (1970), 465–583; Edward P. Colbert, *The Martyrs of Cordoba (850–859): A Study of the Sources* (Washington, DC, 1962); Jessica A. Coope, *The Martyrs of Cordoba* (Lincoln, NE, 1995).

which the saint is martyred when he seems to be prevailing in debate against his Muslim captors – and indeed with the *Passio* of George and the Martyrs of Cordoba. The argument deployed by Elias, particularly the accusation that Islamic teaching is basically Arianism, and that its practices are judaising, seems to be taken by the author of the *Life* from the eighth-century author John of Damascus – again, an indication of an intellectual and textual milieu with connections to Constantinople and to the Holy Land, since John had been a monk in the desert monastery of St Sabas.[37]

The harmonious exchange in the encounter with Muslims in the *Life* of Elias of Enna should not mislead us, however. In two of the three Italo-Greek hagiographies – the *Life* of Elias of Enna and the *Life* of Vitalis – the terms used for Muslims are 'barbarians', Agarenes, Ishmaelites or Saracens. This is fairly standard terminology, shared by Greek monastic texts from the eastern Mediterranean and from Constantinople dealing with Arab incursions that seek to draw attention to violence and conquest. We find similar language in, for example, the ninth-century *Passion of the Twenty Martyrs of St Sabas*, the *Chronographia* of Theophanes (*c.* 814) and the *Lives* of Theodora of Thesssaloniki, Athanasia of Aegina and Theoktiste of Lesbos, all of which describe Christians suffering at the hands of Arab raiders.[38] Just to pick two eleventh-century Greek monastic texts, the *Life* of Lazaros of Mount Galesion and the *Testament* of the monastic founder Christodoulos, again we find Muslim conquerors described in the same terms, even though the contexts are different – the passage in the *Life* of Lazaros is set in the first decade of the eleventh century, when Lazaros fled the Holy Land from the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim's persecution of Christians, whereas Christodoulos was recounting his flight from the Holy Land in the face of the Seljuq invasion.[39] Just as two of the Italo-Greek hagiographies, the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte and the *Life* of Vitalis, emphasise the preoccupation of the Aghlabid raiders from Sicily with sacrilegious robbery, so the *Life* of Lazaros characterises the Fatimids carrying out the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1009 as 'sacrilegious and thieving'.[40]

The *Testament* of Christodoulos, an account of how the founder came to establish his monastery on Patmos, tells briefly but in vivid tones of his flight from Jerusalem. For him, the Seljuqs were 'the Saracen swarm … a barbarian phalanx … spreading like a monstrous hailstorm, with a baneful rattling and gibbering, destroying and annihilating the whole Christian society'.[41]

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[37] Levy-Rubin and Kedar, 'A Spanish Source', 69 and n. 36; John of Damascus, *Liber de haeresibus*, Patrologia Graeca 94, col. 764, trans. D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam* (Leiden, 1972), 133.

[38] *Passio SS XX martyrum S.Sabae*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameos, *Pravoslavnii Palestinski Sbornik*, 57 (1907), 1–41 [Greek text], AASS Mar III, cols. 165–79 [Latin translation]; *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, (2 vols., Hildesheim, 1963), I, 484, 499; *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, ed. and trans. C. Mango and R. Scott (Oxford, 1997), 665, 693, and see above, note 18.

[39] *The Life of Lazarus of Mt Galesion, an Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint*, Byzantine Saints' *Lives* in Translation 3, ed. and trans. Richard P. Greenfield (Washington, DC, 2000), 101–3; *Rule, Testament and Codicil of Christodoulos*, trans. Patricia Karlin-Hayter, in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. John P. Thomas and Angela Hero (5 vols., Washington, DC, 2000), IV, 564–606.

[40] *Life of Lazarus*, 102.

[41] *Testament of Christodoulos*, 579.

The Italo-Greek texts all merit a more systematic comparison of their polemical content with earlier or contemporary Byzantine polemics against Islam, but the passage in which Vitalis compares the Muslims with the Egyptians of the Old Testament is particularly striking. As Katherine Allen Smith has recently shown, Latin crusade narratives and papal letters from the twelfth century exploit such parallels, and, in Latin monastic discourse more generally, 'Egypt' is found as a term of opprobrium for sinfulness.[42] But the sentiment expressed in the *Life* of Vitalis that God will not allow the Muslim raiders to prevail against Christians is also found in a very similar context in an eleventh-century Latin text from Italy. In the *Dialogi* of Desiderius of Monte Cassino, a Muslim raiding fleet that had burned Monte Cassino in 846 was destroyed by the miraculous appearance of SS Benedict and Peter, with an accompanying speech by St Peter to the effect that the Agarenes, who are described as *heretici atque Iudei* (heretics and Jews), are God's instrument to inflict punishment on Christians but not to defeat them utterly.[43] The labelling of the Muslim raiders as heretics and Jews is, to my mind, particularly striking, since it echoes the identification of Muslims with Jews made by Elias of Enna, and of course shows the longevity of John of Damascus's profiling of Islam as a Christian heresy.

It will not have escaped attention that the citations from the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte and the *Life* of Vitalis are in Latin, not Greek. The question of the reception and readership of these Italo-Greek hagiographies brings the discussion back to wider questions about western monastic attitudes to Islam. Both the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte and the *Life* of Vitalis of Castronuovo were translated into Latin, the *Life* of Elias in *c.* 1080, the *Life* of Vitalis in 1194. Indeed, the Greek original of the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte no longer survives, so the Latin translation is the earliest text we have, although a subsequent Greek version was made from a retranslation of the Latin in the early fourteenth century.

What were the circumstances of these translations into Latin? The Latin version of the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte was made at the monastery of Sta Eufemia in Calabria. The manuscript containing the *vita* dates from the twelfth century, and contains hagiographical lives according to the calendar mid-April to mid-September. The presence of saints such as Audoenus (d.684), archbishop of Rouen, indicates a Norman influence on the calendar. But other *vitae* in the manuscript, including the *Life* of Elias, also show a southern Italian influence: *Translatio s. Bartholomaei de India in insulam Lypparim*, *Passio ss.mm. Senatoris, Viatoris, Cassiodori et Dominatae matris eorum* and of course *Vita e i Miracula di Sant'Elia lo Speleota*. The monastery of Sta Eufemia was founded in 1062 with an endowment from Robert Guiscard, on the site of the cave monastery founded by Elias, and its first abbot was Robert of Grandmesnil, formerly abbot of St Evroul, who had been exiled from Normandy after incurring

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the suspicion of William the Conqueror.[44] The endowment for the monastery seems to have been considerable. Like other Hauteville foundations, it was directly subject to the papacy. It was probably during Robert of Grandmesnil's abbacy that the translation of the *Life* of Elias was undertaken.

Not only was Sta Eufemia founded on the site of an older Greek house, but among its endowments was the still functioning cave monastery of Elias the Troglodyte. The translation may have been in part an attempt to appropriate the cult of Elias, perhaps to ensure the transfer of property, and this indeed sounds perfectly plausible as a reason.[45] The appropriation of the cave monastery might be seen as the sort of example that historians arguing a case for the enforced latinisation of the indigenous monastic landscape would usefully deploy, but this is not really a sustainable inference, given that what we seem to be witnessing is the transfer of a functioning Greek community to Latin possession. Moreover, Norman interest in the veneration of local saints was already well established by the 1080s. As Paul Oldfield has argued, promoting a local cult helped to reconcile the largely Greek urban community with the new Norman lords.[46]

The *Life* of Vitalis of Castronuovo was translated at the request of Robert, bishop of Tricarico (1187–94), and the translation is addressed to him. Tricarico, in the Basilicata, was a diocese with a strongly Greek cultural orbit. The cathedral chapter included Greek- as well as Latin-speakers – in fact the Epistle and Gospel was chanted in Greek by some canons as late as 1758. Liturgical rites were sometimes celebrated in Greek instead of Latin – there is evidence of payments being made for this to be done at funerals; and, as also happened in crusader states, auxiliary Greek-rite bishops were appointed to administer sacraments to Greek-speakers. In 1203, just a few years after the *Life* of Vitalis was translated, the cathedral cantor of Tricarica, the son of a Greek priest and someone who had received minor orders according to the Greek rite, was elected bishop of Anglona. The archbishop of the province wrote to Innocent III to ask if this was acceptable, and the pope ruled that it was, as long as it did not cause outrage to the chapter.[47]

These translations of Greek texts in the Norman period obviously raise wider questions about the religious politics of the Norman settlement in the *mezzogiorno*; questions over which there has of course been considerable scholarly debate and disagreement. To summarise the historiography very crudely, the traditional view was that the Normans effectively liquidated Greek monasteries, or denuded them of property which they gave to their own Latin foundations, and put an end to Greeks holding episcopal

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[44] Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, v, 16, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (6 vols., Oxford, 1969–80), III, 158–61; Graham Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy* (Cambridge, 2007), 85–7; Peters-Custot, *Les grecs d'Italie*, 271.

[45] Loud, *Latin Church in Norman Sicily*, 506.

[46] Paul Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy 1100–1200* (Cambridge, 2014), 51–106.

[47] *Die Register Innocenz' III*, Osterreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften VI, 1203/4, ed. O. Hageneder, John Moore and A. Sommerlechner (Vienna, 1995), 228–9, no. 139.

office.[48] With regard to bishoprics, this view has been rejected, particularly by Graham Loud and Vera von Falkenhausen, and more recently by Annick Peters-Custot.[49] It is now accepted that there were remarkably few forced latinisations of sees, and that in most cases Latins were appointed only after a see had become vacant; it was only when a Greek bishop refused to accept Roman authority, as was the case with Basil, the metropolitan of Reggio, that he was deprived. There are examples of pragmatism in appointments; for example, John de Niceforo, the first Latin bishop of Squillace (1096), was of mixed Greek and Latin origins, perhaps bilingual. The cathedral of Anglona – whose chapter elected the Greek cantor – was enlarged at the end of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century, perhaps because of the addition of the Greek chapter from Tursi. The sees of Crotone and Sta Severina had a Greek bishop until the end of the thirteenth century, Oppido Mamertina as late as 1400, and Gallipoli and Bova into the sixteenth century.[50] Annick Peters-Custot has recently cautioned against too positivist a view that sees no rupture at all in the 'politique religieuse' of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; nevertheless, there is ample reason to understand the translations of Italo-Greek hagiographies within a hybridising culture.

In emphasising the Norman pragmatic modus vivendi as the context of these acts of translation, however, we must be careful not to miss the significance of the context in which I have framed this discussion, the landscape of Muslim/Christian encounters. The significance of the texts in the form in which we have them is not only that Greek hagiographical texts were being translated into Latin, but about the content of the texts. Presumably they were read and used by their Latin communities in similar ways to Latin hagiographical texts; in other words, liturgically, and for didactic and instructive purposes. No Latin audience could miss the fact that part of the construction of sanctity in these texts is the polemical confrontation with Muslims in which the tenets of the faith are either presented, or demonstrated miraculously, or in the case of the *Life* of Vitalis, both. So what might the instances of Christian–Muslim interaction in these texts have told Latin audiences? As suggested at the start, the underlying message in respect of Christian–Muslim dynamics in the hagiographies is concerned with expounding the principles of Christian doctrine, particularly on the Trinity and the Resurrection. One might say, in fact, the message of those episodes at least is concerned with conversion. What it is *not* concerned with is holy war.

In the 1080s, when the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte was translated, a preoccupation with the tenets of the faith, even conversion, does not seem out of line

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[48] Louis-Robert Ménager, 'La "byzantinisation" religieuse de l'Italie méridionale et la politique monastique des Normands d'Italie (IXe – XIIe s.) *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 53 (1958), 747–74; 54 (1959), 5–40, repr. in *Hommes et institutions de l'Italie normande* (1981).

[49] Graham Loud, 'Byzantine Italy and the Normans', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 13 (1988), 215–33, esp. 227–32; Vera von Falkenhausen, 'I monasteri greci dell'Italia meridionale e della Sicilia dopo l'avvenuto dei normanni: continuità e mutamenti', in *Il Passagio dal domino bizantino allo stato normanno nell'Italia meridionale* (Taranto, 1997), 197–229; Peters-Custot, *Les grecs*, 234, 271.

[50] Peters-Custot, *Les grecs*, 257–9.

with concerns in other Norman sources. An example from roughly the same period helps to make the point. In a well-known passage in Eadmer's *Life* of Anselm, the archbishop, in exile from England, was present at the siege of Capua in 1098. He encountered the Sicilian Muslims in the service of Count Roger, whom he so impressed by his conduct and his words that, according to Eadmer, they would have converted to Christianity if Roger himself had not forbidden this.[51] We are not obliged to believe that this was at all likely in order to appreciate the point that in a hagiographical text, more or less contemporary with the Italo-Greek texts under discussion, and written in a Norman orbit, Muslims are encountered as non-Christians ripe for conversion rather than as a legitimate enemy.

Some historians, of course, tend to view the Norman conquest of Sicily as part of a wider phenomenon of the aggressive 'defence of Christendom', or indeed as a precursor of the crusading phenomenon.[52] Doubtless there are plentiful examples of violence rather than evangelism offered to Muslims in Sicily. But this example seems closer to the dynamic of witness and conversion that we have seen in the Italo-Greek texts, or indeed in the Cluniac *Lives* of Abbot Maiolus, than to holy war. As I remarked at the beginning of this paper, when we look closely at holy war narratives – especially the first-crusade chronicles – we see very little interest in the conversion of Muslims. An exception is the episode of the betrayal of the walls of Antioch to the crusader Bohemond by the Turkish emir Pirus/Firuz. In the earliest crusade narrative, the anonymous *Gesta Francorum*, Pirus is prepared to do this in return for material riches and baptism.[53] In the version of the story by Raymond d'Aguilers, Firuz is a *Turcatus*, or Christian renegade – in other words, an Armenian Christian in Turkish service, or even a convert to Islam.[54] It is surely significant that the author of the *Gesta* was a south Italian follower of Bohemond; and therefore someone to whom the notion of alliances and agreements between Christians and Muslims was a defining feature of their interaction. As Joshua Birk has pointed out, by 1095 southern Italians were used to fighting alongside Muslims as well as against them because they had frequently made use of Muslim soldiers in their campaigns of conquest. Moreover, a parallel can be found between the Firuz episode in the siege of Antioch and the Norman siege of Castrogiovanni in Sicily in 1087.[55] The conversion story is also followed, and extended, in the slightly

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[51] *Eadmeri vita sancti Anselmi*, xxxiii, ed. and trans. R. W. Southern (1962), 111–12.

[52] Chevedden, 'A Crusade from the First', 190–210.

[53] *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, viii, ed. Rosalind Hill (1962), 44–7; see also Joshua Birk, 'The Betrayal of Antioch: Narratives of Conversion and Conquest during the First Crusade', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 41 (2011), 463–85.

[54] Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, 215 vols., clv, 608.

[55] Joshua Birk, 'Imagining the Enemy: Southern Italian Perceptions of Islam at the Time of the First Crusade', in *Just Wars, Holy Wars and Jihads: Christian, Jewish and Muslims Encounters and Exchanges*, ed. Sobhail H. Hashmi (Oxford, 2012), 91–106, at 101, citing Geoffrey Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 2nd edn, v, pt 1, ed. Ernesto Pontieri (Bologna, 1927–8), 87–8.

later account of the first crusade by Robert the Monk, written in *c.* 1108. In this northern French version, Pirus asks Bohemond how it can be that, as he has heard the Christians say, the crusaders will be helped by an army of saints. How, specifically, can saints in heaven carry the material equipment of a warrior? Bohemond consults his chaplain and obtains the answer that saints carry weapons as a sign of divine sanction for the coming battle. Pirus is sufficiently satisfied by this to convert, out of conviction that God's hand will be seen at work in a crusader victory; he subsequently becomes a model of faithfulness.[56] There are other examples of early crusaders bearing witness against Islamic belief, specifically in a context of martyrdom: for example the *Passio* of Thiemo, archbishop of Salzburg, who when captured by Turks on the crusade of 1101 smashed a golden statue that he saw them worshipping and that he claimed held a demon.[57]

These episodes are exceptional and anomalous in early crusade narratives. When we look forward in time to the context in which the *Life* of Vitalis was translated from Greek into Latin, in the episcopate of Robert of Tricarico, witness and conversion seems even more exceptional. Robert became bishop in the year that Saladin conquered Jerusalem and the third crusade was launched, 1187. None of the crusading rhetoric of that period – chronicles, papal bulls, even treatises such as Peter of Blois's *De peregrinatione Ierusalem* – talks seriously about conversion as part of the framework of Christian responses to Islam.[58]

Yet the story may not be as simple as this. By way of conclusion, I suggest that if we fail to see an interest in witness and conversion in texts written around the time of the first and third crusades, it may be because we are not looking in the right places. What is most striking in the Christian–Muslim dynamic discussed in the Italo-Greek and Cluniac texts is the expression of fundamentals of doctrine: the Muslim scepticism about Christianity as expressed in the *Life* of Elias the Troglodyte and the *Life* of Maiolus, and Christian profession of faith in the *Life* of Elias of Enna and *Life* of Vitalis, and in Maiolus's resistance to his captors. These 'polemical debate' passages form a distinct aspect of some hagiographies of the late tenth and eleventh centuries, examples of which can be found in both Greek and Latin texts. But there is also an example to be found in a hagiographical text that circulated far more widely than either the Cluniac dossier on Maiolus or the Italo-Greek saints' lives, and that can be found in both Greek and Latin versions in the eleventh century, and subsequently in the vernacular as well – but which we might not immediately associate with Christian–Muslim polemic –

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[56] *The Historia Ihersolimitana of Robert the Monk*, v, ed. Damien Kempf and Marcus Bull (Woodbridge, 2013), 51–5.

[57] *Passio Thiemonis archiepiscopi*, xi, MGH (SS) 11, 51–62; John V. Tolan, 'Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade', in *Western Views of Islam and Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York, 1999), 97–117, at 97–8; Suzanne Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca, 2009), 245–7.

[58] See e.g. John D. Cotts, 'The Exegesis of Violence in the Crusade Rhetoric of Ralph Niger and Peter of Blois', in *Uses of the Bible in Crusader Sources*, ed. Elizabeth Lapina and Nicholas Morton (Leiden, 2017), 273–95.

namely the *Life* of St Katherine of Alexandria. The earliest known versions are Greek, but Latin versions, originating from the mid-eleventh century from Monte Cassino, became phenomenally popular in Normandy and England in the twelfth century, and later in German-speaking territories. There are numerous spin-off versions, and also prayers, hymns and a (now lost) liturgical drama from the early twelfth century.[59] Of course, the *Life* of St Katherine has, ostensibly, nothing to do with Christian–Muslim encounters, but the centre-piece of the text is the debate Katherine holds with pagan philosophers sent by the emperor to argue her out of her foolish adherence to Christian teaching. Katherine ends up, through flouting the philosophers' arguments, converting them to Christianity. The theology in her argument is similar to that in Elias of Enna's homily to the Muslims, namely that the gods worshipped by the pagans are not real, but human constructs. In essentials, the same dynamic is at work here as in the Italo-Greek hagiographies: the saint suffers violence or the threat of violence at the hands of a non-Christian power, and responds by verbal demonstration of the tenets of Christian doctrine, and an attempt to convert the wielders of violence.[60]

In thinking about Christian–Muslim interactions in the period before and during the crusades, we have at our disposal a wider set of writings than has usually been deployed. Like the *Lives* of Elias the Troglodyte and Vitalis of Castronuovo, the *Life* of St Katherine and other texts significant for the spread of her cult were circulating in monastic circles in the West at the same time as texts that presented Christian/non-Christian contacts in purely bellicose ways. Furthermore, these writings are distinctively monastic. They were produced in monasteries, and largely for monastic communities and their clients. While portraying Muslims as hostile to Christians, sacrilegious, even barbaric, they emphasise polemical dialogue and conversion as legitimate forms of resistance, rather than violence. The protagonists of these texts are unarmed, and prepared for martyrdom. If we consider what is happening in such texts from the point of view of the communities that produced and used them, we can see that confrontation with Muslims, with the demands such encounters make on the saint's fortitude, faith and resources of persuasion, is an inherent part of the construction of monastic sanctity.

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[59] The best guide is Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, 2007).

[60] For fuller discussion, see Andrew Jotischky, 'Saint's Cults and Devotions on the Norman Edge: The Case of St Katherine of Alexandria', in *The Normans and the 'Norman Edge': People, Polities and Identities on the Frontiers of Medieval Europe*, ed. Keith J. Stringer and Andrew Jotischky (2019), 191–218, esp. 212–18.