

A Failed Crusade? The Danish-Norwegian Crusade Account. *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (c. 1200)

Karen Skovgaard-Petersen

The Society for Danish Language and Literature, Copenhagen, Denmark

The fall of Jerusalem in 1187 and the dramatic events following it gave rise to a rich and varied literature in western Europe. One of them is the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, a fascinating but rather little-known Latin account of a Danish-Norwegian expedition to the Holy Land in 1191–92, led by five Danish magnates and one Norwegian.¹

This ambitious enterprise is not known from other sources. Indeed, the text itself was only preserved for posterity by a happy stroke of fortune. Around 1620 a medieval manuscript was found in Lübeck, which contained, as the primary text, the Jewish historian Josephus's *De bello Judaico* (1st cent. AD) followed by three shorter texts connected to Denmark and Norway, among them the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (in the following referred to as *Profectio*). Had not this

¹ The standard critical edition of the text is M. Cl. Gertz's edition in *Scriptores minores* II, 1922. Quotations from the text in this article are taken from my own new edition (under preparation).

manuscript appeared, neither the account nor the events themselves would have been known to us today.²

It appears to be the story of a crusade that failed. Towards the end of the narrative it turns out that the expedition arrived in Jerusalem only after ‘the pagans had struck a firm peace with the Christians’, i.e. the peace between the English King Richard Lionheart and the Muslim leader Saladin in September 1192. The Danish-Norwegian expedition came too late to fight, and instead they were given a guided tour to the holy sites.

Nevertheless, the text does not describe the expedition as a failure. Throughout it is hailed as a noble and divinely inspired enterprise. As we shall see, the central message seems to be that the goal *was* achieved, that this was indeed a successful endeavour, not compromised by its late arrival.³

In other words, it makes good sense to read the text as a justification, an apology, and the apologetic argument runs along two lines. Not only is the overall outcome presented as a success; the dispositions that appear to have caused the delay in the first phase of the voyage, are also emphatically defended.

This first phase of the voyage took place in Norway. The expedition, as we shall see, follows a surprising route, starting from northern Jutland in Denmark then via Kungälv (near modern Gothenburg) to Tønsberg on the Norwegian south coast and from there northbound to Bergen on the Norwegian west coast. This was certainly not the direct route to Palestine. It will be my main argument in this article that the description of the events in Norway offers a key to understanding, or rather getting closer to understanding, the purpose of the *Profectio*.

2 The manuscript is no longer extant but from a catalogue of Lübeck Stadtbibliothek drawn up by Johan Kirchmann in 1622 we learn that it was a parchment manuscript in folio and that it contained the following texts: Josephus's *De bello Judaico* (1st cent. AD), Theodericus Monachus's *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, and a life of St Geneviève by William of Ebelholt (c. 1122–1203). Apart from the *De bello Judaico* these texts belong to the late twelfth century, and it seems a fair assumption that the manuscript was produced in the first decades of the thirteenth century (see also below). The history of the manuscript and its rediscovery in the seventeenth century is the subject of Skovgaard-Petersen 2002.

3 This interpretation was first suggested by Norbert Backmund in his chapter on the *Profectio* in *Die mittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreiber des Prämonstratenserordens*, 1972: 244–251. It is further developed in Skovgaard-Petersen 2001.

The Tønsberg-Børglum connection

But first let me briefly sum up what we can reasonably assume about the writer himself and the date and place of composition. The identity of the author is unknown, but it is generally agreed, on account of the way he renders some Old Norse proverbs and place names, that he was of Norwegian origin.⁴ Moreover, he presents himself as a canon, and since he reveals that he has spent some time in Tønsberg as the expedition arrives there (Chapter 9), most scholars see it as highly probable that he had been a canon of the Premonstratensian order in this town – which he singles out for special mention in the same chapter. Let us listen to the canon's vivid description of Tønsberg:

I can paint a clearer description of this place's setting, inasmuch as I lived in the district for quite a long time and came to know the ways of its people no less than its various localities. The sea flows over a broad area into a wide fjord and along many expanses separates the mainland from the islands, one of which, Nøtterøy, stretches its length opposite the town and owing to its position provides it with a harbour; because Tønsberg is built on the sea-coast it supplies wharves for all those who approach it. There is an enormous wealth of sea-fish there, but a scarcity of fresh water. Well populated, especially in summer when hosts of ships bring visitors from all over the world, it contains respectable citizens of both sexes who are celebrated for their generous and bountiful charity; but when they meet to carouse together, bad drinking-habits and frequent intoxication promote disorder and incite these folk even to the point of bloodshed.

Hard by the town a mountain juts high into the sky and, surrounded by sheer precipices, resembles a stout fortress, granting access nowhere except along a single man-made path, which when blocked off allows no easy approach to an enemy. On the mountain peak lies a beautifully fashioned church dedicated to St Michael; with its appurtenances it supports the canons of the Premonstratensian order who dwell in that township. Below the mountain spreads a plain, whose fragrant flowers are a sheer delight, and which provides a dock suitable for fitting or overhauling vessels.

4 This argument was first brought forward by Kr. Kaalund in 1896.

Needless to say these famous men, whose exploits I am recording for history, lingered in this town, overhauling their ships and almost rebuilding them afresh, for a huge and exceedingly perilous voyage lay ahead of them. (Chapter 9).⁵

Note how, in the last lines, the peaceful rest in Tønsberg is contrasted with the dangers waiting ahead. Throughout, the gravity and importance of the project are stressed.

Even more obscure than the author himself is the *dominus K*, to whom the text is dedicated. All we learn of him in the dedicatory letter is that he has commissioned the canon to write the account.⁶ Interestingly, it appears from the following chapter, the prologue, that not only he, but also the leaders of the expedition themselves had asked the author to commemorate the expedition in writing – a request that fits well with the apologetic character of the text.⁷

The events took place ‘a few years ago’ (*ante aliquot annos*), the canon informs us in his dedicatory letter to K – that is, some years after 1191–92.

5 All translations from the *Profectio* are made by Peter Fisher, Cambridge. The Latin wording is: *Situm loci huius eo possum euidentiori stilo depingere, quod in eo longiori tempore conuersatus mores hominum non minus quam locorum didici differentiam. Latitudo maris amplum quandam sinum profundens multis tractibus insulas a corpore terre secernit, quarum una, nomine Nioterei, contra oppidum distenta porrigitur et positione sua portum preparat ciuitati, que maris in littore constructa pontes prebet adeuntibus. Piscium marinorum inibi multa copia et aque dulcis inopia. Populosa satis (in estate propter nauium multitudinem undique terrarum aduentantium), ciues honestos utriusque sexus liberalitate et elemosynarum largitate preclaros habet; sed uitiosa potatio et frequens ebrietas societatem conuictantium turbat et usque ad effusionem humani cruoris instigat.*

Mons quidam iuxta oppidum excreuit in altum, preruptis undique rupibus quasi castrum quoddam fortissimum, nusquam aditum pandens preter unam semitam humano ingenio fabricatam, que reclusa facillime hostes adire non patitur. In cuius cacumine pulchre constructa patet ecclesia beati Michaelis honore consecrata, que cum suis pertinentiis canonicos Premonstratensis ordinis in eadem uilla commorantes sustentat. Planicies quoque suffusa monti, floribus odoriferis gratissima, stationem idoneam nauibus preparandis seu reficiendis administrat.

In hac nempe ciuitate moram fecere uiri gloriosi quorum gesta mando memorie, naues suas reficientes et quasi iam ex nouo solidantes. Grandis enim et periculosa nimis restabat uia.

6 ‘In order to transmit their achievements in a record for posterity with the praise they deserve, despite my ignorance and inarticulacy, you were willing to call upon me ...’ (*Vt ergo eorum gesta memorie posterorum digna laude traderentur, mihi, quamquam inscio et elingui, precipiendi commendare uoluistis ...*, Epistola)

7 ‘At the request of those esteemed individuals, I have undertaken to trace their history in some sort of style ... the individuals I mean are those who left behind the sweet embraces of their wives ...’ (*Et rogatu illarum uenerabilium personarum qualicumque stilo exarandum suscepi ... que uidelicet persone, relictas dulcedine complexus coniugalis ...*, Prologus)

Bearing in mind again the element of justification, it seems reasonable to assume that the account was written not too long afterwards, probably in the late 1190s.⁸

The expedition was a Danish-Norwegian collaboration, launched on Danish initiative. The leaders of the expedition, on whose request the account was written according to the prologue, were all Danish. It is most likely, then, in spite of the author's Norwegian origin, that the account was written in Denmark. This makes Børglum in north-western Jutland a likely place of composition since Børglum was home to a Premonstratensian monastery which was the mother abbey of the abbey in Tønsberg.⁹ Closely connected to Tønsberg as it was, also geographically, Børglum must have been a milieu characterized by the combined Danish and Norwegian outlook that is found in the text.



Figure 1. Børglum kloster by J. F. Richardt, 1846. Photo: National Museum of Copenhagen.

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- 8 Another factor in favour of a date of composition in the late 1190s is the fact that three powerful men – the Danish King Knud VI, the Norwegian King Sverre, and Archbishop Absalon – are mentioned with no indication of their death. Absalon died in 1201 and Knud and Sverre in 1202.
- 9 This has been demonstrated by Johnsen 1976 and Nyberg 1993. Moreover, the uncle of one of the leaders of the expedition, a former Bishop Toke in Børglum, is referred to as master (*dominus*), which may indicate the author's Premonstratensian allegiance (Ch. 22, cf. Ch. 6).

Survey of contents

Before we focus on the Norwegian themes, let us briefly go through the narrative as a whole. It falls into three parts. In the first part we hear of the background and the preparations of the journey. Here the Christian and spiritual dimensions of the journey are strongly emphasized. As a result of man's general sinfulness, we learn, Jerusalem has now fallen into pagan hands. It is made clear from the very beginning that the Danish-Norwegian members of the expedition are followers of Christ. The travellers renounced their homes and families in order to follow the command of Jesus to his disciples; they are presented as a kind of new disciples. This is one of the recurrent *topoi* of twelfth-century crusading discourse.¹⁰

A letter from the Pope exhorting Christians to reconquer what has been lost, is rendered. By placing this papal admonition at the beginning of his account, the author marked the expedition as a crusade. The crusades were characterized by being launched by the popes and conducted under the spiritual leadership of the popes. The expedition that forms the subject of the *Profectio*, was, it is thus shown, organized in response to the papal call. The letter connects the notion of renunciation, of leaving everything behind in order to follow Christ, to the idea of dying for Christ who died for us. Christ has suffered injustice through the pagan pollution of the city. Now the crusaders must not be afraid to give their lives to help Him, who once died for man.¹¹

We hear of the grief that seizes the Danish court at the arrival of the papal delegates. The astonishment is turned into determination to fight after a long speech delivered by Esbern Snare (ca. 1127–1204, brother of Archbishop Absalon). Reminding his audience of the great deeds performed in war by their ancestors, Esbern points out that they now have

10 The text as a whole is characterized by deep familiarity with contemporary European crusading discourse. A seminal study on this topic is Rousset 1945. See Skovgaard-Petersen 2001 for further references.

11 The authenticity of the letter is disputed. It is not identical to the bull *Audita tremendi* in which Pope Gregory VIII launched the crusade in October 1187. It is, however, accepted as authentic in the second edition of Jaffé-Loewenfeld's *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum* II (1888) no. 16073. I am inclined to regard it as a composition on the part of the author of the *Profectio*, but it must be emphasized that its theological outlook resembles not only the *Audita tremendi* but also other papal crusading declarations from the 1180s and 1190s.

much nobler goals to fight for. The travellers should follow the example of saints and be prepared to give their life for Christ.

Fifteen magnates now begin to organize recruitment and prepare their ships, but due to the interference of the Devil, ten of them later back out. The five remaining men are named and hailed as men 'who had received this divinely inspired virtue in their hearts'. Interestingly, three of them belong to the Hvide family, the most powerful family in Denmark – an indication that this must have been a highly profiled enterprise.

This is, we learn, an enterprise of cosmic dimensions, a fight between God and the Devil. The five leaders are said to be travelling with Abraham from Ur to see the Promised Land that flows with milk and honey. They are thus associated with both Abraham and the Israelites after their flight from Egypt, and this is another standard crusading theme. The narrator rounds this chapter off with an allegory: the Promised Land that flows of milk and honey refers to the Virgin Mary, who brought forth Jesus Christ, both Man and God, as indicated by milk and honey, respectively.

In the second part the religious dimensions are less prominent. This is the 'Norwegian' part which tells of the early phases of the journey. First, they sail to Norway, more precisely Kungälv (situated, as it says, where the borders between Sweden, Norway, and Denmark meet) to pick up a group of around two hundred Norwegian men who join the expedition under the leadership of Ulv of Lauvnes (known from *Sverre's saga* as one of Sverre's trusted men). Sailing along the south coast of Norway they make a stop in Tønsberg, from where a delegation is sent to Oslo to assure the Norwegian King Sverre that they have no hostile intentions. It is here the author informs us of his own connection to Tønsberg. Making a break at the Seløy islands (off the south-western coast of Norway) they decide, on Ulv's advice, to go northwards to the city of Bergen before heading for the Holy Land. In Bergen some of the Danes cause a major riot, whereupon all the Danes withdraw to a harbour close by.

In the next chapters Sverre, the Norwegian king, plays an important part. Arriving in Bergen, he spies on the Danish ships, protected by the dark. To the insolent shouting of the watchmen on the Danish ships, who do not realize his identity, he reacts with royal dignity. Then he consents to forgive one of the Danish leaders, the otherwise unknown Sven

Torkilssøn, who has recently joined a conspiracy against him and now fears meeting him face to face. Ulv now persuades his comrades to wait for him since he has to finish some business before he can leave. Most of the Danes, however, are too impatient and start out, while Sven and his men wait for Ulv.

The last part is about the voyage from Norway to the Holy Land and the journey home again. Attention is focused on the first phase, the crossing of the North Sea where the men are met by a violent storm. Here the crusading themes and *topoi* which figure so prominently in the first part, return. The narrator concentrates on Sven Torkilssøn's ship, which is destroyed. Those who die are hailed as martyrs while the miraculous survival of the rest of Sven's men is seen as a parallel to the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea. The other ships are unharmed, but some of the men on board lose all their belongings. Their comrades share their things with them, an act praised by the narrator as a renewal of the primitive Church.

Cast ashore on the Frisian coast they continue to Venice by land, from where they sail to the Holy Land, again suffering terrible hardships. Here they learn that peace has been agreed between Christians and pagans, and, having paid a visit to the sacred places, they return home, some via Rome, others via Constantinople. In Constantinople they witness a miracle. An image of the Virgin Mary (called *Eudoxa* or *Odigitria*), which is carried every day from one part of the city to another, on Tuesdays carries itself by angelic force, in front of a numerous crowd. From Constantinople they travel home through Hungary.

Followers of Christ

There is a remarkable imbalance between the detailed description of the preparations and the first phases of the journey in Norway and in the North Sea on the one hand – and on the other, the very cursory account of the experiences of the travellers in the Holy Land itself. Or to put it in thematic terms, the presentation of the expedition as a grand enterprise, a fight between God and the Devil, seems incongruent with the rather uneventful outcome, that they set out to liberate Jerusalem and end up on a guided tour to the holy sites, under pagan surveillance.

But these are only apparent paradoxes. While not taking part in the actual fight for Jerusalem, the expedition is faced with opposition on a similar scale, not from a pagan army but from Nature itself. The storm in the North Sea and the shipwreck they suffer, forms the dramatic culmination of the narrative. In their final hour the men who suffered shipwreck reminded each other that this expedition was divinely inspired and that they should not be afraid to die for Christ. And in the moment of death, we learn, they obtained remission of all their sins. They died as martyrs and were rewarded with eternal life.

This was an integral part of the theology of the crusades as it had developed in the course of the twelfth century.¹² Martyrdom may be seen as the ultimate fulfilment of the precept to leave behind everything and follow Christ, and to die for him who had died for them. Indeed, our travellers not only follow him, they also imitate him in their death, dying, as it is emphasized, on the same day in the same hour as he did.

In the *Profectio*, men did not die in battle, but some of them lost their lives on their way to the Holy Land. They too risked their lives to follow Christ. The purpose was to reach the Promised Land in the spiritual sense of following Christ and leaving everything else behind. This has been strongly emphasized in the first sections of the text. The point is that they fulfilled this purpose. And even those who did not die, are likened to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and to members of the primitive Church. They thus retain their exalted status. The text tells us that the enterprise was a success after all. This may also lie behind the final description of the miracle of the Virgin Mary the men witnessed in Constantinople. At an earlier point in the text the reader has learned that the goal of the expedition, the land that flows with milk and honey, is an allegorical expression of the virgin mother that brings forth God and man. Witnessing the miracle of the Virgin Mary may be yet another statement to the effect that they did reach their goal, the Promised Land, not only in its geographical sense, but also in the allegorical meaning of the Virgin Mary.

It is a reasonable assumption that after their return to Denmark the travellers were met with criticism. The whole project must have been an

12 Riley-Smith 1993: 151; Rousset 1945: 81–83; Skovgaard-Petersen 2001: 56ff.

expensive and prestigious affair – and they arrived too late to fight. By describing the journey in the literary crusading tradition, emphasizing that anyone who died on the crusade would receive the privilege of martyrdom, our canon makes it clear that they did not die in vain, that the project was not a failure. This must be regarded as the central message of the text.

The Norwegian intermezzo – a key to the interpretation

But can we get any closer in our attempt to understand the interests behind this text? The author indicates that some of the magnates who took part in the journey had asked him to preserve the memory of the great enterprise in writing. Among the five magnates, we follow one of them much closer than the others, namely Sven Torkilssøn. It is a very good guess that Sven Torkilssøn was among the commissioners, perhaps the only one (in addition to the dedicatee, K). It is the events onboard *his* ship that we hear about during the storm in the North Sea. Moreover, he plays a key role in the Norwegian section where we learn about his reconciliation with King Sverre after having taken part in a rebellion against the Norwegian king. Let us take a closer look at this Norwegian, second part of the text.

Having left Tønsberg the expedition reaches the islands of Seløyerne, and here they discuss their route. Some of the men want to take advantage of the mild wind to embark on the journey southwards immediately, but the Norwegian leader of the group of 200 Norwegians, Ulv of Lauvnes, is in favour of going northwards to Bergen first. He argues that the expedition would benefit from receiving the wise King Sverre's advice, and more men would join them there; to this he adds the personal argument that he does not want to look like a fugitive on the run from Sverre. Ulv's advice is followed without further discussion.

After their stay in Bergen, the contrast between the impatient Danes and the sensible Ulv is further illustrated when Ulv tries to persuade his comrades to wait for him, since he has to finish some business before setting off. Sven is the only one of the Danish leaders who stays with Ulf.

The other Danes are seized by an ardent desire to reach the Holy Land and in spite of cautious warnings from the more sensible among them, they now embark on the journey southwards. Their rashness is emphatically criticized by the narrator. Sven, however, stays behind in order to wait for Ulv. When Ulv finally arrives, Sven also sets out immediately in order to find the others. Ulv – still waiting a little – now sets off and, following a better course, he reaches the coast he was heading for.

Against the rashness of the Danes stands Ulv's sensible patience. The text leaves no doubt that if the Danes had cared to wait for Ulv and had respected his wiser judgement, they would not have been caught by the storm. His own destiny is described in vague but panegyric terms. We are told that he reached the coast he was heading for, by which is probably simply meant the Frisian coast:

But Ulv, though he did not immediately leave his mooring in pursuit of them, afterwards hurried to join their fleet, being a man with expert knowledge of wind and waves; nevertheless by following a straighter course he effected a short-cut, so that he did not overtake those he knew were wandering off on a roundabout route. By the same wind which carried the others, he was conveyed to the coast he was aiming for. When God's grace works in conjunction with them, observe how much even human beings can achieve with an active intelligence! (Chapter 18).¹³

Even though we learn nothing concrete about Ulv's fate, we are assured of his ability and his being under God's protection. Perhaps this is even meant to imply that he reached the Holy Land.

However that may be, we are to understand that the Danes might have reached the Holy Land at an *earlier* time if they had waited for Ulv. And this, it seems, is the point. The whole Norwegian intermezzo, the middle third of the text, may be read as an explanation, a defence, of the protraction that the expedition experienced in Norway. The theme first appears

13 *Supramemoratus autem Vlfus, licet non subita insectatione se moueret a loco, ad eorum tamen comitatum, utpote uir gnarus maris et uentorum, accelerauit; sed rectiori cursu compendium capiebat et illos non est consequutus quos nouerat per dispendium euagari. Qui eodem uento, quo hi ducebantur, ad optatum littus eductus est. Ecce quantum, cooperante Dei gratia, ualet etiam humane sagacitatis industria!*

in the discussion on the islands of Seløyerne where Ulv's arguments in favour of going to Bergen are accepted without criticism on the part of the narrator; nor are any objections put in the mouth of the other travellers. In Bergen they have to wait first for Sverre and then for Ulv. No explanation is given but it is made clear that the Danes were too impatient.

It seems a reasonable assumption, as mentioned, that the Danish leaders upon their return from Jerusalem, were met with reproaches because they arrived too late to fight. In particular, the long stay in Norway may well have been questioned. The text does not deny that they spent a long time in Norway. But it suggests that the Danes could have avoided their shipwreck if they had waited for Ulv – in other words that they might have reached the Holy Land in time to fight even when departing as late as they did from Bergen. Sven Torkilssøn is cleared of this blame since he did wait. This, in combination with the fact that he is followed much more closely in the narrative than the others, to my mind suggests that he was involved in the production of the *Profectio*.

The role of Sverre

But there is more to notice in the Norwegian section – namely, the emphatically positive picture of the Norwegian King Sverre as a just, mild, and forgiving monarch. A central scene is the meeting between King Sverre and Sven Torkilssøn in Bergen. We learn that Sven is afraid to meet Sverre since he had recently supported a rebellion against Sverre (which must be the Varbelg (Old Norse *várbelgir*) rebellion, known from *Sverris saga*, in 1190). However, Sverre forgives him with majestic dignity, his speech being related directly. He praises the entire project and expresses his understanding of its divine significance, even advising them to go the Orkney islands and wait until the next spring.

This portrait of Sverre must have been highly controversial in leading Danish circles. In Saxo's History of Denmark, written during the very same years around 1200, Sverre is heavily criticized.¹⁴ Saxo's views may be taken as representative of governing circles in Denmark, writing as he did

¹⁴ Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 14, 53.

under the supervision of Archbishop Absalon. The letters of William of Ebelholt (ca. 1125–1203), French-born abbot in Denmark with close connection to Absalon, attest to his strong support of the Norwegian bishops against Sverre's rule.¹⁵ This is yet another enigma of this text. As we have seen, three of the leaders of the expedition – not Sven Torkilsson – belonged to Absalon's family, the Hvide family. We can speculate that they may have opposed the detour to Bergen. But the focus in the text is on Sverre as a most respectable ally who supported the noble undertaking and whose loyal man Ulv was essential for its success.

Again, this reads like a justification. While the expedition itself, as it is described in the *Profectio*, was conceived among leading Danish men, its execution, with the close connection to the controversial Norwegian king, may have been looked upon with some scepticism in the circle around the Danish king and his archbishop. It seems at least possible that this powerful group formed part of the intended readership. The oldest textual history of the *Profectio* points in the same direction. In the only medieval manuscript known to have contained the text – the one discovered in Lübeck in 1620, which is now lost – were also found three shorter texts (in addition to the main text, Josephus' *De bello Judaico*). Apart from the *Profectio*, these were Theodericus's History of Norway (*Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* written ca. 1180), and an otherwise unknown life of St Geneviève written by William of Ebelholt (*Vita B. Genouefæ Virginis*).¹⁶ This may be taken to suggest that the manuscript was produced in the milieu of William of Ebelholt, perhaps in the early thirteenth century, and hence seen as a sign of interest in the *Profectio* in this same milieu.

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Many enigmas surround the *Profectio*, and much is left to speculation. The most likely scenario is, in my opinion, that the canon wrote the

¹⁵ See Johnsen 1976. While rightly emphasizing the positive picture of Sverre in the *Profectio*, Johnsen goes too far when he suggests that the text was the product of Sverre's chancellery aimed in particular at the Danish court.

¹⁶ This appears in the catalogue of Lübeck library from 1622, see Skovgaard-Petersen 2002.

account at the request of Sven Torkilssøn – and the unidentified dedicatee K – and that his task was to demonstrate that the expedition was not a failure, that it did indeed reach its goal, the Promised Land, both in a geographical and in a spiritual sense.

Moreover, and this has been my focus here, the canon was to make clear that the Norwegian detour was not a mistake. It is clear from the text that Sverre regarded the expedition with some suspicion, perhaps because Sven, who had recently supported a rebellion against him, was part of it. This may have been the reason that they went to Bergen. But the text emphasizes that the Danes nevertheless might have made it, that they might have avoided the storm – and by implication, arrived in the Holy Land before the peace in September 1192 – if they had not been so impatient.

This short text lets us trace the contours of close Danish-Norwegian contacts centred around Børglum-Tønsberg. The author himself, probably a Norwegian Premonstratensian canon living in Børglum, seems to personify the Danish-Norwegian relations to which the expedition itself is a testimony. Finally, it also deserves to be emphasized that his Latin prose, full of contemporary crusading rhetoric as it is, bears witness to an international literary and theological horizon.

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