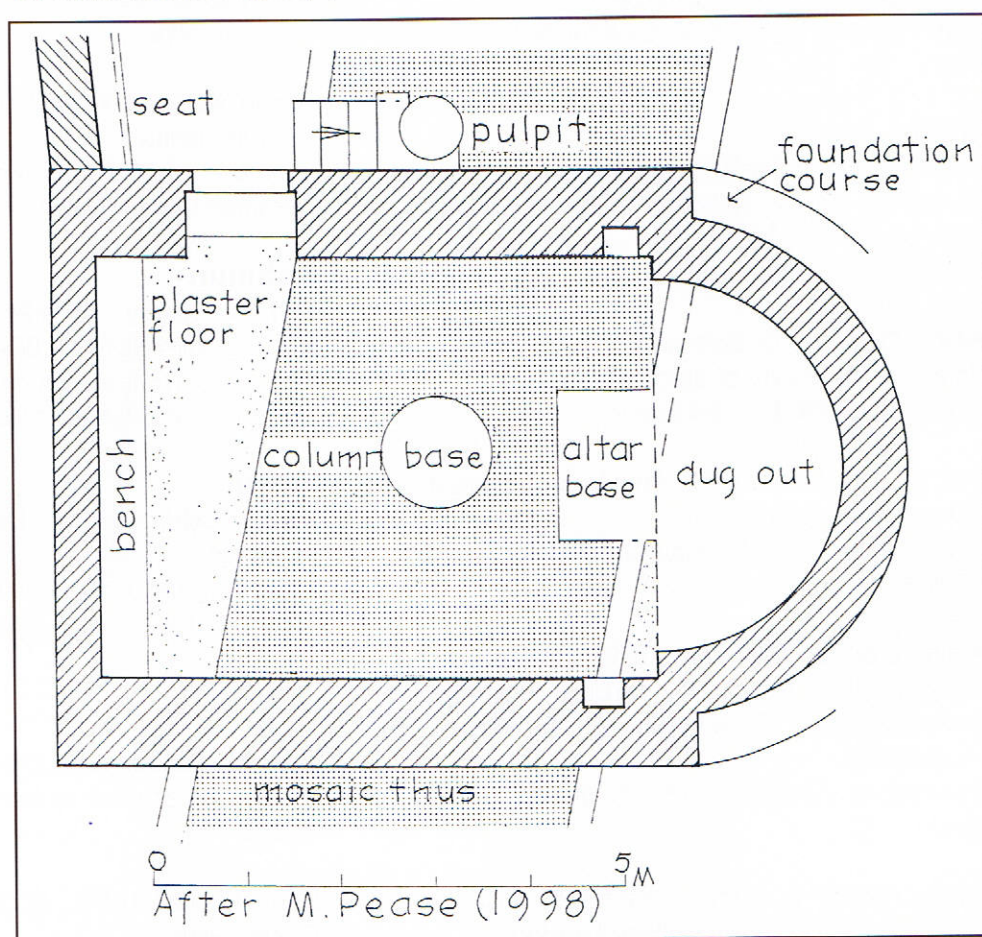




## A CRUSADER CHAPEL IN THE HIPPODROME OF TYRE

DENYS PRINGLE

During the excavation of the hippodrome of Tyre in the 1960s, the remains of a small mediaeval chapel came to light. This had been built over the *spina* and enclosed the base of one of its columns. Although the excavator considered the building to be Byzantine in date <sup>1</sup>, it may be identified more convincingly as the chapel of the Saviour, that was built by the Crusaders soon after the city fell to them in 1124 to commemorate a stone on which Jesus was supposed to have sat <sup>2</sup>.



1 Tyre Crusader chapel of the Saviour (drawn by Peter E. Leach, after survey by Matthew Pease).

According to the Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis, after capturing the city the Franks appointed a certain Englishman as bishop "and constructed a church in honour of the Holy Saviour outside the town" <sup>3</sup>. In fact, it was not until 1128 that William, a former prior of the Holy Sepulchre, was appointed as archbishop. Construction of the chapel of the Saviour, however, seems to have started by the 1130s, since an anonymous pilgrim text of 1131-43 records:

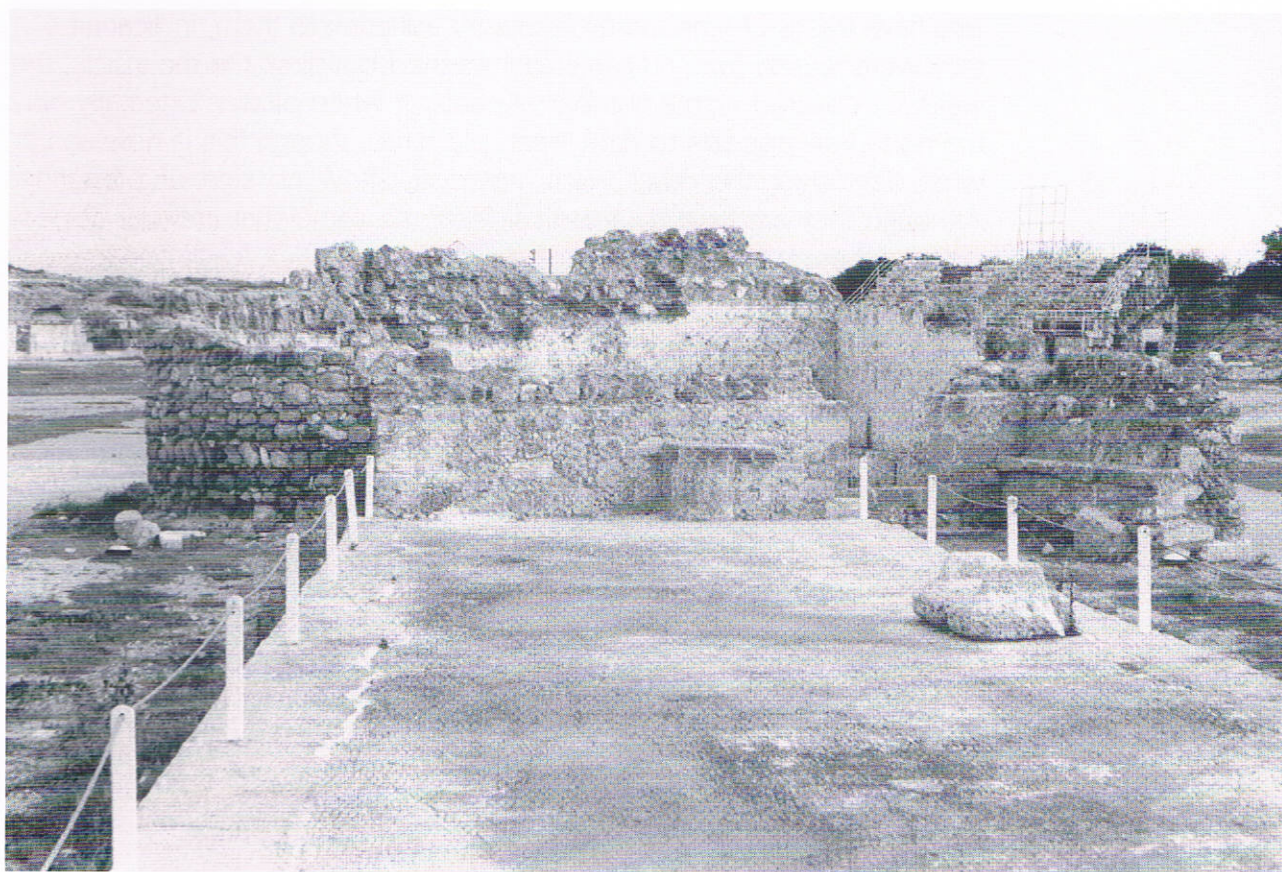
Before Tyre is that stone on which they say that Jesus sat. It remained unharmed from His time until the expulsion of the gentiles [i.e. Muslims] from the city; but afterwards, it was damaged by the Franks and also by the Venetians. Over its remains, on its own site, a certain church in honour of the Saviour has been begun <sup>4</sup>.



The phrase 'has been begun' (*incoata est*) implies that when this text was written, the church had not yet been finished. However, it seems to have been completed quite quickly, for the version of the same text included by Rorgo Fretellus of Nazareth in his description of the Holy Places in 1137 states:

Over the remains of the stone a certain little church (*ecclesiola*) has been established in honour of the Saviour <sup>5</sup>.

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2 Tyre, Crusader chapel of the Saviour, from the north (photo DP, 1998).

The same wording is also used in later redactions of this text, though John of Würzburg (c.1165) uses the phrase 'has been built (*constructa est*)' <sup>6</sup>. The Venetians, it seems, had carried off all or part of the stone to Venice, where it was later seen in St Mark's Cathedral <sup>7</sup>. The stone in question was evidently the base of the Roman column, some 1.15 m in diameter, which occupied a central position immediately in front of the chapel's altar. It has now been reduced to the same level as the pavement, quite possibly as a result of mediaeval visitors chipping away pieces to take away as souvenirs.

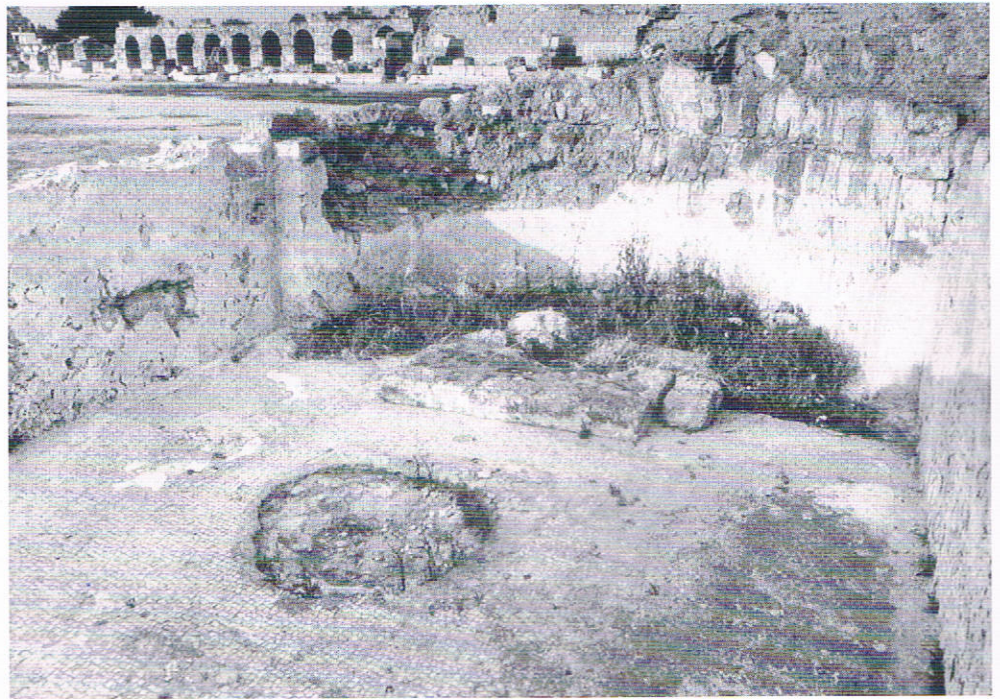
The chapel itself is a single-celled structure. The nave measures 5.92 m by 4.55 m internally with a rounded apse 2 m deep on the east. The north and south walls are around 1 m thick and the apse wall 0.75 m, though set on a wider foundation course. The west wall is 0.5 m thick with a low bench 0.48 m wide on the inside. A single doorway, 0.98 m wide and rebated for a door opening inwards, is set towards the west end of the north wall. The walls of the chapel survive internally to 1.37 m in height on the north side and 2.22 m on the west and south side. The apse survives to a height of 1.88 m corresponding to the level of a crude plaster cornice from which its semi-dome sprang. Judging by the wall-thickness, the nave would pro-



bably have been barrel-vaulted. Although there is no surviving evidence for windows, the interior would most likely have been lit by openings in the west gable and possibly in the vault itself.

The walls of the chapel are built with two facings of roughly squared blocks laid in rough courses, varying from 28 to 40 cm in height. The fill was laid in courses corresponding to the facing stones, and like them was set in a mortar consisting of earth with lime. Many of the stones also have traces of lime mortar or plaster adhering to them, indicating that they were reused from an earlier demolished building. On the inside, the walls are covered with a number of coats of white plaster. Externally only the north wall appears to have been plastered, though this is now somewhat degraded; the other walls, however, show no sign of plastering. Although they are built to a vertical face, the somewhat irregular appearance of these walls, with stones laid at different angles, leads one to wonder whether the building may not have been partly below the level of the surrounding sand when it was built, with all but the north wall hidden to view. This might also explain the purpose of the wall which runs off in a north-north-easterly direction (for some 2.5 m as it now survives) from the north-west corner of the chapel; this is also plastered only on its east face. Alternatively it may simply be that the external walls that have retained their

3 Tyre, Crusader chapel of the Saviour: interior, looking east, showing the base of the altar and of the Roman column associated with Jesus (photo DP, 1998).



plaster were simply those surrounding the court in front of the entrance to the chapel, or those less exposed to the prevailing wind and wind-blown sand.

The floor of the nave is largely formed by a mosaic of plain white *tesserae*, which represents the original paving of the hippodrome's *spina*. To the west, where the nave extends beyond the *spina*, the stone edging of the mosaic has been removed and the floor continued up to the walls of the chapel in white plaster containing differently-coloured gravel to produce a terrazzo effect. A similar area of plaster existed in the south-eastern corner



of the nave. The apse was raised one step above the pavement level of the nave, but its floor was dug away by the excavators. The base for the altar, 1.62 m wide, stands 1 m forward from the chord of the apse and was flanked by rectangular aumbry niches in the nave walls.

5

Immediately outside and to the east of the door, four stone steps lead up to the top of a section of column-drum set in the ground. This has the appearance of a mounting block. A more likely use for it, however, would have been as an open-air pulpit from which a preacher could have addressed his group of pilgrims. This interpretation is given some support by the existence of a stone seat that runs along the wall that faces it from the west side of the chapel door.

That the chapel was indeed visited by pilgrims in the twelfth century is indicated by the large collection of *graffiti* incised into the plaster covering the inside face of its walls <sup>8</sup>. These include drawing of crosses, shields, ships and a number of monograms and names. The longer inscriptions include one that records: *hic fuit stephan(us) coch i(n) assis [ia]*

4 Tyre, Crusader chapel of the Saviour: example of Crusader graffiti on the west wall (photo DP, 1998).



*accone[nse]* (Stephen Coch was here in the siege of Acre). Although the word *assisa* or *assisia* more usually means 'assize', it seems more likely to refer here to the siege of Acre by the army of the Third Crusade, which lasted from August 1189 until July 1191 <sup>9</sup>. Tyre served during that time as the base from which the campaign against Acre was initially launched and as the main port through which the Crusaders' camp was supplied with men and materials.

Another text reads: *hic fuit her(ricu)s / de podio d[...].ferio* (Henry de Podio ... was here). A son of Henry de Podio (or Henry du Puy) named John is listed among the knights of Roard Lord of Haifa, in a charter concerning the granting of the unlocated village of *Digegie* to the Hospital of St John in 1201 <sup>10</sup>. It is uncertain whether he is the same person as John Dupuis,



Sergeant of the king of France, whose tombstone was built into the Hermann Stuck House in Haifa in the 1920s <sup>11</sup>. If the two Henries were the same, however, a late twelfth-century date for the scratching of the text would seem likely. Henry de Podio may also perhaps have been related to the parish priest Richius, who incised on the chapel wall: *h(ic) fuit r(i)ch(i)us d(e) Pod(i)o pleba(nus)*. In this case however, the reading of the family name is far from certain. Equally uncertain is the identity of William of Jerusalem, whose Squire, James or Jacob, wrote: *hic fuit jacob(us) sc(ut)ifer / Ih(eru)s(a)l(im)it(an)i Will(eli)mi...* One possibility is that he was the Marshal of Jerusalem who is mentioned between 1159 and 1179 <sup>12</sup>, though it is equally possible that he was a simple knight.

It is uncertain if the chapel was still standing in the thirteenth century. It is referred to by Oliver of Paderborn (1196-1227) <sup>13</sup> but he uses the same words as Rorgo Fretellus had used in 1137, suggesting that he may not have seen it for himself. Other pilgrims, however, mention a stone but no church and appear to be referring to different sites altogether. The Greek John Phocas wrote in 1185:

Outside the city, at a distance of about two bowshots, is a very great stone, upon which, according to tradition, Christ sat when He sent the holy Apostles Peter and John into the city to buy bread: they went away, brought it, and set out together with the Saviour to the neighbouring fountain, distant about one mile, where the Saviour sat down, and after having eaten with the Apostles, and drunk of the water, He blessed the fountain <sup>14</sup>.

Phocas then describes in some detail the massive octagonal water-tower which served as distribution point for the aqueducts that irrigated the region around Tyre <sup>15</sup>. This was evidently the *fontaine de Notre Seigneur*, which was still feeding the city aqueduct in 1269 <sup>16</sup>. The Dominican friar Burchard of Mount Sion (1283) also appears to refer to the site visited by John Phocas, and like him he mentions no church:

Before the east gate [of Tyre] at a distance of two bowshots is shown among the dunes the place of Jesus Christ's preaching ... and the large stone on which Jesus Christ used to stand at that time.

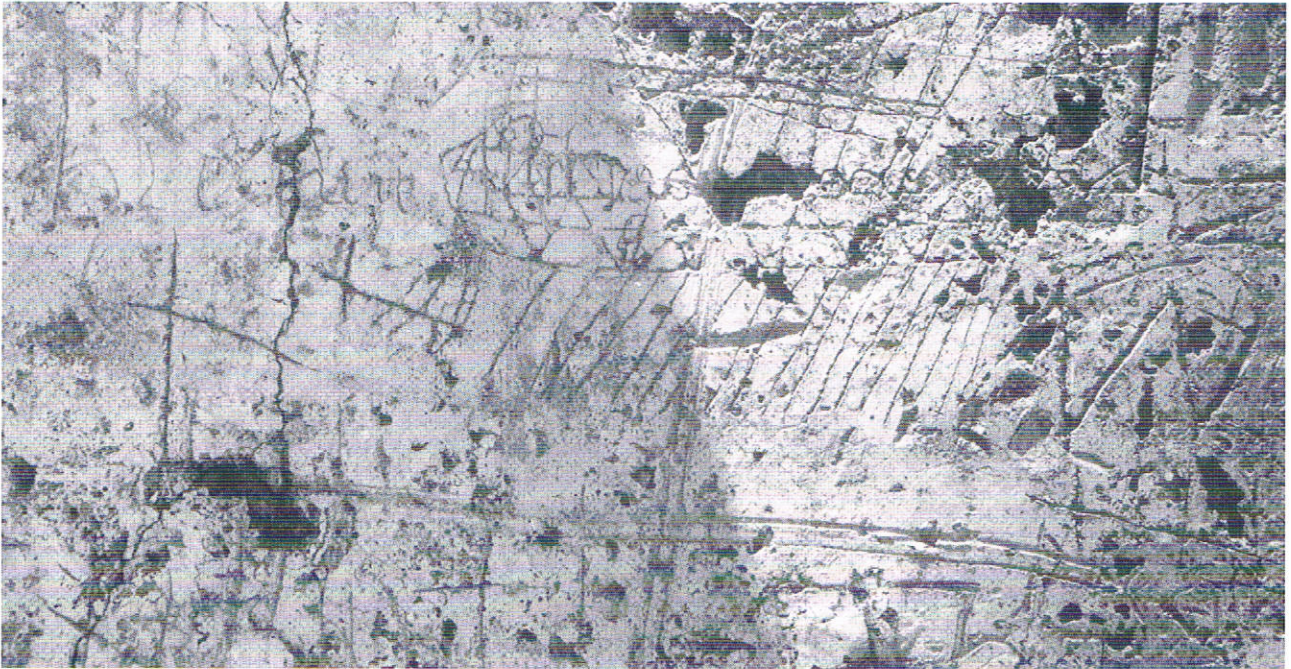
Burchard remarks that, although this place lay among the dunes, it never became covered by sand either in summer or in winter. In the same place there was also a large column lying on the ground, at which some pilgrims had been ambushed and killed by the Muslims <sup>17</sup>.

In addition to the stone recorded by John Phocas and Burchard, Wilbrand of Oldenburg (1211-12) mentions three highly venerated stones, on which Jesus and His disciples were said to have rested; these lay next to the city walls <sup>18</sup>. James of Vitry (1217), appears to refer to the same location beside the walls, though he saw only one stone on which Jesus was said to have sat and taught the crowds <sup>19</sup>. The only thirteenth-century source that might possibly indicate that the chapel was still standing is the Franciscan friar Albert of Stade (c.1251-2), who describes "before Tyre a marble stone on which Jesus sat which now has over it a certain covering (*theculiolam*)" <sup>20</sup>. Unfortunately Albert's account was based entirely on earlier sources; if he



was referring to the chapel mentioned by earlier writers, it therefore does not necessarily follow that it was still intact when he was writing.

Taken together, the documentary and archaeological evidence therefore indicate that sometime between 1131 and 1137 a chapel was built over one of the large stones outside Tyre that were held to mark the place where Christ had either sat or stood to teach. The *graffiti* scratched into its internal plaster indicate that it was probably still standing at the time of the siege of Acre between August 1189 and July 1191 but there is no certain evidence for it having remained standing for long after that. Quite possibly it was damaged in the earthquake that hit Tyre in May 1202, in which “all the towers but three, and the walls except for the outer barbican” were destroyed<sup>21</sup>. Whatever the reason, in the thirteenth century the stone associated with Jesus’ visit was shown in alternative locations.



5 Tyre, Crusader chapel of the Saviour: Crusader *graffiti* on the west wall, including the representation of a galley (photo DP, 1998).



## NOTES

- 1 M. Chéhab, *Tyre* (Editions Antoine: Beirut n.d.) p. 47-8, pl. X; cf. N. Jidejian, 1996, *Tyr à travers les âges*, trans. D. Halard-Jidejian Beirut, p. 190; A. K. Badawi, 1999, *Tyre and its Region*, Beirut, pp. 61-2.
- 2 My investigation of this building in May 1998 formed part of a project to record all the churches in Tyre dating from the Crusader period. It was facilitated by an Archaeology Research Grant awarded by the Humanities Research Board of the British Academy. I am also most grateful to Dr Camille Asmar, Director General of Antiquities, for permission to examine and record the remains and to Mr Ali Badawi, the department's local officer, for his unfailing assistance. A full account of the chapel will appear in due course in D. Pringle, 1993, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: a Corpus*, 4 vols, Cambridge, IV.
- 3 *Historia aecclesiastica*, XI, 27, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford Medieval Texts: Oxford 1969-80), VI, p. 128.
- 4 *Descriptio locorum*, XLIX, ed. and trans. S. de Sandoli, *Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucesignatorum* (saec. XII-XIII), 4 vols. (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior, XXIV: Jerusalem 1978-84), II, p. 110.
- 5 *Descriptio cuiusdam de Locis Santis*, XXV, ed. P.C. Boeren, *Rorgo Fretellus de Nazareth et sa Description de la Terre Sainte* (Amsterdam-Oxford-New York 1980), p. 18.
- 6 Ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Pergrinatores Tres* (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, CXXXIX: Turnhout 1994), p. 102.
- 7 I. Kootwyk, 1619, (Cotovicus), *Itinerarium hierosolymitanum et syriacum*, Antwerp, pp. 121-2.
- 8 For a preliminary account of these graffiti see D. Pringle, 2004, 'Crusader Inscriptions from Southern Lebanon', *Crusades*, 3, pp. 131-51.
- 9 *Itinerarium Regis Ricardi*, I, 26; III, 17-18, ed. W. Stubbs, *Rolls Series*, XXXVIII.i, p. 62, 231-3; trans. H. J. Nicholson, 1997, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade* (Crusade Texts in Translation, III: Aldershot), pp. 70, 218-21.
- 10 R. Röhricht (ed.), 1893, *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, Innsbruck, pp. 208-9, n° 784.
- 11 Anon, 1977, 'Epitaffo del sergente Giovanni di Le-Puy', *La Terra Santa*, 53, pp. 15-16; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, I, p. 222.
- 12 Röhricht (ed.), *Regesta*, pp. 87-8, n° 336 [1159], and *passim*; *idem*, *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani Additamentum* (Innsbruck 1904), pp. 36-7, n° 590b [1179].
- 13 *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, ed. H. Hoogeweg, 1894, *Die Schriften des Kölner Domscholasters Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart*, CCII: Tübingen, p. 6.
- 14 *Ekphrasis*, VIII, ed. L. Allatius, 1864, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXXIII Paris, p. 933; trans. A. Stewart, 1889, *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*, V, London, pp. 10-11.
- 15 Cf. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, XIII, 3, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, 1986, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, LXIII: Turnhout, pp. 588-600.
- 16 J. Delaville le Roulx (ed.), 1894-1906, *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem (1100-1310)*, 4 vols. Paris, III, pp. 202-3, n° 3346.
- 17 *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, II, 6, ed. J. C. M. Laurent, 1864, *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi IV* Leipzig, p. 25; trans. A. Stewart, 1896, *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*, XII, London, p. 12.
- 18 *Peregrinatio*, II, 5, ed. J. C. M. Laurent, 1864, *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi IV*, Leipzig, p. 164.
- 19 *Historia Orientalis*, I, 43, ed. S. de Sandoli, 1978-84, *Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucesignatorum* (saec. XII-XIII), 4 vols., Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior, XXIV, Jerusalem, III, p. 314.
- 20 *Itinerarium Terrae Sanctae*, X, ed. S. de Sandoli, 1978-84, *Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucesignatorum* (saec. XII-XIII), 4 vols. Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior, XXIV, Jerusalem, IV, p. 4.
- 21 H. E. Mayer, 1972, "Two Unpublished Letters on the Syrian Earthquake of 1202", in *Medieval and Middle Eastern Studies in Honor of S. A. Atiya*, Leiden, pp. 295-310 (at p. 303, 307, 309); cf. M. H. Chéhab, 1979, *Tyr à l'époque des croisades*, II. *Histoire sociale, économique et religieuse*, Paris, pp. 710-12.