

Charles Foster

THE FIRST CRUSADERS IN LEBANON

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In 1099, in a great wave of song and steel and psalm, the Crusaders burst into Jerusalem. They had come a long way, both geographically and culturally. The medieval European world which they had left was, for most of them, a world bounded by the walls of their village or their estate and by the dogmas and superstitions of the Catholic Church. The Near East did violence to their parochial preconceptions. As well as being soldiers, they were travellers in several dimensions.

They collided with an ancient, exotic and labile Levantine world -a world which overwhelmed their senses and was later to overwhelm the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other Crusader states of Tripoli, Edessa and Antioch. Their impressions of that world are recorded in letters, later narrative reminiscences, a chronicle which drew on reminiscences, and an epic poem.

Part of that world, and a particularly colourful part of it, was Lebanon. The Crusaders were not there long¹, but what happened to them there left deep marks on many of them. There is a breathless apocalyptic expectancy about their accounts of their time there. At last they were standing at the gates of the Holy Land. Dreams were about to be

transmuted into reality. If the first glimpses of the walls of Jerusalem were the incarnation of hopes cherished and suppressed and frustrated during the long march from Europe, it was in Lebanon that the first unquestionable quickenings were felt.

It was the vicissitudes of Lebanon which made out of bickering fragments an army capable of punching through the thick and ancient walls of the Holy City. Arqa, in particular, was a crucible in which, heated by hardship and religious fervour, the Provencals and Normans were melded together in a rough and ready but sufficient unity.

This article looks at what the First Crusaders thought of Lebanon². It is not a history. There are plenty of those. It deals with the events of the Crusade only because the Crusaders' impressions of the place are nonsensical without some account of what they were doing there. It aims to make the ghosts of the First Crusaders visible in the places in Lebanon they visited. It is based on a number of contemporary or near contemporary accounts.

For these purposes Lebanon is deemed to start at Arqa and end at Tyre.

THE CHRONICLERS

This article draws mainly on five sources³. First

¹ Mid February to the third week of May 1099.

² This article deals only with the passage of the main Crusading army on its way to Jerusalem in 1099. Securing the route through Lebanon was of course crucial to subsequent Crusader strategy in the Near East.

there is Raymond of Aguilers⁴. He was Chaplain to Raymond of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse, who led the Provençal contingent and refused the crown of Jerusalem in 1099. One has to be careful with Raymond of Aguilers. A lot of the history of the First

Crusade is the history of the infighting between the Provençal and Norman contingents⁵. Raymond makes no secret of his allegiance. He is very much a Provençal propagandist, and superstitious and chauvinistically opinionated with it.

Much more objective is William of Tyre, composer of the romantically named "*History of Deeds Done Beyond The Sea*"⁶. This was put together several decades after the events which it describes, but William was a responsible and competent historian. He did his homework well. He or his sources clearly chatted to a lot of eyewitnesses: their impressions are fresh and wondering⁷. His is an accessible account from a humane and likeable man. He is interested in history and architecture and people. He tries to praise whenever it is possible.

Fulcher of Chartres, author of the *Historia Hierosolymitana*, is colder and more literal⁸. Few warm to him, but there is no doubting the value of what he says. He was chaplain to Baldwin of Boulogne (later King of Jerusalem), and was at his side throughout the campaign. His is very much

the official history - the final court of appeal where there is dispute. He is more or less silent on topographical or sociological detail.

The history of the Crusades, just like all history, tends to be written by the elite for the elite. That is what makes the *Gesta Francorum* so interesting. The unnamed author, a follower of Bohemond I of Antioch, was no peasant, but was no highly-scented courtier either. His is a rough, prosaic, workmanlike account⁹.

The final source is the *Historia Vie Hierosolimitane*, nominally by Gilo of Paris¹⁰. It is clear, in fact, that the *Historia* has two authors, and it is suggested that it is also clear, despite a lot of scholarly obloquy having been poured over the *Historia*, that it is at least based on eye-witness accounts of the First Crusade.

THE LOCAL BACKGROUND

At the time that the Crusaders entered Lebanon, the Fatimids of Egypt had taken Palestine, conquered Jerusalem, and held a line at the Dog River, just north of Beirut. Between the Dog River and the Crusaders lay territory divided between two Arab families. The Banu Ammar of Tripoli ruled the land from the Fatimid frontier to about half way between Beirut and Tripoli. From there to the Orontes was the bailiwick of the Munqidhites of Shaizar.

- 3 There are other sources too: see the extensive bibliographies in Runciman, S, *A History of the Crusades*, Cambridge, 1951-4: Vol. 1: *The First Crusade*; and in Riley-Smith, J, *The First Crusaders: 1095-1131*, Cambridge, 1997.
- 4 All citations from and references to Raymond D'Aguilers are from Raymond D'Aguilers: *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, Trans. Hill J.H. and Hill L.L., 1968, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 71).
- 5 There was a real north-south divide in the Crusade. "Normans" is used in this article to denote both true Normans and, more generally, the northern French. There were of course other nationalities represented, but to describe the politics in terms of internecine French conflict is not dangerously inaccurate.
- 6 All citations from and references to William of Tyre are from *William, Archbishop of Tyre, A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*. 1943: New York, Columbia University Press. Trans. Babcock E. A and Krey A. C., Vol. 1.
- 7 Those sections of William of Tyre which deal with the expedition to Jerusalem are drawn mainly from the *Liber Christianae Expeditionis pro Ereptione, Emundiatione et Restitution Sanctae Hierosolymitanae Ecclesiae* of Albert of Aix, which was written around 1130. Albert himself did not go on the Crusade or indeed east at all, but he clearly interviewed diligently a number of men who did.
- 8 All citations from and references to Fulcher are from the translation of the *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem Pergrinantium* in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, Hallam, Elizabeth (Ed), 1989, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- 9 All citations from and references to the *Gesta Francorum* are from the translations in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants*, Krey, August C., 1921, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 10 All citations from and references to Gilo of Paris are from the *Historia Vie Hierosolimitane of Gilo of Paris*, Ed. and Trans. Grocock and Siberry, 1997, Oxford, Clarendon.

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BEFORE LEBANON

In November 1095 Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade and embarked on a year-long road-show, preaching the eternal benefits and hinting at the temporal benefits of prising Jerusalem from the Muslims.

Tens of thousands responded. Many gave up everything they had to take the cross and joined one of the various private armies which drifted towards the Levant, looting, burning, and killing Jews and non-Latin Christians. They took many different routes through Europe consolidating very loosely at Constantinople.

There were three main waves. The first and the third foundered. It was the men of the second wave who were to take the prize.

In June 1097 they captured Nicaea, and then trudged through the blazing heat of Anatolia to Antioch, which they reached in October 1097. The siege of Antioch was marked by disease, schism, the alleged finding by Peter Bartholomew of the Lance which had pierced the side of Jesus, the death of Adhemar of Le Puy - one of the only men capable of holding together the various factions - and, when Antioch fell in June 1098, dreadful barbarism. There was squabbling between the Normans and the Provençals over the spoils of Antioch, and finally an uneasy detente under which Raymond took over command of the whole expeditionary force and Bohemond remained in Antioch with a small band of troops.

There were two schools of thought about the best route to Jerusalem. Raymond's instinct was to head straight for the coast and then hug the coast line all the way to Palestine. This, he thought, would let his army be supplied by English and French vessels operating out of Cyprus, and would let him keep an eye on any skullduggery in Antioch. He seems to have underestimated the strength of the Fatimid fleet, and did not get the support from the sea that he had hoped for, particularly once he had passed the Dog River. Tancred, however, noted that the coast road was punctuated by some of the most formidable fortresses ever built. It was wholly unrealistic to expect the small

force (now probably about six thousand, only a thousand of whom were mounted) to storm them all. Much better, he said, to take the inland road direct to Jerusalem.

In the end they compromised, agreeing to bypass the fortresses on the Syrian coast and to make for the sea through the Buqaia. Raymond decided that one big fortress needed to be taken to put the fear of God into the resistance further south. He chose the fortress of Arqa, about fifteen miles from Tripoli. It was a very bad choice from which eventual benefit came. He arrived there on 14 February 1099.

THE SIEGE OF ARQA

"Arqa", noted William of Tyre, "is a city of the province of Phoenicia. It is situated on a well fortified height at the base of Mount Lebanon, four or five miles from the sea. The extensive plain in which it lies is blessed with rich and fertile soil and pleasant pasture lands, and streams of running water are not lacking. Ancient traditions say that this city was founded by Aradius, the seventh son of Canaan, from whom it received its name, which was later corrupted to Archis"^{11/12}.

The author of the *Gesta* had more rigorously tactical interests in Arqa, noting curtly how marvellous were its fortifications and how bravely it was defended by the "countless host of pagans, Turks, Saracens, Arabs and Publicani" who occupied it¹³. Raymond, too, was impressed with the apparent invulnerability of Arqa. It was, he said, "...a strongly defended place, one unconquerable by human force"¹⁴. That comment was a significant one. From then on his account of the Crusade has a dark, Old Testamental flavour. All subsequent events are theological metaphors. Misfortunes are didactic: they are God disciplining His chosen people, preparing them to enter the Promised Land. At Arqa the flames of the final refining fire were kindled. He becomes more earnest a chronicler than he has professed to be before, because he is dealing with events which are not merely human. He declared his reliability with terrible solemnity: "May God burden me with the horrors of Hell and blot me from the Book of Life if I, out of zeal or hatred or anyone, add anything to this book except that which I believed or saw"¹⁵.

It was clear that Arqa was not going to fall quickly. But a long siege would be logistically tricky. Raymond knew that some link with the sea would help with resupplies, but having ships bursting with bacon was no good unless they could land. He despatched Raymond

Pilet and Raymond, Viscount of Turenne, to take Tortosa, an important port between Lattakieh and Tripoli, “....well fortified by inner and outer walls and well provisioned”¹⁶. They had only a small force with them: cunning rather than strength would have to be used. The detachment arrived at Tortosa after nightfall on 16 February, and lit camp fires all round it. The governor, terrified at this apparent evidence of a vast encircling army, abandoned the city, and in the morning the Crusaders sauntered in and took possession of it ¹⁷.

In the capture of Tortosa were the seeds of a lot of dissension. Antioch of course heard of the success, and Godfrey of Lorraine, Bohemond and Robert of Flanders, all of whom had stayed behind at Antioch, decided that they were missing out on the real business of the Crusade, and hastened south. The perpetually prevaricating Bohemond, fretting about affairs in Antioch, turned back, but Godfrey and Robert pressed on and laid siege to the port of Jabala.

Meanwhile, there was little progress at Arqa. “[W]e bore heavy losses”, wrote Raymond

D’Aguilers, “including many illustrious knights”¹⁸. He had a theological explanation. The siege had been conceived proudly and presumptuously, and was therefore bound to fail. “....God, unwilling to forward a siege which we undertook more for unjust interests than for Him, showered us with all kinds of misfortune” ¹⁹. “Again and again”, complained William of Tyre “they assailed the city and invented new methods of injuring the besieged by breaching the wall or by fresh assaults, but just so often were they checked by new obstacles. Their work was frustrated and rendered of no avail, and they were plainly given to understand that, as far as the siege of Arqa was concerned, divine favour had been withdrawn from them. All in vain was it that the people were dying and illustrious noblemen sacrificing their lives to no purpose” ²⁰. There were some significant individual losses, and a lack of resolve to fight: “Strange enough”, wrote Raymond, “the Christians, who had been eager and prepared for former battles, now were indisposed or ineffectual, and the inspired soldiers of Christ who did attempt anything were either wounded or found their efforts fruitless” ²¹.

It was not really strange. This was a tired army which had marched a long way and undergone some terrible hardships. Life was pleasant at Arqa. The weather was good, food (now supplemented by supplies coming through Tortosa) was abundant. The soldiers knew that before they took Jerusalem there would be some significant fighting to do. Many must have thought that they might as well relax, lick their wounds and fatten up. And

11 p. 318.

12 Fulcher, too, makes similar historical observations about Arqa, mentioning that it “lies at the base of Mount Lebanon andwas founded, so it is written, by Aracaeus, son of Canaan and grandson of Noah”. He skips blithely over the siege, saying simply that “...since [Arqa] is very difficult to take, the siege struggled on for about five weeks until they went away having achieved nothing”. Fulcher: pp. 86-88.

13 p. 216.

14 p. 87.

15 pp. 87-88.

16 Raymond D’Aguilers, p. 88.

17 Gesta: p. 216. William of Tyre (p. 322) notes that Tortosa is also known as Antarados. He says that the force commanded by the two Raymonds found it deserted. Raymond D’Aguilers says that the city was abandoned “....on account of the fear which God had instilled in the Saracens and Arabs of the area, a fear which caused them to believe that we were all powerful and bent on ruthless devastation of their lands”: p. 88.

18 Raymond D’Aguilers, p. 87.

19 Raymond D’Aguilers, p. 88.

20 William of Tyre, p. 323.

21 Raymond D’Aguilers, p. 88.

they must also have had difficulty seeing why Raymond was so adamant that Arqa had to fall.

Their difficulty in understanding Raymond's insistence was shared by Godfrey and Robert.

They had been summoned by Raymond from Jabala after Raymond had heard rumours, which turned out to be false, that the Caliph of Baghdad was raising a huge army to relieve Arqa. Raymond was no doubt glad to see them arrive, but his pleasure did not last long. Wrangling soon began. It turned into a debate about the whole future of the Crusade. Should the siege continue, as Raymond urged? Or should the army march on, abandoning Arqa? If so, under whom? Matters were complicated and inflamed by letters from Emperor Alexius. He was ready to leave for Syria, he said. He could be with them by the end of June, and would then lead the army himself to Jerusalem. Raymond, alone amongst the leaders, wanted to wait. Partly this was because of his genuine loyalty to Alexius, partly it was because of his stubborn insistence on the fall of Arqa (which had become a point of pride out of all proportion to its conceivable tactical significance), and partly it was because, whatever the military merits of immediate departure for Jerusalem, immediate departure would have meant agreeing with Godfrey and Robert, whom Raymond saw as usurpers of his authority. Raymond's sense of betrayal was heightened by his quarrel with

Tancred. Tancred had been Raymond's faithful henchman: but on the question of tactics he now stood with Godfrey and Robert.

The tension between the Normans and the Provençals then burst out in a dramatic way. Peter Bartholomew said that he had seen some new visions, and his *bona fides* were loudly questioned by the sceptical Normans. Peter was outraged. He and his fellow-believers saw doubt about his dreams and prophecies and about the Holy Lance as blasphemies which, if not repented of, would bring down terrible judgment on the Crusade. Peter seems to have been completely convinced that he was the Crusade's main conduit of the divine, and insisted on an ordeal by fire. Holding the Lance, he would walk through an inferno. If he survived, his visions and the Lance itself would be vindicated. If he did not, his critics would win the day.

The ordeal took place on Good Friday 1099. A great crowd gathered. Raymond of Aguilers numbered them, wholly impossibly, at sixty thousand²². A huge fire of olive branches was lit. Peter Bartholomew, dressed in a tunic, knelt before the crowd, insisted again that his visions were real, took the Holy Lance, genuflected, made the sign of the Cross, and walked into the flames.

What happened then is the subject of much controversy. Raymond D'Aguilers says that he emerged unscathed, brandishing the Lance and shouting the Crusaders' battle cry, "God help us".

22 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 100.

23 Raymond D'Aguilers, pp. 100-101.

24 William of Tyre, p. 325.

25 He died on 20 April 1099, and was buried at the spot where the fire of the ordeal had burned.

26 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 102: "....the crowd seized him, seized him, I say, and pulled him along the ground. Almost everyone from the mob pushed and shoved, thinking Peter was nearby and hoping to touch him or snatch a piece of his clothing. The mob made three or four gashes on his legs in the tussle, and cracked his backbone. We think that Peter would have died there if Raymond Pilet, a renowned and courageous knight, had not with the aid of numerous comrades charged the milling mob, and at the risk of death snatched him from them....".

27 Raymond continued to believe in the Lance, and eventually took it to Constantinople, where he presented it to Emperor Alexius.

28 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 106.

29 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 107.

30 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 107.

31 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 110.

32 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 110.

33 William of Tyre, p. 329.

He relates, too, how a ghostly figure in priestly garments entered the fire before Peter did ²³. William of Tyre, too, thought that Peter passed through uninjured ²⁴. Others thought that he was terribly burned. What is clear is that Peter did not live long after the

ordeal ²⁵. Raymond D'Aguilers said that he died from injuries incurred when the hysterically adoring horde fell on him, and indeed that many doubters were convinced when they came to Peter's bedside and saw his more or less burn-free body ²⁶.

The ordeal was inconclusive. The Provençals still, although probably with more muted conviction, said that the Lance was vindicated ²⁷. The Normans noted that Peter had died, and saw that as discrediting him, his visions, the Lance, and casting serious doubt on the judgment and leadership of Raymond. At any rate the ordeal did not help to solve the problem of what to do next.

There was a genuine impasse. It was resolved with a typical mediaeval mix of real piety and really impious acrimony. The company, wrote Raymond D'Aguilers, "...proclaimed fasting, prayers and alms to the people with the hope that Omnipotent God, who had guided us across so many lands, would condescend to communicate His will" ²⁸. Raymond believed that the prayers were answered, for Bishop Adhemar of Puy, who had died at Antioch, appeared in a vision to Stephen of Valence. Adhemar's face was burned. He explained that this was because he had visited Hell as a punishment for his incredulity about the Lance, and that henceforth the army must march behind a Cross. "Why", asked Adhemar, "have you ignored so many times my commands concerning the Cross of the Lord, as well as those of our Mother, the Virgin Mary? I speak of the Cross which was in our front ranks; let it be carried in the army. Tell me, what relic is better than this Cross? Has this Cross not been stoned enough for you? Or has it not guided you to the Holy Lance? Now our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, says that without this Cross you will have no wisdom" ²⁹. The implication was clear enough. One would need to be led by the Cross only if one were moving on.

And if one was disobedient enough not to move on, one could expect a taste of the same diabolical flames that had scorched the cheeks of Adhemar.

Stephen then saw the Virgin herself, who said, through Adhemar, that Stephen must take off his ring and present it to Raymond, saying: "The Virgin, very sainted Mother, sends this ring to you; and with each failure call to mind the Lady, donor of this ring, and implore Her, and God will help you" ³⁰. This, apparently, Stephen did. As a divine stratagem the ring seems to have been wasted: it had no recorded effect on the decision to abandon the siege. How the army finally shifted is described very strangely by Raymond D'Aguilers. He details how, in the "back and forth clash of opinions, William Hugh of Monteil returned with the above mentioned Cross. The sight of the Cross so agitated the entourage of the Count [Raymond] concerning the journey that contrary to the advice of Raymond and other princes they burned their shelters and were the first to leave Arqa..." ³¹. Raymond then burst into tears 'and began to despise himself and others, but God ignored his feeling in deference to the people's will' ³².

There seems to have been some sort of popular uprising in favour of moving on. There was a successful sortie against Tripoli, which made abandonment of Arqa seem less shameful and the storming of Jerusalem more feasible. When the army returned from Tripoli the popular feeling became irresistible. William of Tyre writes that "...the entire populace at once loudly demanded that the leaders abandon the ruinous siege and start on the road to Jerusalem, whither all so ardently desired to go. This obstinate persistence finally brought about the desired result" ³³. This was no collection of supine serfs. This was a Peasants' Revolt: one of the first recorded acts of government by a sort of mutinous democracy.

The decision to march made sense. By the time the army moved it was May. The soldiers knew that if they stayed at Arqa Raymond would be forced to make some progress in the siege, and that meant a dangerous assault on a fortress which had rebuffed violently all their attempts. They also knew that there would be plenty of food on the march south, and no doubt realised that they were unlikely ever to be better prepared for the assault on Jerusalem

Tripoli.

than they then were.

So, on 13 May 1099, they left Arqa. There were few regrets. Even Raymond D'Aguilers, the quintessential Provencal loyalist, described it as "...that hateful and abominable siege of Arqa"³⁴. They made for

FROM ARQA TO TYRE

Back in April, Tripoli had had a taste of Crusader steel, and had not liked it. When the Crusaders approached again, the governor made terms with the Franks, paying them off with gold, horses, mules, sheep, goats and other food, silks and precious vases, and returning some Christian prisoners. For this, the Crusaders agreed to get off his territory, and also to spare Arqa (a promise which must have been made with a wary face) and Byblos (Jubail).

That done, the Franks made their way south³⁵. An urgency enters the accounts here. There is really very little written about what happened before they enter Palestine. Partly because they were now so focussed on Jerusalem and the state of their swords and souls that they were rather blinkered to what was immediately around them, and partly it was because, after a nasty brush with thirst right at the start, they were having a blissfully uneventful time. Gilo talks rapturously about the weather and

the food: "...ripened by the warmth, the orchards were bearing fruit, the harvest corn, the fields beans"³⁶.

The army was visited by some local Christians. Surians, Raymond D'Aguilers called them. They were in fact Maronites. He wrote a little about their origins, and creates a long, hair-raising catalogue of the indignities inflicted on them by the Muslims - defamatory of Muslims in a way only a man with a long apprenticeship in anti-Semitism could be.

He said that "Some sixty thousand Christian inhabitants have been in possession of the Lebanon mountains and its environs for many years. These Christians are addressed as Surians, since they are close to Tyre, now commonly called Sur. When the Saracens and the Turks rose to power through God's will, many of the Surians under their bondage for four hundred years or more were compelled to forsake their country and Christian law"³⁷.

Raymond of St. Gilles took the opportunity of local knowledge to renew discussion about the route. The Surians were quite clear about the way the Franks should go, as is recorded by Raymond D'Aguilers:

"The Damascus route is flat, well stocked with food, but waterless for two days, [the Surians said]. The road through the Lebanon mountains is safe, bountiful in necessities, but very tough for camels and pack animals. Still another way, skirt-

34 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 110.

35 They left Tripoli on 16 May 1099.

36 Gilo, p. 233.

37 Raymond D'Aguilers, pp. 108-109.

38 Raymond D'Aguilers, pp. 109-110.

39 A good account of the Gospel of the Blessed Peter is in Clemens Klein, *Raimund von Aguilers, Quellenstudie zur Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges*, Berlin, 1892, pp. 72-75. Cited Raymond D'Aguilers: Hill J. H. and Hill L. L. (*supra*), at p. 110, note 8.

40 William of Tyre, p. 330.

41 Gesta, pp. 242-243.

42 Gilo, pp. 234-235.

43 Fulcher, p. 88.

44 Raymond D'Aguilers, p. 113.

45 Beirut seems to have been reached on 19 May 1099.

46 Gilo, p. 235.

47 Gesta, p. 243.

48 William of Tyre, p. 331.

49 Sidon was reached on 20 May 1099.

50 William of Tyre, p. 331.

51 Gilo, p. 235.

52 Gesta, p. 243.

ing the sea, has many passes so narrow that fifty or a hundred Saracens could hold back all of the human race. Yet it is recorded in our Gospel of the Blessed Peter that if you are the destined captors of Jerusalem, you will journey by the sea-coast, although its hazards make it appear impossible to us....”^{38/39}

Raymond was always impressed by suggestions of divine ordination, and also had in mind the ships from Flanders, Normandy, England, Genoa, Venice and Greece, which were plying up and down the coast, with their cargoes of pork and grain and wine. He rubber-stamped the decision which had tentatively been made before Arqa, and the army moved south, keeping to the coast.

From Tripoli to Beirut the journey was uneventful and the accounts are terse. “They proceeded along the sea coast with the Lebanon range on their left”, wrote William of Tyre, and after passing Jubail encamped on the bank of a river near a place called Maus. There they rested for a day, while waiting for the host of feeble followers and those who could not keep up⁴⁰. The Gesta is similarly curt: “We left [Tripoli] on the second day of the week in the month of May and, passing along a narrow and difficult road all day and night, we came to a fortress, the name of which was Botroun. Then we came to a city called [Jubail] near the sea, in which we suffered very great thirst, and, thus worn out, we reached a river named Ibrahim. Then, on the eve of the day of the Ascension of the Lord we crossed a mountain in which the way was exceedingly narrow, and there we expected to find the enemy lying in ambush for us. But God favouring us, none of them dared to appear in our way....”⁴¹. Gilo has an almost identical account: “It was the month of May when, leaving [Tripoli] behind them, the brave men came to al-Batrun, a fort; their march there took them more than a day, and was scarcely completed by a night of hard effort. From there, the youthful band, afflicted by the heat, made its way along the coast and suffered terrible pains from thirst as it came to Jubail, for it saw no water to draw in the city; but a further day’s toil brought the thirsty ones to the great waters of the Nahr Ibrahim, and the people ran to its streams.

Scarcely able to breathe, the crowd fell upon them and drank from them greedily with their mouths; they had little trust in cups”⁴². Fulcher gets from Tripoli to Acre in three sentences⁴³.

Raymond D’Aguilers is brief almost to the point of skipping this phase of the journey completely. He is also inaccurate about times. He says: “...we left [Tripoli] at evening, rambled along all night, and arrived at Beirut the next day....”⁴⁴. Then, after the capture of the pass at Bucca Torta, Raymond is suddenly in Acre, and passes out of our story. The trek from Tripoli to Beirut in fact took three days⁴⁵.

Beirut itself warrants only a mention from the chroniclers. Gilo notes that the troops “trod a weary journey” from the Nahr Ibrahim river, and “pitched their camp before Beirut, set beside the sea”⁴⁶. The Gesta similarly disposes of Beirut in less than a sentence: “...our knights went ahead of us and cleared the way before us, and we arrived at a city by the sea which is called Beirut....”⁴⁷. Even William of Tyre, who was so appreciative of much else in Lebanon, is hardly explicit: “On the third day they encamped before the city of Beirut on the bank of a river which flows past the town. The governor of the place offered them money and a bountiful supply of provisions, to induce them to spare the crops and trees, and there they rested for one night”⁴⁸.

They moved rapidly on to Sidon, reaching it in one day’s march⁴⁹. There, says William of Tyre, the Crusaders “stretched their tents along the river bank in order to have the advantage of the water”⁵⁰, but it was not a peaceful stay. The governor, for reasons best known to himself, orchestrated some sort of harassment of the Frankish army. It is not clear whether this was meant as a serious attempt to stop the Crusade, or some sort of ineffectual tokenism. Baited until their tempers snapped, some of the Crusaders responded, killing some of their annoyers. That stopped further trouble, and the army was able to sleep peacefully for the rest of the night. Only William pauses in Sidon: Gilo mentions simply that “the blessed band of plunderers passed the two cities of Sidon and Tyre, and pressed on to Acre”⁵¹ and the Gesta deals with Sidon almost identically⁵². Fulcher mentions that after Beirut the company came to “...another city, which we read of as Sidon in the land of

Phoenicia” and then went on to the wonderful city of Tyre...⁵³.

If we want other adjectives south of Sidon, we are in the hands of William of Tyre, and he was enthusiastic.

“The first part of the route on the succeeding day was through a country generally hilly. At last, however, they came into more level land. They passed on the right the ancient city Sarepta of the Sidonians, the nurse of Elijah, the man of God. They then crossed the intervening river and came to Tyre, the famous capital of that region and the ancient home of Agenor and Cadmus. At this place they established their camp near the famous fountain of the Gardens, a well of living waters, the wonder of the world. There, in the extensive gardens, full of all kinds of agreeable conveniences, they remained that night”^{54/55}.

William’s final glimpse of Lebanon is on the following day, when “...they girded themselves for the march and, after surmounting the difficulties of the narrow pass between the over-hanging mountains and the sea, once more descended into the plain near the city of Acre”⁵⁶.

Less than two months later the Franks swarmed over the walls of the Holy City, and its streets ran red⁵⁷. It seemed like a miracle to them, and it has seemed like little less to many subsequent military logisticians. A rag-bag army, thousands of miles

from home, riven by disease and schism, had fought its way to the City which was the umbilicus of Christendom and a cherished satellite of Islam. At Antioch they were divided and demoralised. At Jerusalem they were united enough, and terribly single-minded. Raymond D’Aguilers was right: Lebanon was a proving ground: a divine furnace in which, at many levels, the splintered swords of the Crusaders were re-forged and made ready for the great assault.

53 Fulcher, p. 88.

54 William of Tyre, p. 331.

55 They probably reached Tyre on 21 May 1099, and spent a couple of days there, waiting for some stragglers from Edessa and Antioch to catch up. They left Tyre on 23 May 1099.

56 William of Tyre, p. 331. The route taken was up the “Ladder of Tyre” and over Naqoura.

57 Jerusalem was taken on 15 July 1099. There was terrible slaughter.