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Walter the Chancellor on Ilghazi and Tughtakin: a prisoner's perspective

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Abstract

This article concerns two leading Turkish rulers, active in the Near East during the crusading era: Tughtakin of Damascus and Ilghazi of Mardin. They were important commanders, but the surviving sources create difficulties when outlining the contours of the characters and cultural perspectives. Muslim authors typically present them as idealised Islamic rulers and yet it is difficult to accept such stereotyped portraits. This article sheds new light on these men, seeking to understand how far they had transitioned from the steppe culture of their forefathers into a more distinctively Islamic mould. It focuses in particular on the Antiochene chronicle written by Walter the Chancellor. He witnessed both rulers at first hand when he was their prisoner in Aleppo in 1119; an experience which left him deeply scarred. This is tainted evidence, yet it will be shown that many of Walter's observations also provide invaluable insights that deserve to be taken seriously.

Keywords: Saljuq Turks; Walter the Chancellor; crusades; principality of Antioch; Ilghazi of Mardin; Tughtakin of Damascus

Given the choice, most historical figures would probably prefer not to have their character profiles drawn up by writers whom they had imprisoned and tortured. Yet such in part may be the fate of the Turkish warlords Najm al-Din Ilghazi (d. 1122) and Zahir al-Din Tughtakin (d. 1128). They were both rulers who, despite playing a crucial role in the politics of early twelfth century Syria, have been survived by very few reliable sources offering clues as to their character and world view. This article seeks to address this deficiency, considering what can be learnt about them from the *Bella Antiochena*, a chronicle detailing the principality of Antioch's wars against the Turks as well as other Northern Syrian events from 1114-1122. The chronicle's author was Walter, Antioch's chancellor at that time; a man who seems to have been educated as cleric and who was present at many of the events he described; most importantly he was incarcerated by Ilghazi after the battle of the Field of Blood and encountered them both at first-hand during his time in prison.¹

Ilghazi and Tughtakin were among those Turkish warriors who sought to oppose or negotiate with the incoming Franks during the First Crusade and its aftermath, and both worked to thwart the ambitious Christian attempts to expand the newly-formed Crusader States. They both enjoyed long and fairly successful careers. Much of Zahir al-Din Tughtakin's early life was spent supporting the Saljuq sultan Alp Arslan (d. 1072), and he later came to serve his son Tutush (d. 1095), and subsequently his grandson Duqaq, ruler of Damascus.² He was *atabeg* [regent] of Damascus at the time of the First Crusade and later became sole ruler in 1104, shortly after Duqaq passed away. From this time until his death in 1128 he proved adept both at strengthening his city state and cementing his own power. He

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¹ T. Asbridge and S. Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars: a Translation and Commentary*, Crusade Texts in Translation 4 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 5-8. Walter the Chancellor, *Bella Antiochena*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer (Innsbruck: Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1896),

² Very little work has been conducted on Tughtakin to date. A good summary of his life and the works that have been written upon him can be found in T. El-Azhari, 'Tughtakin', in *The Crusades: an Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, ed. A. Murray (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), 1204-5.

fought wars against his Frankish, Turkish and Arab neighbours, and showed himself to be a capable commander. At other times he was equally prepared to make alliances and treaties with all these powers. He died in 1128 and was succeeded by his son Buri.

Tughtakin's ally and son-in-law, Najm al-Din Ilghazi, had an even more varied and adventurous career.³ Scion of the Artuqid family, he too began his career in service to the Saljuq sultans and when the sultanate fractured after Malik-Shah's death he was caught up in the ensuing infighting. In these years, Ilghazi and his Turkmen allies travelled from his father's *iqta'* of Jerusalem to Baghdad where he was subsequently appointed as the city's governor (*shihna*) by the future Sultan Muhammed. Later, having alienated Muhammad by switching his support to his rival, Berkyaruq, in 1104, Ilghazi was compelled to travel to the Jazira where he assumed control over his late brother's town of Mardin. From this base he sought to strengthen his own position, whilst fending off the Saljuqs, the Franks and his other Turkish rivals. In 1117 he briefly took control of Aleppo, which by this stage was acutely in need of a powerful defender, but it was only during the following year that he cemented his rule within its walls. In 1119 he won his famous battle against the Franks at the Field of Blood (*Ager sanguinis*) and, even more ambitiously, he launched a disastrous campaign against Georgia in 1121. He died shortly afterwards in 1122.

Despite these commanders' significance, both for crusader studies and Near Eastern history, we know precious little about the characters and cultural orientation of Ilghazi and Tughtakin. Neither they nor their Turkish peers authored any accounts of their exploits and so we are compelled to turn to writers from other cultures – Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and so on – when reconstructing their lives. Perhaps the most obvious sources to consult to this

³ The main studies on Ilghazi include C. Hillenbrand, 'The Career of Najm al-Dīn ʾIl-Ghāzī', *Der Islam*, 58 no. 2 (1981): 250–92; S. Tezcan, 'Realpolitik and Jihād: Najm al-Dīn Ilghāzī's Relations With the Early Crusader States', *Bilig* 69 (2014): 263–96. See more recently: A. Mallett, 'The "Other" in the Crusading period: Walter the Chancellor's presentation of Najm al-Dīn ʾIl-Ghāzī', *Al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean*, 22:2 (2010), 113–128.

end are those written by the Muslim historians of this period; for example, the Damascene chronicler Ibn al-Qalanisi. In his case, he clearly held Tughtakin in high esteem and described him at length as a model Islamic ruler. He is depicted as a just and capable master, who was committed to *jihad* and obedient to the caliph.⁴ As Christie has pointed out, Ibn al-Qalanisi constantly referred to him by his honorific title ‘Zahir al-Din’ (‘revealer of the faith’) which stresses his pious character.⁵ Ilghazi was at times presented in similar ways. Ibn al-Azraq in his ‘blatantly pro-Artuqid’ history of Mayyafariqin and Amid (written c.1176–7) characterises Ilghazi as a pious, responsible and compassionate Islamic ruler.⁶ Prima facie, it would be reasonable to conclude that we are dealing with two devout, exemplary Muslim leaders.

The problem with such characterisations, however, is that recent studies have cast doubt upon precisely such laudatory portrayals of early Turkish rulers. By the early twelfth century the Turks were still relatively new converts to Islam and scholarship has underlined the survival of many elements of the former steppe traditions and beliefs that were held by their forebears before the Turkish conquest of the Near East.⁷ Tughtakin may have found it useful to adopt an Islamic mantle at times, but Hillenbrand has indicated that he retained

⁴ See, for example, Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, ed. and trans. H. Gibb (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 183–6.

⁵ N. Christie, ‘Ibn al-Qalānisi’, in *Medieval Muslim Historians and the Franks in the Levant*, ed. A. Mallett (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 19.

⁶ Quotation from Hillenbrand, ‘Career of Najm al-Dīn Īl-Ghāzī’, 265. See C. Hillenbrand, ed. and trans., *A Muslim Principality in Crusader Times: the Early Artuqid State* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1990), 29–46.

⁷ See, for example, A. Peacock, *Early Seljūq History: a New Interpretation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 99–127. See also G. Leiser, ‘Conclusion: Research on the Seljuks of Anatolia: Some Comments on the State of the Art’, in *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East*, eds. A.C.S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 264–75 (especially 264). For a brief survey of the historiography on the conversion of the Anatolian Turks to Islam see Peacock and Nur Yıldız, eds., *Seljuks of Anatolia*, 10–11. For a useful summary of the debate on the Turks’ commitment to Islam during this period and the case for a strong vein of personal religiosity amongst Turkish sultans, D. Tor, ‘“Sovereign and Pious”: the Religious Life of the Great Seljuq Sultans’, in *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, eds. C. Lange and S. Mecit (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 39–62.

many of his people's pre-Islamic customs and practices.⁸ Indeed, a major historiographical question mark hangs over the traditional academic view that the Turks suddenly swapped their former traditions and culture for devout and orthodox Islamic practices in the mid-eleventh century. Likewise, recent scholarship has begun to reveal that the representation of Turkish leaders by Muslim authors living under Turkish/Saljuq hegemony as model Islamic rulers reflects at least in part a legitimising discourse encouraged by the Turks following their conquest of the Near East; one intended to consolidate their rule and win acceptance from its native peoples. Safi, in his pioneering study on this topic, describes this kind of narrative as the 'great Saljūq myth' and naturally this thread within the historiography problematises any easy acceptance of the idealised depictions of men such as Ilghazi and Tughtakin.⁹ At such an impasse, when seeking further information about individual Turkish leaders it is necessary to turn to texts written in other traditions, sources whose authors were not under the same obligation to describe Turkish rulers according to an established template.

Among those to take an interest in Ilghazi and Tughtakin was the Antiochene writer Walter the Chancellor. He was an astute observer who took a close interest in his Turkish neighbours. He holds the distinction of being the first known Latin author to distinguish 'Turkmens' (*Turcomani*) from 'Turks' (*Turci*).¹⁰ At other times he followed the recent and distinctively Western European scholarly practice of describing Turks as 'Parthians', an association not found in other eastern Christian traditions.¹¹ He described both Tughtakin's and Ilghazi's deeds in his retelling of the wars fought between Antioch and the Turks

⁸ C. Hillenbrand, 'What's in a Name? Tughtegin – the 'Minister of the Antichrist'?', in *Fortresses of the Intellect. Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, ed. Omar Ali-de-Onzaga (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 463–75.

⁹ O. Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), *passim*. Safi himself is uninterested in the Turks 'actual' faith (3); his interest lies in their legitimising discourse.

¹⁰ *Bella Antiochena*, 79.

¹¹ For example, see *Bella Antiochena*, 61, 62, 67, 69, 70, 72, 75. Guibert of Nogent explains this association: Guibert de Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos*, ed. R. Huygens. *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 127 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 83, 352. For discussion, N. Morton, *Encountering Islam on the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 195–200.

between 1114 and 1122. Of particular interest is his unusually comprehensive account of these Turkish leaders' treatment of the Frankish prisoners taken captive during the Field of Blood campaign and its aftermath (1119). Here Walter is both precise and detailed about their conduct and characters and so this section demands the closest attention.

Walter himself was among these prisoners of war and so, as an eyewitness, writing soon after the event, he was in some respects well placed to comment on his captors' behaviour.¹² Nevertheless, he was scarcely a neutral observer. He clearly suffered acutely during his time in Aleppan imprisonment and witnessed horrific acts, including many conducted either personally by Tughtakin and Ilghazi, or on their direct orders. Consequently, it is natural to ask how much of his portrayal of these Turkish commanders can be accepted as having any basis in fact, and how much was the product of Walter's scarred recollections.¹³ As Asbridge and Edgington have indicated, the chapters of Walter's work which discuss his captivity (and which contain the bulk of his information on Tughtakin and Ilghazi) are situated at the end the *Bella Antiochena* and 'sit rather uncomfortably with the rest of the text' in that they lack attention to the recreation of an overarching narrative which is manifested in other parts of his text.¹⁴ Mallett has likewise observed that Walter's depiction of Ilghazi suddenly becomes a lot more heated when dealing with his captivity.¹⁵ This factor alone is enough to raise the possibility that these were, for Walter, the most emotionally charged elements of his text. The purpose of this article is to examine Walter's presentation of these Turkish warriors, focusing on his account of their treatment of the Frankish prisoners (*Bella Antiochena*, Book II, chapters 13–16), and weighing up the value of his account as a source for their character, culture and conduct. By extension it will consider

¹² *Bella Antiochena*, 94.

¹³For another interpretation on the themes of reality and representation in Walter's account of Ilghazi see: Mallett, 'The "Other" in the Crusading period', 113-128.

¹⁴ Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars*, 8.

¹⁵Mallett, 'The "Other" in the Crusading period', 118.

whether any indicators can be extracted from his chronicle, showing how far these rulers had abandoned their people's traditional steppe practices and spirituality for a more distinctively Islamic code of behaviour. To begin, however, it is necessary to review the events surrounding Walter's imprisonment.

By 1119, fighting in northern Syria had reached a crescendo and by this stage the Antiochenes had been in the ascendancy for many years.¹⁶ In August 1115 they defeated the major army led by Bursuq of Hamadan. This force had been sent to the region by the sultan of Baghdad, but it was driven away at the battle of Tell Danith. During this campaign, both Ilghazi and Tughtakin had allied themselves to the Franks, fearing that the sultan might attempt to impress his control upon them, although they were not present at Tell Danith itself.¹⁷ In the following years, the Antiochene Franks continued to extend their authority across the region. This expansion was enabled at least in part by the political turmoil engulfing the major city of Aleppo after the death of its Turkish ruler Ridwan in 1113. This powerful regional capital was well placed to offer substantial resistance to the Franks and yet it failed to do so, largely on account of the sustained infighting among its ruling elite that characterised the period 1113–19. The forward momentum built up by the Franks stalled abruptly, however, when Ilghazi launched a major assault on the principality of Antioch in 1119. This invasion led to his major Turkish victory at the Field of Blood on 28 June which culminated in the death of Prince Roger of Antioch along with much of his army. In the weeks that followed, great swathes of the Antiochene frontier collapsed with the loss of many

¹⁶ For an overview of events, T. Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch, 1098–1130* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 70–9.

¹⁷ Albert of Aachen states that Tughtakin was with the army, but Asbridge has demonstrated that other sources, whose authors were present in northern Syria, do not corroborate this point: Asbridge, *Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 73; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana: History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, ed. S. Edgington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 856. Tughtakin and Ilghazi had both made an alliance with the Franks during the previous year but clear the events of 1115 drove them into closer co-operation. D.S. Richards, ed. and trans., *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh.*, vol. 1. Crusade Texts in Translation 13 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 167.

towns and strongholds.¹⁸ The situation stabilised somewhat in August with the arrival of reinforcements led by Baldwin II of Jerusalem and Count Pons of Tripoli. These new armies then attempted to drive away Ilghazi – now supported Tughtakin – and they fought an indecisive encounter with the two Turkish commanders on 14 August at the second battle of Tell Danith, during which both sides suffered substantial casualties. Following this battle, Ilghazi and Tughtakin returned to Aleppo and their arrival in the city sets the scene for Walter’s account of their treatment of their captives.

Walter’s story of his captivity runs – in brief – as follows. Shortly after the second battle of Tell Danith, Ilghazi’s son (his deputy in the city of Aleppo) learned that his father and Tughtakin had suffered a major defeat. The city’s civic leaders came to hear of this and then proceeded to commiserate with their Turkish overlords whilst secretly plotting against them. The Turks, fearing that their authority was being undermined, then changed their story and proclaimed that they had just won a great victory; hoping by doing so to quell any rebellious stirrings among the populace. The prisoners themselves could hear these pretended rejoicings from their cells and Walter reports that they too were told by their captors that the Franks had suffered a second great defeat and that King Baldwin II was dead (although they subsequently heard a rumour that these were lies). Then the survivors from the Turkish army returned to the city and Ilghazi – named by Walter as the ‘star of the law’ (*legis stella*) – sent troops to the prisoners claiming they would take them to a place of execution and reiterating that they had just destroyed the Frankish army in battle.¹⁹ Their threats, however, were not realised and these messengers then returned to Ilghazi, who was drinking heavily and

¹⁸ There is considerable debate over Ilghazi’s intentions and objectives at this stage. In particular historians have debated why he did not attack the city of Antioch itself at this moment. For discussion, Asbridge, *Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 79; S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 152; Hillenbrand, ‘Career of Najm al-Dīn Īl-Ghāzī’, 276–80; Tezcan, ‘Realpolitik and Jihād’, 263–96.

¹⁹ *Bella Antiochena*, 107.

encamped in tents outside the walls of Aleppo.²⁰ On the fifth day (estimated at 19 August 1119),²¹ the Frankish baron Robert Fitz-Fulk was taken away and presented before a mob, who wished to kill him, but Ilghazi did not let them. Robert was later executed by Tughtakin when he refused to deny his faith. Tughtakin then expressed the wish to execute all the remaining captives and to bathe in their blood. Ilghazi demurred, perceiving too much political advantage in retaining the prisoners, but he allowed Tughtakin to torture them. From this time, the Turkish commanders embarked on a sustained drinking binge and periodically caused prisoners to be brought before them and killed. Some were tied up and shot with arrows, others were buried in pits, others were dismembered and their bodies and limbs thrown into Aleppo's thoroughfares. There was then a public execution where 37 prisoners were beheaded. The remainder were exposed to public ridicule and given the choice of death or conversion. Ilghazi subsequently ordered the execution of Arnulf, seneschal of Marash, and asked a Damascene religious leader to carry out the killing, but he refused, asking another emir to kill Arnulf in his place. From this time Ilghazi continued drinking until he was rendered insensible for 15 days.²²

This is the basic narrative of Walter's account of the Frankish prisoners' sojourn in Aleppo and it is a tale told with the utmost hostility; indeed, far more enmity is shown during this section than is manifested in Walter's entire first book. He describes Tughtakin and Ilghazi with the greatest scorn.²³ Both rulers are portrayed as frenzied monsters whose sense

²⁰ The fact that they took up residence in their tents outside the walls suggests parallels to other Turkish rulers, most notably the Saljuq rulers, who likewise preferred such encampments. Naturally this practice speaks, at least in part, of their nomadic steppe background, linking them as Durand-Guédy observes 'to their ancestors and their fellow-Türkmens' (although he foregrounds other reasons for the Saljuqs at least in their retention of such residences): D. Durand-Guédy, 'Ruling From the Outside: a New Perspective on Early Turkish Kingship in Iran', in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, eds. L. Mitchell and C. Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 335 (quote at 340). See also D. Durand-Guédy, 'The Tents of the Saljuqs', in *Turko-Mongol Rulers, Cities and City Life*, eds. D. Durand-Guédy (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 149–89.

²¹ It is suggested that Walter means the fifth day after the battle of Tell Danith: Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars*, 159. n. 239.

²² *Bella Antiochena*, 105–115.

²³ Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars*, 8, 64.

of political advantage is almost the only curb barring them from the cruellest of excesses. Tughtakin is named at one point as the ‘minister of the Antichrist’ (*minister Antichristi*); which is amongst the strongest polemical phrases employed by medieval authors.²⁴ It recalls – possibly consciously, probably unconsciously – apocalyptic works, such as Adso of Montier-en-Der’s (d. 992) treatise *De ortu et tempore Antichristi* (written c.950). In this description of the life of the Antichrist, Adso claimed that this emissary of Satan will be supported by many ministers, past, present and future. Previous *ministri Antichristi* included King Antiochus, and the emperors Nero and Domitian. Clearly Walter the Chancellor felt that Tughtakin should be numbered amongst this pantheon of satanic villainy.²⁵

At other points Tughtakin is depicted gloating over the prisoners’ suffering, wearing a feral, gaping grin. He is said to have given a speech crowing over Robert Fitz-Fulk, saying, among other things: ‘Ha, Robert! Ha! Look how much use your law is to you, look where error and unbelief have brought you.’²⁶ In these cases, the caricature Walter supplies, with its exaggerated depictions of distorted facial features and Tughtakin braying vainglorious boasts, recalls the portraits of ‘Saracens’ offered in the *chansons* (the dramatic tales of bravery, war and love intended predominantly for a knightly audience).²⁷ Certainly, there is a sense of caricature and melodrama in Walter’s descriptions which call to mind such chivalric fantasies. To take one example, in the early epic *Gormont and Isembart*, the pagan king Gormont (incidentally, also described as an Antichrist) is shown crying to his Christian

²⁴ *Bella Antiochena*, 111.

²⁵ D. Verhelst, ed., *Adso Dervensis de Ortu et Tempore Antichristi*. Corpus Christianorum Continatio Mediaevalis 45 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 22.

²⁶ Translations from the *Bella Antiochena* are taken from: Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor’s The Antiochene Wars*, here at 160. Original text: *Bella Antiochena*, 108.

²⁷ For an introduction to *chansons* within a crusading context, see A. Leclercq, *Portraits croisés: l’image des francs et des musulmans dans les textes sur la première croisade: chroniques latines et arabes, chansons de geste francaises des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*. Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Âge 96 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014). See also N. Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: an Interpretation of the Chansons de geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

enemies: ‘You’ve come to grief for good this time! He’s little help, this Jesus Christ.’²⁸

Gormont’s words recall those ascribed to Tughtakin in that both speakers decry the Christian God’s ability to support His people. This is a well-worn trope in such *chansons* where non-Christian leaders are often shown initially mocking Christianity as a prelude to their own subsequent catastrophic defeat at the hands of Christian heroes, reverses that naturally prove the emptiness and falsity of their initial boasts. This is precisely what happens in *Gormont and Isembart* (Gormont is killed shortly after uttering these words) and it is a literary device that is also manifested in Walter’s *Bella Antiochena*. By this stage, Walter’s readers already know that the Turks’ claim of victory at the second battle of Tell Danith was exaggerated. Likewise, his chronicle concludes with a gruelling account of Ilghazi’s death (though admittedly not Tughtakin’s) and descent into Hell, an event that completes the work’s moral lesson by revealing to its audience that, for all Ilghazi’s arrogance and trumpery, he ultimately had to confront the judgement of God.²⁹ Walter’s use of narrative structures which closely parallel those of the *chansons* naturally casts doubt on the accuracy of his recreation of events, raising the possibility that the reality was substantially reworked to conform to a moralising agenda.³⁰

Precisely why Walter elaborated his chronicle from the repertoire of the *chansons* is unclear. He may have drawn upon such works because they gave voice in some way to his experiences, or perhaps he was an enthusiast for such epics and he drew upon them instinctively because they were an underlying presence within his thought-world, or perhaps he deliberately drew upon them to pour scorn upon his former captors – perhaps a combination of the above.

²⁸A. Bayot, *Gormont et Isembart: fragment de chanson de geste du XIIe Siècle* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1914), 45. Translation taken from ‘Gormont and Isembart’, in *Heroes of the French Epic: Translations from the Chansons de Geste*, trans. Michael Newth (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 16.

²⁹*Bella Antiochena*, 114–15. See also: Mallett, ‘The “other” in the crusading period’, 122.

³⁰Mallett’s article reaches the conclusion that Walter’s work was guided by a moralising and polemical agenda: Mallett, ‘The “other” in the crusading period’, 113–128.

Whatever his motives, the presence of such tropes within the *Bella Antiochena* guides readers to be cautious when seeking to unravel experience from subsequent embellishments. At some points, disentangling representation from reality becomes almost impossible. An example of this is Walter's claim that Tughtakin expressed the wish to bathe in the blood of his slaughtered Frankish prisoners so that his youth might be renewed like an eagle.³¹ One suggestion has been that this was simply anti-Turkish polemic, drawing upon Psalm 106 which includes the concept of youth being returned like an eagle (although there is no reference to bathing).³² Alternatively, this could reflect an actual cultural practice, perhaps one with nomadic shamanistic roots. Certainly, some shamanistic communities held a deep conviction both that blood holds mystical properties and that it is an essential life force.³³ Hodous discusses this conviction with reference to the later Mongol practice of differentiating between those opponents who should be executed bloodlessly (i.e. by strangulation) and those who should be killed by the shedding of blood.³⁴ Admittedly no certain link can be drawn connecting Tughtakin's behaviour to such ideas but it is hypothetically possible that, if he did subscribe to such beliefs, it might explain why he hoped to derive some kind of spiritual renewal from bathing in his enemies' blood.³⁵ On this point it is impossible to be certain and arguments can be made for both reality and representation, or for an admixture of the two.

Having said this, there remains a great deal of material in Walter's account that is verifiable. His statements of fact are often well grounded. He rightly observes that Ilghazi

³¹ *Bella Antiochena*, 109.

³² This potential explanation is offered by Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars*, 162, n. 246.

³³ F. Hodous, 'Faith and the Law: Religious Beliefs and the Death Penalty in the Ilkhanate', in *The Mongols' Middle East: Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, eds. B. de Nicola and C. Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 108.

³⁴ Hodous, 'Faith and the Law', 107–9.

³⁵ For discussion on bathing in blood, K. Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 106.

was known by the title ‘star of the law’.³⁶ In fact the correct honorific title was ‘star of the religion’ (‘Najm al-Din’), although medieval Latin authors often referred to religions as ‘laws’. Likewise, many of his contextual points of detail are either well grounded, or at least plausible. His observation that Ilghazi’s son Timurtash commanded Aleppo is corroborated by Muslim writers.³⁷ Walter’s report that the people of Aleppo were first informed that the Turks had been defeated at Tell Danith on 14 August only then to be told that they had been victorious is broadly confirmed by the Aleppan writer Kamal al-Din (d. 1262).³⁸ On this point, the second battle at Tell Danith seems to have been a very confused encounter and most authors, including Walter the Chancellor, present it as a rather bloody draw. During the fighting – seemingly – at one point a Turkish charge disordered the forces of the count of Tripoli, scattering three of the nine Christian battlelines and a large contingent of infantry, whilst at another point a Christian charge drove the Turks from the battlefield. Thus there was victory and defeat on both sides.³⁹ The salient point here is that, according to Kamal al-Din, news from the defeated Turkish contingents arrived in Aleppo first, before news from the more successful Turkish warriors.⁴⁰ Thus Walter’s claim that the battle was reported first as a reverse and then as a triumph gains plausibility.

In a similar vein, Walter’s suggestion that Ilghazi and Tughtakin were acutely concerned about the Aleppan people’s reaction to the outcome of the battle is entirely reasonable. The longstanding Arab Muslim communities of Northern Syria were very far from reconciled to the idea of Turkish rule during the early twelfth century and the First Crusade had proved that Saljuq power was contestable. In the Aleppan region, the Banu

³⁶ *Bella Antiochena*, 107.

³⁷ *Bella Antiochena*, 105; *Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol. 1, 187; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, 157. Although Hillenbrand, ‘Career of Najm al-Din ʿĪl-Ghāzī’, 268, notes that some sources describe him as a hostage rather than a ruler. See also Asbridge and Edgington’s comments on Walter’s knowledge of Tughtakin and Ilghazi: *Walter the Chancellor’s The Antiochene Wars*, 60.

³⁸ Kamal al-Din, ‘Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep’, *Recueil des historiens des croisades : historiens orientaux*, vol. 3 (Paris : Imprimerie impériale, 1884), 621.

³⁹ *Bella Antiochena*, 103–4.

⁴⁰ Kamal al-Din, ‘Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep’, 621.

Kilab tribe, whose leading family – the Mirdasids – had formerly ruled Aleppo, rebelled against the Saljuq ruler Ridwan in 1100 and ravaged his lands.⁴¹ Other authors report local Muslim hostility including Albert of Aachen, who speaks of the ‘Saracens’ hatred for their Turkish masters, and the Jacobite patriarch Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), who describes how, during this period, the Arabs began to rise up against their former masters during the years following the First Crusade.⁴²

By extension, Aleppo itself had changed hands repeatedly following the death of Ridwan in 1113, and both Ilghazi and Tughtakin had a rather chequered history in their dealings with the city in the years preceding the Field of Blood. In 1117, and having fallen into a parlous state, the urban elites – in dire need of a new leader – were prepared to grant Ilghazi entry to Aleppo, but he was denied access to its main citadel and he abandoned the city soon afterwards. He then raided Aleppo’s hinterland from the nearby town of Bales. Tughtakin and his ally, Aqsunqur al-Bursuqi, then tried to take control but were repulsed by Aleppo’s citizens, who stated that they had no wish for an eastern [presumably meaning ‘Turkish’] ruler. Either before or during these events, the Aleppans sought protection from the Franks.⁴³ It was only when the Franks launched a further raid into Aleppan territory, breaking their truce with Aleppo, that the citizens turned for support first to Tughtakin (who could not take advantage of this offer having just been defeated in battle by the Franks) and then to the ruler of Mosul, and finally, with great reluctance, to Ilghazi. This was a last resort:

⁴¹ Kamal al-Din, ‘Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep’, 588. For discussion of the Mirdasids, see C. E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: a Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 66–7; and on Arab/Turkish tensions during this era, N. Morton and J. France, ‘Arab Muslim Reactions to Turkish Authority in Northern Syria, 1085–1128’, in J. France, *Warfare, Crusade and Conquest in the Middle Ages*, Variorum collected studies series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), XV (1–38).

⁴² Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, 534; Michel le Syrien, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, vol. 3, ed. J.-B. Chabot (Paris: E. Leroux, 1905), 192.

⁴³ Kamal al-Din, ‘Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep’, 612–13; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, 156.

even when Ilghazi arrived, he was initially denied access to the city, although he was grudgingly permitted to take charge soon afterwards.⁴⁴

On these grounds, Ilghazi's rule was far from secure in 1119. The people were acutely in need of a protector, but if he was going to stay in control then he needed to prove to them that he could supply the military defence they needed. His victory at the Field of Blood would have bolstered his credentials, but it is entirely reasonable that the subsequent and rather ambiguous engagement on 14 August would have shaken any confidence he had built up amongst the city's elites. Certainly Ilghazi had few other qualifications to recommend him, given that there was local resistance to him both as an individual and, in all likelihood, as a member of the Turkish ruling elite. Thus Walter's belief that Ilghazi's rule was far from secure and that he endeavoured to trumpet his 'victory' at Tell Danith – in part through humiliating his prisoners – are plausible; their humiliation represented the 'triumphal arch testifying to the victor's greatness'.⁴⁵

On this basis, many of Walter's statements cannot be dismissed simply as fantastical recreations; he was an eyewitness and many of his observations are corroborated elsewhere and need to be taken seriously. His specific comments regarding Ilghazi's and Tughtakin's behaviour towards the prisoners supply clues about their character and culture. One of the most lurid elements of Walter's account is his description of Tughtakin's treatment of Robert Fitz-Fulk, lord of Zardana, who ended up in Turkish captivity after falling from his horse after the second battle of Tell Danith.⁴⁶ Having been transported back to Aleppo, Walter tells that Robert was sent twice by Ilghazi to Tughtakin, who initially condemned him to death, but refused to carry out the execution personally because Robert had formerly paid him tribute. Nevertheless, when Robert was sent for a second time to Tughtakin, he decapitated

⁴⁴ Kamal al-Din, 'Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep', 614–15.

⁴⁵ Y. Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*. Cultures, beliefs and traditions: medieval and early modern peoples 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 119.

⁴⁶ Kamal al-Din, 'Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep', 621–2.

him with a sword.⁴⁷ Much of this tale is corroborated by the Arabic author Usama ibn Munqidh, who confirms both the method of execution and the fact that Robert was sent by Ilghazi to Tughtakin. He also mentions that Robert and Tughtakin had a prior relationship, although he does not establish a direct connection between this back-history and the negotiations surrounding Robert's death. Usama supplies the additional detail that Ilghazi did not want to execute Robert because he wanted to ransom him.⁴⁸ This point is not mentioned by Walter although he does subsequently mention other occasions when Ilghazi restrained Tughtakin so that he could earn ransom monies from the prisoners.⁴⁹ These details aside, the bones of Walter report are corroborated by Usama's account.

More arresting is Walter's claim that Tughtakin then converted Robert's skull into a bejewelled drinking vessel.⁵⁰ While it is tempting to dismiss this claim as sheer fantasy, included for polemical effect, there are substantial grounds for taking his claim seriously. The only other author of any twelfth-century crusading narrative to report this grisly practice was Guibert of Nogent, but crucially he too levelled this accusation solely at Tughtakin. He describes how in 1108 Tughtakin captured his sparring partner Gervase, lord of Tiberias (formerly advocate of the church of Mont-Notre-Dame in Soissons), and, like Robert, Tughtakin executed him and carved his skull into a cup.⁵¹ The fact that two unrelated authors both ascribed the same practice solely to Tughtakin at two separate moments is suggestive. The later Muslim chronicler Ibn al-Furat also confirms that Gervase's head was turned into a drinking vessel.⁵² These accounts gain further credibility when it is considered that this was

⁴⁷ *Bella Antiochena*, 107–9.

⁴⁸ Usama Ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, trans. P. Cobb (London: Penguin, 2008), 131–2.

⁴⁹ *Bella Antiochena*, 109.

⁵⁰ *Bella Antiochena*, 108–9.

⁵¹ Guibert de Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos*, 350. For discussion on Gervase, see: A. V. Murray, *The Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Dynastic History, 1099–1125* (Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, 2000), 201. Both Hillenbrand and Peacock take this accusation seriously: Hillenbrand, 'What's in a Name?', 469–71; A. Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 232.

⁵² Hillenbrand, 'What's in a Name?', 467; Ibn al-Furat, *Ayyubids, Mamlukes and Crusaders: Selections From the Tārīkh al-Duwal wa'l-Mulūk*, ed. and trans. U. and M.C. Lyons (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons Ltd, 1971),

not a standard accusation within Western Europe's toolbox of stereotypes. True, Herodotus mentions this practice in a description of the Scythians, and he was widely read in medieval Europe, but there is nothing to suggest that either Walter or Guibert were drawing upon his account.⁵³ Moreover, other sources confirm that the creation of skull cups from the decapitated heads of fallen enemy leaders was an established practice amongst Turkic steppe peoples.⁵⁴ Theophanes reports that the Bulgar ruler Krum made a silver-lined cup from the head of the Byzantine Emperor Nikephorus I, following his victory at Varbitsa in 811.⁵⁵ Several centuries later, the Bulgar ruler Kalojan is said to have decapitated Emperor Baldwin I of Constantinople, whom he had imprisoned, and turned his head into a bejewelled goblet.⁵⁶ Likewise, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* described the Pechenegs carrying out this practice in the tenth century.⁵⁷ In sum, it seems reasonable to conclude that Tughtakin did indeed possess a collection of bejewelled drinking vessels formed from the skulls of his fallen enemies – and that Robert's head was added to his collection. Needless to say, this practice is not Islamic in inspiration and speaks rather of the world and culture of the Eurasian steppe.⁵⁸

45–6. Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, 122, 223, considers the possibility that the description of Tughtakin turning skulls into cups was a motif 'connected to the imagery of the Holy Grail'. It seems more likely, however, for the reasons given above, that this was simply observed reality.

⁵³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 256. Among the very few authors to report this practice in subsequent centuries was Paul the Deacon (d. c.799) in his description of the victory of Alboin (king of the Lombards) over the Gepids: Paul the Deacon, 'Historia Langobardorum', in *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX*, ed. G. Waitz. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum*, 1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1878), 69.

⁵⁴ See Hillenbrand, 'What's in a Name', 469–70; I. Kafesoğlu, *Origins of Bulgars* (Ankara: Institute for the Study of Turkish Culture, 1986), 29.

⁵⁵ For the ethnological relationships between the various Turkic groups discussed here, see P. Golden, 'The Turks: Origins and Expansion', in idem *Turks and Khazars: Origins, Institutions, and Interactions in Pre-Mongol Eurasia*. *Variorum Collected Studies Series* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), I (1–33). For a later example, see A. Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 233.

⁵⁶ Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD284–813*, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 673–4.

⁵⁷ George Akropolites, *The History: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, ed. R. Macrides (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 139–40.

⁵⁸ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, trans. S.H. Cross and O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 90.

⁵⁹ William of Rubruck also claims that the Tibetans make such skull-goblets: P. Jackson, ed., *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*. Hakluyt Society, 2nd series 173 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 158.

Other indicators of these leaders' steppe background can be seen in the methods by which they killed and mutilated their prisoners. Walter lists numerous methods of execution and defilement employed by Tughtakin and Ilghazi, but two of these are particularly suggestive. The first was to suspend prisoners by their feet and then shoot them repeatedly with arrows. Such Turkish practices are widely attested and both Western and Eastern Christian authors describe Turks killing bound captives with arrows. Orderic Vitalis, Robert the Monk and Albert of Aachen all make this charge in their crusading narratives, Albert again ascribing this custom to Tughtakin.⁵⁹ Likewise, Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) describes the Saljuq Sultan Alp Arslan losing his life whilst carrying out just such an execution.⁶⁰ Again, this derives from the Turks' steppe background where archery-themed symbolic acts and rituals are widely referenced in the surviving sources. In a similar vein, at an earlier point in his second book, Walter reports Ilghazi scalping his enemies.⁶¹ This too speaks of Ilghazi's Central Asian background. He is not alone in carrying out such acts, and Albert of Aachen also indicates that Tughtakin scalped his enemies.⁶² Indeed, as Hillenbrand has shown, his very name references the Turkish practice of bearing *tughs* (often horse-tail banners but also trophies made from human remains, such as hair) on spear points into battle.⁶³ Other accounts

⁵⁹ D. Kempf and M. Bull, eds., *The Historia Iherosolimitana of Robert the Monk* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 5; Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. 6, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 112; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, 770. See also G.M. Myers, ed., *Les chétifs: the Old French Crusade Cycle*, vol. 5 (Alabama: University of Alabama Press), 10; N.R. Thorp, ed., *La chanson de Jérusalem: the Old French Crusade Cycle*, vol. 6 (Alabama: University of Alabama Press), 196.

⁶⁰ Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l Faraj: the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, vol. 1, trans. E. Wallis Budge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 224.

⁶¹ *Bella Antiochena*, 91. See also A.S. Tritton and H.A.R. Gibb, 'The First and Second Crusades From an Anonymous Syriac Chronicle', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1933): 286.

⁶² Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, 770. Another possible reference to the Turks scalping their enemies can be found in Matthew of Edessa's chronicle where he describes Jokermish of Mosul's treatment of prisoners taken after a successful raid on Edessa in 1104. He writes: 'After having flayed all their corpses, they took their heads back to Persia': Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades: Tenth to Twelfth Centuries. The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. A. Dostourian (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 197. Fulcher of Chartres also reports an instance of flaying conducted by a Turkish leader but it is not clear whether this was specifically an instance of scalping: Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127)*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 692. See also Thorp, ed.: *La chanson de Jérusalem*, 196. Bohemond II apparently met this same end: Tritton and Gibb, 'First and Second Crusades', 99.

⁶³ Hillenbrand, 'What's in a Name', 469.

of Turks scalping their enemies occur in many of sources from the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries, in texts produced by authors from very different backgrounds.⁶⁴

Perhaps the best known – certainly the most widely reported – of Ilghazi’s foibles was his penchant for drinking binges. Walter recalls that at one point during his sojourn in Aleppo after the second battle of Tell Danith he remained ‘as if dead’ (*quasi mortuus*) in a state of uncontrollable intoxication for 15 days.⁶⁵ He is not alone in reporting Ilghazi’s sustained drunkenness. Usama ibn Munqidh went further, claiming that he was frequently inebriated for upwards of 20 days and that, after defeating the Franks at the Field of Blood, he never really recovered until the arrival of Baldwin II of Jerusalem in northern Syria.⁶⁶ In terms of strictest factual accuracy, Usama is probably at error here because, as Tezcan points out, Ilghazi spent the period immediately after the Field of Blood besieging al-Atharib and Zardana, rather than overindulging in drink.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Usama’s report still reflects Ilghazi’s reputation and he was probably offering a slightly misremembered report of Ilghazi’s drinking after the second battle of Tell Danith, which took place only a short while later.

Ilghazi and Tughtakin were not the only Turks to be accused of drunkenness. Hillenbrand has suggested that drunkenness formed part of the derisory stereotype that contemporary Arabs ascribed to the Turks.⁶⁸ This seems to have been particularly the case in

⁶⁴See, for example: *The ‘Templar of Tyre’: Part III of the ‘Deeds of the Cypriots’*, trans. P. Crawford, Crusade Texts in Translation VI (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 53. See also: Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography*, 465; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, 337.

⁶⁵ *Bella Antiochena*, 113.

⁶⁶ Usama Ibn Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, 131.

⁶⁷ Tezcan, ‘Realpolitik and Jihād’, 270. See also N. Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders: Christianity’s Wars in the Middle East, 1095–1382, From the Islamic Sources* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 26.

⁶⁸ C. Hillenbrand, ‘Ibn al-Adīm’s Biography of the Seljuq Sultan, Alp Arslan’, in *Actas XVI Congreso Union Européene des Arabisants et Islamisants*, eds. C. Vásquez de Benito and M.A. Manzano Rodriguez (Salamanca: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1995), 240–2. See also Abu Dulaf, ‘Pseudo-Travel’, in *The Turkic Peoples in Medieval Arabic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Y. Frenkel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 54–60. Usama ibn Munqidh claims that Tughtakin was drunk during his execution of Robert Fitz Fulc: Usama Ibn Munqidh, *Book of contemplation*, 132. In a rare deviation from his generally positive description of Turkish rulers, Ibn al-Qalanisi describes Ilghazi as being frequently drunk: *Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, 149.

the early years of Turkish rule when the discourse of Turkish piety and idealised rule was only beginning to emerge. The famous *atabeg* Zengi, conqueror of Edessa, is said to have died in a state of drunkenness.⁶⁹ Needless to say, the Turks' tendency towards intoxication stands at variance to their characterisation as pious Muslims, yet it is the duration of these binges that is so distinctive and which requires particular attention. Frequently their bouts – with Ilghazi as a prime example – are said to have lasted for a prolonged period, spanning days if not weeks. As Peacock has demonstrated Turkish sultans likewise could dedicate large blocks of time to drinking and the *Qabusnama* by Kayka'us recommended that rulers should devote two to three days per week to drinking.⁷⁰ Such drinking parties were common among Turkish elites and reflect the influence of steppe culture where the drinking of *qumiz* (fermented mare's milk), among other alcoholic brews, was part of everyday life and ritual.⁷¹

The excerpts considered thus far tend towards the view that these warlords were continuators of existing steppe practices, rather than adopters of Islamic culture. Nevertheless, there are other pieces of evidence that may tend in a rather different direction. At two points in his chronicle Walter reports Tughtakin and Ilghazi offering their captives a choice between death and the renunciation of their Christian faith.⁷² On both occasions Walter informs his readers that the captives in question refused to deny their religion and were consequently killed. These are interesting episodes for this present question because the

⁶⁹ Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, 271. Kamal al-Din in his biography of Zengi reported an interesting tale of this Turkish warlord's drunkenness set in Mosul. It tells of a pious Muslim inhabitant who saw Zengi drinking alcohol whilst travelling by boat on the Tigris. He then swam out to Zengi's boat and emptied his drink into the river whilst also cutting the strings of his lute. Apparently Zengi made no move to stop him: T. El-Azhari, *Zengi and the Muslim Response to the Crusades* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 154.

⁷⁰ For discussion on this practice and on Kayka'us' observations, Peacock, *Great Seljuk Empire*, 172–8.

⁷¹ For a description of *qumiz*, Jackson, ed., *Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 76–7. For an example, see the three day drinking party that Mahmud, Ghaznavid sultan, is said to have laid on for Isra'il son of Saljuq: C. Bosworth and K. Luther, eds. and trans., *The History of the Seljuq Turks* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 31. For discussion of surviving items such as cups and bowls which reflect this drinking culture, see: S. Canby and others, *Court and Cosmos: the Great Age of the Seljuqs* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 127–8, 135. Ibn Battutah reports the Anatolian Turks still drinking *qumiz* during his travels in the region during the fourteenth century: T. Mackintosh-Smith, ed., *The Travels of Ibn Battutah* (London: Picador, 2003), 122.

⁷² *Bella Antiochena*, 108, 110.

basic fact that the Turks wished to convert their captives implies that they possessed a strong spiritual identity and attached a degree of importance to effecting coerced conversion in the name of their faith. Also, it is fairly clear that the religion they had in mind must have been Islam (rather than their pre-Islamic beliefs) because, following the refusal of the prisoners to yield to his demands, Ilghazi requested that the ‘patriarch of Damascus’ (referred to immediately afterwards as the *archadius*) kill a selected prisoner: Arnulf, seneschal of Marash.⁷³ Exactly who this ‘patriarch’ was is unclear. The suggestion has been made that either he may have been an imam or, alternatively, the term *archadius* may be a garbled reference to a *qadi*, (a judge who interprets religious law).⁷⁴ This would make sense and, to take another example, Metcalfe, in discussion of William of Malaterra’s *De rebus gestis Rogerii*, noted that in William’s history of the Normans in Sicily there are references to an *archadius* from Palermo and another from Syracuse; he too felt that these were references to *qadis*.⁷⁵ Thus this conclusion is probably correct. Regarding the identity of this *qadi*, one possibility is that he was Abu al-Fadl Ibn al-Khashshab. Certainly this *qadi* was present at this time and, according to Kamal al-Din, he made a speech to the Turkmen troops on the eve of the Field of Blood inciting them to fight the Franks.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, he cannot be identified unproblematically as the individual in question, not least because he was the Aleppan, rather than a Damascene, *qadi*.⁷⁷ Whoever this patriarch may have been, he was evidently a senior Islamic religious leader, and these Turkish leaders clearly attached a value to his presence during these proceedings and wished to convert the Franks to his faith. In addition, by

⁷³ *Bella Antiochena*, 111.

⁷⁴ Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor’s The Antiochene Wars*, 165, nn. 256–7.

⁷⁵ A. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 95–6. Baxter-Wolf offered an alternative explanation in this instance suggesting it could refer to a *qa’id* (military governor): Geoffrey of Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of His Brother Duke Robert Guiscard*, trans. K. Baxter Wolf (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 96; Geoffrey of Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, ed. E. Pontieri. *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 5 part1 (Bologna : N. Zanichelli, 1927), 11,44.

⁷⁶ Kamal al-Din, ‘Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep’, 617.

⁷⁷ See C. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2006), 109.

offering the prisoners a choice between apostasy and death, they may have been adhering to the Islamic law which required Muslims to offer prisoners the opportunity to convert before execution.⁷⁸

These are all indicators of their Islamic identity, but even here there are important nuances. Strikingly, Walter reports that this ‘patriarch’ refused to execute the prisoner as Ilghazi had asked, offering the sword instead to a nearby emir. Apparently he excused himself, ‘pricked by conscience’ (*mente compunctus*),⁷⁹ saying to the emir: ‘you carry out this act of respect for our law in my place! So great a man should lose his head at the hand of a great knight.’⁸⁰ Clearly the patriarch was troubled by Ilghazi’s actions, although it is not clear precisely why he was so uneasy. Perhaps he was sickened by the whole proceedings. Perhaps he had some other political motive or reason. Certainly when Saladin later invited Muslim clerics to kill bound Frankish prisoners taken in 1178 it was viewed by peers as a highly distasteful deed.⁸¹ Either way, the patriarch’s discomfiture clearly manifested itself sufficiently in his public behaviour to attract Walter’s attention, and it strongly suggests that he perceived a discordance between, on one hand, Ilghazi’s and Tughtakin’s actions and, on the other, those of the main Islamic religious leader there present.⁸²

This unsettled relationship between religious leaders and Turkish commanders manifests itself in other sources. Returning to the Aleppan *qadi* Abu al-Fadl ibn al-Khashshab, Kamal al-Din reports that when he began to address the Turkmen troops before

⁷⁸ Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, 137.

⁷⁹ *Bella Antiochena*, 111.

⁸⁰ *Bella Antiochena*, 111. Translation from Asbridge and Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars*, 165.

⁸¹ See M.C. Lyons and D.E.P. Jackson, *Saladin: the Politics of the Holy War* (Cambridge, 1982), 132; although Saladin also invited clerics to kill prisoners taken after the battle of Hattin in 1187.

⁸² Mallett suggests that the ‘patriarch’ and Ilghazi were in agreement in carrying out this execution, but he doesn’t discuss the clear discomfiture Walter attributes to this religious leader. Mallett offers the supposed cooperation between the ‘patriarch’ and Ilghazi as evidence that Walter was seeking to show that Ilghazi’s brutal actions were representative of Islam as a whole; that he was being presented as acting like a ‘good Muslim’. In fact, this event in Walter’s chronicle suggests something rather different, showing elements of both agreement and discordance between these two leaders: Mallett, ‘The “Other” in the crusading period’, 121.

the Field of Blood he was immediately mocked by one Turkish warrior who asked his comrades why they should obey a man in a turban. Kamal al-Din goes on to report that Ibn al-Khashshab rose above such heckling to offer an inspirational speech. Even so, the mere fact that he was interrupted in this way (and that this interjection was deemed worthy of recording) implies that he was not unanimously well received within the army.⁸³ This again seems to indicate a separation between elements among the Turkmen and the Islamic leaders accompanying them. Alternatively, this uneasy episode may reflect Ibn al-Khashshab's position as a Twelver Shia cleric, a status which might set him apart from his – at least nominally – Sunni Turkish allies. This certainly seems the most likely explanation, but this in itself is striking because it was not common for a Shia cleric to be allowed to accompany and address a Turkish army.

Another practice Walter attaches to Ilghazi and the Turks of northern Syria is a reverence for auguries and astrology. Describing the advent of the Sultan's army in 1115 he reports the Turks 'taking auguries from the sun and moon'.⁸⁴ Likewise, one of Ilghazi's soldiers is depicted recommending to his master that the Christian prisoners be tortured as part of their 'astrological rituals'.⁸⁵ Walter's conviction that the Turks revered such omens is entirely plausible and probably has a basis in fact. Strikingly, in 1105, the Damascene writer al-Sulami, in his *Kitab al-Jihad*, specifically warned the 'community of sultans of this country' (a direct allusion to his Turkish overlords, possibly including Tughtakin) to spurn astrologers, a statement that reveals his fear that they were prone to such influences.⁸⁶ Other Muslim sources describe the Turks consulting the stars and famously so too does the *Gesta Francorum* in its report of the Turkish general Karbugha being warned by his mother not to

⁸³ Kamal al-Din, 'Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep', 617.

⁸⁴ *Bella Antiochena*, 66–7.

⁸⁵ 'sollemnitatibus mathematicis': *Bella Antiochena*, 93; I am following Asbridge and Edgington's translation: *Walter the Chancellor's The Antiochene Wars*, 134.

⁸⁶ Al-Sulami, *The Book of the Jihad of 'Ali ibn Tahir al-Sulami (d. 1106): Text, Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. N. Christie (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), 211.

take the field against the forces of the First Crusade.⁸⁷ Likewise, astrological signs, symbols and charts are well represented in the Turks' material culture.⁸⁸

What is unclear however is whether these rituals should be characterised as a manifestation of the Turks' former steppe culture or whether they had adopted them during their conquest of the Near East. The Arab nobleman Usama ibn Munqidh, for example, alluded to astrological practices in both his home town of Shaizar and in Fatimid Egypt. Even his father was a devotee of the horoscopes, an interest he pursued 'even with all his pious scrupulosity'.⁸⁹ Astrology cannot be automatically labelled as a Turkish import to the region when it was already well embedded amongst the local dynasties. On the other hand, traditional steppe beliefs also incorporated such practices and the alternative interpretation is that these were long-standing customs practiced by the incoming Turks, including Ilghazi (or perhaps a mixture of both influences).⁹⁰ On this point it is difficult to be sure, but it is suggestive that it is typically only the early crusading histories that report Turkish astrological rituals. Christian authors from the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries are almost silent about such practices. Perhaps this is a reflection of the Turks' deepening engagement with Islam over this period; and correspondingly their abandonment of other influences. Wherever the truth may lie in this matter, the Turks' interest in astrology adds a further component to the Turks' already varied topography of spiritual beliefs.

Cumulatively, these reports of Tughtakin's and Ilghazi's behaviour build an image of two leaders who saw some value in signalling their adherence to Islam. They respected Muslim religious leaders (who by turn seem to have been unsettled by their Turkish

⁸⁷ *Gesta Francorum: the Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, ed. R. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 55; Ibn al-Athir, *The Annals of the Saljuq Turks*, trans. D.S. Richards (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 151.

⁸⁸ Canby and others, *Court and Cosmos*, *passim*.

⁸⁹ Usama Ibn Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, 33 (quotation from 67); P. Cobb, *Usama ibn Munqidh: Warrior Poet of the Age of the Crusades* (Oxford: One World, 2005), 78–80.

⁹⁰ A. Peacock, *Early Seljūq History: a New Interpretation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 124–5.

overlords) and they perceived conversion to Islam to be important. Nevertheless, so many of their actions speak of customs or ritual behaviours that are redolent of their pre-Islamic steppe culture. Islamic culture had penetrated only superficially into these zones of behaviour. It seems likely that, as Bar Hebraeus later suggested, their newfound Islamic religious adherence was driven largely at least in part by pragmatic political logic.⁹¹ They were relatively new conquerors and they needed to secure support from the Muslim populace. It is useful to recall here a comment made by Kaplony regarding Turkic conversion to Islam in Central Asia which fits well in this Syrian context: ‘pre-Mongolian Turks considered converting to Islam not as turning away from, or even denying, their Turkish past, but rather as an addition to their identity, as a new dimension.’⁹² A politic adherence to Islam might have been deemed advantageous and aspects of their new faith may have been spiritually attractive, but Turkish commanders were plainly unwilling to jettison their former pastimes and customs, including those which stood in direct contravention of Islamic law. Indeed they may have perceived no need to abandon their old beliefs as a necessary predicate for the adoption of the new. As conquerors they presumably believed that it was for them to dictate those cultural/religious practices they would adopt from their conquered subjects (and those which they would not). They certainly were not going to be dictated to.

Ilghazi and Tughtakin emerge as products of their time. Their behaviour and conduct reflects a mid-point in the slow transition by which the Turks were remoulded from shamanistic steppe nomads into settled Islamic rulers. Whether they deserve to be labelled as barbarians, brutes or drunks – as historians of the early twentieth century have captioned

⁹¹ Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography of Gregory Abū'l Faraj*, 195. For discussion, see A.M. Khazanov, ‘The Spread of World Religions in Medieval Nomadic Societies of the Eurasian Steppes’, in *Nomadic Diplomacy, Destruction and Religion from the Pacific to the Adriatic*, eds. M. Gervers and W. Schleppe (Toronto: Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 1994), 11–33; T. Stepanov, *The Bulgars and the Steppe Empire in the Early Middle Ages: the Problem of the Others*, trans. T. Stefanova and T. Stepanov (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 64.

⁹² A. Kaplony, ‘The Conversion of the Turks of Central Asia to Islam as Seen by Arabic and Persian Geography: a Comparative Perspective’, *Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 39 (2008): 328.

them – is irrelevant.⁹³ Dismissing their attitudes towards violence, spirituality and/or alcohol as unadorned vice or barbarity brings us no closer to understanding the cultural milieu of which they were part.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this study has been to see how strenuously contemporary and later Muslim intellectuals sought to present leaders such as Tughtakin and Ilghazi as exemplary Islamic rulers. As the evidence discussed here has shown, such depictions clearly stretched reality whilst covering up a multitude of behaviours that did not fit the desired discourse. Reflecting upon such characterisations, it would be easy to dismiss these idealised portrayals as mere propaganda: authors simply giving their later, fully-Islamicised Turkish masters a version of history that was more suited to their agendas/tastes. There is almost certainly some truth in this and yet there seems also to have been a more complex venture at work. An important author here, whose work perhaps reflects this endeavour, is al-Sulami (d. 1106). In essence his *Kitab* is a call for *jihad* against the Franks, which offers guidance and advice on the conduct of holy war supported with exemplars drawn from the early Islamic period. It is an orthodox piece of work intended for an orthodox listener. Christie shows that it was intended for a wide audience, including the Turkish sultan, but he also observes that it may also have had an impact on local rulers such as Tughtakin.⁹⁴ Al-Sulami accepts the principle of Saljuq authority and repeatedly affirms the sultan's overall supremacy (and his responsibility to lead the military *jihad* against the crusaders).⁹⁵ Given the above discussion, al-Sulami's pious *Kitab al-Jihad* feels rather out of place when compared with reports of Tughtakin's drinking bouts, his scalping, his skull cups and his other distinctively steppe-influenced practices. Perhaps the disjuncture between the text's message and Tughtakin's behaviour can be dismissed by styling al-Sulami as a propagandist, a writer

⁹³ For discussion of the earlier historiography, see Hillenbrand, 'Career of Najm al-Dīn ʿIl-Ghāzī', 252; Tezcan, 'Realpolitik and Jihād', 263–4.

⁹⁴ Al-Sulami, *Book of the Jihad*, 10–12.

⁹⁵ Al-Sulami, *Book of the Jihad*, 211, 233–4, 342, 344.

adhering more to an approved Saljuq discourse than to reality. Nevertheless, there is something more here. It seems more likely that al-Sulami, in so far as he was addressing Tughtakin and his other Turkish masters, was gently seeking to steer him and his peers away from the steppe practices of his forefathers and into a more recognisably Islamic mould. Perhaps the Islamic scholars who presented Turkish warlords as exemplary Muslim rulers were seeking to shape their masters as much as their masters were trying to legitimise their own rule by recasting history.

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