

## Department of History: Past Events

### The *Historia Iherosolimitana* of Robert the Monk

The Arts and Humanities Research Council is funding a four-year (2007-11) programme of research, led by [Professor Marcus Bull](#), on the historiography of the First Crusade, specifically the *Historia Iherosolimitana* of Robert the Monk. This is a major project, awarded £540,000. Its aim is to understand the social and cultural impact of the crusading movement on western Europe, through an examination of the First Crusade as a site of memory and commemoration. As well as being a significant historical event in itself, the First Crusade (1095-1101) was a historiographical phenomenon: it became the theme for more contemporary histories than any other episode in the Middle Ages. The story was told in Latin prose and verse, as well as in vernacular epic; these texts all conserved powerful collective memories. Of all the chronicles of the First Crusade, by far the most widely copied was Robert's *Historia*, a vivid account of the expedition between its launch at the Council of Clermont in 1095 and the aftermath of the crusaders' capture of Jerusalem in 1099. The *Historia* was written in about 1107 in north-eastern France. The scale of Robert's popularity requires emphasis. According to a list compiled in 1905 there survive about 90 manuscripts; and in fact, the project has already succeeded in identifying several more, hitherto unnoticed, manuscripts. The number of copies of Robert's *Historia* exceeds those of most other First Crusade histories by a factor of at least ten. This imbalance cannot be the result of the vagaries of source survival; it suggests that Robert's text assumed a cultural significance that transcended its status as simply one crusade narrative among many. A full understanding of the *Historia* is therefore vital, and the project aims to reach this through a comprehensive examination of the manuscript tradition.

The postdoctoral researcher attached to the project, [Dr Damien Kempf](#), is tracking down and studying all the manuscripts of the *Historia* dotted around numerous European archives and libraries. This quest is taking him to, amongst many other places, Paris, Brussels, Uppsala, Copenhagen, Berlin, Munich, Wolfenbüttel, and Vienna. The principal objective of the project is to create a new edition of the *Historia* based on these manuscripts; the last edition, which was produced in the nineteenth century and was based on only about a quarter of the surviving manuscripts, is becoming increasingly exposed as deficient as the project proceeds. Robert the Monk's *Historia* has long been the 'holy grail' of research on the First Crusade. The sheer number of manuscripts in so many countries has always deterred scholars from attempting a detailed study. But the AHRC award means that this will now be remedied. The crusades continue to have a powerful modern resonance, and the word is often bandied around in discussion of contemporary conflicts around the world, so it is important to develop a clear understanding of the crusade movement in its true historical context, as well as to integrate the study of the crusades with close attention to medieval manuscript culture – a connection that has tended to be downplayed by scholars in the past.

Part of the project will be a large international conference on *Crusade and Narrative*, to be held in spring 2011. This conference will not limit itself to the historiography of the First Crusade, but will broaden the perspective to include scholarly work being

done on other crusade texts, and to set agendas for future research. Its aim will be to encourage researchers to investigate new questions, methodologies and theoretical approaches when studying crusade history's rich narrative source repertoire.

A further major element of the project is a PhD studentship funded by the AHRC, on Baldric of Bourgueil's *Historia Jerosolimitana*, another early twelfth-century Latin prose history of the First Crusade. The doctoral student, **Steven Biddlecombe**, is preparing a new edition of the text, having already discovered several hitherto unknown manuscripts to add to the seven that we knew about before. His research will take him to places such as Paris, Montpellier and Rouen. Baldric is a very interesting but much under-researched figure, both a high-ranking ecclesiastic and a versatile writer known for his poetry as well as for his elegant and learned prose works. A close examination of Baldric's crusade history is therefore a most useful complement to the work on Robert, and is opening up further questions about medieval historiography and the cultural impact of the First Crusade.