

# Burchard of Strasbourg

DATE OF BIRTH	Uncertain; probably 2nd quarter of 12 <sup>th</sup> century
PLACE OF BIRTH	Cologne
DATE OF DEATH	Uncertain; probably late 12 <sup>th</sup> century or early 13 <sup>th</sup> century (after 1194)
PLACE OF DEATH	Unknown, probably Strasbourg

## BIOGRAPHY

The author of the *Itinerarium* is probably Burkardus, native of Cologne, a churchman in the entourage of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. Several of his letters survive, one of which relates the author's diplomatic embassies to Aquileia, Salzburg and Hungary in 1161; another narrates the emperor's siege of Milan in 1162. In 1175, Burchard was sent on a diplomatic mission to Saladin; this was apparently the continuation of an earlier diplomatic exchange, for imperial chronicles tell of Egyptian envoys present in Frederick's court in 1173. Burchard, notary and chaplain in the imperial court, signed a number of charters in 1177 and 1178. Finally, various documents mention Burchard, Vidame of Strasbourg, between 1182 and 1194. It seems probable that all these documents refer to the same person.

## MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### *Primary*

Burchard of Strasbourg, *Epistolae*, ed. F. Güterboeck, 'Le lettere del notaio imperiale Burcardo intorno alla politica del Barbarossa nello schismo ed alla distruzione di milano', *Bolletino dell' Istituto storico per il medio evo e Archiv. Murator* 66 (1949) 1-65

### *Secondary*

- F. Worstbruck, 'Burchard von Straßburg', *Die Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexicon* 1, Berlin and New York, 1978, 118-19
- P. Scheffer-Boichorst, 'Der Kaiserliche Notar und der Straßburger Viztum Burchard', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Oberrheins* N.F. 4 (1889) 456-77 (repr. in *Gesammelte Schriften von Paul Scheffer-Boichorst*, Berlin, 1903-5, 225-47)

- J. Laurent, 'Burchard von Straßburg', *Serapeum: Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswissenschaft, Handschriftenkunde und ältere Literatur* 19 (1858) 145-54; 20 (1859) 174-76

## WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

### *Itinerarium*, 'Itinerary'

DATE 1175 or shortly thereafter

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Latin

#### DESCRIPTION

Burchard's *Itinerary* reads as a travel narrative. He tells how he set sail from Genoa and stopped in Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily (he describes the flora, fauna, and the inhabitants of these islands); he describes the fish of the Mediterranean and the famous lighthouse of Alexandria, which he saw as he approached the African coast. He gives a long description of Egypt, and then relates his voyages across the desert to Syria, where he visits Damascus and the monastery of Saydnaya.

Burchard nowhere mentions his diplomatic mission to Saladin, but shows particular interest in relations between 'Saracens' and their Jewish and Christian subjects. He presents a picture of easy *convivencia*; members of the three religions show courtesy and respect for each other, and he repeatedly describes the flourishing Christian communities that he encountered in Egypt and Syria. Moreover, he emphasizes Muslim reverence for Christ and the Virgin Mary. In particular, he describes the Marian shrines of Matariyya, near Cairo, and Saydnaya, near Damascus, where both Christians and Muslims show their devotion to the Virgin and she performs miracles on their behalf. Throughout his narration, and in particular in his descriptions of the Marian sanctuaries, Burchard affirms that Saracens, Christians, and even Jews are united in their devotion to Mary. She grants miracles to all her faithful, apparently showing no preference for Christians.

Burchard is aware of doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity, which he describes succinctly. He says that the Saracens believe that Jesus was a prophet, miraculously born from the Virgin, but they deny that he is the son of God, that he was baptized, died and was buried. He says that Muslims believe in a paradise of sensual delights. In battle against Christians, the Muslim warrior thinks only of the ten virgins who await him in heaven if he dies a martyr's death, but, Burchard adds skeptically, his Saracen interlocutors were unable

to answer his questions about these women. He also describes the Egyptians' customs of veiling and isolating their women and, with some disapprobation, their polygamy (which, he notes, only a few men practice). The *Itinerarium* ends abruptly without describing the return voyage.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Burchard is rare among 12<sup>th</sup>-century Latin authors in his portrayal of idyllic harmony between Egyptian and Syrian Christians and Muslims; he is also unusual in his calm, non-polemical presentation of doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam. If this text is indeed the product of Burchard's diplomatic mission from Frederick Barbarossa to Saladin, this positive image of Islam corresponds to the diplomatic purpose of his embassy, if we assume that it was to forge an alliance or at least a treaty between emperor and sultan. If the 'Saracens' are so pious, so devoted to the Virgin, if they allow Christians to freely practice their religion, what could be more natural than to seek a peaceful alliance with them? Just as other Latin authors denigrated Islam and its prophet to justify wars of conquest against Muslims, Burchard paints a glowing picture of Muslim-Christian harmony to justify peace with Saladin. If the Virgin herself bestows the grace of miracles on the Saracens, he seems to be saying, who are we to consider them enemies of her Son?

The *Itinerarium* was subsequently used and cited by a number of medieval authors, such as the chronicler Jacques de Vitry and various pilgrims, who insert Burchard's descriptions into the narratives of their own travels (real or fictive), beginning with a certain Thietmar, who travelled to Jerusalem and Saydnaya in 1217.

#### MANUSCRIPTS

MS Vat – Lat. 1058, fols 108r-112r (13<sup>th</sup> century)

MS Munich, Universitätsbibliothek – 76 (burned in 1944; base MS of the edition by Lehmann and Glauning, who describe it in *Burchard, Itinerarium*, pp. 61-62)

MS Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsbibliothek – cod. 362, fols 36r-38v (14<sup>th</sup> century)

The version in Arnold of Lübeck's *Chronica Slavorum* survives in 12 MSS, most of them modern (16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries), none earlier than the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

## EDITIONS &amp; TRANSLATIONS

- Burchard of Strasbourg, Itinerarium*, ed. P. Lehmann and O. Glauning in 'Mittelalterliche Handschriftenbruchstücke der Universitätsbibliothek und des Georgianum zu München', *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 72 (1940) 61-73
- Arnold of Lübeck, Chronicae Slavorum continuatio*, ed. G. Pertz, in *MGH SS* 21, Hannover, 1869 (this 13<sup>th</sup>-century chronicler inserts Burchard's text verbatim into his chronicle, making for the most part only minor modifications, referring to Burchard as *Gerardus Argentinensem vicedominum*)

## STUDIES

- Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, ch. 7 (= Tolan, *L'Europe latine et le monde arabe au moyen âge. Cultures en conflit et en convergence*, Rennes, 2009, ch. 6)
- M. Milwright, 'The balsam of Matariyya. An exploration of a medieval panacea', *BSOAS* 66 (2003) 193-209
- B.Z. Kedar, 'Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim and Frankish worshippers. The case of Şaydnâyâ and the Knights Templar', in Z. Hunyadi and J. Laszlovszky (eds), *The crusades and the military orders. Expanding the frontiers of medieval Latin Christianity*, Budapest, 2001, 89-100
- D. Baraz, 'The incarnated icon of Saidnaya goes west. A re-examination of the motif in the light of new manuscript evidence', *Le Muséon* 108 (1995) 181-91
- U. Zanetti, 'Matarieh. La sainte famille et les baumiers', *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 (1993) 21-68
- C. Cannuyer, 'Les pyramides d'Egypte dans la littérature médiolatine', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 62 (1964) 673-81
- P. Devos, 'Les premières versions occidentales de la légende de Saïdanaia', *Analecta Bollandiana* 65 (1947) 243-78

**John Tolan**