



Rewriting the First Crusade

Epistolary Culture in the Middle Ages

Thomas W. Smith

DESCRIPTION

An exploration of the letters from the First Crusade, yielding evidence for a number of reinterpretations of the movement.

The letters stemming from the First Crusade are premier sources for understanding the launch, campaign, and aftermath of the expedition. Between 1095 and 1100, epistles sustained social relationships across the Mediterranean and within Europe, as a mixture of historical writing, literary invention, news, and theological interpretation. They served ecclesiastical administration, projected authority, and formed focal points for spiritual commemoration and para-liturgical campaigns.

This volume, grounded on extensive research into the original manuscripts, and presenting numerous new manuscript witnesses, argues that some of the letters are post hoc "inventions", composed by generations of scribe-readers who visited crusading sites from the twelfth century on, adding new layers of meaning in the form of interpolations and post-scripts. Drawing upon this new understanding, and blurring the distinction of epistolary "reality", it rewrites central aspects of the history of the First Crusade, considering the documents in a new way: as markers of enthusiasm and support for the crusade movement among monastic clergy, who copied and consumed them as a form of scribal crusading. Whether authentic letters or literary "confections", they functioned as communal sites for the celebration, commemoration and memorialisation of the expedition.

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