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ST GEORGE AND THE CRUSADERS

Today is St George's Day. April 23rd is the feast day of the Patron Saint of England, adopted as such during the crusader period. So I thought that I would collect a few early sources connecting the crusaders and St George. This is not comprehensive: merely whatever comes to hand.

In the Latin *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, ch.15, written 1100-1101, St George is accompanied by St Demetrius and St Mercurius:^[1]

The squadrons began to go forth from both sides and to surround our men on all sides, hurling, shooting, and wounding them. There came out from the mountains, also, countless armies with white horses, whose standards were all white. And so, when our leaders saw this army, they were entirely ignorant as to what it was, and who they were, until they recognized the aid of Christ, whose leaders were St. George, Mercurius, and Demetrius. This is to be believed, for many of our men saw it. However, when the Turks who were stationed on the side toward the sea saw that that they could hold out no longer, they set fire to the grass, so that, upon seeing it, those who were in the tents might flee.

...

There was celebrated Pentecost on the third day of outgoing May. Then we came to Ramlah, which through fear of the Franks the Saracens had left empty. Near it was the famous church in which rested the most precious body of St. George, since for the name of Christ he there happily received martyrdom from the treacherous pagans. There our leaders held a council to choose a bishop who should have charge of this place and erect a church.

The shrine of St George was that at Lydda.

In the *Chanson d'Antioche*, to which I have no access, I gather that St George is also accompanied by St Maurice.^[2]

The *Golden Legend* reads:^[3]

We read in the History of Antioch that during the Crusades, when the Christian hosts were about to lay siege to Jerusalem, a passing fair young man appeared to a priest. He told him that he was St George, the captain of the Christian armies; and that if the crusaders carried his relics to Jerusalem, he would be with them. And when the Crusaders, during the siege of Jerusalem, feared to scale the walls because of the Saracens who were mounted thereon. Saint George appeared to them, accoutred in white armour adorned with the red

cross. He signed to them to follow him without fear in the assault of the walls: and they, encouraged by his leadership, repulsed the Saracens and took the city.

In the history of Richard of Devizes,^[4] we find many references to “St George” – i.e. Lydda – as a town, a mile from Ramleh, and Richard the Lionheart and his men basing themselves there.

It would be nice to see a proper collection of sources. (I’m currently busy with a new job, so I can’t do anything at the moment!)

Happy St George’s Day!

1. ^[1]<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/gesta-cde.asp#antioch6>↵
 2. ^[2]See Susan B. Edgington, “Romance and Reality in the sources for the sieges of Antioch, 1097-8”, in: *Porphyrogenita: Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides*, Ashgate (2003), p.37-8, 44.↵
 3. ^[3]Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, transl. and adapted from the Latin by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York. 1969). pp. 237-8)↵
 4. ^[4]1848, p.253. Online [here](#).↵
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