The Translator as a Pilgrim

Did the translator visit the East as Pryor has suggested? Because the translator’s voice is not prominent in the text it is difficult to answer this question. Therefore it is necessary to examine the alterations to William of Tyre’s text to determine whether anything added would indicate that he had travelled. It is entirely possible, however, that additional information is not the personal input of the translator, that he was working in an ecclesiastical environment with colleagues who had travelled. In any case, there are few additional references to the East, and no large portion of another text has been added to William’s Historia. The translator was careful to name William as the author of the text and does not identify any other source of information.

The majority of additions in the Eracles text serve as glosses, providing information or explanations. For example, where William mentioned that Bohemond of Taranto and Baldwin de Boulogne were marching to Jerusalem during the month of December, the translator adds that December ‘sieut estre mout pluieus en cele terre’ [known to be the wettest in this land]. This passage further portrays the difficulties faced by the crusaders. It may also show, however, first-hand experience of the East. Bernard Hamilton has pointed out a similar instance near the end of the text where Saladin is depicted crossing the desert between Egypt and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. William related: ‘Porro Salahadinus, transcura cum suis expeditionibus solitudine, quod iter cum multa difficultate vix diebus viginti confecerat, iamque terram habitabilem’. [Moreover, Saladin, having crossed the desert with his army, the journey took twenty days and was very difficult, finally (reached) inhabited land]. The Eracles reads ‘Salehadins ot pasée la voie des deserz ou il et sa gent orent soffertes mout granz peines, porce que ausi sordent tempestes és sablons com en la mer’ [Saladin had travelled the desert roads where his men had suffered

1 Pryor, pp. 284–288.
2 wt, 9.14 line 41.
5 wt, 22.15 (14) lines 38–40; in Huygens’s edition the verb is lacking from the end of this sentence, but he notes that two manuscripts read ‘iam terram habitabilem attigit’ wt, 22.15(14) line 40 n.
6 Paris, 22.13 vol. 2 p. 432.
great hardships, because there are storms in the sand just as there are in the sea]. This is another instance in which the translator has added local information to explain the difficulties alluded to in William’s text.

William noted that, during King Amaury’s siege of Damietta in 1169, the Greek forces began to run short of food and sought food from the nearby palm trees.

Cedebatur ad usus varios silva palmarum castris contermina deictisque ad terram certatim arboribus, in summo earum, unde rami habent originem, Greci fame laborantes querebant multo studio quandam teneritudinem, unde ramis humor vitalis ministratur, esui quodammodo habilem, unde suam, licet misere, consolabuntur esuriem: querendi victus artem fames auxerat et ventris appetites rugientis sollertiam induxerat ampliorem. Hoc sane per dies aliquot edulio vitam misere protrahantes famen laborabant depellere.7

[Cutting down a palm grove in the area near the camp for various uses, the Greeks, who were suffering from hunger, sought a tender shoot from the tops of certain trees, where the branches grow. The sap from these branches is suitable for food, although it is from a lowly source, and comforts the hungry: for a rumbling belly aids and increases the skill of those seeking food to alleviate hunger. This was certainly a time in which nourishment prolonged a miserable life as they worked to avoid hunger.]

The French renders this as:

Lors veissiez que il abatoient les paumiers qui entor la ville estoient ausi espessement com une grant forest; au sommet queroient un tendron que l’en apele le fromage qui assez est de bone saveur, et en ce est la vie de tout l’arbre. Cil qui mouroient de faim le menjoient mout volentiers, et de ce vesquirent ne sai quanz jorz.8

[They discovered that if they should cut down the palm trees which surrounded the town, which were as abundant as a great forest, in they tops they would find a shoot that is called the fromage, which is very nourishing, and in this is all of the life of the tree. Those who would have died of starvation ate most willingly, and on this they lived for I do not know how many days.]

---

7 wt, 20.16 lines 4–11.
8 Paris, 20.15 vol. 2 p. 332.