2. COUNT HUGH OF SAINT POL’S REPORT TO THE WEST

Hugh IV, count of Saint Pol in Picardy (r. 1174-1205), was a veteran of the Third Crusade, on which he distinguished himself at the siege of Acre, and he was also a direct vassal of the king of France. The former distinction brought Count Hugh great moral authority; the latter made him one of the kingdom’s highest ranking nobles. Among the Frankish leaders of the Fourth Crusade who traveled eastward with the Venetians, he ranked fourth, preceded only by Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, Count Baldwin IX of Flanders (with whom Count Hugh was connected by marriage alliance), and Count Louis of Blois. From the time of his second swearing of the Cross in early 1200¹ to his death at Constantinople in March 1205,² Hugh of Saint Pol was a major player in all of the decisions and actions of the crusade leadership.³

Sometime shortly after the first capture of Constantinople on 18 July 1203, Count Hugh sent several versions of essentially the same letter to friends in the West, in which he recounted the recent turn of events in Byzantium. Three versions of that letter have been discovered and edited, and it seems likely that Abbot Ralph of Coggeshall saw and used a fourth version, which has yet to be found.

The best known and most widely circulated version of this letter was addressed to Henry I, duke of Brabant and count of Louvain (r. 1190-1235), a distinguished leader of the German Crusade of 1197-1198. The letter found its way into the *Chronica regia Coloniensis* (The Royal Chronicle of Cologne), also known as the *Annales maximi Colonienses* (The Great Annals of Cologne),⁴ thereby assuring its dissemination and preservation. All modern editions of the letter to Duke Henry trace themselves back to this chronicle insertion.⁵ In

¹ Villehardouin, *Conquête*, 1:12, sec. 9.
² Ibid., 2:144, sec. 334.
³ Longnon, *Compagnons*, 195-197, provides a fuller biography.
⁵ Rudolf Pokorny, “Zwei unedierte Briefe aus der Frühzeit des lateinischen
the early eighteenth century, the Maurist scholars Edmond Martène and Ursin Durand edited an anonymous letter to an unknown recipient regarding the crusaders’ initial capture of Constantinople. Knowing nothing else about the letter, they entitled it “The Letter of an Anonymous Eyewitness Regarding the Capture of the City of Constantinople.” The letter is manifestly a version of Count Hugh’s letter, but it differs in significant ways from the letter to Duke Henry and clearly was sent to someone else. This anonymous version contains a number of obvious errors, and because the manuscript from which Martène-Durand copied it is now lost, we have no way of determining who is to blame—a medieval scribe or two eighteenth-century editors. A third version of the letter was sent to Count Hugh’s vassal and steward R. de Balues, whom Rudolf Pokorny has suggested was possibly Robin of Baileul. While variously sharing elements unique to one or the other versions of Hugh’s letter, it stands alone as the best and fullest of the three. Additionally, a careful reading of that portion of Ralph of Coggeshall’s *Chronicon Anglicanum* entitled “How the City of Constantinople Was Captured by the Latins” reveals his profound reliance on Hugh’s letter as his chief source for the first capture of the city. Indeed, in a later portion of his account of events at Constantinople, Abbot Ralph commends Hugh’s letter to those of his readers who wish to know more about the crusade. Although Ralph’s account seems to follow most closely the anonymous letter edited by Martène-Durand (except for the amount of silver marks that Alexius the Younger promised the doge and the army), the abbot’s list of crusade leaders differs enough from the different lists of leading crusaders in favor of the diversion to Constantinople that appear in the three known versions of the letter to lead one to suspect that Ralph had another, now-lost version of Hugh’s letter before him as he composed his chronicle.

The letter to R. de Balues contains warm, personal details, which

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8. Ibid., 203-209.
10. Ibid., 151.