



Minerva-Gentner Symposium: Burchard of Mount Sion's Descriptio Terrae Sanctae

von Daniel Gneckow und Moritz Lange

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The Minerva-Gentner Symposium on Burchard of Mount Sion's *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, organized by **Ingrid Baumgärtner** and **Jonathan Rubin**, was held at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel, from 28 November to 1 December 2022.¹ In the workshop, German, Israeli, Italian and British scholars discussed the challenges – on the level of content, textual philology and technology – of publishing this work in print and digital form. The focus of the discussion was on questions relating to the new edition of the *Descriptio*, which is to be published in the 'Travelogues' series at Monumenta Germaniae Historica. The edition will be produced within the framework of a DFG project launched in October 2022, based at the University of Kassel and Bar-Ilan University. Specialists in computer science also contributed their expertise on the subject. The workshop not only brought together researchers from different disciplines, but also allowed an intensive exchange. In accordance with the aim of the Minerva Foundation, it permitted the participants to establish personal contacts and thus strengthen German-Israeli relations in the long term, enabling us to deepen our understanding of the *Descriptio* from a collaborative, multidisciplinary perspective.

The new edition of the *Descriptio* will be extremely valuable for research on this widely read travelogue. Although little is known about the author's life, he was long believed to have been a mere pilgrim who, as a Dominican friar from northeastern Germany, travelled through the Holy Land between 1274 and 1285. More recent studies argue that Burchard was on a diplomatic mission. In his report, Burchard deals with both the topography of the Holy Land and its geography, and also includes ethnographic observations. The broad reception of the *Descriptio* had a lasting influence on the European conception of the Holy Land, which is why the travelogue is considered to be of central importance today. The nineteenth-century edition by Laurent,² based on a manuscript family that is further away from Burchard's original, no longer meets present-day standards.

As **Jonathan Rubin** (Bar-Ilan), **Ingrid Baumgärtner** (Kassel) and **Susanna Fischer** (Kassel) stressed in their introduction, the choice of manuscripts used in previous editions, including that of Bartlett³ in 2019, seems arbitrary, given that there are now more than eighty known manuscripts and twenty print editions of the *Descriptio*. The aim of the new edition is to produce a version that is as close as possible to the author's original, and will enable scholars to study changes in the reception. The workshop therefore explored what form the print and digital versions of the new edition should take, and which manuscripts should be included in the text and the critical apparatus.

¹ This conference report is a revised and extended English version of Moritz Lange, Burchard of Mount Sion's *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*. Minerva-Gentner Symposium, in: H-Soz-Kult, February 7, 2023, www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-133602.

² Johann C. M. Laurent, *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi quatuor*. Burchardus de Monte Sion, Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, Odoricus de Foro Julii, Wilbrandus de Oldenborg, Leipzig 1864, pp. 19–94.

³ John R. Bartlett, *Burchard of Mount Sion, O.P. Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* (Oxford medieval texts), Oxford 2019.



The first presentation was by **Jonathan Schler** (Holon Institute of Technology), who talked about the computer science perspective on editing medieval texts in the digital age. Schler discussed the techniques of textual analysis, showing how specially trained software can be used to draw conclusions about authorship and even to reconstruct lost original texts. At the same time, he mentioned the technical limitations of this method.

Next, **Paolo Trovato** (Ferrara) shared his thoughts on the *Stemma codicum* and the history of transmission of the *Descriptio*. Trovato referred to the state of research outlined by the organizers in their introduction: the fact that the manuscripts can essentially be divided into a long and a short version, and that the short version can in turn be divided into five families of texts (a – e). Trovato confirmed the hypothesis that the short version of the text is very similar to the textual tradition of family a, which is closest to the author’s original version of the text, and that it was therefore derived from a very early stage of the tradition. He also presented some thoughts on editorial practice, and, with regard to the layout of the future print edition, advocated a synoptic comparison of differing passages.

Going into Burchard’s geographical remarks, archaeologist **Denys Pringle** (Cardiff) discussed the places and buildings in the different versions of the *Descriptio*. He showed that the divergences between the texts in families a and b can perhaps be attributed to later alterations by Burchard himself. He used selected passages to illustrate the dynamic development of the text, and to demonstrate how the figures cited in the text, for example on the number and the thickness of the walls around the town of Tyros, diverge in the different versions. The same is true for the way the places are described – in terms of both content and syntax. It can also be observed, he noted, that localizations altered over time, indicating changes in the knowledge and interests of the intended audience.

Iris Shagrir (The Open University of Israel) took a similar approach, closely examining the descriptions of the balsam tree and balsam oil, and the representation of the places where they were produced, Eingeddi and Matarea. After a thorough analysis of relevant passages in the London and Zwickau manuscripts, Shagrir drew the conclusion that those producing the manuscripts took different approaches: the scribe of the London manuscript focused on book learning, and relied heavily on Josephus, while the copyist of the Zwickau manuscript probably asked people for advice and then used this information directly.

Presentations by **Phillip Landgrebe** (Kassel) and **Mor Hajbi** (Jerusalem) rounded off the first day of the workshop. Both were concerned with the reception of the *Descriptio* and offered illustrative examples of the reception processes undergone by Burchard’s travelogue. Hajbi explored the question of how the *Descriptio* was read and used. She noted that fifteenth-century scribes always added information of their own to the text during copying. She focused particularly on the Wolfenbüttel manuscript, Codex Guelferbytanus 354 Helmstadiensis, in which the information given by Burchard was



systematically updated. Landgrebe presented an analysis of the marginalia, interlinear glosses and later transmission in further selected manuscripts. He highlighted the complex reception processes of the *Descriptio*, with particular reference to its links with the travelogue of Johannes Poloner.

The programme for the second day consisted of five presentations. The first was by **Susanna Fischer** (Kassel), who discussed to what extent maps can help to understand the *Descriptio*. After an overview of the general connections between pilgrims' texts, maps and diagrams, Fischer presented her project [*Declaracio Mappe Terre Sancte*](#), completed in 2019. In this project, she links a grid map of Palestine, found in three extant manuscripts, with two descriptions of such maps from Marino Sanudo's *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis* and Johannes Poloner's *Descriptio terrae sanctae*, though these works do not contain the map itself. On the basis of these experiences, Fischer talked about potential new techniques for visualizing pilgrims' texts.

Sinai Rusinek (Haifa) explored the question of how a medieval text can best be presented in the digital age. In this context, she introduced the project 'TravelLab', which aims to make the twelfth-century travelogue of Benjamin of Tudela (who travelled from the Iberian Peninsula to Arabia) accessible for research. Rusinek demonstrated how the places named in the travelogue can be represented on a map, and how localizations can be interlinked. One of the advantages of this approach, she explained, is that it allows a deeper understanding of the traveller's route.

Cornelia Linde (Greifswald) identified the exact relationship between the London and Zwickau manuscripts, and explored the possibility of using these two manuscripts from the early strand of transmission to draw conclusions about a lost original version. To illustrate this, she examined the first paragraphs and the descriptions of the Dead Sea. Her conclusion was that it is not possible to reconstruct an original version, or at least not without doing an injustice to the very complex reception. She therefore argued that each version should be edited separately – even if there are practical limits to this approach.

Julia Burkhardt (Munich) presented her edition and analysis (published in 2020) of *Bonum universale de apibus* by Thomas of Cantimpré, a thirteenth-century Dominican friar and theologian. To decide which manuscripts should be included, she used a computer-based stemmatological method. This helped her to pragmatically identify different strands of transmission of the work among the 120 relatively complete Latin manuscripts and the 100 abridged copies, and then ultimately select four of them for inclusion in the edition.

The second day ended with presentations by **Michael Schonhardt** (Kassel) and **Daniel Gneckow** (Kassel) about their practical editing experience from the Academy project



„Burchards Dekret Digital“. After an overview of this project, which is concerned with the *Decretum* of Bishop Burchard of Worms and its significance for legal and cultural history, they focused on the project workflow, which uses (among other things) Transkribus, Oxygen XML Editor and CollateX. The speakers emphasized the close interaction between the digital and print editions, based on a common digital data basis. Conceptually, the two forms are inextricably linked. Schonhardt and Gneckow raised many points, which will also be relevant for the new edition of the *Descriptio*.

The working groups offered an opportunity to collaborate, discussing editorial procedures, scrutinizing the processes of reception on the basis of selected samples, and considering the resulting opportunities and challenges. The lively debates revolved around concrete questions and textual examples. Attempts were made to resolve these in the working groups, and the discussions continued in plenary.

On the third day, the participants went on an excursion to the coastal town of Acre, which not only forms the fictional centre of Burchard’s *Descriptio*, but also still has numerous sites of archaeological interest from its eventful history. Jonathan RUBIN and Denys PRINGLE offered a valuable and highly informative commentary, sharing their expert knowledge of the city and encouraging discussion of questions not yet resolved by scholarship.

In the final section, **Jose Maria Andres Porrás** (Oxford) introduced the project [„Reading the Holy Land. The Reception of Crusader Period Accounts of the Holy Land“](#). This project will compile a database of travelogues and other witnesses that give information about the Holy Land in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. The collection and content analysis of as many works as possible will serve to give researchers a clear view of this subject area. The database is based on earlier work such as the studies of Reinhold Röhrich. To make the texts accessible via a search engine, the individual manuscripts will first be subjected to an extensive process of categorization. Ultimately, the aim is to make systematic comparisons of textual differences. The presentation was combined with a bench test, in which the participants were able to try out the integrated search options and planned search functions and contribute their own ideas.

The final discussion concluded that this four-day workshop, funded by the Minerva Foundation, had been extremely worthwhile. Not only the participants, but also the topics covered had spanned the distance between Germany and Israel. It had allowed an intense scholarly discussion in a focused work atmosphere, and a long-awaited opportunity to meet and talk in person – something that had been repeatedly postponed or replaced by Zoom sessions because of the pandemic. The event also served to consolidate international and specifically German-Israeli contacts in an interdisciplinary context. The focus on a selected group of experts offered the chance to identify problems quickly and discuss them in



depth. Beside the substantive work on the textual transmission, another key area was computer-assisted methods and practices. The insights brought together here will inform the subsequent editorial process, which will also benefit considerably from the newly established and re-established contacts and the local knowledge gained from the excursion. The newly acquired findings will be of great benefit for the further work on the DFG project. The symposium in Bar-Ilan, which dealt with the contact between Germany and Israel on different levels, can thus be seen as a promising step towards the new edition of Burchard's *Descriptio*.



Location: Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

Organizers: Prof. Dr. Ingrid Baumgärtner, Mittelalterliche Geschichte, Fachbereich 05 Gesellschaftswissenschaften, Universität Kassel, Deutschland; Prof. Dr. Jonathan Rubin, Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

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Program

Jonathan Rubin (Bar-Ilan University), Ingrid Baumgärtner (University of Kassel) & Susanna Fischer (University of Kassel), Opening Remarks and Presentation of the Project

Jonathan Schler (Bar-Ilan University), Collating and Editing Medieval Texts in a Digital Age

Paolo Trovato (University of Ferrara), Remarks on the Stemma codicum and the *Descriptio*'s Tradition

Denys Pringle (Cardiff University), Descriptions of Sites and Monuments in the Different Versions of Burchard's *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*

Iris Shagrir (The Open University of Israel), Matarea and Eingeddi in the *Descriptio*'s Different Versions

Mor Hajbi (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) & Phillip Landgrebe (University of Kassel), The *Descriptio*'s Reception: Some Test Cases

Susanna Fischer (University of Kassel), The Use and the Presentation of the *Descriptio*: Maps of the Holy Land

Sinai Rusinek (University of Haifa), Presenting a Medieval Text in a Digital Age

Cornelia Linde (University of Greifswald), Dominican Manuscripts and Burchard's Intellectual World I: Reconstruction and Reception

Julia Burkhardt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich), Dominican Manuscripts and Burchard's Intellectual World II: Editing Thomas of Cantimpré's *Bonum universale de apibus*

Michael Schonhardt (University of Kassel) & Daniel Gneckow (University of Kassel), Digital Editing Practices. Experiences from the 'Burchards Dekret Digital' Project

Working Groups I: Text Constitution

Excursion to Acre

Jose Maria Andres Porras (University of Oxford), Presentation of the Database of the ISF funded Project 'Reception of the Accounts of the Holy Land (12th-13th centuries)'

Working Groups II: Commentary

Concluding Discussion and Remarks