

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Issue 40: The Crusades

### **The Crusades: Did You Know?**

#### **Little Known Facts about the Crusades.**

Caroline T. Marshall

There were literally hundreds of crusades. In some periods, armed religious expeditions set forth almost every year.

Many crusades did not fight against Muslims or go near the Holy Land. The church marched against European pagans (such as the Slavs) or heretics (such as the Albigensians).

Women participated actively in the Crusades, with a few on the front lines. Arab historian Imad al-Din noted, "Among the Franks there were indeed women who rode into battle dressed in men's clothes; who rode out into the thick of the fray."

The Crusades were supported by such Christian saints as Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, and Thomas Aquinas.

Ironically, the council that launched the First Crusade also renewed the Truce of God, which limited military bloodshed. Under the Truce of God, knights were forbidden to feud from Wednesday evening to Monday morning, and on holy days. The Crusades were likewise seen as a way to bring peace, because they redirected knights' aggression away from Europe.

The Tafurs, a group of wild peasants on the fringe of the First Crusade, would sometimes lead the charge into battle armed only with sticks! Reportedly, they sometimes cooked and ate dead Muslims in a sacred cannibalism.

During the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), Christians attacked other Christians. The crusaders intended to fight Muslims in Egypt but got sidetracked and destroyed the great Eastern Christian capital of Constantinople.

Muslims conquered far larger territories of Christians than vice-versa. As late as 1683, Muslim forces had pushed into central Europe.

Several crusades were led by children or peasants. These groups believed God would use them, the poor and humble, to free Jerusalem. But none made it to the Holy Land.

Crusades were outrageously expensive. King Louis IX spent more than six times his annual income to finance one crusade.

Peace-loving Francis of Assisi joined the Fifth Crusade in Egypt, though he did not fight. He risked his life crossing enemy lines to preach to Muslim sultan Malik-al-Kamil. The sultan did not convert, but he offered Francis riches (declined) and had him escorted back to the Christian camp.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, crusading fervor broke out into savage persecutions of Jews. Although some bishops tried to stop them, Christians in the First Crusade slaughtered entire villages of

Jews along the Rhine River.

In Spain and Portugal, crusade-like wars against the Muslims continued for nearly 800 years. This "perpetual crusade," known as the Reconquest, did not end until 1492 under Isabella and Ferdinand.

Crusades were waged in almost every country in Europe and the Near East.

In military terms, crusades to the Holy Land utterly failed. Only the First Crusade reached its objective of capturing Jerusalem.

***Dr. Caroline T. Marshall is professor of history at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and a contributor to *The History of Christianity* (Lion, 1977).***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 40: The Crusades

## The Crusades: From the Editor - The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Mark Galli

Recently, a group of Christian leaders, mostly missionaries to the Muslim world, gathered in Jerusalem, at the spot where 900 years earlier Christian knights and soldiers stormed the walls. They read historical accounts of the Jerusalem massacre. Then they formally apologized for the Crusades. I apologize for their apology.

Not because I'm a cheerleader for the Crusades. I cringe when I think of the centuries of slaughter and pillaging done in the name of Christ, with the blessing of the church. I'm saddened by what Muslims and heretics suffered. As philosopher David Hume put it, the Crusades stand as a "durable monument to human folly."

But it's too easy, when we repudiate actions of Christians of other times and places, to subtly repudiate those Christians. They become the distant uncle with the dark and troubled past—someone we don't talk about. And when we're forced to, we shift nervously and turn a little red.

For too long, modern Christians have assumed the crusaders are not spiritual parents but distant uncles: "If these crusaders were real Christians, they wouldn't have done such a thing!"

But the crusaders were real Christians. They deplored their sins. They longed for forgiveness. They loved fellow Christians in the East. They yearned to do something noble and lasting for their Lord. They prayed and fasted before battles and praised God after victories. Their devotion and courage make ours look juvenile.

So much of what they did was wrong. Yes, and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So there's little point in becoming judgmental. Better to try to understand the crusaders in the context of their times.

This issue focuses on crusades to the Holy Land, made between 1096 and 1291, especially on the First Crusade. But church-sponsored military action, with an indulgence attached, continued against unbelievers and bad believers (heretics) through the sixteenth century. Some historians, as you'll see in our interview, suggest that in parts of Christendom today, crusading is alive and well.

We present you, then, with a movement and a time in which the good, the bad, and the ugly mingled, when Christian men and women did wonderful and horrible things, when they desperately loved God and neighbor and yet fell so short, as do all of us.

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## Bloody Pilgrimage

As the crusaders assaulted Jerusalem, the holy and savage joined hands.

Mark Galli

When he heard the Christian armies were approaching, Iftikhar ad-Dawla, Muslim governor of Jerusalem, readied the city for a siege. He destroyed the wells outside the walls, poisoning some, dumping earth in others. He drove outlying flocks and herds into the city, and then drove Christian inhabitants, who outnumbered the city's Muslims, out into the Judean wilderness. He strengthened the towers with sacks of cotton and hay, to absorb the shock of bombardment by French catapults. Then he sent a message to fellow Fatimids (a branch of Islam) in Egypt, imploring them to send armed aid.

Meanwhile, along the coastal road of modern-day Lebanon, the Christian armies advanced—color-filled banners fluttering in the wind, relics carefully borne, pilgrims trudging behind, sometimes singing, sometimes chanting, like a monastery on the march. As they made their way during this spring of 1099, they found only light resistance from Muslim cities and fortresses, at least compared to the protracted siege and fierce fighting they had seen in Antioch. At Jaffa, they turned inland and started the slow ascent to Jerusalem.

On June 5, the Christians' spirits were buoyed by a lunar eclipse—a portent of victory. The next day, one army headed for Bethlehem and conquered it in short order. On the evening of June 7, the main army encamped, finally, within sight of the massive, stone walls of the Holy City.

Thus began a five-week siege, which would culminate in a fierce three-day battle, which in turn would conclude nearly four years of prayer, courage, savagery, and faith we now call the First Crusade.

## Taking Up the Cross

It all started at a meeting of church bureaucrats. Pope Urban II had gathered leaders at Clermont, in South-East France, in November 1095. After nine days of sessions among clerics, he invited the public to a speech. In an open field, Urban called upon the men of France to defend their fellow Greek Christians, who had been invaded by the Turks. Furthermore, he exhorted them to liberate Jerusalem, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, from the infidel Muslims.

When Urban finished, a great cry went up from the crowd: "God wills it! God wills it!" Immediately volunteers approached and knelt before him. To Urban's surprise, the Christian imagination had been seized. In the next few months, as he and others preached his message through France and Germany, dukes and counts, knights and foot soldiers, bishops and priests, and poor, simple pilgrims "took up the cross," literally sewing the emblem on their shirts as sign of their vow to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It would be a dangerous 2,000-mile trek, and most had no idea what lay before them. They knew, though, what lay behind. Wrote a chronicler of one man leaving his wife, "He commended her to the Lord, kissed her lingeringly, and promised her as she wept that he would return." But whether with families or without, whether gladly or sorrowfully, thousands ventured forth.

They went because they feared Muslims, the fierce and aggressive devotees of a heathen religion. Still entrenched in southern Spain, Muslims had also recently swallowed large chunks of land in Asia Minor and

were now an easy march from Constantinople, the capital of Byzantine (Eastern) Christianity.

They went because they were outraged. For 400 years, Muslims had controlled the most sacred of Holy Land sites. Though Christian pilgrims were generally permitted to visit sites, their Lord Christ was not, in fact, Lord of his manor, Jerusalem. Worse, he was not Lord of the most sacred church in Christendom, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built over the place where Christ was buried and resurrected, the scene of the greatest miracle in history.

They went because they hungered for forgiveness. Vows and pilgrimages to the Holy Land—to touch sacred history and receive partial remission of sins—had become increasingly popular. Now the pope announced a pilgrimage of extraordinary importance. Not only would Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher be delivered from defiling infidels, “Remission of sins will be granted to those going.” All past sins would be forgiven!

And so they left—men, women, children—a few out of lust for money and adventure, a few to fight someone besides fellow Christian knights, most because they felt something larger calling them. Some went on horseback, some on foot, some glimmering with chain mail and armaments, others in rags.

On their way to Jerusalem, the band had starved and plundered, had killed and been killed. They had seen strategic victories at Nicea, Antioch, and lesser cities. Now one objective remained: the Holy City, and within it, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

### **The Hermit’s Prophecy**

On Sunday, June 12, the princes of the crusading armies surrounding Jerusalem made a pilgrimage to the Mount of Olives. There they met an aged hermit. To their surprise, he exhorted them: “If you will attack the city tomorrow, the Lord will deliver it into your hands.”

The princes balked. Jerusalem was one of the great fortresses of the medieval world. The walls had been strengthened and maintained since Roman emperor Hadrian had rebuilt them. The eastern wall faced the steep slopes of the Kidron Valley. On the southeast, the ground fell toward the Valley of Hinnom (the Bible’s Gehenna). A third steep valley ran along the western wall. In addition, the princes were short of scaling ladders, mangonels (catapults), and siege towers.

The princes objected, “We don’t have the necessary machinery for storming the walls,” but the hermit persisted.

“God is all powerful,” he declared. “If he wills, he will storm the walls even with one ladder. The Lord aids those who labor for the truth!”

These soldiers could not ignore this argument. Since their victory at Nicea early in the campaign, they had witnessed heavenly signs. In early October 1097, they saw a comet with a tail shaped like a sword. On December 30, during the siege of Antioch, an earthquake shook, and the heavens glowed red, and the crusaders spotted a great light in the form of a cross. Just outside of Jerusalem, they had seen a lunar eclipse. All, they felt, showed sure divine approval.

They had also experienced the supernatural. Many soldiers had glimpsed St. George and St. Demetrius, with gallant faces and glimmering armor, leading their armies in the Battle of Dorylaeum. In Antioch, some had seen an army of angels, saints, and dead crusaders leading the fight, carrying white banners and riding white horses.

These men were hardened soldiers, though; they didn’t believe every vision reported. They knew God

generally gives victory to the army with tighter discipline, better plans, and more men. The unruly masses led by Peter the Hermit, on a preliminary, brief wave of the First Crusade, were faith-filled pilgrims. But they were not soldiers, and they had been slaughtered outside Nicea by the Saracens (the crusaders' term for Muslims). These princes had passed through that mountain pass seven months later and marched past their fellow pilgrims' skulls and bleached bones.

Still, it only made sense that with the golden prize of the journey before them, God would work a great miracle. The princes left the hermit, returned to their camps, and ordered their soldiers to prepare an attack.

### **Not Enough Ladders**

The Christian armies were strategically encamped. On the northern wall camped the army of Robert "Duke of Normandy" the courageous eldest son of William the Conqueror. Next to him was the army of Robert, Count of Flanders, a younger man whose father had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem eleven years earlier.

To the northwest sat the army of Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine, a handsome man with yellow beard and hair. He was joined by the army of Tancred, a Norman knight, who brought with him flocks from his recent capture of Bethlehem.

To the south, "near the Church of St. Mary the Mother of the Lord, where the Lord shared the Last Supper with his disciples," was the army of Raymond, Count of Toulouse, a man of some 60 years and a veteran of holy wars against Muslims in Spain.

On Monday, after the sun had risen and shown brightly on the city, the trumpets sounded. The crusaders cried, "God wills it!" and "God, help!" and rushed the city from all sides. They quickly overran an outer stone defense, and began throwing their few ladders against the main wall.

Knights, one at a time, scaled the ladders, and with swords and spears, fought face-to-face with the Saracens. But they had too few ladders; they couldn't scale the walls in sufficient numbers to overtake the defenders. After several hours of desperate fighting the soldiers of Christ were forced to withdraw. They returned to their camps profoundly discouraged.

### **Deathly Thirst**

Time was on the Muslims' side. Though the Muslim army was barely sufficient to man the walls under siege, the city was well supplied with food and water. If the defenders could hold out till the Egyptian reinforcements arrived, the siege, and the crusade, would be over.

On the other side, the crusaders, even before the first attack, were suffering thirst. Their only source of pure water was the Pool of Siloam, below the south walls. But it was only a bow shot from the city. When crusaders dipped their cups into the pool, sometimes a hail of arrows from the walls would drive them back.

The crusaders sewed up skins of oxen for containers and scoured the countryside, sometimes traveling five miles before they found water. On arriving at a pool, the desperate Christians often shoved and fought each other to get at the water. Worse, the Muslims would often sortie out and ambush Christians at these pools, killing them and cutting them to pieces.

At times the crusaders drew water that was "all muddy" and that, borne in skins, smelled putrid. Still, back in camp, it sold for high prices, and often, as one chronicler noted, "a thirsty man hardly got enough to satisfy his barest need."

Summer in Jerusalem can reach temperatures above 100 degrees, with few trees for shade. The hot wind and dust dried throats. Animals thirsted to death and rotted where they had stood. One chronicler reported, "Many sick people fell down by the fountain [of Siloam], with tongues so parched that they were unable to utter a word."

## **Weapons Shortage**

Still the crusaders had work to do. The failed attack had convinced the princes they needed more siege equipment. That meant, first, siege towers, portable castles that could be wheeled up to a city wall, where a small drawbridge could be dropped, enabling the attackers to enter. They needed scaling ladders to climb the walls. They also needed mangonels, catapults that took 50 men to operate, some powerful enough to hurl a 300 pound stone 150 yards. Mangonels also launched balls of fire—burning wood, straw, and animal fat, wrapped in iron bands—to set cities ablaze.

But the crusaders lacked supplies to build these weapons. As had happened more than once on this expedition, though, hope arrived at just the right time, this time in Jaffa: six Christian vessels, carrying food and ropes, nails and bolts. A party (and later another, because the first was ambushed) was sent to retrieve the supplies.

Now the problem was wood; little was to be found on the bare hills surrounding Jerusalem. So expeditions were formed, which traveled many miles. Eventually Tancred and Robert of Flanders returned from the forests of Samaria, laden with logs and planks, carried on the backs of camels and captive Muslims. Construction was begun.

## **Desertions**

By now, the crusaders' spirits ebbed. Food had become scarce. Quarrels broke out—not the first time—among the expedition's leaders.

The first concerned the possession of Bethlehem. Tancred had left his standard flying over the Church of the Nativity, meaning he had taken it as his own. The clergy and rival princes argued that so holy a building should not be in the power of a secular lord.

They also fought about the future status of Jerusalem. Some knights wanted a king appointed. The priests argued that no Christian should call himself a king in the city where Christ was crowned and suffered. After bitter debate, decisions were postponed, but between certain princes bad blood remained.

All along, soldiers and pilgrims had deserted the expedition, despite their vows. Military defeats, famine, disease, and sundry tragedies (one ship carrying 400 crusaders had capsized, drowning all aboard), as well as ongoing exposure to heat, cold, wet, and mud, took their toll. Though a stream of pilgrims had joined along the way, the attrition had been steady.

In 1096 at Nicea, the first city besieged by the crusaders, about 43,000 knights, foot soldiers, and noncombatants were at hand. At Jerusalem now, three years later, the numbers were down to about 15,000. Before the very walls of the city, more crusaders deserted. One company went to the Jordan and were rebaptized; then they gathered palm branches and headed for Jaffa to find a ship for home.

In early July, things came to a head. The crusaders heard that a great army had set out from Egypt to relieve Jerusalem. But even this alarming news could not shake them out of their doldrums. As it turned out, it would take a miracle to do that.

## **Barefoot Procession**

In the early morning of July 6, priest Peter Desiderius told two princes that he had received a vision: Adhemar, Bishop of Le Puy, dead now for many months, had appeared to him.

At the Council of Clermont, Adhemar had been the very first to kneel before Urban, seeking to join the holy expedition; soon Urban appointed him spiritual head of the armies. He proved to be a strong and compassionate preacher, a military tactician, and a careful diplomat—a man all respected. Adhemar's presence had kept the expedition together until his tragic death after the victory at Antioch.

"Speak to the princes and all the people," the bishop had commanded in the vision, "and say to them, 'You who have come from distant lands to worship God and the Lord of hosts, purge yourselves of your uncleanness! Let each one turn from his evil ways.' "

As penance for their selfishness, greed, and quarreling, the crusaders should "with bare feet march around Jerusalem, invoking God; you must also fast. If you do this and then make a great attack on the city on the ninth day, it will be captured. If you do not, all the evils that you have suffered will be multiplied by the Lord."

Immediately, the princes gathered an assembly of soldiers and pilgrims. Peter told them of his vision. If they obeyed, God would "open the city to us and give us judgment upon his enemies and ours, who now with unjust possession contaminate the place of his suffering and burial, the enemy who seek to deny us the great blessing of the place of God's humiliation and our redemption."

During this long expedition, many crusaders had received visions: of Jesus, of Mary, of saints Peter and Andrew, as well as of deceased crusaders. Some visions inspired courage, others skepticism; often the most dubious hearers, in fact, were priests and bishops. On this occasion, though, soldiers, clerics, and pilgrims alike believed.

So on Friday, July 8, a solemn, barefoot procession slowly wound around the city walls. Bishops and priests came first, bearing crosses and holy relics. Princes and knights followed, then the foot soldiers, and finally the pilgrims. Muslims gathered on the walls and mocked them. They placed crosses in yokes, striking them and performing other obscene acts.

Then the crusaders ascended the Mount of Olives, where the fiery Peter the Hermit and two other preachers exhorted them: "Now that we are on the very spot from which the Lord made his ascension and we can do nothing more to purify ourselves, let each one of us forgive his brother whom he has injured, that the Lord may forgive us." Princes, who for weeks (and years) had been quarreling and vying for power, embraced.

Thirst and fasting could not now dampen their enthusiasm. In the next two days, mangonels were completed and ladders built, and finishing touches were put on the siege towers. Pilgrims sewed camel-hide and nailed it on the exposed parts of the towers, to protect them from the fire balls Saracens would hurl. Crossbows and battering rams were readied; spears, spikes, axes, and swords were sharpened.

On Sunday, the wooden towers were wheeled to their stations, one against the north wall, one against the south; a third, slightly smaller, was put against the northwest corner. The Christians' work had been carefully guarded, so the Saracens were alarmed at seeing the structures. Iftikhar, the city governor, quickly shored up weaker sections of his defenses and began bombarding the siege towers with stones and fire.

All was ready.

## **Fresh Assault**



On Wednesday evening, the horn sounded, and soldiers climbed the towers and charged the walls with shouts of "God wills it!" The main attacks were from the south (Raymond) and northeast (Godfrey and Tancred), with a diversionary attack on the northwest (the two Roberts).

The first objective was to bring the wooden towers right up to the walls, but that meant filling up the ditch that ran around the city. All night long and during Thursday, the crusaders dug and filled, while rained on by stones and fire.

For the next day and a half, battering rams thudded, arrows whirred, huge stones crashed, and streaks of fire shot through the skies. Wrote one chronicler, "Thus the fight continued from the rising to the setting sun in such a splendid fashion that it is difficult to believe anything more glorious was ever done."

By Thursday evening, Raymond's men, on the south, had succeeded in wheeling their tower over the ditch against the wall. But the defense was fierce, for Iftikhar himself commanded this sector. In the end, Raymond could not establish a foothold on the wall.

That night, anxiety settled in both camps, according to one crusader. "The Saracens feared that we would take the city during the night or on the next day, for the outer works were broken through and the ditch was filled. ... On our part, we feared only that the Saracens would set fire to the machines that were moved close to the walls. ... So on both sides it was a night of watchfulness, labor, and sleepless caution."

### **Good Friday**

In the morning, the trumpets blasted again, and the crusaders, with banners flying and shouts of "God wills it!" rushed the walls. Priests and pilgrims prayed, sang, and chanted at a safe distance; some brought water to cool thirsty soldiers. The Saracens defended themselves fiercely. By mid-morning, the wooden towers and many mangonels were badly shaken by the blows of the huge Saracen stones; some were burned.

The soldiers, weary from nearly two days of battle, sank in discouragement. There were just too many defenders to get a foothold on the wall. The walls still stood high and strong, and in one Christian's words, the "great resources and skill the enemy exhibited in repairing their defenses seemed too great for us to overcome."

A council was held to decide whether the towers should be withdrawn. But as the council met, some soldiers with Godfrey, on the north, spotted a knight on the Mount of Olives. He waved his shield to advance. One chronicler noted, "Who this knight was, we have been unable to find out. At this signal our men began to take heart."

The loud, steady battering of the wall began afresh; fresh attempts were made to scale the walls. On the north, archers shot burning arrows at the nearby Saracen tower, and the fire caught on reinforcing wood. Soon smoke was bellowing forth, and the men guarding it were forced to retreat.

Godfrey released the long drawbridge on his tower; it swung down and made a bridge to the wall. Two Flemish knights led an army across, soon followed by Godfrey himself. One chronicler noted that the crusaders were entering the city on "the day of the week when Christ redeemed the whole world on the cross."

Once that sector of the wall was captured, other attackers scurried over the walls from ladders, and now everything seemed to happen at once. In one chronicler's words, "With trumpets sounding and with everything in an uproar, exclaiming, 'Help, God!' they vigorously pushed into the city and straightaway

raised the banner on the top of the wall." Godfrey remained on the wall, shouting encouragement to the newcomers; he sent men to open the city gates to let other crusading forces in. Tancred and his men, having come across the drawbridge, were soon deep in the streets of Jerusalem. The Saracens, "completely terrified," ran for their lives through the narrow streets.

Meanwhile, on the southern wall, Raymond couldn't get a foothold, but it became apparent to him and Iftikhar that all was lost for the Muslims. Iftikhar retreated to the tower of David, a citadel he could have defended for many days. Iftikhar immediately began negotiating a surrender, offering to turn over to Raymond a great treasure for the return of his life and that of his bodyguards. Raymond accepted and occupied the tower. Iftikhar and his men were escorted out of the city. They were nearly the only Muslims to get out of the city alive.

### **Worship at the Tomb**

A chronicler noted, "Now that our men had possession of the walls and towers, wonderful sights were to be seen. Some of our men (and this was more than merciful) cut off the heads of their enemies; others shot them with arrows, so that they fell from the towers; others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames."

Some Muslims fled toward the temple area, where the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of al-Aqsa stood. They intended to use the latter as their last fortress. But as they crowded in and up on the roof, Tancred was already upon them. He began pillaging the Dome of the Rock. The Muslims hastily surrendered to him, promising a heavy ransom. Tancred accepted and gave them his banner to display over the mosque as protection.

Meanwhile, crusaders rushed through the streets and into houses and mosques, killing everyone they met—including women and children. All Friday afternoon and night, the killing and looting continued as soldiers and pilgrims rushed through the city, "seizing gold and silver, horses and mules, and houses full of all sorts of goods."

It was a frenzied attack, and yet not without rules. Whichever looter "entered the home first, whether rich or poor, was not to be harmed by anyone else in any way. He was to have and to hold the house or palace. ... They mutually agreed to maintain this rule."

Saturday morning the blood flowed unabated. Tancred's banner, turned out, was no protection to the refugees in the Mosque of al-Aqsa. A band of crusaders forced entry into the mosque, killing those on the roof with arrows, hacking others to pieces with swords. "If you had been there," one chronicler said, "your feet would have been stained up to the ankles with the blood of the slain."

Another reported, "Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from the blasphemies."

The Jews of Jerusalem fared no better. They had fled to their chief synagogue, but since they were believed to have aided the Muslims, the building was set on fire.

No one was safe: "With drawn swords," one chronicler reported, "our people ran through the city; nor did they spare anyone, not even those pleading for mercy. The crowd was struck to the ground, just as rotten fruit falls from shaken branches, and acorns from a windblown oak."

By evening, soldiers and pilgrims, "weeping from excess of gladness," picked their way through the bodies of people and horses, past piles of heads, hands, and feet, and made their way to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. There, "singing a new song unto the Lord in a high-sounding voice of exultation, and making offerings and most humble supplications, [they] joyously visited the Holy Place as they had long desired to

do.”

“Oh, time so longed for!” this chronicler continued, “Oh, time remembered among all others! Oh, deed to be preferred before all deeds! Truly longed for, since it has always been desired by all worshipers of the Catholic faith with an inward yearning of the soul.”

Another wrote, “This day, I say, will be famous in all future ages, for it turned our labors and sorrows into joy and exaltation; this day, I say, marks the justification of all Christianity, the humiliation of paganism, and the renewal of our faith.”

## **Heading Home**

In the hot summer sun, it didn’t take long for the smell of decaying bodies to become revolting. So, the few surviving Saracens were commanded to drag the dead ones outside the walls, where they were thrown into piles “as big as houses” and set on fire.

On July 22, a week after the Christians had entered the city, the princes gathered and elected Godfrey as ruler (not king) of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. And on August 1, a Latin patriarch (Roman Catholic bishop) was elected.

On August 12, crusading armies resoundingly defeated a rescuing Egyptian army at the Battle of Ascalon, thus securing the safety of Christian Jerusalem for nearly a century to come. By the end of the month, the bulk of the crusaders, having fulfilled their vows, headed home.

That December, Fulcher of Chartres, who would shortly compose his chronicle of the First Crusade, visited Jerusalem. He noted that both inside and outside the walls of the Holy City, the stench of death still lingered.

***Mark Galli is managing editor of Christian History.***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## How Could Christians Do This?

Why followers of the Prince of Peace waged war.

Bruce L. Shelley

Within Christian circles, the terms *crusade* and *crusader* survive as expressions of devout purpose. Near where I live, a Christian high school calls its athletic teams "Crusaders," and several evangelical organizations refer to their ministries as Christian "crusades."

In other circles, however, *crusade* usually triggers less admiration, more shock. It recalls the violence and cruelty of medieval military expeditions to conquer the Holy Land, all done in the name of Christ and with the blessing of the church.

Many of us, then, not only balk at using the term *crusades*, we ask, "How could Christians have done such a thing?"

### Sweeping Forces

Historians usually answer this question by describing the historical circumstances, or the "proximate causes," of the Crusades. Three such causes often top the list.

First, Christians faced the military and political threat of Islam. The Seljuk Turks, new and fanatical converts to Islam, invaded the Holy Land and seized Christianity's sacred shrines. They then aggressively headed for Asia Minor, Christian territory. Forces of the Byzantine [Eastern Christian] Empire tried desperately to bar the invader, but at the battle of Manzikert (1071), the Turks captured the eastern emperor and scattered his army.

Within a few years, Asia Minor, the chief source of Byzantine revenue and troops, was lost. Nicea fell to the invaders in 1092, bringing the Turks perilously close to Constantinople, the Byzantine capital. The new emperor, Alexius I, sent emissaries to Pope Urban II, pleading for mercenaries to aid in the rescue of lost territories.

Thus, Christian crusaders streamed toward the Holy Land in part because they were invited. They were giving aid to Christians in the East.

Second, the Roman Catholic Church of the eleventh century was led by a militantly aggressive papacy. The reform-minded party of the church, which had recently come to power, thought church improvement lay in investing the pope with more authority; they cast a vision of the universal sovereignty of the Holy Father. In his rallying sermon for the First Crusade, Urban referred to himself as "spiritual ruler of the whole world."

A universal Christian sovereign, naturally, would want the Holy Land liberated from Turkish "infidels," so Urban was inclined to accept the invitation to send troops to Asia Minor and Palestine. Some historians speak of the First Crusade as "the foreign policy of the reformed papacy." That foreign policy would, it was hoped, bring the Holy City of Jerusalem back under Christian control. And it would possibly restore unity between Eastern and Western Christians.

Third, Europeans, after centuries of political and economic disintegration, were entering a new era of self-conscious unity.

Separate regions worked to enhance mutual interests: forest land was cleared, new markets opened, and Italian shipping poised to challenge Muslim dominance in the eastern Mediterranean. Many historians have suggested the Crusades would have been next to impossible without these Italian ships.

One answer, then, to "How could they?" is simply, "Conditions were right." Christian crusaders were swept along by the tides of history.

### **Deeper Questions**

Still, most Christians today feel an ethical shock over the crusaders' seemingly blind and bigoted religious zeal. It is easy for us to criticize the Crusades. They permanently embittered relations between Christians and Muslims, and they left Jews suspicious and fearful of Christians.

Yet, if we fail to see the crusaders' spiritual ideals, we misperceive the spirit of the times. The evil elements of the Crusades, though repulsive, are not the whole story.

The Crusades raise deep questions about the human heart. What is the nature of a "good" society? How do we restrain evil? Can "good" be defined by Christian doctrine? If so, how shall destructive ideas (called "heresy") be eliminated from society? Such questions are not buried in the twelfth century. Thoughtful Christians today, concerned about the moral decline in our own society, are asking essentially the same questions.

So, a second way to answer the question about Christian sponsorship of the Crusades is to check the ideals of the times. We might call these "more distant causes" or "internal motivations."

One can scarcely speak of a single motive in a movement embracing hundreds of thousands of people over several centuries. Still, a look at three principal ideals of crusaders helps explain their motivations.

### **Defending Christians**

Pope Urban II and other preachers of the Crusades wanted to defend Christian society. In launching the First Crusade, Urban reportedly exhorted his listeners, "You must carry succor to your brethren dwelling in the East. ... The Turks have attacked them, ... occupying more and more the lands of those Christians." They have "destroyed the churches and devastated the kingdom of God." If Christians permitted them to go unchallenged, "they will extend their sway more widely over many faithful servants of the Lord."

Furthermore, Christians of the time believed that violence, if used rightly, was a proper means of defending Christians. Augustine had laid down the principles of a "just war": it was conducted by the state; its purpose was the vindication of justice, meaning the defense of life and property, and it respected noncombatants, hostages, and prisoners. For Augustine, a just war's purpose was to achieve peace. Even in waging war, a follower of Christ must "cherish the spirit of a peacemaker."

Unfortunately, this ideal evaporated in the heat on the way to the Holy Land. The just defense of Christians faded from view, and Christians became increasingly inflamed with avenging the wrongs perpetrated against Christians and their holy places—especially Jerusalem.

En route to the Holy Land, crusading mobs destroyed Jewish communities in the Rhineland, raping, plundering, and murdering. And in the Holy Land, even Muslim noncombatants, women, and children, were slaughtered. In the fervor of a crusade, the noble end justified the ignoble means.

## **Knights' Honor**

Many crusaders were also motivated by the honor of knighthood. The clearest portrait of the ideal knight came from English philosopher John of Salisbury, who wrote, "What is the office of the duly ordained soldiery? To defend the church, to assail infidelity, to venerate the priesthood, to protect the poor from injuries, ... to pour out their blood for their brothers ... and, if need be, to lay down their lives. The high praises of God are in their throats, and two-edged swords are in their hands."

The First Crusade, as originally designed, was composed of nobles from France, Germany, and Italy. The pope envisioned the Crusades partly as an outlet for restless, pugnacious nobles. "Gentle knights were born to fight," wrote one French chronicler, "and war ennobles all who engage in it without fear or cowardice." Urban wanted to enlist the knight for the glory of God.

Unfortunately, honor, in historian J. Huizinga's words, is "a strange mixture of conscience and egotism." In addition, though the crusaders formally took high moral and spiritual vows in "taking up the cross," history shows that greed motivated some of them, at least some of the time. This mixture of knightly motives led too often to brutality.

## **Forgiveness of Sins**

Finally, the crusaders were empowered by the hope of salvation, an ideal that was not buried with the crusaders.

For centuries, peaceful European pilgrims had been traveling to worship at the birthplace of Christ. The rise and spread of Islam during the seventh century did not interrupt this traffic. By the tenth century, bishops were organizing mass pilgrimages to the Holy Land. In 1065, about 7000 pilgrims set out from Germany, probably the largest of these events.

Like our rallies at state capitals or marches on Washington, these pilgrimages were part devotion and part celebration. Through the years, the church adopted them as acts of penance. Surrounded by deep, religious emotions, pilgrimages assumed an aura of special sanctity; any disruption of them could be interpreted as blasphemy.

The crisis came when the Seljuk Turks seized Jerusalem from their fellow Muslims and sometimes denied Christians access to Christianity's most holy places. This halted medieval Christians from practicing a deeply meaningful act of devotion and an aid to salvation.

When Pope Urban II rallied Christians, he offered an extraordinary reward to those who set out to liberate the land of the Savior's birth: "All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins."

For years the church had claimed the power to remit part of a sinner's temporal punishment, but no complete remission had been granted until this historic moment.

It was only a slight step further to confer like benefits upon those who were unable to go on a crusade but who contributed to the cause. Thus, as the risks of the pilgrimage were heightened, so were the spiritual rewards.

## **Another World**

The intensity of crusaders was caught by Shakespeare, in words put in the mouth of that pugnacious

English monarch Henry IV:

We are impressed and engaged to fight ...  
To chase those pagans in those holy fields,  
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,  
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed,  
For our advantage on the bitter cross.

Some Christian ideals change with time and culture. Today, we do not share many of the assumptions of medieval Christians. The modern world exalts democratic individualism, religious liberty, and the separation of church and state. Urban II and the crusaders lived in a world with different ideals.

Still, we consider it unfortunate that the crusaders never understood two basic truths: Christianity's highest satisfactions are not guaranteed by possession of special places, and the sword is never God's way to extend Christ's kingdom.

***Dr. Bruce L. Shelley is professor of church history at Denver Seminary. He is author of Church History in Plain Language (Word) and a member of Christian History's advisory board.***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 40: The Crusades

## Why You Should Crusade

Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote the beautiful essay *On Loving God*, also urged Christians to fight for Christ. Here are some excerpts from a letter written in 1147.

The earth has been shaken and has trembled, because the Lord has caused his land to lose territory. His land, I repeat, where he was seen and in which he lived among men for more than thirty years. His land, which he honored by his birth, embellished by his miracles, consecrated with his blood, and enriched by his burial. His land, in which the voice of the turtledove was heard when the son of the Virgin praised the life of chastity. His land, where the first flowers of his Resurrection appeared.

Evil men have begun to occupy this land of the new promise, and unless someone resists them, they will be feasting their eyes upon the sanctuary of our religion and will try to stain that very bed, on which for our sake slept our life in death; they will profane the Holy Places—the places, I say, purpled with the blood of the immaculate Lamb.

I have something else to say which ought to move a Christian man's heart, however hard it is. Our king [Jesus] is accused of treachery; it is said of him [by the Muslims] that he is not God, but that he falsely pretended to be something he was not. Any man among you who is his vassal ought to rise up to defend his lord from the infamous accusation of treachery; he should go to the sure fight, where to win will be glorious, and where to die will be gain.

Why are you delaying, servants of the cross, why are you deceiving yourselves, you who have great physical strength and many worldly goods? Take the sign of the cross and the supreme pontiff, the vicar of him to whom it was said, ***Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven***, offers you this full indulgence of all the crimes you confess with contrite hearts. Take the gift that is offered to you and race one another to be the first to take advantage of the irrecoverable opportunity of the indulgence. I ask you and advise you not to want to put your own business before the business of Christ.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 40: The Crusades

## **The Crusades: A Gallery of Martial Monks & Holy Kings**

The great preachers, planners, and fighters of the Holy Land crusades.

Stephen M. Miller

### **Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)**

**The “theologian of love” who preached war**

Bernard, the son of a crusader, was a model monk. While young, he fasted so much he damaged his health, causing lifelong digestive problems. He reportedly studied the Bible and worshiped more than half of each day. He said Christ came to him in visions.

His spiritual intensity made for penetrating sermons, letters, and hymns. His essay “On Loving God” is one of Christian literature’s most eloquent on the subject. In it, Bernard writes, “God himself is the reason why He is to be loved.”

This same Bernard, in 1128, convinced church leaders to recognize a new order: fighting friars known as Templars. Though they took vows of poverty and chastity, these military monks were allowed to kill. They defended the pilgrim roads in Palestine.

Bernard was a powerful preacher, perhaps the greatest of his time. At times, he could be blunt. To the pope he wrote, “You have been entrusted with stewardship over the world, not given possession of it.” To crusaders fighting the pagan Wends in Germany, he insisted on no truce until “either their religion or nation shall be wiped out.”

Pope Eugene III, a former student of Bernard, enlisted his mentor to rally the people behind the Second Crusade. In his sermons and promotional letters, Bernard declared, “God arranges for himself to be in need, or he pretends to be, so that he can award to those fighting for him wages: the remission of their sins. ... Take the sign of the cross. ... If the cloth itself is sold it does not fetch much; if it is worn on a faithful shoulder, it is certain to be worth the kingdom of God.”

Response to his 1146 Easter sermon was so enthusiastic, he ran out of cloth crosses to pass out. So he tore pieces from his own habit to stitch on the shirts of would-be crusaders.

Though the promotion was a huge success, producing as many as 50,000 volunteers from France alone, the Second Crusade ended in embarrassing retreat. Bernard’s popularity took a dive, and for the remaining four years of his life, people criticized him.

With unyielding confidence he replied, “How can human beings be so rash as to dare to pass judgment on something that they are not in the least able to understand?”

### **Richard the Lion-Heart (1157–1199)** **Courageous commander**

King Richard I of England deserved his nickname.

During the Third Crusade, while 70 miles from Jaffa, he heard that the city had fallen to Muslims and that the last defenders were surrounded. He immediately started his troops on the march while he sailed ahead. From Jaffa's harbor, he saw Muslim flags flying in the city. A priest jumped from the fortress walls into the ocean and swam to the ship, telling Richard that Christians were negotiating a surrender.

Richard unstrapped his leg armor and waded ashore. Behind him were no more than fifty knights and a few hundred archers and sailors. His advance stirred the defenders in the fortress to charge, and the Muslims were run out of town.

Richard's crusading career began ten months after he was crowned at age 32. Recovering Jerusalem was his top priority. He made his way to the Holy Land with no more than 800 mounted soldiers. They were, however, well financed: Richard had collected an unpopular tithe of all income, arm-twisted acquaintances for donations, and even sold political offices.

An accomplished military strategist and skilled politician, Richard was also hotheaded and sometimes irresponsible. He arrived in the Holy Land in June 1191, in time to join the siege of Acre. Muslim defenders surrendered a month later. While negotiations for the release of captives were underway, Richard suspected bad faith on the part of the Muslims. In a rage, he ordered the immediate massacre of 2,700 Muslim hostages.

A month later, Richard headed south and began fortifying cities to make an assault on Jerusalem. Twice he managed to get within 12 miles of the Holy City, but his supply lines and forces proved too weak.

After sixteen months in Palestine, Richard heard his brother was plotting a takeover and that France was amassing troops for an attack. Before he left, he made a treaty with Muslim general Saladin that gave crusaders the Smile stretch of coastline from Tyre to Jaffa. Christians also were accorded safe passage throughout Palestine, permitting them to visit holy shrines.

Richard was 41 when, in a minor battle in northern France, he was killed by a lone arrow.

**Saladin**  
**(c. 1138–1193)**  
**Chivalrous Muslim general**

Balian, a soldier in Christian forces just defeated by the Muslims, asked Saladin for one favor. Could he travel safely to and from Jerusalem to get his family out before the Muslims attacked the city? Saladin granted the request; he asked only that Balian not stay to fight.

When Balian reached Jerusalem, however, the city's few defenders wanted him to command the garrison. Embarrassed, he asked Saladin for release from his vow. Saladin understood and also gave Balian's family safe passage to the coast.

Such incidents have built the chivalrous reputation of the brilliant and sometimes brutal Saladin.

A Muslim Kurd from northern Iraq, Saladin was raised in a prominent family. At 14 he joined his uncle's military staff and at 31 followed him to Egypt, where his uncle became vizier (a high officer). When his uncle died two months later, Saladin succeeded him. He then defeated competing Muslim leaders and started a dynasty that restored Egypt as the major Muslim power in the Middle East.

Saladin declared a jihad against the Christians. In July 1187, in mountains overlooking the Sea of Galilee, he won the bloody and critical Battle of Hattin. Thousands of Christians were killed during the battle, and hundreds slaughtered afterwards. Then Saladin swept through Palestine, taking Jerusalem and capturing

more than fifty crusader castles in two years. When he was done, he had pushed the Christians back to three coastal cities.

In Richard the Lion-Heart, Saladin found a worthy military opponent, who thwarted his Muslim armies time and again. Saladin found Richard "pleasant, upright, magnanimous, and excellent." Once when Richard contracted a serious fever, Saladin sent him peaches and pears, along with ice from the top of Mount Hermon 100 miles away. Eventually stalemated, Richard reluctantly agreed to a three-year truce.

Islam's most famous military hero left an empire stretching some 1,200 miles north to south, covering parts of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey. Saladin died at 55, weary of perpetual war. Generous throughout his life, he did not have enough money left to pay for a grave.

### **Innocent III (c. 1160–1216) Mightiest of popes**

The prestige and power of the medieval papacy were never more obvious than during Innocent's reign, which began in 1198. He argued that his position was semidivine—"set in the midst between God and man, below God but above man." He was the first to call himself "Vicar of Christ."

Innocent exercised what he believed was his right to select the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (which took in Germany and much of Italy). When the emperor he had chosen, Otto IV, made plans hostile to the pope, he soon found himself excommunicated, and eventually, ex-emperor.

Innocent longed to recapture the Holy Land. To make crusading easier for pilgrims and knights, he taxed ministers, collecting one-tenth of all revenues from clergy in Rome, and one-fortieth from outlying clergy. As a result, crusading was continuous during his 18-year papacy.

He repeatedly tried to convert the Albigensians of southern France from their dualist heresy. He even sent his personal representative as a missionary. When this legate was murdered, Innocent launched a crusade against the Albigensians, the first against heretics. Innocent tried to reduce the carnage, but the crusade produced horrifying massacres.

Innocent also longed to reunite the Western and Eastern churches under his papacy. But the disastrous Fourth Crusade ended that dream.

These crusaders never even made it into Muslim territory. Instead, in spite of Innocent's threats of excommunication, soldiers captured and plundered Constantinople, the capital of Eastern Christianity, and divided the empire of the Eastern church. This bizarre turn of events shocked the world.

Innocent was planning what he hoped would be a more successful Fifth Crusade when he died from one of his frequent bouts with fever, likely caused by malaria.

A year before his death, he convened the Fourth Lateran Council, which enacted lasting decrees: that every Catholic make confession at least annually, and that the bread and wine of Communion are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ.

### **St. Louis (1214–1270) The ultimate Christian king**

When Louis IX fell seriously ill with malaria in 1244, he vowed if he got well he would join the holy war. He

recovered and did what men of nearly every generation in his family had done since the First Crusade 150 years earlier—he led crusades.

Born the fourth of eleven children to King Louis VIII and Queen Blanche, he became heir to the throne after his three older siblings died. At age 12, prepubescent Louis found himself king, with a devout but smothering mother at his side.

Louis lived his faith: He wore hair shirts and visited hospitals, sometimes emptying the bedpans. He collected relics and built a chapel to house them.

At 20 he married Margaret, to whom he quickly became devoted. She bore him 11 children. When he left on a crusade, he took his wife and children along.

In 1248, with 36 ships loaded with 15,000 men, their horses, and supplies, Louis headed for Egypt, the center of Muslim power and the doorway to Jerusalem. After capturing Damietta, he led his army inland toward Cairo. But an epidemic forced Louis to retreat. The king suffered so badly from dysentery that he cut a hole in the back of his pants and marched with the rear guard.

Louis and part of the army were captured before making it back to the ships. Their ransom was so high, it reportedly took two days to count the gold. When one of Louis's officials bragged about cheating the Muslims, the king angrily ordered the ransom paid in full.

The defeat plunged him into despair and deeper piety. He blamed himself for the loss, believing God was punishing him for his sins. He began dressing plainly, eating simply, and helping the poor.

Instead of going home, Louis took his army to Palestine, where they built walls and towers around several coastal cities. He stayed four years, returning to France only upon hearing of the death of his mother, who had been ruling in his absence.

Twenty-two years later, Louis tried to redeem himself with another crusade. He landed in Tunis, in northern Africa, in the heat of the summer of 1270. Dysentery or typhoid quickly swept through the unsanitary camp. Louis fell ill and died while lying penitently on a bed of ashes, whispering the name of the city he never won: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem."

He soon became the only king of France named a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

**Peter the Hermit**  
**(c. 1050–1115)**  
**Fiery recruiter**

Two years before Pope Urban II called for a crusade, Peter made a pilgrimage to the Muslim-controlled Holy Land. There, he later said, he saw Christians chained, beaten, and killed. When he returned to France, he became an eloquent promoter of armed pilgrimage.

During some services, when he had exhausted his words and was overcome with emotion, he reportedly waved his crucifix before the sobbing masses. He attracted at least 20,000 followers—mostly peasant men, women, and children—in what became the first wave of the first Crusade.

This ragtag "army," mockingly known as the Peasants' Crusade, set out on the 2,000-mile walk in March 1096, five months before the official starting date set by the pope. The effect was electric. Whatever Peter did or said, wrote one medieval chronicler, "was regarded as little short of divine, to such an extent that hairs were snatched from his mule as relics." One witness said Peter looked very much like the donkey he

rode: his long face was framed in the hood of a dirty old robe made of coarse wool, tied at the waist by a rope.

As the army marched across Germany and south toward the Holy Land, Peter began losing control. The army forced the mostly Jewish community of Regensburg to undergo baptism. When they crossed into modern-day Hungary, Peter's band began pillaging cities and countryside—all of which was under the jurisdiction of Greek Christians.

After crossing into Asia Minor, the army moved only 50 miles into Muslim territory before it was wiped out. "Their monument," a chronicler wrote, "was a heap of bones."

Peter, who happened to be in Constantinople seeking supplies, then joined the army of Godfrey of Bouillon in the second wave that eventually reached Jerusalem. Though an ascetic used to deprivation, Peter deserted the crusade during the siege of Antioch when food got scarce. This caused a scandal; one of the military commanders brought him back forcibly and made him vow not to leave again.

Shortly before the storming of Jerusalem, Peter stood on the Mount of Olives, a few hundred yards outside the city walls, and preached a stirring sermon. As Muslims jeered, he said, "You hear them? You hear their threats and blasphemies? Christ dies again on Calvary!"

The next year, Peter returned to Europe and started a monastery in Belgium, where he died eleven years later.

***Stephen M. Miller is editor of Illustrated Bible Life.***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 40: The Crusades

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## Major Crusades to the East: Christian History Timeline

### 1071

Seljuk Turks defeat Byzantine armies at Manzikert

### 1093-1109

Anselm serves as archbishop of Canterbury

### 1095-99

The First Crusade

### 1100

Baldwin I becomes King of Jerusalem

### 1113

Crusader military order, the Hospitallers of St. John, recognized

### 1115

Bernard founds Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux

### 1118

Order of Knights Templar founded to protect pilgrims

### 1121

Abelard shocks theologians with his "Yes and No," seemingly contradictory statements of theology

### 1144

Turkish chief Zengi takes Edessa from crusaders

## First Crusade (1095–1099)

### Mission

- Defend Eastern Christians from Muslim aggression.
- Make pilgrimages to Jerusalem safer.
- Redirect knights' aggression.
- Recapture the Holy Sepulcher.

### Leaders

- Pope Urban II, who called for the crusade in November 1095.
- Peter the Hermit, preacher who recruited a first wave of crusaders, mostly peasants.
- Baldwin of Boulogne, Godfrey of Bouillon, and other French princes who led a second wave.

### Outcome

The first wave, an unauthorized "people's crusade," massacred Jews and plundered Eastern Christian territory, before being slaughtered by Muslims near Nicea in 1096.

A second wave, led by princes, moved into Asia Minor that summer and won strategic battles at Nicea

and Dorylaeum. After a seven-month siege, Antioch was captured in June 1098.

With great violence the crusaders captured Jerusalem in the summer of 1099. Four crusader states were established in the Holy Land.

### **1145–48**

Second Crusade

### **1155**

Carmelite order founded by 11 crusaders who live as hermits on Mt. Carmel

### **1167-68**

Oxford University founded

### **1169**

Saladin becomes vizier in Egypt

### **c. 1173**

Peter Waldo, founder of Waldensians, begins to preach

### **1174**

The tower of Pisa built

### **1187**

Saladin's forces crush Christian army at Hattin and take Jerusalem

## **Second Crusade**

**(1145–1148)**

### **Mission**

To regain crusader capital of Edessa, which had been overrun by Muslims in 1144.

### **Leaders**

- Bernard of Clairvaux, revered monk, who preached the crusade.
- King Louis VII of France.
- Emperor Conrad III of Germany.

### **Outcome**

Because of bickering and ineffective leadership, the German crusaders suffered a major defeat at Dorylaeum (1147). Badly weakened, the crusaders abandoned any hope of retaking Edessa.

Instead, they besieged Damascus. But following a strategic blunder they failed in their siege and were forced to retreat (1148).

Christians were devastated that a crusade preached by a moral exemplar and led by royalty would fail.

## **1187–1191**

Third Crusade

### **1191**

Order of Teutonic Knights begins

## **Third Crusade (1187–1191)**

### **Mission**

To retake Jerusalem, which fell to Muslim general Saladin in 1187.

### **Leaders**

- Frederick Barbarossa, Holy Roman Emperor.
- Philip II, King of France.
- Richard I, later king of England.
- Pope Gregory VIII.

### **Outcome**

Barbarossa ("Redbeard") set out with an army in 1189 but drowned crossing a river en route.

In 1190, Philip II of France and Richard I (Lion-Heart) of England gathered their armies. On the way, Richard captured Cyprus from a rebel Byzantine prince. Meanwhile, Philip II laid siege to Acre, and after Richard arrived, it fell. Richard also took Jaffa and negotiated Christian access to Jerusalem.

## **1198–1204**

Fourth Crusade

### **1199**

Innocent III attempts to launch first "political" crusade, against a German opponent

### **1208**

Francis of Assisi renounces wealth

### **1208–18**

Crusade against Albigensians, first against heretics in Europe

### **1212**

Children's Crusade, one of several popular uprisings that fails to reach Holy Land

### **1215**

King John of England seals the Magna Carta. Fourth Lateran Council affirms transubstantiation

### **1217**

Cambridge University founded

## **Fourth Crusade (1198–1204)**

### **Mission**

To defeat Egypt, center of Muslim power.

### **Leaders**

- Pope Innocent III.
- Enrico Dandolo, Doge of Venice.
- Byzantine prince Alexius IV.
- Boniface de Montferrat.

### **Outcome**



The crusaders contracted with Venice, the shipping power, to sail them to Egypt. When they couldn't pay the bill, the crusaders agreed to conquer for the Venetians a Christian city along the Adriatic Sea.

Then Alexius IV, son of the former Byzantine emperor, asked the crusaders to restore his father to power. In return he'd pay huge sums of money, reunite the Eastern church with Rome, and supply a crusade to the Holy Land. Most crusaders agreed, and against the pope's orders, attacked Constantinople, the capital of Greek Christendom. When the restored Alexius couldn't fulfill his promises, the crusaders attacked the city again. The resulting three-day massacre soured relations between Eastern and Western Christians for centuries.

The crusade never reached Egypt.

### **1217–21**

Fifth Crusade

### **1225**

First cotton cloth made in the West

### **1226**

Teutonic Knights commissioned to conquer and convert Prussia

## **Fifth Crusade**

**(1217–1221)**

### **Mission**

To defeat Egypt, center of Muslim power.

### **Leaders**

- Pope Honorius III, who organized the crusade called for by his predecessor, Innocent III.
- John of Brienne, early leader of crusaders.
- Cardinal Pelagius, papal legate.

### **Outcome**

In 1218, crusaders successfully took a strategic tower in Uamietta, on the Nile. More troops arrived with Cardinal Pelagius, who assumed leadership. Though Muslims offered to give up the kingdom of Jerusalem, he continued the siege and took Damietta in 1221. Then an advance inland failed, forcing crusaders to retreat with nothing gained.

Only bright spot: during the siege of Damietta, Francis of Assisi crossed enemy lines to preach to the Muslim sultan.

### **1228–29**

Sixth Crusade

### **1244**

New group of Muslims recaptures Jerusalem and defeats Christian settlers

### **1244–50**

Pope Innocent IV crusades against Frederick II, one of many European political crusades

## **Sixth Crusade**

**(1228–1229)**

**Mission**

To retake Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

**Leaders**

- Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor.
- Pope Gregory IX.

**Outcome**

Frederick II, who had vowed to participate in the Fifth Crusade, pleaded illness as the Sixth set out, so the pope excommunicated him for not fulfilling his vow.

Nonetheless, Frederick joined the crusaders in the Holy Land and soon negotiated with Muslims for Christian access to Jerusalem (except for the Temple area). The treaty was denounced by the devout of both faiths and lasted but ten years.

Ironically Frederick was again excommunicated for making peace rather than pushing for military victory.

**1248-50**

Seventh Crusade

**1253-68**

Pope Innocent IV launches a crusade against Conrad IV in Germany

**1261**

Byzantines reconquer Constantinople

**1263-71**

Muslim Baybars overrun Nazareth, Jaffa, and Antioch

**Seventh Crusade**

**(1248-1250)**

**Mission**

To defeat Egypt, Muslim political center.

**Leaders**

- Louis IX, King of France.
- Pope Innocent IV.

**Outcome**

As soon as he heard Jerusalem had fallen to Muslims, the devout Louis IX of France volunteered to lead a new crusade. After four intense years of planning, the well-financed army of crusaders took the Egyptian city of Damietta in 1249.

But on a subsequent move toward Cairo, Louis's forces were surrounded, and he was taken prisoner. Louis was ransomed for a huge sum in gold and the city of Damietta.

Louis then went to the Holy Land for four years and rebuilt many Christian fortresses.

**1267-72**

Eighth Crusade

**1271**

Marco Polo journeys to East

**1273**

Thomas Aquinas leaves "Summa Theologiae" unfinished

**1291**

Crusader forces defeated at Acre, and Christians expelled from the Holy Land

## **Eighth Crusade (1267–1272)**

### **Mission**

To retake Holy Land fortresses and cities that had recently fallen to Muslims.

### **Leaders**

- Louis IX, King of France.
- Charles of Anjou, brother of Louis IX.
- Prince Edward of England.

### **Outcome**

Louis's second crusade got sidetracked into attacking Tunis in North Africa. Typhus and dysentery spread through the crusader camp, killing Louis. His brother Charles negotiated a treaty.

Edward arrived too late to join Louis. Still, he proceeded to Acre, where soon the crusade was abandoned.

In 1291, the crusader city of Acre fell, and the Christian presence in the Holy Land ended.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## The Muslim Defense

Christians thought they had liberated Jerusalem from infidels. But what did Muslims think?

Hadia Dajani-Shakeel

*To get a full historical picture of any war, it is especially helpful to see it from the perspective of the invaded. What did Muslims think of their enemies? And how devastating was their being conquered? To get answers to such questions, Christian History asked Islamic historian Dr. Hadia Dajani-Shakeel to explain. She is associate professor in the department of Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto and co-editor of The Jihad and Its Times (Michigan, 1991).*

Pope Urban II staged a massive military invasion of the Muslim East. That invasion and occupation caused the forced expulsion, conversion, or enslavement of the Muslim majority. Only a few cities in Syria remained in Muslim hands, and these became centers for Islamic resistance.

Why did Christians embark on this First Crusade? According to Muslim observers of the time, Christians aimed to expand their territory, weaken or replace Islam, avenge earlier Muslim successes in Spain and Sicily, and above all, to take Jerusalem.

Elaborating on the motives of the First Crusade, one Muslim chronicler wrote, "In the year 490 [A.D. 1097], the Franks began their march against the **Sham** [modern Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon]. Baldwin, their king, a kinsman of Roger the Frank, assembled a great army and sent a message to Roger saying, 'I have assembled a great army, and now I am on my way to you. From your base, Sicily, I will march against Africa and conquer it....'

"Roger called together his companions and consulted them about these proposals. 'We swear by the Bible that this is good for them and for us,' they said, for 'By this means these lands will be converted to Christianity.'"

Roger then advised Baldwin to conquer Jerusalem; "If you have decided to wage war against the Muslims, your best course will be to conquer Jerusalem, thus freeing it from their rule and winning great honor."

## The Great Loss

Muslims viewed the Christian settlements in the **Sham** as alien and illegitimate, established at the expense of the native population, which had been displaced or massacred. The early Christians were portrayed as ruthless, bloodthirsty, and barbaric.

Furthermore, Muslims considered the loss of Jerusalem, with its Islamic sacred shrines—the Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock—as the greatest loss in their history. To profane Muslim shrines was to abuse Islam itself. The bitterness of the Muslims against defilement of their religious places, a bitterness that had been fed throughout the century, erupted in destruction of Christian images and objects when these sacred shrines were recaptured.

Some Muslim scholars interpreted the success of the First Crusade as a divine punishment against

Muslims for neglecting their religious duties, and for failing to prosecute a *jihad* (holy war) in defense of territories God had entrusted to them. Thus, the only way to satisfy God was to fight at two fronts: spiritual (against materialism, oppression, and evil) and political (to liberate Muslim territory from the enemy). Hence when the counter crusade, or *jihad*, was begun, it was seen as a defensive war.

Sacred shrines, and indeed Jerusalem itself, became the rallying focus for the *jihad* throughout the 1100s. When Jerusalem was finally recovered by Saladin in 1187, Muslim reaction was vividly described by a witness:

"At the top of the cupola of the Dome of the Rock was a great golden cross. When the Muslims entered the city on Friday, some of them climbed to the top of the cupola to take the cross down. As they reached the top, a great cry went up from the city, and from outside the walls the Muslims cried, 'God is greatest!' in their joy, and the Franks groaned in consternation and grief. So loud and piercing was the cry that the earth almost shook."

### **Cultural Intermarriage**

During the two centuries of Christian occupation, Christians and Muslims grew to understand each other to some degree, despite the fact crusades and counter-crusades continued.

Christians and Muslims intermarried. Muslim women taken into captivity were first converted to Christianity before they were freed and allowed to marry Christians. Muslim men also married Christian women taken in war.

These marriages, naturally, transmitted culture. For instance, many Christians of the second or third generation spoke Arabic fluently, and vice versa. These bilinguals were in great demand as interpreters.

Native cuisine was introduced into Christian homes, as was native fashion. An Arab scholar, an ambassador for the ruler of Damascus to the kings of Jerusalem, made many Christian friends, especially among the knights. In his memoirs, he described the experience of a friend who visited a Christian knight:

"We came to the house of one of the old knights who came with the expedition [the First Crusade]. This man had retired from the army and was living on the income of the property he owned in Antioch. He had a fine table brought out, spread with a splendid selection of appetizing food. He saw that I was not eating and said, 'Do not worry, please eat what you like, for I do not eat Frankish food. I have Egyptian cooks and eat only what they serve. No pig's flesh ever comes into my house.' So I ate, although cautiously, and then we left."

Although the Muslims saw the Crusades as a religious war against Islam, they considered Christians more a political than religious enemy. Thus, when Saladin recovered the Holy Land from Christians, he gave them the choice of living in the area and paying a poll tax, or moving to Christian-held territories. Many Christians migrated to Tyre, Tripoli, Antioch, and Europe.

The descendants of Christians who remained in the East eventually melted into the population of the area. Today signs of the Christian presence remain in the names of some families, in the folk dress of some areas such as Bethlehem, and in stories and proverbs from the area.

Along with archaeological remains, they are the only visible witnesses to the massive military invasion.

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Puzzling Encounters

Usama ibn Munqidh was emir of Shizar in the twelfth century, when Christians occupied much of the Holy Land. Here are three accounts of his experience with the clash of cultures.

### Take My Son?

A very important Frankish knight ... had come on a pilgrimage and was going home again. We got to know one another, and became firm friends. He called me "Brother," and an affectionate friendship grew up between us.

When he was due to embark for the return journey, he said to me, "My brother, as I am about to return home, I should be happy if you would send your son with me" (the boy, who was about 14 years old, was beside me at the time), "so that he could meet the noblemen of the realm and learn the arts of politics and chivalry. On his return home, he would be a truly cultivated man."

A truly cultivated man would never be guilty of such a suggestion; my son might as well be taken prisoner as go off into the land of the Franks!

I turned to my friend and said, "I assure you that I could desire nothing better for my son, but unfortunately the boy's grandmother, my mother, is very attached to him, and she would not even let him come away with me without extracting a promise from me that I would bring him back to her."

### Their God Is Too Small

I was present myself when one of them [Templars] came up to the emir Mu'in ad-Din—God have mercy on him—in the Dome of the Rock, and said to him, "Would you like to see God as a baby?"

The emir said that he would, and the fellow proceeded to show us a picture of Mary with the infant Messiah on her lap. "This," he said, "is God as a baby."

Almighty God is greater than the infidels' concept of him!

### Fanatic Foreigner

This is an example of Frankish barbarism, God damn them! When I was in Jerusalem, I used to go to the Masjid al-Aqsa, beside which is a small oratory which the Franks have made into a church. Whenever I went into the mosque, which was in the hands of Templars, who were friends of mine, they would put the little oratory at my disposal, so that I could say my prayers there.

One day I had gone in, said the *Allah akhbar* [the beginning of a sequence of prayers], and risen to begin my prayers, when a Frank threw himself on me from behind, lifted me up, and turned me so that I was facing east.

"That is the way to pray!" he said. [Medieval Christians prayed facing east—toward Jerusalem; Muslims faced the *qibla*, the direction of Mecca.]

Some Templars at once intervened, seized the man, and took him out of my way, while I resumed my prayer. But the moment they stopped watching him, he seized me again and forced me to face east, repeating that this was the way to pray. Again the Templars intervened and took him away.

They apologized to me and said, "He is a foreigner who has just arrived today from his homeland in the north, and he has never seen anyone pray facing any other direction than east."

"I have finished my prayers," I said, and left, stupefied by the fanatic who had been so perturbed and upset to see someone praying facing the **qibla!**

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Women of the Cross

The devout, combative, and scandalous women who shared in the Crusades.

Ronald C. Finucane

Though historians have fixed the crusading knight firmly in the public mind, it is less easy to picture the women who went along on these ventures. Women followed the pilgrimage routes of medieval Europe as avidly as men. Women suffered while on ordinary pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and they could hardly expect lighter treatment on the Crusades. And yet they went.

Well-known ladies accompanied their husbands on these dangerous journeys—for example, the wives of Baldwin of Boulogne and Raymond of Toulouse, leaders in the First Crusade, and the wife of Richard the Lion-Heart, who married him in the course of the Third Crusade.

Most of the women who accompanied the crusaders, though, were the wives of ordinary pilgrim-warriors. Sometimes the proportion of women must have been relatively high, considering the dangerous nature of the expeditions. On the First Crusade, the armies were held up at Antioch when a pestilence struck: it was reported, incredibly, that “nearly fifty thousand” women died within a few days. Even though medieval statistics are untrustworthy, the writer is clearly saying that a great many women died.

Whenever a fight was in the offing, women and other noncombatants (the clergy, the sick, the old, and children) were usually herded together in some secure position while the infantry, knights, and their leaders formed up for action. But there were bound to be fatalities.

As a prelude to the First Crusade, Peter the Hermit’s band was wiped out just beyond Constantinople, in the course of which the Turks invaded the base-camp of the Christians: “And going within the tents, they destroyed with the sword whomever they found, the weak and the feeble, clerics, monks, old women, nursing children, persons of every age. But they led away young girls whose face and form was pleasing in their eyes, and beardless youths of comely countenance.”

### On Active Duty

Women sometimes took a more active part in the fighting. This might be as elementary as bringing water to the fighting men, as the women of Bohemond’s camp did at a skirmish beyond Nicea and at the siege of Jerusalem. At Damietta, during the so-called Fifth Crusade in the early thirteenth century, they brought water, wine, and bread, as well as stones to use as projectiles.

One woman was helping to fill a moat at Acre during the Third Crusade. After depositing the load she had been carrying, she was shot with an arrow. While she lay dying she asked her husband to use her own body to help fill up the moat, which was done. “No man” wrote a contemporary, “ever should forget such [a] woman.”

There are also reports of women actually taking up arms and fighting alongside the men. As William of Tyre claimed, women fought at Jerusalem in the First Crusade regardless of their “natural weakness.” During the Third Crusade actions at the city of Acre, three Frankish women “fought from horseback and were recognized as women only when captured and stripped of their armor.” [Muslim writer] Imad ad-



Din claimed that among the Franks "there were indeed women who rode into battle with cuirasses and helmets, dressed in men's clothes."

Women occasionally participated in even more bloodthirsty activities: when a Turkish galley was taken, Christian women went on board, according to a contemporary, seized the captured Muslims by the hair, cut off their heads, and bore them back in triumph to the shore.

Margaret of Beverly was in Jerusalem while it was under attack by Saladin. She says she defended the city like a man, putting a cooking-pot on her head as a helmet and carrying water to the men on the walls; she was injured by fragments from a boulder big as a millstone fired by Saracen engines.

### **Sin in the Camp**

Women served the crusading armies and pilgrims in yet other ways, much to the regret of Holy Mother Church. On the extended pilgrimage of a crusade, where women were scattered indiscriminately among armies larger than one usually saw on the battlefields of Europe, the risk of sin was great indeed.

In the midst of their troubles at Antioch during the First Crusade, army leaders and prelates decided that the troops had displeased the Lord by their dissipation. They therefore expelled the women from the camp.

After Acre was captured in 1191, the troops settled down in the city to enjoy "many damsels beautiful/ And with the wines and women they/ Caroused in vile and shameful way." Consequently, to avoid God's wrath for such behavior, when the army moved on, it was decreed that the loose women should stay behind in Acre.

### **On the Home Front**

Of course, a great many women were left behind after those tearful farewells which the chroniclers and poets described so fondly. The fragile status of most women was made even more apparent when their men went off to battle the infidel.

For those wives who remained behind, the church guaranteed to protect them in their persons and property until their absent spouses should return. Even so, this protection was not always effective.

In the early thirteenth century, [a crusader named] John came back to his family and lands in Suffolk, only to find that during his absence in Jerusalem a certain Thomas had helped himself to thirty acres by the simple expedient of taking it from John's wife, Matilda.

Some crusaders must have been thrown into states of outrage or depression when they heard scandalous rumors about their distant wives. During the Second Crusade, one party of Christians was taunted by Muslims shouting merrily from their city walls about "the many children who were going to be born at home while we were gone."

The church tried to reduce the risk of adultery by requiring that both husband and wife must agree, and give mutual consent, to the man's taking a crusading vow and departing for distant lands.

In canon law, the woman whose husband had died on crusade could remarry after the lapse of a year. If he were merely a prisoner of war, she had no right to remarry, no matter how long he remained in captivity. The difficulties began when there was uncertainty about the fate of a husband who was missing in action. After the mid-twelfth century, lawyers agreed that a woman should wait five years (an old Roman law) after her husband was missing.

Finally, sometimes the reappearance of a presumed-dead husband created complications. Palmerius, who was thought to have been killed, reappeared after several years' captivity. His wife, Gilla, had remarried, and Palmerius brought an action to recover both wife and lands.

Gilla retorted that her first husband had died, and that the present claimant was an impostor since he could not play the harp like her Palmerius, or sing in French and Latin. On the claimant's behalf his family maintained that he had the same bent finger, the same scar on his face, and the same two toes crossed in an unusual way, just as the original Palmerius had. Pope and cardinals pondered this case and then decided to let the second marriage stand.

***Dr. Ronald C. Finucane is author of *Soldiers of the Faith: Crusaders and Moslems at War* (St. Martin's Press, 1983), from which this article is abridged.***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 40: The Crusades

## Long Journey to Jerusalem

Whether by land or sea, a crusade to the East was difficult and dangerous.

### By Land

A crusader leaving from Paris would have traveled more than 2,100 miles (3,360 km) to Jerusalem. That journey is roughly equivalent to walking from New York to Salt Lake City. This distance doesn't include numerous side journeys to forage for food or skirmish with enemy forces.

Most pilgrims *walked*, and they had to climb steep mountains and cross semi-desert. The band tramped perhaps 12–15 miles per day, fewer in mountainous areas. Thus, the journey took many months. With sieges and delays for gathering food and supplies, most campaigns lasted for years. Thousands of crusaders deserted or died from disease, starvation, or warfare.

### By Sea

The perilous voyage from Genoa to Antioch stretched approximately 1,450 nautical miles. Despite storms, however, sea travel was much faster than travel overland. In 1248, for example, an immense fleet led by Louis IX sailed from France to Cyprus in about three weeks.

Increasingly, then, crusaders traveled all or part of the way by ship. And once in Palestine, they depended on shipping for supplies. This enriched Italian shipping cities such as Genoa and Venice.

### The Goal

The Holy Land. Crusaders soon settled and ruled over four new "countries" in Palestine: the County of Edessa, Principality of Antioch, County of Tripoli, and Kingdom of Jerusalem. Though these did not last long, until 1291 Christians controlled long stretches of coastline in modern-day Israeli Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## The Fighting Monks

In the new religious orders, Christians blended poverty, chastity, and military fervor.

Michael Gervers

***A Muslim army quietly set up camp on the Mount of Olives in 1152, preparing for a surprise attack on the city of Jerusalem. Victory seemed certain: Jerusalem's Christian ruler, Baldwin, was away in Tripoli.***

***But during the night, the encamped Muslims were slaughtered in a surprise counterattack that reportedly left 5,000 dead. Who had so heroically saved the city of Jerusalem?***

***Brothers in a religious order, men who had vowed themselves to poverty, chastity, and obedience.***

***But these devout men came from new religious groups—military orders known as the Knights Templar and the Hospitallers. They had been commissioned by the pope to defend the Holy Land.***

Christian History ***invited Mr. Michael Gervers to describe the three most prominent of these unprecedented religious orders.***

### **The Templars: Fabled Success, Sudden Fall**

Founded in 1118 by the French knights Hugh de Payens and Godfrey de St. Omer, the Templars were also called "The Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon" because they had been granted quarters on the site of Solomon's Temple. Their mission was to protect Christians on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, but this protection soon expanded to include the land itself.

Nine years after their founding, the Templars gained the valuable support of Bernard of Clairvaux, who would draw up the order's rule (guidelines for community life). Bernard composed a treatise, ***In Praise of the New Knighthood***, championing the Templars' Christian calling: "A new sort of chivalry has appeared on earth ... that tirelessly wages ... war both against flesh and blood and against the spiritual forces of evil. ... Go forward in safety, knights, with undaunted souls drive off the enemies of the cross of Christ."

The Templars gained the favor of monarchs and popes and soon acquired large portions of land in exchange for their disciplined military services in the Holy Land and Europe. The papacy, in particular, extended privileges to the Templars, considering the order its military arm and making its members accountable directly to the pope. Because they traveled internationally, transported money, and owned land, the Templars soon became prominent bankers. Such status and wealth did not go unnoticed, however, and the Templars aroused the jealousy of detractors.

The knights' strict discipline and battlefield effectiveness kept them in the forefront of crusading throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They held the fortress of Gaza—the gateway to Egypt—against the feared Muslim commander Saladin. In 1217, they constructed the Castle Pilgrim near Acre, from which the Fifth Crusade departed for Egypt a year later. They also rebuilt the Castle of Safad in 1240—

43, making it the foremost Christian stronghold in the East.

Sometimes their valor was costly. In the Battle of Hattin in 1187, many Templars were killed in combat, and those taken prisoner were singled out for execution because of their membership in the order.

Despite their successes, the Templars eventually came to suffer the distrust of one-time patrons. Their privileged status, financial practices, and military might placed them at the center of crusading politics, especially in the Holy Land.

They were blamed for the fateful decision to attack Damascus (1148) that brought an end to the Second Crusade. The Templars also were criticized for their misguided advice to King Guy de Lusignan of Jerusalem—followed by tactical errors in the rout at Hattin—that led to the loss of Jerusalem in 1187. Even when the Templars played a crucial role in Louis IX's expedition to Egypt in 1249 and 1250, the growing suspicions about them could not be assuaged.

A key source of contention came from rivalry with another military order, the Hospitallers. In an effort to stop the problem, the Council of Lyons in 1274 moved to combine the Templars and the Hospitallers into one order. Though the merger was successfully resisted, just three decades later King Philip IV—with an eye for the Templars' enormous wealth and property—ordered the arrest of all Templars in France, speciously charging them with sodomy, blasphemy, and heresy.

The situation worsened in November 1307, when Pope Clement V ordered the arrest of all Templars in England, Aragon, Castile, and Cyprus. Then, in 1310, fifty-four Templars in Paris were burned at the stake. Finally, at the Council of Vienna in 1312, the Templars were officially disbanded and their property transferred to the Hospitallers. Jacques de Molay, the last Templar Grand Master, was burned at the stake in 1314.

### **The Hospitallers: from Hospital to Army Base**

"Take this sword; its brightness stands for faith, its point for hope, its guard for charity." With these words, knights were inducted into the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem—also called the Knights Hospitaller.

Begun in Jerusalem around 1099 in the wake of the First Crusade, the order was confirmed by Pope Paschal II as a unique, noncloistered religious order to care for pilgrims and the sick in the Holy Land. However, within fifty years the Hospitallers became a military order of Christian knighthood.

The papacy granted the Hospitallers exceptional privileges. With that support, the Hospitallers would continue their benevolent and military operations for the next 600 years.

In 1291, Muslim forces conquered Acre, the final remaining crusader settlement in the East. The Hospitallers moved ultimately to the Byzantine island of Rhodes, which they conquered around 1309. There they became a Mediterranean seafaring power and a major European bulwark against the Ottoman Turks. They held Rhodes for more than two centuries, until finally overcome by the Ottomans in 1522.

The order reestablished itself on the Mediterranean island of Malta a few years later, and thus became known as the Knights of Malta. They defended European interests in the Mediterranean until in 1798 they were expelled from Malta by Napoleon.

The Knights of Malta have retained diplomatic status in Rome to this day. Their charter was renewed in 1961 by Pope John XXIII, permitting them to carry on religious and charitable activities as an international

sovereign order. The English branch (reestablished as a Protestant order in 1888) today supports an eye hospital in Jerusalem as well as the St. John Ambulance Association and Brigade in the British Commonwealth. The order's emblem is the eight-pointed cross known as the Maltese Cross.

### **The Teutonic Knights: Border Guards**

Early in the Third Crusade (1189–92), a group of German merchants formed a fraternity to care for the sick and the wounded during the siege of Acre. After the group established a formal hospital, it was recognized by Pope Clement III in 1191. Seven years later, when more German crusaders were needed in the Holy Land, the order was commissioned for military service.

The Teutonic Knights, who followed a rule like the Templars and Hospitallers, also received generous privileges from the church and soon acquired large regions of land. But the Teutonic Knights concentrated more on conquering pagan lands along Christianity's eastern frontier.

The king of Hungary, in 1211, gave the Knights land in exchange for defending his borders. A dispute over the extent of the order's autonomy led to its expulsion in 1225.

The Teutonic Knights were then invited to Prussia to civilize its lands. Soon after, Emperor Frederick II endowed the Teutonic Grand Master with the status of a prince, giving the order rights over lands it subjugated. By 1280, the Teutonic Knights had established supreme control over all of Prussia.

From this height, the group declined. In 1410, the knights lost much of their land to a combined Polish and Lithuanian army. In 1530, the Teutonic Order was incorporated into imperial Germany as an association of nobles. Finally, in 1805, the order was suppressed by Napoleon.

A group in Austria carried on the Teutonic tradition, however, and resumed its original work of running hospitals and other charitable enterprises. The Teutonic Knights' headquarters in Vienna stands as a reminder that even though the crusades were launched nearly a millennium ago, their effects linger today.

***Dr. Michael Gervers is professor of history at the University of Toronto and author of *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians (St. Martin's, 1992)*.***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Holy Violence Then and Now

A historian looks at the causes and lingering effects of Christian warfare.

an interview with Jonathan Riley-Smith

***Christians marching off to holy war—how can we understand that? And did any good come of it? To answer these questions, Christian History editors Kevin Miller and Mark Galli talked with Jonathan Riley-Smith, professor of history at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London. Professor Riley-Smith is author of The Crusades: A Short History (Yale, 1987) and numerous other books on the crusading era.***

**Christian History:** In the first three centuries, Christians were pacifists. By 1096, they embarked on a holy war. What caused such a huge change?

**Jonathan Riley-Smith:** First, the early church was not entirely pacifist. In Romans 13, for example, Paul justifies the violence of the pagan emperor, for the emperor is yet a minister of God. And Christians served in the Roman army from the second century on.

Following the conversion of the emperors, in the fourth century, the church became more open to using violence. Church leaders, after an initial shock, began supporting the use of force against heretics.

Then Augustine formulated his theory of “just war,” but his terms effectively mean “holy war.” Augustine and the medieval world concluded that violence is not evil. Instead, violence is morally neutral. That makes a crusade possible.

**How did medieval Christians support their idea that violence was morally neutral?**

Augustine gave this example: Suppose a man has gangrene in the leg and is going to die. The surgeon believes the only way to save him is by amputating the leg. Against the man’s will, the surgeon straps him to a table and saws off the leg. That is an act of extreme violence.

But was that violence evil? Augustine said no. And if you find one exception to the idea that violence is evil, he concluded, then violence cannot be intrinsically evil.

Thus, for medieval theologians, violence may or may not be evil; it depends largely on the intention of the perpetrator. Until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this was the normative Christian view. In fact, the majority of Christians over 2,000 years have believed that violence may be justified under certain circumstances.

**It’s one thing to say violence is morally neutral, but how did the crusaders justify an offensive strike against Islam?**

If you had asked a canon lawyer (theologian), he would have said the crusades were **defensive**: Christians were defending their brothers and sisters in the East from Muslim aggression and oppression, or they were regaining land that had been taken by Muslims. Senior churchmen maintained that when Christianity goes to war, it can only be in defense or for the recovery of property.

But if you had mingled with a crowd of knights in the late eleventh century, they would have said they were fighting for “the liberation of Jerusalem”. That’s not so hard to understand when you consider that Christians reach the same conclusions today.

**Christians crusade today?**

Think about the more militant advocates of Christian liberation. Although liberationists argue for rebellion rather than war, they put forward arguments that were made in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: Violence is morally neutral; Christ intends people to live in just political structures; Christ is present in the process of liberation; we must show solidarity with our oppressed brothers and sisters; dying in this cause is martyrdom.

***Every Christian reformation is accompanied by violence.***

—Jonathan Riley-Smith

**It's often said that Christians were more cruel than the Muslims—for example, when they captured a city. Do you think that's true?**

I don't think it is. The case that is always given is this: When the Christians took Jerusalem in 1099, they mercilessly sacked the city, killing nearly everyone; but when the Muslims under Saladin captured Jerusalem in 1187, they allowed captives to go free.

But that example accords with the medieval laws of war: if a city surrenders, you don't sack it; if it resists, you do. Jerusalem resisted in 1099, and it was sacked. When it surrendered in 1187, it was not. In actuality, you find cruelty on both sides.

We must also be aware of combat psychology. Long campaigns, as many of the crusades were, put tremendous stress on combatants. Today we recognize that under the stress of battle and fatigue, discipline can disintegrate, often with tragic consequences.

In the late nineteenth century, people looked at the crusaders and said, "These are brutal men." Modern historians are likely to add, "These are also brutalized men."

**Yet how can we understand the slaughtering of entire villages of Jews in Germany? This happened at the very beginning of a campaign.**

In this area, the Christians behaved abominably. Too often, Christians have excused these horrendous persecutions on the grounds that they were led by peasants and rabble. That is not strictly true; the so-called People's Crusade was led by a significant number of nobles and knights. We have to face up to the terrible crimes committed by these Christians.

Why did they do it? Remember that in order to sell the crusading idea to the masses, preachers had to use ideas that people understood. And they used terms of family: "The Eastern Christians are your brothers and sisters, and they are being persecuted by the Muslims. Christ is your Father, and he has been shamed, because his estate has been taken away by the Muslims. You must go to defend your brothers and sisters and to recover your Father's patrimony!"

This was the great age of the vendetta, and knights and nobles immediately thought in terms of blood feud and revenge. They responded to this preaching: "We are called upon to avenge the occupation of our Father's land in 638 [when Muslims occupied the Holy Land]."

But soon they added, "What about the destruction of his body in 33? Why shouldn't we punish these people who have disparaged our Father's honor even more than the Muslims did?"

Church leaders tried to halt that line of reasoning, but once they had taken the cork out of the bottle, they could not put it back in.

**How much did greed for land or riches motivate crusaders?**

Very little, because most crusaders became poorer as a result of their crusades.

A German knight called to fight in Italy in the mid-twelfth century, for example, expected his expenses to be twice his annual salary. If we assume that to live like a knight now would require \$50,000 a year, that means his expenses were \$100,000. A French or English knight crusading to the Holy Land might spend twice as much! The only way to raise this much money was to sell property.

Neither did crusaders get rich from booty. They did bring home relics, but you cannot sell relics; canon law forbids it. I know of no case of a crusader returning home rich.

We picture people, without a thought in the world, galloping off to the East. But we have to remember how unpleasant crusades were. Medieval Christians were frightened by them. Would you want to walk 2,000 miles, starve yourself periodically, drink only the dirtiest water, and subject yourself to violence?

**How many people did, in fact, venture forth to crusade? And how many died as a result?**

Throughout the crusading period, only a minority of people actually went on a crusade. The First Crusade was organized when there



were probably 50,000 nobles and knights in France alone, yet only about 5,000 of these went.

As far as those who died, we simply don't have accurate information. Thousands and thousands, certainly. But from the medieval perspective, death is beside the point. Humbert of Romans, a great crusades preacher, said, "The aim of Christianity is not to fill the earth, but to fill heaven."

### **What happened to the crusading ideal once Christians were expelled from the Holy Land in 1291?**

The traditional date, 1291, is convenient for marking the end of the crusades for Jerusalem. But 1291 is no longer a significant date to crusades historians.

There are as many crusades going on in the fourteenth century as there were in the thirteenth—some against Muslims, and some against heretics. Even as late as 1580 you have a crusade to Morocco that fits all the features of crusading.

### **We think of the Crusades as a military and political failure. Is that true?**

In the Holy Land, they did fail. But the larger crusading movement was successful in preserving Christian Europe. Europe was threatened by Islam. For example, Muslims were advancing from the late fourteenth century to the late seventeenth century. Vienna, in the heart of Europe, was besieged twice—once in 1683, which is not very long ago. People were terrified of being invaded.

What would have happened in Spain, the Balkans, and in northern Europe without the various crusades against Muslims? The Muslims would have advanced, and the history of Europe and of Christianity would have been entirely different.

### **What were some of the unintended results of crusading?**

One was a great advance in the field of nursing.

At the time, surgery was extremely limited. But the Salerno school of medicine taught that you should keep patients warm, clean, and quiet. This method was adopted by a crusader military order, the Hospitallers of St. John, and because of their influence, it spread throughout Western Europe.

The Crusades also introduced the income tax, without which no modern government could finance itself.

### **Did crusades bring any benefit to the church, to the average Christian?**

The Crusades also developed the use of indulgences. For Protestants, this is a sticky affair, because they see how the indulgence was later corrupted. But for Catholics, the fully developed indulgence was a great advance in pastoral care.

Medieval men and women, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were obsessed with their sinfulness. They felt themselves locked in a world of sin, a world from which there was only one escape: renouncing the world entirely and going into a religious community.

Penance was available, of course, but one had to pay back to God an equivalent of the sin committed. Medieval Christians instinctively knew nothing they could do—crawling on their knees to Rome, standing in a stream for six months, whatever— could compensate for sin.

The indulgence simply said, "Such is God's mercy, that he will treat your penitent act as though it were satisfactory (even though it is not)." Indulgences were an application of God's love and mercy and grace to an uneasy conscience.

With an indulgence to go on a crusade, people didn't have to enter the monastery. By traveling or soldiering, they could get on their way to heaven.

### **This yearning for salvation sounds like the spiritual unrest just prior to the Protestant Reformation.**

It is very similar. The Crusades come during the eleventh-century reformation.

In Europe today, if you drive five miles along any road, you will probably find two churches. Nearly all of those churches are built on eleventh- and twelfth-century foundations. Previously, there might have been one church every twenty miles, from which priests

would go out to serve the sacraments. Eleventh-century reformers believed religion should be taken into the villages, and this evangelizing drive resulted in a great building program. This burst of construction ranks with anything the Roman Empire did. Someone in 1032 said, "France is becoming white with churches."

Now, as one historian has pointed out, every Christian reformation is accompanied by violence—take for example, the Protestant Reformation, which led into the wars of religion. The eleventh-century reformation was no exception.

### **Are the Crusades a root of the problems in the Middle East today between Christians, Jews, and Arabs?**

They might have contributed to the problem. If you talk to Arabs now, they express bitter feelings about crusading.

Ironically, the Arabs actually won the Holy Land Crusades. Christians as a political and military force were driven out in 1291 and haven't returned since.

### **What should we think of crusaders?**

First, we need to understand that medieval crusaders are likely to be our relatives. If you are of Western European origin, you have nearly a 100-percent chance of being a direct descendant of someone who had a link with a crusade. Even if your ancestors did not go on a crusade, they would have paid taxes to finance crusades, and they would have attended crusade sermons.

Second, as a historian I try to understand what people did and why they did it. Why did medieval Christians risk their lives and sacrifice nearly all they owned to crusade? Given the historical setting and their understanding, were these people trying to express love of God and neighbor through crusading? Though I cannot condone all of their actions, I have to say they were.

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## The Crusades: Recommended Resources

The last few decades have seen a resurgence of crusades studies. Here are several of the many fine works available.

James M. Powell

### Overviews

- Sir Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1951–54) remains a striking historical narrative.
- Kenneth M. Setton, ed., *The History of the Crusades*, 6 vols. (Wisconsin, 1969–89) is a comprehensive work by dozens of specialists. Though some articles are out of date, it is still valuable.
- Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1988) stresses the relationship between the Crusades and contemporary religious movements.
- Jonathan Riley-Smith *The Crusades: A Short History* (Yale, 1987) differs from Mayer chiefly in the broad sweep of his coverage, which extends to the sixteenth-century struggles of Europeans against Ottoman expansion.
- Malcolm Billings, *The Crusades* (Sterling, 1988) is based on a BBC radio series. A high-quality popularization.
- Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade* (Princeton, 1977) sparked interest in the question of Christianity's involvement in these wars.
- *The Atlas of the Crusades* edited by Jonathan Riley-Smith, (Facts-on-File, 1990) is useful for those interested in the geographical aspects of the Crusades.

### Arabs and Jews

- Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (Schocken, 1985) is a popularized yet important work directed to an Arab audience.
- Peter M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades* (Longman, 1986). This clearly written narrative provides a useful companion to Maalouf.
- *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, edited and translated by Francesco Gabrieli; translated from the Italian by E. J. Costello (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969; California, 1984) is a major collection of Arabic sources.
- Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (California, 1987) studies the Jewish persecutions that broke out.
- *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades*, translated and edited by Shlomo Eidelberg (Wisconsin, 1977) makes these important sources readily

accessible.

### **Specific Aspects**

- Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Pennsylvania, 1986) analyzes the motives and participants in the First Crusade.
- Jean Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (North Holland, 1979) is an outstanding study of the kingdom established by the First Crusade.
- Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, ca. 1050–1310* (St. Martin's, 1967) deals with the quasi-religious military orders.
- Charles Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180–1204* (Harvard, 1968) explores the background of the Fourth Crusade from a Byzantine view.
- William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade* (Princeton, 1979) discusses the involvement of King Louis IX.

*Dr. James M. Powell is professor of medieval history at Syracuse University and author of **Anatomy of a Crusade, 1213–1221 (Pennsylvania, 1986–1990).***

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