

Heather Wade

Dr. Inbari

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A History of the First Crusade and Frederick II's 'Crusade'

When one thinks of the Crusades, it is common to think of Christian soldiers marching into other lands and warring and fighting with those who were not Christians. It is more than common to term the Crusades as Holy Wars. And that is, to a high degree, what they were. But, many times, people have little understanding of exactly what occurred during the Crusades and when, where, or how they actually started.

The Crusades were many things, but were, at the core, Holy Wars. The Crusades were a call to the Christians of Eastern Europe to go forth and deliver the Holy City of Jerusalem from those occupying it and reclaim the Holy Land (Claster 3; *Crusades* 35; Tyerman 21). This call led to the first of many expeditions, which collectively became known as the Crusades; those that participated in these wars may have been participating for various reasons, but none of them termed them as crusades (Tyerman 21). For them, they were simply expeditions to regain land that rightfully, in their eyes, belonged to them.

In the late 11th Century, the society of Eastern Europe was highly religious. This religious society had a significant role and place in the lives and motivations of the people; it was also a largely guilt-ridden society in which the people strived to accomplish that which would ascertain their entrance to Heaven (Phillips 17). Thus, when Pope Urban II, who "was a visionary, a reformer, deeply spiritual, eloquent, and, when necessary, a remarkably good diplomat," announced that anyone who, "for devotion alone, not to gain honour or money, goes to Jerusalem

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to liberate the Church of God can substitute this journey for all penance,” he gained the interest of many citizens (Claster 34; Phillips 16). This statement, considered by most as the start of the First Crusade, was given on November 27, 1095, amidst a multitude of persons at the Council of Clermont (Claster 35; Jaspert 36). With this statement, he was saying that the participants of the Crusade would receive a spiritual reward for their obedience and sacrifice to God, so long as their motives were pure and not influenced by greed. The yearning for this substitution for penance was so great that Urban received support and participants from around 60,000 people from not just one nation, but multiple (Phillips 17). In his article, Jonathan Phillips lists nationalities that included the “French, Flemings, Frisians, Gauls, Allobroges [Savoyards], Lotharingians, Allemani [South Germans and Swiss], Bavarians, Normans, English, Scots, Aquitainians, Italians, Danes, Apulians, Iberians, Bretons, Greeks and Armenians” (17). This shows that, contrary to what many people in today’s society may believe, it was not just one group of people leading the Crusades, but many nations uniting under one banner: the banner of God.

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The preparations and preliminary events for the First Crusade began after Pope Urban II’s address to the nations. This call to the people originated with a request from Alexius I Comnenus in March of 1095 while at a council in Piacenza (Claster 35). Alexius, emperor of the Byzantine Empire, was seeking more soldiers and help to reconquer the lands of Asia Minor (Claster 36; *Crusades* 35; Phillips 18). Acquiescing to help this Christian empire, Pope Urban II gave his call, and thus began the long string of Crusades. The Crusade was led not only by knights and nobles, but also by people that mortgaged lands to pay the costs of participating; the participants had to pay for their own equipment, including weapons, armor, and even horses and the supplies needed to care for their horses (Claster 48; Phillips 19). In addition to those that

joined in pursuit of combat and conquest of the Holy Land, there were also those that desired to join who were not combatants. These included “women, children, the old, the infirm and the poor” (Philips 19). Although Urban tried to prevent these noncombatants from embarking on the journey, many of them still went with permission from their parish priests; unfortunately, most of them died along the way or were enslaved, if not deserted (19). While the fate of the noncombatants may seem harsh, it was not something that could easily be avoided; as the journey continued, even soldiers would suffer casualties and struggle to survive.

In preparing for the First Crusade and helping Emperor Alexius, “those wishing to go had to take a pilgrim vow to persist in the way of God to the end, or until death. In return they were promised church protection of their lands and the remission of their sins” (*Crusades* 36). This vow ensured that the participants were committed to the cause, but also tried to instill pure motives in them while giving them a reward for their service – assuming, of course, that they made it home alive. The departure date was set for August 15, 1096 (Claster 38; *Crusades* 36; Jaspert 37). For those joining, they were supposed to meet at Constantinople, from whence they would be embarking upon their journey. So, once the departure date arrived, many different groups left home, arriving to Constantinople in waves (Jaspert 37). According to one source, “around 60,000 gathered at Nicaea near Constantinople in June 1097, including up to 7,000 knights” (*Crusades* 37). However, sources vary in their counts of participants; Jaspert contends that, having arrived between the fall of 1096 and May of 1097, there were a total of between 30,000 and 70,000 combatants, not counting an additional 30,000 noncombatants (42). Regardless of the historical differences in number, the congregation of the participants was the last step in preparing for the First Crusade.

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After they were all gathered, the second contingent, composed of five armies, departed on the campaign for Anatolia, which was initiated on the sixth of May by a siege on Nicaea (Claster 63; *Crusades* 40). This siege ended on June 19, 1097 when the Nicaeans surrendered to Alexius after he sent a fleet to the other side of the city along the lake (Claster 66; *Crusades* 41; Jaspert 42). Having conquered Nicaea, the army left on June 26th to advance toward their next goal. In their Anatolian campaign, the next target was Dorylaeum, which was viewed as “the gateway to the Anatolian plateau” (*Crusades* 41). However, before the armies could reach their destination, they had split up; the group that was in the lead was ambushed by Kilij Arslan and his Turks, who had snuck up behind them. Nearly destroyed, this group fled, but the sultan, Kilij Arslan, “was then drawn into a close-quarter fight that gave the main crusader force time to arrive and defeat his army” (Claster 68; *Crusades* 41). This appearance of the main lines allowed the Crusaders to conquer yet another city, Dorylaeum, and thus move to their next big objective in reclaiming the Holy Land: Antioch.

In moving toward Antioch, the soldiers had to pass through other smaller cities. By pursuing this route, in which the cities were open to them, and by liberating the Armenians in Caesarea-in-Cappadocia, the soldiers were able to create friendships and garner more support and supplies for their approaching attack on Antioch. Even with this support, the capture of Antioch would not be easy, nor would the journey be easy. By the time the Crusaders reached the town on October 20, there were only about 40,000 of them remaining (*Crusades* 41; Jaspert 42). However, upon arriving, they discovered that the English had already reached the coast, and thus had secured the port (*Crusades* 42). This meant that they only had to enter by land; this task, though, was not as easy as it might sound, because the walls of the city were incredibly strong and continued into the mountains where they were inaccessible (42). Without the ability to enter

the city and take it by force, the Crusaders decided to establish a blockade; this siege of Antioch would last for seven months, beginning in October 1097 and ending in June 1098 (*Crusades* 42; Jaspert 42). During this siege, the blockading army began to run low on food and supplies. As a result, they went on foraging expeditions that did not bode well for them; after a fight with Duqaq of Damascus, which was a draw, the Crusaders returned without food (*Crusades* 42). However, Duqaq's brother, Ridwan of Harim, then attempted to attack Bohemond and his army; fortunately, Bohemond was able to ambush Ridwan, thus scattering his forces and capturing Harim (42). As a result, the Crusaders were able to once again forage and obtain the needed food and supplies.

Again having food and supplies, and with the arrival of more English ships in the port, the Crusaders used these new arrivals "to build a fort outside Antioch's vital Bridge Gate" and close off all of the other gates (*Crusades* 42). Then, Bohemond was able to negotiate with a citizen on the inside of the city, thought to be an Armenian Christian or Turk, and likely a tower-commander; this negotiation culminated in the citizen opening a gate for the crusaders, thus allowing them into the city and leading to the fall Antioch (Claster 75; *Crusades* 42; Jaspert 43). The opening of the gate not only led to the fall of the city, but to a bloodbath. In fact, the massacre was so brutal that "[a]ll the streets of the city on every side were full of corpses, so that no one could endure to be there because of the stench, nor could anyone walk along the narrow paths of the city except over the corpses of the dead" (qtd. in Claster 75). Perhaps this description is what many imagine or envision when the Crusades are mentioned or taught.

Once inside, Bohemond revealed his desire and decision to become the ruler of Antioch; the Crusaders, though, were unhappy with this, as it seemed a clear violation of the vow made to Alexius. However, they finally conceded due to the impending threat of Kerbogah of Mosul, and

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only under the condition that Alexius would have the opportunity to claim Antioch if he desired it (*Crusades* 42). So, with the help of elite crusaders, the forces were able to conquer the city of Antioch on June 3, 1098 (*Crusades* 42; Jaspert 43). The capture of Antioch was not yet over, though, as Kerbogah then laid siege to the Crusaders inside of the city; as the food was low and the number inside was smaller than the number of Kerbogah's forces outside, the prospect seemed hopeless. Then, the Crusaders located the "Holy Lance," which was thought to have been used to pierce the side of Jesus Christ; this relic gave the Crusaders new hope and encouragement (Caster 76; Jaspert 43). The Crusaders were now rallied and enthused; so, after appointing Bohemond as their leader, they went outside the city gates on June 28th and destroyed the armies of Kerbogah, "who had unwisely let his army become dispersed" (Caster 77; *Crusades* 43; Jaspert 43). With this defeat and the culmination of the capture of Antioch, the Crusaders were now free to advance on toward their final and ultimate goal.

Before heading towards Jerusalem, the army of Crusaders captured one more city and encountered difficulties among their leadership. After gaining control of Antioch, Raymond led his troops south, while Bohemond remained behind in Antioch (*Crusades* 44; Jaspert 44). In heading south, Raymond attacked Marra, a Syrian city, on November 28, 1098, where Bohemond joined him. Despite a strong resistance from Marra, the city fell on the eleventh of December, and was followed by cruelty on the part of the crusaders; believing that the citizens and soldiers of Marra had swallowed money, the troops dismembered the bodies of captives (*Crusades* 44). Those that were not killed or dismembered were sold into slavery. In addition to this cruelty, the decision to stay in Marra for rest led some troops to barbarism; in an attempt to obtain food, some participants of the Crusade "dug up enemy corpses and ate them" (Caster 81; *Crusades* 44). The threat of starvation also caused many to abandon the crusades for other cities;

soon, however, Raymond helped to put the shortage of food to an end by once again leading foraging expeditions into nearby cities and enemy territory (*Crusades* 44). With food to sustain them, they should have been able to move on; however, there was still an unresolved issue.

Because it was a joint effort that allowed them to capture both Antioch and Marra, Raymond and Bohemond split control of the two cities between them; each one had control over a portion of each city. When Bohemond tried to trade his portion of Marra for Raymond's portion of Antioch, the tension between the two leaders rose higher than it had been previously (*Crusades* 44). This dispute over control of conquered cities created a breach in the unity of the Crusades and showed a weakness within the structure of the Crusades – with multiple leaders and commanders, there was no set loyalty or no one person in whom the Crusaders could put their loyalty (Caster 79). Then, in January of 1099, Raymond “offered money to those who would accept his leadership as far as Jerusalem” (Caster 81; *Crusades* 44). This proposition severely angered Bohemond, who then refused to continue onward toward Jerusalem; instead, because the two could not come to an agreement, Bohemond expelled Raymond's men from Antioch (Caster 82; *Crusades* 44). Raymond and his men went on towards Jerusalem, departing on January 13, 1099, and were joined by Robert of Normandy and Bohemond's nephew, Tancred (Caster 81; *Crusades* 44). Thus, the Crusaders began the final portion of their mission toward Jerusalem.

The road to Jerusalem was not too difficult for the troops. Many of the rulers along the way allowed them to pass peacefully through to avoid disaster and bloodshed; it was not until they reached Tripoli, having taken the coast rather than passing through Damascus, that they encountered conflict (*Crusades* 45; Jaspert 44). Here, while waiting for the return of the emissary who would reveal whether or not Egypt, with whom there had been a friendly relationship since

the alliance against the Seljuks, would concede Jerusalem to them, they foraged and raided towns that were part of Tripoli's territory (*Crusades* 45). Finally, the emissary returned, but not with the desired news; upon discovering that the Fatimids would not concede the Holy Land to them, the troops went into Fatimid territory. Though they took the Egyptians by surprise, they knew that a retaliatory attack would soon follow, and so they hurried onward to Jerusalem, arriving June 7, 1099 (Caster 84; *Crusades* 45). Soon after began the final battle of the First Crusade.

Having reached their destination, the troops wasted no time. Still desiring to capture Jerusalem before the reinforcements from Egypt arrived, the Crusaders attacked the Holy City on the thirteenth of June (Caster 85; *Crusades* 46; Jaspert 44). Unfortunately, by the time of this attack, the army only contained approximately 20,000 men, much less than the amount with which they had started (Jaspert 44). In fact, of these 20,000, it is estimated that only between 1,200 and 1,500 were mounted knights, with around 12,000 foot soldiers; this number of foot soldiers also likely contained noncombatants as well (Caster 85). Further, they lacked strategy and entrance acquisition, due to the destruction of lumber and other items by the citizens before the troops arrived. The hastiness of the decision and lack of supplies caused defeat; however, they did not give up; rather, after five days with no success, they retreated and began to plan a more thought-out strategy (Caster 85; *Crusades* 46).

In the midst of their planning, while trying to land at the Jaffa port, a Crusader fleet was attacked by Egyptian ships and forced to beach itself (*Crusades* 46). However, these ships were still able to get supplies to the forces; these supplies were used to build siege towers, or siege engines (Caster 85; Jaspert 44). The troops, in figuring out plans, decided upon a two-pronged assault in which the French would build a siege tower in the northwest of the city, as well as a ram with which to break down the walls (Caster 86; *Crusades* 46). Raymond, meanwhile, "hired

a Genoese ship's captain, William Ricau, to build a tower outside Zion Gate and fill in the ditch" (*Crusades* 46). In addition, both entourages were to build catapults. Yet, while they were making their own preparations, the defenders of Jerusalem were also preparing by strengthening the walls and establishing a total of fourteen catapults (46). Due to these preparations, the French, between the ninth and tenth of July, moved their tower and other supplies east to a section of the wall that was weaker (Caster 86; *Crusades* 46). Once moved and resettled, the troops attacked on the night of the thirteenth of July, and on the fifteenth, the tower constructed by Raymond's group had been destroyed by the catapults on the inside of the city (Caster 86; *Crusades* 47; Jaspert 44). Yet, due to the help of Godfrey of Bouillion, the troops were able to gain access to the city on the north; he "brought the siege tower up to the wall and the knights inside it were able to build a bridge onto the wall itself" (*Crusades* 47).

Once access was gained, both Godfrey's and Tancred's men quickly entered the city and obtained control of the Temple Mount and the city gates, which were opened. The governor then attempted to escape into the Tower of David, "but agreed to surrender the citadel to Raymond in return for safe passage out of the city" (47). Raymond accepted this offer of surrender, and just as the governor fled, so too did many of the citizens; those that did not, however were massacred by the troops (Caster 87; *Crusades* 47; Jaspert 44). This massacre was, just like previous one, horrible, being "described even by approving witnesses in apocalyptic terms (Tyerman 21). The Crusaders cut off heads of citizens, as well as shooting them with arrows, and one described the city as being "piled high with the dead and mutilated bodies;" this massacre was viewed as "a just end...for God's enemies, who had defiled Christian holy places with their pagan rituals" (Caster 87). After cleaning themselves, ecstatic over their triumph and the completion of their long journey and campaign, the troops celebrated inside the church of the Holy Sepulcher

(Caster 87; *Crusades* 47). However, they knew that a fleet of Egyptians would be coming. So, they embarked on a final mission, surprised the unsuspecting Egyptians, and defeated their army on the twelfth of August, 1099. (*Crusades* 47; Jaspert 45). After this final defeat, Godfrey of Bouillon was proclaimed *advocatus sancti Sepulchri*, or Guardian of the Sepulcher, and many of the Crusaders returned home (Caster 89; Jaspert 45). Thus, the campaigns of the First Crusade ended with victory and happiness, as well as the sense of accomplishing God's will.

Over the next few centuries, The First Crusade was followed by more Crusades, some of which were aimed at reconquering the Holy Lands and some of which were aimed at Christianizing other lands. Regardless of the purpose, most of these Crusades were bloody and violent. In fact, that is the major point anyone hears about the Crusades. Further, Nikolas Jaspert explains that, though they may have "presented themselves as participants in a sanctified war for the sake of God and the holy places," much of the Crusaders' "behavior was often anything but holy. Like all wars, the crusades were brutal, horrible events that brought enormous suffering to the people involved on both sides" (33). However, history also reveals that not all of the Crusades were bloody massacres of innocent, non-Christian, people. One such Crusade was that of Frederick II, through which he managed to recapture Jerusalem without any bloodshed.

In understanding how Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, reclaimed the Holy Land without bloodshed, it is important to know the background and his relationships with other rulers. As Hiroshi Takayama states, "Frederick II's crusade cannot be fully understood without knowledge of his long-term relationship with Muslim rulers, although the political circumstances in the Christian world, strongly influenced by the religious passion of the people and by papal ideology, should not be dismissed" (169). Takayama's statement explains that, while the political and religious circumstances of the time period are important, it is even more important, in

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understanding this particular Crusade, to understand who Frederick was and how he interacted with the Muslim rulers around him.

Frederick was “crowned king of Sicily at the age of three in 1198, king of Germany in 1212 (and again in 1215), and Holy Roman Emperor in 1220” (Takayama 170). In addition to being crowned, he also vowed to take the cross, meaning that he agreed to participate in the Crusades, and took the Crusader’s Oath in 1220 (Caster 229; Takayama 170). Yet, he did not leave for a Crusade; the one time he left for a Crusade in 1227, he became gravely ill due to a malaria outbreak and had to return home, resulting in excommunication by Pope Gregory IX (Caster 230; Jaspert 55; Takayama 174). Thus, Frederick never actually participated in a violent Crusade. Not only did Frederick never participate in a violent Crusade, he also maintained friendly relationships with other Muslim leaders (Takayama 170). The main relationship he maintained was with Egyptian sultan al-Kāmil; this relationship would be pivotal in the negotiations that would culminate in the possession of Jerusalem.

While there are many different scholars and different opinions of when their correspondence began, Takayama, based on varying sources, believes the first correspondence between these two leaders to have been as early as 1217 (170); this date is supported by “the fact that Frederick II had Muslim officials and soldiers as well as scholars at his court, and lived a life surrounded by Muslims,” which implies that he had some communication with Muslims, and it is likely that the Muslims he was in communication with were those that were in charge (171). The relationship between Frederick and al-Kālim continued with the two rulers sending envoys to each other multiple times throughout the years. Then, around 1227, al-Kālim sent another envoy to Frederick; this envoy was requesting the assistance of Frederick’s military, as the sultan was involved in conflict with his brothers, al-Mu`azzam and al-Ashraf, whom he believed wanted

vengeance and had allied with Jalāl-al-Dīn, who was the sultan of the Khwarizmians (172). In return for Frederick's military aid, al-Kālim offered the land of Jerusalem to Frederick (173). In attempting to help out, Frederick II also sent an envoy to al-Mu`azzam in Damascus, after meeting with al-Kālim, to inform him that the lands were demanded. Despite this, al-Mu`azzam refused to cede the lands (174). However, in November of the same year, al-Mu`azzam died, leaving his son, al-Nāsir in command. Because al-Nāsir was submitted to his uncle, al-Kāmil, the importance of Frederick was decreased as the hostilities between family members decreased. However, in the wake of these circumstances, Frederick departed for the Holy Land on the twenty-eighth of June in 1228 (Caster 230; Takayama 174). Once he arrived, he began to meet with the sultan, and they began the negotiations for Jerusalem.

Even though the threat of conflict was no longer a factor for al-Kālim, he was still willing to negotiate with Frederick. In fact, it appears from history that the two "rulers were of a mind to make a peaceful arrangement, though neither was willing to lose face with his followers, so the negotiations were prolonged and delicate" (Caster 230). The negotiations themselves may have taken a while to start due to the once impending conflict, but once the negotiation talks began, it did not take the two leaders long to make an agreement. After months of negotiating, an agreement was reached on February 11, 1229 (Takayama 175). This agreement, termed the Treaty of Jaffa, was signed on February 18, 1229, and stated that the lands of Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Bethlehem were given to Frederick II. In return, however, the Muslims were able to retain areas that were sacred to them, such as the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsā Mosque (Caster 231; Jaspert 56; Takayama 175). In addition, the treaty allowed for the free travel of Muslims as they wished, while also retaining the privilege and right to worship in the land. Plus, not only was this a land treaty, but it was also a treaty of truce for "ten years, five months and

forty days,” in which Frederick II vowed that he would not attack al-Kāmil, nor would he support any other nations that were to attack him (Caster 231; Jaspert 56; Takayama 175). Further, Frederick had to promise to protect the lands of al-Kāmil. Thus, as of February 24, 1229, the Crusade was over and Jerusalem was back in the hands of the Christian nations (Takayama 175). As a result, the Crusade of Frederick II ended peacefully and successfully; not only was no blood shed, but Jerusalem was acquired through negotiations and diplomacy.

While it is amazing and outstanding that Frederick II was able to obtain Jerusalem without shedding blood, the control of Jerusalem did not last. Just as the First Crusade was followed by many more, so, too, was this peaceful Crusade. In fact, roughly three months after the expiration of the treaty in 1239, the Holy Land was again taken back and occupied by Muslims (Takayama 176). This would eventually lead to more Crusades to again take back Jerusalem. This process, along with the attempt to spread Christianity by the sword to other nations, would continue for a few more centuries, finally ending in 1453 when Constantinople of the Byzantine Empire, that which the First Crusade had been called to help, fell to the Turks (Caster 324; Jaspert 61). However, this issue is still not resolved to this day. The conflict over the Holy Land, which started massively with the Crusades, is still an on-going event, as the peoples of two different religions claim and fight for the Holy Land which they believe is theirs. And, while all people may want the violence and bloodshed to end, it will continue until the end of time, until everyone is dead, or, the best alternative, until today’s leaders and religious adherents can peacefully negotiate and work together. Until one of these three events happen, the Crusades will continue; perhaps not in name, but in all reality and theory.

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