

The German Crusade

Sadly, the call for the "First Crusade" also had other consequences. It initiated the "Rhineland Massacres", which also became known as the "German Crusade".

There had not been so broad a movement against Jews by Catholics since the seventh century's mass expulsions and forced conversions. While there had been a number of regional persecutions of Jews by Catholics, such as the one in Metz in 888, a plot against Jews in Limoges in 992, a wave of anti-Jewish persecution by Christian millenarian movements (which believed that Jesus was immediately to descend from Heaven) in the year 1000, and the threat of expulsion from Trier in 1066; these are all viewed "in the traditional terms of governmental outlawry rather than unbridled popular attacks."

Also many movements against Jews (such as forced conversions by King Robert the Pious of France, Richard II, Duke of Normandy, and Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor, around 1007–1012) had been suppressed by various Popes and Bishops. The passions that were aroused within the Catholic community by Pope Urban II's call for the "First Crusade" in early 1096 had moved the persecution of Jews into a new chapter in history where previous constraints no longer held.

In the spring of 1096, a number of small bands of knights and peasants, inspired by the preaching of the Crusade, set off from various parts of France and from Worms and Cologne in Germany. The crusade of the priest Folkmar, beginning in Saxony, persecuted Jews in Magdeburg and later, on May 30 1096, in Prague in Bohemia. The Catholic Bishop Cosmas attempted to prevent forced conversions, and the entire Catholic hierarchy in Bohemia preached against such acts. Duke Bretislaus II was out of the country and the Catholic Church's officials' protests were unable to stop the mob of crusaders.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church as a whole condemned the persecution of the Jews in the regions affected (though their protests had little effect). Especially vocal were the parish priests (only one monk, named Gottschalk, is recorded as joining and encouraging the mob).

Chronicler Hugo of Flavigny recorded how these religious appeals were ignored, writing: "It certainly seems amazing that on a single day in many different places, moved in unison by a violent inspiration, such massacres should have taken place, despite their widespread disapproval and their condemnation as contrary to religion. But we know that they could not

have been avoided since they occurred in the face of excommunication imposed by numerous clergymen, and of the threat of punishment on the part of many princes."

In general, the crusader mobs did not fear any retribution, as the local courts did not have the jurisdiction to pursue them past their locality nor did they have the ability to identify and prosecute individuals out of the mob. The pleas of the clergy were ignored on similar grounds (no cases against individuals were brought forward for excommunication) and the mob believed that anyone preaching mercy to the Jews was doing so only because they had succumbed to Jewish bribery.

Gottschalk the monk went on to lead a crusade from the Rhineland and Lorraine into Hungary, occasionally attacking Jewish communities along the way. In late June 1096, the crusader mob of Gottschalk was welcomed by King Coloman of Hungary, but they soon began plundering the countryside and causing drunken disorder. The King then demanded they disarm. Once their weapons had been secured, the enraged Hungarians fell upon them and "the whole plain was covered with corpses and blood."

The priest Folkmar and his Saxons also met a similar fate from the Hungarians when they began pillaging villages there, because "sedition was incited".

The first real outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence occurred in France and Germany in June and July 1096 AD. According to a contemporary chronicle of events written by an anonymous author in Mainz, Germany:

"There first arose the officers, nobles, and common people who were in the land of France who took counsel together and plotted...to make clear the way to go toward Jerusalem."

Richard of Poitiers wrote that Jewish persecution was widespread in France at the beginning of the expeditions to the east. The anonymous chronicler of Mainz admired the Jews:

"At the time the [Jewish] communities in France heard [about these things], trembling...seized them. They wrote letters and sent messengers to all the communities around about the River Rhine, [to the effect] that they should fast...and seek mercy from Him who dwells on high, that He might save them from their hands. When the letter reached the holy ones in the land [of the Rhine], namely the men of renown...in Mainz, they responded [to their brethren in] France as follows: 'The communities have decreed a fast. We have done that which was ours [to do].

May the Lord save us and may He save you from all sorrow and oppression [which might come] upon you. We are in great fear'."

Following years of Catholic suspicion and distrust, Jews were perceived as just as much an enemy as Muslims. They were held responsible for the crucifixion of Christ and they were more-immediately visible than the distant Muslims. Many people wondered why they should travel thousands of miles to fight non-believers when there were already non-believers closer to home

It is also likely that the Crusaders were motivated by their need for money. The Rhineland communities were relatively wealthy, both due to their isolation, and because they were not restricted, as Catholics were, against money-lending. Many crusaders had to go into debt in order to purchase weaponry and equipment for the expedition. As Western Catholicism strictly forbade usury, unlike Eastern Orthodoxy, which merely regulated it, many crusaders found themselves indebted to Jewish moneylenders. Having armed themselves, by assuming the debt, the crusaders rationalized the killing of Jews as an extension of their Catholic mission.

A relevant perspective on the extent of the era's "anti-semitism" was recorded 40 years afterward by the Jewish historian, Solomon bar Simson. He stated that Godfrey of Bouillon swore: to go on this journey only after avenging the blood of the crucified one by shedding Jewish blood and completely eradicating any trace of those bearing the name 'Jew', thus assuaging his own burning wrath.

Emperor Henry IV (after being notified of the pledge by Kalonymus Ben Meshullam, the Jewish leader in Mainz) issued an order prohibiting such an action. Godfrey claimed that he never really intended to kill Jews, but the community in Mainz and Cologne sent him a collected bribe of 500 silver marks.

Sigebert of Gembloux wrote that before "a war in behalf of the Lord" could be fought, it was essential that the Jews convert; those who resisted were "deprived of their goods, massacred, and expelled from the cities."

When thousands of French members of the "People's Crusade" arrived at the River Rhine, they found that they had run out of provisions. To restock their supplies, they began to plunder

Jewish communities for food and property, while attempting to force the Jews to convert to Catholicism.

Jewish communities in the Rhineland, north of the main departure areas of the "First Crusade" (Neuss, Wevelinghoven, Altenahr, Xanten and Moers) were attacked, but the leadership and membership of these crusader groups was not chronicled. Consequently, some Jews dispersed eastward to escape the persecution.

Not all Crusaders, who had run out of supplies, resorted to murder, some, like Peter the Hermit, used extortion instead. While no sources claim he preached against the Jews, he carried a letter with him, from the Jews of France, to the community at Trier on the River Moselle. The letter urged the community to supply provisions to Peter and his men. The Jewish historian, Solomon bar Simson, recorded that they were so terrified by Peter's appearance at the gates that they readily agreed to supply his needs

Whatever Peter's own position on the Jews was, men claiming to follow after him felt free to massacre Jews on their own initiative, to pillage their possessions. Sometimes Jews survived by being subjected to involuntary baptism, such as in Regensburg, where a crusading mob rounded up the Jewish community, forced them into the Danube, and performed a mass baptism. After the crusaders had left the region, these Jews returned to practicing Judaism.

Previous such movements against Jews had been quashed by either the Papacy or its Bishops, but the passions aroused in the Catholic populace, by Pope Urban's call for a Crusade, moved the persecution of Jews into a new chapter in history, where previous constraints no longer held and these attacks are often presented as the first instance of "anti-semitism".

The largest of these crusades, and the most involved in attacking Jews, was that led by Count Emicho. Setting off in the early summer of 1096, an army of around 10,000 men, women and children proceeded through the Rhine valley, towards the Mainz River and then to the Danube. Emicho was joined by William the Carpenter and Drogo of Nesle, among others from the Rhineland, eastern France, Lorraine, Flanders and even England.

Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, absent in southern Italy, ordered the Jews to be protected when he learned of Emicho's intent. After some Jews were killed at Metz in May, John, Bishop of Speyer gave shelter to the Jewish inhabitants. Still, 12 Jews of Speyer were slain by crusaders on May 3rd. The Bishop of Worms also attempted to shelter Jews, but the crusaders

broke into his episcopal palace and killed the Jews inside on May 18th. At least 800 Jews were massacred in Worms when they refused Catholic baptism.

News of Emicho's crusade spread quickly, and he was prevented from entering Mainz on May 25th by Bishop Ruthard. Emicho also took an offering of gold raised by the Jews of Mainz in hope to gain his favour and their safety. Bishop Ruthard tried to protect the Jews by hiding them in his lightly fortified palace. Nevertheless, Emicho did not prevent his followers from entering the city on May 27th and a massacre followed. Many among the Christian business class (the burghers) in Mainz, had working ties with Jews and gave them shelter from the mobs (as the burghers in Prague had done).

The Mainz burghers joined with the militia of the Bishop and the Burgrave (the town's military governor) in fighting off the first waves of crusaders. This stand had to be abandoned when crusaders continued to arrive in ever greater numbers, and the militia of the Bishop together with the Bishop himself fled and left the Jews to be slaughtered by the crusaders.

Despite the example of the burghers, many ordinary citizens in Mainz and other towns were caught up in the frenzy and joined in the persecution and pillaging. Mainz was the site of the greatest violence, with at least 1,100 Jews (and possibly more) being killed by troops.

Given the choice between flight, death, and conversion, some Jews opted for a desperate fourth alternative: active martyrdom. That is, killing their family and themselves. One man, named Isaac, was forcefully converted, but wracked with guilt, later killed his family and burned himself alive in his house. Another woman, Rachel, murdered her four children with her own hands so that they would not be kidnapped and "raised in the way of error" as Christians.

On May 29th, Emicho arrived at Cologne, where most Jews had already left, or were hiding in Christian houses. In Cologne, other smaller bands of crusaders met Emicho, and they left with quite a lot of money taken from the Jews there. Emicho continued towards Hungary, where Coloman of Hungary refused to allow them through. Count Emicho and his warriors besieged Moson, on the River Leitha. This led Coloman to prepare to flee into Russia, but the morale of the crusader mob began to fail, which inspired the Hungarians, and most of the mob was slaughtered or drowned in the river. Count Emicho and a few of the leaders escaped into Italy or back to their own homes. William the Carpenter and other survivors eventually joined Hugh of Vermandois and the main body of crusader knights of the "First Crusade", which also included Peter the Hermit.

As a consequence of the foregoing, the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, overruled Church law and permitted forcibly converted Jews to return to Judaism.

The massacre of the Rhineland Jews by the "People's Crusade" and other associated persecutions were condemned by the leaders and officials of the Catholic Church. The Church and its members had previously carried out policies to protect the presence of Jews in Christian culture. For example, the twenty-five letters regarding the Jews by Pope Gregory I, from the late sixth century, became the primary texts for the canons, or Church laws, which were implanted to not only regulate Jewish life in Europe but also to protect it. These policies did have limits to them; the Jews were granted protection and the right to their faith if they did not threaten Christianity and remained entirely submissive to Christian rule.

These regulations were enacted in a letter by Pope Alexander II in 1063. Their goal was to define the place of the Jews in Christian society. The "*Dispar nimirum*" [Diss-par Nim-I-rum] of 1060, was the late eleventh-century papal policy concerning the Jews. It rejected acts of violence and punishments of the Jews, and it enforced the idea of protecting the Jews because they were not the enemy of the Christians. This papal policy aimed at creating a balance of privilege and restrictions on Jews so that the Christians did not see their presence as a threat. Sixty years after the "*Dispar nimirum*" [Diss-par Nim-I-rum], inspired by the atrocities of the "First Crusade", the "*Sicut Judaeis*" [Sih-cut Jew-day-iss] was issued. It was a more detailed and organized text of the position of the papacy concerning the treatment of Jews. This text was enacted by Pope Calixtus II in 1120. It defined the limits of the Jews' eternal servitude and continued the reinforcement of the Jews' right to their faith.

The bishops of Mainz, Speyer, and Worms had attempted to protect the Jews of those towns within the walls of their palaces. In 1084, Rüdiger Huzmann (1073–1090), Bishop of Speyer, established an area for the Jews to live, to protect them from potential violence. Rüdiger's successor, Bishop John, continued the protection of Jews during the "First Crusade". During the attack on Speyer, John saved many of the Jews, providing them protection in his castle.

Bishop John had the hands of many attackers cut off. Archbishop Ruthard of Mainz tried to save the Jews by gathering them in his courtyard; this was unsuccessful as Emicho and his troops stormed the palace. Ruthard managed to save a small number of Jews by putting them on boats in the Rhine. The Archbishop of Cologne, Hermann II, sent many of the Jews to

outlying villages, so that they would be safe from Crusaders. The Archbishop of Trier was less effective; he favoured protecting the Jews from violence, but during the attack on Trier, he hid and did not take any action to help them.

After the "First Crusade", there was a continued effort made by the Popes to protect the Jews, so that violence that occurred in the Rhineland Valley would not reoccur. In 1272, Pope Gregory X stated that the Jews "are not capable of harming Christians, nor do they know how to do so." Popes continually assured the Christian people that the Jews were not the enemy, but the Saracens were because they opposed Christianity, and Jews would only become the enemy if they challenged the religion. Following Gregory X's lead, Pope Benedict XIII clearly stated to the Christian people how to treat the Jews. "Jews are never to be burdened beyond the limits of the present constitution. [They are not] to be molested, to be offered in their persons, or to have their goods seized... [Rather, they are to be treated] humanely and with clemency..." Benedict enforced the privileges given to the Jews by warning the Christians that their actions toward the Jewish people must not violate those given to them by the Church.

Fifty years later, when St. Bernard of Clairvaux was urging recruitment for the "Second Crusade", he specifically criticized the attacks on Jews that had occurred in the "First Crusade". Though Clairvaux considered the Jews to be "personae non gratae", he condemned, in his letters, the crusaders' attacks on the Jews and ordered protection for Jewish communities. There is debate on Bernard's exact motivations: he may have been disappointed that the "People's Crusade" devoted so much time and resources to attacking the Jews of Western Europe while contributing almost nothing to the attempt to retake the Holy Land itself, the result being that Bernard was urging the knights to maintain focus on the goal of protecting Catholic interests in the Holy Land.

It is equally possible that Bernard held the belief that forcibly converting the Jews was immoral or perceived that greed motivated the original Rhineland massacre: both sentiments are echoed in the canon of Albert of Aachen in his chronicle of the First Crusade. Albert of Aachen's view was that the People's Crusaders were uncontrollable semi-Catholicized country-folk who massacred hundreds of Jewish women and children and that they themselves were, in turn, slaughtered by Turkish forces in Asia Minor. Which some might see as 'poetic justice'.