

THE FIRST CRUSADE

As we know, Palestine is situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan, surrounded by Egypt, Syria and Arabia. The region has a long and tumultuous history as a crossroads for religion, culture, commerce, and politics and has been controlled by numerous peoples over the centuries.

It has had many names, but that which interests us today is that of the "Holy Land". We know Christ was born and ministered there and his ministry was continued by others, but what led to the formation of the Crusades and the desire to place the Holy Land in Christian hands? To find out, we must look back in history to understand the developments that occurred leading up to the arduous journeys and hardships endured to achieve this purpose.

Palestine was a part of the Roman Empire and, in 285 AD, the Emperor Diocletian partitioned the Roman Empire into the Greek eastern half and the Latin western half, to improve the administration of his Empire, which was, later, divided still further into a Tetrarchy. Following the victory of the Emperor Constantine, in the Civil wars of the Tetrarchy, the **Christianization** of the **Roman Empire** began.

In 326 AD, Constantine's mother, Saint Helena, visited Jerusalem and began the construction of churches and shrines. It was also at this time that Constantine the Great transferred the capital of the Empire from Rome to Byzantium, in Asia Minor, or Anatolia as it was then termed. At the end of the 4th century, Christianity became the Empire's official state religion.

Several events occurred, between the 4th and 5th centuries, that contributed to a transitional period, during which the Roman Empire's Greek East and Latin West divided. The Eastern Roman Empire, or **Byzantine Empire** as it later became known, survived the fragmentation and fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century and continued to exist for another thousand years, until it fell to the Ottoman Turks, in 1453 AD.

In 570 AD, in Mecca, the prophet Muhammad was born and, after many years of trial and upheaval, succeeded, during the last years of his life, in uniting the tribes of Arabia into a single Arab Muslim body. Following Muhammad's death, in 632 AD, a dispute occurred over his successor, between his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, and Muhammad's son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Abu Bakr was confirmed as the first Caliph of the new Islamic body, with Ali, later, becoming the fourth Caliph. Those following Abu Bakr would become termed "Sunni" Muslims and those, who

followed Ali, as "Shi'a" Muslims. Following his election as Caliph, Abu Bakr, immediately, moved to strike against the **Byzantine Empire**.

In 638 AD, Jerusalem was conquered, by the Arab armies and, with the Arab conquest, Jews were allowed back into the city. The Caliph signed a treaty with the Christian Patriarch, assuring him that Jerusalem's Christian holy places and population would be protected under Muslim rule, which appears to have been complied with.

From 878 AD, Palestine was ruled from Egypt, by semi-autonomous Arabs rulers, for almost a century. During which period, reverence for Jerusalem increased, with many of the Egyptian rulers choosing to be buried there.

In 970 AD, the **Fatimid Caliphate**, who were Shi'a Muslims originating from Syria, invaded the region, which marked the beginning of a period of unceasing warfare between numerous enemies, that destroyed Palestine and, in particular, devastated its Jewish population. The Fatimids renamed Jerusalem as Kūḍus.

The battle of Manzikert, on 26th August 1071 AD, between the **Byzantine Empire** and the **Seljuq [Selkuk] Empire**, who were Sunni Muslims of Turko-Persian origin, played an important role in undermining Byzantine authority in Anatolia and Armenia, and allowed for the gradual Turkification of Anatolia. The fallout from Manzikert was disastrous for the Byzantines, resulting in civil conflicts and an economic crisis that severely weakened the **Byzantine Empire's** ability to adequately defend its borders.

In 1073 AD, Jerusalem was captured by the Sunni Muslim **Seljuk [Selkuk] Empire** from the Shi'a Muslim **Fatimid Caliphate**.

The Byzantine Empire, which was composed of Christians who had long-followed a separate Orthodox rite, and the Roman Catholic Church had been in schism since 1054 AD. However, in 1074 AD, Pope Gregory VII had called for the *milites Christi* ("soldiers of Christ") to go to Byzantium's aid. This call was largely ignored and even opposed. The reason being that, while the defeat was shocking, it had limited significance. A later request also had a similar response.

By the time Alexios I became Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, in 1081 AD, the **Seljuq [Selkuk]**

Empire had expanded their rule over almost the entire Anatolian plateau, an area of 30,000 square miles, taking such strategically and religiously important cities as Antioch and Nicaea, where they founded their capital, being just 56 miles from Constantinople.

Alexios secured much of the coastal regions, by sending peasant soldiers to raid the Seljuq [Selkuk] camps, but these victories were unable to stop the Turks altogether. Moreover, there were harrowing accounts of the Turkish invasion and conquest of Anatolia, recorded by Eastern Christian chroniclers. This change in ruler-ship resulted in great disruption to the pilgrimages being made by Christians.

In 1090 AD, fearing the consequences of the ever-encroaching **Seljuk** [Selkuk] **Empire**, Alexios took reconciliatory measures towards the Papacy, with the intention of seeking western support against the Seljuqs [Selkuks].

When the Seljuk [Selkuk] Emperor died, in 1092 AD, the **Seljuk Empire** split, as his family quarrelled over the apportioning of the Empire among themselves and contested with each other for it, thus further dividing Syria amongst emirs who were antagonistic towards each other.

This resulted in the **Seljuq** [Selkuk] **Empire** achieving piecemeal conquests, being led by semi-independent warlords, rather than by the sultan. By the mid-1090s, the **Byzantine Empire** was largely confined to Balkan Europe and the north-western fringe of Anatolia. It faced Norman enemies in the west, as well as the Turks in the east.

In 1095 AD, as relations, between the Christian East and West, were, at least temporarily, friendly, Alexios sent ambassadors to Pope Urban II, seeking help, from the West, in the form of mercenary forces, or western volunteers, being sent to assist him to repel the **Seljuq** [Selkuk] **Empire** from Anatolia and restore it into Byzantine control.

Council of Piacenza

Pope Urban held the **Council of Piacenza** [Pee-ah-cenza], a town in northern Italy, in March 1095 AD, and the most important attendees were the ambassadors sent by Alexios. Upon hearing the Byzantine ambassadors' plea, Pope Urban asked those present to lend aid to the Byzantine Emperor.

Council of Clermont

In July 1095 AD, Pope Urban turned to his homeland of France to recruit men for the expedition. His travels culminated in the **Council of Clermont** in November, where, according to the various speeches attributed to him, he gave an impassioned sermon to a large audience, including French nobles and clergy.

Pope Urban talked about the violence of European society and the necessity of maintaining the Peace of God; about helping the Greeks (Byzantines), who had asked for assistance; about the crimes being committed against Christians in the east; and about a new kind of war, an armed pilgrimage, and of rewards in heaven, where remission of sins was offered to any who might die in the undertaking. It is allegedly, during this speech, that the enthusiastic crowd responded with cries of *Deus vult!* ("God wills it!").

Pope Urban's speech had been well-planned. He had discussed the Crusade with Adhemar, the papal legate and Bishop of the Diocese of Le Puy [Le Pwee], near Clermont, and Raymond de Saint-Gilles, Count of Toulouse, Duke of Narbonne, and Margrave of Provence. Instantly, the expedition had the support of two of southern France's most important leaders. Adhemar himself was present at the Council and was the first to "take the cross". During the rest of 1095 and into 1096 AD, Pope Urban spread the message throughout France, and urged his bishops and legates to preach in their own dioceses in France, Germany, and Italy. However, it is clear that the response to the speech was much greater than the Pope expected.

On his travels around France, Pope Urban tried to forbid certain people, including women, monks, and the sick, from joining the Crusade, but found this nearly impossible. In the end, most, who took up the call, were not knights, but peasants, who were not wealthy and had little in the way of fighting skills, in an outpouring of a new emotional and personal piety that was not easily harnessed by the church and aristocracy. Typically, preaching would conclude with every volunteer taking a vow to complete a pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They were also given a cross, usually sewn onto their clothes.

Despite this popular enthusiasm, Pope Urban ensured that there would be an army of knights, drawn from the French aristocracy. Aside from Adhemar and Raymond, other leaders, he recruited throughout 1096 AD, included Godfrey de Bouillon, who was Duke of Lorraine, and his brothers: Eustace III, Count of Boulogne, and Baldwin of Boulogne; Hugh I, Count of Vermandois, and brother of Philip I of France; Robert Curthose of Normandy, brother of William II of England; and his relatives Stephen II, Count of Blois and Robert II, Count of Flanders.

The Crusaders represented northern and southern France, Flanders and Germany, and were divided into three separate armies that were not always cooperative, though they were held together by their common ultimate goal. An additional goal soon became the principal objective - the Christian reconquest of the sacred city of Jerusalem, the Holy Land and the freeing of the Eastern Christians from Muslim rule.

However, things do not always work out as one intends. Before such a Crusade could be organized, a number of unexpected bands of peasants and low-ranking knights, numbering 40,000, formed their own Crusades, which are popularly referred to as the "**People's Crusade**" and the "**German Crusade**", but that, as they say, is another story.

The First Crusade

The First Crusade began when the three Crusader armies left Europe in August 1096 AD, taking different routes to Constantinople.

Godfrey's party, from Flanders, Bologne and Bouillon, met at Mayence and travelled down the River Rhine, through Strasbourg, along the River Danube to Vienna, and then down through Belgrade, Nis and Sofia to Constantinople. However, Godfrey's brother, Eustace III, Count of Boulogne, soon returned home to Europe to administer his domains.

Hugh's party left Paris, travelled down through Clermont, across the Alps to Genoa, down past Rome, across Italy to the Bari Region, then across the Adriatic Sea to Durres, and on to Constantinople.

Raymond's party, from Bordeaux, Toulouse and Saint-Gilles, met at Le Puy and travelled through the Alps to Milan, across the top of Italy to Aquilee, then down the Adriatic coast to Durres, and across to Constantinople.

Robert's party, from Blois, Rouen and Gand, met at Pontarlier, and travelled across the Alps, down to Pisa and Rome, across Italy to the Bari Region, then across the Adriatic Sea to Durres, and on to Constantinople.

In 1097 AD, Bohemond of Taranto, a Norman, witnessed bands of crusaders passing by, on their way to Constantinople, and the zeal of the Crusader came upon him. A chronicler, of that

time, bluntly states that Bohemond did so, with the intention of plundering and conquering the Greek lands of the Byzantine Empire, which he had been raiding for a number of years.

Whatever the reason, Bohemond gathered together one of the finest armies in the crusading host, from the Normans of Naples, Palermo and Taranto, which also included his nephew, Tancred, and headed, via Bari, across the Adriatic Sea, landing south of Durres, and then on to Constantinople.

All of them arrived in Constantinople, between November 1096 and April 1097 AD, and gathered outside the city walls. They had little food, expecting provisions and help from the Byzantine Emperor. Alexios, understandably, was suspicious, after his experiences with the "People's Crusade", and, also, because the knights included his old Norman enemy, Bohemond, who had invaded Byzantine territory, on numerous occasions.

Bohemond was careful to observe a "correct" attitude towards Alexius, when he arrived at Constantinople, in April 1097 AD, doing homage to the emperor. From Constantinople to Antioch, Bohemond was the real leader of the First Crusade and it says much, for his leadership, that the First Crusade succeeded in crossing Asia Minor, which the Crusade of 1101, the Second Crusade in 1147, and the Third Crusade in 1189 failed to accomplish.

The size of the entire Crusader army is difficult to estimate, as various numbers were given by eyewitnesses, but modern-day scholars estimate the armies to have consisted of between 30,000 and 35,000 Crusaders, including 5,000 cavalry,

The Crusaders may have expected Alexios to become their leader, but he had no interest in joining them, and was mainly concerned with transporting them into Asia Minor as quickly as possible. In return for food and supplies, Alexios requested the leaders to swear fealty to him and promise to return to the Byzantine Empire any land recovered from the Turks. Godfrey was the first to take the oath, and almost all the other leaders followed him, except Raymond, alone, who avoided swearing the oath, instead pledging he would cause no harm to the Empire.

Alexios advised the leaders on how best to deal with the Seljuq [Selkuk] armies they would encounter, before ensuring that the various armies were shuttled across the Bosphorus. They crossed over into Asia Minor during the first half of 1097 AD, where they were joined by Peter the Hermit and the remnants of his "**People's Crusade**". In addition, Alexios also sent two of his own generals to assist the Crusaders. The first objective of their campaign was Nicaea,

previously a city under Byzantine rule, which had become the capital of the Seljuq [Selkuk] Sultanate of Rum.

Subsequently, the city was subjected to a lengthy siege, but the Crusaders had little success as they found they could not blockade the lake, which the city was situated on, and from which it could be provisioned. To break the city, Alexios sent the Crusaders ships, which were rolled over land on logs, and at the sight of them the Turkish garrison finally surrendered, on 18th June 1097. Honouring their oath, the Crusaders handed custody of Nicaea over to the Byzantines and resumed their journey to Jerusalem, still harbouring the hope that Alexios would send a full Byzantine army after them.

At the end of June, the Crusaders marched on through Anatolia, unopposed, but the journey was unpleasant, as the Turks had burned and destroyed everything in the army's path. It was the middle of summer, and the Crusaders had very little food and water; many men and horses died. Fellow Christians sometimes gave them gifts of food and money, but, more often than not, the Crusaders simply looted and pillaged whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Individual leaders continued to dispute the overall leadership, although none of them were powerful enough to take command on their own, and Bishop Adhemar was always recognized as the spiritual leader.

They travelled on to Konya, then turned north, through the Taurus Mountains, passing through the Cilician Gates, a pass connecting the plains of Cilicia with the Anatolian Plateau, and on to Maras, where Godfrey's brother, Baldwin, departed with his army towards the Armenian lands around the Euphrates, having resolved to seize a fiefdom for himself in the Holy Land.

The Crusader army, meanwhile, marched on to Antioch, which lay about halfway between Constantinople and Jerusalem. Described by Stephen II, Count of Blois, as "a city great beyond belief, very strong and unassailable". The idea of taking the city by assault was a discouraging one to the Crusaders. Hoping, rather, to force a capitulation, or find a traitor inside the city, the Crusader army began a long siege on 20th October 1097 AD. During which, Stephen decided the situation was hopeless and left the Middle East, with his army, and returned to France.

Meanwhile, in February 1098 AD, Baldwin arrived at Edessa in Mesopotamia, where the ruler, Thoros of Edessa, made an alliance with him. Baldwin gradually convinced Thoros to adopt him as his son and heir, but, having done so, Baldwin attacked Thoros' officers and besieged him in

the citadel. Thoros agreed to let him have the city and made plans to flee with his family, but, shortly afterwards, on March 9, Thoros was assassinated by the Armenian inhabitants of the city, who disliked him for his Greek Orthodox religion, and Baldwin became the first Count of the **County of Edessa**, which was the first of the Crusader states.

Also, in 1098 AD, the Fatimids of Egypt returned and besieged Kūdus (or Jerusalem), resulting in the Sejkuk [Selkuk] Sunni Muslim ruler abandoning the city and it being re-captured by the Fatimid Shi'a Muslims.

Meanwhile, after an eight month siege at Antioch, in June 1098 AD, Bohemond, bribed an Armenian guard to surrender his tower and the Crusaders entered the city and killed most of the inhabitants. Only a few days later, the Muslim relief army arrived and laid siege to the former besiegers. However, on 28th June, the Crusaders emerged from the city and defeated the Muslims in a pitched battle.

After the Crusaders had successfully captured Antioch, Hugh of Vermandois and his army was sent back to Constantinople to appeal for reinforcements from Alexios, who was uninterested, and Hugh, instead of returning to Antioch, went home to France. Because, of what looked like a massive betrayal by Alexios, the leaders, most notably Bohemond, argued that Alexios had deserted the Crusade and, thus, had invalidated all of their oaths to him. While Bohemond asserted his claim to Antioch, not everyone agreed, most notably Raymond, so the Crusade proceeded no further, for six months, while the nobles argued among themselves.

Meanwhile, a plague broke out, killing many among the army, including the Papal legate, Bishop Adhemar, who died on 1 August. There were now even fewer horses than before, and, worse, the Muslim peasants, in the area, refused to supply the Crusaders with food.

Raymond, frustrated by the continuing arguments, left Antioch, and, following a siege, captured the fortress of **Ma'arrat al-Numan**, where, in December 1098 AD, history describes the first occurrence of cannibalism among the Crusaders. Radulph of Caen wrote, "In Ma'arrat our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots; they impaled children on spits, and devoured them grilled". On 5th January 1099 AD, Raymond, dismantled the walls of **Ma'arrat al-Numan**.

By this time, the minor knights, infantry and soldiers of the main party, had become increasingly restless and were threatening to march to Jerusalem without their squabbling leaders. So it was, on 13th January, the march south, finally, restarted, leaving Bohemond behind, as the first

Prince of the **Principality of Antioch**. Raymond, and his forces rejoined the Crusade march, but he did so barefoot and dressed as a pilgrim.

Proceeding down the Mediterranean coast, the Crusaders encountered little resistance, as local rulers preferred to make peace with them and furnish them with supplies rather than fight.

The Fatimid governor of Jerusalem, was aware of the approaching Crusaders' and, he expelled all of Jerusalem's Christian inhabitants before their arrival. No doubt, to remove any possible internal rebellion. He also poisoned most of the wells in the area. On 13th May, the Crusaders came to Tripoli, where the ruler gave them money and horses.

Continuing south along the coast, the Crusaders passed Beirut on 19th May and Tyre on 23rd May, turning inland at Jaffa. On 3rd June they reached Ramlah, which had been abandoned by its inhabitants. The bishopric of Ramlah-Lyddda [Ram-lar Ly-dar] was established at the church of St. George, a popular Crusader hero, before they continued on to Jerusalem.

On 6th June, Godfrey of Bouillon sent Tancred to capture Bethlehem, where he flew his banner from the Church of the Nativity. On 7th June 1099, the Crusaders reached Jerusalem and many wept upon seeing the city they had journeyed for so long to reach.

The Crusaders' arrival at Jerusalem revealed an arid countryside, lacking in water or food supplies. Here there was no prospect of relief, even as they feared an imminent attack by the local **Fatimid** rulers. There was also no hope of trying to blockade the city, as they had at Antioch, as the Crusaders had insufficient troops, supplies, and, most importantly, time. Rather, they resolved to take the city by assault.

They might have been left with little choice, as, by the time the Crusader army reached Jerusalem, it has been estimated that only about 12,000 men, including 1,500 cavalry, remained. These contingents, composed of men with differing origins and varying allegiances, were also approaching another low ebb in their camaraderie; e.g., while Godfrey and Tancred made camp to the north of the city, Raymond, made his to the south. In addition, the Provençal contingent of Raymond's forces did not take part in the initial assault.

This first assault, on 13th June, was perhaps more speculative than determined, and, after scaling the outer wall, the Crusaders were repulsed from the inner one.

After the failure of the initial assault, a meeting between the various leaders was organized, in which it was agreed upon that a more concerted attack would be required in the future. On 17th June, a party of Genoese mariners, under Guglielmo Embriaco [Jzoo-leemo Em-bree-ah-co], arrived at Jaffa, and provided the Crusaders with skilled engineers, and, perhaps more critically, supplies of timber, cannibalized from their ships, to build siege engines.

The Crusaders' morale was raised when a priest, Peter Desiderius [Dezi-dur-eye-uss], claimed to have had a divine vision, of Bishop Adhemar, instructing them to fast and then march, in a barefoot procession, around the city walls, after which the city would fall, following the Biblical story of Joshua at the siege of Jericho. After a three days fast, on 8th July, the Crusaders performed the procession, as they had been instructed by Desiderius [Dezi-dur-eye-uss], ending on the Mount of Olives, where Peter the Hermit preached to them.

Shortly thereafter, the various bickering factions arrived at a public rapprochement. News arrived, shortly afterwards, that a **Fatimid** relief army had set off from Egypt, giving the Crusaders a very strong incentive to make another assault on the city.

The final assault, on Jerusalem, began on 13th July, when Raymond's, troops attacked the south gate, while the other contingents attacked the northern wall. Initially, the Provençals, at the southern gate, made little headway, but the contingents at the northern wall fared better, with a slow but steady attrition of the defence. On 15th July, a final push was launched at both ends of the city, and, eventually, the inner rampart of the northern wall was captured. In the ensuing panic, the defenders abandoned the walls of the city at both ends, allowing the Crusaders to finally enter.

After the successful assault on the northern wall, the defenders fled to the Temple Mount, pursued by Tancred and his men. Arriving before the defenders could secure the area, Tancred's men assaulted the precinct, butchering many of the defenders, with the remainder taking refuge in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Tancred then called a halt to the slaughter, offering those in the mosque his protection. When the defenders on the southern wall heard of the fall of the northern wall, they fled to the citadel, allowing Raymond and the Provençals to enter the city.

The slaughter continued for the rest of the day. Muslims were indiscriminately killed and Jews, who had taken refuge in their synagogue, died when it was burnt down by the Crusaders. The following day, Tancred's prisoners in the mosque were slaughtered. Nevertheless, it is clear that some Muslims and Jews of the city survived the massacre, either escaping or being taken prisoner to be ransomed.

On 22nd July, a council was held in the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** to establish a king for the newly created **Kingdom of Jerusalem**. Raymond was invited to become king, but refused, perhaps attempting to show his piety, whilst Godfrey did no damage to his own piety by accepting a position as secular leader. The exact nature and meaning of Godfrey's title is unclear. Chroniclers have alleged he took various titles, but Godfrey himself seems to have used the more ambiguous term *princeps* [prince], or simply retained his title of *dux* [duke].

After the Crusaders captured Jerusalem from the **Fatimids**, they learned of a Fatimid army about to attack them. Therefore, on 10th August, Godfrey led the remaining troops from Jerusalem to Ascalon, a day's march away. The Fatimids are estimated to have had between 20,000 and 30,000 troops, led by the military vizier of Egypt, whilst the Crusaders numbers are estimated at around 1,200 knights and 9,000 infantry.

On 12th August, scouts discovered the location of the **Fatimid** camp, which the Crusaders immediately marched on, catching the Fatimids unaware, and the battle was fairly short. The vizier and his army retreated into the heavily guarded and fortified city of Ascalon. The next day, the Crusaders learned that the vizier had retreated back to Egypt, via boat, so they plundered what remained of the Fatimid camp and returned to Jerusalem.

Having captured Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the crusading vow had been fulfilled, so most of the Crusaders returned home to Europe, where they were treated as heroes. The life of Godfrey of Bouillon became legendary, even within a few years of his death.

The Crusaders, who remained in Jerusalem, numbered only a few hundred knights. Godfrey himself only ruled for one year, for, having contracted an illness in Caesarea in June, he died in Jerusalem in July 1100 AD. He was succeeded by his brother, Baldwin, who left Edessa and became the first person to take the title **King of Jerusalem**.

As we know, further Crusades were to follow, but that is yet another story.

E.P. and Bro. Knights, thank you for the kind attention you have paid to my paper this evening.