

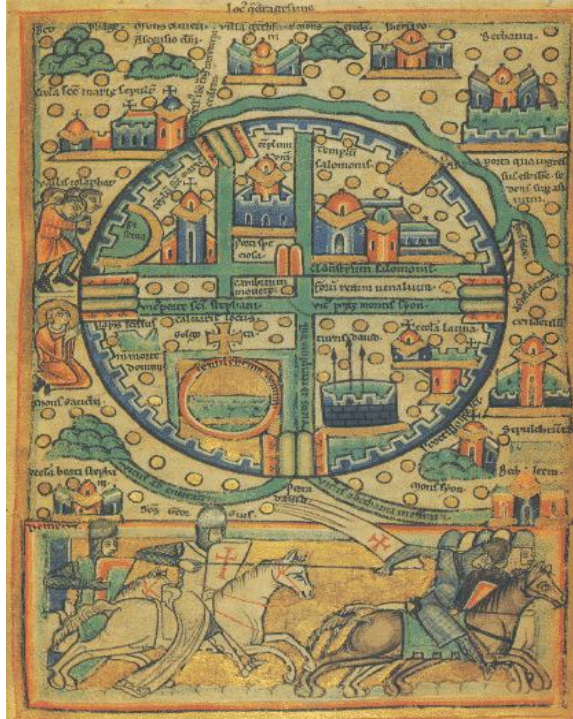
THE FIRST CRUSADE

By

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Priory of Robert the Bruce

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European society survived raids of Magyars, Vikings, and Saracens, and its economy and society were recovering quickly. There was a spirit of adventure apparent in European art, literature, and action. This was manifested in an increased popularity of *pilgrimages* -- journeys to distant holy places to worship and view the relics of saints. Pilgrimage was a religious activity, but many pilgrims enjoyed themselves like tourists in any age. Europe was in a period of expansion, and its capacity for conquest had grown during years of fending off raiders from all directions. Most importantly, Italian city-states had developed navies of merchant/fighting vessels that seized control of the Mediterranean. They reconquered Sicily and southern Italy from the Muslims, and there was a sense that the force of Islam was spent and that the way east lay open.

In the 7th century, the caliph [Umar](#) took Jerusalem. He did not cut off pilgrimages at first, but early in the 11th century, the [Fatimid](#) caliph Hakim persecuted Christians and despoiled the Holy Sepulcher. Persecution abated after his death (1021), but relations grew strained when Jerusalem passed (1071) from tolerant Egyptians to fanatical Seljuk [Turks](#). Since their victory at *Manzikert* (1071), Seljuk Turks pressed toward Constantinople and were now within sight of the city. *Alexius Comnenus*, the eastern emperor, needed reinforcements. He had seen western knights under the command of Count Robert of Flanders, while returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He had been impressed by their fighting ability and decided to hire twelve hundred of them. He sent his request and the reasons for it to *Pope Urban II*.

The First Crusade began on November 27, 1095, with a proclamation from [Pope Urban II](#) to clergy and lay folk in a field in Clermont in central France. The Pope's sermon was an appeal

for help which he had received from the Byzantine Emperor, [Alexius I Comnenus](#). There are no records of exactly what Urban said, but he began with a denouncement of continual warfare that plagued Europe. Pilgrims returning from *the Holy Land* had brought home stories of atrocities committed by *Seljuk Turks* against pilgrims, who supposedly desecrated places holy to Christians. He described in lurid detail attacks of Turks on the Christian Byzantine Empire, and begged soldiers present to travel to the east to attack Muslims, rather than fellow Christians. As encouragement, Urban offered them a Papal Indulgence that promised immediate remission of sins of those participating in the expedition. The crowd responded with the chant that became the war cry of the First Crusade – *Dieu li volt!* (God wills it!). [Bishop Adhémar of Le Puy](#) handed out crosses made of cloth, which were sewn on the clothing of those who vowed to take part. Buoyed by the response, Urban II continued his tour around southeastern France, preaching the Crusade wherever he went.

Pope Urban wanted the expedition to the east to be a military one, undertaken by soldiers and controlled by churchmen. But such was the appeal of his call for liberating the Holy Land that many thousands of ordinary folk left on the [People's Crusade](#). The most famous leaders of these bands were [Peter the Hermit](#), who rode his donkey out of Amiens early in March 1096 and an obscure knight named Walter Sansavoir. As they traveled to Constantinople, they left destruction in their wake, especially in Germany, where they encountered Jewish communities and extracted vengeance for what they believed was the complicity of Jews in executing Christ. When Peter the Hermit reached Constantinople, the Byzantines hurriedly ferried the horde across the Bosphorus to Asia. Alexius advised them to wait for the main Crusader armies, but by this time, they were out of control and eager to fight infidels. Most were wiped out easily by the Seljuks in the middle of arid Anatolia. Only a handful survived.

The official crusading armies did not leave until the middle of 1096. Three groups traveled under the command of Robert, Hugh, and Godfrey. From France came the most powerful faction under Raymond of St. Gilles. From Italy, came a large group of Normans under their warlord [Bohemond](#). The spiritual leader, and the only one who could exercise overall authority, was Bishop Adhémar of Le Puy - a close confidant of Pope Urban II. They arrived in Byzantium in 1097 and, after a period of wrangling in which Godfrey's forces attacked the Imperial Palace at Blachernae, the principal leaders swore allegiance to Alexius.

After crossing the Bosphorus, their first target was [Nicaea](#), capital of Kilij Arslan, sultan of the Seljuk state of Rhüm. In the end, Nicaea surrendered to the Emperor. Alexius distributed the spoils, but would not allow Crusaders to pillage the city – a move that later caused much bitterness.

The Crusaders then headed to Antioch in two groups, and Arslan took advantage to ambush the vanguard near Dorylaeum. Bohemond, Hugh of Vermandois, and Count Stephen of Blois now faced the combined armies of Kilij Arslan and the Danishmend Emir. After six hours of fierce onslaught, the main army led by Raymond of St. Gilles and Adhémar appeared on the flank of the Turks and forced them to flee.

The journey across Anatolia became a nightmare, although there were no more serious engagements. The army ran short of food, and had to deal with lack of water and freezing cold. This prompted a series of diversionary movements, the most notable of which was Baldwin's annexation of Edessa stretching from Cilicia to the Euphrates. Edessa, deep within Muslim lands, provided a secure flank for the subsequent campaign.

The [siege of Antioch](#) began in October, 1097. [Antioch](#) was a huge and strongly defended city that had never fallen, except by treachery. It was so large that the Crusaders found it impossible to surround it. They blockaded the gates, ensuring that defenders could not get out to mount an attack and fending off relief forces. The siege dragged on. Many died of starvation and disease (including Bishop Adhémar), and many fled home. Bohemond made a deal with an Armenian who had converted to Islam and commanded one of the city's towers. Crusaders entered the tower and seized Antioch just as a Muslim relief army appeared on the horizon. The Crusaders were then trapped inside the city. Stephen of Blois persuaded the Emperor that the situation was hopeless and left with his army.

A Provençal peasant, Peter Bartholomew, claimed that Christ and St. Andrew had come to him in a vision to tell him that the Lance that pierced the side of Christ was buried under the altar of the Church of St. Peter. They dug and Peter found the Holy Lance. Most of the leaders thought Peter a fraud, but the rank and file believed that a miracle had occurred. The army leaders took advantage of this 'miracle' to launch a last-ditch attempt to break the siege. The demoralized Turks fled.

With Islamic regional power destroyed, the journey to Jerusalem (with the Holy Lance leading the way) was uneventful. When they arrived before the walls of the city, they found that it was stoutly fortified. The Muslim commander expelled the Christians and desolated the countryside. The garrison of Arab and Nubian troops outnumbered the besieging Crusaders, and there was an Egyptian army on its way.

Crusaders set up positions along the northern and western walls and began constructing siege equipment. Before preparations were complete, a mystical cleric persuaded the leaders to attempt an assault. God, he said, would not fail them. The attack was a disaster.

The chastened Crusader army settled down to conducting the siege. Soon, soldiers were in a spiritual fervor with miracles, signs and portents occurring daily. In one, the dead Bishop Adhémar appeared before a priest and told him that the Crusaders must humble themselves before they could enter Jerusalem. Led by priests chanting and holding sacred relics, the army marched in solemn procession barefoot around Jerusalem's walls. Six days later, the final assault began. The night before the attack, Godfrey of Bouillon and Robert of Normandy moved their forces to an undefended part of the wall. From there, the Crusaders forced their way into the city.

Soldiers rampaged through the streets, killing everyone they met. Some townspeople took shelter in the Dome of the Rock mosque where Tancred, with an eye to ransom money, promised protection. This was of no avail, as men not under his command tore through the al-Aksa Mosque

and slaughtered everyone inside. Many of the city's Jews took refuge in the main synagogue. Crusaders burned it to the ground. The Muslim commander and his bodyguard shut themselves in the Tower of David, negotiated surrender with Raymond of St Giles, and were allowed to go free. Surviving townspeople were forced to serve the Crusaders, including performing the grisly task of carting bodies outside the city to be consumed in a fire lasting for days.

The following is an eyewitness account of the massacre: “Now that our men had possession of the walls and towers, wonderful sights were to be seen. Some of our men (and this was 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. Piles of heads, hands and feet were to be seen in the streets of the city. It was necessary to pick one's way over the bodies of men and horses. But these were small matters compared with what happened in the Temple of Solomon, a place where religious services are normally chanted. What happened there? If I tell the truth, you would not believe it. Suffice to say that, in the Temple and Porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies. The city was filled with corpses and blood.” *From Raymond d'Aguilers, Historia francorum qui ceprint Jerusalem.*

The election of Godfrey of Bouillon as Defender of the Holy Sepulcher was the beginning of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Other fiefs dependent on Jerusalem were created as Crusader leaders expanded their domains. These were the counties of Edessa (Baldwin) and Tripoli (Raymond), and principality of Antioch (Bohemond).

The First Crusade ended in victory. It was the only crusade that achieved more than temporary results. Until the ultimate fall (1291) of the Latin Kingdom, the brunt of the fighting in the Holy Land fell on Latin princes and their followers and on the military orders, [Knights Hospitalers](#) and [Knights Templars](#) that arose out of the First Crusade.



Chronology of the First Crusade

1071 - [Battle of Manzikert](#) – Turks destroy most of the Byzantine army.

1071-85 - Seljuk Turks conquer Syria, Jerusalem, and most of Palestine.

November 27, 1095: Pope Urban II presides at [Council of Clermont](#) and calls for a crusade.

Spring, 1096 - [Peasants' \(or People's\) Crusade](#) sets out from Europe; three armies lost in Hungary.

Spring-Summer 1096 – Massacres of German Jews by Crusaders.

August, 1096 - Emperor Alexius of Constantinople ships the Peasants' Crusade over the Bosphorus.

Late Summer, 1096 - [First Crusade leaders depart Europe](#).

October 1096 – Turks annihilate Peasants' Crusade in Anatolia.

Spring, 1097 - First Crusade contingents assemble in Constantinople.

End of April 1097 - Crusaders began march to Nicaea.

May 14 – June 19 1097 - [Siege of Nicaea](#).

July 1, 1097 – Crusaders victorious at [Battle of Dorylaeum \(Eskisehir\)](#) and seize much booty.

October 21, 1097 – June 3, 1098: [Crusader siege of Antioch](#).

December 31, 1097 – First Battle of Harenc. Turkish prisoners dragged to walls of Antioch and beheaded.

February 9, 1098 – Second Battle of Harenc.

February, 1098 - Emperor Alexius' general Tacitus abandons siege of Antioch.

Mar 10, 1098 - Citizens of Edessa give Baldwin control of the city.

Jun 1, 1098 - Stephen of Blois and a large group of French Crusaders flee the siege of Antioch with arrival of Emir Kerboga of Mosul and his army of 75,000.

Jun 3, 1098 - Antioch falls to Bohemond and the remaining Crusaders.

Jun 5-9, 1098 - Kerboga's army arrives before Antioch, forcing Bohemond to assume the defense.

Jun 14, 1098 - Peter Bartholomew discovers the supposed [Holy Lance](#) (used by a Roman soldier to stab Jesus during his crucifixion.) Crusader morale skyrockets.

Jun 28, 1098 - Battle of Orontes. Crusader victory forces Kerboga to lift the siege of Antioch.

Nov 27-Dec 11, 1098 - Crusaders capture M'arrat-an-Numan.

Jan 13, 1099 - Raymond of Toulouse, after disagreeing with Bohemund about the course of action, leads most Crusaders to Jerusalem.

Feb 14, 1099 - Raymond begins the disorganized [siege of Arqah](#), near Tripoli.

Late Mar, 1099 - Godfrey and Robert of Flanders join the siege of Arqah.

April 20, 1099 – Peter Bartholomew dies after an ordeal by fire to prove the authenticity of the Holy Lance.

Mid-May, 1099 - Raymond lifts the siege of Arqah and pushes to Jerusalem.

Jun 7, 1099 - Crusaders reach the [walls of Jerusalem](#).

Jun 13, 1099 - Crusaders fail to take Jerusalem by storm.

Jul 15, 1099 - Godfrey's forces scale the walls of Jerusalem near Herod's Gate by use of a massive siege tower and ladders. Once in the city, Crusaders massacre the Fatimid garrison and much of the city's Muslim and Jewish population. Crusaders elect Godfrey Guardian of Jerusalem.

