

## **I. BACKGROUND**

\*In 1092 Emperor Alexis I of Constantinople sent a letter to Pope Urban II in Rome asking for military assistance to remove Seljuk Turks from his border. What Alexis expected was a delegation of well-armed, well-disciplined mercenaries. What he got was the Crusades – 200 years of armed pilgrimages, waves of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children from all levels of European society piously hacking their way to the Holy Land, slaughtering Rhineland Jews along the way, setting up a Christian Kingdom on the shores of The Levant, and ultimately sacking Constantinople itself. How and why did this happen, and what were the ultimate consequences?

\*By 1092, three major civilizations had developed in the territories that radiated out from the Mediterranean: The Eastern Christian world, called Byzantium, The Western Christian World, coming to be called Christendom, and the Islamic world.

Each of these civilizations had grown into very different cultures, but all three shared some relevant commonalities. All three worlds had intellectual, philosophical and political/legal ties to the Classical world. All three had spiritual ties to sites in the Middle East. All three assumed that a notion of Holy War, or Just War, was acceptable. In the earliest days of Western Christianity, Augustine expounded on Just Causes for wars, citing as authority passages in the Old Testament such as the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. Charlemagne certainly was not averse to conversion by the sword. Mohammad preached jihad as part of the rapid expansion of Islam. And Byzantine armies carried banners sporting religious symbols, converting pagans as they conquered territory. \*It is worth noting, however, that the Islamic and Byzantine worlds had highly developed, peaceful urban centers that flourished, with sophisticated literate court cultures, thriving intellectual life inherited or appropriated from Classical Greece, and rich aesthetics in art and architecture. While the Germanic and Celtic people of Northern Europe had built, and still maintained, a culture based entirely on fighting.

\*Finally, the importance of pilgrimage to holy sites as a way of coming closer to one's god, or invigorating one's spirituality, cannot be overstated. Pilgrimage to Mecca is, of course, a pillar of Islamic faith. For Western Christians, pilgrimage to Palestine began in the fourth century and steadily grew into a major tradition, indeed a perceived "right." The only reason pilgrimage was not on the Orthodox agenda was that the Byzantines were sure they were already in the holiest place on earth, Constantinople. She was perceived as the New Rome. However, Western pilgrimage was big business for the Byzantines and was, therefore, encouraged. Until the arrival of the Seljuk Turks, Catholic pilgrims were also welcomed by the ruling Abbasid Muslims, again, for financial reasons. These pilgrimages were movements of large groups of people across vast territories

## **II. FIRST CRUSADE:**

\*Upon receiving Alexis' letter, Urban immediately saw the possibility of redeeming spiritual and political authority, and reforming a corrupt church. After a lengthy and thorough P.R. tour, during which he secured the good will of the most powerful ecclesiastical authority in Europe, the reform-minded Bishop of Cluny, the pope called a special council on November 27, 1095 at Clermont, France. \*There, he delivered a charismatic sermon, preaching for a holy war to be waged by God's chosen people to liberate Jerusalem from an accursed race – not, you notice, to help Alexis. Urban was speaking to most of the secular and spiritual leaders of the Western Christian world. \*For that audience, he brilliantly married the three ideas of Catholic piety and personal salvation, Germanic militarism and honor, and the obvious need for church reform. Those who took up the cross and sword would receive remission of sins, would be assured a place in Heaven, and would be like their manly Germanic ancestors – especially Charlemagne. The cry of "GOD WILLS IT!" swept Europe. All crusaders put their properties under the Church's control while they were fighting, in exchange for a guarantee of Church protection. Thus, the Church became their Lord, to whom they owed fealty.

\*Popular enthusiasm grew to an uncontrollable fever pitch, thanks to lay preachers like Peter-the-Hermit, and people didn't wait for the Pope's prescribed departure date. In the first thaws of Spring, \*as many as 40,000 ill-disciplined, inadequately armed pious-poor, prelates, knights and their families zealously poured out of France and Germany towards Constantinople. This motley movement is called "The People's Crusade." \*Many, inspired by apocalyptic visions, conducted pogroms against Rhineland Jews in order to eradicate the heathen within and avenge Christ's murder, on the way to eradicating the Muslims and liberating Christ's city. One historian describes these massacres as an orgy of bloodletting. They then looted the countryside across Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria and attacked Byzantine subjects. The Emperor Alexis' daughter, a historian named Anna Comnena, called the First Crusade a migration of Barbarian tribes preceded by a swarm of locusts. Alexis refused them access to Constantinople and shipped them on to Anatolia, with a recommendation that they wait for the real Crusaders, which they didn't. \*They attacked the Turks at Nicea and were handily destroyed by a disciplined cavalry with well-learned battle techniques. The Turks had developed a strategy in which they faked withdrawal in defeat, luring foes to break ranks and chase after them. Such a leaderless mob was easily massacred from horseback.

The Official First Crusade departed on The Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1096. \*In the course of this movement possibly 100,000 Europeans, fired up by propagandistic artwork depicting the viciousness of Muslims, traveled in huge groups to the Middle East. \*Motives seem to include piety, \*a desire to be forgiven of sins and secure salvation, \*a confusion of the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly one, escape from political, economic or domestic problems at home, ambition, adventure, family honor and kinship ties,\*\* booty, \*vengeance against Muslims, \*and the opportunity for younger sons to carve out their own principalities in the East. The Crusaders were led primarily by Frankish knights. In fact the Muslims came to refer to all crusaders as *franji*. These warriors were well-armed, experienced veterans, with battle strategies that had recently been successful at Hastings in 1066, and in the Investiture wars.

\*Their first real battle was at Dorylaeum, in Anatolia. The lead forces, led by a remarkably able general named Bohemond, entered a pass and were ambushed by Turkic cavalry, who then faked a retreat. Bohemond did not let his troops panic. He called up the main army and on July 1, 1097, the Crusaders won their first victory, which they took as a sign of God's favor. It is worth noting that The Song of Roland, about a similar battle, is thought to have been written down shortly after this Crusade.

\*The crusaders' long march south to the sacred city of Antioch, in high summer over arid and rough terrain, over mountains in the autumn rains, and under constant attack by Turkic raiding parties, was so deadly, it was compared to Exodus. By the time they reached Antioch most of the animals and many of the men women and children had perished. \*They settled into a grueling, ten month siege through the winter of 1097-98, which cost the spirits and lives of many. Some defected, and supposedly told Alexius, who was on the way with relief, that he might as well go home because the crusaders' situation was hopeless – which Alexis did. Meanwhile, Bohemond talked an Armenian Christian official named Firuz into betraying the city. On June 2, he marched his troops away, pretending to quit the siege. The Turks believed he had given up. Then at midnight he stole back, climbed a ladder that Firuz had put up for him, and opened the gates. After two days of massacre and looting, a Turkish relief force arrived, and the crusaders themselves became the besieged. \*Morale was at an all time low, when, as a result of a vision, The Holy Lance was discovered sticking a couple of feet out of the floor of the Church of St. Peter! \*This miracle galvanized the Franks, who marched out and defeated the Turks.

\*The much diminished troops marched 300 miles to Jerusalem, where they set up another long, seemingly hopeless siege. \*\*Morale got so low again, that the leaders tried a new tactic. \*All crusaders humbly walked barefoot around the city walls to encourage Christ to open it for them and exercise his judgment upon the inhabitants, \*then listened to a rousing sermon from Peter the Hermit on the Mount of Olives. Thus fortified, the crusaders stormed, took and brutally sacked Jerusalem on July 13-14, 1099. \*In accordance with their own military custom of the time regarding defenders who do not surrender, and in emulation of Old Testament models like the sacking of Jericho, \*the Christian “new people of Israel” massacred all the Muslims and Jews in the city then marched in thanksgiving through the Christian quarters. \*One florid chronicler reported that 10,000 were beheaded in the Temple of Solomon alone – the site now know as the Al Aqsa Mosque.

The First Crusade was a stunning victory for the Franks. Four Crusader States were carved out and distributed to the chief knights: \*Edessa, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Tripoli. During the sack of Tripoli, one of the treasures of the Muslim world was destroyed - the great Arabic library of Dar al-Ilm. Those martial pilgrims who did not go home, became settlers of the Outremer – French for “land beyond the sea” - , and built reasonably comfortable lives in the now Christian Levant. \*They adapted feudal practices to the new realities, raising cash crops instead of sustenance ones, creating monetary fiefs instead of landed ones, and becoming urban merchants and traders instead of manorial lords.

Probably the most lingering results of the First Crusade were the Jews' and Muslims' horror at the brutality of victorious crusaders, the severely strained relations between Latin Christendom and Byzantium, and the opening of the Mediterranean to Christian trading ports for mercantile exchange with the East. \*

Most martial pilgrims DID go home, so, ruling and hanging on to Outremer territory was problematic. \*Partly for this reason, it was during this interim period that the military orders were established and gained power: The Knights Templar and The Hospitallers. The Knights Templar began as a religious order dedicated to protecting pilgrims. The order began recruiting in the West among the great families of Europe in the 1120s and became incredibly wealthy and powerful as, essentially, the bankers of the Crusades. \*They held land in exchange for money or a line of credit, and maintained cash reserves in major centers that crusaders could draw on as they moved around. At the height of their power, the Templars were feared, both as the most fanatical and effective soldiers of the Christian cause and as the holders of liens on much of the Christian land back in Europe. Since their liege lord was God, they swore an oath to win or die on the battlefield. \*Islam had its own fanatical splinter

group called The Assassins, presumably after the Hashish they smoked in order to whip up a killing frenzy and martyrdom mentality. \*But they were outlaws, and dedicated most of their murderous activity against other Muslims.

### III. SECOND CRUSADE:

An important reason for franji victory in the First Crusade was instability within the Muslim world itself. This changed. Many Muslims had thought of jihad as an old concept, associated only with the expansion period of Islam. But after the horror stories told by refugees from the First Crusade, ideas about jihad were resurrected. \*An emir named Zengi recaptured Edessa from the Christians in 1144, and began to promote jihad as a way to recover Islamic territory from unbelievers – a shift in definition that would have lasting repercussions. When he was murdered, in 1145, his son, Nur ad-Din, took over.

\*The princes of the Outremer (NOT the Byzantines) asked the pope for help. The leading cleric of the day, Bernard of Clairvaux, preached the Second Crusade (1146-48). Bernard initiated a subtle shift in the definition of “Crusade,” by urging Christians to use “crusade” to convert pagans closer to home, like pagan Slavic tribes and Spanish moors. \*King Louis VII of France, one of the leaders, was a weak and ineffectual man with a strong, brilliant, politically astute, notorious and scandalous wife - Eleanor of Aquitaine. \*Eleanor reportedly dressed her female courtiers as Amazons for the occasion, and had an incestuous affair with her uncle in Antioch. After a series of miscalculations and bad decisions, the franji were roundly defeated by Nur ad-Din and went home in disgrace, blaming – who else – the Byzantines for not helping them out of their mess.

\*Consequences of second crusade: Nur ad-Din was free to unite Syria and the Turkomen were free to re-conquer and unite much of Anatolia. In the process they destroyed pilgrimage routes, forcing future crusaders to travel by ship. And Eleanor divorced Louis and married a man who was her intellectual match - the young, dashing great-great grandson of William the Conqueror, King Henry II of England, with whom she held a glittering, cultured court and had many children, most notably King Richard the Lion Heart and King John. Their marriage shifted the European power center from France to England.

\*This period saw the rapid rise to power of Saladin, nephew of a Kurdish general in Nur ad-Din’s army. By 1186 Saladin had overturned the Fatimid Shiite caliphate in Cairo, annexed Syria and, with the capture of Aleppo and Mosul, united the Islamic world.

### IV. THIRD CRUSADE:

Things could very easily have calmed down at this point, with a tenuously peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians. But they didn’t. \*One man is almost universally blamed for Saladin’s decision to launch jihad against the infidel still residing in Islamic lands, a Crusader named Reynaud of Chatillion. He was a brutal, ruthless and rash loose canon, robber-baron and gigolo who hated Muslims, and pursued his own agenda for personal vengeance and aggrandizement. \*He had spent 14 years languishing in a Turkish prison because no-one wanted to ransom the scoundrel. When he got out in 1175, he promptly married someone useful, thus acquiring a principality, built a monster castle, and settled down to attack Muslim pilgrims on the way to Mecca. He even outfitted a fleet and attacked Muslim ports on the Red Sea, at one point threatening Mecca itself.

\*As a result, in 1187, Saladin invaded Galilee and laid siege to Tiberias. King Guy of Jerusalem, in response, did not listen to his moderate advisors. He listened to the Muslim-hater, Reynaud, and the powerful Grand Master of the Templars, who counseled the disastrous move of forcing a battle with Saladin. \*Guy marched his forces, at least half of whom were Templars and Hospitallers, in June and July across the hot, dry Plain of Toran. The Bishop of Acre accompanied them, armed with part of the True Cross. \*Desperate with exhaustion and thirst, the troops were easily ambushed and defeated on the plains beneath the Horns of Hattin. \*Saladin captured the True Cross, spared the king and his traditional knights, executed Reynaud personally, and let his more fundamentalist followers execute the more fundamentalist Christian knights – the military orders. He then easily conquered most of the rest of the Crusader States. Jerusalem fell on October 2, 1187. Unlike the Christian sack of the city 88 years earlier, there was no looting or massacre.

\*A third Crusade was immediately preached. Philip II of France, Frederick Barbarossa of Germany, and Richard the Lionheart of England sallied forth. Frederick drowned in a Syrian river, and Philip had a fight with Richard and went home. \*Richard had some successes against Saladin, but his most notable triumph was at Cyprus against fellow Christians, the Byzantines, who had arrested some crusaders and made him mad. \*Richard’s most perfidious deed came after his long and successful siege and capture of the key port city of Acre. \*Prisoner negotiations with Saladin became bogged down, so impatient Richard \*slaughtered all 2,700 Muslim prisoners outside the city walls, in full view of their Saracen companions in Saladin’s

encampment. The two most romantic Crusading leaders, Richard and Saladin, came to respect each other, and even exchanged medicine across enemy lines when they both fell ill. In the end, they signed a three year truce leaving Jerusalem in the hands of Muslims, but recognizing Christian control of the coast. When Saladin and Richard died, they quickly entered the realm of myth.

\*Important consequences of the Third Crusade: A precedent was set at Cyprus for attacking Byzantine territory in the name of Christendom, and the road to Jerusalem now clearly lay through Cairo – which meant by ship. The phrase is coined: Jerusalem will be won on the Nile.

## **V. FOURTH CRUSADE:**

\*The Fourth Crusade, launched by Pope Innocent III in 1199, was preached at markets and tournaments, rather than from pulpits, reflecting an interesting demographic shift in the 100 years since the first Crusade. \*In 1201, crusaders negotiated a contract with Venice to transport an anticipated fighting force of 33,500 men and their horses and supplies by ship across the Mediterranean, at an astonishing price. Venice halted her own ship-building program for over a year in order to construct the largest fleet she had ever assembled. However, fewer than half of the expected Crusaders showed up and they defaulted on their contract. Venice, furious, used the situation to her advantage. She forgave part of the debt and joined the Crusade in exchange for Crusaders promising to make a detour to seize a Dalmation port city, useful to Venice's economic interests. The Crusaders, against papal decree, agreed. In 1202 they attacked and took Zara, a Latin Christian city that was also a papal vassal. Innocent III excommunicated all the crusaders and Venice.

### *Images from treasury of Constantinople*

\*The Crusaders, desperately in need of money, next promised to restore to the Byzantine throne a deposed prince in exchange for promises of vast treasure. They arrived before the walls of Constantinople on June 24, 1203. When Emperor Alexis III saw the Venetian fleet he ran away. \*But the reinstated emperor was unable to fulfill his foolish promises. When he was deposed (actually, strangled), the new Emperor told the Crusaders he would never honor any of his predecessor's promises. \*On April 12, 1204, the Crusaders coordinated a land and sea attack, entered the Queen of Cities and for three days murdered, raped and looted her. \*In addition to specie, horses, tapestries, and silks, they dismantled and divided up the holy golden altars of the sacred places, including Hagia Sofia, stole all the sacred relics, and pulled off what one historian calls the greatest art theft of the Middle Ages. \*Pope Innocent III, who had absolved the crusaders after Zara, re-excommunicated them after the sack of Constantinople, but then re-absolved them for the "great blessings" they had bestowed on Christendom by capturing Constantinople.

Consequences of the 4<sup>th</sup> Crusade: The Black Sea, the most direct route to the Silk Road, was opened up to Italian trade. Relations between the Eastern and Western Church were permanently harmed, so that later, they were unable to co-ordinate a response to the Ottoman threat. \*Crusading fever at the level of the Nobility waned, although there was a rise of populist, grassroots movements with crusade elements. The odd phenomenon of the two Children's Crusades is an example – in which a rag-tag mob followed a teen-age preacher over the Alps, on foot, to Genoa where they expected the Mediterranean Sea to part for them so they could walk to Jerusalem. . Most importantly, the focus of Europe shifted toward internal matters, the Inquisitions picked up, and the idea of Crusade was broadened and redefined as a holy war against any perceived foe of Latin Christendom, like the Cathars and Waldensians. One historian speaks of this transition as one from holy war to persecution.

\*Meanwhile, to the east, the nomadic equestrian Mongols, led at first by Ghingis Khan, conquered most of Asia, Poland, Hungary, Russia, Anatolia, Persia, and finally Baghdad in 1258. \*They were finally halted in 1260 by the Mamluks, an Egyptian military elite under a general named Baibars. The Mongols, who strengthened their troops with Turkic slave warriors, allowed Turkic culture and language to spread across their empire. \*One effect of Mongol invasions in Asia Minor was to pave the way for the rise and spread of the Ottoman Empire, beginning in 1300, which would forever change the face of Islam.

## **VI. ROYAL CRUSADES**

\*The 13<sup>th</sup> century did see four more official Crusades aimed at reclaiming Holy Lands – led by kings and emperors, because they were the only ones who could any longer afford to mount such expeditions. \*King Louis IX actually lived in Outremer for five years, efficiently and effectively running France from overseas. \*The honestly pious St. Louis was responsible for the construction in Paris of the jewel, \*St. Chapelle, to house the Crown of Thorns, which he purchased (not stole) from the Byzantine emperor for an unheard of sum.\* And the cynical, pragmatic Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, did briefly negotiate control of Jerusalem through diplomacy (while under excommunication for showing up late to the crusade). But the last Crusader outpost, Acre, fell to the Mamluks in 1291. When Acre fell, Marco Polo was in China. Dante had already published *La Vita Nova*. Osman I was ruling as the first sultan of what would become the Ottoman Empire. Florence had

become the leading European city in commerce and finance. The glass mirror and spectacles had just been invented. Lisbon University joined the sprouting academic culture around Europe. Cimabue and Giotto were painting. And the Aztecs had arrived in the Valley of Mexico.

## VII. CONSEQUENCES

What was the effect, if any, of two hundred years of over-seas holy war participated in directly or indirectly by hundreds of thousands of men and women, popes and clergy, emperors and kings, knights and commoners, Latin Christians, Greek Christians, Shiites and Sunnis?

\*For Byzantium: the empire was completely devastated, its sacred city destroyed, its treasure lost. They did take back the city in 60 years, but it was a hollow victory. It took the Ottomans, in 1453, to restore the glory of the old empire.

\*For Islam: The concept of jihad was resurrected, strengthened and broadened to include holy war against any perceived enemies of the faith, and groundwork was laid for Ottoman expansion and unification of Islam.

\*For Western Europe: One historian has remarked that the only thing to come out of the Crusades was the introduction of the apricot. Nevertheless, glance at this scroll for some areas that might provide fruitful thought and discussion. Clearly, movements of this size and duration do have consequences.

\*Economic

\*Political

\*Religious

\*Social

\*Cultural

## VIII. USES AND INTERPRETATIONS

In an ultimate irony of the original concept of crusade, during Great Schism the pope preached a crusade against the anti-pope!

Within a few years of the Crusades' collapse, Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* – placing Saladin next to Aristotle in the Limbo of the Virtuous pagans.

Christopher Columbus believed he was on a Crusade to convert New World pagans, and in his will left his wealth for the reconquest of Jerusalem.

\*The last of the Templars, who controlled land and wealth that impoverished King Philip IV of France coveted, were arrested on trumped up charges of heresy, homosexuality, and idolatry. They were tried, tortured, and burned at the stake in Paris in 1314, an event sanctioned by Pope Clement V, who promptly frustrated Philip by handing over the Templar property to the Hospitallers. That military order wisely got out of town and settled on Rhodes.

\*The Crusades have been mythologized by each successive era according to the needs of that era, beginning with the earliest chroniclers, such as William of Tyre. Whether they were the \*heroic Romantic adventure portrayed by Sir Walter Scott in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as part of a program to glorify England and her White Man's Burden, or whether they were the dark prequel to mindless Western Imperialism portrayed by many self-critical late 20<sup>th</sup> century writers – they were surely a significant movement of peoples around the Mediterranean at a significant time, featuring fascinating and colorful characters, and highlighting profoundly important themes in human history.

\*On April 7, 2000, in the speech launching his pilgrimage to Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, Pope John Paul II asked God's forgiveness for the crusades, the Inquisition, and the conquest of the New World – for what he called “the use of violence in the service of truth.”

\*Discussion questions and Richard the Lionheart's music