

# The Crusades: Voices and Perspectives

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[George McDowell](#)

NEH Seminar: The Arab World and the West: A History of Intellectual Relationships

[Center of Middle East and North African Studies](#)

University of Michigan

## **Dateline: The Crusades**

### **Voices and Perspectives**

#### **Overview/Objectives:**

Students will read primary sources to understand different perspectives of the Crusades including Muslim, European, Jewish, and Byzantine. After completing this project students will

- become aware of different social, economic, political, and religious forces contributing to the Crusades;
- become more aware of the significance of the Middle East as a crossroads at this time in history;
- have an understanding of the impact of the Crusades on different cultures;
- appreciate the impact on individuals involved;
- have a greater understanding of different perspectives;
- develop a sense of how groups create a sense of the "other", and how that is manifested in art and literature;
- use different sources such as maps, travel literature, chronicles, coins, etc to have an understanding of history;
- integrate technology by using the Internet for research and presentation and video for presentation

#### **Level:**

Grades 9-12 (although this may be geared more for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades)

#### **Type of Class:**

World History

#### **Duration:**

2-3 class periods. This assignment could be shortened to one class period or extended to a week.

#### **Procedure:**

1. Students will be divided into 4 groups-Franks, Byzantines, Palestinian Jews, Arab Muslims. (My class size is on average 12 students.)
2. Each group will receive a different packet of sources or a web page of links. In these packets or pages is a variety of information, depending on the group, such as

- o Background information on their group
  - o maps with cities and trade routes
  - o pictures-coins, images of members of other groups, or even of themselves
  - o writings-such as different versions of Urban's speech, Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*, the *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, Usama's autobiography, different European and Arabic chronicles such as Fulcher of Chartres or Ibn Al-Athir
3. Students will work together and research and put together a video news story (like *Dateline* or *20/20*) of about 3-5 minutes demonstrating their perspectives on the Crusades, with specific focus on the first three Crusades. Other possibilities for projects may include a newspaper or an Internet magazine. Students can be as creative as possible. They should, however, somehow support their perspectives and address the following issues:
- a. The significance of Jerusalem for their group;
  - b. Possible economic means for their group;
  - c. The cause of the Crusades from their perspective, attempting to consider economic, religious, social forces;
  - d. The impact of the Crusades on their group;
  - e. A "Dateline Timeline" or some chronology;
  - f. Their perceptions of other individuals or groups.
3. At the end of the group component, the class will review the other news pieces from their group on their own and evaluate the other perspectives.
4. We will have a follow-up discussion focusing on the issues
5. We will end with a 1-2 page reaction paper.

### **Assessment:**

1. Each individual will provide a self-assessment on her work in the group
2. Assessment of the group project according a rubric to be provided
3. Class participation in the discussions
4. Reaction Paper according to a rubric to be provided

**All truth is a shadow except the last, except the utmost; yet every truth is true in its own kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but shadow in another place.**

***Isaac Pennington***

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### **Dateline: The Crusades Voices and Perspectives**

#### Student Assignment

Your task is to develop an understanding of the Crusades through the perspective of your assigned group.

1. Each group will receive a different packet of sources or a web page of links. In these packets or pages is a variety of information, depending on the group, such as
  - Background information on their group
  - maps with cities and trade routes
  - pictures-coins, images of members of other groups, or even of themselves
  - writings of various authors such as chroniclers, traders, soldiers, or eyewitnesses
2. You will work together and research and put together a video news story (like *Dateline* or *20/20*) of about 3-5 minutes demonstrating your group's perspective on the Crusades, with specific focus on the first three Crusades. Your group can be as creative as possible. You should, however, somehow support your perspectives and address the following issues:
  - a. The significance of Jerusalem for their group;
  - b. Possible economic means for their group;
  - c. The cause of the Crusades from their perspective, attempting to consider economic, religious, social forces;
  - d. The impact of the Crusades on their group;
  - e. A "Dateline Timeline" or some chronology;
  - f. Their perceptions of other individuals or groups.
3. At the end of the group component, the class will review the other news pieces from their group on their own and evaluate the other perspectives.
4. We will have a follow-up discussion focusing on the issues
5. We will end with a 1-2 page reaction paper.

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## The Europeans

### [Background](#)

### [Maps](#)

### [Speech of Urban II at the Council of Clermont,](#)

November 1095: First Call to the Crusade (Five versions)

### **The First Crusade:** (1095-1101)

[Seige and Capture of Jerusalem: Collected](#)

[Accounts](#)

[Orientalized Franks](#)

### **The Second Crusade:** (1145-1147)

[The Fiasco at Damascus](#) 1148

[Criticism of the Crusade](#)

### **The Third Crusade:** (1188-92)

[Pictorial depictions of Saladin](#)

[Text description of Saladin](#)

[Battle of Hittin](#) 1187

[The Fall of Jerusalem](#)

**[Beyond the Pale:](#)** Includes "Christian Images of Jews" as well as images from the First Crusade and "Patterns of Discrimination".

### **Other Sources:**

[Outline of the Crusades:](#) From Skip Knox of Boise State

[Military Orders](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia

[Jerusalem Photo Tour](#)



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# The Byzantine Empire

## [Background](#)

## [Maps](#)

[Animated Map of the Byzantine Empire](#)

### **First Crusade:** (1095-1101)

[Byzantine Court's Attitude Toward the Franks](#) From Anna Comnena's *Alexiad* and the *Gesta Francorum*.

[Other observations by Anna Comnena](#)

### **Second Crusade:** (1145-1147)

[Byzantines and Germans meet again](#) From *Deeds of Juan and Manuel Comnenus*

### **Fourth Crusade:** (1204)

[Sack of Constantinople](#) From *The Annals of Niketas Choniates*

[Other Accounts](#)

[Byzantium 1200](#) Computer reconstructions of Byzantine monuments in 1200 CE

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## **Other Sources**

[Outline of the Crusades:](#) From Skip Knox of Boise State

[The Glory of Byzantium](#) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including a artistic pieces and a timeline

[The Romano Site](#) with brief history and timeline

[The Great Schism](#) from the Catholic Encyclopedia

[Byzantium](#) from the Medieval Sourcebook

[Jerusalem Photo Tour](#)

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# Islamic Caliphate Page

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### **The First Crusade:** (1095-1101)

[Franks Seize Antioch](#) from Ibn al-Athir

[The Franks Conquer Jerusalem](#) Ibn al-Athir and Ibn al-Qalanisi, the chronicler of Damascus.

### **The Second Crusade:** (1145-1147)

[The Siege of Damascus](#) Ibn al-Qalanisi and Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi

### **The Third Crusade:** (1188-92)

[Depictions of Salah al-Din \(Saladin\)](#)

[Text Description of Salah al-Din \(Saladin\)](#)

[Battle of Hittin](#) 1187

[Salah al-Din \(Saladin\) takes Jerusalem](#)

[Usama Ibn Munqidh](#) (1095-1188): *Autobiography*, excerpts on the Franks

### **Other Sources:**

[Outline of the Crusades:](#) From Skip Knox of Boise State

[Islamic History](#) from Islam.org

[The Seljuks](#) an academic article by J.J. Saunders

[Jerusalem Photo Tour](#)



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## Jewish Perspectives During the Crusades

### [Background](#)

### [Maps](#)

### [Map of Jewish Trade Routes](#)

### The Crusader Attacks in Europe:

[Soloman bar Samson: The Crusaders in Mainz](#), May 27, 1096. This source looks at attacks on Jews in Germany on the way to the Crusades. (From the Medieval Sourcebook.)

[Albert of Aix and Ekkehard of Aura: Emico and the Slaughter of the Rhineland Jews](#) A Christian account of the Jewish persecution in Germany. (From the Medieval Sourcebook.)

[The Crusaders Seize Jerusalem First Crusade 1098](#) Accounts by Ibn al-Athir and Ibn al-Qalanisi

[The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela](#) (Selections from a Jewish traveler in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century)

[Jewish Letter No. 1](#) (1100)

[Jewish Letter No. 2](#) (1099-1100)

### [Jewish Sea Poem](#)

[Beyond the Pale](#): Includes "Christian Images of Jews" as well as images from the First Crusade and "Patterns of Discrimination".

### Other Sources:

[Outline of the Crusades](#): From Skip Knox of Boise State

[Jerusalem Photo Tour](#)



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**Bibliography:**

**Resources on the Crusades**

**General:**

*Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye Witness Accounts of the Wars between Christianity and Islam.* Ed. Elizabeth Hallam. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989.

*The Crusaders: A Documentary Survey.* Ed. James A. Brundage. Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1962.

**Muslim:**

*Arab Historians of the Crusades,* trans. F. Gabrieli, trans. E. J. Costello. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

Ibn al-Qalanisi, trans. H. A. R. Gibb, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades.* London: Luzac & Co., 1932.

Usama ibn Munqidh, trans. P. K. Hitti, *Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman.* Beirut: Khayats, 1964.

**Jewish:**

Benjamin of Tudela, trans. M. N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela.* New York: Philipp Feldheim Inc., 1907.

"Contemporary Letters on the Capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders." *Journal of Jewish Studies,* trans. S. D. Goitein. Vol. 3, No. 4, p162-77, London: Jewish Chronicle Publications, 1952.

*Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* trans. & ed. S. D.

Goitein. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

### **Byzantine:**

Niketas Choniates, trans. H. J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1984.

Anna Comnena, trans. E. R. A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*. Middlesex & Baltimore: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969.

John Kinnamos, trans. C. M. Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus by John Kinnamos* in *Records of Civilization Sources and Studies*, Vol. 95. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

### **Local Christian:**

Barhebraeus, trans. E. A. W. Budge, *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus*. Vol. 1, London & Edinburgh: Oxford University Press, 1932.

*The First and Second Crusades from an Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, trans. A. S. Tritton & H. A. R. Gibb, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1933). p69-101 & 273-305, London: The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1933.

Matthew of Edessa, trans. A. E. Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades*. Lanham & New York: University Press of America, 1993.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Erbstösser, Martin, trans. C.S.V. Salt. *The Crusades*. Newton and Abbot, UK: David and Charles, 1978.

*Images of the Other: Europe and the Muslim World Before*

1700. Ed. David Banks. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1997.

*The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades.* Ed. Vladimir P. Goss. Studies in Medieval Culture, vol. XXI. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986.

## **Video**

[The Crusades](#) with Terry Jones from A&E Videos

## **Internet Resources:**

Several Internet Resources are available in the student group packets. Sites I particularly recommend for primary sources are the [Medieval Sourcebook](#) sites under the guidance of Paul Halsall.

[The Medieval Sourcebook: Selected Sources on the Crusades](#)

[The Medieval Sourcebook: Selected Sources on Islam](#)

[The Medieval Sourcebook: Selected Sources on Byzantium](#)

[The Medieval Sourcebook: Selected Sources on Medieval Jewish Life](#)

Also the  
[Internet Jewish Sourcebook](#)

[Internet Islamic Sourcebook](#)

Other sites are on the web pages for each individual culture.

## **Background on the European Crusaders**

The Roman Empire had linked the European territories by roads, the Latin language, and Christianity to the peoples of Western Europe. But Rome was a Mediterranean power. The Germanic peoples who ended Roman rule in the west shifted the focus to the north. There civilization evolved differently from the eastern half.

Resources in these areas were dense forests, richer soil suited for raising crops than the dry soil around the Mediterranean.

Germanic tribes who migrated across Europe were farmers and herders. Their culture differed greatly from the Romans. They had no cities and no written laws. Instead they lived in small communities.

Between 400 and 700 the Germanic tribes carved Western Europe up in small kingdoms. The strongest and most successful kingdom was that of the Franks. The Franks and other Germanic peoples did not know much about Islam as Muslim armies were sweeping across North Africa and into Spain in 711. At the battle of Tours and Poitiers in 732. At these battle of Tours, Frankish warriors led by Charles Martel defeated a Muslim army. Christians saw the victory that God was on their side. Although it was a minor skirmish for the Muslims, they did not advance further into Western Europe, but they continued to rule in Spain.

Charles Martel's grandson Charles the Great (Charlemagne) built an empire reaching across France, Germany, and part of Italy. After helping Pope Leo III against rebellious nobles in Rome, the pope showed his gratitude by proclaiming him "emperor" in the year 800. Although the Roman empire still continued in the East from Byzantium, the event of crowning a Germanic king as successor to the Roman emperors revived the ideal of a united Christian community.

### **Feudalism**

In the early Middle Ages, hundreds of feudal nobles ruled over territories of varying size. Most acknowledged a king or overlord, but royal rulers had little power. During the later Middle Ages, as economic conditions improved, feudal monarchs started to increase their power.

In England, we see the invasion of the Normans from France and their increase as a strong feudal power in both England and France. The Capetians also in France from 987. In Germany and parts of Italy the ruler Otto I was crowned "Holy Roman Emperor" by the pope, similar to Charlemagne.

As economic and social conditions improved and the feudal monarchs increased their power, there was a need education. The Church wanted an educated clergy. New royal rulers needed officials for their bureaucracy. Cathedral schools, perhaps influenced by Muslim universities were created. Many of these thinkers were influenced by thinkers from nearby Muslim Spain and their libraries.

### **Crusades**

While some of these new monarchies were growing, they were expanding into the



areas of Muslim control in Spain. This was especially true of Aragon and Castile. This was known as the "Reconquista", a reconquering of Spain. By 1085, they had captured Toledo a powerful city of government and learning.

On the other side of the Mediterranean there was another threat. In the later 11<sup>th</sup> century Seljuk Turks invaded the Byzantine empire. The Turks had migrated from Central Asia into the Middle East, where they had converted to Islam. By 1071, the Seljuks had overrun most of the Byzantine lands in Asia Minor. The Seljuks also extended their power over Palestine and attacked Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land.

As the Seljuk threat grew, the Byzantine emperor Alexius I sent an urgent plea to Pope Urban II in Rome. In 1095, he asked for Christian knights to help him fight the Turks. Although Roman peoples and Byzantine emperors were longtime rivals, Urban agreed. At the Council of Clermont in 1095, Urban incited French and German bishops and nobles into action.

Why did so many take part in the Crusades? Religious reasons obviously played a role. Fiery preachers in the countryside inspired others, and some even led crusades of their own. Some crusaders hoped to win wealth and land. Some crusaders sought to escape troubles at home. Others yearned for adventure.

## Maps for the Crusades

Maps from W.C. Brice, *An Historical Atlas of Islam* (Leiden, 1981)

[Map of the Late Abbasid Caliphate c.A.D.900](#)

[Map of Almoravid, Saldjuk, and Ghaznavid Expansion c.A.D. 1100](#)

[Map of the Muslim World c.A.D. 1300](#)

[Map of the Muslim World c.A.D. 1500](#)

From R. Roolvink et al., *Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples* (Amsterdam, 1957)

[Map of the Empire of Sultan Salah Al-Din \(1171-1193\) and Map of the Crusaders' Principalities in Syria and Palestine](#)

[Map of the Muslim East in the First Half of the 13th Century](#)

From Juniata College

[Map of Hijaz showing Mecca and Medina](#)

[Europe in the Year 1000](#)

[Europe in the Year 1100](#)

[Map of the Crusader States 1110](#)

[Extent of Fatimid control 1200](#)

[Europe in 1300](#)

[Conquests of Timur Lang 1400](#)

[Extent of Ottoman Empire and Constantinople 1450](#)

**From the Medieval Sourcebook**

[Europe at the time of the first Crusade](#)

[Crusader States in 12th and 13th Centuries](#)

**The Romanoi Site**

[Animated Map of the Byzantine Empire](#)

## **Orientalized Franks**

*After the Franks had settled and created the Crusader states, the chronicler Fulcher of Chartres had this observation.*

We who had been occidentals have become orientals; a man once Italian or French has here become Galilean or Palestinian: and the man who once lived in Reims or Chartres now finds he is a citizen of Tyre or Acre. We have already forgotten the places of our birth.

Some of us already own houses and servants in this country. Some have married women who are Syrian or Armenian perhaps, or even Saracens who have received the grace of baptism. He who once was a stranger here is now a native, and every day, our dependants and relatives follow us here. For he who was poor there finds now that God has made him rich here. He who had little money now has countless gold coins. He who did not hold even a village there now enjoys a whole town which God has granted him.

Why should anyone return to the West who has found an east like this?

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Fulcher of Chartres 1127 Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Wars between Christianity and Islam. Ed. Elizabeth Hallam. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. p. 118.

**Depictions of Salah al-Din**



Salah al-Din drawn by an Arab artist

Saladin according to Western perceptions



Western depiction of Saladin (in the middle) holding prisoners in chains

## Saladin

*"The Latin Itinerarium regis Ricardi was compiled in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century by a canon of the priory of Holy Trinity in London, who wrote this account of Saladin's parentage and early career."*

By way of introduction, and so that the eager curiosity of future generations may be more fully informed about Saladin, this great persecutor of Christianity, I will say something here about his origins. He was of Kurdish stock, and his parents were not noble. However, in spite of this lowly beginning, his life did not follow the pattern of common folk.

...The first inclinations of Saladin's taste for power appeared under Nur ad-Din, sultan of Damascus. Saladin made a disgraceful income out of the prostitutes of that city, none of whom could ply her filthy trade without first buying a license from him. The money he thus obtained by pimping he lavished on entertainers, purchasing the people's indulgence for all his whims by displays of generosity.

He was inspired with hopes of the kingdom by the prophecy of a certain Syrian, who foretold that he would hold sway over Damascus and Cairo. So he began to aspire to greater things than the kingdom beyond whose narrow limits and boundaries he had never gone. As time went on and he became older and stronger, he hankered after a soldier's life. He offered himself for military service to Humphrey of Toron, a distinguished Frankish ruler in Palestine, and received from him the girdle of knighthood after the French manner.

At that time, a certain pagan [the vizier] called Shawar was administering the whole of Egypt under [the Fatimid caliph, probably al-Adid] Molanus ('Lord' in their language), who had been forced to pay an annual tribute to the victorious king of Jerusalem, Amalric I, who died on 11 July 1174. Molanus, considered by his subjects to be so powerful that the Nile rose at his command, showed himself to the Egyptians, to be seen and worshipped, only three times a year. Moreover, punctiliously fulfilling the requirements of his pagan religion, he kept the same number of concubines as the days of the year. Growing old and feeble among all these young women, he left the government of the country to Shawar. Saladin, who at that time happened to be on military service there, in Egypt with his uncle Shirkuh, treacherously murdered both the unsuspecting Shawar and Molanus and obtained power over all Egypt. Not long after Nur ad-Din died, 15 May 1174, Saladin married his widow, put the heirs to flight and ruled the country with her.

Such was the power of playful Fortune, changing the course of events at will. That pimp, king of the brothels, who campaigned in the taverns, and devoted his time to gaming and the like, was suddenly elevated to sit among the rulers. The possessor of a glorious throne, he ruled the Egyptians, held sway over the Damascenes, controlled Edessa and Mesopotamia and conquered the recesses of India.

Overcoming the surrounding countries, either by guile or by force, he welded many sovereign nations into a single monarchy, holding supreme power over all their kings. But the greedy tyrant, not satisfied with these possessions, concentrated all his efforts on an attempt to seize the inheritance of the Lord, Palestine. And when the opportunity arose, he had hopes of gaining something beyond his wildest dreams.

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## **Source**

Hallam, Elizabeth. *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the wars Between Christianity and Islam*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. pp 155.

## **Battle of Hattin, 1187**

*Saladin gradually consolidated his position, gaining control of Egypt, Damascus, Aleppo and Mosul. He also made periodic invasions of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. Then, on 4 July 1187, he decisively defeated the Christian forces at the Horns of Hattin. The disastrous battle and its aftermath were bewailed by the author of the Itinerarium.*

The opposing lines were drawn up at a place called Hattin, in the hills behind Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee. At the precise instant that the fighting began, Raymond III, count of Tripoli, left the spot, feigning flight. The story is that he did this by prearrangement, so that our troops should scatter, apparently stricken by terror at the desertion of the one who should have been their support, while the spirits of the enemy were raised. So the Lord 'gave his people over also unto the sword' [Psalm 78.63], embroiled in conflict, consigning his inheritance to slaughter and pillage, as the sins of mankind demanded. What more of there is to say?

To cut a long story short, so many were slain, so many wounded and so many were thrown into chains that our people, completely destroyed, were a pitiable sight even to the enemy. Worse still, the Cross of our salvation, that life-giving wood, was taken into the hands of the enemy and along with it fell its bearers, the bishop of Acre and preceptor of the Holy Sepulchre; one killed and the other captured.

When Guy of Lusignan, king of Jerusalem, saw the Cross fall, he was overcome by pity. He rushed forward and flung his arms around the Cross, hoping to snatch it back, if God so willed, or at least to die beside it. So the Holy Cross suffered yet another insult because of our wickedness. Not the Ark of the Lord, not Jewish kings led away captive can compare with this disaster of our time, when King Guy had as fellow prisoner the glorious Cross. Some of the captives—and their numbers were as amazing as they were pitiable—were kept unharmed to await the victor's will. The rest were despatched to heaven in a swift and merciful death by the murderous sword.

Among others, Reynald of Châtillon, lord of Oultrejourdain, was brought before Sultan Saladin. The tyrant, driven by rage, or possibly out of respect for such a great man, struck off that proud and venerable head with his own hand. All the Templars, with the exception of their master, he ordered to be beheaded, determined to wipe them out completely, for he knew their reputation for superiority in battle.

Then what a passionate rivalry of faith and courage ensued! Many of the captives, claiming to be Templars, vied together in a rush towards the butchers. Gladly they



offered their necks to swordsmen, under a holy pretence. Among these soldiers of Christ was a certain Templar called Nicholas. He was so successful in urging others to their death that, in the rush to get ahead, he himself only just managed to be the first to win the glorious martyrdom he so earnestly desired.

Evidence of the miraculous power of God's mercy was not lacking: throughout the following three nights, while the bodies of the holy martyrs still lay unburied, rays of the divine light shone clearly above them.

When the noise of battle had ceased, and Saladin beheld the captives being dragged away and the dead strewn about, he raised his eyes to heaven and thanked God for the victory, as he always did when things went well for him. One of his most frequent remarks was that our wickedness, not his power, gave him this victory, and the turn of events bore him out. For our army, however small, generally prevailed, with God's help. On this occasion, however, we were not with the Lord, nor he with us, and our troops were utterly worsted, even before the flight, although there were reckoned to be more than twenty thousand of them. In fact the might of the entire kingdom had gathered there by royal decree for that disastrous conflict. Only those who, by reason of age or sex, were exempt from bearing arms, remained in the protection of the castles or cities. This fateful battle was fought on 4 July 1187. In that short space of time, all the glory of the kingdom of Jerusalem was shattered and destroyed.

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## Source

Hallam, Elizabeth. *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the wars Between Christianity and Islam*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. pp 156-157.

For another account see [Ernoul, a Frank](#) from the [Medieval Sourcebook](#)

## **Background on the Byzantine Empire**

As the cities of the western Roman Empire fell victim to Germanic invaders, Constantinople seemed to prosper. By 330 the emperor Constantine had rebuilt the Greek city of Byzantium and renamed it Constantinople. From this new center, trade began to flourish from the Eastern Europe to the Middle East and North Africa. Roman political concepts, Greek culture and the Christian faith were the main elements which determined Byzantine development. The Byzantines considered themselves Romans, and their emperor considered himself a Roman ruler, successor and heir to the Roman Caesars. There were different characteristics, however, that began to differentiate this Eastern empire from the West. In language and culture Greek elements gained in importance, and the Church increased its influence in daily life.

### **Politics**

The Emperor was not only the highest military commander, the supreme judge and the only legislator, but also the protector of orthodoxy. Emperors continued to live in splendor with entertainment with great arenas such as the [Hippodrome](#).

The Byzantine empire reached its greatest size under the emperor [Justinian](#) who ruled from 527-565. With his objective to regain the glory of the ancient Roman Empire, he spared no expense. With competent generals he reconquered North Africa, Italy, and Southern Spain. The endless fighting, however, lay Italy in ruin while exhausting Justinian's treasury and weakened his defenses. In the end, these costly victories were temporary and Justinian's successors lost the lands in the west. Other legacies of Justinian's reign were the construction of the [Hagia Sophia](#) and Justinian's code of laws, his attempt to codify previous Roman laws.

During the Arab conquests in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, Arab armies overran wealthy Byzantine provinces of Egypt and Syria before advancing on Constantinople. The city held out, eventually turning back the Arabs. Thus, when the European Crusaders set off on their first campaign in the Orient, Byzantine society had already experienced centuries of fighting and confrontation. There had been no sign of a crusading spirit, no union of a "Christian world against an Islamic one." Nor was there a need to unify with the western crusading powers.

For medieval times, Constantinople was a gigantic city. Its population in the 6<sup>th</sup> century was about 400,000 people and it could not have been much less than this in the centuries

leading up to the Crusades. It was protected by mighty walls with multiple fortifications, ramparts and ninety-six towers. It would make a tremendous impression to a visitor.

### **Economy**

All the essential trades were in Constantinople; the city was very famous for luxury items. Fine silk fabrics were woven here and jewellers, goldsmiths, ivory carvers and other craftsmen produced fine artistic works. Architecture, painting, and glassware also achieved high artistic quality. These objects, along with an exceptionally large number of palaces, churches, and cloisters of the city always excited the admiration of even those visitors who were familiar with such artistic goods.

Constantinople was the trade center of Eastern Europe. From here, merchants sold silks from China via the "Silk Road", wheat from Egypt, gems from India, spices from Southeast Asia, slaves from Western Europe, and furs from the Viking lands. Merchants from all over the world, Arabs, Jews, Russians, Venetians and Genoese bought and sold their goods here.

### **Religion**

Religion also played an important role in the division of eastern and western Europe. Primarily there were differences in the structure. Although the Byzantine emperor was not a priest, he controlled Church affairs and appointed the patriarch, or high Church official in Constantinople. Over time other traditions began to separate the Roman and Byzantine churches. Unlike priests in western Europe, the Byzantine clergy retained the right to marry. Greek, not Latin, was the language of the Byzantine church.

In the 700s a controversy divided Christians over the use of icons. In 730, Emperor Leo III banned the worshipping of holy images in the churches. At this time the veneration of icons had assumed unprecedented importance. The common people believed that praying to these objects could assist them against poverty, natural catastrophes and personal misfortune. Opposing them were iconoclasts who rejected this idea and saw that worshipping these images had gone beyond symbolism and were coming between God and man. Although many Byzantines were divided on this issue, a synod at Constantinople in 843 allowed for the continuation of the veneration of icons.

The differences had increased so much that a [Great Schism](#) formed in 1054. The Byzantines had begun to look away from the pope in Rome and put more importance to the Patriarch in Constantinople. The Council of Chalcedon had established five patriarchs, church officials in a particular region: Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and later

Jerusalem and Constantinople. The patriarch of Constantinople slowly increased in power also was seen as more important than the other eastern patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria. The rift widened even more when Charlemagne was crowned as a new Roman emperor by the pope in 800, when an emperor was already ruling in Constantinople. In 968, the German king Otto I gave himself the title Holy Roman Emperor which brought scorn and indignation from the Byzantines. By 1054 the difference had grown so great that the pope and patriarch excommunicated each other over a theological debate.

The Byzantine church did continue to see itself as a role of protecting Christians living or making pilgrimages to the Orient. There were close contacts with the other Patriarchs in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria and other orthodox churches in the Levant. Favored by the religious tolerance of Islam, these contacts were even maintained in times of war.

### **The Crusades**

By the time of the Crusades in the latter 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium (or the Roman Empire) was no longer the power as it was. The Church had lost some prestige. Although trade flourished, the agricultural economy was weak and stagnant.

A new power began to upset the balance of power in the East. A Turkish nomadic people, called the Seljuks, migrated from the central steppes. They adopted Islam as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century and rapidly absorbed Islamic culture. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, groups advanced westward and overran the eastern states of the Arab Caliphate. Baghdad fell to them in 1055 although they maintained the Abassid Caliph as merely a symbolic power. Around 1070, led by Alp Arslan, they conquered Syria and Jerusalem. Byzantium was not as concerned for religious sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem as they were for the threat of being overcome by this new force. A [Seljuk](#) army pushed forward to Anatolia and destroyed the Byzantine forces in the battle of Manzikert in 1071 where the emperor was taken prisoner. The emperor was upset at having to fight this battle not with a well-trained military but with mercenaries hastily put together. Although the Seljuks were not a direct threat, the emperor felt the need to call for assistance.

This call for help marked the beginning of the end of its power. By 1204 during the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople will be taken over by western Crusaders. Although a dynasty eventually returns, the city will fall to a new power, the Ottoman Turks in 1453.



## The Byzantine Court's Attitude Toward the Franks

### Anna Comnena

*Pope Urban II had called on princes to join forces at Constantinople, before proceeding across Anatolia towards Palestine. One of the last to arrive, in April 1097, was Bohemund of Taranto. Anna Comnena, then a young woman of 14, was both fascinated and repelled by him, as is evident from her description written some 40 years after she met him.*

Bohemund was, to put it briefly, like no other man seen in the Byzantine Empire, whether barbarian or Greek. The sight of him caused astonishment, the mention of his name occasioned panic. To describe the barbarian's appearance systematically: he was so tall in body that he exceeded even the tallest men by almost fifty centimetres. He was narrow in the belly and flanks, broad in the chest and shoulders and strong in the arms. His whole stature could be described as neither constricted nor over-endowed with flesh, but blended as perfectly as possible, built so to speak, according to the canon of Polykeitos. His hands were broad, he had a firm stance and was compact in neck and back. If one looked at him carefully and closely, he seemed somewhat stooping—not that the vertebrae of the lower spine had been injured, but that he had had this deformity from birth, it seems.

The flesh on his body was very white, that on his face ruddy as well as white. His hair was light brown, and did not hang down as far as his back, as does on other barbarians; the man was not hirsute, but had his hair cut short around the ears. I cannot say whether his beard was reddish or some other colour, for the razor had removed it and left his face smoother than marble; it did, however, seem reddish. His eyes were greyish, indicating courage and dignity. His nose and nostrils breathed air freely: his broad lungs complemented his nostrils the breadth of his lungs.

Some charm also manifested itself in this man, but it was obscured by the fear he inspired all around him. For he seemed harsh and wild partly because of his size and partly because of his appearance; even his laughter was a cause of fear in others. In body and soul, his disposition was such that both courage and love welled up inside of him, and both looked towards war. His mind ranged over all possibilities, dared anything and rushed into any undertaking. In his conversation he gave responses that were always ambiguous. Such was Bohemund's character, and such his physical size, that only the emperor, through luck, eloquence and other natural advantages, could surpass him.

*The following is her account of Baldwin.*

When the Franks had all come together and had taken an oath to the emperor, there was one count who had the boldness to sit down upon the throne. The emperor, well knowing the pride of the Latins, kept silent, but Baldwin approached the Frankish count and taking him by the hand said, "You ought not to sit there; that is an honor which the emperor permits to no one. Now that you are in this country, why do you not observe its customs?" The insolent count made no reply to Baldwin, but said in his barbarous language, as if talking to himself, "This must be a rude fellow who would alone remain seated when so many brave warriors are standing up." Alexis noted the movement of the man's lips and called an interpreter in order to learn, what he had said; but when the interpreter had told him he did not complain to the Franks, although he did not forget the matter.

When the counts came to take leave of the emperor he retained this haughty knight and asked him who he was. "I am a Frank," he replied, "of the most high and ancient nobility. I know but one thing, and that is that there is in my country a church built at the crossroads where all those betake themselves who hope to show their valor in single combat, and there make their prayer to God while they await an enemy; I remained there a long time without anybody daring to measure swords with me."

Alexis was on his guard against accepting this challenge. "If you then waited without being able to show your bravery," he said to him, "you now have a chance to fight; and if I may give you a word of advice, it will be not to put yourself either at the head nor rear of the army but in the middle. The experience which I have had with the Turks make war has convinced me that is best place." [The knight was later killed in battle, possibly Count Robert of Paris.]

### Gesta Francorum

*As the Gesta Francorum makes plain, Alexius did not trust Bohemund*

When the Emperor Alexius had heard that Bohemund, that most noble man, had arrived at Constantinople, he gave orders that he should be received honourably, but also, cautiously, that he should be looked after outside the city. When Bohemund had been lodged, the emperor sent a message summoning him to speak in secret with him. Godfrey of Bouillon and his brother Baldwin of Boulogne also went; Raymond, count of Toulouse, was near the city.

The emperor, full of anxiety and boiling with anger, was thinking of how to capture these soldiers of Christ by cunning and fraud. But by divine grace, neither place nor time for mischief was found, either by the emperor or by his men.

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## Second Crusade

*Very similar the First Crusade, German armies marched and devastated the countryside. This time as they arrived in Byzantium, the emperor Manuel was not willing to assist them as eagerly as Emperor Alexius was 50 years earlier.*

When he reached [the port of Byzantium], Conrad [the German king] sent a letter to the emperor which was really not far from extreme conceit. The statement ran thus. "One who possesses intelligence, emperor, must consider not merely a problem in itself, but particularly inquire the reason whence it arose. Whoever depends on a prejudice frequently fails to commend what is good, and does not naturally blame what appears base. And, contrary to general opinion, one sometimes meets with good from enemies, but again experiences something ill from friends. Do not impute to us the causes of the damages lately wrought by the commonality of our army in your land, nor be wroth on that account, since we ourselves have not been causes of such things, but the mob's impulse, recklessly hastening onwards, was capable of doing this of its own will. For when a foreign and outland army is everywhere wandering roving about, partly to investigate the land, partly to gather necessities, I think it not unreasonable that such injuries occur on every hand." Such the German said.

The emperor, who reckoned the matter a piece of sarcasm, answered as follows. "The inclination of the multitude, perpetually unmanagable and uncontrollable, has not escaped our empire. Indeed, it was our care that you, foreign strangers, should pass uninjured through our [realm] without alleging or really experiencing any harm from us, lest we gain an ill repute among mankind for acting contrary to hospitality. Since, however, such things apparently seem unworthy to blame to your, inasmuch as you are very clever and well skilled in accurately investigating the nature of affairs, we owe you thanks. We shall not then consider how we should rein in the mass impulse of our people, but we shall attribute it to the mob's folly, as you have kindly instructed us. So it will no longer profit you to take the road in groups, nor thus to wander in a foreign land. Since this has seemed right, and the commonality are allowed to exercise their passions on every hand, foreigners are likely to suffer much from natives." So saying, he sent them back.

Knowing the Roman's army to be much less in number than the barbarians, but that it was equally superior in military science and perseverance in battle, he planned as follows. He commanded Prosoch and [Basil] Tzikandyles and many other Roman generals to lead out a sufficient force and take a stand confronting the Germans. They were arrayed thus: the least warlike, common part of the army stood far forward, in four



units; thereafter, the well-armed and armored; then those who rode swift horses; and finally, behind the line of battle, the Cumans with the Turks and the Roman's archer force. The Romans acted thus; as soon as the Germans saw this, seized by great eagerness and disorder, they advanced at a run. A fierce battle developed, and a great slaughter of Germans occurred. As they attacked, the Romans scientifically resisted and slew them.

*After the battle and the arrival of the French*

As he [Manuel] desired to separate the kings from each other and sympathized with the man [Conrad], he replied thus: "Men who claim to grow a little wise customarily observe matters not according to turns of fortune, but individually, apart from any sudden alteration. So when you were prospering we decided not to treat you beyond your worth, and now that you are in a moderately bad situation, we do not hesitate to welcome you back with those same things which we were eager to do in honor of a relative, the ruler of such nations, and to take counsel together regarding present circumstances, on account of the said [reasons] as well as of being of the same religion.

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John Kinnamos, trans. C. M. Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus by John Kinnamos* in *Records of Civilization Sources and Studies*, Vol. 95. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

## The Sack of Constantinople

*The following is a lament of the fall of Constantinople in 1204 by an eye-witness. Notice the comparison with the sack of Jerusalem by Salah al-Din fifteen years earlier.*

O Christ our Emperor, what tribulation and distress of men at that time! The roaring of the sea, the darkening and dimming of the sun, the turning of the moon into blood, the displacement of the stars—did they not foretell in this way the last evils? Indeed, we have seen the abomination of desolation stand in the holy place, rounding off meretricious and petty speeches and other things which were moving definitely, if not altogether, contrariwise to those things deemed by Christians as holy and ennobling the word of faith.

Such then, to make a long story short, were the outrageous crimes committed by the Western armies against the inheritance of Christ. Without showing any feelings of humanity whatsoever, they exacted from all their money and chattel, dwellings and clothing, leaving to them nothing of all their goods. Thus behaved the brazen neck, the haughty spirit, the high brow, the ever-shaved and youthful cheek, the bloodthirsty right hand, the wrathful nostril, the disdainful eye, the insatiable jaw, the hateful heart, the piercing and running speech practically dancing over the lips. More to blame were the learned and wise among men, they who were faithful to their oaths, who loved the truth and hated evil, who were both more pious and just and scrupulous in keeping the commandments of Christ than we "Greeks." Even more culpable were those who had raised the cross to their shoulders, who had time and again sworn by it and the sayings of the Lord to cross over Christian lands without bloodletting, neither turning aside to the right nor inclining to the left, and to take up arms against the Saracens and to stain red their swords in their blood; they who sacked Jerusalem, and had taken an oath not to marry or to have sexual intercourse with women as long as they carried the cross on their shoulders, and who were consecrated to God and commissioned to follow in his footsteps.

In truth, they were exposed as frauds. Seeking to avenge the Holy Sepulcher, they raged openly against Christ and sinned by overturning the Cross with the Cross they bore on their backs, not even shuddering to trample on it for the sake of a little gold and silver. By grasping pearls, they rejected Christ, the pearl of great price, scattering among the most accursed brutes the All-Hallowed One. The sons of Ishmael did not behave in this way, for when the Latins overpowered Sion the Latins showed no compassion or kindness to their race. Neither did the Ishmaelites neigh after Latin women, nor did they turn the cenotaph of Christ into a common burial place of the fallen, nor did they transform the entranceway of the life-bringing tomb into a passageway leading down into Hades, nor did they replace the Resurrection with the Fall. Rather they allowed everyone

to depart in exchange for the payment of a few coins; they took only ransom money and left to the people all their possessions, even though these numbered more than the grains of sand. The enemies of Christ dealt magnanimously with the infidels, inflicting upon them neither sword, nor fire, nor hunger, nor persecution, nor nakedness, nor bruises, nor constraints. How differently, as we have briefly recounted, the Latins treated us who love Christ and are their fellow believers, guiltless of any wrong against them. . . .

O prolific City, once garbed in royal silk and purple and now filthy and squalid and heir to many evils, having the need of true children! O City, formerly enthroned on high, striding far and wide, magnificent in comeliness and more becoming in stature; now thy luxurious garments and elegant royal veils are rent and torn; thy flashing eye has grown dark, and thou art like unto an aged furnace women all covered with soot, and thy formerly glistening and delightful countenance is now furrowed by loose wrinkles.

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**Source:**

Niketas Choniates, trans. H. J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1984. pp 316-317.

## Background on the Islamic Caliphate

On the eve of the Crusades, two of the three dominant powers in the Mediterranean were Muslim. By the seventh and eighth centuries, the Muslims had conquered the Arabian peninsula, the Fertile Crescent, much of Central Asia, the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Spain, Sicily and more. Check the [map](#).

The conquest of these territories spread rather quickly. It was a heterogeneous configuration with a small population of Arabs ruling a majority of non Arabs. This expansion was mainly a political expansion and not a religious one. There were not forced conversions to Islam as we believe. There were "Persons of the Book" who were called *dhimmi*, or persons of protected status. As long as they paid the *jizya*, a tax or tribute to the caliph, they would be protected. There were also other restrictions such as not wearing arms and showing visible signs of their faith. Thus, although there was no forced conversion, there was some social pressure to convert and they would easily accept converts.

**The Umayyads 661-750 CE** [Click here for more information on the Umayyads](#)

During the Umayyad period, the bureaucracy became increasingly formalized. Arabic language became used throughout the empire. The caliphs were powerful but unpopular. They were not as interested in religion as in power. This period was the most centralized with the capital at Damascus, the capital of present day Syria.

**The Abbasids 750-1258 CE** [Click here for more information on the Abbasids](#)

The capital was moved from Damascus to a new city Baghdad in 762. This move had economic and political ramifications. With the Umayyad capital at Damascus there had been a Mediterranean orientation. With Baghdad the orientation was East and the Indian Ocean.

The Abbasids ruled over the entire, vast Islamic empire. Soon, however, outlying provinces--beginning with Spain--began to achieve independence from the Abbasid rulers in their capital of Baghdad. By the end of the ninth century, the caliphs controlled little more than southern Iraq, though at times they managed to reconquer other provinces.

But even as other, independent dynasties came to power, the Abbasid caliphs remained. People throughout the Islamic world still looked to them with admiration and respect.

### The Fatimids

As the caliphate in Baghdad weakened, other powers emerged. In North Africa a branch of Shi'a Muslims called Isma'ilis was formed. Differing from the dominant Sunni Branch, they conquered most of North Africa and established another caliphate in 909. They conquered Cairo and Fustat in Egypt in 969. By the time of the Crusades they are in power in North Africa. The Fatimids attempt to rescue Jerusalem after the defeat to the Franks in 1099 but fail. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century before the Third Crusade we will see a Kurdish/Turkish leader Salah al-Din defeat the Fatimids and create a more united control in the area of the Middle East.

**The Seljuk Turks** [Click here for more information on the Seljuks](#)

The Turks began in the 6<sup>th</sup> century as a nomadic peoples from the area in Central Area of what is Tukestan. Some of these Turks were converted during the Arab expansion across the Oxus River. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, many Turks moved into the Arab empire as slaves and soldiers. Although historians do not know how, there were many peaceful conversions around the year 1000.

With these conversions the eastern frontier collapses, and new political groupings of Turks form. One family, the Seljuks, create a dynasty. They enter the Islamic world a century before the Crusades. They take control of Iran, Iraq (with Baghdad), and parts of Syria. They leave the Abbasid caliph in place but hold the real political control.

They happen to bring a new political unity for the Islamic world. The Seljuks expand north and meet with the Byzantine armies at Manzikert in 1071, where they take the army and the Byzantine emperor. They like Anatolia and begin to establish more permanent leadership with the area called "Rum" for Rome. During this period the leaders spoke Turkish while the peoples spoke Arabic.

## The Military

During the Arab conquests the army was made up from volunteers. After a quick expansion, the system began to decline, and under the Umayyads professionalism begins. Slave soldiers were brought into the Islamic world from the mid-9th century onward, and (strangely) often formed the elite units within the various armies. From the tenth century onward, Turks from the Central Asian steppes, with their magnificent skills in the use of horses and weapons, tended to dominate in much of the Middle East.

## The Economy

During the era preceding the Crusades the economy of the Islamic world was dominant from the Western Mediterranean to India. Baghdad, the capital, was its largest city, and the economic basis of the town was artisan with highly skilled craftsmen. There was a high level of skill and specialization involved. Textiles with fabrics of wool, cotton, linen, and silk were produced by artisans in almost all the Muslim territories. Carpet weavers in Persia, Azerbaijan, and Bukhara were renowned far and wide. Egypt also became a leading center for linens and cotton textiles. The art of metalworking achieved a high standard, as well as glassware and ceramics. In comparison to the cities, the rural areas were relatively backward and remained agricultural.

This specialization would not be possible without a high level of trade. At the beginning Arab merchants were granted the trading privileges, but soon other groups such as Jews enjoyed equal trading rights. Trade involved shipping as well as caravan routes. The Arabic language and culture facilitated the trade along the Mediterranean and the Middle East to India and China.

## Contributions

With the large towns and trading economy, a large middle-class emerged, consisting of scholars, doctors, artists, and highly specialized artisans. Many of these intellectuals provided very important translations of Greek and Roman texts into Arabic. This was also a golden age of science and medicine. Some examples

**Al-Khawarizmi** (780-850) introduced the Indian system of numerals, wrote several works on algebra and calculated the movements of the stars.

The physician and philosopher **Ibn Sina** (Lat. Avicenna 980-1037) wrote down the whole of medical knowledge in a "Canon of Medicine".

**Ibn al-Haytam** (d. 1059) composed scientific treatises about optics and the human eye.

**Al-Biruni** (973-1050) from Central Asia acquired knowledge on an encyclopedic scale

**Al-Razi** of Persia was a physician, chemist and philosopher who wrote renowned treatises on infectious diseases.

Other schools of thought were also developed:

**Al-Zarawi**, one of the leading physicians in the Spanish Caliphate wrote a series of

medical and pharmacological textbooks.

**Ibn al-Baytar** of Malaga wrote treatises on medicinal herbs and medicaments in which 1400 drugs were listed.

The geographer **Al-Idrisi**, who was born in Ceuta wrote a geographical description of the then known world.

The illustrious physician and philosopher **Ibn Rushd** (Lat. Averroes, 1126-1198), born in Cordoba, who developed an original philosophical system and later had great influence on European philosophy.

Cities became great centers of learning with new universities and libraries such as Alexandria, Cairo, and Cordoba.

## The Crusades

As stated before Christians and Jews as "People of the Book" were granted some toleration and privileges. There were, however, some breaks of the peace for brief periods. For example, Caliph Hakim had ordered Church property to be destroyed and plundered and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to be destroyed in 1009.

When the Crusaders arrived in 1095, they were seen as a minor irritant. Just another invasion similar to what they faced in other areas of the empire. The Muslims did not see it as a holy war until Nur al-Din escalated it in the Second Crusade and the Third Crusade with Salah al-Din.



[George McDowell](#)

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## The Siege of Damascus

*The most significant episode of the inconclusive Second Crusade, which was begun under the shadow of the loss of Edessa, was the short and ineffective siege of Damascus (1148). Ibn al-Qalanisi was an eye-witness, and provides a nice account.*

At the beginning of 543/1148 news was brought from several sources of the arrival of a Frankish fleet on the Syrian coast. Troops disembarked on the ports of Tyre and Acre to link up with the Franks already there. These were estimated at 100,000 men, allowing for the depredations of war, plague and famine. After the new arrivals had completed the obligatory pilgrimage to Jerusalem and returned, some by land and some by sea, they assembled in the camps of the King of Germany, the leading Frankish noble there, and of other, lesser princes. They had not decided which of the Muslim cities to attack. In the end they decided to besiege Damascus, for in their evil hearts they deluded themselves that they could take it, since the town and country districts merge into one another. The amir of Damascus, Mu'in ad-Din Unur, received several warnings of the invasion and made preparations to defend his realm and repulse the enemy. . . .They[the Franks] closed in on the city walls, coming up closer than any army in ancient or modern times had ever been. On this day the Malakite lawyer and scholar, the imam Yusuf al-Findalawi-may God have mercy on him!-fell in battle, a martyr to the Faith, by the river at ar-Rabwa. He was facing the enemy and refusing to withdraw, in obedience to the precepts of God Almighty in His noble Book. The devout 'Abd ar-Rahman al-Halhuli met the same fate.

The Franks set to work to cut down the trees and build fortifications with them, and to destroy the bridges. This occupied them for the whole of the night. The population of Damascus, after the experiences of the last hours, were disheartened and uncertain what to do. But at dawn on the Sunday the Muslim army made a sortie, attacked the Franks and defeated them, killing and wounding large numbers. . .

[The following] day a large detachment of archers arrived on foot from the Bija, increasing the number of defenders and doubling their supply of arms. . .[The Franks] dared not take the initiative until they could see an opportunity to charge the Muslims, or an avenue of escape. Anyone bold enough to come within range of the Muslims was struck down by an arrow, stone, or lance. Men of the Damascus militia and from the surrounding regions lay in wait for the Franks along paths they thought safe and killed anyone who used them. The heads were taken to Damascus to be exchanged for a reward; in this way a large number of heads was collected.

News reached the Franks from many sources that the Muslims were bearing down on them to attack them and wipe them out, and they felt that their defeat was certain. They consulted among themselves, and decided that the only escape from the trap or abyss that loomed ahead of them was to take flight. At dawn on the following Wednesday they retreated in miserable confusion and disorder.

*Another account by Sibt Ibn Al-Jauzi*

. . . It was harvest time. The Franks went down into the valley and ate much of the crop, and this gave them dysentery. Many died of it, and all the others were ill. The people of Damascus were in great need, but gave alms of what they had, each in proportion to his possessions. The whole population, men, women and children, assembled in the Great Mosque. Uthman's Qur'an was displayed, and the people sprinkled their heads with ashes and wept tears of supplication. And God heard their prayers.

The Franks had with them a great Priest with a long beard, whose teachings they obeyed. On the tenth day of their siege of Damascus he mounted his ass, hung the cross round his neck. He had the Testaments and the crosses and the Holy Scriptures set before him and assembled the army in his presence; the only ones to remain behind were those guarding the tents. Then he said: 'The Messiah has promised me that today I shall wipe out this city.' At this moment the Muslims opened the city gates and in the name of Islam charges as one man into the face of death. Never, in pagan times or since the coming of Islam, was there a day like this. One of the men of the Damascus militia reached the Priest, struck his head from his body and killed his ass too. As the whole Muslim army bore down upon them the Franks turned and fled. The Muslims killed 10,000, smote their crosses and their cavalry with Greek fire, and pursued the army as far as the tents. Night separated them, and in the morning the Franks were gone and no trace of them remained.

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**Source:**

*Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. F. Gabrieli, trans. E. J. Costello.  
London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.



## Salah al-Din

*Salah al-Din's Muslim biographer, bha ad-Din Ibn Shaddad, who was a member of his entourage, writes an adulatory pen portrait.*

God—may he be exalted—has said, ‘And as for those who fight us, we guide them along our path. Indeed, God is on the side of those who do good.’ There are many texts on jihad in the Koran. Saladin was extremely diligent in waging this holy war, and it was constantly on his mind. One could swear by one’s right hand without fear of contradiction that, from the time he first set out, intent on jihad, until he died, he did not spend a single gold or silver coin except on jihad and pious works. His heart and mind were so taken over by this burning zeal for jihad that he could speak of nothing else. Out of his desire to fight for God’s cause, he left behind him his family, children, country, home and all the towns under his control.

Saladin was sociable, well mannered and entertaining. He could recite by heart the genealogies and battles of the Arab tribes, and knew all their exploits. He could even recall the genealogies of their horses. In addition he had studied the curiosities and wonders of the world. As a result, those who sat with him learned from him things they would never have heard elsewhere. He would put his friends at ease and raise their spirits. If anyone was sick he would ask about his illness, his treatment, his food and drink and whether there was any change in his condition.

The purity of Saladin’s character was always evident: when in company, he would allow no one to be spoken ill of in his presence, preferring to hear only of their good traits; when he himself spoke, I never say him disposed to insult anyone; when he took up his pen to write, he would never use words to harm another Muslim.

He always stuck to his promise and was loyal. No orphan ever came before him without Saladin’s praying for God’s mercy on the child’s parents and offering to help him maintain the same level of livelihood as his father had afforded him. If an older member of the orphan’s family was still alive and capable of accepting the responsibility, Saladin would hand the child over to him; and if the child had no relatives Saladin would set aside enough for him to live on, and send him to someone to take care of him and his upbringing. Similarly with the aged, he always treated them kindly and generously. He continued to behave this way until the day that God called him to the seat of his grace and mercy.

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## Source

Hallam, Elizabeth. *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the wars Between Christianity and Islam*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. pp 155-155.

## **Battle of Hittin, 1187**

*This account is given by Salah al-Din's own secretary and chronicler of his military campaigns, Imad ad-Din al-Isfani.*

The sultan, Saladin, stayed up that night of 2 July 1187 until he had positioned each company's detachments of front-rank archers and had filled their wooden and leather quivers with arrows. The number of arrows he distributed amounted to four hundred loads, not counting the supply carried by seventy dromedaries he brought on to the battlefield, from which anyone could take a supply of arrows.

As the day of 3 July dawned, our archers emerged, setting alight the people of hell-fire with a blaze of arrows. There was a creaking of bows and a plucking of strings on that day. And the army poured down on the Franks their scorching rays. As the heat flared up the forces of evil began to fade. A searing thirst descended: the air burned as passions turned to fear. Those dogs, panting, their lolling, plagued by a havoc of their own making, turned their minds to thoughts of water only to be met by the flames of hell and to be overcome by the fire of the midday sun.

That took place on Friday, the day of congregation in the mosques. Behind our army at no great distance was Lake Tiberias. The road to it had been barred from the Franks. Devastated by a thirst fed by fiery fuel, they stood patiently, steadfastly, obstinately; then struggling, rabid with greed, they drank what water their flasks contained. They lapped up whatever was held in the surrounding man-made wells, exhausting even the source of their tears as they teetered on the brink of calamity. Night came and the storm of battle subsided. They camped bewildered, drunk with thirst, yearning for the lake.

O God! What a night guarded by the angels, and what a dawn, its breezes a succession of God's mercies. The Sultan Saladin, trusting in God's victory, passed among the ranks, encouraging them and promising them the victory they expected from God, and urging them to jihad. They were strengthened by the sight of him, renewing their efforts, blocking the enemies' attack and repelling them. The sultan had a slave named Mankurus, fighting at the very front. His horse, being headstrong, dashed off with him far away from his companions. As his friends were unable to keep up, he found himself isolated among the Franks. His feet caught fast in this mire of death, he fought until they finally overwhelmed him. On capturing his head, they imagined they had taken one of the sultan's sons. As for him, he took his martyr's place by the All-merciful.

The Muslims, on witnessing his martyrdom and the cruel treatment he had received, felt

their zeal well up, their hearts intent on God alone. The army appeared as though at full strength, and victory within reach. Victory occurred on that day, Saturday 4 July 1187. Tormented by thirst, the Franks succumbed to defeat, impotent to recover their fall. The breeze was in their direction, and beneath their feet was grass. Some of our holy warriors set fire to the grass. Its flame bore down on them, and its heat became intense. They, the people of the Trinity, were consumed by a worldly fire of three types, each invincible and obliterating: the fire of flames, the fire of thirst, and the fire of arrows. The Franks longed for release, and attempted a sortie, but in vain.

No matter how hard they fought they were repulsed; no matter how often they rallied, each time they were encircled. Not even an ant crawled out from among them, nor could they defend themselves against the onslaught. They retreated to Mount Hattin to escape the storm of destruction; but on Hattin itself they found themselves encompassed by fatal thunderbolts. Arrowheads, transfixed them; the peaks laid them low; bows pinned them down; fate tore at them; calamity chewed them up; and disaster tainted them.

Not since the Frankish occupation of the Syrian coast had the Muslims' thirst for victory been quenched to the extent it was on the day of Hattin, 4 July 1187. God—may he be honoured and glorified—have the upper hand to the Sultan Saladin and enabled him to perform that in which kings had proved themselves deficient. By his grace, God guided him to obey His command and, by performing his duty, to attain the goal set before him; the road leading to his enemies' destruction and his followers' conquest God made straight for the sultan. He reserved for him the most illustrious of days, this most righteous of victories, tis happiest of joys and this most abundant of successes. Were no other merit his that that of this day, in majesty and valour Saladin would still stand out above all the kings of former times let alone those of this age. Yet this propitious attack was but a prelude to the conquest of Jerusalem, a tightening of the knot on his way to an inescapable triumph.

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## Source

Hallam, Elizabeth. *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the wars Between Christianity and Islam*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. pp 157-160.

For another account see [Ernoul, a Frank](#) from the [Medieval Sourcebook](#)



## Saladin Takes Jerusalem

*This account is from Ibn al-Athir after the battles for Jerusalem.*

When the Franks saw how violently the Muslims were attacking, how continuous and effective was the fire from the ballistas and how busily the sappers were breaching the walls, meeting no resistance, they grew desperate, and their leaders assembled to take counsel. They decided to ask for safe-conduct out of the city and to hand Jerusalem over to Saladin. They sent a deputation of their lords and nobles to ask for terms, but when they spoke of it to Saladin he refused to grant their request. 'We shall deal with you,' he said, 'just as you dealt with the population of Jerusalem when you took it in 492/1099, with murder and enslavement and other such savageries!' The messengers returned empty handed. Then Balian ibn Barzan asked for safe conduct for himself so that he might appear before Saladin to discuss developments. Consent was given, and he presented himself and once again began asking for a general amnesty in return for surrender. The Sultan still refused his requests and entreaties to show mercy. Finally, despairing of this approach, Balian said: 'Know, O Sultan, that there are very many of us in this city, God alone knows how many. At the moment we are fighting half-heartedly in the hope of saving our lives, hoping to be spared by you as you have spared others; this is because of the horror of death and our love for life. But if we see that death is inevitable, then by God we shall kill our children and our wives, burn our possessions, so as not to leave you with a dinar or a drachma or a single man or woman to enslave. When this is done, we shall pull down the Sanctuary of the Rock and the Masjid al-Aqsa and the other sacred places, slaughtering the Muslim prisoners we hold—5,000 of them—and killing every horse and animal we possess. Then we shall come out to fight you like men fighting for their lives, when each man, before he falls dead, kills his equals; we shall die with honour, or win a noble victory!'

Then Saladin took council with his advisors, all of whom were in favor of granting the assurances requested by the Franks, without forcing them to take extreme measures whose outcome could not be foreseen. 'Let us consider them as being already our prisoners,' they said, 'and allow them to ransom themselves on terms agreed between us.' The Sultan agreed to give the Franks assurances of safety on the understanding that each man, rich and poor alike, should pay ten dinar, children of both sexes two dinar and women five dinar. All who paid this sum within forty days should go free, and those who had not paid at the end of the time should be enslaved. Balian ibn Barzan offered 30,000 dinar as ransom for the poor, which was accepted, and the city surrendered on Friday 27 rajab/2 October 1187, a memorable day on which the Muslim flags were hoisted over the walls of Jerusalem. . . .

The Grand Patriarch of the Franks left the city with the treasures from the Dome of the Rock, the Masjid al-Aqsa, the Church of the Resurrection and others, God alone knows the amount of treasure; he also took an equal quantity of money. Saladin made no difficulties, and when he was advised to sequester the whole lot for Islam, replied that he would not go back on his word. He took only ten dinar from him, and let him go, heavily escorted, to Tyre. . .

Once the city was taken and the infidels had left, Saladin ordered that the shrines should be restored to their original state. The Templars had built their living quarters against al-Aqsa, with storerooms and latrines and other necessary offices, taking up part of the area of al-Aqsa. This was all restored to its former state. The Sultan ordered that the Dome of the Rock be cleansed of all pollution, and this was done.

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**Source:**

*Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. F. Gabrieli, trans. E. J. Costello.  
London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

## **Usmah Ibn Munqidh (1095-1188):**

### **Autobiography, excerpts on the Franks**

From [The Medieval Sourcebook](#)

*Usamah (1095-1188), was a Muslim warrior and courtier, who fought against the Crusaders with Saladin. Yet as a resident of the area around Palestine, he also had a chance to befriend a number of them. His autobiography dates from around 1175.*

Mysterious are the works of the Creator, the author of all things! When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks, he cannot but glorify Allah (exalted is he!) and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting, but nothing else; just as animals have only the virtues of strength and carrying loads. I shall now give some instances of their doings and their curious mentality.

#### **A Proposal to Send My Son to Europe**

In the army of King Fulk, son of Fulk, was a Frankish reverend knight who had just arrived from their land in order to make the holy pilgrimage and then return home. He was of my intimate fellowship and kept such constant company with me that he began to call me "my brother." Between us were mutual bonds of amity and friendship. When he resolved to return by sea to his homeland, he said to me: My brother, I am leaving for my country and I want you to send with me thy son (my son, who was then fourteen years old, was at that time in my company) to our country, where he can see the knights and learn wisdom and chivalry. When he returns, he will be like a wise man. Thus there fell upon my ears words which would never come out of the head of a sensible man; for even if my son were to be taken captive, his captivity could not bring him a worse misfortune than carrying him into the lands of the Franks. However, I said to the man: By thy life, this has exactly been my idea. But the only thing that prevented me from carrying it out was the fact that his grandmother, my mother, is so fond of him and did not this time let him come out with me until she exacted an oath from me to the effect that I would return him to her. Thereupon he asked, "Is thy mother still alive?" "Yes." I



replied. "Well," said he, "disobey her not."

### **Frankish Medicine**

A case illustrating their curious medicine is the following: The lord of al-Munaytirah wrote to my uncle asking him to dispatch a physician to treat certain sick persons among his people. My uncle sent him a Christian physician named Thabit. Thabit was absent but ten days when he returned. So we said to him, "How quickly has thou healed thy patients!" He said: They brought before me a knight in whose leg an abscess had grown; and a woman afflicted with imbecility. To the knight I applied a small poultice until the abscess opened and became well; and the woman I put on diet and made her humor wet. Then a Frankish physician came to them and said, "This man knows nothing about treating them." He then said to the knight, "Which wouldst thou prefer, living with one leg or dying with two?" The latter replied, "Living with one leg." The physician said, "Bring me a strong knight and a sharp ax." A knight came with the ax. And I was standing by. Then the physician laid the leg of the patient on a block of wood and bade the knight strike his leg with the ax and chop it off at one blow. Accordingly he struck it-while I was looking on-one blow, but the leg was not severed. He dealt another blow, upon which the marrow of the leg flowed out and the patient died on the spot. He then examined the woman and said, "This is a woman in whose head there is a devil which has possessed her. Shave off her hair." Accordingly they shaved it off and the woman began once more to eat their ordinary diet-garlic and mustard. Her imbecility took a turn for the worse. The physician then said, "The devil has penetrated through her head." He therefore took a razor, made a deep cruciform incision on it, peeled off the skin at the middle of the incision until the bone of the skull was exposed and rubbed it with salt. The woman also expired instantly. Thereupon I asked them whether my services were needed any longer, and when they replied in the negative I returned home, having learned of their medicine what I knew not before.

### **Another Example of Frankish Medicine**

I have, however, witnessed a case of their medicine which was quite different from that.

The king of the Franks had for treasurer a knight named Bernard, who (may Allah's curse be upon him!) was one of the most accursed and wicked among the

Franks. A horse kicked him in the leg, which was subsequently infected and which opened in fourteen different places. Every time one of these cuts would close in one place, another would open in another place. All this happened while I was praying for his perdition. Then came to him a Frankish physician and removed from the leg all the ointments which were on it and began to swab it with very strong vinegar. By this treatment all the cuts were healed and the man became well again. He was up again like a devil. Another case illustrating their curious medicine is the following: In Shayzar we had an artisan named abu-al-Fath, who had a boy whose neck was afflicted with scrofula. Every time a part of it would close, another part would open. This man happened to go to Antioch on business of his, accompanied by his son. A Frank noticed the boy and asked his father about him. Abu-al-Fath replied, "This is my son." The Frank said to him, 'Wilt thou swear by thy religion that if I prescribe to you a medicine which will cure thy boy, thou wilt charge nobody fees for prescribing it thyself? In that case, I shall prescribe to you a medicine which will cure the boy.'" The man took the oath and the Frank said: Take uncrushed leaves of glasswort, burn them, then soak the ashes in olive oil and sharp vinegar. Treat the scrofula with them until the spot on which it is growing is eaten up. Then take burnt lead, soak it in ghee butter and treat him with it. That will cure him. The father treated the boy accordingly, and the boy was cured. The sores closed and the boy returned to his normal condition of health. I have myself treated with this medicine many who were afflicted with such disease, and the treatment was successful in removing the cause of the complaint.

### **The Franks and Marital Jealousy**

The Franks are void of all zeal and jealousy. One of them may be walking along with his wife. He meets another man who takes the wife by the hand and steps aside to converse with her while the husband is standing on one side waiting for his wife to conclude the conversation. If she lingers too long for him, he leaves her alone with the conversant and goes away. Here is an illustration which I myself witnessed:

When I used to visit Nablus, I always took lodging with a man named Mu'izz, whose home was a lodging house for the Muslims. The house had windows which opened to the road, and there stood opposite to it on the other side of the road a house belonging to a Frank who sold wine for the merchants. He would take some wine in a bottle and go around announcing it by shouting, "So and so, the

merchant, has just opened a cask full of this wine. He who wants to buy some of it will find it in such and such a place." The Frank's pay for the announcement made would be the wine in that bottle. One day this Frank went home and found a man with his wife in the same bed. He asked him, "What could have made you enter into my wife's room?" The man replied, "I was tired, so I went in to rest." "But how," asked he, "didst thou get into my bed?" The other replied, "I found a bed that was spread, so I slept in it." "But," said he, "my wife was sleeping together with you!" The other replied, "Well, the bed is hers. How could I therefore have prevented her from using her own bed?" "By the truth of my religion," said the husband, "if thou shouldst do it again, thou and I would have a quarrel." Such was for the Frank the entire expression of his disapproval and the limit of his jealousy. . . .

Another illustration: I entered the public bath in Sur [Tyre] and took my place in a secluded part. One of my servants thereupon said to me, "There is with us in the bath a woman." When I went out, I sat on one of the stone benches and behold! the woman who was in the bath had come out all dressed and was standing with her father just opposite me. But I could not be sure that she was a woman. So I said to one of my companions, "By Allah, see if this is a woman," by which I meant that he should ask about her. But he went, as I was looking at him, lifted the end of her robe and looked carefully at her. Thereupon her father turned toward me and said, "This is my daughter. Her mother is dead and she has nobody to wash her hair. So I took her in with me to the bath and washed her head." I replied, "Thou hast well done! This is something for which thou shalt be rewarded [by Allah]!"

### **Frankish Piracy**

I once went in the company of al-Amir Mu'in-al-Din (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) to Jerusalem. We stopped at Nablus. There a blind man, a Muslim, who was still young and was well dressed, presented himself before al-amir carrying fruits for him and asked permission to be admitted into his service in Damascus. The amir consented. I inquired about this man and was informed that his mother had been married to a Frank whom she had killed. Her son used to practice ruses against the Frankish pilgrims and cooperate with his mother in assassinating them. They finally brought charges against him and tried his case according to the Frankish way of procedure.

They installed a huge cask and filled it with water. Across it they set a board of wood. They then bound the arms of the man charged with the act, tied a rope around his shoulders and dropped him into the cask, their idea being that in case he was innocent, he would sink in the water and they would then lift him up with the rope so that he might not die in the water; and in case he was guilty, he would not sink in the water. This man did his best to sink when they dropped him into the water, but he could not do it. So he had to submit to their sentence against him-- may Allah's curse be upon them! They pierced his eyeballs with red-hot awls. Later this same man arrived in Damascus. Al-Amir Mu'in-al-Din (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) assigned him a stipend large enough to meet all his needs and said to a slave of his, "Conduct him to Burhan-al-Din al-Balkhi (may Allah's mercy rest upon his soul!) and ask him on my behalf to order somebody to teach this man the Koran and something of Muslim jurisprudence." Hearing that, the blind man remarked, "May triumph and victory be thine! But this was never my thought..... What didst thou think I was going to do for thee?" asked Mu'in-al-Din. The blind man replied, "I thought thou wouldst give me a horse, a mule and a suit of armor and make me a knight." Mu'in-al-Din then said, "I never thought that a blind man could become a knight."

### **Orientalized Franks**

Among the Franks are those who have become acclimatized and have associated long with the Muslims. These are much better than the recent comers from the Frankish lands. But they constitute the exception and cannot be treated as a rule. Here is an illustration. I dispatched one of my men to Antioch on business. There was in Antioch at that time al-Ra'is Theodoros Sophianos, to whom I was bound by mutual ties of amity. His influence in Antioch was supreme. One day he said to my man, "I am invited by a friend of mine who is a Frank. Thou shouldst come with me so that thou mayest see their fashions." My man related the story in the following words: I went along with him and we came to the home of a knight who belonged to the old category of knights who came with the early expeditions of the Franks. He had been by that time stricken off the register and exempted from service, and possessed in Antioch an estate on the income of which he lived. The knight presented an excellent table, with food extraordinarily clean and delicious. Seeing me abstaining from food, he said, "Eat, be of good cheer! I never eat Frankish dishes, but I have Egyptian women cooks and never eat except their cooking. Besides, pork never enters my home." I ate, but guardedly, and after that we departed. As I was passing in the market place, a Frankish woman all of a

sudden hung to my clothes and began to mutter words in their language, and I could not understand what she was saying. This made me immediately the center of a big crowd of Franks. I was convinced that death was at hand. But all of a sudden that same knight approached. On seeing me, he came and said to that woman, "What is the matter between you and this Muslim?" She replied, "This is he who has killed my brother Hurso." This Hurso was a knight in Afiimiyah who was killed by someone of the army of Hamah. The Christian knight shouted at her, saying, "This is a bourgeois (i.e., a merchant) who neither fights nor attends a fight." He also yelled at the people who had assembled, and they all dispersed. Then he took me by the hand and went away. Thus the effect of that meal was my deliverance from certain death.\*

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## Sources

Usamah ibn Munquidh. *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades*, Philip Hitti, trans., New York: Columbia, UP, 1929.

See also:

. *Arab Historians of the Crusades* Francesco Gabrieli, trans. Berkley: University of California Press, 1969

## **Background on the Jews during the Crusades**

In 63 BCE the Romans conquered Palestine, where most Jews of the time lived, and created the province of Judea. In 66 CE the Jewish forces rebelled. Roman forces crushed the rebels, captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish temple. When revolts broke out again in the next century, Romans leveled Jerusalem. In 135 CE, they drove the Jews out of their homeland and forbade them to return. Jews scattered throughout communities around the Mediterranean and Babylonia.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> century of CE, the emperor Constantine adopted Christianity and created a new capital of Constantinople (the Greek city of Byzantium), which led to a different Roman presence in the area. The region became dominated by Christians with churches built on holy sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Galilee. The Jews were deprived of their relative autonomy, as well as their right to hold public positions, and were forbidden to enter Jerusalem except on one day of the year to mourn the destruction of the Temple.

### **Islam**

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Persians gained control of the city with the help of the Jews. However, in 629 the Byzantines (Romans) regained control of the city and again expelled the Jewish population. There was a new power rising at the same time. Islam with its roots in Judaism and Christianity began to dominate the area. In 632, four years after the death of Muhammad, Arabs began to expand into Palestine. They took control of Damascus in 635 with the caliph ruling from there, with Jerusalem taken in 638. Eventually the Muslims took control of Iraq to India and Central Asia, as well as North Africa and Spain under the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) and the Abbasids (750-1258).

During this period, Jewish settlement in the area resumed. As "People of the Book" the Jewish community was "protected" under Islamic rule, which safeguarded their lives, property, property, and freedom of worship in return for payment of special poll and land taxes. However, the subsequent introduction of restrictions against non-Muslims affected the Jews' public conduct as well as their religious and legal status. The imposition of heavy taxes on agricultural land compelled many to move from rural areas to towns, where their circumstances hardly improved, while increasing social and economic discrimination forced many Jews to leave the country. By the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community in the area had diminished considerably and had lost some of its organizational and religious cohesiveness.

The Jewish economy developed during this time as the restrictions on Jewish economic activities were almost nonexistent. Other factors which contributed to their rise as traders. The vast territory of the caliphate opened new trading opportunities. The Hebrew language common to all Jews as well as Arabic used throughout the caliphate made it easier to communicate. As conflicts between Christians and Muslims increased, Jews were tacitly recognized as a neutral element. Since there were Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean, they could find security and perhaps ransom money for pirates on the seas. The growing Jewish merchant class traded in slaves, spices, pharmaceuticals, metals, and textiles. They even formed partnerships with Muslims or Christians at times. Many also made a living in crafts and textiles such as dyeing and silk production.

### **Byzantium**

In comparison with the populous Jewish communities in the Islamic areas, Byzantine Jewry was numerically very small. The traveler Benjamin of Tudela found about 9,000 Jews in Byzantium. Modern scholars estimate about 12,000 in a population of 15 million. Jews in the area found persecution during the early years. They also blamed during a theological debate of icons in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries with both sides of the debate attacking Jews. In the two centuries leading up to the Crusades, the Jewish population met with periodic forced conversions, although

many of these attempts ended in failure.

However, there were not many restrictions on Jewish economic activity. Most made a living as farmers. Many engaged in trade and some were wealthy merchants. As in the Arab areas, many made living in crafts and textiles.

### **Western Europe**

At the start of the Early Middle Ages, Jewish existence under western Christendom was fairly peaceful. Jews were small in number and therefore did not threaten or pose resentments from those in power.

### **The Crusades**

The Crusades, as Christian holy wars, first began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Preludes to these wars were in Spain and Sicily where there was fighting to reconquer territories from the Muslims. During these earlier wars, Jews at the time were suspected of plotting the destruction of Christianity in complicity with the Muslims. In 1063 massacres against the Jews in Spain and France were so severe that Pope Alexander II (1061-73) found himself compelled to intervene and protect the Jews.

The Crusades to the Holy Land began after many Church reforms in Cluny (France) reached their peak. Everybody was suddenly aware of the fact that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was under the control of Muslim infidels. The idea spread that it was necessary to take the Holy Land from the Turks. Once arriving there the Jewish role in the crucifixion was recalled as well as venting frustration from the difficulty in fighting a war far away from home. These beliefs set the stage for the bloody attacks on Jews in the Near East as well as Western Europe.

The First Crusade began a speech from Pope Urban II calling for call to arms against Turks in order to save Christendom. The first group was a group of peasants under a religious leader Peter the Hermit. Later knights and feudal lords began their trek on the way ravaging Jewish homes and synagogues. Some of these Jewish communities took their own lives in a ritualistic manner rather than succumb to the Crusaders. During the Second and Third Crusades, a similar pattern followed with crusaders attacking the "Christ Killers" in the countryside. The Christian Church, especially under Bernard of Clairvaux did, however, have a greater role in protecting the Jews.

The first crusade saw European victories. Once cities and areas were under European control, Jews fled probably with an understanding of what was happening to the Jews in Europe. Once Jerusalem was taken, Jews were burned alive, sold into slavery, and small number survived but converted. Rural Jews in the area were either expelled or obliterated.

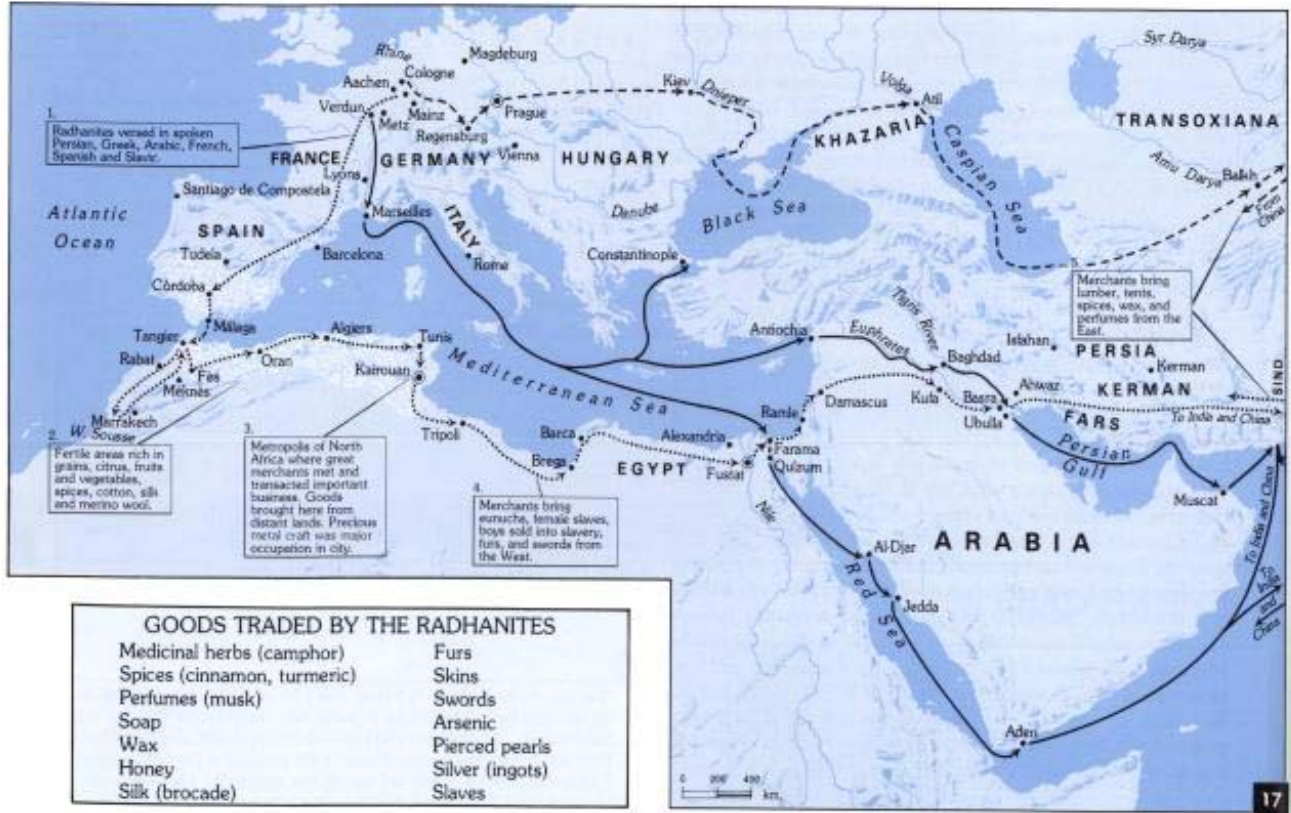
Once Crusader states were established, however, (after 1110) the Crusaders ruled but as a small percentage of the population and did allow for some toleration. Jews were permitted settlement except in Jerusalem. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries there were also increasing numbers of Jews as pilgrims and immigrants from the East and West. Historians disagree on how well off economically Jews were in the Crusader states. We can surmise through letters and tax rolls that there were opportunities, especially as trading merchants in the coastal cities.







# THE RADHANITE MERCHANTS



1. Radhanites versed in spoken Persian, Greek, Arabic, French, Spanish and Slavic.

2. Fertile areas rich in grains, citrus, fruits and vegetables, spices, cotton, silk and merino wool.

3. Metropolis of North Africa where great merchants met and transacted important business. Goods brought here from distant lands. Precious metal craft was major occupation in city.

4. Merchants bring eunuchs, female slaves, boys sold into slavery, furs, and swords from the West.

Merchants bring lumber, tents, spices, wax, and perfumes from the East.

GOODS TRADED BY THE RADHANITES	
Medicinal herbs (camphor)	Furs
Spices (cinnamon, turmeric)	Skins
Perfumes (musk)	Swords
Soap	Arsenic
Wax	Pierced pearls
Honey	Silver (ingots)
Silk (brocade)	Slaves

— Major Radhanite trade routes  
 ● Trade center

## **The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela**

*Benjamin Tudela was a Jew from Muslim Spain who traveled through southern France, Italy, Greece, and the Middle East on into China, India and Tibet. He traveled from 1169-1171. Note: his numbers for Jews in the area are for heads of families. [Click here for the map of his journeys.](#)*

### **Spain**

I journeyed first from my native town to the city of Saragossa, and thence by way of the River Ebro to Tortosa. From there I went a journey of two days to the ancient city of Taragona with its Cyclopean and Greek buildings. The like thereof is not found among any of the buildings in the country of Sepharad. It is situated by the sea, and two days' journey from the city of Barcelona, where there is a holy congregation, including sages, wise and illustrious men, such as R. Shessheth, R. Shealtiel, R. Solomon, and R. Abraham, son of Chiasda.

This is a small and beautiful city, lying upon the seacost. Merchants come thither from all quarters with their wares: from Greece, from Pisa, Genoa, Sicily, Alexandria in Egypt, Palestine, Africa and all its coasts. Thence it is a day and a half to Gerona, in which there is a small congregation of Jews. (59)

### **Constantinople**

Constantinople is a busy city, and merchants come to it from every country by sea or land, and there is none like it in the world except Baghdad, the great city of Islam. In Constantinople is the church of Santa Sophia, and the seat of the Pope of the Greeks, since the Greeks do not obey the pope of Rome. There are also churches according to the number of days of the year. A quantity of wealth beyond all telling is brought hither year by year as tribute from the two islands, and the castles and villages which are there. And the like of this wealth is not to be found in any other church in the world. And in this church there are pillars of gold and silver, and lamps of silver and gold more than a man can count. Close to the walls of the palace is also a place of amusement belonging to the king, which is called the Hippodrome, and every year on the anniversary of the birth of Jesus the king gives a great entertainment there. And in that place men from all the races of the world come before the king and queen with jugglery and without jugglery, and

they introduce lions, leopards, bears, and wild asses, and they engage them in combat with one another; and the same thing is done with birds. No entertainment like this can be found in any other land.

This King Emanuel built a great palace for the seat of his government upon the seacoast, in addition to the palaces which his fathers built, and he called its name Blachernae. He overlaid its columns with gold and silver, and engraved thereon representations of the battles before his day and of his own combats. He also set up a throne of gold and of precious stones, and a golden crown was suspended by a gold chain over the throne, so arranged that he might sit thereunder. It was inlaid with jewels of priceless value, and at night time no lights were required, for every one could see by the light which the stones gave forth. Countless other buildings are to be met with in the city. From every part of the empire of Greece tribute is brought here every year, and they fill strongholds with garments of silk, purple, and gold. Like unto these storehouses and this wealth there is nothing in the whole world to be found. It is said that the tribute of the city amounts every year to 20,000 gold pieces, derived both from the rents of shops and markets, and from the tribute of merchants who enter by sea or land.

The Greek inhabitants are very rich in gold and precious stones, and they go clothed in garments of silk with gold embroidery, and they ride horses, and look like princes. Indeed, the land is very rich in all cloth stuffs, and in bread, meat, and wine.

Wealth like that of Constantinople is not to be found in the whole world. Here are also men learned in all the books of the Greeks, and they eat and drink, every man under his vine and his fig-tree. (71)

They hire from amongst all nations called Loazim (Barbarians) to fight with the sultan Masud, King of the Togarmim (Seljuks), who are called Turks; for the natives are not warlike, but are as women who have no strength to fight. (71)

No Jews live in the city, for they have been placed behind an inlet of the sea. An arm of the sea of Marmora shuts them in on the one side, and they are unable to go out except by way of the sea, when they want to do business with the inhabitants. In the Jewish quarter are about 2,000 Rabbinite Jews and about 500 Karaites, and a fence divides them. . . . And amongst them are artificers in silk and many rich merchants. No Jew there is allowed to ride on horseback. The one exception is the king's physician, and through whom the Jews enjoy considerable alleviation of their oppression. For their condition is very low, and there is much hatred against them, which is fostered by the tanners, who throw out their dirty water in the streets before the doors of the Jewish houses and defile the Jews' quarter. So the Greeks hate the Jews, good and bad alike, and subject them to

great oppression, and beat them in the streets, and in every way treat them with rigour. Yet the Jews are rich and good, kindly and charitable, and bear their lot with cheerfulness. The district inhabited by the Jews is called Pera.(72)

## **Tyre**

There is no harbor like [Tyre] in the whole world. Tyre is a beautiful city. It contains about 500 Jews, some of the scholars of the Talmud. . . The Jews own sea-going vessels, and there are glass-makers amongst them who make that fine Tyranian glassware which is prized in all countries. In the vicinity is found sugar of a high class, for men plant it here, and people come from all over to buy it. A man can ascend the walls of New Tyre and sea ancient Tyre, which the sea has now covered, lying at a stone's throw from the new city. And should one care to go forth by boat, one can see the castles, market places, streets, and palaces, in the bed of the sea. New Tyre is a busy place of commerce, to which merchants flock from all quarters. (79)

## **Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is a small city fortified by three walls. It is full of people whom the Mohammedans call Jacobites, Syrians, Greeks, Georgians, and Franks, and of people of all tongues. It contains a dying-house, for which the Jews pay a small rent annually to the king, on condition that besides the Jews no other dyers be allowed in Jerusalem. There are about 200 Jews who dwell under the tower of David in one corner of the city. [*He goes on to describe some landmarks and gates of the city.*] (82)

## **Damascus**

. . .Damascus, the great city, which is the commencement of the empire of Nur-al-din, the king of the Togarmin, called Turks. It is a fair city of large extent, surrounded by walls, with many gardens and plantations, extending over fifteen miles on each side, and no district richer in fruit can be seen in all the world. From Mount Hermon descend the rivers Amana and Pharpar; for the city is situated at the foot of Mount Hermon. The Amana flows through the city, and by means of aqueducts the water is conveyed to the houses of great people, and into the streets and market places. The Pharpar flows through their gardens and plantations. It is a place carrying on trade with all countries. Here is a mosque of the Arabs called the Gami of Damascus; there is no building like it in the whole world, and they say that it was a palace of Ben Hadad. Here is a wall of crystal glass of magic workmanship, with apertures according to the days of the year, and as the sun's rays enter each of them in daily succession the hours of the day can be told by a graduated dial. In the palace are chambers built of gold and glass, and if the people walk

around the wall is between them. And there are columns overlaid with gold and silver, and columns of marble of all colours. . . Three thousand Jews abide in this city, and amongst them are learned and rich men. (90-91)

## **Baghdad**

Baghdad, the great city and royal residence of the Caliph Emir al Muminin al Abbassi of the family of Mohammed. He is at the head of the Mohammedan religion, and all the kings of Islam obey him; he occupies a similar position to that held by the Pope over Christians. . . .

There the great king, Al Abbassi the Caliph (Hafiz) holds his court, and he is kind unto Israel, and many belonging to the people of Israel are his attendants; he knows all languages, and is well versed in the law of Israel. He reads and writes the holy language (Hebrew). He will not partake of anything unless he has earned it by the work of his own hands. . . .He is truthful and trusty, speaking peace to all men.

Within the domains of the palace of the Caliph there are great buildings of marble and columns of silver and gold, and carvings upon rare stones are fixed in the walls. In the Caliph's palace are great riches, and towers filled with gold, silken garments, and all precious stones. . . .[During the parade of Ramadan] He is accompanied by all the nobles of Islam dressed in fine garments and riding horses, the princes of Arabia, the princes of Togarma and Daylam (Gilan), and the princes of Persia, Media and Ghuzz, and the princes of the land of Tibet, which is three months' journey distant, and westward of which lies the land of Samarkand. . . . Along the road the walls are adorned with silk and purple, and the inhabitants receive him with all kinds of song and exultation, and they dance before the great king who is styled Caliph. . .

He built, on the other side of the river, on the banks of an arm of the Euphrates which borders the city, a hospital consisting of blocks of houses and hospices for the sick poor who come to be healed. Here there are about sixty physicians' stores which provided from the Caliph's house with drugs and whatever else may be required. Every sick man who comes is maintained at the Caliph's expense and is medically treated. Here is a building called Dar-al-Maristan, where they keep charge of the demented people who have become insane in the towns through the great heat in the summer, and they chain each of them in iron chains until their reason becomes restored to them in the winter-time. Whilst they abide there, they are provided with food from the house of the Caliph, and when their reason is restored they are dismissed and each one of them goes to his house and his home. Money is given to those that have stayed in the hospices on their return to their homes. Every month the officers of the Caliph inquire and investigate whether they

have regained their reason, in which case they are discharged. All this the Caliph does out of charity to those that come to the city of Baghdad, whether they be sick of insane. The Caliph is a righteous man, and all his actions are good.

In Baghdad there are about 40,000 Jews, and they dwell in security, prosperity and honour under the great Caliph; and amongst them are the great sages, the heads of Academies engaged in the study of the law. In this city there are ten Academies. . . . In Baghdad there are 28 synagogues, situated either in the city itself or in Al-Karish on the other side of the Tigris; for the river divides the metropolis in two parts.

The city of Baghdad is twenty miles in circumference, situated in a land of palms, gardens, and plantations, the like of which is not to be found in the whole land of Shinar. People come thither with merchandise from all lands. Wise men live there, philosophers who know all manner of wisdom, and magicians expert in all manner except witchcraft. (95-102)

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**Source:**

Benjamin of Tudela. The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Travels in the Middle Ages. Trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (1907). Joseph Simon Publisher. 1983 [G 370 . B4 S57 1983]

## Jewish Letter No. 1

*The following is a letter from three prominent members of a Jewish community to another town asking for financial assistance. Although we do not know the specific addressee or the date it was written, historians have reconstructed the letter and have surmised that the letter must have been from the heads of the community of Ascalon in Egypt. This letter was written before the fall of the town in 1153, and the Egyptian army was defeated by the Franks in 1099 and to be handed over to the Franks. This would have been a time of great concern for Jews in this community. This letter was probably written after Passover in the summer of 1100.*

We thank the Most High who gave us the opportunity of fulfilling this pious deed, and granted to you to take a share in it with us. We spent the money for the ransom of some of the captives, after due consideration of the instructions contained in your letter, that is, we send what was available to those who [had already been ransomed.]

We did not fail to reply to what you have written us, and indeed we answered, but we were seeking a man who would bring our reply to you. Afterwards it happened that these illnesses came upon us; plague, pestilence, and leprosy, which filled our minds with anxiety, that we ourselves or some of our relatives might be stricken with the disease. A man whom we trust went from here and must have explained to you the position with respect to the sums you sent: that they reached us safely and that they were spent in the manner indicated [in your letter.]

News still reaches us that among those who were redeemed from the *Franks* and remained in *Ascalon* some are in danger of dying of want. Others remained in captivity, and yet others were killed before the eyes of the rest, who themselves were killed afterwards with all manner of tortures; [for the enemy murdered them] in order to give vent to his anger on them. We did not hear of a single man of Israel who was in such plight without exerting ourselves to do all that was in our power to save him.

The Most High has granted opportunities of relief and deliverance to individual fugitives, of which the first most perfect instance—after the compassion of Heaven—has been the presence in *Ascalon* of the honourable Shaykh ‘Abu l-Fadl Sahl son of Yusha ‘son of Shay’a (may God preserve him), an agent of the sultan (may God bestow glory upon his victories), whose influence is great in *Alexandria* where his word is very much heeded. He arranged matters wisely and took great pain in securing the ransom; but it would require a lengthy discourse to explain how he did it. But he could only ransom some of the people and had to leave the others. In the end, all those who could be ransomed from

[the Franks] were liberated, and only a few whom they kept remained in their hands, including a boy of about eight years of age. It is reported that the Franks urged the latter to embrace the Christian faith of his own free will and promised to treat him well, but he told them, how could he become a Christian priest and be left in peace by them [the Jews], who had disbursed on his behalf a great sum. Until this day these captives remain in their [Franks] hands; as well as those who were taken to Antioch, but these are few; and not counting those who abjured their faith because they lost patience as it was not possible to ransom them, and because they despaired of being permitted to go free.

We were not informed, praise be to the Most High, that the accursed ones who are called *Ashkenazim* (Germans) violated or raped women, as did the others.

Now, among those who have reached safety are some who escaped on the second and third days following the battle and left with the governor who was granted safe conduct; and others who, after having being caught by the *Franks*, remained in their hands for some time and escaped in the end; these are but few. The majority consists of those who were ransomed. TO our sorrow, some of them ended their lives under all kind of suffering and affliction. The privations which they had to endure caused some of them to leave for this country without food or protection against the cold, and they died on the way. Others in a similar way perished at sea; and yet others after having arrived here safely, became exposed to a "change of air"; they came at the height of the plague, and a number of them died.

And when the aforementioned honoured shaykh arrived, he brought a group of them, *i.e.*, the bulk of those who had reached *Ascalon*; he spent the Sabbath and celebrated Passover with them on the way in the manner as is required by such circumstances. He contracted a private loan for the sum that he had to pay the camel drivers and for their maintenance on the way as well as caravan guards and for other expenses, after having already spent other sums of money, which he did not charge to the community.

*The letter goes on to state the finances for their community and the ransomes.*

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**Source:**

"Contemporary Letters on the Capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders." *Journal of Jewish Studies*. Vol.3, no.4. 1952, pp 162-77.



## Jewish Letter No.2

*This letter signed S.D. Goitein from Jerusalem was sent from North Africa or Spain by a pilgrim who had set out from his country more than five years before 1099. He was detained in Alexandria because of constant dangers in Palestine. However, there were constant dangers in Egypt due to the warfare between the Fatimids and the Seljuk Turks as well.*

You may remember, my Lord, that many years ago I left our country to seek God's mercy and help in my poverty, to behold Jerusalem and return thereupon. However, when I was in Alexandria God brought about circumstances which caused a slight delay. Afterwards, however, "the sea grew stormy," and many armed bands made their appearance in Palestine; "*and he who went forth and he who came had no peace.*" So that hardly one survivor out of a whole group came back to us from Palestine and told us that scarcely anyone could save himself from those armed bands, since they were so numerous and were gathered round . . . every town. There was further the journey through the desert, among [the Bedouins] and whoever escaped from the one, fell into the hands of the other. Moreover, mutinies [spread throughout the country and reached] even Alexandria, so that we ourselves were besieged several times and the city was ruined; . . . the end however *was good*, for the Sultan—may God bestow glory upon his victories—conquered the city and caused justice to abound in it in a manner unprecedented in the history of any king in the world; not even a dirham was looted from anyone. Thus I had come to hope that because of his justice and strength God would give the land into his hands, and I should thereupon go to Jerusalem in safety and tranquility. For this reason I proceeded from Alexandria to Cairo, in order to start [my journey] from there.

When, however, God had given Jerusalem, the blessed, into his hands this state of affairs continued for too short a time to allow for making a journey there. The Franks arrived and killed everybody in the city, whether of *Ishmael* or of *Israel*; and the few who have survived the slaughter were made prisoners. Some of these have been ransomed since, while others are still in captivity in all parts of the world.

Now, all of us had anticipated that our Sultan—may God bestow glory upon his victories—would set out against them [the Franks] with his troops and chase them away. But time after time our hope failed. Yet, to this very present moment we do hope that God will give his [the Sultan's] enemies into his hands. For it is inevitable that the armies will join the battle this year; and, if God grants us victory through him [the Sultan] and he conquers Jerusalem—and so it may be, and with God's will—I for one shall not be amongst those who will linger, but shall go there to behold the city; and shall afterwards

return straight to you—if God wills it. My salvation is in God, for this [is unlike] the other previous occasions [of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem]. God, indeed, will exonerate me, since at my age I cannot afford to delay and wait any longer; I want to return home under any circumstances, if I still remain alive—whether I shall have seen Jerusalem or have given up the hope of doing it—both of which are possible.

You know, of course, my Lord, what has happened to us in the course of the last five years: the plague, the illnesses, and ailments have continued unabated for four successive years. As a result of this the wealthy became impoverished and a great number of people died of the plague, so that entire families perished in it. I, too, was affected with grave illness, from which I recovered only about a year ago; then I was taken ill the following year so that for four years I have remained. [. . .]. He who has said: *The evil diseases of Egypt* [Deut. Vii, 15] . . . he who hiccups does not live. . . ailments and will die . . . otherwise . . . will remain alive

*The following is a selection of a sea-poem of Judah Halevi, describing the hardships en route to the Holy Land.*

Call greeting unto daughters and kindred  
Peace to brother and sisters,  
From the captive of hope who is possessed  
By the sea, and hath placed his spirit in the hand of the winds,  
Thrust by the had of the west into the hand of the east:  
This one passeth to lead on, and that one to thrust back.  
Between him and death is but a step,  
Aye, between them but the thickness of a plank;  
Buried alive in a coffin of wood,  
Upon no floor, with no four cubits of earth, nor even with less.  
He sitteth—cannot stand upon his feet,  
He lieth down—he cannot stretch them forth;  
Sick and afraid because of the heathen  
And because of the marauders and the winds.  
The pilot and the mariner, and all their rabble—  
They are the rulers and the captains there.

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**Source:**

*Translated by Nina Salaman, Selected Poems of Judah Halevi, Philadelphia 1924.*

Printed in Beinart, Haim. *Atlas of Medieval Jewish History*. Jerusalem: Carta, 1992.

# THE TRAVELS OF BENJAMIN OF TUDELA:

