

## Analyse the developments in crusading in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

Crusading was not a phenomenon unique to the Christian world, and the comments of Christian and Islamic chroniclers on the 'Frankish Wars' curiously mirror one another. Thus Urban II's call to the faithful to fight the oppressors of the Eastern Christians was matched by al-Harawi's to the Caliph of Baghdad to reverse the 'ultimate shame of the Muslim cities.' Both crusade and *jihad* offered their participants the prospect of a martyr's death on the battlefield. Both also concentrated primarily on the possession of land which each considered their own: thus the penultimate exchange of letters between Richard Coeur-de-Lion and Saladin contrasted Richard's demand for possession of Jerusalem as being consecrated by the feet of Jesus, while Saladin referred to the Prophet Muhammed's miraculous ascent to heaven from there. Yet the attitudes towards these wars differed greatly between the two cultures, not least between the role of religious authority in the pursuit of victory - while the Caliphs in Baghdad remained impotent, the popes in Rome assumed ultimate responsibility for the recruitment, deployment and spiritual discipline of the Christian armies.

The first major aspect of Christian attitudes towards Jerusalem, and indeed to all the affairs of the Holy Land, was that Jerusalem was a place of pilgrimage. Crusading soldiers therefore were not engaged in a holy war for the sake of a holy war, but rather as an addition to the other trials of such a lengthy pilgrimage. It is interesting to note that Urban II's earliest justification for announcing an indulgence towards these soldiers was as reported by Orderic Vitalis that 'As a wise doctor he had the foresight to see that those who pilgrimaged would be most severely tried by many daily perils on the way... through which the willing servants of Christ would make amends for all the filth of their faults' <sup>1</sup> Since crusading was essentially a pilgrimage, it is unsurprising that Roger of Howden's account of the events should be entitled *Iterarium Perigrinationum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* despite the fact that it deals primarily with the military details of Richard's progress. Indeed the defenders of Jerusalem in 1099 were bemused by the fact that on their arrival at the city, the Christian troops did not attack immediately until they had achieved victory, but rather made a series of processions around the city walls, chanting and making penance. Peter Desiderius was said to have had a vision of Bishop Adhémar of Puy ordering this penance, and it was thanks to this measure that many attributed the eventual capture of the city. However the status of crusaders did change through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries such that Innocent III felt able to urge the king of Denmark 'to extirpate the error of paganism and spread the frontiers of the Christian faith.' - clearly there were no sites of pilgrimage to the north, and crusading later began to take on a much more political aspect, which I shall return to later.

This appellation of pilgrimage in many ways hampered the efficiency of the crusading armies, in that the old, the infirm, paupers, women and priests thereby tagged along with the bulk of the military strength, using crusader resources without contributing to the success of the missions. One of the reasons for Kilij Arslan's lack of concern at the build-up of Frankish troops at Constantinople in late 1096 was exactly because of the high proportion of non-combatants or at best poor-quality soldiers in this army. Christian leaders were similarly critical of the negative impact of pilgrims on the effectiveness of the armies. Bruno of Lucca, returning home after the siege of Antioch in 1098, requested reinforcements with the caveat that the poor be left at home. Louis VII of France apparently suggested that 'the defenceless mob which has always harmed us and because of which food is more expensive and progress slower'<sup>2</sup> should be separated from the main army and be entrusted to the fleet. It was one of the great contradictions of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians*

<sup>2</sup> quoted in Siberry *Criticisms of Crusading* p.25

crusades that despite being a pilgrimage, it excluded those classes of people most inclined to go on pilgrimage to other shrines such as Canterbury and Compostella. Indeed official measures such as those of the Councils of Geddington and Le Mans were required to penalise runaway serfs who wished to join the Third Crusade, while Emperor Frederick I was forced to decree that those incapable of supporting themselves for two years should remain at home.

The crusaders' pilgrim status served in effect to ensure that the church was in charge of the crusading initiatives. Crusades could only be justified where the papacy blessed the expedition, and the crusaders' vow emphasised the church hierarchy as supreme commanders - since the battles were being fought in the name of Christ, direct allegiance to his vicar quite clearly was essential. However the main reason why crusades had to be carried out at least initially under the banner of a pilgrimage was outlined as I have mentioned before that indulgences could be granted to pilgrims since they 'would be most severely tried by many daily perils on the way... through which the willing servants of Christ would make amends for all the filth of their faults' - and not through the murder of Muslims or pagans. Indulgences therefore were at the heart of the appeal of crusading, and these explain their popularity among the great number of fighting men and it required a great deal of ingenuity on the part of the church to create precedents and wording which could transfer the benefits of pilgrimage into ones which could be used for purely offensive campaigns. Urban II had offered indulgences to pilgrims to Jerusalem, who were nevertheless armed because of the 'oppression of the Eastern Church by the Muslims.' A little later he could write to several counts of the Spanish March that "No one must doubt that if he dies on this expedition for the love of God and his brothers his sins will surely be forgiven... But if any of you has made up his mind to go to Asia, it is here instead that he should try to fulfil his vow, because there is no virtue to rescue Christians from Muslims in one place, only to expose them to the Muslims in another."<sup>3</sup> From this piece of dexterity the original aim of protection of a shrine has been removed. Twenty years later, Calixtus II could add that 'We concede to all fighting firmly in this expedition the same remission of sins which we have given to the defenders of the Eastern Church.'<sup>4</sup> Since this precedent had then been set, Eugenius III could say in 1147 that 'To all those who do not receive the same cross of Jerusalem but determine to go against the Slavs... that remission of sins which our predecessor Pope Urban instituted for those going to Jerusalem.' although Urban had not in fact said exactly this. The evolution of the indulgence process continued on with Innocent III who said of the Albigensian Crusade in 1207 that 'We wish that those men... who take up arms to fight the perfidious should enjoy that remission of sins which we have granted to those who labour in aid of the Holy Land.'<sup>5</sup> From this we can see that offensive wars against 'the perfidious' could now not only be justified but even rewarded. There was but a small step from here to aiming these offensive wars at whoever the papacy decided was perfidious, until as Innocent III decreed 'We concede to all those who fight the violence of Markward and his men the same remission of sins that we concede to all who go against the perfidy of the Muslims in defence of the eastern provinces, because through him aid to the Holy Land is impeded.'<sup>6</sup>

By the time of Innocent IV crusading had lost its original meaning, and although the crusaders still took their crusading vows as pilgrims the control of the movement was no longer solely for the defence of access to the Holy Places, but rather it had become a means for the Church to acquire a physical strength which it had not possessed beforehand, and in some people's eyes the institution of the crusade under Church guidance fulfilled the dictum in Luke's Gospel that the Church had two swords, spiritual and temporal - only now they did not need to rely so heavily

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<sup>3</sup> quoted in Riley-Smith *What were the Crusades* p.13

<sup>4</sup> quoted in Riley-Smith *What were the Crusades* p.13

<sup>5</sup> quoted in Riley-Smith *What were the Crusades* p.14

<sup>6</sup> quoted in Riley-Smith *What were the Crusades* p.27

on the support of the Empire in temporal affairs. Indeed, where previous popes such as Gregory VII had solemnly deposed emperors, they could only enforce their decisions by use of the ecclesiastical apparatus of excommunication and interdict. Innocent IV on the other hand was in a position to call a crusade and grant 'the Indulgence to all those who undertake this labour personally...and we wish them to enjoy that privilege and immunity which was conceded to those aiding the Holy Land.'<sup>7</sup>

It is a mistake on the other hand to see crusading as simply a tool of the papacy in its bid for mastery of the European scene. In fact, crusading was highly popular among the ordinary people as is seen from the very legislation mentioned above restricting access to it. This popularity cannot be dismissed as a reaction to the overpopulation of Europe in a time of demographic growth. Admittedly the areas which contributed the greatest numbers of crusaders, such as Flanders, northern France, the Rhineland and northern Italy were indeed the richest areas of Europe; however the piety of those who arrived before Jerusalem in 1099 surprised even the devout Muslim defenders. It is certainly true that crusading was popular also because of the considerable inducements the Church offered to crusaders: as the Fourth Lateran Council had it 'Because those who continue in the service of the ruler of heaven ought in justice to enjoy special privilege...crusaders shall be exempt from levies, tallages and other burdens, and we take their persons and goods under the protection of St Peter...for their protection so that until there is certain knowledge of their death or of their return their goods may remain intact.'<sup>8</sup> Since these inducements were available to rulers as well as to their subjects, many took advantage of them such as Henry III of England. However, the times when the Church had trouble in enforcing the fulfilment of crusaders' vows, came about at times of mutual conflict between rulers, not through any lack of piety on the part of the rulers: thus Emperor Frederick II postponed his crusade due to internal disturbances, yet was sufficiently pious to attempt a crusade even when under sentence of excommunication - and to the embarrassment of the church was successful.

A remarkable fact about the crusades of the early twelfth century especially was despite the immense suffering of crusaders who were 'most severely tried by many daily perils on the way' such as starvation and ignominious death in Asia Minor, the First Crusade succeeded in its aim of taking Jerusalem, a fact which the participants could only attribute to divine intervention. In contrast, the subsequent crusades generally ended in ignominious failure - a fact doubly embarrassing for the Western Church due to the fact that they claimed all along that the effort was inspired and directed by God Himself. The serious reverses had to have a cause therefore in sin, and Christian writers were not slow in apportioning blame. The writers of the First Crusade complained about the sinful behaviour of the crusaders themselves. Fulcher of Chartres mentions the surrounded crusader army at Dorylaeum recognising a divine judgement on them - when they had confessed their sins they were given the victory. Peter Tudebode described the conclusion of the siege of Antioch as being dependent on the crusaders giving a tenth of their possessions in charity, while the siege of Jerusalem was preceded by extravagant forms of penitence before the crusading army massacred the population. The writers of the Second Crusade such as William of St-Denis could only comment that the remnants of the Christian army only succeeded in returning home because the Lord was merciful. Odo of Deuil recounts Louis VII as saying 'if I had not been puffed up because of my large force but had placed my hope in the Lord of hosts, God would not have subdued an arrogance which did not exist.' Other writers saw instead a judgement on the Christian community, especially of Outremer but also much further afield. Jacques de Vitry's comment was that it was God's anger against the transgressions of the people of the Latin kingdom that he permitted them to fall into the hands of their enemies. However the majority of Western writers blamed the state of Christian society

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<sup>7</sup> quoted in Riley-Smith *What were the Crusades* p.14

<sup>8</sup> *English Historical Documents* vol. 3

at large. Where an anonymous Anglo-Norman poet could claim that the Turks had driven God from his land 'pur nos pechiez', Gregory VIII clearly stated that it was 'non solum peccatum habitorum illius sed et nostrum et totius populi Christianorum' - not only the sins of the inhabitants of Outremer but ours and those all the Christian peoples.

Despite the reverses, it is not at all accurate to say that the ideal of crusading was dying out in the thirteenth century. If criticisms were increasing, they were not directed against the crusading movement as a whole, but for abuses of it in particular areas. Therefore when Matthew Paris has Louis IX say 'if I alone could suffer the shame and adversity and my sins not rebound upon the church, I could endure with equanimity, but woe is me, all Christendom has fallen into confusion'<sup>9</sup> - we must bear in mind his resentment against the latter's tithes on the clergy. The very heavy taxation levied especially on the church by both king - such as the Saladin tithes in England and France - and pope - as the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that 'all clerks, subordinate as well as prelates, shall give a twentieth part of their ecclesiastical revenues for three years in aid of the Holy Land'<sup>10</sup> - caused a great deal of resentment. The use of crusades in Europe also attracted criticism - prompting Hostiensis to have to distinguish between the *crux transmarina* and *crux cismarina* - yet the principle of holy warfare continued unchallenged. What almost nobody doubted was that crusading had proved the strong arm of the papacy in its dealings with rulers. The decline in its popularity therefore after the final loss of Jerusalem in 1244 must stem at least partly from the fact that it had now lost its currency to some extent: crusades in northern Europe, for instance the Prussian crusade in which pagans were converted at sword-point, could not be reconciled with the ideals of liberating the Holy Places and ending the oppression of the Church. The decline in the agricultural expansion of Europe and, later, the decimations of plague across Europe eased the problem of overpopulation which had led so many people to the Near East. High taxes, not least for crusading itself, weighed heavily on the popular appeal of the ventures. Arab successes against Christian armies did not trigger a decline in piety among the latter - but a realisation of the futility of their purpose and difficulties at home made further crusading ventures less and less viable.

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<sup>9</sup> quoted in Siberry *Criticisms of Crusading* p.86

<sup>10</sup> *English Historical Documents* vol. 3