

An Introduction to Knights, Kings, and Crusaders

Unit 1 INTRODUCTION

🎵 Don't forget to learn this week's song verse(s)! The lyrics can be found in appendix A.

IMPORTANT WORDS

WORD	DEFINITION
Romance	A genre of medieval epic poetry modeled on the <i>Aeneid</i>

IMPORTANT FIGURE

WORD	DEFINITION
Knight	A warrior from a noble family who achieved his position via a special ceremony after serving as a page and squire

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS¹

WORD	DEFINITION
High Middle Ages	The period in Europe, ca. AD 1000–1300, which was characterized by relative peace, increasing population, and the growth of cities
Christendom	A term used to describe medieval western Europe when it was predominantly Christian
Holy Roman Empire	The Germanic and Italian empire that considered itself as the heir of the Western Roman Empire and the leader of Christendom.

Time Machine Destination: AD 1200

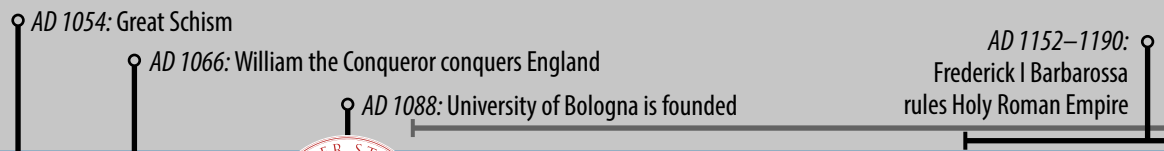
Imagine we have a time machine and can travel together to visit the German town of Eisenach sometime around the year 1200. Suppose that while we're wandering through one of the three marketplaces, admiring the half-timbered houses and the stone churches and deciding what goodies to buy from the local merchants, a messenger runs up to us. Word of our arrival has reached Hermann I, Landgrave of Thuringia, and as we're foreign dignitaries, he's invited us to a feast at his castle outside of town, the Wartburg! Now in our time, Wartburg Castle is best known as the home where Saint Elizabeth of Hungary spent most of her life. It is also where the reformer Martin Luther translated the Bible in the 1520s. We'll be visiting the castle prior to the time of these two important historical people, but who knows what else we'll discover! It's only good manners to accept Hermann I's invitation, right?

So off we go past the southwestern edge of town, through the dark forest, and up a steep mountain to the



▲ Wartburg Castle exterior #3

1. For extended definitions of Christendom and Holy Roman Empire, see the alphabetical glossary.<



Middle Ages
ca. AD 500–1500
AD 500

▼ Medieval Bow & Arrows,
Hunting Knife #2



◀ University of
Bologna Seal

AD 1122: Henry V and Pope Callixtus II sign Concordat of Worms

ca. AD 1000–ca. 1300: High Middle Ages

(India) Middle Kingdoms Period ca. 185 BC–AD 1200

(China) Song dynasty AD 960–1279

Jin dynasty AD 1115–1224



▲ Medieval Bow & Arrows,
Hunting Knife #6



castle overlooking Eisenach. The outer wall is so tall and stout, with only arrow slits and no windows, that it looks forbidding as we follow the messenger over the drawbridge to the main gate . . . the only way in or out, easily blocked by shutting its massive oak door. You might be a little nervous walking through the first courtyard, past the knights' barracks and everything needed to defend the Wartburg against attack. But once we pass the inner gatehouse and reach the *Palas*, the main building—ah, now there's cheerful firelight shining through the windows into the inner courtyard, rich color from flags and tapestries, music and delicious smells, and laughter among the guests going up to the feasting hall on the top floor!² When we arrive, we find the tables adorned with astonishing sculptures of almond paste or sugar that aren't meant for eating, a sure sign that this is a wealthy household. Landgrave Hermann greets us warmly and gives us seats at the high table, and soon the feasting begins.

Dinner and a Show

And what a feast it is! Besides roasted meats such as venison and boar, poultry such as goose and duck, and whole fish such as pike, we're served meat pies and fruit pies, stews and sauces, and lovely soft pretzels to eat between courses. Most of the dishes contain lots of expensive spices, and many are colored green with parsley, blue with berries, red with sandalwood, or yellow with saffron. We may or may not enjoy the flavor combinations, but we don't have to eat much of any one thing to be polite. Not only is the sheer quantity and variety of food impressive, but the way the dishes are delivered and served presents a spectacle. We might be served a bird such as a swan or peacock that the cook roasted and then put the feathers back on so that it looks alive (and might be rigged to

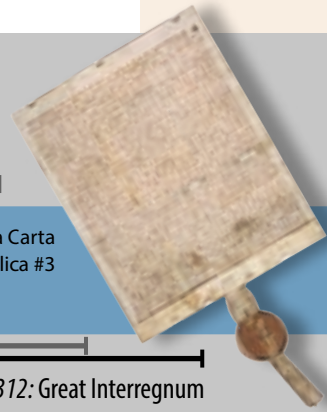


▲ Roasted peacock

2. "A Virtual Tour of Wartburg Castle," *Wartburg Castle*, accessed January 7, 2023, <http://capress.link/tch3bui01>; "Wartburg Castle," *UNESCO World Heritage*, 2020, <http://capress.link/tch3bui02>; John M. Jeep, ed., *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2001), s.v. "Wartburg."

AD 1095–1291: Crusading Era
 AD 1215: English barons present King John with the Magna Carta
 AD 1194–1250: Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II lives

► Magna Carta replica #3



AD 1198–1216: Pope Innocent III holds office
 AD 1204: Sack of Constantinople

AD 1245–1312: Great Interregnum
 ◀ Fourth Crusade sack of Constantinople #1



Yuan dynasty AD 1206–1368

(Middle East) Mamluk Sultanate AD 1250–1517

Mongol Ilkhanate AD 1260–1335



◀ Crusades #2

► Courtly Love or Chivalry #2



When were pretzels invented? We don't know, but we do know that they existed at least as early as 1111 when they were first featured in the crests of German bakers' guilds.³ -A.D.

◀ Wartburg Castle Singer's Hall

make a noise or breathe fire). We might also see fantastic creatures of the cook's imagination such as a cockatrice, made by stitching the front half of a young pig to the back half of a chicken and roasting them together. The cooks might show off further with dishes that look like one thing but are really another, such as "Bohemian peas" made of almond flour and honey.⁴

The food isn't the only spectacular part of the evening, either. Musicians and acrobats are standard parts of dinnertime entertainment across Europe in this period, but Landgrave Hermann's court is unique in one way: All the best

3. See, e.g., "Precedella: 1500s Pretzels Made with Wine," *Tasting History with Max Miller*, YouTube Video, September 29, 2020, <http://capress.link/tch3bui05>.
 4. Alia Atlas, trans., *Ein Buch von guter Spise*, *MedievalCookery.com*, last updated 1993, <http://capress.link/tch3bui03>; James L. Matterer et al., *Gode Cookery*, last updated 2017, <http://capress.link/tch3bui04>.

▲ Medieval acrobats & musicians
#2



▲ Medieval acrobats & musicians
#1

► Medieval acrobats & musicians
#5

German poets and singers have been in his service at one time or another.⁵ He's even set aside a large hall on the second floor as a "Singers' Hall"! So we might be treated to a contest between the greatest singers in the realm, a song about Charlemagne or Jerusalem, or a **romance**—a genre of medieval epic poetry modeled on the *Aeneid*. Or if we're really lucky, we'll get to hear a knight called Wolfram von Eschenbach share part of his poem *Parzival*, about a boy who wants to grow up to be a knight of the Round Table and join the court of King Arthur. A **knight**, as we of course know, is a warrior from a noble family who achieved his position via a special ceremony after serving as a page and squire.

"Wait," you whisper. "Wasn't King Arthur...?" Yes, as we discussed in *The Curious Historian 3A*, King Arthur was British, and so was Parzival! Wolfram's story is *very* loosely based on legends about the Welsh hero Peredur, filtered through several layers of English, Norman, and French influence before they reached Thuringia. You might be even more confused if we come in at the beginning of the story, which deals with the adventures of Parzival's father, Gahmuret of Anjou. In Wolfram's version, Gahmuret is a younger son who's not allowed to inherit any of his father's estate, so he travels east and ends up in the service of "the Baruc of Baghdad," who seems to be a fictional version of the



5. Herbert A. Frenzel and Elisabeth Frenzel, *Daten deutscher Dichtung: Chronologischer Abriß der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, Band 1: *Von den Anfängen bis zum Jungen Deutschland* (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuchverlag, 1985), 26.

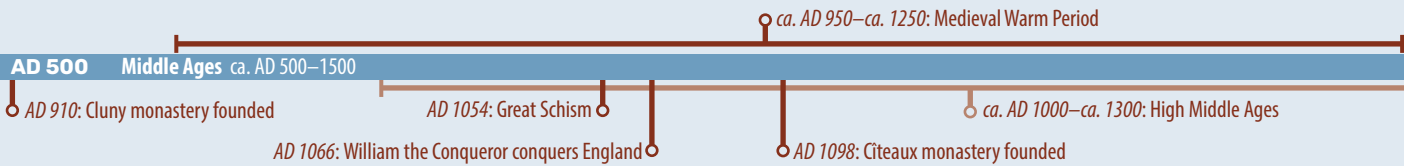
Abbasid caliph.⁶ As we learned in the previous volume, neither Baghdad nor the caliphate—nor Islam, for that matter—existed when Ambrosius Aurelianus was fighting the Anglo-Saxons for control of Britain. Yet nobody else at this feast appears to be bothered by that. The knights are all nodding as if it makes perfect sense for a French nobleman to go off to the Middle East to seek fame and fortune. What on earth is going on?!

Time Machine Destination: High Middle Ages


Well, stay curious, readers! You'll learn the answers to these questions and many more in this unit. You see, the imaginary feast above paints a picture of what life might have been like for those who lived during the **high Middle Ages**, a period from roughly 1000 to 1300 when the population in Europe grew substantially and, as a result, so did cities and trade. The era of the early missionaries who brought Christianity to Germanic and other pagan peoples living beyond a crumbling Roman Empire was over. Because Christianity was now the predominant religion, many institutions of the Catholic Church—from monasteries to universities to the papacy itself—grew and became much more formalized. Some scholars use the term **Christendom** to describe western Europe at this time, as it was an era when the relationship between the sole Church most people in the West belonged to and the secular leaders of various kingdoms became more closely intertwined and complex. This means Christendom was an idea as well a geographical location, though there was a specific region which claimed to have even older roots. The **Holy Roman Empire** describes the lands in western and central Europe that were held by Frankish and then German kings from about 800 to 1806. It is sometimes understood as the secular counterpart of the Church, given that the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope were usually two of the most influential people in Europe during this period.

But we won't be staying just in western Europe in the chapters that follow! After we cover some of the foundational social structures that existed in post-1066 Europe in chapter 1, we'll make our way through the Byzantine Empire as we follow the knights who flocked to the Holy Land during the Crusades. Throughout chapter 2, we'll explore not only this lengthy conflict and the reasons for it, but the frequent interactions among Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Muslims that resulted. In chapter 3, we'll examine the political and religious powers that arose during the high Middle Ages, which sets the stage for the cultural, intellectual, and artistic developments of chapters 4 and 5—achievements that have shaped how we imagine the Middle Ages up to this very day. From Robin Hood and Richard the Lionheart to great castles and glorious cathedrals, this unit is full of many legends and landmarks you will surely recognize. So let's get going!

6. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (New York: Penguin, 1980), 15–40.



MEMORY

 Don't forget to learn this week's song verse(s)! The lyrics can be found in appendix A.

Unit I: Knights, Kings, and Crusaders

Chapter 1

European Society after 1066

IMPORTANT WORDS¹

WORD	DEFINITION
Primogeniture	Nomadic warriors from central Asia who moved west in the fourth and fifth centuries under leaders such as Attila
Crusades	A series of military pilgrimages undertaken to free the Holy Land from Muslim control
Fief	Territory a lord grants to a vassal in exchange for service
Penance	A devotional act of spiritual healing following the confession of sins before a priest, which in the Middle Ages might have involved prayer, charity, or pilgrimage

IMPORTANT FIGURES

WORD	DEFINITION
Knight ²	A warrior from a noble family who achieved his position via a special ceremony after serving as a page and squire
Gentry ³	English term for the lowest level of aristocracy
Alaric	Leader of the Visigoths who sacked Rome in 410
Serf	A person who was the lowest level of peasant, bound by law to the estate on which he or she lived
Vassal	A person who owed allegiance and service (and sometimes taxes or tribute) to a feudal overlord in return for protection and a grant of land or resources

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

WORD	DEFINITION
Medieval Warm Period	A period of warmer temperatures and better weather for growing crops across Europe and the North Atlantic, from the mid-tenth to mid-thirteenth centuries
Guild	A medieval trade association that offered mutual support and also regulated standards and working conditions
Feudalism	A system of mutual obligations between a lord and his vassals
Manorialism	A system of mutual obligations between the lord of the manor and his serfs and tenants
Chivalry	A code of ideal conduct for knights

- For an extended definition of Crusades and Penance, see the alphabetical glossary
- Vocabulary words in color are review words from *The Curious Historian Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3A*. You can find all the vocabulary words from previous levels in the alphabetical glossary at the back of this book.
- For an extended definition, see the alphabetical glossary

The Symbolic Number Three

What do you think is going on in this unusual illustration from a medieval manuscript? To make sense of it, we first need to discuss why the number three was so important in the Middle Ages. Do you have any guesses? To start, there is the foundational Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which proclaims that one God exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (A doctrine is a belief or body of teachings, usually held by a religious or political group.) The number three was also symbolic of the family unit, and one of the most popular images in medieval art was the holy family, made up of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and the Christ child.



Yet the significance of the number three wasn't limited to religion only. Illustrations of a medieval tale known as "The Three Living and the Three Dead" (see image above) told the story of three young noblemen who were hunting in the forest when they came across three corpses. This spooky skeleton trio wasn't just trying to scare them, however; they had an important message to share. The supernatural visitors told the noblemen to remember that one day they too would die, and since they don't know *when* death will strike, they should strive to live well every day.⁴

🗨️ A rhyming Anglo-Norman poem describes the conversation between the three noblemen and the three corpses. The Three Living say, "I am afraid" (*Ich am afert*), "Lo, what I see!" (*Lo whet ich se*), and "Methinks these be devils three" (*Me þinkes hit bey develes þre*). And the Three Dead reply, "I was well fair" (*Ich wes wel fair*), "Such shall you be" (*Such schel tou be*), and "For God's love, beware by me" (*For godes love bewer by me*).⁵

▲ Symbolic Three

And how did people strive to "live well" during the high Middle Ages? That is the topic we are exploring in this chapter, which will give you a general overview of what society looked like for most of this period. Similar to the story and illustration mentioned above, you will read about several "groups of three"—so keep an eye out for them! Hopefully these triads help you better understand and remember the concepts covered in this chapter.

Stability and Growth

Remember how much upheaval there was between 350 and 1050, with the Western Roman Empire collapsing and people moving from northern Europe and western Asia into Roman territory? After 1066, that period of mass migration was over, as were the days of Viking and Magyar raids. Most kingdoms had their share of internal political problems and wars still broke out from time to time. In general, though, the kingdoms and empires of Europe had much greater political and economic stability than they'd had in the centuries before.

Can you also remember the Late Antique Little Ice Age that caused so much trouble beginning in 536, with volcanic eruptions blocking the sun and causing crop failures around the world? By 1066, things were heating up quite literally. From the middle of the tenth century to the middle of the thirteenth century, Europe and North America

4. "The Three Living and the Three Dead," Medieval Manuscripts Blog, British Library, January 16, 2014, <http://capress.link/tch3b0101>.

5. "Three Living and the Three Dead."

experienced the **Medieval Warm Period**. During this time, temperatures were comparable to what they had been in the Roman period. What impact do you think this warmer weather had on everyday life? One significant consequence was that there was more food, which meant more people. As a result, the high Middle Ages was a period when Europe's population grew tremendously, since milder weather, improved farming techniques, and better farm technology meant greater crop yields. Trade began to improve, too, and these new trading networks meant that goods and ideas alike could travel from places such as England and France to Byzantium and beyond—and back again. In fact, as the spread of Christianity and European civilization spread ever outward, even places that had once been beyond the edges of the old Roman world—Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Poland, and Scandinavia—were becoming very much a part of this new Western world.



▲ Medieval Grain Mill #1

This combination of relative peace and prosperity had many positive effects on society. People didn't have to work as hard physically to survive as their ancestors had (though still much harder than most people in developed countries such as the United States do today). And just as better food supply meant fewer people were dying of starvation or the kinds of diseases that improved nutrition could prevent, the lack of raiding, whether by ship or on horseback, meant fewer people were killed by marauders. With more people to share the work, a greater number of people had free time to develop new farming technologies and build facilities to take on time-consuming tasks. For example, new mills could take over the task of grinding grain, which freed up a lot of time! Do you enjoy getting creative in *your* free time? Do you like to write stories, draw pictures, or play music? Medieval people were no different and used the time to pursue interests such as art, music, games, and storytelling. People also had more time and money to get creative about their building work too. Most notably, teams of many different types of craftsmen built the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe with their elaborate stone carvings and impressive stained-glass windows. And they improved their techniques in similar ways in all aspects of life.

The high Middle Ages were also when a new social structure developed in Europe, portions of which still exist in some countries today. Although every culture was unique and there were surely exceptions to the three-part structure we will explain in the next section, this overview—based mainly on the way things worked in England and West Frankia, which had become known by this time as France—can be a helpful way to understand the major groups of people that made up medieval society. It will also help you understand how European rulers set up new kingdoms outside of Europe as this period continued.

Before medieval society reinvented the technology needed for windmills and water mills, the task of grinding grain into flour had to be done at home by hand every day. That's where we get the phrase "the daily grind." When millers took over the task, however, they would take a pinch of flour and rub it against their thumb to check the texture and see whether they needed to adjust the millstones for a coarser or finer grind. This practice was known as the "rule of thumb." —A.D.

The Orders of Medieval Society

If there was one thing medieval people liked, it was a neatly ordered system in which everyone and everything had its place. Of course, reality is never as neat and orderly



▲ Medieval Bow & Arrows, Hunting Knife #9

as we'd like it to be! There are always bits that don't fit, and when it comes to medieval society, people could have more freedom to move up, down, or around the social structure than a snapshot view might suggest. But the model medieval thinkers hit upon to describe their society gives us a framework from which to begin our discussion.

Do you remember how Carolingian thinkers such as Alcuin of York divided society? They said that there were three groups of people (there's that number again!), sometimes called the Three Orders or the Three Estates: those who *fight*, those who *work*, and those who *pray*. This model remained popular throughout the high Middle Ages, so let's take a closer look at each group.

Those Who Fight

Medieval kingdoms didn't keep standing armies, but they did have laws about who was allowed to own weapons. The average person might be allowed to have a hunting knife and (especially in England) a bow and arrows, and troops conscripted in times of war might be issued weapons that were to be returned as soon as their military service was over, but otherwise, a right to keep and bear arms was something that only the upper classes were guaranteed. The phrase "those who fight" thus refers to those upper classes, who also ran the government.

The royal or imperial family formed the top tier of society, headed by the king or emperor. (Few kingdoms had queens ruling in their own right during this period, but as we've seen in earlier centuries, queens could and often did rule as regents for their sons. In theory, emperors outranked kings. But at least in western Europe, East Fran-
kia—which became known first as Germany and later as the Holy Roman Empire—was the only realm where the popes were willing to crown any ruler as an emperor, and the emperors generally regarded kings outside their own realms as fellow heads of state unless they had a reason to pull rank.) Kings usually gave their sons lands of their own to govern in peacetime and military units to command in times of war, and they often arranged diplomatic marriages for their daughters to secure alliances. In that regard, not much had changed since the Carolingian era, although wars, revolts, and lack of heirs did cause power to change from one royal family to another over time.

There were more aristocrats than just the royal families, of course. The nobility held different ranks and different amounts of power in different kingdoms. In England, for example, there were only two ranks of nobility until the fourteenth century: earls and barons. "Earl," from the Anglo-Saxon *eorl*, is a title found only in England; on the Continent, the same rank is called a count, so an earl's wife is a countess, since the English word has no female equivalent. An earl was in charge of a county. Barons, on the other hand, were a lower level of noble; a barony might include one or more estates. By contrast, France had more ranks, and the Holy Roman Empire had even more than France! The important thing to keep in mind is that each kingdom has its own ranking system for the nobility. Collectively, these ranks of nobility are called the peerage in England, and the general term for a title of nobility is likewise a peerage, because the king was supposed to be "first among equals" and a person who holds a title of nobility is considered "a peer of the realm."

Knights occupy the next step below the peerage, and they are probably one of the most recognizable social roles of the Middle Ages. Can you name any knights from either history or legend who you are familiar with? Perhaps you have some ideas of

▼ Medieval Emperor (Frederick Barbarossa) #1



▲ Medieval Pope (Gregory IX) #3

what you would like to do for a job when you grow up, but can you imagine spending your days preparing for an adult role in society when you were as young as seven years old? And yet that is how it was for future knights in the Middle Ages, who followed a three-step path to knighthood during much of their childhood. First, a boy from a noble family would become a page. During this time, he would learn how to ride horses, hunt, and train with mock weapons. He might also learn basic manners and how to serve a table in court.

The next step was becoming a **squire**⁶. A future knight would be a squire from about ages fourteen to eighteen, and during this time he served a full knight by cleaning his weapons, polishing his armor, helping him dress for battle, and looking after the knight's horses. In addition to training with real weapons—especially a lance and sword—a squire might also study non-combat skills that would be very important for a life at court, such as reading and writing, reciting poetry, falconry, and playing chess. Squires also had to look after the pages and dispense discipline to these younger boys—just imagine what it would be like if your older brother actually had the power to tell you to go to your room! Being a squire wasn't all fun and games, though. In warfare, a squire followed his knight onto the battlefield, riding a second horse in case the knight's first horse became injured. If the knight was also injured or killed, it was up to the squire to retrieve him from the battlefield.

Finally, when his training was complete, a squire could become a full-fledged knight, usually between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. The knighting ceremony, called a dubbing, was a life-changing event for the young squire. He might spend the entire night before the dubbing praying in a chapel. The day of the ceremony, he would wear a special white tunic and be given gilded spurs. A priest would bless the squire's sword and urge him to always protect the poor and vulnerable. Then, the young man would kneel before the knight or king dubbing him, who would tap his shoulder with a sword and possibly say something simple such as “Be thou a knight” (this is the part you may have seen in movies!). The new knight would then be given his own horse, his shield, and a banner that possibly bore his family's coat of arms. If the new knight's family was wealthy enough, it was time to head for a great feast held in his honor.⁶

Originally, a knighthood wasn't hereditary, and it didn't necessarily come with land or an income, although it often did. Some knights thus found permanent positions in a nobleman's court. In the Holy Roman Empire, for example, a *ministerialis*, or knight ministerial, was a **knight**⁷ who was bound to his lord's household and had official administrative duties to help the lord run his part of the empire's government. But other landless knights went from place to place, looking for adventure and offering their services to whatever nobleman might need them at the moment. These men became known as knights-errant, from the Old French word for “to wander,” and their travels were known as errantry. Traveling knights also became popular heroes in literature during the Middle Ages and beyond. You may even meet a few in the pages that follow!

Below knights and noblemen was the **gentry**. In England, a man might hold the rank of esquire or gentleman, but whatever his rank,



▲ Medieval Knight, Squire, Page #2



To the Source:

“Squire” derives from the French word *ecuyer*, which means “shield bearer.”



To the Source:

“Knight” derives from the Old English word *cniht*, which described a younger warrior-companion to a lord than the more senior *þegn* (thane).

One group of people who didn't fit into this neat three-part scheme were outlaws. Have you ever thought about what the word “outlaw” actually means? When the king declared someone an outlaw, he officially placed that person *outside the law*, meaning that the legal system would no longer protect him or her. Anyone could be declared an outlaw, even nobles or priests. Once a person was outlawed, anyone could rob, injure, or even kill that person without fearing the king's justice. —A.D.

6. Mark Cartwright, “How to Become a Medieval Knight,” World History Encyclopedia, June 8, 2018, <http://capress.link/tch3b0105>.



▲ Knight Being Dubbed #2

he generally ran an estate for his lord and had the rights to a certain amount of the income from that estate. You might also see a member of the gentry referred to as “the lord of the manor.” Later in the Middle Ages, the gentry accumulated enough wealth that in many cases, they were able to buy their lands from the king.

Most aristocrats were born to aristocratic families and married into other aristocratic families, but that wasn’t always the case. Someone who wasn’t an aristocrat—a commoner—might render such extraordinary service to the king that the king would make him a knight or even a nobleman. There were also instances of wealthy commoners buying titles or marrying into noble families. On the other hand, a nobleman might do something so wrong that the king would take away his title and lands.

One big problem the aristocracy faced was the question of inheritance. Some kingdoms—most notably England and France—adopted the law of **primogeniture**, under which a father’s entire estate passed to his firstborn

son. Frequently, the second son would become a priest or monk (whether he wanted to or not), but other sons might become knights-errant. If a man had no surviving sons at the time of his death, his estate usually went to his nearest male relative, who could be anything from his brother to his fifth cousin. Whether a daughter or wife could inherit when there was no male heir at all was controversial.

Those Who Work

The working classes had just as many ranks as the aristocracy, although their lives weren’t nearly as comfortable. The lowest rank of commoners were the **serfs**, who were legally bound to the estate where they lived and had very few freedoms. Laws varied from kingdom to kingdom, but in general, a serf couldn’t move, travel, or marry without the permission of his lord. There were often restrictions on what serfs could own, what they could do with anything they produced beyond what was needed for their own survival, and what they were required to give the lord (more on that later). That said, a serf had more rights than a slave: for example, a lord couldn’t beat or kill his serfs for no reason, nor could he sell a serf apart from the land as he could a slave. Free peasants existed, too, and often rented (or if they were very lucky, owned) the land they farmed for the lord. They might get just enough of an education to be able to read documents regarding taxes and other legal obligations related to the land they lived on. The lord might also employ people from these classes as servants and even as managers such as reeves, foresters, and stewards.

Commoners could also earn a living from a trade or a craft. Every manor needed at least one blacksmith to make and repair tools and a roper to make ropes, for example, as well as a carpenter and a potter. A village might be able to support other trades as well, such as a cordwainer who made shoes and a cobbler who repaired them, a chandler who made candles, and a butcher and a baker. Towns and cities could support even more specialized trades, such as a man who made only carts (a cartwright) and a man who made only wagons (a wainwright). These trades weren’t limited only to men, either: A brewster was a female brewer, for example, and a webster was a female weaver. Children often worked with their parents, and at least the eldest son of a tradesman would usually expect to inherit his father’s business and tools. Over time, the business became so associated with the family that even family members who went into other businesses might still bear the name of their ancestors’ trade. As

▼ Serfs



7. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.vv. “villain” and “villein,” accessed April 7, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3a0505>.

a result, many common last names come from medieval trades. For example, have you ever met someone with the last name of Smith or Cook? That might have been the job of an English ancestor many years ago.

To become a successful craftsperson, commoners often followed (you guessed it!) a three-step process that would allow them to become members of a guild. A **guild** was an organization where people working in a given trade would come together to regulate the many aspects of their craft, from working hours to prices to quality. In any medieval town or city, you might find a number of these guilds, such as the Masons' Guild, the Shoemakers' Guild, or the Tanners' Guild. The guild also set rules for apprenticeships, which was the first step on the path to becoming a craftsperson. An apprentice, who was usually in his early teens, would work under a master of a specific craft. The master, in turn, would take an oath to feed, lodge, clothe, and treat his apprentice honorably in return for his labor. An apprenticeship could last anywhere from four to twelve years, depending on the nature of the craft the apprentice was learning.⁸

After serving an apprenticeship, a tradesperson or craftsperson might become a journeyman, becoming a full member of the guild and working for a master at full pay. A journeyman was free to move to work for a different master, or perhaps even take a journey (hence the name) to a new town to find work, although sometimes the guild in the new place had different standards or high guild dues that prevented an outsider from moving in. When a journeyman had enough skill and experience, he might be permitted to produce and submit to the guild a masterpiece, an extra-special example of his craft to show off his great talents. If the guild judged this, his greatest achievement so far, to be good enough, he would complete the third and final step to becoming a craftsperson: becoming a master. A master had the right to open his own shop, employ other workers, and train apprentices. He would also become part of the leadership of his guild. Guilds could function like clubs outside of working hours, too, and members might socialize together, support each other's families in times of crisis, sponsor town events, provide their members' children with baptismal gifts, and pool their resources for donations to the parish church.

Although life could be difficult for commoners, and most people had to work very hard, people also enjoyed Church feast days or took part in community celebrations such as weddings, wakes, and baptisms. And what does every party need? Food, of course! Most commoners throughout Western Europe lived on food and drink that came from grains, such as bread, ale, and porridge made from barley and oats. They might also grow vegetables such as cabbage, onions, and lettuce, as well as fruits such as apples, berries, and pears. Many people did not get nearly enough protein, as they could rarely afford meat; the scant protein they did consume likely came as much or more from beans, peas, eggs, and maybe a little cheese.⁹

Medieval Latin still used *villa* to refer to a manor, so a free peasant who lived on a manor estate was called a *villanus*. That term filtered through Anglo-Norman French into Middle English as *villein*, an alternate spelling of which was *villain*. The fact that *villain* went on to mean "bad guy" tells you something about the aristocracy's view of the peasants!⁷

-A.D.



▲ Medieval Craftsman #1



▼ Master & Apprentice

8. Joseph Gies and Frances Gies, *Life in a Medieval City* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 88–89.

9. Joseph Gies and Frances Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 93–96.

► Medieval Wine Merchant's House
#1

Increased trade also meant the rise of an increasingly influential merchant class. These merchants and wealthier tradesmen soon possessed more individual political power and might also serve as mayors and as members of the town council. They could petition the king to grant their town a charter that would allow the townspeople to hold fairs that attracted trade from far and wide. Some towns on major international trade routes, such as Venice, Genoa, and Hamburg, grew so wealthy and powerful from trade that they were able to negotiate a special status within their kingdoms or even to become fully independent city-states.



The Crusades and Marco Polo's travels opened up many new trade routes to the East during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The **Crusades** were a series of military pilgrimages undertaken to free the Holy Land from Muslim control. We will learn more about them, as well as the explorer-merchant Marco Polo, in later chapters. With these additional trade opportunities, silks, furs, and jewelry—along with more exotic goods such as sugar from Syria, wax from Morocco, and cinnamon from Egypt—could be found among the merchant stalls at medieval trade fairs in places such as France, England, and Italy.¹⁰

Those Who Pray

The Church stood at the center of medieval life. In many cases, the parish church also stood at the geographical center of the village! In just such a way, a large town would almost always have a large church at its center, and every great city its cathedral (the bishop's seat). The church calendar provided a reliable rhythm of feasts and fasts, seasons of the year, days in the week, and hours in the day, and people often used the length of certain prayers to time activities precisely. When the first mechanical clocks were invented in the fourteenth century, cathedrals and wealthy monasteries began installing them to ring the bells for services on an exact schedule, which gave the towns around them a more exact sense of time.

▼ Cluniac or Cistercian Abbey #2



Priests, monks, nuns, and bishops also continued to fill the same important roles in society that they had taken on as Roman rule crumbled in western Europe. Although these religious institutions had the specific task of caring for people's souls, that didn't mean they neglected the physical world. Churches and monasteries cared for the sick and hungry, even establishing hospitals, and many also had schools. Monks and

10. Gies and Gies, *Life in a Medieval City*, 147–148.

nuns copied old books and wrote new ones, preserving the learning of the ancients while also adding to it. They contributed to the local economy too: Monasteries that followed the Rule of Saint Benedict had time set aside every day for work, and the monks and nuns sold some of what they produced—things such as beer, wine, and lace—to raise money for supplies and maintenance.

New monastic orders sprang up throughout the Middle Ages. Two of the most important early offshoots of Benedictine monasticism were the reform orders founded at the French monasteries of Cluny and Cîteaux. Cluny was founded in 910 and was the first monastery founded with the goal of reforming monastic practice to be more in line with the Rule of Saint Benedict. One major difference between the Cluniac Order and regular Benedictine monasteries is that with Cluny's system of monasteries, the daughter houses were required to send part of their income back to the mother house. However, as the nobility donated oodles of money to Cluniac houses over the next two centuries, Cluny became just as corrupt as the monasteries it had reacted against. Thus, in 1098, a group of monks who wanted to get back to basics founded a new monastery at Cîteaux and called themselves the Order of the Strict Observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict ("Cistercians" for short). The Cluniacs disliked the Cistercians, and the feeling was mutual!¹¹

The new monastic orders didn't replace older forms of monasticism, however. One form that remained popular throughout the Middle Ages was eremitic, or solitary, monasticism, which dates back to the days of the early Church. Some hermits, both male and female (although it was more common for men), would move out into the wilderness by themselves to devote themselves to a life of prayer. Often they would live off the land, but some lived close enough to towns that their friends could bring them supplies now and then. There was also a subset of hermits known as anchorites or anchoresses who stayed in one place, usually in a town. An anchorite or anchoress lived in an anchorhold, which might be a freestanding house but was usually an apartment built onto a manor house or church. (Saint Wiborada from chapter 11 of *The Curious Historian Level 3A* was an anchoress.)

An anchorhold could be anything from one small room to a suite of rooms with a courtyard, like a miniature abbey. Once the anchorite or anchoress went into the anchorhold, the bishop would have its outside door blocked up, to be opened only in extreme emergencies or after its inhabitant died. Anchorholds did have windows, however—usually at least one into the church, through which the anchoress could see the Mass and receive the Eucharist, and one to the outside through which to receive necessities. Because they lived at the church and had good reputations as holy women, some anchoresses had better social lives in their confinement than they would have had otherwise. In fact, one of the most beloved spiritual writers of the late Middle Ages is an anchoress named Julian of Norwich, who wrote several works from her anchorhold and also served as a trusted spiritual advisor to many in her community, including an English woman named Margery Kempe who ended up traveling to many pilgrimage sites throughout Europe and the Holy Land. Isn't it interesting how a woman who remained in one place could inspire another to travel far and wide?! —A.D.

The Feudal and Manorial Systems

So how did these pieces of society fit together? Two systems of mutual obligation developed, **feudalism** and **manorialism**. The feudal system structured the relationship between the lord and his vassals; the manorial system structured the relationship between the lord of the manor and the commoners who lived on his land.

The exact nature of these systems varied from kingdom to kingdom and could be much more complex than the following sketch, but in theory, they operated this way: The crown owned all the land in the kingdom, which was divided into units known generically as fiefs (or fiefdoms). A **fief** could be anything from a single manor to an entire duchy. But of course, the king couldn't manage all the local details of every fief on

11. See, e.g., Bernard of Clairvaux, *An Apologia to Abbot William*, trans. Michael Casey, in *Treatises I*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux* (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970).



▲ Medieval Manor House #1



▲ Coronation Soup/Dillegrout

▼ Reconstructed Medieval Village #2



his own. So he granted control of each fief to an aristocrat, usually a nobleman or knight but sometimes only a member of the gentry. Whatever the person's rank, he took part in the relationship as a **vassal**, who had taken oaths of loyalty and service to his feudal overlord in return for protection and other favors. (A vassal was typically a man, but there were noblewomen such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Isabella of Castile who held fiefs and even kingdoms in their own right.)

A vassal who held a fief—let's call him the "fief-holder" for convenience—was allowed to live there, govern it in his overlord's name, dispense the king's justice, and keep the rents from the tenants on the land. In return, the fief-holder agreed to send the overlord a certain share of taxes collected from the fief and possibly to render

some service to the overlord when required. This service was usually military, but some grants were for other kinds of service. William the Conqueror, for example, liked one particular stew served at his wife's coronation banquet so much that he granted the cook the English manor of Addington on the condition that he and his heirs make that stew for every English coronation thereafter!¹² There was a chain of command among the various ranks of nobility: The knights answered to the barons, who answered to the earls, and so on. But the responsibility went both ways. Lower-level nobles and even commoners who were being mistreated by their feudal overlords could and often did complain to their overlord's overlord. They might even appeal all the way to the king, though a king who overstepped his authority risked sparking a civil war. Also, kings and other rulers also had many knights who were direct vassals of that ruler, which would give him the most loyal core of his army.

At the manorial level, when a vassal received a new grant of land, he often began his management of it by building or rebuilding a stately residence for himself and his family. What kind of residence he built depended both on what he could afford and what the king gave him permission to build. It might be no more than a big house, but often it was a castle. If the manor already had a parish church, and especially if that church was built on an ancient sacred site, the lord might build his house near it; otherwise, he might build the house first and build a new church next door. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these improvements were usually the first step in creating a new village or town, with a village green where people could graze their own livestock and streets that led to the manor house and church through land divided into lots (called burgages

in England) and assigned or rented to various people who lived and worked there. The lord might plan the town in advance or let it grow up gradually around the market, which was usually close to the church. In rural areas, each peasant family usually had a long, narrow lot to farm for their own use, on which they might have a small cottage, a garden, a few fruit trees, and a few farm animals (which sometimes lived in the cottage with them). Other manors had long houses divided into large one-room apartments, and each tenant family lived in one apartment. Free peasants also rented a strip of land to farm for the lord, while serfs might be put to work in larger fields.

12. "An English Manor for a Bowl of Stew?" *Tasting History with Max Miller*, May 11, 2021, <http://capress.link/tch3b0108>.

Each commoner owed the lord a certain amount of work, rent, tax, or produce; what they could do with the rest depended on the laws of the kingdom or on local customs. In return, the lord had to make sure that his serfs and poorer tenants had everything they needed to survive and work, from food, shelter, and clothing to certain farm tools. The lord could certainly take unfair advantage of this relationship: If a manor had a flour mill, for instance, the lord might require his tenants to use it *and* charge them for doing so. There were also many cases where the lord had so many manors that he never even visited some of them, leaving them to govern themselves—and to fend for themselves in times of crisis. And there were instances, especially in the late Middle Ages, when the lord changed the use of the land in such a way that the peasants were driven from their homes, which caused great suffering and hard feelings. When a lord actually cared about his tenants as people, however, the relationship could be harmonious and peaceful.¹³

The idea that the crown owned all the land could also cause serious problems for anyone who wasn't a member of the royal family. Perhaps the best-known instance was William the Conqueror's introduction of the Forest Law in England. The Forest Law declared that all areas of wilderness (whether forested or not, thus including millions of acres of land) were reserved for the king's use alone and that all wild game animals—especially deer and boar—were the king's property. Anyone found hunting without permission could face severe consequences. The same went for doing anything that might damage the wilderness: foraging, grazing animals in the woods, fishing, cutting timber, etc. The goal of the Forest Law was to preserve game because William and his sons were avid hunters, and William ordered the planting of thousands of acres of trees in an area that's known to this day as the New Forest. But William ignored the fact that under Anglo-Saxon law, wilderness areas were common property. The poorest peasants were hardest hit because they were no longer allowed to use the forest's free resources to help them survive. Many people of all classes, including nobles and churchmen, simply ignored the law and hunted without permission anyway. But they did so at their own risk. If caught, aristocrats might only be fined, but commoners could be maimed or even killed.¹⁴



▲ Medieval Hunting Image

Key Elements of Medieval Society

The Code of Chivalry

The systems described in the previous section still needed an additional element to make them more stable—a code of conduct. These moral rules and customs became known as the code of chivalry, and this is how it developed among the knights of medieval Europe.

Average people in this era probably liked the greater peace and stability they were experiencing in the high Middle Ages, but knights sometimes didn't. Peace meant there was nobody to fight, and warfare was what knights spent their time training for! So, in the eleventh century, the Church tried to stop knights from going around picking fights




▲ Tournament/Jousting #3



▲ Courtly Love or Chivalry #3

13. See, e.g., *Time Team*, season 5, episode 8, “High Worsall, North Yorkshire,” presented by Tony Robinson, directed by Brendan Hughes, aired March 1, 1998, Channel 4 (UK); *Time Team*, season 11, episode 12, “Roxburgh, Scotland,” presented by Tony Robinson, directed by Simon Raikes, aired March 21, 2004, Channel 4 (UK); *Time Team*, season 12, episode 9, “Lost Centuries of St. Osyth,” presented by Tony Robinson, directed by Laurence Vulliamy, aired February 27, 2005, Channel 4 (UK), <http://capress.link/tch3b0111>; *Secrets of the Castle*, episode 4, “The Castle’s Community of Skills,” presented by Ruth Goodman, Peter Ginn, and Tom Pinfold, directed by Blythe Tinker, aired December 9, 2014, BBC Two.

14. See, e.g., *Time Team*, season 12, episode 13, “Animal Farm,” presented by Tony Robinson, directed by Nick Metcalfe, aired December 17, 2007, Channel 4 (UK), <http://capress.link/tch3b0113>; *Time Team*, season 19, episode 11, “King John’s Lost Palace,” presented by Tony Robinson, directed by George Pagliero, aired April 8, 2012, Channel 4 (UK), <http://capress.link/tch3b0114>.



Do you remember Augustine of Hippo from *The Curious Historian 3A*?

He was one of the first Christian philosophers to try to reconcile the teachings of Jesus, which promoted nonviolence and praying for one's enemies, with the reality of an imperfect world in which violence and wars would always exist. While early Christians were largely pacifists—people who believe engaging in violence and war is morally wrong—things became more complicated for the Church after the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the early fourth century. What was a Christian ruler to do if an enemy invaded his lands and began hurting his people? Was it morally right to defend his subjects even if it required the taking of other human lives? Drawing on ancient philosophers such as Plato and Cicero as well as his Christian religion, Augustine came to believe that the great evil of war was not that people died fighting in them (since he believed the human soul was eternal), but the fact that wars were often motivated by selfishness, greed, and a “lust for domination.”¹⁵ However, if a Christian ruler took part in a war because he wanted to restore justice and ultimately desired peace—for example, his soldiers fought against an invading army in self-defense, or took part in a war to recover stolen property—Augustine believed the use of violent force was justified. These principles are the beginning of what is known as “Just War Theory,” a tradition of military ethics that another important thinker, the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, added to in the thirteenth century.

with people “just because.” The Peace of God was a movement in which local nobles and religious authorities made public statements that told knights not to attack women, churchmen, or unarmed peasants. Related to the Peace of God was the Truce of God, which told knights they could fight only on certain days of the week and never on Sundays or high holy days.¹⁵ Those restrictions didn't sit well with the knights, however, and as tensions between church and state began to rise, the aristocracy looked for a way to please themselves and God without having to answer to church authorities.

There were a few outlets for a knight's love of riding and using weapons that didn't break the Peace of God. Hunting was one, but as we've already seen, that was often restricted by law, and even the most avid hunter doesn't like hunting *all* the time. Another outlet was the tournament, which offered knights a chance to demonstrate their skills. At first, however, tournaments were little more than organized brawls; nobody used blunted weapons, which led to serious injuries, and many tournaments ended with at least one knight being killed. Plus, if one knight defeated another in a tournament, the winner could take the loser's horse and armor, if not claim the loser himself as a prisoner and hold him for ransom. So when it came to keeping knights in one piece, early tournaments weren't all that much better than other fights!

What the knights needed was a better set of goals than merely bashing each other's heads in. And a new concept of knighthood did develop in the courts of France and later spread across Europe, each culture refining it over time to meet its own standards. We know these ideals as **chivalry**. There was no one document that defined a universal code of chivalry, but broadly speaking, a chivalrous knight was obedient to God and the Church, loyal to his feudal overlord and his fellow knights (and his host if he was another lord's guest), courteous to women, generous to his subjects, and merciful to his defeated enemies. Some cultures had longer lists of virtues expected of knights, but the idea that every knight was playing by the same basic set of rules, both morally and strategically, was an improvement over the days when some cultures refused to recognize that there were any rules at all.

A related concept that first became popular at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine in the twelfth century was courtly love, which set rules for the relationships between knights and ladies. Chivalry may have accorded ladies high honor and protection, but the principles of courtly love, based on reverence for the Virgin Mary, told the knight to put his lady-love on an even higher pedestal than that. There were rules for how a knight could declare his interest in a lady, how he should and shouldn't go about proving himself worthy of her, and whether and how he should ever try to do more than wear her favors (a small token of her regard, like a ribbon he could tie to his lance) at a tournament. These rules often differed from one kingdom to another—the German concept of *Minne*, for instance, was much more spiritualized and moral than the French notion of courtly love—but most agreed with the idea that rules were needed. Once a knight did declare his love, the lady generally expected him to obey her, which gave ladies the opportunity to curb knights' worst impulses. Tournaments became less brutal, for example, and ladies could limit the number of tournaments their husbands participated in.

When someone tells you he is reading a romance story, what do you usually think that story is about? Love, right? The genre known as romance developed during this period, but it was *not* originally a love story, but rather a “Roman story” (a Rome-ance) like Virgil's *Aeneid*. The romance is an example of the ideals of chivalry finding their way into the poetry being composed in the royal courts and aristocratic households

15. Trey Whitworth, “The Peace of God and Truce of God,” StMu Research Scholars, September 21, 2016, <http://capress.link/tch3b0126>.

16. Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137.

across Europe. These poems weren't necessarily twelve-book epics that followed the Greco-Roman model; some were longer, and some were shorter. But most of them, regardless of where they were written, dealt with one of three subjects: "the Matter of Rome," which included the Trojan War and the founding of Rome by the Trojan hero Aeneas; "the Matter of France," generally about Charlemagne and his companions; and "the Matter of Britain," which we call the Arthurian legend. A similar genre was the *chanson de geste* ("song of deeds"), which recounted the adventures of real people in a way that was often exaggerated, cleaned up, or fictionalized in other ways. Among the most popular *chansons de geste* was *The Song of Roland*, a grand chivalric tale about one of Charlemagne's noble companions who was killed at the Battle of Roncesvalles, which you read about in chapter 8 of *The Curious Historian 3A*.

The codes of chivalry and of courtly love could and did clash with each other and with the Church's expectations regarding Christian behavior. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* demonstrates these tensions vividly when Sir Gawain, visiting a strange castle, becomes trapped between his chivalric obligations to his host and the demands of his host's wife for Gawain's courtly love.¹⁷ The conflicts among codes also raised the question, first asked in Walther von der Vogelweide's poem "*Ich saz ûf eime steine*" ("I Sat on a Stone"), of whether it was possible to have honor, worldly goods, and God's blessing all at once. How each person answered that question depended heavily on her own understanding of each concept and of morality.



▲ "I Sat on a Stone" #2

LITERATURE OF THE AGE: *The Arthurian Legend*¹⁸

Have you ever read books or seen movies about King Arthur, such as *The Sword in the Stone*? What's your favorite? Do you remember the names of specific characters or the kinds of adventures they went on? It seems like almost everyone in the world knows the stories about Arthur receiving Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake, gathering brave knights to the Round Table at his great castle of Camelot, and sending them off on adventures like the quest for the Holy Grail. But the Arthur of those stories looks a lot more like the kings of the high Middle Ages than the Romano-British warlords of the fifth and sixth centuries, such as Ambrosius Aurelianus. What happened after our angry preacher Gildas wrote *On the Ruin of Britain* that could take Arthur so far from his possible historical roots?

Although the Arthurian legends have roots in the Welsh oral traditions, the process of turning fact into fiction kicked into high gear when Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote *The History of the Kings of Britain* in the 1130s. Geoffrey was Welsh, but he wrote in Latin for a Norman audience. While he wanted to follow older sources, he didn't like to let facts get in the way of a good story! He also tended to stick stories together where they didn't belong. The character of Myrddin, for example, featured in his own Welsh legends unrelated to King Arthur, but Geoffrey sanded off his rough edges and shoehorned him into the story of Arthur under the name of Merlin. Is that



▲ King Arthur/Merlin/Camelot #3

17. See, e.g., Elisabeth G. Wolfe, "Poetics of Holiness: Bernard of Clairvaux and the Pearl Poet" (doctoral dissertation, Baylor University, 2009), 26–69, <http://capress.link/tch3b0117>.

18. Unless otherwise noted, the information in this article comes from Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Alan Lupack and Barbara Tapa Lupack, eds., *The Camelot Project*, accessed April 4, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3b0118>; David Nash Ford, "King Arthur on Early British Kingdoms," *Early British Kingdoms*, accessed April 4, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3b0119>.



▲ King Arthur/Merlin/Camelot #7

a name you recognize? Geoffrey was also the first to introduce characters such as Arthur's father Uther Pendragon, to name Arthur's sword, and to suggest that Arthur was buried on the isle of Avalon. Geoffrey's stories of Arthur inspired a Norman poet named Wace to write the *Roman de Brut* in the 1150s; Wace called Arthur's sword Excalibur and invented the idea of the Round Table. Wace, in turn, inspired an English poet named Layamon to write a Middle English poem called *Brut* around 1200, which gives more detail about Arthur going to Avalon and adds his promise to return at the time of England's greatest need.

The stories told by Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon caught the imaginations of French poets such as Marie de France, whose twelfth-century *Lais* include several stories about Arthur's knights. At about the same time, Eleanor of Aquitaine's daughter, Countess Marie de Champagne, began commissioning Chrétien de Troyes to write romances about "the Matter of Britain." Chrétien introduced the character

of Lancelot, the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, and the concept of "a grail" (probably meaning a shallow Roman serving dish called a *gradalis*) that his successor Robert de Boron turned into the Holy Grail, the cup from the Last Supper in which Joseph of Arimathea caught some of Jesus's blood during the Crucifixion.

Chrétien and Robert thus started a whole new branch of the legend! In the "chronicle tradition," following the older Welsh sources, Gawain is Arthur's chief knight; in the "romance tradition," following French sources, Lancelot is the chief knight. Both traditions spread across Europe, inspiring poems and prose tales in languages far removed from Welsh and Middle English. But historical accuracy wasn't something medieval poets cared about! So Arthur and his knights began to look and act like the kings and knights the poets knew in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries rather than like people who lived in fifth-century Britain.

Finally, in the fifteenth century, Sir Thomas Malory decided to take all these different stories from both traditions and fit them together into one coherent prose narrative. He finished his book, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, around 1470, and William Caxton published it in 1485. Malory's version of the legend also became the standard version for centuries to come, and every retelling that has come after, from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* to T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* to Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, has either relied on it or reacted against it somehow. And who knows . . . maybe you'll tell your own version someday!

▼ Christian Pilgrimage #2



Penance and Pilgrimage

Have you ever said something unkind to someone, say a brother or a sister, and then apologized for it, but the hurt sibling doesn't feel any better because they don't think you really meant it? What happens next? You usually have to think up some way to show that you are truly sorry, right?

This simple example relates to the concept of penance as it was understood in the Middle Ages. Now **penance**, which is sometimes also called "confession" or "reconciliation," is one of the seven sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church. Yet "a penance" is also a devotional act of spiritual healing, such as visiting a holy site or giving alms to the poor, that shows a person is truly sorry for his sins. Here's how the two worked together in the Middle Ages.

A major part of medieval life for everyone from kings to commons centered on the seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, marriage, holy orders (becoming a monk, nun, deacon, or priest), and extreme unction (sometimes called "last rites," meant to convey forgiveness of sins at what might be the end of a person's life). Each of the sacraments is considered a means by which people receive God's grace. We've already seen emperors such as Louis the Pious undergoing pen-

ance for their misdeeds, and you may already have some idea of what the other sacraments are about. Marriage and holy orders are pretty straightforward, for example, and a person usually did only one or the other (although there were people who married young and then became monks or nuns later in life, often after being widowed). Because penance will continue to play an important role in the history of this era, it's worth taking a moment to talk about that sacrament in particular.

To receive the sacrament of penance, a Catholic in the Middle Ages (and still today) confessed to God before a priest any sins she may have committed. The priest made sure the person—the penitent—was truly sorry for what she had done and really wanted to do better. Then he assigned the person a task—a penance—to do and prayed a prayer of absolution (forgiveness) over the penitent. The sacrament wasn't complete until the penitent did the assigned penance, which both showed how sorry she was and helped her start doing better.

The nature of the penance assigned depended on the severity of the sin being confessed. In most cases, the penance involved saying a certain number of prayers, apologizing to someone whom the penitent had wronged, doing whatever he could to make things right, or doing acts of service. For very serious sins, however, a priest might have told the penitent that he couldn't receive the Eucharist again until he did something more significant, whether that was doing public penance in front of the whole church or going on a pilgrimage to visit a particular shrine.

Penance wasn't the only reason a person might want to go on pilgrimage, however. Some pilgrims went to shrines to ask saints to pray for them about specific problems, especially healing from diseases that medieval medicine couldn't treat. Others made a vow to visit the shrine if the saint would ask God to help them. Traveling some pilgrimage routes, such as the Camino de Santiago in Spain, could be as much a spiritual experience as visiting the shrine of Saint James itself in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was (and still is). And going on pilgrimage could also give people an excuse to travel that they wouldn't have had otherwise. Many people today enjoy having adventures and visiting new places, and people in the Middle Ages were no different.

Whatever a person's reason for going on pilgrimage might be, both the saint to whom the shrine was dedicated and the difficulty of the journey affected the spiritual power of the trip. Some chapels were built on the tops of steep mountains or on islands that were tough to sail to. Someone who already lived close to a cathedral with an important shrine could make the journey harder by starting some distance out of town, walking barefoot, or crawling up the cathedral stairs on his or her knees. Or pilgrims who lived near one shrine to a given saint might travel to a shrine to the same saint that was further away; for instance, someone who lived in Penzance, Cornwall, might go on a pilgrimage to the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy rather than to the Priory of Saint Michael's Mount that was just next door. Pilgrims who traveled long distances were encouraged to travel light, and churches and monasteries along pilgrimage routes built hostels where pilgrims could get free food and lodging. After reaching their destination and visiting the shrine, pilgrims would buy badges and other souvenirs to take home; for penitents, a pilgrim badge served as proof that they'd completed their penance. For example, people who walk the Camino de Santiago today still receive a special document, known as a *credencial*, that is filled with stamps along the way and certifies the pilgrim's journey at the end with a personalized document called a *compostela*. These documents are based on the ones originally used by pilgrims in the Middle Ages!



▲ Church of the Holy Sepulcher #5

The Seven Sacraments

While various Christian churches define the sacraments differently, both the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches number them as seven and consider them to be outward signs of inward grace. It was during the late Middle Ages at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) that the Roman Catholic Church formally defined the seven sacraments:

- baptism
- confirmation
- Holy Eucharist
- penance (or reconciliation)
- extreme unction
- holy orders
- matrimony

19. *Digging for Britain*, season 3, episode 2, “West,” presented by Alice Roberts and Matt Williams, aired February 10, 2015, BBC Four.<

A 2011 University of Winchester excavation at the leper hospital of Saint Mary Magdalene in Winchester, which was founded shortly after the Norman Conquest, uncovered the skeleton of a man buried with a scallop shell, a traditional pilgrim badge from Santiago de Compostela.¹⁰ Imagine how much this man treasured his memories of walking the Camino and visiting the shrine of Saint James if he kept his pilgrim badge with him even when leprosy sent him to the hospital! -A.D.

? Church of the Holy Sepulcher

Do you know why the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is so important to many Christians?

Rome, the seat of the Latin church and the city where Saint Peter and Saint Paul were martyred, was another popular place of pilgrimage, but the ultimate destination for pilgrimage was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Not only did the Holy Land have special significance as the place where Jesus lived, died, and rose again, but the journey was long—especially when starting from as far away as western Europe, from where it could take months. It was also difficult both because of the terrain and because of dangers on the road from humans and animals. The fact that Jerusalem was in Muslim hands only added to the difficulty, although the early caliphs generally allowed Christian pilgrims to visit their holy sites unharmed. For most of the Early Middle Ages, the only way to reach Jerusalem from western Europe was by sea, which carried its own risks. However, after the Magyars converted to Christianity in the tenth century, Saint Stephen of Hungary began allowing pilgrims from other parts of Europe to cross Hungarian territory on their way to Jerusalem. This new, safer land route gave many more pilgrims the opportunity to visit the Holy Land at about the same time that anti-Christian sentiment was rising in the Fatimid Caliphate. This combination of trends would be

one factor that would lead to one of the most controversial series of events in medieval history: the Crusades.

Looking Back . . . Looking Ahead

We've reached the end of our pilgrimage (get it?) through the basics of medieval society in Western Europe after 1066. Do you remember any of the "triads" we discussed early on in the chapter? The most important "group of three" is the one that centers around the tricky concept known as feudalism and the order of society that was prevalent in many places during this time. A key concept to remember is "those who fight, those who work, and those who pray"—this way of thinking about the people of the Middle Ages will be helpful to you in later chapters.

First, however, we're turning to some regions of the world that didn't necessarily adopt the same social structure that developed in the realms of Western Europe, though they often shared a religious heritage. Remember, Christianity was also alive and well in Eastern Europe and in Byzantium, and in the next chapter we'll take a closer look at the Crusades: the movement that momentarily brought East and West back together as they faced a common adversary. Why didn't this cooperation last and what were the costs of this lengthy conflict? That's the long and somewhat complicated story we'll be digging into in the next chapter.

Monuments of the Age: Castles²⁰

Quick—draw a castle! Is there a tall tower with a wall around it? Does the top of the wall look kind of like teeth? Did you draw a gate with a drawbridge? Everybody has some idea of what a castle looks like, and there's something about castles that captures the imagination and makes a person think of epic stories about knights and ladies and . . . maybe even dragons! Real castles played an important role in medieval history, and those that survive remain important landmarks throughout Europe. But they don't all look the way you'd expect!

The most basic definition of a castle is "a fortified dwelling." Thus, some buildings called "castles" are just houses with a few features such as drawbridges that made them easier to defend against attack. Who lived in castles is another question with unexpected answers. Kings and noblemen often had multiple castles and stayed in each for only a few weeks or

20. The information in this article can be considered common knowledge and can be found in any printed book or documentary about castles. See, e.g., David Macaulay, *David Macaulay: Castle* (1983; PBS Home Video, 2006), DVD; *Great Castles of Europe*, directed by Mark Verkerk et al., aired 1993–1994, The Learning Channel; as well as *Secrets of the Castle* and many episodes of *Time Team*.

months every year. When the lord and his household were away, each castle might house just enough soldiers to man the defenses and just enough staff to keep the place running. And some castles were glorified toll booths and never housed noblemen at all, only soldiers.

You might also be surprised to learn that the vast majority of castles were originally built of wood and earth, not stone. The basic castle form that William the Conqueror took to England was called the motte and bailey: The strongest part of the castle was a big mound of dirt called a motte, on which the Normans built a wooden tower called the keep, and the bailey was an area around the motte that was fenced in by a palisade of wooden stakes. The great hall, stables, barracks, and other assorted buildings were usually in the bailey. Later, a lord who wanted to improve his castle might have it rebuilt in stone in the latest style and then add on over the centuries as tastes and needs changed.

The earliest castles had square towers, but those proved too easy to break down with catapults or to collapse by digging tunnels under them (a tactic called undermining). Knights and architects who visited the Holy Land paid attention to the fortresses they saw there, and they brainstormed new and better ways to design their castles. By the end of the thirteenth century, when Edward I sponsored major construction of new castles across Wales, most castles had round towers that were better at deflecting catapult shots and were harder to undermine. Castle architects had also started designing walls that had two faces of dressed stone mortared together with rubble in between; digging under them might cause the rubble to fall through, without necessarily weakening the mortared faces as much, leading to the intruders' tunnel collapsing. More important, designing walls in this way, with a harder outer shell and a softer layer underneath to absorb impact, made them much harder to knock down.

There could be more layers of defenses too: If the castle were near a town, the town might have an outer wall of its own, and the castle itself often had one wall around an outer bailey with no buildings in it and a second wall around the inner bailey, which housed all the important buildings such as the great hall, living quarters, chapel, and stables, along with the castle well. Can you guess why the well was in the strongest part of the castle? You wouldn't want to have to go outside the walls for water in the middle of a siege! Each wall had its own gatehouse, which usually didn't line up with each other so that attackers who got through one couldn't go straight to the other, and each gatehouse had a series of doors and portcullises that could trap attackers. (A portcullis is the big grille that slides up and down, often made of wood reinforced with steel.) Raising the drawbridge further protected the outer gatehouse, both because the drawbridge surface covered the gate and because the attackers would have a much harder time getting across the moat without it.



▲ Castles #7



▲ Castles #11



▲ Castles #5



▲ Pfalzgrafenstein #1

And of course those tooth-like parts at the tops of the walls weren't just for show, either! Those are called crenellations, and they gave the defenders a way to shoot at attackers from behind partial cover even when on the very top of the wall or tower. Inside the gatehouses and towers, little slits called embrasures or arrow loops were built into the walls, allowing archers to fire out without leaving cover. Walkways that extended past the outer edge of the wall could have murder holes in the floor through which defenders could drop big rocks or pour boiling oil and other nasty things down onto attackers on the ground below.

For all their military might, most castles *were* places where aristocratic families lived at least part of the year. Living quarters were often in the towers, which had their own defenses but also pretty views, and the great hall was a space for socializing and entertainment as well as meals. Only rooms high enough that attackers couldn't climb through the windows would have windows that were larger than slits, and glass was so expensive that only the most important rooms, such as the chapel and the lord's apartments, would have glass window panes. That plus the thick stone walls meant that the rooms could be dark, drafty, and cold in the winter. So the walls were usually covered with white plaster, and while some rooms might have painted decorations, others were hung with rich tapestries that served as both decoration and insulation. Candles, torches, and braziers provided both light and heat, as did the fire in the great hall.

The living quarters also had rooms called *garderobes* that served as both toilets and closets. In some castles, the toilet part of the garderobe emptied into the moat, but more often, the waste went down into a cesspit (which the servants might or might not empty out periodically), and the ammonia from the cesspit was believed to keep bugs out of the clothes that were stored in the closet part of the garderobe. In fact, "garderobe" is where we get the word "wardrobe" in modern English!

As castle designs improved, so did siege weapons and tactics, which prompted more improvements to castle design. This cycle continued until the arrival of gunpowder weapons from Asia made the old-fashioned, high-walled style of castle obsolete. Fortresses could still be made, but now they required a whole different approach, with low, thick walls and lots of defensive firepower. Rich cities and large kingdoms could afford such defensive structures, but most nobles could not. Noblemen who still wanted to build castles in the age of gunpowder usually weren't doing it for defense anymore; French chateaus such as Chambord and British pleasantries (manors for rest and pleasure) such as Tregrug Castle in Wales were places for noble and royal families to show off their wealth and get away for a fun vacation. Such castles were still a strong statement of power, though, and those that survive have a lot to tell us about the history of the area where they stand, the people who built them and lived in them, and the people who lived around them.

▼ Chateau Gaillard



To read more about the castle that inspired Disney's Cinderella Castle and about the legend of the Holy Grail, see the Profiles and Legends PDF in *The Curious Historian's Archive: Extra Resources for Level 3A*.

Be Creative

During this time period monks and nuns very often would copy books to make more copies available. Some would create illuminated manuscripts that contained more intricate designs in the writing. Pretend you are a monk or a nun in charge of copying a text. Use this class time to quietly work on rewriting a text assigned to you by your teacher. Try to use illuminated writing in your work. You should continue your writing for the entirety of the time that the teacher provides for this assignment. Your teacher may make this experience more “realistic” by dimming the lights or using only battery-powered candles for you to work by.

Talk About It

After you have finished your illuminated writing time, your teacher will instruct you to come back together as a whole class to discuss the experience. Consider the following questions:

- What did you like about this experience? Dislike?
- Did you find any challenges with working in the dim light?
- What were some benefits of monks and nuns copying texts?
- Why do you think this was a job given to monks and nuns?



True or False

For each statement, circle *T* if the statement is true or circle *F* if the statement is false.

1. A serf was a noble that could own an estate. T F
2. A master could open his own shop, employ other workers, and train apprentices. T F
3. The Cluny order was not interested in reforming monastic practice. T F
4. The manorial system was what was used to structure the relationships between the lord and his aristocratic vassals. T F
5. A credential was a document that a person received to fill with stamps along their pilgrimage. T F
6. Chanson de geste was a writing genre similar to comedy that was developed during this time period. T F
7. The Peace of God movement referred to the law that stated all areas of wilderness were only allowed to be used by the king. T F
8. Vassals were usually required to promise their overlord service when it was required, which was likely military service. T F

AD 500 Middle Ages ca. AD 500–1500

AD 1071 Seljuk Turks win Battle of Manzikert


AD 1081 Alexios I Komnenos comes to power

AD 1096–1099 First Crusade

AD 1095 Pope Urban II announces the First Crusade

ca. AD 1120 Knights Templar established

MEMORY 

 Don't forget to learn this week's song verse(s)! The lyrics can be found in appendix A.

Unit I: Knights, Kings, and Crusaders

Chapter 2
The Crusading Movement Begins

IMPORTANT WORDS

WORD	DEFINITION
Crusades ¹	A series of military pilgrimages undertaken to free the Holy Land from Muslim control
First Crusade	The first of a series of armed pilgrimages to the Holy Land, 1096–1099
Excommunication	The formal banning of a person from church and forbidding that person from receiving the sacraments
Investiture	The process of bestowing the symbols of power on someone assuming a high office, such as a bishop or abbot

IMPORTANT FIGURES

WORD	DEFINITION
Pope Urban II	The pope who announced and planned the First Crusade
Latins	A name given by the Byzantines to most westerners, regardless of where they were from or what language they spoke
Alexios I Komnenos	Byzantine emperor during the First Crusade. It was his call for aid in defeating the Seljuk Turks that prompted Pope Urban II to call for an armed pilgrimage.
Knights Templar	A religious, military order that was established to protect Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land and that also provided a banking system for them

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

WORD	DEFINITION
People's Crusade	The first "wave" of crusaders, led by Peter the Hermit, who went ahead of the official gathering of the nobles' troops for the First Crusade
Reconquista	Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslim rulers of al-Andalus
Barons' Crusade	The four official armies of the First Crusade, each led by members of the nobility
Outremer	Realms conquered by the Crusaders, organized around the cities of Edessa, Tripoli, Antioch, and Jerusalem; also known as Crusader States

1. For an extended definition of Crusades, see the alphabetical glossary.

The Crusading Movement Gets Its Start

Have you ever been assigned a group project and watched in horror as the rest of the group took what you thought was a great idea and turned it into something you never meant for it to be? We often refer to moments like these as “too many cooks in the kitchen.” Of course, a group project for school is one thing, but a situation such as this can quickly become serious and unwieldy when “the cooks” are rulers of vast territories and “the kitchen” is the Holy Land—a region that has long held great significance for the world’s three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

This brings us to a conflict known as the Crusades and the heirs to the communities involved, who still have strong feelings about these events. How did this world-changing campaign begin? In the simplest terms, the emperors of Byzantium found themselves in a challenging “too many cooks” situation at various times when they tried to ask the popes to send help from Western Europe to fight the Seljuk Turks. As you may remember from *The Curious Historian 3A*, Byzantine forces were constantly being pulled in multiple directions as they faced threats from nomadic warriors such as the Pechenegs in Bulgaria, Norman adventurers in southern Italy and the Balkans, and the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia. The Byzantine army simply wasn’t big enough to fight on all these fronts at the same time. But asking for help from Europe came with its own risks, and even when the leaders on both sides wanted to work together, they often came to the table with very different ideas of what cooperation should mean.

Countless books have been written about this project over the centuries from the perspectives of Europeans, Byzantines, Muslims, and the many minority groups who got caught up in the conflicts of the era through no fault of their own. Most of these books, including eyewitness accounts, present the views of only one side without trying to understand the others, so it can be difficult to untangle what really happened during the Crusades, as well as when and why. It was a time when people on all sides did terrible things and caused lasting harm. All sides circulated stories that exaggerated their enemies’ cruelty and greed while excusing or ignoring their own. As a result, historians can find the task of presenting an objective picture to be a major challenge. Yet this lengthy period was also a time of surprising friendships and improved communication and cooperation, as well as a time when trade and travel brought lasting good to both Europe and the Middle East.

Our goal in this chapter and the next is to introduce you to the main events and the big players of the first four Crusades as fairly as we can, along with some of the context about what was happening in Byzantium and the Muslim world while the Crusades were in progress and why the leaders of Western Europe became involved. We hope this brief overview will make you curious enough to find out more on your own and form your own opinions about the events of the era. The better we understand the past, the better we can understand how it shapes the present, and the better we can make our future.

Now when it comes to the Crusades, there are a couple of important facts that are easy to miss, since we have the benefit of hindsight. The first is how crazy it must have seemed for the leaders of the Crusade to go marching off, to campaign thousands of miles away in a region they knew little about. Why would they do such a thing? Second, when we take into account the fact that the armies of the First Crusade were a rather rag-tag collection from different regions, led by a group of middle-ranking nobles who really didn’t get along, it seems surprising, even miraculous, that it achieved what it did. How on earth were they able to pull it off? It is sometimes asked why the later crusades never seemed to be as successful as the first, but given all this, the more interesting question is why this first foray achieved anything at all! To answer these two questions

▼ Crusades #1



as best we can, we're going to give more attention to the details of the **First Crusade**—the first of a series of armed pilgrimages to the Holy Land, 1096–1099—and summarize the story of the later ones more broadly.

Defining Terms: Crusade

Before we go on, let's take a moment to talk about some of the terminology we'll be using. You've probably heard the word "crusade" used in all sorts of modern contexts. Some people use "crusade" to mean simply "mission" or "campaign." Some churches, for example, call an event for children a "Kids' Crusade," and politicians might talk about launching a "crusade against crime." But what did the word mean in the Middle Ages?

Well, the word didn't actually exist in the Middle Ages! Strictly speaking, "**crusade**" is a modern term—it wasn't used in English until the early eighteenth century. The Europeans who took part in the Crusades sewed crosses on their clothes to show that they were part of Jesus Christ's army, so medieval English sources generally refer to "taking the cross" rather than "going on Crusade." The word "crusader" likewise entered English in the mid-eighteenth century; Middle English didn't have a specific word to distinguish someone who had taken the cross from someone who had gone on any other kind of pilgrimage.²

Western historians generally define the Crusading Era as the period from 1095 to 1291. The year 1095 was when **Pope Urban II** (pope from 1088 to 1099) announced the First Crusade, and 1291 was when Muslim forces permanently destroyed the last of the Latin kingdoms that had been established by western knights in the Middle East. Urban's original idea was for an armed pilgrimage of knights and infantry to the Holy Land, with the intent of freeing Jerusalem from Muslim rule. Later expeditions had the stated goal of defending the Holy Sepulcher. Over time, however, the concept of "crusade" grew to include "holy wars" declared by the pope against any perceived enemies of the Catholic Church, from pagan Slavs to heretical sects to annoying monarchs who hadn't changed their ways after being excommunicated. (**Excommunication** is the formal banning of a person from church and forbidding him from receiving the sacraments.) According to views popular at the time, most people considered these wars to be justified because they were declared by the pope—understood to be a legitimate authority. Additionally, they may have been initially viewed by Latin Christians as a response of self-defense to protect fellow Christians living in distant lands, because the targeted groups were believed to be God's enemies.

The idea of holy war wasn't new, of course. As we've seen, the concept of holy war—*jihad*—had been an important part of the Muslim belief system from the beginning. Historians have long debated whether or not Urban's notion of an armed pilgrimage was specifically inspired by *jihad*, but even if not, it's likely that he was aware of the idea because of its role in Islam's expansion since the seventh century.

Defining Terms: Latins and Byzantines

In writing about this period, historians often borrow terms from historical sources that had very different meanings in that context from the meanings you've learned so far. Muslim sources on the Crusades, for example, call all Europeans "Franks," no matter what kingdom they were from. The Byzantines use "**Latins**" for most westerners, regardless of where they were from or what language they spoke. European sources use "Latins" and "Greeks" to distinguish between Catholics and Orthodox Christians, based on the languages generally used in their respective churches. We'll mainly use "Latins" (or "Crusaders") and "Byzantines" in this chapter to avoid confusion.



To the Source:

Crusade from the French *croisade* and the Spanish *cruzado*, derived from the medieval Latin *cruciata*, "marked with a cross."



▲ Pope Urban II #1

2. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "crusader," accessed July 26, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3b0201>; Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "crusader," accessed July 26, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3b0202>.

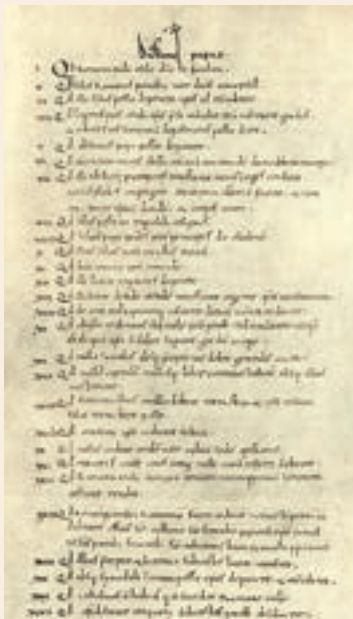
The Investiture Controversy³

► Pope Leo IX #2



The fact that Latins united to launch the First Crusade is even more remarkable because at the time there was a rift between the pope and the emperor. Gregory VII (pope from 1073 to 1085) had fallen out with Emperor Henry IV of East Frankia over relations between church and state. Gregory first came to prominence as secretary to Pope Leo IX (1049–1054). Remember how reformers in the tenth and eleventh centuries had begun fighting corruption in the Church? Leo IX embodied many of these trends, and Gregory took Leo's ideas even further when he became pope in 1073. Some sources claim he came from a humble background and had been the son of a blacksmith. Whether or not this story is true, Gregory did not come from a powerful family, as earlier popes had. Like other reformers, he was highly educated and had traveled widely: He had journeyed to Cologne and might even have spent time at Cluny.⁴

▼ Dictatus Papae Manuscript



We can get a flavor of Gregory's reform from a work known as the *Dictatus Papae* (*The Sayings/Orders of the Pope*). The surviving text seems to be only a table of contents for a much larger work, so we do not have all the nuanced arguments that Gregory or his assistants might have used to justify these ideas. Nevertheless, this text gives us an idea of Gregory's priorities. Gregory argued that the pope should be able to depose bishops and other church officials who were behaving badly—but also that the Pope, as leader of all Christians, should even be able to depose kings and emperors if they misbehaved!

Such reforming ideas were quite popular with some people on the Italian peninsula. For example, tradesmen in Milan supported the reformers. They objected to the wealthy clerics and the great landowners who dominated both the government and the church in Milan, so they liked many of Gregory's ideas. Gregory also received support from Countess Matilda of Tuscany, who owned a great deal of land in northern Italy, including a castle in Canossa. But can you guess who did not like these ideas? Kings and emperors, of course! Although the Holy Roman Emperors had initially supported the popes' reforms, Henry IV felt Gregory's changes had gone too far.

Eventually, Henry tried to reassert his power over the pope, creating a massive conflict. The spark that triggered the enmity between the pope and emperor was the issue of who was permitted to appoint bishops and archbishops. Both Henry and Gregory wanted to install an ally as archbishop of Milan, a powerful city in northern Italy. Remember, bishops were important political figures, judges, and administrators in this period, not just spiritual leaders, so getting to pick who was a bishop was a big deal to all of a kingdom's powerful people. Gregory and the reformers thought only churchmen should get to do this, but Henry wanted a say in who helped rule such a big, important town. This clash led Gregory to excommunicate Henry and declare him deposed, the first time a pope had ever dared to do such a thing. The declaration pushed East Frankia to the brink of a civil war—one Henry was afraid he would lose.

In January of 1077, Henry decided his only option was to go meet Gregory at Countess Matilda's castle in Canossa and beg for forgiveness and peace. Taking only his wife and infant son across the Alps with him, he went to the castle barefoot and wearing a penitent's rags. When he got there, Gregory wasn't sure what to do and made Henry



▲ Gregory VII & Matilda of Tuscany (or just Matilda) #1

3. For a chronology of events, see Hanna Vollrath, "The Western Empire under the Salians," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History Vol. 4: c.1024–c.1198*, ed. D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith, 2 parts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), part 2, 56–71.

4. H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 27, 29.

wait outside in a blizzard for three days before agreeing to forgive him! Unfortunately for both men, the rebels in East Frankia weren't willing to accept that Gregory had reversed Henry's deposition, so the war raged on for another three years and sparked more arguments between pope and emperor. When Gregory excommunicated Henry again in 1080, his harsh attitude cost him considerable support.⁵

For the *Spotlight on Virtue: Humility*, see appendix C.

Byzantium after the Battle of Manzikert

Now that we've touched on the rising tensions between the pope and some secular rulers in Western Europe, let's take a closer look at the situation further east. When last we left the Byzantine Empire in *The Curious Historian 3A*, it was reeling from the Seljuks' victory at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. Not only was the defeat humiliating, but the Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan had captured Emperor Romanos IV. Romanos's subsequent release by the sultan set him against the Doukas family, an imperial family that had taken back power in his absence. Romanos was blinded and sent into exile, where he died of his wounds. The new emperor, Michael VII Doukas (ruled 1071–1078), spent his reign dealing with threats to his hold on power. The struggle between competing aristocratic families eventually brought the Komnenos family to power in Constantinople. However, other powerful clans also attempted to seize the throne. As the Byzantine families fought each other for power, groups of Seljuks began to settle across the interior of the Anatolian plateau. Eventually, the new occupants of the region formed two powerful, competing emirates: the Seljuk emirate of Rum, based at Ikonion (modern Konya in Turkey), and the Danishmendid emirate beyond, in the northeast of the plateau.

Michael VII was unable to gain ground against the Seljuks and did not trust his own generals, who were members of the powerful families who threatened his throne. He began to look abroad for mounted troops who were able to match the horsemanship of the Turkish cavalry. First he wrote to Pope Gregory VII to ask him to send help against the Seljuks. Gregory responded by planning to lead an army to free Jerusalem himself! This notion of a pope going to war was so far removed from how most Catholics thought churchmen should act that Gregory's plans never got off the drawing board.

With no immediate help coming from Rome or East Frankia, Michael VII looked to West Frankia instead. The Franks and Normans were famous for their skills as horsemen, and many were willing to serve the Byzantine emperor as mercenaries. Most famous among these was Roussel de Bailleul, called *Frangopoulos*, Greek for "Son of a Frank." Sent to fight the Seljuks, Roussel instead used his 3,000 men to set himself up as prince of an independent region with his capital at Ankyra, which is today Ankara, capital of modern Turkey. Roussel was defeated in battle and captured by a young Byzantine general, Alexios Komnenos. Roussel died a captive in 1077, while Alexios was transferred to the west, where he fought against rival generals who had risen in rebellion against Michael Doukas. Soon, however, Alexios himself rebelled, supporting Nikephoros III Botaneiates (ruled 1078–1081), who took the throne. Powerful military families were now all fighting each other for control of the imperial office, and eventually the Komnenos family triumphed.

Alexios I Komnenos (ruled 1081–1118) came to power surrounded by enemies and unable to gain ground. He delegated an ongoing war against the Pechenegs to trusted generals. Alexios himself spent the early years of his reign fighting the Nor-

In case you were wondering, the Emirate of Rum (later called the Sultanate of Rum) had nothing to do with strong beverages. Besides, rum the beverage hadn't been invented yet! "Rum" was how the Turks said "Rome," and at that time Anatolia was considered the heart of the Byzantine (Roman) Empire.

—A.D.

5. Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 116–119; John M. Jeep, ed., *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2001), s.v. "Gregory VII."

► Alexios I Komnenos #1



mans. These Normans were distantly related to those who, two decades earlier under William the Conqueror, had successfully conquered England in 1066. And one of them was even a papal vassal, which meant that he had sworn loyalty to the pope as his overlord! Robert Guiscard had forced Pope Gregory VII to name him Duke of Apulia in 1059 and acknowledged Gregory as his feudal overlord. Now, Guiscard and his son Bohemond of Taranto had led an army of Normans from southern Italy to invade Byzantium's Balkan territories. Guiscard's Normans had made a cunning plan: They had brought with them a man claiming to be the deposed emperor, Michael VII. Many of Alexios's subjects defected to the Normans and before long, the Byzantines lost two pitched (intense, closely fought) battles to the newcomers.

Alexios chose, like Michael Doukas before him, to look to the west and find new allies to win fights at home. He turned to Venice, which had a powerful navy. The Venetian ruler, called the *doge*, agreed to send ships if he was granted property in Constantinople, and the right to trade there free of taxes. Alexios agreed and would later offer similar privileges to other Italian cities, including Genoa and Pisa. We'll return to these deals later, as they had long-term consequences for the Byzantine Empire.

Venice kept watch over the Adriatic Sea while the Byzantine emperor slowly clawed back land. Alexios won his first major victory by avoiding pitched battle, tricking the Norman cavalry into a chase, and shooting at their horses from a distance. When Robert Guiscard returned in full force in 1084, he was confronted at sea by the Venetians. Then, having landed, the Normans were caught between a naval blockade and the mountains, where the Byzantines guarded the passes. Alexios had discovered how best to use the natural defenses of the western Balkans and the services of his allies. The Normans were defeated.

Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos

While Alexios was away fighting, he placed his mother in charge of the government back home in Constantinople. Family was at the heart of everything that the Komnenos rulers did from the very start. Therefore, the traditional system of imperial ranks and honors, which had existed for centuries, was completely changed. An entirely new level in the imperial hierarchy was created over and above everything else, which could be held only by members of the emperor's family, by blood or marriage, which in Alexios's case included his eldest brother Isaac and his brother-in-law. This hierarchy was based on the rank of *sebastos*, a Greek translation of the Rome title "Augustus."

The Byzantine historian John Zonaras criticized Alexios for running the government for the benefit of his family, writing that "he thought of and called the imperial palace his own house." Alexios did not pay his relatives in gold from the imperial treasury, but instead he gave them huge, landed estates, and allowed them to collect and keep all the taxes from those lands. For example, Alexios's brother Isaac received the taxes of all the lands of Thessalonica, at the time the empire's second city.

Besides his family, Alexios rewarded his generals. Gregory Pakourianos, commander-in-chief of the army, was given estates in present day Bulgaria, where he founded a monastery for his own retirement. Pakourianos died before he could retire, riding his horse headlong into a tree while fighting the Pechenegs. Giving aristocrats the right to raise taxes was not good for farmers and smallholders (owners of small farms), who had been used to living in village communities under imperial protection. Now, farmers and villages served the needs of powerful families who could bully and threaten,

control and coerce. Most of those granted the right to collect taxes and rents did so in “kind”—collecting grain and other goods produced from the land. They sold the surplus at market.

As the twelfth century progressed, land was granted not just to members of the aristocracy, but also to regular soldiers. The historian Niketas Choniates provides a clear explanation of the practice: Soldiers, some of whom were “barbarians,” collected taxes from the landholders, and the emperor no longer paid the soldiers from the treasury. Many farmers now suffered the regular presence of a military “lord” who treated them as his dependents. This may have entailed some benefits: an interested “master” willing to provide investment in hard times and protection. But this kind of patronage was very different from the recent days when farmers shared responsibility for their lands through the village. It has been called “Byzantine feudalism,” although many now question whether that is an accurate or useful description.

A Change in Coinage

Even before Alexios’s reign, the Byzantine state had great trouble collecting enough gold to mint the heavy golden solidus—a coin that has been called the “dollar of the Middle Ages” because it circulated across thousands of miles for centuries. During the last decades of the eleventh century, the solidus had less and less gold in it, a process called “debasement.” Alexios abandoned the solidus and created an entirely new coinage based on the *hyperperon*, a thin, cupped gold coin that had 10 percent less gold than before. The traditional silver coin (*miliaresion*) was also replaced, and two new copper coins, the *tetarteron* and half *tetarteron* were circulated. A half *tetarteron* was enough to buy a loaf of bread, a *tetarteron* bread and a few vegetables. Add to that olive oil, wine, perhaps some meat, and other staples, and a single *hyperperon* would have fed a family of four for about a month. A *hyperperon* was also the average salary for a worker each month, so in order to provide for rent and other necessities such as clothing and fuel, more than one member of each household would have had to work. Salaries increased considerably for the educated and those able to enter imperial service or the bureaucracy.⁶

Throughout the twelfth century, millions of tiny copper *tetartera* were minted and circulated, allowing people to buy an increasingly wide range of goods. And there were many more things to buy. Italian merchants from Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, who had been given rights to live and work in parts of Constantinople, set up their own warehouses to store wares and jetties to dock their boats. The Italians paid lower taxes on the goods they sold here, in exchange for military assistance. As we have seen, the Venetians earned their privileges by helping Alexios defeat the Normans. With a new currency and a boom in international trade, it has been estimated that 80 percent of transactions in Constantinople now took place using coins, which is remarkably different from the idea that medieval societies relied on barter and the direct exchange of goods for goods.

Life in Constantinople was becoming very different, although some things seemed not to change. Almost a thousand years after the first Roman chariots raced in Constantinople’s hippodrome, the chariot-based games continued. They were staged on special days and holidays, when the emperor and his family attended.



▲ Hyperperon



▲ Statue Base of Porphyrius the Charioteer

A poem by Christopher of Mytilene from the eleventh century reminds us that the hippodrome in Constantinople was also still full of ancient sculpture in bronze and stone, including “that horse of bronze you see there that truly breathes. . . . It is getting ready to race! Stop, do not go near!” Statues of long-dead charioteers, heroes of an earlier age, still stood there too. While the statues have been lost, today we can still see some of the beautifully carved stone bases in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. —A.D.

6. Branko Milanovic, “An Estimate of Average Income and Inequality in Byzantium around Year 1000,” *Review of Income and Wealth* 52, no. 3 (2006): 449–470.

The poet Christopher of Mytilene also celebrated the public baths, another feature of Roman life that survived well into the Middle Ages in Constantinople. Baths were far less grand and fuel for heating the water less abundant, but as Christopher reminds us, “Truly the bath is a delightful thing, comforting the body and washing off the dirt, soothing all parts of the flesh. . . . Nature truly rejoices in those washed clean.”⁷ People could exercise as well as get clean in public baths.

Imperial Charity

The truly poor, who did not earn even a hyperperon a month, could also eat, sleep, and learn with charitable help. Although free bread was no longer given to everyone, the city had charitable foundations to support the poor, including hospitals, orphanages, and homes for old people. These foundations were all created by aristocrats and emperors. They were reflections of a deep commitment to Christian charity. Alexios founded a great orphanage with a school that provided elementary education to those who lived in the complex, but also to children of poor parents who did not live there. The orphanage complex covered several acres in the city center and included a great hospital for people of all ages. Thousands of disabled, elderly, and sick people occupied a circle of two-story buildings in the heart of the complex, with at least one member of staff to each patient. There was a large church, dedicated to Saint Paul, and there were monks and nuns on hand to pray for the physical and spiritual recovery of the sick. There were, in fact, three nunneries for women and one monastery for men within the grounds of the orphanage. All activities were paid for by taxes and the sale of goods produced on lands that the emperor granted to the orphanage forever. The orphanage became so central to the image of Alexios and his successors that the traditional route of imperial processions through Constantinople was changed so that they now passed by the complex, where the emperor would be guaranteed a large cheering crowd, well rehearsed in praising him and his generosity!

There was a darker side to imperial patronage, however. The Komnenos rulers were committed to charity and education, but not to freedom of thought and belief. During the twelfth century, the nature of higher education changed. It was no longer possible in Constantinople to find teachers offering traditional classical education, the form of instruction that had survived from Roman times into the eleventh century. Instead, education was mainly theological, and focused on ensuring the correct belief, or orthodoxy. Yet Alexios did not trust his own priests and bishops to define orthodoxy. He issued a law in 1107 that made the emperor himself the judge, who could act like a single supreme court justice in all matters relating to religious belief. Alexios also paid a favorite monk, Euthymios Zigabenos, to compile texts to list and attack all known Christian heresies. In this work, which has survived, Zigabenos tells us that Emperor Alexios “burned with righteous zeal.”

Prelude to the First Crusade: A New Call for Aid

Yet before Alexios had reached these lofty theological heights, he needed to address the problem of the Seljuk Turks, who had occupied much of Anatolia since 1071. In 1094, the time seemed ripe to deal with them since, as we saw in *The Curious Historian Level 3A*, the Fatimid Caliphate was greatly weakened by the deaths of two rulers, the caliph al-Mustansir and his vizier, Badr. Alexios, like previous emperors, sent letters to the west appealing for fellow Christians to join his fight against the infidel. He was hoping to recruit mercenaries such as Roussel, who would be as effective in the saddle but

7. Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropos, *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropos*, ed. and trans. F. Bernard and C. Livanos (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 94–95, 98–99.

more loyal. Instead, his messages sparked a mass movement of Christians of all social levels, many unskilled in warfare.

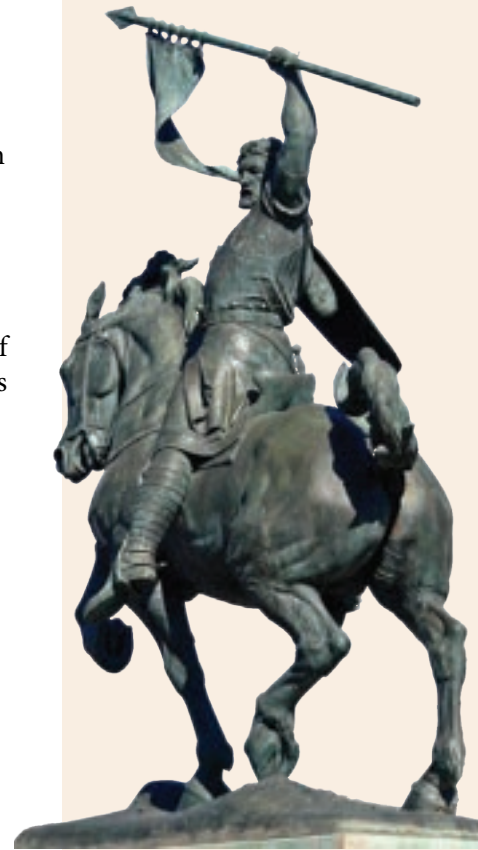
Pope Urban II's initial idea of an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem wasn't necessarily at odds with Alexios's hope for loyal mercenaries, although their ultimate goals differed. Urban wanted to retake the Holy Land; Alexios mainly wanted to retake the territory the Byzantines had lost to the Seljuks of Rum. But Gregory VII's aggressiveness had soured many Europeans on his notions of how militant the Church should be. If Urban wanted support for an armed pilgrimage, therefore, he needed to present the idea to secular leaders in a way that didn't make them fear that he'd be marching into battle himself—or turning his new armies against enemies other than Muslims.

Of course, the idea of Christians fighting to retake their lands from the Muslims wasn't new in the West. Since the days of Charlemagne, the small Christian kingdom of Asturias (in what is now northern Spain) had been slowly pushing back the boundaries of Muslim Spain, known as al-Andalus. This process became significantly easier when the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba collapsed into tiny principalities known as *taifas*. Today, the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslim rulers is generally called the **Reconquista**, after the Spanish term for reconquest. Asturias itself had split into smaller kingdoms over the centuries, but most Europeans didn't care about the details of Iberian politics. Instead, leaders such as El Cid and events such as the capture of the former Visigothic capital, Toledo, by Christian forces in 1085 fired the imaginations of people far from the front lines. Popular poems such as *The Song of Roland* and *The Song of My Cid* made the Reconquista sound like a grand romantic enterprise and prompted “those who fight” to think about fighting Muslims, even if only in fantasy. Have you ever read a book that made you want to go on an adventure or travel to a distant land? These medieval epics had a similar effect!

Apart from the Reconquista, however, big wars of conquest had become rare, yet small wars between rival lords or rival cities, or even rival knights, continued. And the good news was that the big outside threats from Vikings raiding by sea and Magyars by horse had been tamed. But everywhere else, the knights and nobles spent most of their energy hunting, competing in tournaments, or fighting each other over local politics or issues of honor. The Church, and especially the papacy, wasn't having much success in convincing “those who fight” to quit picking fights for what they saw as silly reasons.

Remember how we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the Byzantine emperors requesting military aid from popes in western Europe was what initiated the crusading era? Well, all of the driving factors mentioned above seem to have played a role in the way Pope Urban II responded to Alexios's appeal for help. Urban himself was a reformer, though less radical than Gregory, and he was better at persuading people to go along with his plans than Gregory had been. He also hoped that he would be able to repair the breach between the Catholic and Orthodox churches that had followed from the Great Schism of 1054, and Alexios's request gave him what looked like the perfect opportunity to do so. At least from Urban's perspective, the time for an armed pilgrimage from Europe couldn't have been better.

▼ El Cid #4



Literature of the Age: *The Song of Roland*

Today, if you were walking the “Way of Saint James” (remember the *Camino de Santiago* pilgrimage route from chapter 1?) and wanted to visit the hamlet of Roncesvalles (or *Roncevaux* in French) near the border of Spain and France, you might travel through a green, rocky pass on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees mountains. While the scenery would be beautiful, the only sign you'd likely see that you were walking in a place of great legend would be a rough stone monument with a simple inscription: “Roland.” And yet, despite these humble surroundings, you would be standing in a spot attributed to one of the great battles of the early Middle Ages, a conflict celebrated in one of the

great medieval works of literature known as the “Chanson de Roland” or *Song of Roland*.

As is the case with many medieval works of literature based on real people and events, it requires a bit of effort to separate history from myth. Before we get to that, let’s discuss what kind of literature, or genre, this poem is part of in the first place. The *Song of Roland* is an epic poem written in Old French in the tradition of Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Composed around 1100, it is also one of the oldest examples of a *chanson de geste*—French for “song of deeds” written about Charlemagne, who is usually depicted as the champion of Christendom. The *Song of Roland* influenced many other French



▲ Ibaneta Mountain Pass

chansons de geste written throughout the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, and the genre spread to other parts of Europe, influencing works such as the Spanish epic poem “Song of My Cid.”⁸ Such epics tend to focus on an all-male military world and are most concerned with the heroism displayed in battle.

One of the most interesting aspects of the *Song of Roland* is that it’s a work that reflects both the poet’s imagination and real events. The historical story, as you may remember from *The Curious Historian 3A*, is that in the year 777, Muslim rulers in Spain requested aid from King Charlemagne against a common enemy, who was also Muslim. Although Charlemagne was already busy fighting the Saxons, he agreed to march his men into Spain. After crossing the Pyrenees Mountains that forms a border between France and Spain, Charlemagne received word that hostilities with the Saxons had intensified back home, so he abandoned the Spanish expedition. When his men were passing through the Pyrenees again, the rear-guard of Charlemagne’s army was ambushed by a group of Basques—a people group who have long lived in these mountains, on both the Spanish and French sides. The Basques killed many of Charlemagne’s men, including Roland, a Frankish military leader and the duke of the Breton March.


More than two hundred years after this event, the *Song of Roland* was composed . . . with a few significant changes. The Basque raiders who attacked the Frankish troops became a Saracen army several thousand strong. Charlemagne, who was probably around thirty-eight years old during the actual expedition, was suddenly an old man with a long white beard—the “sacred Emperor” of Christendom. Roland was not just one of Charlemagne’s commanders, he was also the emperor’s nephew and a man of almost superhero status, considered the greatest warrior in the world. In this version of the story, Roland was also accompanied by his loyal friend, Oliver, a valiant knight who was prudent where Roland was rash.⁹

So what exactly was the poet doing here? Was he purposely altering or embellishing history? Probably not. He was likely attempting to do what poets have always done—write an exciting story based on historical events and characters people were well familiar with while *also* speaking to the problems that existed in the poet’s own time. With the Spanish Reconquest underway and the First Crusade launched in 1095, it’s really no surprise that the *Song of Roland*—likely written in the early twelfth century to both entertain and inspire—reflected current rivalries and conflicts of the day, not just the events of the distant past.

8. J. E. Luebering, “Chanson de geste,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed September 22, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3b0206>.

9. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Song of Roland* (Victoria, BC: Reading Essentials, 1957), 49.

The First Crusade¹⁰

 The people of the Syrian ports prevented Frankish and Byzantine pilgrims from crossing to Jerusalem. Those of them who survived spread the news about that to their country. —al-‘Azīmī, *The Abridged Chronicle of al-‘Azīmī*¹¹

When Alexios’s messengers reached Urban in March of 1095, they brought with them tales of horrible Seljuk Turkish oppression of Christians, especially pilgrims bound for Jerusalem. Whatever the truth was—Muslim sources differ as to whether any persecution was happening at all, although some chronicles do record that the Turks in Syria were treating pilgrims badly—the stories that reached Urban were probably exaggerated to at least some degree. The messengers’ goal, of course, was to illustrate why the Seljuks were as much a threat to Europeans as they were to the Byzantines. But the stories also reminded their audience of the reports of the infamous Fatimid caliph al-Hakim’s treatment of Christians and his destruction of holy sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher less than a century earlier. Although later Fatimids had allowed the Christians of Jerusalem to rebuild their churches, those who heard the messengers’ reports worried that the Seljuks would destroy the Holy Sepulcher again—or worse. These fears were worsened by the general belief among Christians that since it had been more than a thousand years since Jesus had died, risen again, and ascended into heaven, he would be returning any day to end the world.

Urban spent most of 1095 planning. He made preliminary arrangements with Alexios for how the army was to be sheltered and supplied once it reached Constantinople, and he also persuaded European leaders to go along with the plan. His idea was to recruit

Driving Forces behind the First Crusade

- The desire of Christians to free Jerusalem from Muslim rule
- Church leaders’ belief in their right to depose political or military leaders not in compliance with Church teaching
- The Byzantine Empire’s long struggle with the Seljuk Turks
- The successful example of the Reconquista in al-Andalus
- Byzantine Emperor Alexios’s appeal to Pope Urban II for help

▼ Crusades #11



10. Unless otherwise noted, information in this section comes from Thomas Asbridge, *The Crusades: The Authoritative History of the War for the Holy Land* (New York: HarperAudio, 2016), audiobook, introduction–chapter 3; Zoë Oldenbourg, *The Crusades*, trans. Anne Carter (1966; Ashland, OR: Blackstone Audio, 2010), audiobook, chapter 3; Jeep, *Medieval Germany*, s.v. “crusades.”

11. Quoted (in English) in Asbridge, *Crusades*, audiobook, introduction.

knights and noblemen, who already had the training and discipline needed to mount a successful military campaign, and only as many commoners as would be needed to support the fighting men. He also went to France to meet with various churchmen and nobles in person; this trip was the first time a pope had visited France in over fifty years. Among the French leaders Urban consulted at this stage were Bishop Adhemar of Le Puy and Raymond of Saint-Gilles, who as count of Toulouse was the richest nobleman in France and was even more powerful than the king. Adhemar and Raymond both agreed to lead the pilgrims, with Adhemar serving as the pope's representative and Raymond serving as at least one of the military leaders. With as much preliminary work done as possible, Urban moved on to the next step: formally announcing the pilgrimage at the Council of Clermont that November.

Accounts differ as to exactly what Urban said in his announcement sermon or whether he had spread word around town that he'd be preaching a special sermon that day. What is clear is that a crowd had gathered in a field near the site of the council and that Urban gave a stirring address. Besides sharing stories of what the Seljuks were allegedly doing to pilgrims, he promised both earthly rewards, such as land and wealth, and forgiveness of sins to anyone who joined this expedition. When he finished speaking, Adhemar and Raymond each announced that they would go to the Holy Land. The crowd's response was immediate and overwhelming. Whether or not there was a general shout of "*Deus vult*" (God wills it), as some sources claim, very many of those who heard Urban's sermon eagerly vowed to take the cross.

After his success at Clermont, Urban commissioned preachers to take his message to other parts of Europe. The number of people from all walks of life who vowed to join the Crusade was far beyond anything he had expected. He even had to send out letters telling serfs they couldn't join without their lord's permission and urging would-be crusaders from Iberia to keep fighting in al-Andalus rather than running off to fight the Seljuks in Asia Minor. Everyone seemed to want to leave their current battles behind in order to go to Jerusalem!

Peter the Hermit and the People's Crusade

Besides Urban's authorized representatives, many other preachers began spreading word of the Crusade to commoners and even outlaws who weren't part of Urban's target audience. These preachers distorted Urban's message and exaggerated the tales of Seljuk oppression out of all proportion to what the Byzantine ambassadors had first told Urban. But they succeeded in convincing hundreds of thousands of landless knights and poor commoners—men, women, and children alike—to take the cross in the hope of a better life in the Holy Land.

The most noteworthy of these unauthorized preachers was Peter the Hermit, who had not taken Holy Orders but had been living an ascetic life on his own in the French countryside when news of the Crusade reached him. He then set out on a preaching tour of his own, riding a donkey from town to town. In his sermons, he told stories about the horrors he saw on his own pilgrimage to Jerusalem (which modern historians doubt he'd actually made) and claimed that God had spoken to him in a dream, giving him a letter to send to Urban that had prompted Urban to announce the Crusade.¹² He drew huge crowds wherever he went, and eyewitnesses reported that people would pull hairs out of his donkey's tail and treasure them as if they were a saint's relics! These crowds included some landless knights, including one who called himself Walter the Penniless, but most of his followers were desperately poor people who had nothing to lose by risking their lives to go to Jerusalem.



▲ Peter the Hermit #1

12. See, e.g., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1st ed. (1911), vol. 11, s.v. "Peter the Hermit," <http://capress.link/tch3b0207>.

To give the knights and noblemen enough time to settle their affairs, raise funds for the journey, gather supplies, and so on, Urban had announced that the Crusaders would leave their various homelands on August 15, 1096, and meet up in Constantinople. The eager crowds who followed Peter the Hermit weren't willing to wait that long. They left France in March of 1096 and headed overland through Germany, eventually splitting into five groups and recruiting more pilgrims along the way. Because this first "wave" of crusaders preceded the official gathering of the princes' contingents for the First Crusade, modern historians often call it "the **People's Crusade**" just to help keep things straight.

One such People's Crusade pilgrim was Count Emicho of Leiningen, who took charge of the fifth group. Emicho tried to outdo Peter the Hermit by claiming that he had the stigmata (the marks of Jesus's crucifixion) and that God had destined him to become the last Roman emperor and emperor of Jerusalem. Despite his words, however, Emicho seems to have had little interest in going all the way to the Holy Land to fight the Turks. Instead, he argued that the pilgrims with him could fulfill their vows just as easily by fighting "God's enemies" closer to home—by which he meant not Muslims, but the Jewish communities of the Rhineland. The German bishops did all they could to stop the mobs Emicho had stirred up among the pilgrims, but hundreds of innocent lives were lost.¹³

Most of the pilgrims had left France with little understanding of how far they had to go to reach the Holy Land; some even asked at every walled town whether they were in Jerusalem. They also had neither provisions nor money, and the outlaws among them weren't above stealing what they needed as they went. This fact led to major conflicts as the pilgrims reached Eastern Europe. The newly crowned King Coloman the Learned of Hungary welcomed the first group, led by Walter the Penniless, and made sure they had what they needed to continue toward Constantinople. But Peter the Hermit wasn't able to stop the pilgrims of the second and third groups from raiding as they went, and the fourth group caused even more trouble and was finally massacred by Hungarian troops. So by the time Emicho arrived, Coloman had had such a bad experience with the earlier pilgrims that he wouldn't let Emicho's group cross the border into Hungary. A fierce battle ensued, and Coloman's troops destroyed Emicho's. Emicho himself barely escaped with his life and fled back to Leiningen, where his family looked down on him for not fulfilling his vow to go to Jerusalem.

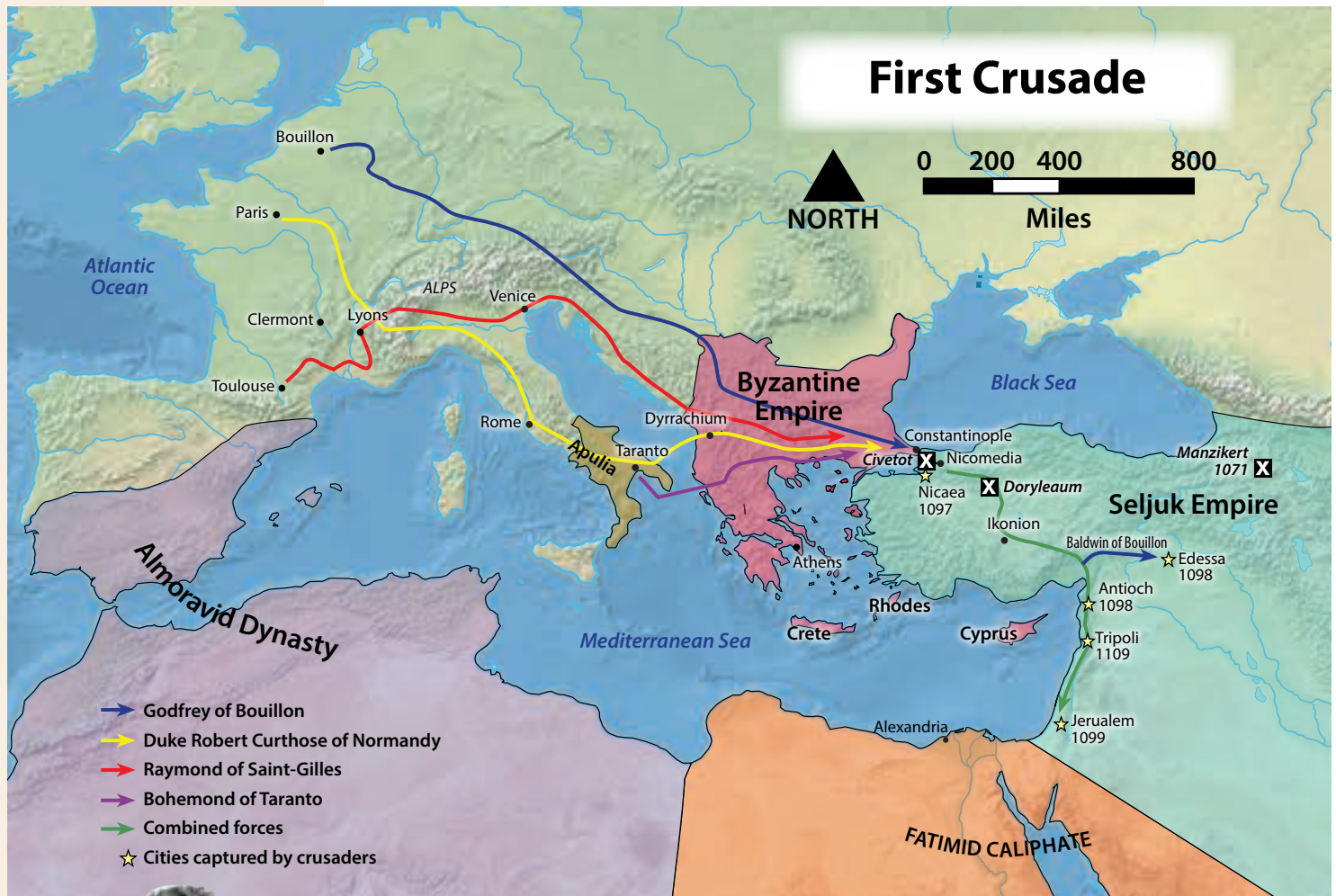
Meanwhile, the three surviving groups reached Constantinople, where Alexios was not expecting them. He was still kind to them, providing them with supplies and even speaking personally with Peter the Hermit, but he also had them ferried across to Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) as quickly as possible to minimize the risk of looting. Once all three groups had met up, the knights decided their first goal should be to free Nicaea from Seljuk rule, and they planned to get there by way of Nicomedia and Civetot. It was late summer, however, and the heat and lack of water took a terrible toll on the pilgrims, killing thousands and weakening the rest.

When the pilgrims arrived at Civetot, Peter the Hermit realized they were in no fit state to besiege Nicaea on their own, so he went back to Constantinople to ask Alexios for more supplies and troops. While he was gone, Walter the Penniless took charge and led the pilgrims on to Nicaea, laying siege to the city without waiting for reinforcements. Unfortunately for them, word of this ragtag bunch quickly reached the new Seljuk sultan, Kilij Arslan I, who had heard that a great army was coming from Europe and thought this was it. He wasted no time in leading an army to relieve Nicaea and killed or enslaved

Nicaea's Importance

Do you remember why Nicaea would be important to Christians?

13. See also Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words, 1000 BC–1492 AD* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 295–303, for a Jewish perspective on the massacre and its aftermath.



▲ Godfrey of Bouillon #5

all but a handful of the pilgrims led by Walter the Penniless. The few who escaped raced back to Constantinople to tell Peter the Hermit what had happened. Alexios arranged for them to stay in the city until the troops of the official Crusade arrived.

The Barons' Crusade

In the meantime, the armies of the official Crusade had completed their preparations and left on schedule, organized in four groups, each led by a member of the nobility. This “second wave” we will call the **Barons' Crusade**, though some sources also call it the “Princes' Crusade.” Godfrey of Bouillon, duke of Lower Lorraine and a descendant of Charlemagne, led French and German troops along the same overland route as the People's Crusade had taken; when it reached Hungary, Coloman asked Godfrey for hostages to ensure that his Crusaders wouldn't cause more trouble. Godfrey agreed, and Coloman treated all the Crusaders well and released the hostages as soon as the rest of Godfrey's group was out of Hungarian territory. Peter the Hermit and the survivors of the People's Crusade joined this group when it reached Constantinople. Another group, consisting of French and Norman troops, was led by Count Hugh of Vermandois, Duke Robert Curthose of Normandy (William the Conqueror's eldest son), and Count Stephen of Blois; they sailed from the region of Apulia to Dyrachium and went overland from there to Constantinople. Raymond of Saint-Gilles and Adhemar of Le Puy led troops from southern France across the Alps. Lastly, Bohemond of Taranto and his nephew Tancred of Hauteville found out about the Crusade from Hugh's group and gathered Norman troops from southern Italy and Sicily to catch up with the others in Constantinople. It took until May of 1097 for all four groups to arrive, and Alexios sent each group on to Asia Minor as soon as possible.

Despite tensions between the Latins and the Byzantines that sometimes boiled over into open conflict, Alexios kept his promise to give the Latins supplies and allowed the leaders to enter the city and tour its holy sites. He also met with the leaders privately and required them to swear an oath to recognize him as supreme commander and to give him any former Byzantine territory that they conquered. This oath was standard for mercenaries entering the emperor's service, but some of the French and Norman noblemen reacted badly to what they understood as a request that they swear loyalty to Alexios as their overlord. It took serious diplomacy to convince Tancred to swear even a modified oath, and Raymond refused to swear any oath at all, although he later became good friends with Alexios and did his best to guard the emperor's interests. Yet somehow, the Latins came away from the oath-swearing process expecting Alexios to lead them all the way to Jerusalem, an idea that would cause more hard feelings later.

Once the Latins had all assembled in Asia Minor and Alexios had joined them with his own troops, they set out to besiege Nicaea themselves. Kilij Arslan again received word of the army crossing his territory, but assuming it was more of the same rabble he'd wiped out before, he ignored them in favor of fighting the Fatimids far to the south. By the time he found out how wrong he was, it was too late. The Latins drove off his relief force, and Alexios captured the sultan's family and secured the city's surrender.

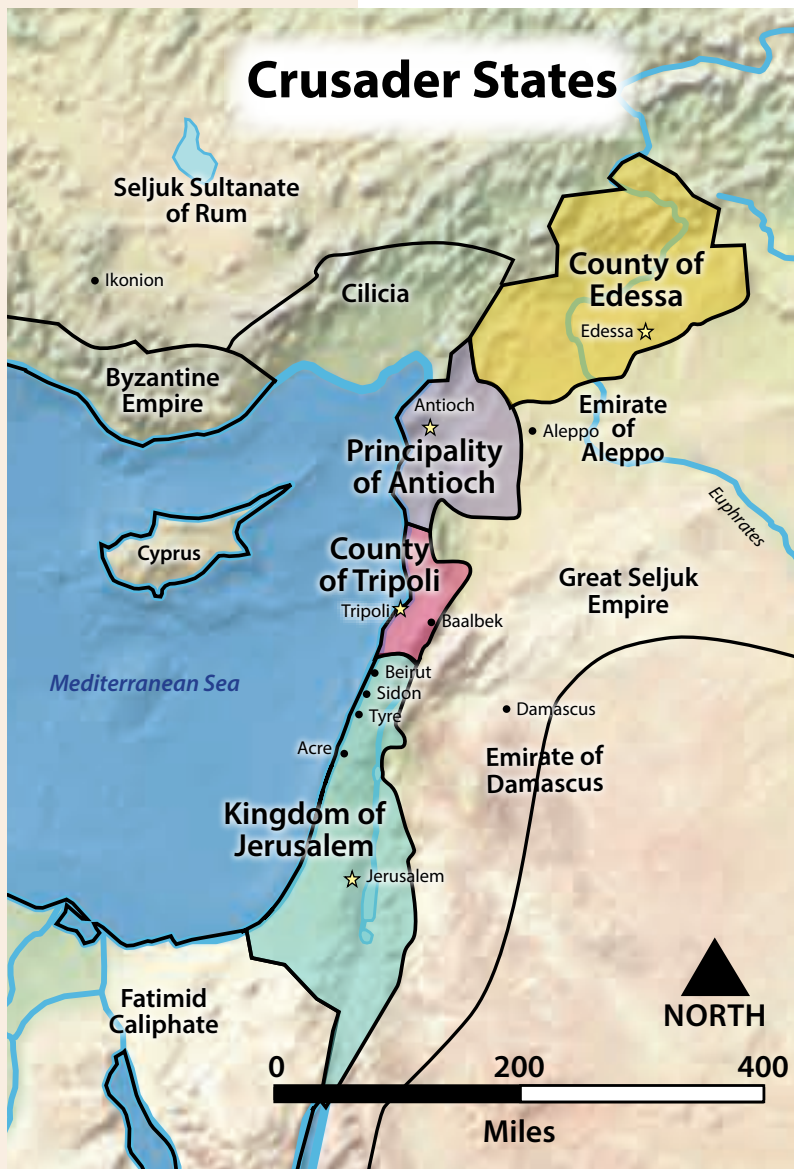
A Victory! (Or Was It?)

But the victory nearly cost Alexios his new allies. While his ambassador had been negotiating with the garrison of Nicaea, the Latins had been preparing siege engines for a major assault against the city from another direction. They were just about to start their attack when the imperial banner appeared above the city walls, which made them feel that they'd wasted their time. And one condition of the surrender had been that Alexios wouldn't allow the Latins to loot anything, so he paid the Latins handsomely but refused to let them into the city. The Latins felt cheated, though for different reasons: Some accepted Alexios's gifts but thought that he'd deprived them of their rights as conquerors, while others were disappointed not to get to visit the holy sites in Nicaea and believed that receiving any worldly benefit cheapened the idea of the Crusade as a pilgrimage. The tensions worsened when Alexios announced a plan to split the force, sending a small Byzantine contingent under his general Tatikios to lead the Latins through Anatolia toward Antioch, while Alexios and his brother-in-law led the rest of the Byzantine army to retake the coastal provinces of Asia Minor. The Latin leaders demanded that Alexios remain with them until they reached Jerusalem, but Alexios promised to rejoin them later and left.

The frustrated Latins split into two groups. The smaller of the two, led by Bohemond, left Nicaea first, followed by the larger and slower force led by Godfrey. Bohemond's group got nearly to Dorylaeum in Anatolia before being ambushed by Kilij Arslan and the Seljuk army. Remembering advice he'd gotten from Alexios, Bohemond ordered his men to stand their ground as the Seljuks surrounded them. Despite taking heavy casualties from both arrow fire and close-quarters fighting, Bohemond's force held out for five hours until the other Latins arrived and drove the Seljuks away. The Latins hailed Bohemond as a hero, and Kilij Arslan realized that "the Franks" wouldn't be as easy to stop as he'd thought.

Barons on Crusade

Barons	Troops led	Routes taken to Constantinople
Duke Godfrey of Bouillon	French and German	Took the same overland route as the People's Crusade, which joined them
Count Hugh of Vermandois, Duke Robert Curthose of Normandy, Count Stephen of Blois	French and Norman	Sailed from the region of Apulia to Dyrrachium and went overland from there
Count Raymond of Saint-Gilles, Bishop Adhemar of Le Puy	French	Crossed the Alps from southern France
Prince Bohemond of Taranto, Sir Tancred of Hauteville	Norman Italian	Came from southern Italy and Sicily and caught up with the other



After the battle, Godfrey sent his younger brother, Baldwin of Boulogne, to Cilicia in south-eastern Anatolia to secure better food supplies. Baldwin also apparently wanted to conquer land for himself that wasn't covered by the oath to return all territory regained by the campaign to Alexios. Tancred headed the same direction at about the same time, but the two leaders hated each other, and their squabbles finally forced Tancred to turn back and rejoin the main Crusade. Baldwin eventually seized control of Edessa and made it his new capital, founding the County of Edessa as the first of what were later called the Crusader States.

The Byzantines and Latins continued pushing through Anatolia throughout the summer and fall. Many cities welcomed the Christian armies as liberators, and the Muslim garrisons surrendered without much of a fight. But the hot, dry conditions of the country continued to take a toll, especially on the horses and pack animals. Many of the Latins blamed Tatikios for leading them through desert country with little water, ignoring the fact that Tatikios' own troops were suffering just as much as they were. Most of the Latin leaders also resented having to hand control of the territory they'd won back to Alexios when he seemed not to be doing much to help them.

When the main Latin force arrived at Antioch, the Latin leaders debated how to approach the task of taking the city. Raymond argued for an immediate attack. What those on the Latin side didn't realize was that the Seljuk governor was so afraid of them that he was preparing to surrender and

flee the city, so Raymond's plan would have worked better than even he could have hoped. However, quick success would have meant giving Antioch back to Alexios, and Bohemond wasn't willing to do that. Instead, Bohemond convinced the other leaders to besiege the city, despite not having enough men to cut off its supply lines completely. As a result, the siege lasted seven and a half months, and the Latin forces were weakened further by disease and desertions. Among the most important men to go were Tatikios and the Byzantine contingent. In her biography of her father, Alexios, Anna Komnena claims that Bohemond tricked Tatikios into leaving, but modern historians suspect that he may have left for other reasons.

More troops deserted in the spring when word came that the governor of Mosul, Kerbogha, was headed toward Antioch with a large relief force. Kerbogha was actually held up for three weeks besieging Edessa, which Baldwin successfully held, and Alexios was on his way with fresh troops to relieve the Latins. Bohemond arranged for an Armenian Christian to let the Latins into the city just before Kerbogha arrived, although the Muslim garrison retreated to the citadel and refused to surrender. But the deserters who met Alexios on the road, including Stephen of Blois, brought the report that Kerbogha had probably already won by that time, so Alexios turned back—a decision for which the Latins never forgave him.

Just as Latin morale was on the point of collapse, a young man named Peter Bartholomew claimed to have had a vision telling him where to find a piece of the lance used to pierce Jesus's side during the Crucifixion, hidden under the floor of one of the churches. Raymond led a team of diggers to the spot, and a piece of rusty metal that looked like part of a spearhead duly turned up. Bishop Adhemar was skeptical about this item actually being part of the Holy Lance, since a spearhead said to be the Holy Lance was one of the many relics he had seen in Constantinople, but Raymond and many of the other Latins took its appearance as a miracle and made plans to attack Kerbogha. The Seljuk commander, apparently believing that he had nothing to fear from the siege-weakened Latins, allowed the Crusaders' troops to come out of the city and even form their battle lines. After what they'd been through, offering an open-field battle to a foe that outnumbered them seemed like madness to the Turks...at first! But the Latins attacked with such ferocity that the astonished Seljuk forces fled, and the garrison in the citadel finally surrendered.



▲ Anna Komnena

More problems arose in the months after the siege of Antioch. Bohemond had tricked the other commanders, apart from Raymond, into promising that whoever got them into the city could claim it for himself, but Raymond insisted that Bohemond give the city back to Alexios. Finally, they agreed to send Hugh of Vermandois to offer the city to Alexios, but Alexios never replied. Bohemond thus claimed the title of "Prince of Antioch" for himself, and he was in no hurry to leave. In the meantime, Bishop Adhemar died, and although Raymond asserted his own right to remain the secular leader of the Crusade, the barons seemed to be losing interest in the campaign as they squabbled over territory and rank. The commoners finally revolted in April of 1099 to force the barons to continue toward Jerusalem (although Bohemond still refused to leave Antioch and set about expanding his principality).

After more delays on the route south, the Latins reached Jerusalem in June and besieged it. This siege lasted five weeks, during which the Crusaders managed to breach the city's outer wall, but the defenders held out until Godfrey and Tancred managed to sneak their forces into the city and occupy parts of it. Then the Seljuk garrison surrendered on the condition that they be granted safe conduct out of the city, and many other Muslims left at the same time. However, while many of the leaders were giving thanks for their victory in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the knights and footmen slaughtered all the Muslims they could still find in the city and burned down the great synagogue. Only Raymond succeeded in keeping his knights from joining in, which earned him a reputation among the Seljuks as the only Latin commander who would keep his word.¹⁴

Aftermath of the First Crusade

The Founding of Outremer¹⁵

With their pilgrim vow fulfilled, many of the Crusaders began heading back to Europe shortly after the capture of Jerusalem. Those who chose to stay now had the task of keep-

14. See also John France, "The First Crusade: Impelled by the Love of God," in *Crusades: The Illustrated History*, ed. Thomas F. Madden (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 46–47.

15. Unless otherwise noted, information in this section comes from Asbridge, *Crusades*, audiobook, chapters 3–5; Oldenbourg, *Crusades*, chapters 3–5, 10–11.

ing what they'd won. They appointed a new Latin patriarch of Jerusalem. They also had to organize a government, which meant agreeing on a feudal overlord. The leaders first offered the position of king to Raymond, who turned it down and eventually founded a new county for himself after conquering Tripoli. Then the leaders offered the crown to Godfrey, who accepted the post but refused the title of king, stating that he refused to “wear a crown of gold where Christ had worn a crown of thorns.” Instead, he called himself the “Defender of the Holy Sepulcher.” When Godfrey died the next year, however, his throne passed to Baldwin, who happily accepted the title of King of Jerusalem.

▼ Church of the Holy Sepulcher #1



As mentioned above, the four realms founded by the Latins—the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Edessa, and the County of Tripoli—are commonly called “the Crusader States” today. But historians also use another important French word from the period to describe them: **Outremer**, which literally means “beyond the sea.” Historical European sources refer to “the Holy Land,” meaning the biblical land of Israel, and to Roman-era divisions of that land such as Judea and Galilee. But Outremer, a catch-all “over there” term, also included the broader territory held by the Latins outside the Holy Land, whether it was captured during the First Crusade or in later expansions.¹⁶ In the next chapter, we will explore the unique culture of Outremer, but for now let’s turn our attention to one development that continues to be a source of fascination in popular culture to this day: military orders.

The Military Orders of Outremer

If you’ve ever read a fictional story, watched a movie, or played a video game set during the Crusades, there’s a good chance the **Knights Templar** made an appearance. A religious order whose members also fought as warriors? It’s a dramatic concept that’s difficult for storytellers to resist! But what exactly were these “military orders” and why were they founded?

Simply put, the military orders initially came about to address a specific need: the protection of Christian pilgrims who were traveling through the Holy Land on perilous roads following the First Crusade. Established around 1120 and led by the French knight Hugh of Payne, the Templars got their name because they were “the order of the Temple”—as in the Temple of Solomon (or at least that’s what the building in Jerusalem that became their headquarters was commonly called). The order was officially recognized by Pope Honorius II in 1129 and was considered a branch of the Cistercians, which is why the Templars adopted a white cloak and then added their distinctive red cross. Knights who wished to join the Templars took monastic vows and lived in community as a brotherhood, though most recruits to the order were lay people and many served in non-military roles. Can you guess what one of the Templar’s most important roles besides fighting and protecting pilgrims was? Banking! This may seem like a strange side business for religious knights, but think about it: If you were a wealthy nobleman or noblewoman traveling to Jerusalem on pilgrimage from England or France, would you want to bring bags and bags of coins with you to pay for supplies? Probably not, given the likelihood of encountering highway robbers at some point

16. See, e.g., Marshall W. Baldwin, Thomas F. Madden, and Gary Dickson, “Crusades,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed July 26, 2022, <http://capress.link/tch3b0209>.

during the long journey. The Templars provided an innovative solution to this problem by setting up a kind of medieval banking system where money could be deposited in a religious house in western Europe. The traveler would then be given a letter as proof of their deposit, which they could then use to withdraw the same amount of money from another Templar convent in the Holy Land! This new system also allowed rulers who embarked on later crusades to pay their armies quickly because they were able to forward large sums of money to Outremer.¹⁷

The Templars may be the best known of the military orders, but they were not the only one established at this time. The Knights Hospitaller—whose full name is the “Knights of the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem”—was, as this lengthy title suggests, originally established at a hospital in Jerusalem where aid was offered to pilgrims and the poor. Around 1120, under the leadership of Raymond du Puy, the order took on more military functions. But the Hospitallers did also establish and run several hospitals that cared for the ill throughout the Holy Land. Additional military orders such as the Teutonic Order developed during the Third Crusade, and all the military orders could be called upon by Latin rulers to provide additional soldiers who could help defend castles on the frontier or take part in later crusades. In several cases, rulers in the Crusader states assigned entire castles to one or another of the military orders to defend, and they tended to do a good job! Most of these military orders also spread beyond Outremer to other parts of the Mediterranean; for example, in the 1140s, both the Templars and the Hospitallers began taking part in the Reconquista on the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁸



▲ Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaller, Teutonic Order #6

Looking Back...Looking Ahead

For all Alexios's triumphs, however, and for all the almost unbelievable achievements of the First Crusade, the Seljuks and other Muslim powers remained a threat to both Byzantium and Outremer. How would the Byzantines and Latins cope with this threat?

As you'll read in the coming chapters, the Crusades were far from over. Next we'll take an even closer look at the Crusader States established in the Holy Land. These states had their own form of governance and became a place where many cultures intersected, producing stunning works of art that were unique to this period. You'll also meet two of the most recognized names and heroes of the entire crusading era—Richard the Lionheart and the Muslim leader Saladin—military rivals who shared a moment of human connection over . . . peaches!

To read more about Anna Komnene and El Cid, see the Profiles and Legends PDF in *The Curious Historian's Archive: Extra Resources for Level 3B*.

17. Mark Cartwright, “Knights Templar,” *World History Encyclopedia*, September 28, 2018, <http://capress.link/tch3b0210>.

18. Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 185–195.

Can You Recall?

Circle the correct answer for each question.

1. When Godfrey accepted the position of ruling Jerusalem, he decided to take the title of Defender of the Holy Sepulcher instead of the title of (Emperor / King).
2. When those taking part in the Crusade adorned their clothing with crosses to show that they were part of this movement, it was referred to as (taking the cross / investiture).
3. The territory of the Caliphate of Cordoba split into smaller principalities called (pilgrimage / taifas).
4. The doge of Venice agreed to do what if Alexios granted him property in Constantinople? (Pay taxes on his property / Provide ships in the Byzantine fight against the Normans)
5. The Latins were not happy with Alexios's deal in besieging Nicaea. Alexios agreed that in return for surrender, the Latins would not be allowed into the city and would not do which of the following? (Loot the city / Take over ruling the city)
6. The Knights Templar got their name from which of the following locations, which was known as their headquarters? (Temple of Solomon / Temple of Nicaea)

Make the Connection

Match the names to the descriptions, and write the correct number on the line for each.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|--|
| 1. Pope Urban II | _____ | A. Founded the County of Edessa and was Godfrey's brother |
| 2. Alexios I Komnenos | _____ | B. Mercenary who was sent to fight the Seljuks but instead set himself up as prince of a kingdom near what is today Ankara |
| 3. Baldwin of Boulogne | _____ | C. Claimed God spoke to him and wrote a letter to the pope |
| 4. Peter the Hermit | _____ | D. The pope who announced and planned the First Crusade in 1095 |
| 5. Raymond of Saint Gilles | _____ | E. A nobleman, the richest in France, who agreed to help Pope Urban in the First Crusade |
| 6. Roussel de Bailleul | _____ | F. Byzantine emperor during the First Crusade |

Talk About It

As Alexios set his sights on defeating the Seljuks, he sent letters to get fellow Christians to join his movement. Inspired, Pope Urban II developed the idea of starting the armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Imagine being in Alexios's or Pope Urban II's shoes on the brink of starting this major movement. Consider the following questions on your own and write notes and discussion points on the lines provided. Then, discuss your ideas with your classmates in small groups.

1. What information would you have included in the letters that Alexios sent out to Christians?

2. What incentives could possibly be offered to get Christians to join the pilgrimage? What might the repercussions of these incentives be later?

3. What would be involved in organizing this movement?

It Takes Two

For each question, provide two answers to fill in the blanks. Use complete sentences.

Count Emicho of Leiningen took charge of the fifth group in the People's Crusade and tried to outdo Peter the Hermit in a couple of different ways. What were those ways?

1.

2.

When Alexios changed the structure of the Byzantine imperial ranking, what were at least two of the repercussions?

3.

4.

When Gregory became pope, he had certain beliefs about what a pope should be able to do. What were at least two of those beliefs?

5.

6. _____

After Peter went back to Alexios to retrieve more supplies and troops to besiege Nicaea, what happened among the group on the pilgrimage? Include at least two things that happened after Alexios left.

7. _____

8. _____

There were four Crusader States identified in the chapter. What were the names of at least two of those Crusader States?

9. _____

10. _____
