

"War of the Worlds - The Crusades"

For two centuries the worlds of Christendom and Islam were at war in a conflict which embraced men of all religions and races. This War of the Worlds started at a time of great change. The western world was emerging from the blanket of the dark ages to be confronted in the East by the massive, but declining, civilisation of the Byzantium Empire, which had itself replaced the old Roman Empire, which like all great empires had perished from within. Western Catholics hated Byzantium Christians of the Orthodox Church, and were in turn detested by them. The world of Islam confronted both the Western World and the Byzantium Empire. Within the Islam World, Arabs opposed Turks and Sunnites opposed Shi'ites. Throw into this cauldron the peoples of the lands through which armies were to march and fight and you have a powder keg ready to set the Middle East ablaze.

Our narrative starts in 1055 when the Seljuk Turks, nomadic shepherds from the Steppes of central Asia who had converted to Islam, had entered Baghdad at the invitation of the Caliph. They were great warriors and in the next 15 years they spread across the land to form a vast empire stretching to the borders of the Byzantium Empire. In 1071, they confronted and destroyed the Byzantium Army at Manzikert (now in Eastern Turkey) thereby closing the routes of Western Christians to the Holy Land. The choice for Western pilgrims was simple; either visit the Holy Land by sea or defeat the Turkish Army. The bulk of the Byzantium people spoke Greek and lived in the *"Invincible City"* - Constantinople. But the heartland of the Byzantium Empire, the rich and fertile steppes of Anatolia, was in the hands of the Turks. Many pleas for help went out from the Byzantium Emperor, Alexius I Comnenus, but there was no response from Pope Gregory or the West.

When Urban II became Pope, he set out to improve relations with the Christians of the East and he and Alexius became friends. In 1095, Pope Urban called his first Great Council at Clermont in France. Urban was a great orator and before a huge audience, including 300 bishops, he announced a crusade to drive the Turks away from the Holy Land. He demanded that his audience should not waste their lives in sin and

misery here, when they could be finding happiness in this world and salvation in the next by being soldiers of Christ in the land where Christ had lived and died. He told them that God would lead them. There and then he promised them absolution and remission of all their sins! A massive response spread across France and all the Western countries, with priests and monks raising crowds to fever pitch demanding a holy war against the Turks.

One monk, known as Peter the Hermit, emerged as the leader of the First Crusade. He was described as a small, middle aged man, with a long and unsmiling face, who always rode a donkey. His only clothing was an appallingly dirty monk's habit and cloak, his bare feet had not been washed for years and he would not eat bread or meat, preferring fish washed down by wine. He had developed a hatred of Turks when they refused him entry into the Holy Land. Peter assembled in Cologne an undisciplined army of 20,000, drawn from all over Western Europe. Tired of waiting for Peter, an impoverished French knight, named Walter Sansavoir, set out with several thousand Frenchmen up the Rhine and into Hungary, where they were welcomed. On they went until they reached the Byzantium border where things went horribly wrong in a small Hungarian border town.

The Crusaders were hungry and started to rampage and pillage the countryside until Hungarian troops were sent to restore order, in the process of which many of the French were killed. Some fled across the border but those bringing up the rear were disarmed and stripped before being sent across the border naked to join the rest. The Byzantium authorities treated the French very well. They were fed and escorted by the Byzantium Army on to Constantinople. Meanwhile, Peter the Hermit and his troops were on the march but when they reached the same Hungarian frontier town they found the bodies of the French Crusaders hanging from the walls. Peter's army set upon the local Hungarians, killing 4,000 townspeople and looting the town of everything they could carry. All in the name of Christ! They then sped across the border and made their way to Belgrade. News of the atrocity in Hungary had reached the townspeople and they had fled to the mountains, leaving Belgrade

an open city. Peter's troops sacked the city, set it on fire and left heavily laden with food looted from the markets.

The Crusaders marched through the Siberian forest until they reached Nish, where the Governor allowed them to buy food, requiring only that they provide hostages to guarantee good behaviour. All went well until they were leaving, when some of the German Crusaders decided to set fire to some mills. The Governor sent a small detachment of troops to restore order but then Peter's undisciplined troops rashly decided to attack the town. This brought them into battle with professional and disciplined soldiers in fortified positions. The Crusaders were slaughtered in their hundreds and Peter and a remnant of 500 fled the battlefield, minus his money-chest. Fortunately, thousands more joined him, having run away during the battle, and he was able to assemble a reasonable force to move on without further trouble until they reached Constantinople and Emperor Alexius. All this and they were yet to fight the Turks. But that comes next month and with devastating consequences for Peter and his Crusaders!

Last month we left Peter the Hermit and his Crusaders in Constantinople with the Emperor Alexius who wisely moved this undisciplined mob a safe distance across the Bosphorus into Cibotos. He advised Peter not to attempt to attack the Turks until more troops arrived from the West but this sound advice was ignored with appalling consequences for the Crusaders. Meanwhile, they were fighting one another, with the Germans quarrelling with the Italians and both at odds with the French. To make matters worse, none of them would accept Peter as their leader. After a few tentative sorties against small groups of Turks, the Crusaders decided on more ambitious moves. First the French sallied forth to destroy a few Turkish villages, committing appalling atrocities on defenceless people, many of whom were Christians. Men, women, children and even babes in arms were murdered in appalling fashion and all in the name of Christ! The Crusaders fled with their booty when Turkish soldiers appeared on the scene.

Not to be outdone, the Germans and Italians managed to halt their differences and band together with a force of 6,000 to march on the city

of Nicaea, where the Turkish Sultan had his capital. They pillaged and killed all they encountered in route, although, unlike the French, they at least spared the Christians. When they at last met up with the Sultan's army, they fled into a deserted castle, which the Turks proceeded to lay siege to. The reason it was deserted soon became evident to the defenders because there was no water supply within the castle, just a spring at some distance from the castle walls which was behind the Turkish lines. The Crusaders were driven almost mad with thirst and after eight days were forced to surrender on a promise that those who renounced their Christian Faith would be spared. A few did and were sold into slavery; the rest were killed!

Worse was to follow because, while Peter was away in Constantinople, a young French knight, Geoffrey Burel, took charge in his absence. He persuaded the rest that they should march out from Cibotos to find better defensive positions, leaving the women and children, together with some monks and priests, in the camp. They had to pass through a narrow valley some three miles away, heavily wooded on one side, where the Turks massed to ambush the oncoming Crusaders. The Crusaders took no precautions, marching along nosily in no sort of order, singing and shouting with no thought of danger. The Turks sent a hail of arrows into this disorganised mob, decimating the Crusaders before what was described as the avalanche of death swept over them in the form of disciplined armed soldiers who slaughtered everyone they could reach as the Crusaders fled back to camp. When the Turks reached the camp, the holocaust continued unabated until even the Turks became tired of killing. This allowed some Crusaders to flee to a castle by the sea where somehow they managed to keep the Turks out until Emperor Alexius sent a squadron of ships to rescue them. The architect of this disaster, Geoffrey Burel, was among the rescued!

Back in Western Europe, armies were being assembled. It occurred to their leaders that it was not necessary to travel 2,000 miles to fight the enemies of Christ, when they were present at home in the form of Jews who were living peacefully in the Rhineland and neighbouring areas. There then followed yet another holocaust

as the Jews were slaughtered in their thousands in a series of atrocities and all in the name of Christ! Soon the Crusaders were on the march to Constantinople, stopping to murder the Jews of Prague before entering Hungary, where they quickly fled from the Hungarian Army but not before suffering heavy casualties. The killing of Jews ceased as these mobs completed the rest of their journey to the Byzantine Capital. Soon the Princes of Europe were making their peaceful way to Constantinople with their own private and disciplined armies. As these armies started to assemble outside Constantinople, Emperor Alexious sought to exercise control over them by requiring the Princes to swear an oath of allegiance to him.

One, Godfrey of Bouillon, with his two brothers Baldwin and Eustace had arrived at Constantinople with an army of thousands of Northern French, Lorrainers and Germans. He refused to swear allegiance to Alexious and, after a number of local skirmishes, astonishingly launched a full scale attack on the Byzantine capital on Thursday in Holy Week! Alexious was a Christian and ordered his archers only to fire from the city walls at the horses, not wishing to kill fellow Christians in Holy Week. However, eventually he had no alternative but to launch his cavalry on the Crusaders, who were routed with heavy casualties. Coming to terms with the reality of the situation, Godfrey met with Alexious on Easter Friday and swore allegiance to him. Soon huge armies started to appear from all over Western Europe until the largest military force seen since the Roman Empire, some 100,000 men, had assembled. They were undisciplined and did not have a single leader, so it was with great relief that Alexious saw them off on their march to the Holy Land. We will be with them next month for the campaign which led to the capture of Antioch and Jerusalem. Last month, we and Emperor Alexius waved the 100,000 crusaders off from Constantinople on their journey to the Holy Land. Fifty miles away and directly on their route was the Turkish fortified coastal city of Nicaca which had to be captured in order to secure their supply lines. The city was massively defended with four miles of walls, heavily fortified with towers. Part of the powerful garrison was away dealing with insurgents but it was quickly summoned back to launch itself at the

Crusaders. A battle waged all day until the remnants of the Turks fled the battle scene. There was still the problem of capturing the city. While the Crusaders spent their time catapulting the heads of Turkish dead into the city, the Byzantine engineers sent by the Emperor attempted to blow holes in the walls but without success. It seemed something of a stalemate until the Emperor sent a squadron of ships to mount a seaborne assault. Their admiral secured a surrender and escorted the Turkish garrison away before the Crusaders could murder them.

Flushed with victory, the Crusaders marched on across the steppes of Anatolia. Bitterly cold in winter, with 50ft snowdrifts, and baking hot in summer, the steppes were as formidable as any army. By June 1097, the Crusaders had reached the city of Dorylaeum where they were attacked by a strong force of Turks which they defeated, leaving them free to march on to Iconium. This city had been deserted by the inhabitants, leaving the Crusaders the luxury of a stay in a beautiful garden city, with an abundance of fruit and comfortable quarters. Soon they were marching on some 80 miles east to Heraclea where they defeated the Turks again, who fled leaving southern Cappadocia to the Crusaders. Following the battle, the Crusaders saw a great comet blazing its way across the sky which they took to be a sign of God's blessing on their victory.

Following the battle, a dispute broke out between the leaders as to their next objective. While the bulk of the army marched on across the Syrian plain to Antioch, a large body of almost 3,000 Crusaders, led by Tancred and Baldwin, proceeded through the steep and rugged pass through the Tarsus Mountains with the intention of capturing Paul's city of Tarsus. Tancred with 300 Crusaders arrived first at the city which was held by the Turks who made an attempt to drive off the invaders but soon fled back into Tarsus, where the Christian community eagerly awaited their liberators. Soon Baldwin with the bulk of the army arrived and, under the cloak of darkness, the Turks fled from Tarsus, leaving the Christians to open the gates to admit the Crusaders.

When they left Tarsus in 1098, the Crusaders moved towards the Kingdom of Edessa through country inhabited by Armenian Christians who rose and massacred the Turks as Baldwin arrived.

The Armenian Prince of Edessa offered to be joint ruler with Baldwin, but the prince was very unpopular with his people. Following his death, torn to pieces by a mob of his own subjects, Baldwin became the sole ruler, with the title of Count of Edessa. While all this was going on, the main army of Crusaders, after four months of hard fighting, had finally arrived at the magnificent city of Antioch. The Crusaders still numbered around 100,000, with casualties replaced by regular reinforcements from the West. Battle raged for months around the city walls, with heavy casualties on both sides. At one point, the Crusaders declared a truce to allow the Turks to come out and bury their dead. This Christian act was somewhat spoilt the next day, when the Crusaders dug up the nearly buried Turks, to steal the personal possessions buried with them! Eventually, after much hard fighting, the Crusaders captured Antioch on 3 June 1098 to the great joy of the Christian inhabitants. However, almost as soon as they established themselves, a large Turkish army arrived to lay siege to the city.

After more bloody fighting, the Turks were again vanquished and on 13 January 1099 the Crusaders moved on towards the prize of Jerusalem. There were many more battles, many towns liberated from Turkish rule, before the Crusaders under a new leader in Raymond finally arrived before the gates of the Holy City. The army had suffered huge casualties during the long and exhausting campaign and was now down to some 30,000 troops, led by Raymond on foot, true to his Christian vows, barefoot and in a pilgrim's garb. The Egyptian Fatimid Governor had no intention of surrendering the massively fortified city. He had expelled all Christians and had poisoned the wells outside the city walls. The Crusaders tried unsuccessfully to storm Jerusalem but were easily repulsed. Months went by while the Crusaders prepared assault towers and received supplies by sea. By July, their strength was down to 15,000 and the Crusaders learnt that a large Egyptian army was on its way to relieve the city. Finally they breached the defences of Jerusalem on 13 July 1099 and proceeded to murder every man, woman and child in the Holy City. Not just Moslems but also Jews, many of whom were locked in the Synagogue which was then burnt to the ground. When there was no one left to kill, the Crusaders

went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to give thanks for the great triumph of the Cross! Within two weeks and before news of the victory could reach him in Europe, the spiritual leader of the First Crusade, Pope Urban, had died. Next month, our attention turns to the large Egyptian army fast approaching the Crusaders.

Last month, we left Jerusalem in the hands of the Crusaders but a large Egyptian army was on its way to relieve the beleaguered city. The Crusader army was now down to some 12,000 knights and 9,000 infantrymen. Nevertheless, they took the audacious ploy of marching out to surprise the Egyptians and surprise them they did, for the enemy troops were asleep in their camp when the Crusaders fell upon them. There was a virtual massacre and the Egyptian army was destroyed as a fighting force, with very few soldiers escaping back to Egypt.

For almost a century, Jerusalem and many of the surrounding towns remained in the hands of the Crusaders. However, as the 12th century developed, the Moslem armies increased in strength and valour, notably under Imad ad-Din Zengi. On Christmas Eve 1144, his troops stormed into Edessa, indiscriminately massacring the inhabitants in their thousands, reminiscent of the Crusaders actions on the capture of Jerusalem. In 1147 the German Emperor Conrad and King Louis VII of France started the Second Crusade to defeat the Moslem armies of the East. Setting off with large armies, they marched across Hungary bound for the Holy Land. A small English army also set off for the Holy Land but first assisted the Duke of Portugal who had waged war against the Moslems for years on the Iberian Peninsular. He had laid siege to Lisbon, with the help of English and Flemish troops, and eventually persuaded the Moslem defenders to surrender on condition that their lives would be spared. They duly surrendered and were murdered to a man and all in the name of Christ!

The two armies of Crusaders reached Byzantine territory, where the German army pillaged and killed everyone they encountered. They even destroyed a monastery killing all the monks. The French army behaved properly and were appalled by the excesses of the Germans. Eventually, the two armies arrived at Constantinople, where the Emperor Manuel urged them to unite. Instead, the

two armies travelled on separately until the German one reached Dorylaeum. Exhausted in the heat and after a long day's travel, they were surprised by a Seljuk Turkish army which fell upon them without warning and virtually destroyed them, with very few survivors escaping to Nicaea. Meanwhile the French army left Constantinople and met up with the remnants of the German army. The two monarchs agreed to unite and the now one army struggled on in 1148 to reach the shelter of Attalia on the Mediterranean coast. The journey was a nightmare. The terrain was rocky and difficult, they were desperately short of food and water and the Turkish cavalry picked off the stragglers, the sick and the wounded. They finally arrived at Attalia, where King Louis, with most of his cavalry and knights, took ship to Syria, leaving the foot soldiers to fend for themselves. Thus the Second Crusade gradually collapsed with indecision and enmity between the leaders. The Turks continued to win all the minor skirmishes, leaving the Crusaders demoralised and defenceless. Louis and Conrad returned to their own countries. Astonishingly, a wave of hate sprang up in France against the Byzantine people, with even prospects of another crusade. This time Christians against Christians! Emperor Conrad and the Pope both refused to support it.

In 1169, a charismatic leader emerged in the East, whose name has lived on through the centuries. He was Turkish, the Sultan of Egypt and a great soldier. But more than this, he was a man of great humanity and compassion, unusual for those barbaric times. His name was Saladin. In 1174 he captured Damascus and in 1183 Aleppo. In 1186, he declared a holy war and advanced on Jerusalem, promising his hordes endless booty. The small garrison of Crusaders, now numbering less than 10,000 men advanced to do battle at the Twin Horns of Hattin. When Joy and I went on the pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Father Tom and the good people of St Joseph's a few years ago, we saw the site of the battle, dominated by the "horns" of twin peaks of a hill. Our Israeli guide

explained that, apart from facing an army many times their own size, the Crusaders fought in heavy armour in searing heat which exhausted them in no time. Saladin had a massive victory and in 1187 Jerusalem surrendered to him. Unlike the Crusaders, Saladin showed great magnanimity in victory and ordered his soldiers not to harm the Christians in the city. His orders were obeyed and the Christians were allowed to buy their freedom with small sums of money. Soon he had driven the Crusaders out of Palestine and most of Syria. He was an outstanding soldier and leader, who ruled the Moslem world with justice and humanity.

The Western world stirred itself for the Third Crusade to be jointly led by the French and English monarchs. Rallies were held and crowds were raised to fever pitch by stories about Saladin's men abusing the holy places of Jerusalem. In England, men were encouraged to go on the Crusade by the introduction of a tax - Saladin's tithe - on all citizens but those who joined the Crusade were exempt from payment! Next month we look at this Crusade and at one of our most heroic and loved Kings, despite only spending a few months in England on just two occasions in his 10 year reign. He is, of course, King Richard Coeur de Lion.

Following the fall of Jerusalem, King Philip Augustus of France and the newly crowned King Richard Coeur de Lion of England made preparation for a joint Crusade to the Holy Land but Emperor Frederick of Germany was already ready to launch his own Crusade. Frederick had been Emperor for 30 years and was now approaching 70, so perhaps he felt that time was not on his side! He set out on 11 May 1189 with a very large army, estimated by contemporary sources as between 100,000 and 150,000 men, although this is thought to have been a huge exaggeration. Certainly, it was the largest army assembled for any of the Crusades. By March 1190, it had crossed the Dardanelles and in May Frederick won a great victory against a Turkish army commanded by Saladin's son-in-law.

In June, Frederick died in mysterious circumstances. His army had descended from the Taurus Mountains on to the plain of Seleucia, when Frederick and his personal guards went on alone to the river Saleph. He apparently slipped and fell into the water in full armour and was swept away before anyone could help him. His

body was recovered and carried with his troops, pickled in vinegar. As the army crossed into Syria, Saladin attacked and virtually destroyed it. The remnants struggled on to Antioch. By now, Frederick's body was starting to disintegrate and his remains were buried in the cathedral. The German Crusade was over.

Now came the turn of Philip and Richard. Their two armies were taken in September 1190 by their respective navies to Sicily where they spent the winter in preparation for the Holy Land. Relations between the two armies and the Sicilian people were not good. At one stage, Richard decided to end the troubles by capturing the capitol of Messina, which someone said took less time than a priest to sing matins. (I have never timed our Rector!) In March 1191, Philip and his army set sail for the Holy Land and had an uneventful journey. Richard and the English army set sail ten days later and encountered violent storms which drove two of his ships off course to Cyprus. One ship had on board Richard's sister Joanna and his intended bride Princess Berengaria of Navarre. The Byzantine ruler of Cyprus refused to help them, so Richard landed troops and captured the island, installing two English governors!

After a total voyage of some seven weeks, Richard landed in the Holy Land to join the French who were besieging Acre. He took full command of the two armies and, although ill with sores covering his mouth and face, he conducted the siege with great vigour, using French siege machines which hurled great stones against the walls of Acre day and night. The British fleet were blockading the city and the plight of the 6,000 Moslems was becoming desperate. Eventually, they offered to surrender the city intact, together with 1,500 Christian prisoners including Lords, and offered a large sum of gold, together with the "True Cross" captured at Hattin. In return, the Moslems required that they be allowed to return to Saladin's camp unharmed. Saladin was furious when he heard of the terms for the surrender but nevertheless he still honoured them. Richard readily agreed the terms but when the Christian prisoners were released, none of the Lords was in their number. He immediately sent ambassadors to Saladin who received them courteously. He released some prisoners and paid the first instalment of the promised gold. This did

not satisfy Richard. In revenge, 2,500 Moslem prisoners, with wives and children, were led out to a plain in full view of Saladin's camp and slaughtered.

Meanwhile, Philip, who hated Richard and the English, left the Holy Land with his army and returned to France. In August, 1191, Richard and his army started to march South through Haifa and Mount Carmel to Caesarea. Many soldiers collapsed in the baking and merciless heat and were killed by the Moslem cavalry who were shadowing them. The two armies faced one another on the coastal plain. Saladin's cavalry were lightly armoured and riding small, fast Arab horses. The English cavalry were heavily armoured on large shire horses. Richard had his troops in a tight formation, with bowmen in front of the cavalry behind a thick shield of pikemen. The arrows of the Moslem archers bounced off the armour of the English cavalry, with a resounding clang, but the arrows of the English archers pieced the armour of the Moslems. The attack of the Moslem cavalry was repulsed with heavy losses. Finally, the English cavalry charged sweeping all before them and the battle was over. Saladin soon replaced his casualties and the two armies continued to manoeuvre around the Holy Land. Although Richard captured Jaffa and Ascalon, the latter being destroyed by Saladin (and subsequently rebuilt by Richard) before the arrival of the English, Richard did not recapture Jerusalem, deeming it not a military necessity. Saladin recaptured Jaffa and in 1192 Richard captured it back in what proved his final battle in the Holy Land. Saladin so admired Richard's valour during the battle that when his horse was killed under him, Saladin, under a flag of truce, sent his grooms to Richard with the gift of two of his own horses as a remarkable act of respect. After the battle, the Moslems went wearily back to Jerusalem. Richard was taken ill and returned to England, ransom being paid for him after his capture by first the Austrians and then the Germans.

He finally arrived back in England in 1194. For five years, he fought in France to retain his lands, finally dying when struck in the shoulder by a bolt from a crossbow. The bolt was cut out but gangrene set in. As Winston Churchill put it,

"Coeur de Lion knew he must pay a soldier's debt". On his death bed, Richard ordered that the archer who had fired the fatal bolt and who was now a prisoner, be brought before him. He pardoned him and gave him a purse of money. Sadly after Richard's death, the archer was flayed alive. This is how Winston described the death of Richard; *"He received the offices of the Church with sincere and exemplary piety and died in the forty-second year of his age on April 11, 1199, worthy, by the consent of all men, to sit with King Arthur and Roland and other heroes of martial romance at some Eternal Round Table, which we trust the Creator of the Universe in His comprehension will not have forgotten to provide."* Saladin had died shortly after Richard left the Holy Land on 3 March 1193 at the age of fifty-four. I am sure one more seat would have been found for him at that Eternal Round Table. Next month we look at the Fourth Crusade in 1202. Patient reader, the end of our narrative is in sight (but not next month!)

With the death of Saladin and Richard, the Moslem and Christian worlds had lost their two great champions. In 1202, with the blessing of Pope Innocent III, a large army of Crusaders sailed from Venice in a huge armada of Venetian ships. As part of the agreement for the use of the ships, the Crusaders captured the Hungarian city of Zara, which they sacked and pillaged. After a long winter break, they set out in 1203 for Constantinople with the intention of deposing the current Emperor Alexius, who in turn had deposed and thrown into a dungeon his own brother. However, with the Crusaders camped outside the city walls, the citizens decided to revolt against Alexius, who was strangled by the mob. The Crusaders were not going to allow the revolt to interfere with their plans. They proceeded to storm the city. There then occurred atrocities on a scale never seen before even in those violent times. Some 20,000 Crusaders, fuelled by drink, went on a drunken rampage of raping, pillaging, killing and looting. They sacked and destroyed the great churches, priceless and irreplaceable works of art were destroyed, residences and public buildings were torched, women including nuns were violated and abused; nothing and no one were spared. Pope Innocent offered his congratulations for the great victory! However, he was horrified when he subsequently heard of the

sack of the city and apologised publicly for the crimes committed but by then the damage had been done. The Byzantines now had a hatred of the West which was to continue through the centuries.

Minor skirmishes occurred until an extraordinary sequence of events set off another wave of religious fervour to ignite Christendom. A 12 year old shepherd boy named Stephen from Cloyes in France took a group of children to King Philip Augustus who was holding court in the Abbey of Sait-Denis. Stephen said that he had a letter from Christ ordering him to preach a crusade! From the Abbey he went around the country preaching that our Lord had said that unless we became as little children we would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, so therefore Jerusalem would only be captured by an army of children! Astonishingly, contemporary records say that Stephen converged on Marseilles with 30,000 children to embark to the Holy Land. This figure is thought to be grossly exaggerated but even the more likely total of 10,000 is still astonishing. The children had to beg for food and some died on the journey to Marseilles but arriving in the seaport they found that seven ships had been provided by merchants to take them to the Holy Land. For 18 years, nothing was heard of them but in 1230, a priest arrived in France with a harrowing account of the arrival of the children in the East. They had been rounded up and either killed or sold into slavery. Around the same time, a German boy named Nicholas, fired by the example of Stephen, gathered up a similar number of children and took them on a hazardous journey through Switzerland to Rome. Almost two-thirds of the children died from the privations of the journey and the remainder were received by the Pope, who with great kindness gently persuaded them to return home. Sadly only a pitiful few finally made it back to their families.

However we are getting ahead of ourselves. In 1216, Pope Innocent died suddenly but his successor Pope Honorius took over his plans to launch another Crusade; this time led by King Andrew of Hungary and Duke Leopold VI of Austria. They landed in the Holy Land in 1217 with a small army and achieved virtual nothing in a campaign almost without engagement with the

enemy. About the only success was the capture by King Andrew of an earthenware jar believed to have been used by Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana in Galilee when the miracle of the turning of water into wine occurred. In 1218, a large Crusader army of Dutch and Germans arrived led by one John of Brienne, King of Jerusalem, and they were joined by a large French army and Leopold of Austria with a strong force. Their mission was to capture Egypt, which was now the Moslem super power in the region. They set off from Acre on Ascension Day to capture the Egyptian seaport of Damietta which was protected by a massive chain across the Nile and a castle dominated by a strongly fortified tower. With great ingenuity, the attackers produced a floating castle of two galleys lashed together and protected by copper sheets. The attackers prevailed and the citadel was captured. The way was clear to advance and capture Damietta but the Crusaders, fatally decided to wait until reinforcements arrived. The weeks went by and the opportunity was lost. Bickering broke out between the leaders and the Crusaders were decimated by dysentery. Moral was low but the Crusaders were able to beat off and inflict heavy casualties on a Moslem army seeking to drive them out of Egypt. A stalemate lasted some 18 months until in 1221, following flooding; the Crusaders agreed a peace with the Moslems and returned to Acre with nothing to show for their campaign. Next month we conclude our narrative with the Sixth and final Crusade led by King Louis IX of France.

In 1228 Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen arrived in Acre with an army of some 11,000. He had fallen out with Pope Gregory IX who had excommunicated him for leaving his army when taken ill. He was no soldier but a brilliant diplomat. The Moslems were fighting among themselves and were in no state to go to war with the Crusaders. Taking advantage of this, Frederick managed to broker a peace in 1229 whereby Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and much of Galilee would be returned to the Christians, with the Moslems having an enclave in Jerusalem of the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of al-Aqsa.

In 1244 10,000 Turkish horsemen swept in to capture Jerusalem. The Sixth and final Crusade was led by King Louis IX of France. He was a man

of great religious fervour but also given to outbursts of unbridled anger. He set sail in 1249 with the intention of attacking Egypt, the weakest of the Moslem countries. He landed at the mouth of the Nile with only part of his army, the rest having been delayed by a heavy storm. Against advice, he foolishly attacked the Moslems but they were poorly led and retired, leaving Louis to enter Damietta which had been deserted by the citizens when they saw their own army flee. After a stay of several months in the town, Louis moved his army cautiously forward, crossing canals in route until they came to the formidable obstacle of a river which was a branch of the Nile. The Egyptians were camped on the other side. An Egyptian offered to show the Crusaders an easy way across in exchange for money and the first group got over without difficulty, catching the Egyptians asleep in their camp. They immediately took flight into the neighbouring city of Mansourah where the Crusaders rashly pursued them without waiting for the bulk of their force which was still across the river. The Crusaders were being killed in the narrow streets and alleys of the city and had to withdraw. The Egyptians now had the upper hand. They were able to destroy boats bringing much needed supplies to the Crusaders, who were ravaged by illness. King Louis had no choice but to surrender his whole army. There was not enough food to feed them all, so their captives' beheaded 300 prisoners each day until eventually Louis secured their release by paying a huge ransom and surrendering Damietta. He sailed home on 24 April 1254.

There occurred an event at this time which completely changed the balance of power in the Holy Land. It started with a palace revolution in Cairo when a group of slaves named Mameluks gained power. The Mameluks were Turkish, brought to Egypt as slaves, and taught to kill with ruthless efficiency. They had no family ties, no real patriotism but would obey orders without question. They quickly ousted the sultans and soon were in total command. Following the debacle of King Louis, the Franks in the Holy Land lost the will to continue and bitter fighting broke out between different Christian factions. The Italian states and the Venetians controlled the seas and on land the Mongols in the north and the Mameluks in the south were at war, with the

Franks in danger of being crushed between them. There now comes a curious twist in our narrative because the Mongols were ruled by a man name Mongka, whose mother and wife were both Christians.

In 1254 the Franks of Antioch made an alliance with the Mongols against the Moslems. An enormous army of Mongols swept all before them in an avalanche of death; first destroying the Moslem Sect of Assassins and then capturing Baghdad, where they murdered 80,000 inhabitants, sparing only the Christians who sheltered in the churches. The Mongol hordes then moved into Syria with unspeakable cruelty. (The ruler of one city which refused to surrender was made to eat flesh cut from his own body until he died!). Aleppo held out for less than a week until it was captured, when all the inhabitants were murdered to a man but all the Christians were spared. On to Damascas which opened its gates to the invaders and the inhabitants were spared. Soon the Mongols were heading for Egypt but suddenly Mongka died and the Mongols became divided as a power struggle developed over the succession. The Franks suddenly changed sides, realising that the balance of power was changing, and allowed a powerful Mameluk (Egyptian) army through its territory into Syria where it destroyed the depleted Mongol army.

In 1260 a new name comes into our narrative in Baibars, a Mameluk who had become Sultan of Egypt. He was an outstanding soldier who at first proved a good diplomat, despite harbouring distrust of the Franks for their support of the Mongols. He agreed with a man named John of Jaffa, with whom he got on well, to exchange Christian prisoners for some Moslem ones. However, the two great Military Orders of Christendom, the Templars and the Hospitallers, refused to release their prisoners because they were skilled craftsmen. The consequences for the world were appalling. The Egyptians led by Baibars marched on the Franks, capturing first Caesarea, which he razed to the ground but spared the inhabitants, then to Haifa, where the inhabitants were not so fortunate, being slaughtered to a man. In a highly successful campaign all the Templar fortresses were taken including Arsuf, defended by 300 Knights of St John who were all killed or put

into slavery. Finally, Baibars, tired of campaigning took his troops back to Egypt. He was to dominate the scene until his death in 1277. Many were his victories, excessive was his cruelty and ruthlessness which shocked even the Moslems of those violent times. Perhaps his greatest victory was the capture of Antioch in 1268, after two centuries of Christian rule. With great barbarity, the citizens including women and children were systematically murdered within the locked gates of the city, with virtually no survivors.

In 1271, Prince Edward arrived from England with 1,000 men but achieved very little in the next 18 months. Eventually a truce was signed which lasted 11 years. Edward returned to England, having almost being assassinated, to find his father had died and he was now king. In 1277, Baibars died from drinking poison and was succeeded after some two years of disputes by Qalawun who then continued the fight against the Franks. In 1281 the Mongols, assisted by the Knights of St John, fought a largely inconclusive battle with Qalawun. In 1287 an earthquake in northern Syria badly damaged the walls of the Christian port of Lattakieh. Qalawun took advantage of the weakened defences and captured the port. In 1289 he captured the important port of Tripoli. Eventually, the Christians concluded a truce with Qalawun which lasted 10 years. In 1290 Qalawun died suddenly to be succeeded, after the usual struggle with rival claimants, by his son Khalil who eventually drove the Christians from the Holy Land. The Crusades were finally over but to this day hatred and enmity live on in the Holy Land.

Roger Bryant

