



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

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Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

# The Fifth Crusade

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## INTRODUCTION



## Fifth Crusade

**T**he **Fifth Crusade** (1217–1221) was an attempt by Western Europeans to reacquire Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land by first conquering the powerful Ayyubid state in Egypt.

Pope Innocent III and his successor Pope Honorius III organized crusading armies led by King Andrew II of Hungary and Leopold VI, Duke of Austria, and an attack against Jerusalem ultimately left the city in Muslim hands. Later in 1218, a German army led by Oliver of Cologne, and a mixed army of Dutch, Flemish and Frisian soldiers led by William I, Count of Holland joined the crusade. In order to attack Damietta in Egypt, they allied in Anatolia with the Seljuk Sultanate of Rûm which attacked the Ayyubids in Syria in an attempt to free the Crusaders from fighting on two fronts.

After occupying the port of Damietta, the Crusaders marched south towards Cairo in July 1221, but were turned back after their dwindling supplies led to a forced retreat. A nighttime attack by Sultan Al-Kamil resulted in a great number of Crusader losses, and eventually in the surrender of the army. Al-Kamil agreed to an eight-year peace agreement with Europe.



## Innocent III

was born Lotario dei Conti di Segni and reigned as Pope from January 8, 1198 to his death in 1216. Pope Innocent was one of the most powerful and influential of the medieval popes. He exerted a wide influence over the Christian states of Europe, claiming supremacy over all of Europe's kings. He was central in supporting the Catholic Church's reforms of ecclesiastical affairs through his decretals and the Fourth Lateran Council. This resulted in a considerable refinement of Western canon law. He is furthermore notable for using interdict and other censures to compel princes to obey his decisions, although these measures were not uniformly successful. Innocent III, died suddenly at Perugia on June 16, 1216. He was buried in the cathedral of Perugia, where his body remained until Pope Leo XIII had it transferred to the Lateran in December 1891.

# Historical Context

The previous crusade, the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), had been called by Pope Innocent III to retake Jerusalem in 1202. In the event, the Crusaders instead sacked Constantinople in 1204 and the Byzantine territories were distributed between Venice and its allies. The objective of placing Jerusalem under Christian rule still remained an important aim of the Church and so yet another crusade, now known as the Fifth Crusade, was called for in 1215, again by Pope Innocent III.

Richard I of England (r. 1189-1199), during the Third Crusade (1189-1192 CE), had promoted the idea of attacking the Muslim states, not via their castles and city strongholds in the Levant but at the softer underbelly of the Muslim Ayyubid Empire: Egypt. Now that strategy would be adopted in the hope that if Egypt fell then Jerusalem, without the possibility of reinforcement and supplies, would fall too.

The Ayyubid dynasty had been founded by Saladin (r. 1174-1193) and would rule Egypt until its conquest there by the Mamluks in 1250. At the time of the Fifth Crusade the Sultan of Egypt, and therefore the most senior ruler in the Muslim Middle East, was Sayef al-Din al-Adil (r. 1200-1218), the brother of the late Saladin. While an uneasy truce had been in existence between the Latin East states (as the Crusader states in the Middle East were known) and the Ayyubids, the latter's recent fortification of Mount Tabor in Galilee threatened Crusader-held Acre and its surrounding territory. This was the move which Innocent III used as the spark to ignite the flames of religious fervor amongst Western Europe's leadership.

# Recruitment

Pope Innocent III had already planned since 1208 a crusade to recapture Jerusalem. In April 1213 he issued the papal bull *Quia maior*, calling all of Christendom to join a new crusade. It was sent to nearly all the ecclesiastical provinces in Europe.

Innocent claimed that the Crusade offered an opportunity for salvation: "[H]ow many, converted to penitence, have handed themselves over by service of the Crucified for the liberation of the Holy Land, as is by suffering martyrdom they have obtained the crown of glory, who would perhaps have perished in their iniquities entangled in carnal desires and earthly seductions. This is an old device of Jesus Christ that he deigned to renew in these days for the salvation of his faithful". Innocent then called for a new crusade:

*Thus the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought body and soul and other goods to you, will condemn you for the vice of ingratitude and the crime of infidelity if you should fail to aid him with the result that he lost his kingdom that he brought with the price of his blood. Know then that whoever denies aid to the Redeemer in this time of his need is culpably harsh and harshly culpable. For, also, insofar as, according to the divine command, he loves his neighbor as himself and for him, he knows that this brethren in faith and in the Christian name are imprisoned by the faithless Saracens in a cruel prison and endure the harsh yoke of slavery, he does not expend the efficacious work for their liberation, that the Lord spoke of in the Gospel. "Do to others whatever you wish them*

*to do to you". Or perhaps you do not know that many thousands of Christians are held in prison and slavery by them and they suffer countless torments?*

Innocent continued:

*...the Christian people possessed almost all the Saracen provinces until after the time of Saint Gregory. But after that time, a certain son of perdition, the pseudo-prophet Muhammad, arose, and he seduced many away from the truth with carnal enticements and pleasures. Even though his perfidy lasted until the present, still we trust in the Lord who has now made a good sign that the end of this beast, whose number, according to John's Apocalypse, counts 666, of which now almost six hundred years are completed approaches. ... Therefore, dearly beloved sons, changing dissensions and fratricidal jealousies into treaties of peace and goodwill, let us gird ourselves to come to the aid of the Crucified, not hesitating to risk property and life for him who laid down his life and shed his blood for us.*

Innocent also promised the remission of sins to those who took part in the Crusade, to those who supplied men at their expense and to those who donated money towards it.

The bull also included a prayer for the liberation of the Holy Land through crusade, the *Deus qui admirabili*.

This was followed by another papal bull, the *Ad Liberandam* in 1215.

For the first time in the run-up to the Fifth Crusade, the preaching of the Crusade, essentially its method of recruitment of volunteers, was organized by geographical areas with guidelines for provincial boards and their delegates on just how to persuade people and who to target. There were even manuals of model sermons designed to best whip up fervor and enthusiasm for the cause. Nobles and knights with the skills and means to travel and fight were to be more intensively targeted and thus such unofficial popular movements as the so-called Children's Crusade of 1212, which involved peasants and children, could be avoided.

Pope Innocent III did theoretically widen the call to all males except monks but those who were not militarily skilled were strongly encouraged, perhaps even compelled, to 'redeem their vows' and give funds to the cause rather than travel in person. Those who paid but did not travel would still receive the benefit of a remission of their sins, the Pope promised. In addition, and as was by now typical papal policy, a tax (one-twentieth of income over a three-year period) was imposed on the clergy to help pay for the Crusade. The prospect of adventure, financial gain from war booty, and improving social status by acquiring new honors and titles were all additional motivators besides religious conviction.

## France

The message of the crusade was preached in France by Robert of Courçon; unlike other Crusades, few French knights joined, as they were already fighting the Albigensian Crusade against the heretical Cathar sect in

**CATHARISM** appeared in Europe in the Languedoc region of France in the 11th century and this is when the name first appears. The idea of two gods or principles, one good and the other evil, was central to Cathar beliefs.



**Robert of Courçon**



**Frederick II**



**Andrew II**



**Leopold VI**

southern France. Robert of Courçon (c. 1160/1170 – 1219) was an English cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. After studying at Oxford, Paris, and Rome, he became the Chancellor of the University of Paris in 1211. The following year, he was created Cardinal priest of S. Stefano al Monte Celio. In 1213, he was appointed legate to preach the crusade, and in 1215 was placed at the head of a commission to inquire into the errors prevalent at the University of Paris. He participated in the papal conclave of 1216, which elected Pope Honorius III. He took an active part in the campaign against heresy in France, and accompanied the army of the Fifth Crusade into Egypt as legate of Pope Honorius III.

In 1215 Pope Innocent III summoned the Fourth Lateran Council, where, along with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Raoul of Merencourt, he discussed the recovery of the Holy Land, among other church business. Pope Innocent wanted it to be led by the papacy, as the First Crusade should have been, to avoid the mistakes of the Fourth Crusade, which had been taken over by the Venetians. Pope Innocent planned for the Crusaders to meet at Brindisi in 1216, and prohibited trade with the Muslims, to ensure that the Crusaders would have ships and weapons. Every Crusader would receive an indulgence, including those who simply helped pay the expenses of a Crusader, but did not go on crusade themselves.

## Hungary and Germany

Oliver of Paderborn had preached the crusade in Holy Roman Empire, and Emperor Frederick II attempted to join in 1215. Frederick was the last monarch Innocent wanted to join, as he had challenged the Papacy (and would do so in the years to come). Innocent died on July 16, 1216 before he had the chance to see his Crusade get off the ground and was succeeded by Pope Honorius III, who barred Frederick from participating, but organized crusading armies led by King Andrew II of Hungary and Leopold VI, Duke of Austria. Andrew had the largest royal army in the history of the crusades (20,000 knights and 12,000 castle-garrisons).

## Portugal

Many of the Crusaders from the Rhineland, Flanders, and Friesland decided to go to the Holy Land by their traditional sea journey. The fleet made their first stop at Dartmouth on the southern coast of England. There they elected their leaders and the laws by which they would organize their venture. From there led by Counts William I of Holland and George of Weid they continued on their way south to Lisbon. As in previous crusading seaborne journeys, the fleet was dispersed by storms and only gradually managed to reach the Portuguese city of Lisbon after making a stopover at the famous shrine of Santiago de Compostela. At their arrival in Portugal as during the second Crusade, the Bishop of Lisbon and other members of the Portuguese clergy attempted to persuade the Crusaders to help them capture the Almohad controlled city of Alcaccer do Sal. The Frisians according to *De itinere frisonum*, however, refused on account of Innocent III's disqualification of the venture at the Fourth Lateran Council. The other members of the fleet, however, were convinced by the Portuguese and started the siege of the city in August 1217. The Crusaders finally

**FRIESLAND** historically known as Frisia, is a province of the Netherlands located in the northern part of the country. The Frisii were among the migrating Germanic tribes that, following the breakup of Celtic Europe in the 4th century BC, settled along the North Sea.



Otto I of Merania



John of Brienne



Hugh I of Cyprus



Bohemond IV of Antioch

captured Alcacer do Sal with the help of the military orders on October 1217, after they repel an attempt by the governors of Seville, Badajoz, and Jaén to relieve the besieged garrison. According to William of Holland in his letter to Pope Honorius III the Almohad leader of the garrison with 2000 of his followers converted to Christianity after they had surrendered the town to the crusading forces. From there on the Crusading fleet continued on its journey to the Levant.

## Georgia

Pope Innocent had managed to secure Georgia's participation in the crusade. Georgia's largely isolationist policies had allowed it to accumulate a powerful army and a very large concentration of knights. However, the reconnaissance force under the Mongols Jebe and Subutai destroyed the entire Georgian army in two successive battles, most notably the Battle of Caucasus Mountain. After the death of Georgian King George IV Lasha, his sister Queen Rusudan wrote to the Pope informing him that Georgia was unable to fulfill its promise to assist in the Crusade because its army had been destroyed by unknown savages. It has been speculated that the oddly passive behavior of the Crusaders in the later years was due to them waiting for the Georgian army to join the fray.

# The Campaign

The first to take up the cross in the Fifth Crusade was King Andrew II of Hungary. In July 1217, Andrew departed from Zagreb, accompanied by Leopold VI of Austria and Otto I, Duke of Merania. King Andrew's army was so large—at least 10,000 mounted soldiers and even much more "uncountable" infantrymen—that most of it stayed behind when Andrew and his men embarked in Split two months later. They were transported by the Venetian fleet, which was the largest European fleet in the era. Andrew and his troops embarked on August 23, 1217, in Split. They landed on October 9 on Cyprus from where they sailed to Acre and joined John of Brienne, ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Hugh I of Cyprus, and Prince Bohemond IV of Antioch to fight against the Ayyubids in Syria. Until his return to Hungary, King Andrew remained the leader of Christian forces in the Fifth Crusade. In October 1217, the leaders of the Crusaders - Masters of Hospitalers, Templars and Teutonic Knights with the leaders and dignitaries of the crusade - held a war council in Acre, over which King Andrew II presided.

King Andrew's well-mounted army defeated sultan Al-Adil I at Bethsaida on the Jordan River on November 10, 1217. Muslim forces retreated in their fortresses and towns. In Jerusalem, the walls and fortifications were demolished to prevent the Christians from being able to defend the city, if they did manage to reach it and take it. Muslims fled the city, afraid that there would be a repeat of the bloodbath of the First Crusade in 1099. The Crusaders' catapults and trebuchets did not arrive in time, so they had fruitless assaults on the fortresses of the Lebanon and on Mount Tabor. Afterwards, Andrew spent his time collecting alleged relics. At the beginning of 1218 Andrew, who was very sick, decided to return to Hungary.

Andrew and his army departed to Hungary in February 1218, and Bohemond and Hugh also returned home.

## Egypt and Damietta

In May 1218 the Crusader army landed just west of the city of Damietta in Egypt. The plan was to take the city, then with a population of around 60,000, and then march along the Nile towards Cairo, some 100 miles distant. The army, perhaps numbering 30,000 men at its peak, consisted of the Crusader knights from Europe alongside barons from the Latin East and knights from the three major military orders: the Knights Hospitaller, Knights Templar, and Teutonic Knights. The army in the field was led by John of Brienne, but one of the problems of the Fifth Crusade would be a lack of clear leadership and decisive strategy.

The man charged with leading the Muslim army and defending Egypt was al-Kamil, son of the Sultan and his successor from August 1218 (until 1238). Damietta, the first target of the Crusade, had three rings of formidable fortification walls. There was a moat between the first and second walls and 28 towers built into the latter. It would be a tough nut to crack, but the city, as one Crusader noted, "was the key to all Egypt."

The Crusader army set up camp on the west or far bank of the river outside the city. The first obstacle before the invaders even got to the city proper was to get past a huge chain hung between the city walls and a small but fortified island in the Nile Delta. This chain blocked access to the city's harbor. The Crusaders spent several months trying to attack the 70 ft. high chain-tower. The tower was garrisoned by a force of 300 men, which could be resupplied thanks to a bridge built of boats linking the tower to Damietta. It was only when a siege tower was built on two ships lashed together that the Crusaders managed, on August 24, to capture it and so finally lower the chain.



*Figure 1 The Siege of Damietta by Cornelis Claesz van Wieringen*

Taking the chain tower, though, was not the same as taking Damietta, and the city still stood, formidable, across the waters. There was also the latent threat of al-Kamil, who kept station with a large army camped on the eastern side of the Nile. Significantly, winter was now closing in, and to add to the Crusader's difficulties, the Crusader camp was flooded by the Nile during a storm on November 29, 1218. The age-old problem of supplies for a besieging army also cropped up, and scurvy was rife. The inhabitants of Damietta, one can imagine, were not faring very much better.



### **Al-Kamil** (right)

(c. 1177 – March 6, 1238) was the son of sultan al-Adil, a brother of Saladin, and the fourth Ayyubid sultan of Egypt. In 1218 when Al-Adil died, the Ayyubid domains were divided into three parts, with Al-Kamil ruling Egypt, his brother Al-Muazzam Isa ruling in Palestine and Transjordan, and a third brother, Al-Ashraf Musa in Syria and the Jazira. Nominally the other two recognized Al-Kamil's supremacy as Sultan. Unusually for an Ayyubid succession, there was no obvious dissent or rivalry between the brothers at this point, partly because just before Al-Adil's death, Egypt had been attacked by the forces of the Fifth Crusade. Al-Kamil exemplified the Islamic laws of war. For example, after al-Kamil defeated the Franks during the Crusades, Oliverus Scholasticus praised and commented on how al-Kamil supplied the defeated Frankish army with food. His sons as-Salih Ayyub and al-Adil II succeeded him in Syria and Egypt respectively, but the Ayyubid empire soon descended into civil war. In 1239 the treaty with Frederick expired, and Jerusalem came under Ayyubid control.

All winter, spring, and summer of 1219 the two sides were at a stand-off. The Crusaders were sufficiently entrenched to make any attack on their camp highly dangerous, but they did not have the manpower for a full-scale assault on the city or on al-Kamil's force. Indeed, some contingents of Crusaders had returned home and those that remained hoped that the balance would be tipped in their favor when Frederick II finally arrived, as long-promised, with a large army.

When news arrived that Frederick would not be coming until the next year, the Crusaders rallied themselves, boosted by the arrival of no less a figure than Francis of Assisi, who tried, unsuccessfully, to convince the Muslims that God was definitely not on their side. In the autumn of 1219, it was clear that the lower than usual levels of the Nile that year had reduced crops and now starvation was a real possibility for both sides.

In September, al-Kamil, perhaps realizing the garrison of Damietta had only a very limited time left and fearing the arrival of a larger Crusader army, offered a truce with extraordinary terms. He would keep Damietta and, in return, give the Latins control of Jerusalem. Despite its religious significance to both sides, the Holy City was of very limited economic or even strategic value and had long been neglected by the Ayyubids. Parts of Palestine would also be handed over, showing that al-Kamil was more interested in his wider empire, especially the far richer lands of Egypt and Syria.

Considering that the objective of the Crusade was, after capturing Egypt, to then take Jerusalem, this offer of the Holy City was, surprisingly, rejected by some of the Crusader leadership. John of Brienne and the Teutonic Knights were keen to accept but the Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaller, Venetians and the most senior religious leader, Cardinal Pelagius, were not. The latter group were concerned that without the vital fortresses of Kerak and Montreal, which al-Kamil intended to keep, it would be difficult for the Crusaders to hold onto their gains if war with the Ayyubids followed. Most of all, the arrival of Frederick, better late than never, would almost certainly mean victory for the Westerners and then they could take what they wanted, including Egypt. So, the siege went on.

With his peace offering rejected, al-Kamil went on the offensive and attacked the Crusader camp, but his army was repulsed. In November 1219, the Crusaders attacked Damietta, and after breaking through a ruined tower, the city's now meagre defenses were breached. The Crusaders were shocked to see the state of the enemy with the streets littered with bodies and those still alive suffering from extreme malnutrition and disease.

### **March to Cairo and Defeat**

Damietta was to be the only success of the campaign for the Crusaders. Taking advantage of the Crusader's indecision as to what to do next, al-Kamil, as a precaution, moved his army 25 miles south, still hugging the Nile. Meanwhile, the Crusaders debated over who should control their new prize. The Pope's representatives wanted to keep it for Frederick while John of Brienne wanted it for himself, and to better stake his claim, he even started minting coins. In the end, a compromise was reached with gave John custody until Frederick arrived. Even more crucial to the Crusade was the debate over the next step of the campaign: march on and take Cairo or use Damietta as a bargaining chip to gain territory in Palestine,

including Jerusalem. Incredibly, it took a year and a half and the arrival of a force from Germany under the command of Ludwig of Bavaria for the Crusaders to decide on the former action, and even then, in the spring of 1221, they moved like snails by land and river towards their goal.

Meanwhile, al-Kamil had been able to take advantage of the enemy's indecision to fortify his camp at Mansourah and call upon the support of his allies in Syria and Mesopotamia. In July 1221 CE the Crusaders moved to attack the enemy at Mansourah. However, al-Kamil had chosen his site wisely, and it was easily defended thanks to its position at the joining of a tributary to the Nile River itself. Also, within a month, the annual rising of the Nile would occur. Although the Crusaders seemed in no particular hurry, time was on the Muslim's side, not theirs.

The canny al-Kamil, eagerly awaiting a support army and the coming floods, now choose his moment to offer a new truce deal with the enemy, perhaps in an attempt to further delay them. The Crusaders rejected the terms, though, and, after defeating a small raiding party, rashly moved to attack al-Kamil's fortified camp in August. The Muslim leader allowed them to move forward unchecked and then sank four ships behind the Crusader army to prevent any quick withdrawal. Meanwhile, the Muslim armies had arrived from the north and, taking up position to the north-east, they blocked any land retreat by the Crusaders. It was at this moment that the Nile waters started to rise. The Crusader ships began to flounder in the now treacherous waters, and a chaotic retreat ensued. When al-Kamil opened the sluice gates in the surrounding fields, the whole area was flooded waist-deep. On August 28, 1221, the Crusader army surrendered and a truce was agreed upon. Al-Kamil got Damietta back and all Muslim prisoners. The Crusader army returned home unmolested. Despite all the money, effort, planning, and fervor, it was another spectacular flop of a crusade.

## Aftermath

The terms of this surrender meant the relinquishing of Damietta to Al-Kamil in exchange for the release of the Crusaders. Al-Kamil agreed to an eight-year peace agreement with Europe and to return a piece of the True Cross. However, the relic was never returned as Al-Kamil did not, in fact, have it.

In the years after the Fifth Crusade, there was much debate and finger-pointing as to who exactly was to blame for the disaster. Nevertheless, the decision by the West to directly attack Egypt and not Jerusalem did perturb the Ayyubids as to what might happen if a larger Crusader army made a second, more decisive attempt. This threat may well have eased the negotiations of the Sixth Crusade (1228-1229), led by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, who, finally involving himself in the Crusader movement and arriving in the Middle East in September 1228, gained within a year, rather ironically, control of Jerusalem through diplomacy rather than through actual warfare.





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