



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

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Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

Women of the Cross

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## INTRODUCTION



### **Women of the Cross**

Though historians have fixed the crusading knight firmly in the public mind, it is less easy to picture the women who went along on these ventures. Women followed the pilgrimage routes of medieval Europe as avidly as men. Women suffered while on ordinary pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and they could hardly expect lighter treatment on the Crusades. And yet they went.

Well-known ladies accompanied their husbands on these dangerous journeys. Most of the women who accompanied the Crusaders, though, were the wives of ordinary pilgrim-warriors. Sometimes the proportion of women must have been relatively high, considering the dangerous nature of the expeditions. On the First Crusade, the armies were held up at Antioch when a pestilence struck: it was reported, incredibly, that “nearly fifty thousand” women died within a few days. Even though medieval statistics are untrustworthy, the writer is clearly saying that a great many women died.

Whenever a fight was in the offing, women and other noncombatants (the clergy, the sick, the old, and children) were usually herded together in some secure position while the infantry, knights, and their leaders formed up for action. But there were bound to be fatalities.



## Knight

The word *knight*, from Old English *cniht* ("boy" or "servant"), of the German word *Knecht* ("servant, bondsman, vassal"). This meaning, of unknown origin, is common among West Germanic languages (cf Old Frisian *kniucht*, Dutch *knecht*, Danish *knægt*, Swedish *knekt*, Norwegian *knekt*, Middle High German *kneht*, all meaning "boy, youth, lad"). Middle High German had the phrase *guoter kneht*, which also meant knight; but this meaning was in decline by about 1200. The meaning of *cniht* changed over time from its original meaning of "boy" to "household retainer". A *rādeniht*, "riding-servant", was a servant on horseback. The specific military sense of a knight as a mounted warrior in the heavy cavalry emerges only in the Hundred Years' War. The verb "to knight" (to make someone a knight) appears around 1300; and, from the same time, the word "kighthood" shifted from "adolescence" to "rank or dignity of a knight".

# Female Knights

Knights weren't only male. The women (Dames) of our Order are called Chevaleresse from the French words *chevaleresse* and *chevalière*, which were used in two ways: one was for the wife of a knight, the other was as female knight.

The **Order of the Hatchet** (orden de la Hacha) was founded in 1149 by the Count of Barcelona, to honor the women who fought for the defense of the town of Tortosa (Spain) against a Moorish attack.

During that year, amid heavy fighting between the two fronts, Muslims besieged Tortosa after a withdrawal of Berenguer. In the absence of men to defend the city, women joined the fight, dressing as men and attacking with hatchets and anything else they could lay their hands on. They successfully repelled the attackers. Their participation was essential to the defense of Tortosa. In appreciation of these facts, Count Ramon Berenguer instituted the Order of the Hatchet for women who participated in that defense.

Those in the Order were exempt from all taxes, and received precedence ahead of men in the public assemblies of the town. Furthermore, it was granted "that all the Apparel and Jewels, though of never so great value, left by their dead Husbands, should be their own. No other members were admitted to the Order, and it is presumed that the Order went defunct when the last member died.



Figure 1 Emblem of the Order of the Hatchet

The **Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, also called the **Order of Saint Mary of the Tower** or the **Order of the Knights of the Mother of God**, commonly the **Knights of Saint Mary**, was a military order founded in 1261. The Order received its rule from Pope Urban IV, who expressly states the purpose of the organization and the rights and obligations of its members:

*[The members of the order] are to be allowed to bear arms for the defense of the catholic faith and ecclesiastical freedom, when specifically required to do so by the Roman church. For subduing civil discords they may carry only defensive weapons, provided they have the permission of the diocesan.*

The Order did have some success at building bridges between the Guelphs and Ghibellines. Two founding members, Loderingo degli Andalò, a Ghibelline from Bologna, and Catalano di Guido of the Catalani family of Guelphs, were given the government of Bologna in 1265 during a period of civil strife between the two factions. Though less than successful there, the two knights were appointed by Pope Clement IV the very next year (1266) to govern Florence in the aftermath of the Battle of Benevento.

The rule of the Order was based on that of the Augustinians, but by a precedent set by the Order of Santiago and the Militia of Jesus Christ, members could marry and did not live in communal poverty. Their chief task appears to have been the pacification of the Lombard cities, racked by factional strife. In this they were largely

unsuccessful, due in no small part to their political allegiance to the Church. The unique position of the Order and the nature of its rule has led to its being denied full status by historians, who have sometimes labelled it a mere confraternity. The Order would admit a woman as a *militissa* (female knight).

The Order was eventually suppressed by Pope Sixtus V in 1558.

The **Order of the Ermine**, founded by John V, Duke of Brittany. During his last period of exile at the court of England (1377–1379), John V, Duke of Brittany, observed the functioning of the Order of the Garter. Back in Brittany, in 1381, he created his own order. The little we know of this order comes from Guillaume de St-André. In 1448, it became the **Order of the Ermine and the Ear of Grain**. The ermine was a natural choice for the badge of his order, since the heraldic representation of its fur is the coat of arms of the Dukes of Brittany. In medieval times the ermine was believed to risk capture or death rather than sully the purity of its white fur and thus a symbol of concern for the uncompromising integrity of one's personal honor.



Figure 2 Collar of the Order of the Ermine



Figure 3 Depiction of Joane Agnes Hotot

One woman who participated in jousting tournaments was **Joane Agnes Hotot** (born 1378), but she was not the only one. Agnes was an English noblewoman known for besting a man in a lance fight. She took her father's place in a duel after he fell ill, disguising herself as a man, and only revealed her true identity after knocking her opponent off his horse. Additionally, women adopted certain forms of regalia which became closely associated with the status of knighthood.

During the defense of Hennebont (in which she'd had the misfortune to be besieged by her & her husband's enemies), **Jeanne de Danpierre**, Countess de Montfort (Abt. 1300 - 74) wore armor, rode a warhorse, and sorted out the defense of the city by observing the enemy from the walls. Jeanne also mobilized the townswomen to defend the ramparts with makeshift missiles. She broke out from Hennebont at the head of 300 horsemen, during a French assault on the walls, and successfully fought her way to Brest. She later returned with 600 additional men to reinforce the town. Later that same year, she is reported to have taken part in a sea-skirmish off Guernsey; wearing a suit of armor at the helm of her ship, and wielding a sword.



## Anna Comnena

The story of women in the Crusades begins with Anna Comnena (December 1, 1083 – 1153), the daughter of Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos. She wrote a valuable history of the First Crusade, providing a view of the campaign from the Byzantine elite's perspective. At birth, Anna was betrothed to Constantine Doukas, and she grew up in his mother's household. She was well-educated in "Greek literature and history, philosophy, theology, mathematics, and medicine." Anna and Constantine were next in the line to throne until Anna's younger brother, John II Komnenos, became the heir in 1092. Constantine died around 1094, and Anna married Nikephoros Bryennios in 1097. The two had several children before Nikephoros' death around 1136. Following her father's death in 1118, Anna and her mother attempted to usurp John II Komnenos. Her husband refused to cooperate with them, and the usurpation failed. As a result, John exiled Anna to the Kecharitomene monastery, where she spent the rest of her life. In confinement there, she wrote the *Alexiad*. She died before it was completed.

# Women in the Crusades

The role of women in the Crusades is frequently viewed as being limited to domestic or illicit activities. While to some extent this is true, they nevertheless played a significant role, taking part in such activities including armed combat (which was frowned upon by the church), in the battles in the Holy Land.

While many women remained home to act as regents for their estates during the Crusades, others accompanied their husbands and other family members on their quests, even going so far as to fight in emergency situations when their menfolk fell in battle. It was no surprise that noblewomen would participate in combat in certain situations, their upbringing likely preparing them for this possibility, going so far as to include lessons on riding into battle.

However, it was not only noblewomen who participated in the Crusades. Women who were of the common people were also present throughout the venture, performing tasks such as removing lice from soldiers' heads and/or washing clothes. In fact, the washerwoman was the only role for a woman approved by the Catholic Church and permitted during the First Crusade, as long as they were unattractive, for fear that the troops would engage with them in sexual relations. However, this stipulation was typically not obeyed and all types and classes of women took part in the Crusades. Every time an army marched, several women would join them as sutlers or servants, as well as prostitutes. Unmentioned in victory, they took the blame for defeat and were purged from the campaign several times throughout the Crusades, for relations with them were considered sinful among soldiers who had left their homelands to fight a holy cause and were supposed to be pure in thought and deed. In addition, numerous nuns also accompanied the religious men, namely priests and bishops that traveled as part of the quests, while others actually took up arms, an anathema to their Muslim foes.

## Nuns in the Crusades

A large number of nuns are believed to have traveled to the Holy Land during the Crusades, but only three are known from the First Crusade, and for only one of these do we know a name.

**Anonyma of Cambrai** was the religious leader of a sect traveling with Count Emich of Flonheim, who believed her goose to be filled with the Holy Spirit, even going so far as to allow the spirit-filled animal to direct the sect's course. Guibert of Nogent recorded the event in his chronicle "The Deeds of God Through the Franks"

*'What I am about to say is ridiculous, but has been testified to by authors who are not ridiculous. A poor woman set out on the journey, when a goose, filled with I do not know what instructions, clearly exceeding the laws of her own dull nature, followed her. Lo, the rumor flying on Pegasus wings, filled the castles and cities with the news that even geese had been sent by God to liberate Jerusalem. Not only did they deny that this wretched woman was leading the goose, but said that the goose led her. At Cambrai they assert that, with people standing on all sides, the woman walked through the middle of the church to the altar, and the goose followed behind, in her footsteps, with no one urging it on. Soon after, we have learned, the goose died in Lorraine; she would certainly have gone more directly to Jerusalem if, the day before she set out, she had made herself a holiday meal for her mistress. We have attached this incident to the true history so that men may*

*know that they have been warned against permitting Christian seriousness to be trivialized by vulgar fables.'*

A nun of the monastery of Santa Maria and Correa, Trier, who, as part of the People's Crusade (1096), was taken by the Muslims during the Battle of Civetot that devastated the force of Peter the Hermit, who had returned to Constantinople for supplies. When she was liberated in 1097, she apparently eloped with her Turkish captor. Her name remains a mystery.

A nun of Altejas, who, following Pope Urban's direction, went to her bishop for his blessing, which was granted, to found a hospice for the poor.

## **Wives in the First Crusade**

There were a number of wives that accompanied their husbands to the Holy Land including the following.

**Godehilde**, daughter of Raoul II of Tosny, Seigneur de Conches-en-Ouche, accompanied her husband Baldwin I of Jerusalem, as well as a contingent of their household. While he was marching to Cilicia, she fell ill and died in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, depriving him of the funding from her lands. He later entered into bigamous marriages with an Armenian, Arda, whom he abandoned, and Adelaide del Vasto. If the rumors of his homosexuality were true, his multiple marriages were certainly for personal gain and his behavior on the crusade did not meet the accepted standards of chivalry of the time.

**Hadvide**, daughter of Arnold I, Count of Chiny, accompanied her husband Dodo of Cons, a confidant of Godfrey of Bouillon. Both Hadvide and Dodo returned from the crusade unscathed. Arnold, a conspirator against Godfrey, among his many misdeeds, did not have his sons take the cross, as erroneously reported by a later count, the opportunistic Louis V.

**Elvira of Leon-Castile**, illegitimate daughter of King Alfonso VI of León and Castile, traveled, while pregnant, with her husband Raymond IV of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse. After her husband was killed at the siege of Tripoli in 1106, she gave birth to their son Alfonso Jordan, later Count of Toulouse, and then returned home to Castile. There she married Fernando Fernández de Carrión and had three additional children.

**Emeline** traveled with her husband Fulcher of Bullion.

**Emma of Hereford**, Countess of Norfolk, traveled with her husband Ralph I of Gael, a Breton leader first under Robert Curthose, and then with Bohemund I of Antioch during the siege of Nicaea. Ralph was a participant in the Revolt of the Earls against the rule of William the Conqueror. Emma's parents were William Fitz-Osbern and Adeliza (daughter of Roger I of Tosny), and so was cousin to Baldwin's wife Godehilde, described above. Both Emma and her husband died en route to Jerusalem.

**Humberge of Le Puiset** traveled with her husband Walo II of Chaumont-en-Vexin. Humberge was the sister of the Crusader Everard III of Le Puiset, Viscount of Chartres, and daughter of Hugues "Blavons" de Bretenil and Alix de Montlhéry

(daughter of Guy I of Montlhéry). Walo was killed during the Siege of Antioch in 1098, but it remains unclear as to the fate of Humberge. Their son Drogo was also prominent in the First Crusade.

**Edith**, daughter of William de Warenne, 1st Earl of Surrey, accompanied her husband Gerard of Gournay-en-Bray with both the armies of Hugh the Great and Robert Curthose. Their son Hugh II fought in the Second Crusade.

**Mabel of Roucy** accompanied her husband Hugh I of Jaffa to the Holy Land.

**Helie of Burgundy**, accompanied her husband Bertrand of Toulouse in his quest to claim the role of Count of Tripoli.

**Anonyma of Lèves** accompanied her husband Ralph the Red of Pont-Echanfray, in the Crusade of Bohemond of Antioch-Taranto, 1107-1108. Anonyma was the daughter of Odeline of Le Puiset and Joscelin of Lèves, and so was the cousin of Humberge of Le Puiset. Ralph had been a loyal knight of Bohemond's father Robert Guiscard. Ralph died in the *White Ship* disaster of 1120.

**Emeline**, accompanied her husband Fulcher of Bouillon, a knight in the army of Godfrey of Bouillon, captured and beheaded during the siege of Antioch. She was captured, taken to Azaz and married to a Turkish mercenary.

**Corba of Thorigne**, wife of Geoffrey Burel, Lord of Amboise, participated in the Crusade of 1101. Corba was captured by the Turks and her ultimate fate is unknown.

# Warrior Women

A number of women took the cross and battled the Muslims, some with their husbands, some without; numerous royal women fought as Crusaders, and at least one against them including the following.



Figure 4 Eleanor of Aquitaine

**Eleanor of Aquitaine** (1122 – April 1, 1204) was queen consort of France (1137–1152) and England (1154–1189) and duchess of Aquitaine in her own right (1137–1204). Eleanor of Aquitaine also formally took up the cross symbolic of the Second Crusade during a sermon preached by Bernard of Clairvaux. In addition, she had been corresponding with her uncle Raymond, Prince of Antioch, who was seeking further protection from the French crown against the Saracens. Eleanor recruited some of her royal ladies-in-waiting for the campaign as well as 300 non-noble Aquitanian vassals. She insisted on taking part in the Crusades as the feudal leader of the soldiers from her duchy. She left for the Second Crusade from Vézelay, the rumored location of Mary Magdalene's grave, in June 1147. The crusade accomplished little, and the disagreements on strategy between the king and queen eventually led to the annulment of their marriage. Her subsequent marriage to Henry II of England produced a son, Richard the Lionheart. After becoming king, Richard led the English contingent in the Third Crusade, with Eleanor serving as regent in his absence.

**Florine of Burgundy** (1083–1097) was the daughter of Eudes I, Duke of Burgundy and Sybilla of Burgundy. Her maternal grandfather was William I, Count of Burgundy. Florine was married to Sweyn the Crusader, a son of Sweyn II of Denmark. Together Florine and Sweyn led fifteen hundred horsemen to the First Crusade, and were surprised by the Turks whilst advancing rapidly across the plains of Cappadocia. Outnumbered, Sweyn defended himself during a whole day, without being able to repulse the Turks with all the efforts of his courage or the battle-axes of his warriors; Florine valiantly fought by his side. Pierced by seven arrows, but still fighting, she sought with Sweyn to open a passage towards the mountains, when they were overwhelmed by their enemies. They fell together on the field of battle, after having seen all their knights and most faithful servants perish around them.



Figure 5 Florine of Burgundy



Figure 6 Ida of Formbach-Ratelbert

**Ida of Formbach-Ratelbert** (c. 1055 – September 1101) was a Margravine of Austria by marriage to Leopold II of Austria. In 1101, Ida, alongside Thimo of Salzburg and the dukes Welf IV of Bavaria and William IX of Bavaria, joined the Crusade of 1101, and raised and led her own army toward Jerusalem. In September of that year, Ida and her army were among those ambushed at Heraclea Cybistra by the sultan Kilij Arslan I. Ekkehard of Aura reports that Ida was killed in the fighting, but rumors persisted that she survived, and was carried off to a harem.



Figure 7 Melisende

**Cecilia of Le Bourcq** (d. after 1126), Lady of Tarsus, daughter of Hugh I, Count of Rethel, and Melisende of Crécy, the daughter of Guy I of Montlhéry. sister of Baldwin II of Jerusalem and wife of Roger of Salerno, prince-regent of Antioch. Cecilia helped organize the defenses of Antioch in the Muslim attacks of 1119 in which her husband was killed.

**Melisende** (1105 – September 11, 1161), was Queen of Jerusalem from 1131 to 1153, and regent for her son between 1153 and 1161 while he was on campaign. She was the eldest daughter of King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, and the Armenian princess Morphia of Melitene. In 1144 the Crusader state of Edessa was besieged in a border war that threatened its survival. Queen Melisende responded by sending an army led by constable Manasses of Hierges, Philip of Milly, and Elinand of Bures. Raymond of Antioch ignored the call for help, as his army was already occupied against the Byzantine Empire in Cilicia. Despite Melisende's army, Edessa fell.

Fighting against the Crusaders, **Shajar al-Durr**, Sultan of Egypt during the Seventh Crusade. As wife of sultan As-Salih Ayyub, who had become gravely ill, Shajar helped organize the defenses of Egypt. After the sultan's death, the army supported her in becoming the first female sultan. Shajar's forces defeated the leader of the Crusade, Louis IX of France, at Damietta. The Caliph al-Musta'sim in Baghdad refused to allow her the throne and installed the Mamluk Izz al-Din Aybak in her place. Shajar married Aybak and ruled with him for seven years. Unsure of her position, Shajar had him murdered by her servants; subsequently, she was stripped and beaten to death by the servants of Aybak's 15-year-old son and former wife. Thrown naked from the top of the Red Tower, she lay in the surrounding moat for three days until finally being buried in a tomb near the Mosque of Ibn Tulun.



Figure 8 Shajar al-Durr



Figure 9 Margaret of Provence

**Margaret of Provence** (1221 – December 20, 1295) was Queen of France by marriage to King Louis IX. Margaret accompanied Louis on the Seventh Crusade (their first). Her sister Beatrice also joined. Though initially the Crusade met with some success, like the capture of Damietta in 1249, it became a disaster after the king's brother was killed and the king then captured. Queen Margaret was responsible for negotiations and gathering enough silver for his ransom. She was thus for a brief time the only woman ever to lead a crusade. In 1250, while in Damietta, where she earlier in the same year successfully maintained order, she gave birth to their son John Tristan.

Women began to take a more active role in the Crusades in the thirteenth century. It was then that Pope Innocent III sought to harness the efforts of all Europeans for the success of the Crusades. Women, who could not physically join a crusade, could take part in fasting, prayer, and monetary donations for the benefit of the holy cause. In so doing they could contribute to the war from the home front. To further support the Crusades, however, Innocent also took away a traditional right of married women. Church law had previously held that a man's vow to crusade was valid only with the consent of his wife, since the man's absence would deprive her of her conjugal rights. By the time of the Third Crusade this had led to many instances of abuse. For example, a man after listening to a crusade preacher and being caught up in the moment might swear the cross. The next day, however, he would think better of his decision and look for some way to avoid the dangers of a crusade. The traditional woman's right gave him that opportunity. He could simply report that his wife had refused to give her consent and thus nullify his vow. Innocent's decree closed that loophole.

Innocent had begun the practice of allowing those unfit for military service to pay to outfit and supply a warrior for the crusade and thereby share in the crusade indulgence. This practice was expanded by his successors, particularly Gregory IX (1227–41). In order to raise funds for crusading, popes began encouraging all Christians, including women, to take the cross. The vow would then be "redeemed." In other words, for a donation of money to support the crusade the vow was commuted, usually the day after it was originally taken. Men capable of bearing arms generally could not have their vows redeemed. Yet this was not true for women, who could always pay to be relieved of the cross. This practice allowed women to take a much more active role in the rituals of the crusade as well as its financial support. Indeed, crusade preachers soon began addressing their sermons to women, urging them to take the cross just as their husbands, brothers, or fathers had done in the past.

By the time of the fall of Acre to the Mamluks in 1291, crusading had become an integral part of medieval society that touched the lives of women all over Europe, whether they took the cross or not.

## **Female Templars**

Throughout much of the history of today's Order, women were not originally eligible for membership. Today, however, they are a vital, proud, equal, and growing part of the Order in every way. This equal status is recognition of the marked changes in values and ways of life in the world in general in recent years, and in our American culture in particular.

The Grand Council, at a conclave at Lake Gerard in August 1968, approved a grade of Dame D'Honneur, which was restricted to close relatives by blood or marriage of a present or deceased Chevalier. In that time, the Dames D'Honneur could participate in the activities of our Order from time to time and be present at any installation of either the Local or Grand Priory. However, they were not voting members and took no part in the business meetings.

At a Grand Convent of the Order held in Chicago, the widening of the honorable estate of Dames D'Honneur was considered and, upon the 8th of July 1970, Grand Prior John Whelchel Finger, issued a Proclamation as follows:

*"Know ye by these presents, that we for good and sufficient reasons are desirous of widening the basis of the Honorable estate of Dames D'Honneur in our Grand Priory of the United States of America as created in our original Proclamation of 14 November 1969, to include from time to time a strictly limited number of ladies who have demonstrated by their civic or patriotic interests and humanitarian activities their true chivalrous nature:*

*"THEREFORE, hereafter the honorable estate of Dames D'Honneur shall include ladies in the above-mentioned additional category, who could not otherwise qualify by close relationship of bonds of blood or marriage to our Chevaliers.*

*"All of these ladies shall be refined persons of impeccable high character and excellent reputation in the community in which they live. These ladies also shall be highly recommended in writing to the Local Prior by at least five Chevaliers or Dames D'Honneur or a combination of the same."*

At the Grand Council meeting in Washington, D.C. in January 1994, Dames were accorded full rights and privileges, provided that they were formally admitted in an Investiture ceremony, and provided that they contributed to the financial well-being of the Order through payment of the initial passage fee and subsequent annual oblations.

Women are now screened for membership as Dames of the Order on the basis of the exact same high standards and qualifications as are required of male applicants for membership as Knights. No relationship to an existing member is required as a condition of membership, though any candidate (man or woman) closely connected by bonds of blood or marriage to a present or deceased Chevalier or Dame is considered to have an advantage in application. Once in the Order, Dames and Knights both are recognized by promotion for their own efforts on behalf of the Order in the United States.