



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

The Seventh Crusade

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First Edition
2021
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INTRODUCTION



Seventh Crusade

The **Seventh Crusade** (1248-1254) was led by the French king Louis IX (r. 1226-1270) who intended to conquer Egypt and take over Jerusalem; both then controlled by the Muslim Ayyubid Dynasty. Despite the initial success of capturing Damietta on the Nile, Louis' troops were defeated by the Egyptian army led by Fakhr al-Din ibn Shaykh al-Shuyukh, whose army was supported by the Bahriyya Mamluks led by Faris ad-Din Aktai, Baibars al-Bunduqdari, Qutuz, Aybak and Qalawun. Sheikh Al Shioukh was killed in the war, and Louis was captured, approximately 800,000 bezants were paid in ransom for his return but remained determined to fulfil his Crusader vows, launching the Eighth Crusade in 1270.



Louis IX

(April 25, 1214 – August 25, 1270), commonly known as **Saint Louis**, is the only King of France to be canonized in the Catholic Church. Louis was crowned in Reims at the age of 12, following the death of his father Louis VIII; his mother, Blanche of Castile, ruled the kingdom as regent until he reached maturity. As an adult, Louis IX faced recurring conflicts with some of the most-powerful nobles, such as Hugh X of Lusignan and Peter of Dreux. Simultaneously, Henry III of England tried to restore his continental possessions, but was utterly defeated at the battle of Taillebourg. His reign saw the annexation of several provinces, notably parts of Aquitaine, Maine and Provence. Louis IX was a reformer and developed French royal justice, in which the king was the supreme judge to whom anyone could appeal to seek the amendment of a judgment. He banned trials by ordeal, tried to prevent the private wars that were plaguing the country, and introduced the presumption of innocence in criminal procedure. To enforce the application of this new legal system, Louis IX created provosts and bailiffs.

Historical Context

The Sixth Crusade (1228-1229) had been led by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (r. 1220-1250) who managed to avoid any actual fighting and negotiate control of Jerusalem from the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, al-Kamil (r. 1218-1238). 15 years later, though, trouble was brewing again as al-Kamil's successors fought to maintain the Ayyubid Empire which al-Kamil's uncle, Saldin, had founded in 1174. As in the past, some Muslim cities not under Ayyubid control (notably Damascus) continued to form alliances of convenience with the Latin states in the Middle East.

The Ayyubid control of the Middle East was greatly strengthened when a large Latin army and its Muslim allies from Damascus and Homs was defeated at the battle of La Forbie in Gaza on October 17, 1244. Over 1,000 knights were killed in the battle, a disaster from which the Latin states struggled to recover from, thereafter. Jerusalem had already been taken from the Christians, this time by the Ayyubid allies, the nomadic Khorezmians on August 23, 1244, but the fall of Jerusalem was no longer a crucial event to European Christians; who had seen the city pass from Christian to Muslim control numerous times in the past two centuries. Christians in the Holy City had been murdered and sacred sites desecrated. The Latin East, as the Crusader-created states in the Levant are collectively known, appealed to the West for help. Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243-1254) responded and called for yet another crusade, the campaign now known as the Seventh Crusade. Church figures went on the usual preaching tours to gather recruits across Europe

AYYUBID The Ayyubid was a Sunni Muslim dynasty of Kurdish origins founded by Saladin and centered in Egypt.

There were also many conflicts within Europe at this time that kept its leaders from embarking on the Crusade. Pope Innocent IV and Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor continued the papal-imperial struggle. Frederick had captured and imprisoned clerics on their way to the First Council of Lyon, and in 1245 he was formally deposed by Innocent IV. Pope Gregory IX had also earlier offered King Louis' brother, count Robert of Artois, the German throne, but Louis had refused. Thus, the Holy Roman Emperor was in no position to crusade. Béla IV of Hungary was rebuilding his kingdom from the ashes after the devastating Mongol invasion of 1241. Henry III of England was still struggling with Simon de Montfort and other problems in England. Henry and Louis were not on the best of terms, being engaged in the Capetian-Plantagenet struggle, and while Louis was away on crusade the English king signed a truce promising not to attack French lands. Louis IX had also invited King Haakon IV of Norway to crusade, sending the English chronicler Matthew Paris as an ambassador, but again was unsuccessful. The only king interested in beginning another crusade therefore was Louis IX, who declared his intent to go east in 1245. A much smaller force of Englishmen, led by William Longespée, also took the cross.

Leading European nobles on the expedition would include Henry I of Cyprus, Raymond VII of Toulouse, Duke Hugh IV of Burgundy, Count William of Flanders, and Louis' own brother, Alphonse of Poitiers.



Sir William Longespée

(c. 1212 – February 8, 1250) was an English knight and crusader, the son of William Longespée and Ela, Countess of Salisbury. Longespée made two pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The first was as a participant in the second wave of crusaders of the Barons' Crusade. The second time was in the Seventh Crusade of 1247. Longespée raised a company of 200 English horse to join with King Louis on his crusade. To raise funds for his expedition, he sold a charter of liberties to the burghesses of the town of Poole in 1248 for 70 marks. During the Crusade, Longespée commanded the English forces. He became widely known for his feats of chivalry and his subsequent martyrdom. The circumstances of his death served to fuel growing English animosity toward the French; it is reported that the French Count d'Artois lured Longespée into attacking the Mameluks before the forces of King Louis arrived in support. D'Artois, Longespée and his men, along with 280 Knights Templar, were killed at this time.

The Campaign

France was one of the strongest states in Europe at the time, as the Albigensian Crusade had brought Provence into Parisian control. Poitou was ruled by Louis IX's brother Alphonse of Poitiers, who joined him on his crusade in 1245. Another brother, Charles I of Anjou, also joined Louis.

Just why, in December 1244, Louis took up the cross and decided to leave his kingdom for the Levant is not clear. According to legend, the king was seriously ill and the decision to embark on a crusade miraculously and instantly restored him to health. Modern historians look for less supernatural motivations such as the desire to be seen as Europe's foremost ruler, to consolidate his kingdom by restructuring its administration - a necessity in his long absence - or simply piety for the Christian cause. What is certain is that the king decided to form the Crusade even before the Pope officially called it, a reversal of the procedure of previous crusades.

The French king was determined that his expedition would be well-funded, and it would be, thanks to a series of tax reforms and tax hikes, income from the church (taxes and donations from the faithful), the requisition of 'gifts' from at least 82 towns across France, payments from barons and other nobles, and the king's own pocket. In 1248 the king, long known for his anti-Jewish policies, expelled all Jews from France and confiscated their property. No stone (or piggy bank) was left unturned. Louis even went to the expense of constructing the fortified town of Aigues Mortes in southern France specifically for the Crusader army to assemble and disembark from in ships hired for the purpose from Genoa and Marseille. Supplies were also steadily gathered there. Louis' planning was further evidenced by his stockpiling of goods - especially wheat, barley, and wine - on Cyprus, all of which would be collected en route.

Louis IX's financial preparations for this expedition were comparatively well organized, and he was able to raise approximately 1,500,000 *livres tournois*. However, many nobles who joined Louis on the expedition had to borrow money from the royal treasury, and the crusade turned out to be very expensive.

ALBIGENSIAN CRUSADE

was a 20-year military campaign initiated by Pope Innocent III to eliminate Catharism in Languedoc, in southern France.



Figure 1 Created in Tours, France, sometime between 1245-1248, this stained glass panel depicts King Louis IX carrying the crown of thorns.

Al-Salih Sultan of Egypt

The Ayyubid dynasty was at this time led by al-Salih Ayyub (r. 1240 & 1245-9), the second son of al-Kamil, his predecessor as Sultan of Egypt. Like his father, al-Salih struggled to keep control of his territories due to rivalries between Muslim leaders and even Ayyubid princes. In addition, the Mongol Empire was expanding ever-westwards and seemed unstoppable. Louis IX had made some diplomatic overtures towards the Mongol khan in the hope that he might prove a useful ally in squeezing the Ayyubids out of Egypt and the Levant altogether, but the Mongols were interested only in conquest, whether it be of Christian or Muslim lands made no difference. Fortunately, for the moment the Mongols remained a future threat and, regarding his own internal affairs, al-Salih could rely on his Mamluk regiment, the Bahris, and a very large number of Kipchak Turkish slave warriors taken from the Russian steppe, to enforce his will. Thus, the Sultan, already boosted by the victory at La Forbie, was able to take control of Damascus in 1245, long-since a rebel Muslim stronghold. The decline of the Latin states continued apace when al-Salih captured Ascalon in 1247. Al-Salih was away fighting his uncle in Syria when news of the Crusader invasion came, but he quickly returned to Egypt and encamped at al-Mansourah, where he died on November 22 after having his leg amputated in an attempt to save his life from a serious abscess.

On August 25, 1248 Louis and his approximately 15,000-strong army that included 3,000 knights, and 5,000 crossbowmen sailed on 36 ships from the ports of Aigues Mortes.

Cyprus

They sailed first to Cyprus; staying on the island for eight months for refit and resupply. The delay allowed stragglers to join the main army from both Europe and the Middle East cities of Acre, Tripoli, and Antioch. In addition, Louis would benefit from the contribution of the military orders based in the Levant, the Knights Hospitaller, Knights Templar, and Teutonic Knights. By the summer of 1249, the army was finally ready to begin the crusade. Louis wrote to the Sultan of Egypt, boldly expressing his intention not just to take back Jerusalem but to conquer all of Egypt and the Levant:

I will assault your territory, and even were you to swear allegiance to the cross, my mind would not be changed. The armies that obey me cover mountains and plains, they are as numerous as the pebbles of the earth, and they march upon you grasping the swords of fate.

Damietta

Louis' Crusader army landed in Egypt in June 1249 but met their first of many problems. The heavy and deep-bottomed sailing ships of the westerners meant that the army could not easily disembark to the sandy beaches of Egypt, and so knights were forced to wade through the shallows. Meanwhile, al-Kamil had been busy and reinforced the fortifications and the garrison of Damietta, the fortress city on the Nile Delta. Once all were assembled, the Crusader army now numbered around 18,000 men and included 2,500 knights and 5,000 crossbowmen. It was a large army for a single battle but not perhaps large enough to conquer an entire region.

As it turned out, the Crusaders captured Damietta on June 6, 1249 with surprising ease. A combination of an amphibious attack and the superiority of western crossbows gave a remarkably quick victory considering the trouble it had taken the army of the Fifth Crusade to take Damietta in 1218-19. An added bonus was that because the garrison had fled in panic, the city's fortifications remained intact. The Sultan's main army, though, waited at a safe distance from Damietta. This was only the opening move of what could be a very long game.

The Egyptians withdrew further up the Nile. The flooding of the Nile had not been taken into account, however, and it soon grounded Louis and his army at Damietta for six months, where the knights sat back and enjoyed the spoils of war. The French king was still awaiting an important force belonging to his brother Alphonse,



Figure 2 Engraving representing the departure from Aigues-Mortes of King Louis IX for the crusade by Gustave Doré

which did not arrive in Egypt until October. At least the annual Nile flood was by now abating, and the way to Cairo was open. Louis, going against the advice of most of his nobles to see out the winter at the safety of Damietta, set off for Cairo on November 20, 1249.

Cairo

The Crusaders made painfully slow progress along the Nile, most of the troops marching along the banks and those ships which could, carrying a huge quantity of supplies and equipment, followed alongside fighting against a contrary wind. At this point, the end of November 1249, al-Salih died, succumbing to his illness. The officers of the Bahris, led by their commander Fakhr al-Din, then stepped in to continue the war against the Crusaders.

On February 8, 1250, the French king made his move and a large force of knights gathered at the spot on the river where the informers had indicated. Although having to dismount and have their horses swim across, an advance force of the knights made it to the other side. Their leader, Robert of Artois alongside the Templars and the English contingent, made the decision to immediately attack the enemy camp at Gideila before the rest of the knights had crossed the river behind him. Although Fakhr al-Din was killed in the first attack, the rash decision by Robert to pursue the fleeing Muslim army as it made for the town of Mansourah proved his second and last mistake. Once inside the city, Robert's knights were hemmed in and,



Figure 3
Battle of Al Mansurah

separated by the narrow streets, massacred. Robert and William Longespée were killed, and only a small handful survived. The Muslim army, regathering itself after the initial shock, made a counterattack on Louis and his force of knights which had just crossed the river at the ford.

In the chaotic and bloody battle which followed, Louis only just managed to hold his ground until reinforcements arrived from the main crusader camp at day's end. The Ayyubid army retreated to the safety of Mansourah but remained largely intact. In addition, by the end of February, the new Sultan and son of al-Salih, al-Mu'azzam Turan Shah, had arrived at Mansourah along with vital supplies and reinforcements. Ships were transported overland and dropped in the Nile (in Bahr al-Mahala) behind the ships of the Crusaders cutting the reinforcement line from Damietta and besieging the crusade force of King Louis IX. The Egyptians used Greek fire and destroyed and seized many ships and supply vessels.

The Crusaders, on the other hand, had no means of resupply now that their camp had been cut off from Damietta by a fleet of Muslim ships, and soon starvation and disease were rife in their camp. Finally, on April 5, 1250, Louis ordered a retreat.

In showing utter agony, a Templar knight lamented:

Shepherd's Crusade

After his capture, Louis sent his brothers to France to get relief, where despite the efforts of Blanche of Castile, it was seen that neither the nobility nor the clergy were helping the king. One of the outpourings of support took the form of a peasant movement in northern France, led by a man known as "the Master of Hungary" (*Le Maître de Hongrie*); a very old Hungarian monk living in France, called Jacob. The Master claimed to have been visited by the Virgin Mary, who instructed him to lead the shepherds of France to the Holy Land to rescue Louis. His followers, said to number 60,000, were mostly young peasants, men, women, and children, from Brabant, Hainaut, Flanders, and Picardy. They followed him to Paris in May, where the Master met with Blanche of Castile. The crowd of shepherds split up after leaving the city. Some of them went to Rouen, where they expelled the archbishop and threw some priests into the Seine river. In Tours they attacked monasteries. The others under the Master arrived in Orléans on June 11. Here they were denounced by the bishop, whom they also attacked, along with other clerics, including Franciscans and Dominicans. They fought with the university students in the city as well, as Blanche might have feared would happen in Paris. Moving on to Amiens and then Bourges, they also began to attack Jews. Blanche responded by ordering the crowds to be rounded up and excommunicated.

"Rage and sorrow are seated in my heart ... so firmly that I scarce dare to stay alive. It seems that God wishes to support the Turks to our loss ... ah, lord God ... alas, the realm of the East has lost so much that it will never be able to rise up again. They will make a Mosque of Holy Mary's convent, and since the theft pleases her Son, who should weep at this, we are forced to comply as well ... Anyone who wishes to fight the Turks is mad, for Jesus Christ does not fight them any more. They have conquered, they will conquer. For every day they drive us down, knowing that God, who was awake, sleeps now, and Muhammad waxes powerful."



Figure 4 Louis IX being taken prisoner at the Battle of Fariskur by Gustave Doré

King Louis IX proposed to the Egyptians the surrender of Damietta in exchange for Jerusalem and some towns on the Syrian coast. The Egyptians, aware of the miserable situation of the Crusaders, refused the besieged king's offer. On April 5, covered by the darkness of night, the Crusaders evacuated their camp and began to flee northward towards Damietta. In their panic and haste they neglected to destroy a pontoon bridge they had set over the canal. The Egyptians crossed the canal over the bridge and followed them to Fariskur where the Egyptians destroyed the Crusaders on April 6. Thousands of crusaders were killed or taken prisoner. King Louis IX and a few of his nobles who survived were captured in the nearby village of Moniat Abdallah where they took refuge. Louis IX surrendered to a eunuch named al-Salihi after he was promised he

would not be killed and together with his two brothers, Charles d'Anjou and Alphonse de Poitiers, he was taken to Al Mansurah where he was imprisoned in the house of Ibrahim ben Lokman, the royal chancellor, chained and under the guard of another eunuch named Sobih al-Moazami. King Louis' coif was exhibited in Syria. While the house of Ibrahim ben Lokman was used as a prison for Louis IX and the nobles, a camp was set up outside Al Mansurah to shelter thousands of war prisoners.

The defeat of the Crusaders and the capture of King Louis IX in Fariskur created shock in France. The Crusaders were circulating false information in Europe, claiming that Louis IX had defeated the Sultan of Egypt in a great battle and that Cairo had been betrayed into his hands. When the news of the French defeat reached France, a hysterical movement called the Shepherd's Crusade occurred in France (see side panel).

Louis IX was ransomed for 400,000 dinars. After he pledged not to return to Egypt again and surrendered Damietta to the Egyptians, he was allowed to leave on May 8, 1250, to Acre with his brothers and 12,000 war prisoners, including some from older battles, whom the Egyptians agreed to release. Many other prisoners were

executed. Louis's queen, Marguerite de Provence, suffered from nightmares. The news (the capture of her husband Louis) terrified her so much, that every time she fell asleep, she fancied that her room was filled with Saracens, and she would cry out, "Help! help!" and left for Acre a few days earlier with her son, born in Damietta, who was called Jean Tristan (John Sorrow).

Once free from his Muslim captors, Louis, to his credit, did not flee home in disgrace but remained in the Middle East for four more years. During that time, he oversaw the refortification of his base at Acre, as well as the strongholds of Sidon, Jaffe, and Caesarea. Louis also created an innovative new force of 100 knights and a complement of crossbowmen. Unlike previous knights, who were garrisoned at particular strategic cities or castles, this force was used wherever they were most needed to protect Latin interests in the Middle East.

Aftermath

The Crusade, although a complete military flop, did contribute to the fall of the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt in May 1250 CE when they were ousted by the Mamluks. The changeover of power occurred when the Mamluk officer group murdered Turan Shah. There followed ten years of bitter factional fighting between the Ayyubid nobles and the military generals until, finally, the Mamluks set themselves up as the new lords of the former Ayyubid territories, although Aleppo and Damascus remained under the control of Ayyubid princes.

It has been conservatively estimated that the Seventh Crusade cost Louis IX a massive 1.5 million *livres tournoi*, about six times his annual income as King of France. Despite the material costs and physical dangers, Louis IX would be back in crusader action at the other end of his long reign, when he led the Eighth Crusade of 1270.

In 1258 the Mongols captured Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate, and two years later, also Aleppo and Damascus. They were then defeated by the Mamluks at the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260. In the same year, the Mamluk leader Baibars became the Sultan of Egypt, and he expanded his territory in the Middle East throughout the 1260s.

The Seventh Crusade was, then, effectively the last large-scale crusade in the Levant.