



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

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Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

# The Sixth Crusade

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## INTRODUCTION



## Sixth Crusade

**T**he **Sixth Crusade** (1228-1229), which for many historians was merely the delayed final chapter of the unsuccessful Fifth Crusade (1217-1221), finally saw the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (r. 1220-1250) arrive with his army in the Holy Land, as he had long vowed to do. Jerusalem had been out of Christian hands since 1187 but was finally won back from Muslim control thanks to Frederick's skills at diplomacy rather than any actual fighting. In February 1229 a treaty was agreed with the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, al-Kamil (r. 1218-1238), to hand over the Holy City to Christian rule. Thus, the Sixth Crusade managed to achieve by peaceful means what four bloody previous Crusades had failed to do.



## Frederick II

(December 26, 1194 – December 13, 1250) was King of Sicily from 1198, King of Germany from 1212, King of Italy and Holy Roman Emperor from 1220 and King of Jerusalem from 1225. His political and cultural ambitions were enormous as he ruled a vast area, beginning with Sicily and stretching through Italy all the way north to Germany. As the Crusades progressed, he acquired control of Jerusalem and styled himself its king. However, the Papacy became his enemy, and it eventually prevailed. Viewing himself as a direct successor to the Roman emperors of antiquity, he was Emperor of the Romans from his papal coronation in 1220 until his death; he was also a claimant to the title of King of the Romans from 1212 and unopposed holder of that monarchy from 1215. As such, he was King of Germany, of Italy, and of Burgundy. Speaking six languages, Frederick was an avid patron of science and the arts. After his death his line did not survive, and the House of Hohenstaufen came to an end. Furthermore, the Holy Roman Empire entered a long period of decline from which it did not completely recover until the reign of Charles V, 250 years later.

# Historical Context

The Fifth Crusade was called by Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) in 1215. Capturing Jerusalem for Christendom was again the objective but the method this time changed to attacking what was seen as the weaker underbelly of the Ayyubid dynasty (1174-1250): Egypt rather than the Holy City directly. The Crusader army, although eventually conquering Damietta on the Nile in November 1219, was beset by leadership squabbles and a lack of sufficient men, equipment and suitable ships to deal with the local geography. Consequently, the westerners were defeated by an army led by al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, on the banks of the Nile in August 1221. The Crusaders, forced to give up Damietta, returned home, once again with very little to show for their efforts. There were bitter recriminations afterwards, especially against Frederick II Hohenstaufen, king of Germany and Sicily, for not turning up to the show at all when his army could well have tipped the balance in the favor of the Crusaders. One consequence of the Fifth Crusade was that the decision by the west to attack Egypt did highlight to the Ayyubids their own vulnerability in the southern Mediterranean.

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

Although Frederick II had done little in the Fifth Crusade except overshadow it by his absence, he would eventually become one of the great figures of the Middle Ages.

At the time of the Sixth Crusade, Frederick was still negotiating the early rocky patches of his long road to greatness. Frederick had not left Europe during the Fifth Crusade, despite his promise to do so, because he had found himself in a power struggle with the Papacy over his right to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor. First Pope Innocent III, and then his successor Honorius III (r. 1216-1227), had been concerned at Frederick's control of both central Europe and Sicily, effectively encircling the Papal States in Italy. Honorius pushed for Frederick to fulfill his original crusader vows and take back Jerusalem for Christendom; the distraction might also prove advantageous to the Papacy and allow them some breathing space in Italy.

Frederick was made Holy Roman Emperor in 1220 and he acquired a more personal connection to the Middle East when, in November 1225, he married Isabella II, daughter of John of Brienne (nominal ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem) and Maria of Montferrat. Frederick now had a claim to the truncated kingdom, and reason to attempt to restore it. Assembling a large Crusader army, Frederick's departure, long-since scheduled for August 15, 1227 was delayed once again, this time by illness (possibly cholera). The new pope, Gregory IX (r. 1227-1241) ran out of patience and excommunicated Frederick in September 1227 as the papacy had earlier vowed to do if the emperor's promises were not honored. Those leaders of the Crusade who had already made it to the Middle East took the opportunity of the delay to put their men to good use and get on with some building work, refortifying such key strongpoints as Jaffa, Caesarea, and even a brand new headquarters castle for the Teutonic Knights at Montfort.



## John of Ibelin

(c. 1179 – 1236), called **the** Old Lord of Beirut, was a powerful crusader noble in the 13th century. He was the son of Balian, Lord of Nablus and Ibelin, and Maria Comnena, widow of Amalric I of Jerusalem. By 1198 he had become constable of Jerusalem. Sometime before 1205 John relinquished the office of constable in exchange for the lordship of Beirut, which became the home of the Ibelin family for the rest of the century. He rebuilt the city, which had been completely destroyed during Saladin's conquest of the Jerusalem kingdom. From 1205 to 1210 John served as regent in Acre, the new capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. By 1217 John and his brother Philip of Ibelin had become involved in the politics of the Kingdom of Cyprus as well. In the last year of his life, John of Ibelin, as did many other elderly barons, joined the order of the Knights Templar, so that he could die as a Templar. His family was opposed to this, but John insisted, and was honored with a grand funeral in Acre in 1236.

# The Campaign

## Cyprus

Instead of heading straight for the Holy Land, Frederick first sailed to Cyprus, which had been an imperial fiefdom since its capture by Richard the Lionheart on his way to Acre during the Third Crusade.

The route of Frederick's fleet can be traced day-by-day. On June 29 it stopped in Otranto, whence it crossed the Adriatic Sea to the island of Othonoi on June 30. It was in Corfu on July 1, Porto Guiscardo in Cephalonia on July 2, Methoni on July 4, Portocaglio near Cape Matapan on July 5, Cerigo on July 6, and it reached Souda Bay on Crete on July 7. The fleet moved slowly along the Cretan coast, pausing for a whole day at Candia before crossing the Aegean Sea to Rhodes during July 12-15. They sailed along the Anatolian coast to Phenika, where they stayed on July 16-17, replenishing their water supplies. The fleet then crossed the sea to Cyprus, arriving at Limassol on July 21.

The emperor arrived with the clear intent of stamping his authority on the kingdom, but was treated cordially by the native barons until a dispute arose between him and the constable of Cyprus, John of Ibelin. Frederick claimed that his regency was illegitimate and demanded the surrender of John's mainland fief of Beirut to the imperial throne. Here he erred, for John pointed out that the kingdoms of Cyprus and Jerusalem were constitutionally separate and he could not be punished for offences in Cyprus by seizure of Beirut. This would have important consequences for the crusade, as it alienated the powerful Ibelin faction, turning them against the emperor.

## Acre

Despite his problems with the Church, Frederick II was undeterred and arrived in Acre in the Middle East on September 7, 1228 determined to do what so many nobles before him had failed to do: take Jerusalem. He certainly had the best trained and equipped men of any previous Crusader army, almost all his warriors being paid professionals and numbering some 10,000 infantry and perhaps 2,000 knights.

Acre, as the nominal capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the seat of the Latin Patriarchate, was split in its support for Frederick. Frederick's own army and the Teutonic Knights supported him, but Patriarch Gerald of Lausanne (and the clergy) followed the hostile papal line. Once news of Frederick's excommunication had spread, public support for him waned considerably. The position of the Knights Hospitaller and Knights Templar is more complicated; though they refused to join the emperor's army directly, they supported the crusade once Frederick agreed to have his name removed from official orders. The native barons greeted Frederick enthusiastically at first, but were wary of the emperor's history of centralization and his desire to impose imperial authority. This was largely due to Frederick's treatment of John of Ibelin in Cyprus, and his apparent disdain for the constitutional concerns of the barons.



**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.

The emperor's plans had also been slightly knocked out of tilt with the tragic death of Isabella during childbirth in May 1228. Frederick decided to reign as regent for his newborn son Conrad, replacing his father-in-law John of Brienne, who had been regent for his daughter Isabella prior to her marriage. John, who had led the army of the failed Fifth Crusade, was not best pleased to be ousted from power and swore revenge. Frederick was not without other opposition in the kingdom of Jerusalem where many nobles resisted any changes to the political status quo. Frederick's plans to redistribute certain hereditary lands and his promotion of the Teutonic Knights military order were particular sticking points.

## Jerusalem

Frederick and his army marched from Acre to Jaffa in early 1229 to pose the threat such a force had promised to do ever since the Fifth Crusade. At the same time, al-Kamil faced a dangerous coalition of rivals within the Ayyubid dynasty. In the last two years, the Sultan's own brother, al-Mu'azzam, the emir of Damascus, had joined forces with fierce Turkish mercenaries, the Khwarizmians, to threaten al-Kamil's territory in northern Iraq. Al-Mu'azzam died of dysentery in 1227 but the threat from his followers, especially to al-Kamil's ambitions in Damascus, which was now led by al-Kamil's rebel nephew al-Nasir Dawud, remained. Consequently, the two leaders began negotiations to avoid a war which would seriously damage both side's commercial interests in the region.

Frederick was, no doubt, helped in his diplomatic efforts by his knowledge of Arabic and a general sympathy towards the culture, the emperor having his own personal corp of Muslim bodyguards and a harem - products of his time in Sicily with its significant Arab population. Al-Kamil, on the other hand, had already offered Jerusalem as a bargaining chip during negotiations with the Fifth Crusaders and, if need be, he could always retake Jerusalem once this Crusader army had departed back to Europe. It seems that both leaders were keen to safeguard their own empires and their much more important assets elsewhere than squabble over Jerusalem. At the same time, any gains could be maximized and the concessions minimized when presenting the deal to each leader's followers.

## Treaty of Jaffa

Even with the military orders on board, Frederick's force was a mere shadow of the army that had amassed when the crusade had originally been called. He realized that his only hope of success in the Holy Land was to negotiate for the surrender of Jerusalem as he lacked the manpower to engage the Ayyubid empire in battle. Frederick hoped that a token show of force, a threatening march down the coast, would be enough to convince al-Kamil, the sultan of Egypt, to honor a proposed agreement that had been negotiated some years earlier, prior to the death of al-Muazzam, the governor of Damascus. The Egyptian sultan, occupied with the suppression of rebellious forces in Syria, agreed to cede Jerusalem to the Franks, along with a narrow corridor to the coast.

In addition, Frederick received Nazareth, Sidon, Jaffa, and Bethlehem. Other lordships may have been returned to Christian control, but sources disagree. It was, however, a treaty of compromise.

**TREATY OF JAFFA** The agreement is known sometimes as the Treaty of Jaffa and Tell Ajul to also include the agreement signed by the different Ayyubid rulers at Tell Ajul near Gaza, of which, from al-Kamil's perspective, the treaty with Frederick was just an extension.

On February 18, 1229 the Treaty of Jaffa was signed between the two leaders. Muslims were to leave the city but could visit the holy sites on pilgrimage. The Muslims retained control over the Temple Mount area of Jerusalem, the al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock. The Transjordan castles stayed in Ayyubid hands. Under the detailed terms of the agreement, no new construction or even artistic additions were permitted at those holy sites. Neither could any fortifications be built (although it would later be disputed that this applied to Jerusalem). Included in the deal were other important sites of great significance to Christians such as Bethlehem and Nazareth. The Sultan, in return for these concessions, got a 10-year truce guarantee and the promise that Frederick would defend al-Kamil's interests against all enemies, even Christians.

One of the results of the treaty was that Jews were once more prohibited from living in Jerusalem.

## Aftermath

Frederick entered Jerusalem on 17 March 1229, and attended a crown-wearing ceremony the following day. It is unknown whether he intended this to be interpreted as his official coronation as King of Jerusalem; in any case the absence of the patriarch, Gerald, rendered it questionable. There is evidence to suggest that the crown Frederick wore was actually the imperial one, but in any case proclaiming his lordship over Jerusalem was a provocative act. Legally, he was actually only regent for his son with Isabella, Conrad II of Jerusalem, who had been born shortly before Frederick left in 1228 (see the publication, *Kings and Queens of Jerusalem*).

The local nobles were aggrieved at not having been consulted during the negotiation process and the commoners were not very appreciative of this foreign monarch meddling in their affairs either. A group of disgruntled Latins in Acre even pelted the emperor with meat and offal as he left for home in May 1229.



Figure 1 The Kingdom of Jerusalem after the Sixth Crusade

Frederick was sorely needed back in Italy where Pope Gregory IX had cynically taken the opportunity of the emperor's absence to invade southern Italy with Sicily the ultimate target. Significantly, the leader of the pope's army was Frederick's own father-in-law, John of Brienne. It took a defeat in battle later in 1229 for the Pope to lift the excommunication, but by now Frederick had demonstrated that a crusade could be successful even without military superiority or papal support.

The ten-year expiration of Frederick's treaty with Al-Kamil caused Pope Gregory IX to call for a new crusade to secure the Holy Lands for Christendom beyond 1239. This initiated the Barons' Crusade, a disorganized affair which wound up with relatively limited support from both Frederick and the pope, but which nevertheless regained more land than even the Sixth Crusade.

Jerusalem would remain in Christian hands until 1244, although throughout Acre remained the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. With the emperor gone and his two nominated regents unpopular, the Latin nobles continued, as before, with their damaging rivalry for control of the Crusader states. Meanwhile, al-Kamil received criticism for his peace deal from Muslims far and wide, even from amongst the Ayyubid princes, but he did finally take control of Damascus. The Muslim control of the Middle East was greatly strengthened when a large Latin army was defeated at the battle of La Forbie in October 1244. These events resulted in the Seventh Crusade (1248-1254) and the Eight Crusade (1270) which continued the strategy of attacking Muslim-held cities in North Africa and Egypt. Both campaigns were led by no less a figure than the French King Louis IX (r. 1226-1270) but neither were very successful, even if Louis was later made a saint for his efforts.

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