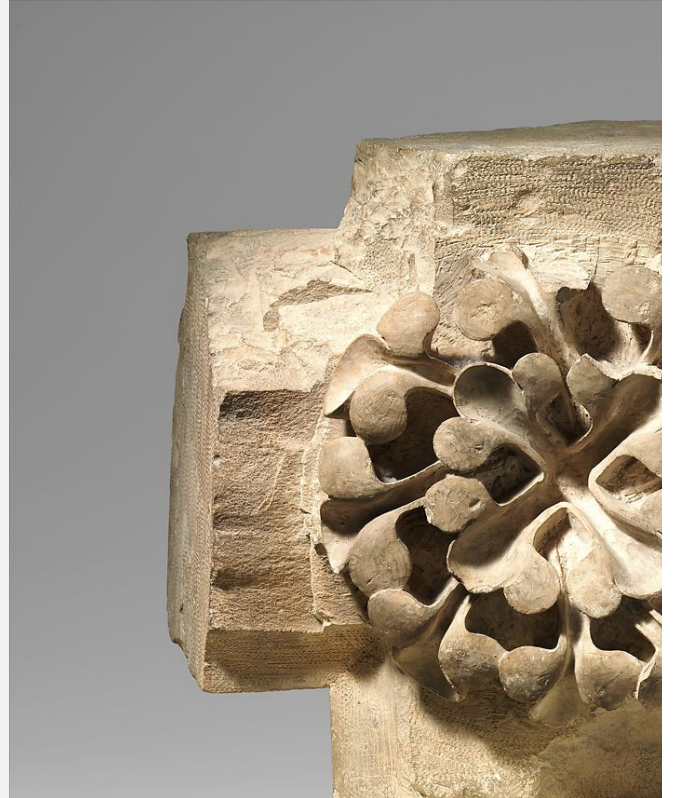


The Crusades (1095–1291)



Reliquary Cross



Keystone from a Vaulted Ceiling

By Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters

, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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The First Crusade

Most historians consider the sermon preached by Pope Urban II at Clermont-Ferrand in November 1095 to have been the spark that fueled a wave of military

campaigns to wrest the Holy Land from Muslim control. Considered at the time to be divinely sanctioned, these campaigns, involving often ruthless battles, are known as the Crusades. At their core was a desire for access to shrines associated with the life and ministry of Jesus, above all the Holy Sepulcher, the church in Jerusalem said to contain the tomb of Christ ([2005.100.373.100](#)). Absolution from sin and eternal glory were promised to the Crusaders, who also hoped to gain land and wealth in the East. Nobles and peasants responded in great number to the call and marched across Europe to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire. With the support of the Byzantine emperor, the knights, guided by Armenian Christians ([57.185.3](#)), tenuously marched to Jerusalem through Seljuq-controlled territories in modern Turkey and Syria. In June 1099, the Crusaders began a five-week siege of Jerusalem, which fell on July 15, 1099 ([92.1.15](#)). Eyewitness accounts attest to the terror of battle. Ralph of Caen, watching the city from the Mount of Olives, saw “the scurrying people, the fortified towers, the roused garrison, the men rushing to arms, the women in tears, the priests turned to their prayers, the streets ringing with cries, crashing, clanging and neighing.”

The Crusaders took over many of the cities on the Mediterranean coast and built a large number of fortified castles across the Holy Land to protect their newly established territories ([28.99.1](#)), while also establishing churches loyal to Rome. For the Crusaders, the Dome of the Rock was the Temple of Solomon; the Aqsa mosque was converted to use as a palace and stables.

The Latin kingdom of Jerusalem established by the Crusaders boasted fifteen cathedral churches. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, for example, became the seat of a Western Christian bishop in 1110 ([1988.1174.9](#)).

Artists from different traditions met in the city of Jerusalem, with, for example, Syrian goldworkers on the right of the market near the Holy Sepulcher, and Latin goldworkers on the left (Conder 1896). Indeed, metalwork from this period sometimes combines an Islamic aesthetic with Christian subject matter ([1971.39a.b](#)). Some pieces even bear an inscription indicating that they were made by an Islamic goldsmith for a Christian. Precious works of art fashioned for the churches of Europe celebrated their links to the Holy Land ([2002.18](#); Toulouse Cathedral Limoges Reliquary).

Second and Third Crusade

In 1147–49, the Second Crusade, championed by the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux ([1975.1.70b](#)), attempted to take Damascus in Syria. The campaign was a dismal failure because the Muslims had regrouped. Led by Salah al-Din (Saladin), Muslim forces advanced across Syria and finally retook Jerusalem in October 1187. Saladin was credited by his personal secretary with allowing the Patriarch of Jerusalem to leave the city with the church's treasure, explaining: "If we make excuses [to confiscate this wealth] they [the Franks] will accuse us of treachery ... let us not make them accuse people of faith of breaking their oaths. Let them go. They will talk about our benevolence" (Mohamed el-Mohtar, in Paul and Yaeger, 2012, p. 209).

Entering the city, a vizier of Saladin marveled at how the Crusaders had beautified Jerusalem: "the care of the unbelievers had transformed [it] into a Paradise garden ... those accursed ones defended with the lance and sword this city, which they had rebuilt with columns and slabs of marble [[2005.100.373.86](#)], where they had founded churches and the palaces of the Templars and the hospitallers ... One sees on every side houses as pleasant as their gardens and bright with white marble and columns decorated with leaves, which make them look like living trees" (quoting Kadi el-Fadel in Hamilton, 1979).

By the end of the Third Crusade (1189–92), Crusader forces had gained Cyprus and the coastal city of Acre. Saladin guaranteed access to Jerusalem to European pilgrims and welcomed Jews back to the city as well.

The chronicle of the Spanish-born Ibn Jubayr, who traveled to Mecca from 1183 to 1185, speaks of the ease of trade in the Holy Land, even in times of military hostilities: "the Muslims continuously journeyed from Damascus to Acre (through Frankish territory), and likewise not one of the Christian merchants was stopped and hindered (in Muslim territories) ... The soldiers engage themselves in their war, while the people are at peace" (as cited in Paul and Yaeger, 2012, p. 34).

The Fourth Crusade

With each crusade, relations between the Byzantines and the Western forces

became more estranged. The Fourth Crusade set out in 1202 with Egypt as its goal. After choosing sides in a dynastic dispute in Byzantium, however, the Crusaders turned their siege upon Byzantium's capital, Constantinople, to collect an enormous sum of money that had been promised for their support. The city was sacked in 1204, its rich treasures divided between the Venetians (the lion's share of which remains in the Treasury of San Marco, Venice), the French, and other Crusaders. The Latin Empire of Constantinople was established with Baldwin of Flanders as emperor. In 1261, the Byzantines regained the city.

Later Crusades

Successive crusades were launched to the Holy Land. The knight Jean d'Alluye traveled to the Holy Land around 1240, but the circumstances of his voyage are not known (25.120.201).

The Seventh and Eighth Crusades, in 1248 (38.60) and 1270, were sponsored by Louis IX, who died in Tunisia (54.1.2; 37.173.3). In 1271, Sultan Baibars captured Montfort Castle (28.99.1), and in 1291, the Crusader city of Acre fell, ending the era of Latin Crusader kingdoms. Calls for new crusades over the next centuries were increasingly ignored, despite the renown in which Crusaders and the Holy Land were held in legend (1993.65.4; 23.21.4; 25.120.528; 25.120.529; 54.1.1; Belles Heures Heraclius leaf, folio 156).

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