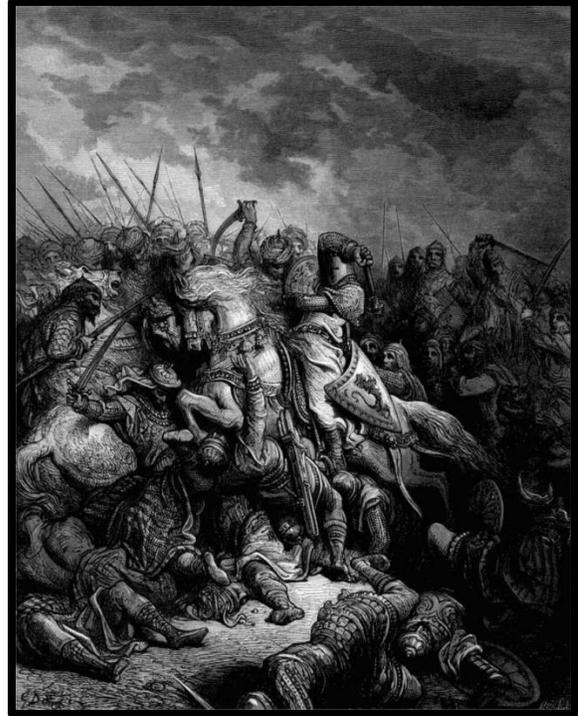


THE CRUSADES: THE HOLY WARS

In 1095 Pope Urban II, the most influential and powerful man in Europe at the time, issued a challenge to all Christian men: "This land which you inhabit, shut in on all sides by the seas and surrounded by mountain peaks, is too narrow for your large population....Hence it is that you murder on another, that you wage war, and that frequently you perish by mutual wounds. Let therefore hatred depart from among you, let your quarrels end, let wars cease, and let all dissensions and controversies slumber. Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulcher. Wrest that land from the wicked race, and subject it to yourselves. That land which as the scripture says, 'Floweth with milk and money' was given by God into the possession of the children of Israel." The



crowd gathered to hear the Pope's command cheered back with "God wills it!" The land he spoke of was the Holy Land, Jerusalem and its surrounding territories—the place that gave birth to Christianity. The mentioned "wicked race" was various Muslim peoples, lumped together and called *Saracens* by the Europeans, who had been in control of Jerusalem for hundreds of years. The city held special significance to them as well.

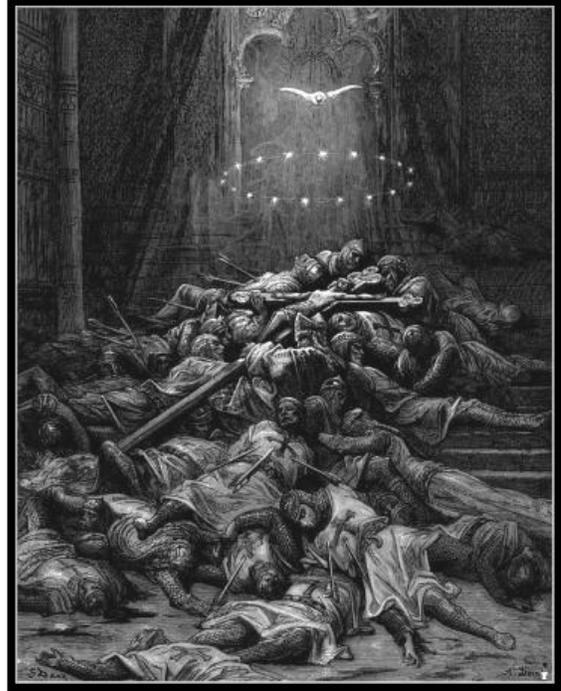
Thousands of knights answered the Pope's call to war. Knights bound for the Holy Lands placed a cross upon their armor to signal their intentions. Many knights who went on the crusade were not land-owners, so the thought of the wealth and land in the Holy Lands probably spurred them on more than religious devotion. Many Europeans imagined the city of Jerusalem to appear as the holy city in the Book of Revelation with gates of pearl, walls studded with precious stones, and streets paved with gold. They were in for a disappointment.

When the knights reached the arid wilderness of the Middle East, their enthusiasm was somewhat squelched. The burning sun heated their armor, scalding their skin. Many of their horses died from the conditions of supporting a heavily armed rider. Even though they reached Jerusalem in this pitiful state, the army of God regrouped, conquered the city, and massacred the Saracens they found there.

Raymond of Agiles wrote of the actions of the European knights in Jerusalem: "Some of our men cut off the heads of their enemies. Others shot them with arrows, so that they fell from the towers. Others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames. Piles of heads, hands, and feet were to be seen in the streets of the city. It was necessary to pick one's way over the bodies of men and horses. But these were small matters compared to what happened at the temple of Solomon, a place where religious services are ordinarily chanted. What happened there? If I tell the truth, it will exceed your powers of belief. So let it suffice to say this much at least, that in the temple and portico of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God, that his place should be filled with

the blood of the unbelievers, when it had suffered so long from their blasphemies....This day, I say, will be famous in all future ages, for it turned our labors and sorrows into joy and exultation; this day, I say, marks the justification of all Christianity and the humiliation of paganism. Our faith was renewed. 'The Lord made this day, and we rejoiced and exulted in it,' for on this day the Lord revealed Himself to His people and blessed them."

Knights weren't the only ones to answer the Pope's call to crusade. Two near-beggars named Walter the Penniless and Peter the Hermit rallied 10,000 peasants to march on Jerusalem. They made it farther than most expected—all the way to the Holy Land—but were easily massacred by a Saracen army they encountered there. During a later period, a group of children even felt the drive to crusade. Led by a pair of French 12-year-olds,



who claimed to have been visited by Jesus himself, led thousands of penniless children toward Jerusalem. When it came time to book passage on a ship bound for the Holy Land, the children were tricked though. The sailors welcomed them aboard and promptly sailed them to Africa, where the children were sold as slaves.

After the city was conquered, word was sent back to Europe that the Holy Land was in Christian hands once again. A flood of devoted Europeans made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to see the holy city for themselves. In the following years Jerusalem became something of a holy tourist trap, with visitors returning to Europe bearing fake holy relics—such as pieces of the true cross, a hair from the head of John the Baptist, or a piece of the burning bush. A new order of knights called the Templars was established, created to protect pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. They were named for the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, and they viewed themselves as a blend between knights and monks. They gave battle, but for a very holy cause. The pagan Saracen was their sworn enemy.

Although the European knights viewed the Saracens as barbarians, in many ways they were more advanced. While the ancient learning of Greece and Rome had been lost in Europe, it had been preserved in the Middle East. Medicine was one area where the Saracens were the superior of the Europeans.

In the following account an Arab doctor, called to help with wounded knights, describes an encounter with the "curious medicine" of the Europeans. "They brought before me a knight in whose leg an abscess had grown and a woman afflicted with imbecility. To the knight I applied a small poultice until the abscess opened and became well. And the woman I put on diet....Then a [French] physician came to them and said, 'This man knows nothing about treating them.' He then said to the knight, 'Which wouldst thou prefer, living with one leg or dying with two?' The latter replied, 'Living with one leg.' The physician said, 'Bring me a strong knight and a sharp axe.' A knight came with the axe, and I was standing by. Then the

physician laid the leg of the patient on a block of wood and bade the knight strike his leg with the axe and chop it off in one blow. Accordingly he struck it—while I was looking on—one blow, but the leg was not severed. He dealt another blow, upon which that marrow of the leg flowed out and the patient died on the spot. He then examined the woman and said, ‘This is a woman in whose head there is a devil, which has possessed her. Shave off her hair.’ Accordingly they shaved it off, and the woman began once more to eat their ordinary diet—garlic and mustard. Her imbecility took a turn for the worse. The physician then said, ‘The devil has penetrated though her head.’ He therefore took a razor, made a deep cruciform incision on it, peeled off the skin at the middle of the incision until the bone of the skull was exposed and rubbed it with salt. The woman also expired instantly. Thereupon I asked them whether my services were needed any longer, and when they replied in the negative, I returned home, having learned of their medicine what I knew not before.”

After many years of Christian rule, Jerusalem fell to the Saracen armies under the command of Saladin. Unlike the crusaders, Saladin did not slaughter his captured enemies. He allowed them to return safely to Europe. As news of Jerusalem’s fall reached Europe, yet another crusade was instigated by Richard the Lionhearted of England. Richard and Saladin engaged in many battles for control of Jerusalem, and during this time, both leaders developed a mutual respect for the other. Saladin, although a Saracen, became a symbol of chivalry among the Europeans. In the end there were five major crusades, but the European knights were never able to retake Jerusalem. The crusades ended with an agreement of tolerance between the two sides—Jerusalem would stay in Muslim hands, but grant Christian pilgrims the right to visit the holy city.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there any heroes in the story of the Crusades? Who are they? Explain.
2. Raymond of Agiles writes about the slaughter in the temple, but what is odd about his account? Explain.
3. In the account concerning the Arab doctor and the French physician, who is more knowledgeable? What did this episode make you feel? Explain.
4. In the years following the crusades the Templar knights became involved in banking. Europeans could borrow money from their order and deposit money for safe-keeping. Because of this the Templar order grew powerful throughout Europe. When the French king Philip IV became greatly indebted to the Templars, he seized upon the strange rumors concerning the knightly order—accusations of devil worship and other corruption—and had most of the order arrested, tortured, and executed. Those Templars who did not burn at the stake went into hiding. For this reason the Knights Templar gained a mysterious, legendary status, and some think their order—a secret one now—still exists today.