

THE FIRST CRUSADE - 1096

THE FIRST EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN CONFLICT AGAINST NON-CHRISTIANS. HERE, POPE URBAN II DECLARED HOLY WAR TO RECLAIM THE HOLY LAND FROM THE MUSLIMS - WHO HAD THEMSELVES DECLARE JIHAD (A WORD WHICH IS OFTEN MISUSED TODAY BY EXTREME MUSLIMS). THE FIRST CRUSADE IS VIEWED BY SOME AS A DEFENSIVE MOVE BY CHRISTIANS - THAT IS, RECLAIMING JERUSALEM - AND BY SOME AS AN AGGRESSIVE MOVE, AS THE CITY HAD NOT BEEN THEIRS FOR NEARLY 500 YEARS. NEVERTHELESS, NUMEROUS PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND BLOOD SPILT. SURELY AN EXAMPLE, THEN, OF MEDIEVAL BLOODTHIRSTINESS? A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

THE SECOND AND THIRD CRUSADES - 1146-49 AND 1189-92

CLEARLY, CHRISTIANS WERE GIVING AT LEAST SOME EVIDENCE OF BLOODTHIRSTINESS. THE SECOND CRUSADE, WHICH FAILED, WAS FOLLOWED BY THE THIRD CRUSADE; WERE CHRISTIANS SIMPLY GOING TO KEEP KILLING UNTIL THEY GOT THEIR AIM? AND, AS HISTORIANS HAVE DISCUSSED, WHAT WAS THEIR AIM? JERUSALEM? TOTAL EUROPEAN DOMINATION? UNIFICATION OF ALL CHRISTIANS? REGARDLESS OF WHAT THEIR AIMS WERE, THE PREMISE WAS CLEAR: CHRISTIANITY FIGHTS NON-CHRISTIANITY, AND THE MEANS INVOLVED MASS KILLINGS AND WARS. BLOODTHIRSTY? IT CERTAINLY APPEARS SO

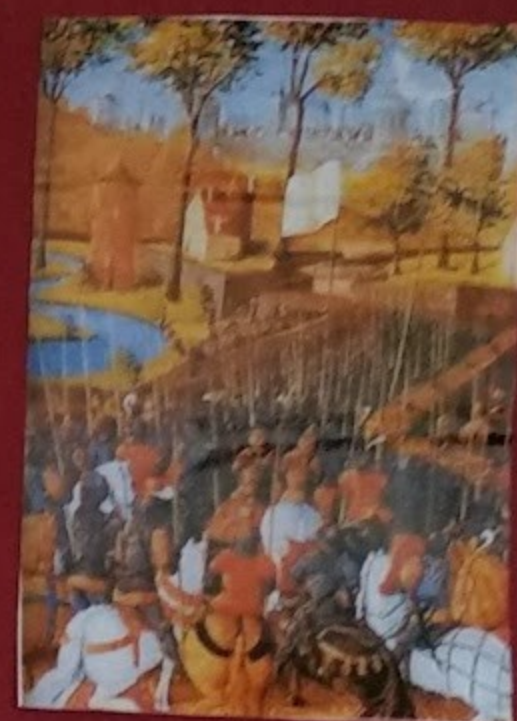
THE FOURTH CRUSADE AND BEYOND - 1202 ONWARDS

THERE ARE DEBATES AS TO WHEN THE CRUSADES END. IT COULD EVEN BE ARGUED THEY NEVER ENDED - TODAY, FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE EVIDENCE OF A VERY SMALL GROUP OF MUSLIMS AIMING TO VERGE 'HOLY WAR' ON THE WEST; A REVERSAL OF AGGRESSOR, BUT STILL A RELIGIOUS CONFLICT. THE FOURTH CRUSADE MARKED A FRESH ATTEMPT TO REGAIN JERUSALEM BY THE CHRISTIANS. ONCE AGAIN THIS WAS NOT ACHIEVED, BUT PROGRESS WAS MADE. WHAT THE KEY POINT IS THOUGH IS THAT THESE CRUSADES WERE NOT HUMANITARIAN, THEY WERE NOT DEFENSIVE; THESE WERE FOR TERRITORY AND CHRISTIAN STRENGTH. HOW CAN THE ACTIONS NOT BE CONSIDERED BLOODTHIRSTY?

1096

1202

Conflict and Bloodthirstiness: Christians and Non-Christians



A CRUSADE IS A WAR SANCTIONED BY THE CHURCH. ALL THE CRUSADES WERE SANCTIONED BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, WHICH CERTAINLY INDICATES CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS; THERE IS NO DEBATE ABOUT THIS.

WHAT THERE IS DEBATE ABOUT IS WHETHER MEDIEVAL PEOPLE WERE 'BLOODTHIRSTIER' THAN TODAY. THE CRUSADES, ARE, ON THE FACE OF IT, BLOODTHIRSTY. LOOKING DEEPER INTO THEM, THOUGH, SUGGESTS IT IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS THIS.

A MAJOR THEME AND ONE TO FOCUS ON IS THAT OF 'BLOODTHIRSTINESS' VS SINCERE COMMITMENT TO THEIR RELIGION. THAT IS, THE PEOPLE (WHO WERE OFTEN UNTRAINED, SUCH AS THE 'PEOPLES CRUSADE' PORTION OF THE FIRST CRUSADE) WERE SIMPLY SO DEDICATED TO CHRISTIANITY - SO COMMITTED TO THOSE WHO HELD SENIOR POSITIONS - THAT THEY WERE PREPARED TO DO AS THEY WERE TOLD REGARDLESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES. THEY WERE NOT HUNTING FOR BLOOD BECAUSE THEY WERE THIRSTY FOR VIOLENCE, BUT BECAUSE THEY GENUINELY BELIEVED THIS WOULD PROGRESS THEIR RELIGION. WE HAVE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS.



THE HISTORICAL DEBATE

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EVIDENCE CAN BE USED TO DEBATE THE ARGUMENT. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, OTHER THEORIES, BUT THIS IS AN INTERESTING ONE TO FOCUS ON.

PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL INDICATES TO US HOW STRONGLY THE CRUSADERS WERE COMMITTED TO THEIR RELIGION. A PRIEST IN THE FIRST CRUSADE WROTE HOW PEOPLE 'LEFT ALL THEY POSSESSED, AND WENT [TO FIGHT]... TO RECEIVE WHAT THE LORD PROMISED'

LOOK AT THIS ON THE ITS VALUES; WERE THESE PEOPLE GOING INTO CONFLICT BECAUSE THEY WERE BLOODTHIRSTY? OR RATHER, AS IT SEEMS, BECAUSE THEY WERE TOLD TO BY THE RELEVANT SENIOR AUTHORITY (POPES URBAN, INNOCENT III ETC) - IT IS HARD TO FIND TRUE BELIEF THAT THE CRUSADERS WENT SOLELY TO SPILL BLOOD. THERE IS HISTORIAN SUPPORT FOR THIS, FOR EXAMPLE KRUEGER. THEREFORE WHILE THE CRUSADES CERTAINLY RESULTED IN HORRIFIC DEATH AND INJURY NUMBERS, THIS IS ARGUABLY NOT DUE TO THE CRUSADERS 'SEEKING OUT VIOLENCE'

THERE ARE, THOUGH, OTHER HISTORICAL VIEWS - IT IS A DEBATE! ANDREW CURRY FOR EXAMPLE DESCRIBES THE CHRISTIANS AS 'BLOODTHIRSTY AFTER THEIR FIERCE SIEGE'; INDEED, HE SAYS THEY WERE SO BLOODTHIRSTY THEY WERE TARGETING OTHER CHRISTIANS! THIS IS A PRINCIPLE THAT TODAY WOULD BREACH INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IT IS SO SEVERE; CURRY IS PERHAPS HARD TO DISAGREE WITH.

WE CAN ALSO, THOUGH, COMPARE THE BLOODTHIRSTINESS OF PEOPLE TODAY. EVEN IF IT IS CONCLUDED WERE MEDIEVAL PEOPLE IN RELIGIOUS CONFLICT WERE SIMPLY BLOODTHIRSTY, IS IT FAIR TO SAY THIS IS NO LONGER THE CASE? KRUEGER AGAIN BELIEVES CHRISTIANS WERE CALLING FOR WAR IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN IN RECENT DECADES; WARS SOME PEOPLE HAVE COMPARED TO CRUSADES DUE TO THEIR RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT

THERE ARE FAR MORE DISCUSSION POINTS AVAILABLE. IN CONCLUSION THOUGH, 'MEDIEVAL PEOPLE ARE BLOODTHIRSTY' IS AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION. IN A RELIGIOUS SENSE, IT IS PROBABLY ARGUABLE THEY ARE MORE SO THAN TODAY. HOWEVER, GIVEN RELIGION IS FAR LESS PROMINENT TODAY, IT IS AN UNFAIR COMPARISON.

