

Name _____ Date _____

The Crusades

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

By 1095 CE, the Christian Byzantine Empire was losing strength and territory. The Islamic Empire controlled much of the Middle East and North Africa, and a Muslim dynasty called the Seljuk Turks was eating away at what the Byzantines had left. When the Seljuks took control of Anatolia and then Jerusalem, they closed off a popular pilgrimage route used by Jews and Christians. Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus saw this as an opportunity. His struggling empire needed military aid that Western European powers could provide, so he sent an envoy to Pope Urban II to share a proposal. If Urban II could provide troops, Alexius would work to help him gain control of the holy land from the Islamic Empire.

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This partnership would serve Alexius's political goals: resist the the Seljuks and regain territory. For Urban II it was a chance to gain power within the church. Though relations between Eastern Orthodox and Western Christians were improving, the two groups were still at odds. Reclaiming the holy land would boost Urban's profile and strengthen the papacy within the church. Urban II agreed to help.

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Notes

In November 1095, Urban II issued a call to arms to Western Christians. At what came to be known as the Council of Clermont in southern France, he urged noblemen and knights to join the pilgrimage to recapture the holy land. He proclaimed that it was a command from Christ and that those who died in the effort would be forgiven for their sins. Word spread and the response was feverish. Everyone from noblemen and knights to peasants and merchants echoed cries of "God wills it." Motivations to join, or "take the cross," varied. Many sought favor in the eyes of God, while others wanted to improve their social status. Merchants wanted a chance to take advantage of Middle Eastern trade routes, while peasants aimed to escape debt or gain access to consistent meals.

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Excitement was so rampant that, before Urban II could organize an army, a group of thousands of mostly poor Christians made their way east in summer 1096. Led by a priest named Peter the Hermit, this mass movement became known as the "People's Crusade" and the results were disastrous. The group massacred Jews in present-day Germany on their way to the Anatolian peninsula. Once there, they were quickly wiped out by Turkish forces. But the violence and fervor of this initial group of Crusaders was written off amid the success of the first official Crusade.

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3. b'

Notes

Later in 1096, the first official group of Crusaders left for the Middle East. This group included four armies from different regions of Western Europe made up of noblemen, knights, and professional warriors. These armies were led by Godfrey of Bouillon, Bohemond of Taranto, Hugh of Vermandois, and Raymond of Saint-Gilles. Compared to the People's Crusade, their organization, skill, and military technology were far superior.

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After staging in Constantinople, the four armies and their Byzantine allies overtook Nicea, the Seljuk capital of Anatolia, in June 1097. In June 1098, they captured Antioch before advancing toward Jerusalem, an area now controlled by Egyptian Fatimids. Despite internal struggles between the Byzantines and Crusaders, the Christian onslaught forced Jerusalem's governor into a surrender in July 1099. These bloody victories came more quickly than Christian leaders expected. They led to the establishment of Crusader states in Tripoli, Edessa, Antioch, and Jerusalem. For the time being, Jerusalem was controlled by Christians. Both the church and Byzantine Empire took this outcome as a sign that crusading worked.

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4. b'

Notes

Following the first Crusade, there were at least eight additional Crusades that took place between 1095 and 1270 CE. Historians note that the only outright successful Crusade for Christians was the first one. In subsequent campaigns, motivations and targets shifted. The initial goal of capturing holy territory from the Islamic Empire extended to conquering pagan regions and converting those who lived there to Christianity. Over time, the gains of the first Crusade were lost as the Byzantine Empire shrunk, becoming weaker than before the Crusades began. By 1291 CE, the final existing Crusade state fell to the Mamluk Sultanate, returning the region to Muslim control.

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5. b'

Notes

The Crusades were expensive and resulted in millions of deaths. This period strengthened the papacy, granting popes widespread influence in the church and society throughout the 12th and 13th centuries. The establishment of Crusader states increased trade activity between the Middle East and Europe. The Crusades also proved influential when it came to religious justification for military action, particularly during the 15th- and 16th-century conquest of the Americas.

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But the most significant impact of the Crusades was on religious relations. Even today, dynamics stemming from the Crusades play a role in the historical and political relationships between Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

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