

**The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098):
Muslim and Christian Perspectives of a Critical
Battle during the First Crusade**

Mersadi's Dā Curtsinger

Pope Urban II's sermon at the Council of Clermont in 1095 calling for Christians of Europe to recapture Jerusalem in the name of God brought forth a widespread response from people of all social ranks.¹ These included *princeps* (princes or leaders), *minors* (petty knights, castellans, and lords), the *populous* (the poor and laborers), and, lastly, the clergy.² The following excerpt from Urban's letter provides instructions on how the Christian community could join this cause:

Your brotherhood, we believe, has long since learned from many accounts that a barbaric fury has deplorably afflicted and laid waste the churches of God in the regions of the Orient. More than this, blasphemous to say, it has even grasped in intolerable servitude its churches and the Holy City of Christ, glorified by his passion and resurrection. Grieving with pious concern at this calamity, we visited the regions of Gaul and devoted ourselves largely to urging the princes of the land and their subjects to free the churches of the East. We solemnly enjoined upon them at the council of Auvergne (the accomplishment of) such an undertaking, as a preparation for the remission of all their sins. And we have constituted our most beloved son, Adhemar [*sic*], Bishop of Puy, leader of this expedition and undertaking in our stead, so that those who, perchance, may wish to undertake this journey should comply [w]ith his commands, as if they were their own, and submit fully to his loosings or bindings, as far as shall seem to belong to such an office. If, moreover, there are any of your people whom God has inspired to this vow, let them know that he [Adhemar] will set out with the aid of God on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary, and that they can then attach themselves to his following.³

In his letter of instruction for those who would go on crusade, Pope Urban II is calling for the relief of the Christians in Jerusalem. In his sermon at the Council of Clermont earlier that same year, the Pope had claimed that the Muslims were spreading their faith rapidly into their territory and turning Christian churches into mosques or destroying them, and presumably

¹

² Thomas F. Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 1.

Riley-Smith, Jonathan, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Great Britain: Anthlone Press, 1986), 74-75.

Urban II, "Letter of Instruction to the Crusaders," in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, edited and translated by August C. Krey (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1921), 42-43.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

pressuring Christians in those regions to convert to Islam. By sending Adhémar, Bishop of Puy, as his papal legate and leader of this holy journey to Jerusalem, he hoped that those who had been forcibly converted would come back to the Christian faith and that the spread of Islam would be stopped. Of course, a successful crusade would also greatly enhance the status of the papacy. As Thomas Asbridge observed, “Launched as it was just as Urban began to stabilise [*sic*] his power-base in central Italy, the campaign must be seen as an attempt to consolidate papal empowerment and expand Rome’s sphere of influence.”⁴ Urban had other motives as well, for by choosing to go this route, the pontiff sought not only to unite and purify Western Christendom and, in the process, redirect the violence so common among the nobility of Europe towards the Muslims, but he also hoped to enhance the prestige of the Roman papacy with the Greek Church at Constantinople and the Levantine Church in Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine.

The crusade itself pitted the Christians against the Muslims for the control of Jerusalem. Many of those who heeded this call for a crusade were nobility. They were, after all, the ones most able to afford the supplies (food, water, armor, weapons, mounts, etc.) in order to make the tedious journey to Jerusalem. On the other hand, those of the labor classes who were strong in their faith also traveled to the Holy Land. The journey was dangerous and arduous, however. By the time that the groups of crusaders arrived at Constantinople, only those with hope and faith in their God and with a determination to fulfill their oaths were left for the journey on to Jerusalem. As the leaders embarked upon their route to reach their final destination, they captured critical objectives along the way. These included Nicaea, Edessa, and, especially, Antioch.

Their plan was to besiege and capture Antioch before taking the cities down the coastline in route to Jerusalem. However, even as the besiegers of Antioch successfully gained possession of the city (by bribing a guard, scaling the city walls, and besieging the Muslims inside of Antioch’s citadel), they soon found themselves the besieged as the Muslim leader Kerbogha and his large relief army encircled Antioch, trapping the crusaders inside. At this critical moment, the true power struggle for control of Antioch began. Not surprisingly, Christian and Arab historians have perceived this battle from greatly different perspectives. Whereas Muslim historians such as Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn al-Qalānisi, and Ibn Taghribirdi tended to place the blame on the Muslim leaders for the loss of Antioch, Christian historians, in stark contrast, gave thanks to divine intervention for the miraculous victory eventually bestowed upon them. Clearly something unusual had transpired, which both sets of chroniclers struggled to explain. How had it been possible for the crusaders to achieve victory in a battle that they should have clearly lost?

Modern day historians may never know what events unfolded during the Battle of Antioch; nonetheless, the reports of the first and second sieges (mostly the latter) of Antioch by the Muslims and Christians provide modern historians with critical evidence and eyewitness accounts that describe the battle, if also from quite different perspectives. Crucial to the crusaders’ victory was the timely “discovery” of the Holy Lance, which appeared to Peter Bartholomew (a poor French religious mystic traveling with the crusaders) and the crusaders

4

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

after a series of visions and miraculously was uncovered in the floor of the Basilica of St. Peter in Antioch. Peter Bartholomew and many of the crusaders claimed that the Holy Lance—the lance thought to have belonged to Longinus, a Roman Centurion—had been used to pierce the side of Christ during his crucifixion. This raises questions concerning the role that the Holy Lance may have played in the crusader victory at Antioch. Though the episode was denied, downplayed, or even ignored by Muslim historians, Christian chroniclers present at the time later claimed that, with the Holy Lance leading them into battle, Christ had directly intervened to give the crusaders their otherwise undeserved victory. What are we to make of this today?

This much is clear: when Kerbogha trapped the crusader forces inside the city of Antioch, he cut off their access to the outside world. No longer able to replenish their food and water supplies, the surviving accounts record, they were forced to eat twigs, leaves, and even to consume the flesh and blood of their horses. The crusaders, desperate for survival, offered to abandon the city in return for the sparing of their lives, but Kerbogha refused to agree to their terms. Meanwhile, those who tried to flee the city by scaling down its walls were met with ambush and either were killed or narrowly escaped death. Once again, this begs the question: if the Muslims had the city surrounded and enjoyed such numerical superiority along with ample supplies, how does one explain their loss of Antioch? Can the crusaders' victory at Antioch be attributed to the First Crusade's being a "Holy War"?⁵

In fact, the surviving evidence suggests that the Christians' victory stemmed in large measure from the actions of Peter Bartholomew, who reportedly inspired the crusaders to search for the Holy Lance on the basis of visions that he allegedly had received from St. Andrew. Having begun to lose their faith in the Christian God because they were outnumbered and out of supplies, the hopeful, faith-inspired testimony and actions of Peter Bartholomew in the discovery of the Holy Lance in the church that St. Peter reportedly had founded in the first century renewed their faith in Christ. Following three days of prayer, the crusaders abandoned their semi-shelter of the city in a combination of desperation, spiritual aspiration, and a burst of adrenaline to face their foes, many of them no doubt expecting to die as martyrs. Meanwhile, the Muslim sources tell us, outside of the city gate the divided Muslim army under the command of Kerbogha, the atabeg of Mosul, failed to achieve victory because a critical rift had developed between the atabeg and the other Muslim emirs. The crusaders won a great victory as a result, but the story warrants a closer look, for upon this famous battle, one might argue, the fate of the entire First Crusade rested.

The Sources

5

The term "holy war" from the Christian perspective refers to reclaiming kingdoms, territories, and cities that once had been claimed for Christ but subsequently had been conquered by Muslims, as well as fighting those of other faiths in the name of Christ. The crusade went further by fusing holy war with Christian pilgrimage. For more on the concept of "holy war," see Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades*, 1-4; and Jean Flori, "Pour une redéfinition de la croisade," *Cahiers de civilisation médiéval* 47 (2004): 329-50, at 349.

As noted above, several contemporary accounts of the Battle of Antioch survive. The following section explains what we know of each of these chroniclers and their accounts of the battle.

Muslim Sources for the Battle of Antioch

Unlike the later crusades, only a handful of Muslim chroniclers or sources cover the First Crusade. As Carole Hillenbrand has observed, “The First Crusade [generally speaking] is poorly documented on the Muslim side in comparison with the relative wealth of documentation in the Crusader sources.”⁶ Nonetheless, a handful of Muslim chroniclers did record in considerable detail the struggle for control of Antioch, especially during the second siege of the city by the forces of Kerbogha. What little was recorded by Muslim historians about the first siege mostly concerns the emir of Antioch, Yaghi Siyān, and his failure to protect Antioch from the crusader army; his ensuing death is also laid out with some detail. The Muslim sources for the Battle of Antioch that have come down to us include:

1. Ibn al-Athīr: “Ibn al-Athīr [1160-1233], . . . born to a Mesopotamian family, . . . did not write during the time of the First Crusade.”⁷ However, his most important and influential work, the *al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rikh* (*The Perfect History*, or *The Collection of Histories*), provides a history of Islam to the year 628/1231.⁸ This work is influential for many different reasons. Francesco Gabrieli observes: “For his history of the [later] Crusades Ibn al-Athīr was an eyewitness The clarity and simplicity of his style, which avoids archaisms and embellishments and aims at presenting the essential facts, has contributed to his reputation as the chief [Muslim] historian of the later Crusades.”⁹ Nonetheless, his account of the First Crusade constitutes an important Muslim source that includes descriptions of the Muslim loss of Antioch and Jerusalem to the Christian crusaders.
2. Ibn al-Qalānisi: Ibn al-Qalānisi lived from 1073 to 1160, and was born in Damascus. As an eyewitness to the First Crusade, Francesco Gabrieli observes, “He is the earliest Arab historian to write about the Crusades, in his chronicle known as *Dhail ta'rikh Dimashq* (*Appendix to the History of Damascus* [an earlier chronicle by Hilāl as-Sabī]).”¹⁰ Since Ibn al-Qalānisi is credited with being the earliest Arab chronicler of the crusades and an eyewitness to both the First and Second Crusades, Gabrieli describes his

⁶

⁷ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 54.

⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rikh*, part 1: *The Years 491–541/1097–1146: The Coming of the Franks and the Muslim Response*, translated and edited by D. S. Richards (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), 1-2.

⁹ Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, translated from the Italian by E. J. Costello (California: University of California Press, 1969), xxvii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xxvii-xxviii.

Ibid., xxv.

chronicle as perhaps the most “circumstantial and accurate,” as well as “dry and objective” account.¹¹

3. Ibn Taghribirdi: Ibn Taghribirdi was an Egyptian Mamluk historian.¹² Mamluks comprised an “elite Turkish slave army.”¹³ According to the sources, Ibn Taghribirdi died around 1469-1470.¹⁴ This dating shows that he was not writing during the time of the First Crusade; like Ibn al-Athīr, he wrote later. Ibn Taghribirdi’s discussion of the First Crusade, but more specifically of the Holy Lance and sieges of Antioch, is found in Book V of his *al-Nujum al-zahira fi muluk Misr wa’l-Qahira*.¹⁵

Crusader Sources for the Battle of Antioch

1. Anonymous: The anonymous southern Italian Norman author of the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, “or “The Deeds of the Franks and other Jerusalemites,” is the “primal source for the First Crusade.”¹⁶ The author first attached himself to Bohemond, and later to Raymond of St. Gilles (Count of Toulouse). The first nine books of the *Gesta* may have been composed prior to November 1098 while still at Antioch. Though this chronology has recently been challenged, the tenth and final book of the *Gesta* certainly was finished prior to 1104 and perhaps as early as 1101.¹⁷ Nirmal Dass, the translator of one of the editions of the *Gesta*, states, “. . . [T]he questions—who wrote the *Gesta*, and is it an eyewitness account—are ultimately unimportant, because the *Gesta* is trying to relate not the experiences dependent upon personal experiences, but upon the tradition of history in the medieval world . . .”¹⁸ As one reads this work, which covers the Council of Clermont in 1095 through the capture of Jerusalem and the Battle of Ascalon in 1099 from the perspective of a knight, it is evident the *Gesta Francorum*

¹¹

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), 33.

¹⁴ Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades*, 161.

¹⁵ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 314 and 326, n. 156.

Anonymous, *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Jerusalem-bound Pilgrims*, edited and translated by Nirmal Dass (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 1.

Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 60-61. Also see Marius Kjørmo, “The Holy Lance of Antioch: A Study on the Impact of a Perceived Relic during the First Crusade” (M.A. thesis, Institute of Archaeology, History, Culture Studies and Religion, University of Bergen, 2009), 16-18.

Anonymous, *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Jerusalem-bound Pilgrims*, edited and translated by Nirmal Dass, 2.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

incorporates the eyewitness of others in addition to the observations of the author.

2. Raymond d'Aguilers: In his *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem*, completed before 1105, Raymond d'Aguilers provides a second eyewitness account of the First Crusade and the Battle of Antioch, especially the visions of Peter Bartholomew and the discovery of the Holy Lance.¹⁹ Raymond, ordained a priest on the crusade, served as the chaplain to Raymond of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse. His account provides a religious perspective to the crusader victory at Antioch as Christ's victory over the Muslims.
3. Fulcher of Chartres: Fulcher of Chartres' *Historia Hierosolymitana*, completed before 1105, consists of three books, the first of which covers from the Council of Clermont in 1095 through the death of Godfrey of Jerusalem in 1100.²⁰ Although it includes an account of the Battle of Antioch, Fulcher was not an eyewitness because, as his chaplain, he had accompanied Baldwin of Boulogne to Edessa in 1097. For his account of the two sieges of Antioch, Fulcher depends upon the *Historia* of Raymond d'Aguilers and the *Gesta Francorum*, or perhaps he simply used the same source materials used by them.²¹
4. Peter Tudebode: Peter Tudebode's *Historia de Hierosolymitano Itinere*, written before 1111, appears at first glance to display a heavy reliance upon the *Gesta Francorum* and Raymond d'Aguilers' *Historia Francorum*. However, it also contains information not found in either work, and his translators have therefore argued that he had access to the same sources as Raymond d'Aguilers and the anonymous author of the *Gesta*.²²
5. Raoul of Caen: The *Gesta Tancredi*, written by Raoul of Caen sometime after Tancred's death in 1112, praises the deeds of Tancred, the nephew of Bohemond and later the regent of Antioch. The sources quoted in the *Gesta Tancredi* suggest that Raoul had received a classical education. Whether or not he was present during the Battle for Antioch remains uncertain, but he was clearly in the entourage of Bohemond when he returned to the East in 1107, and, after Bohemond's death, he served Tancred at Antioch. When Raoul discussed the story of the Holy Lance, he challenged Raymond d'Aguilers' account and called into question Peter Bartholomew's claim, asking why the Holy Lance should have been found at Antioch rather than at Jerusalem, where Jesus's disciples would have been more likely to have hidden it. Raoul also indirectly challenges the claim

19

Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, edited and translated by John and Laurita Hill (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1968).

Fulcher of Chartres and Others, *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, edited by Edward Peters, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 60-61; Kjörmo, "The Holy Lance of Antioch," 18-20.

Peter Tudebode, *Historia de Hierosolymitano Itinere*, translated and edited by John and Laurita Hill (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1974); Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 60-61; Kjörmo, "The Holy Lance of Antioch," 18.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

that Longinus, the Roman soldier of Pontius Pilate, brought the Holy Lance to Antioch by inquiring whether Pilate himself ever visited the city.²³

6. Robert the Monk: Until his deposition in 1097, Robert the Monk (d. 1122) was the abbot of the Benedictine abbey of St. Remy at Rheims.²⁴ We know that he was present at the Council of Clermont, but whether or not he ever made the journey to the Holy Land remains a subject of debate. His popular account of the First Crusade, *Historia Iherosolimitana*, was probably completed by 1107. His *Historia* consists largely of a revised, polished version of the eyewitness account of the First Crusade by the anonymous south Italian Norman author of the *Gesta Francorum*, which had been completed early and was already circulating in France, to which Robert added additional material gathered from his own research. Robert wrote his *Historia* because a certain abbot, probably Bernard of Marmoutier, had expressed his dissatisfaction with the *Gesta Francorum*. As Robert reports, this abbot

showed me a history . . . but it displeased him very much, partly because it contained no description of the foundation of the crusade at the Council of Clermont, partly because it neglected to adorn the sequence of such beautiful events, and the literary composition staggered in rough manner.²⁵

Perhaps not surprisingly, as Carole Sweetenham has observed, “Robert the Monk was far and away the most popular” historians to give an account of the First Crusade.²⁶ More than one hundred medieval manuscripts of his chronicle survive, 10 times the number for any other account of the First Crusade.²⁷

7. Albert of Aachen: Little is known of Albert of Aachen, including even his name with any degree of certainty, though he appears to have lived in the region near Aachen. Rather than participating in the First Crusade, he collected stories and evidence from those crusaders who returned to the Rhineland. His *History of the Journey to Jerusalem* is valuable, first, because he appears not to have relied upon the various eyewitness accounts that circulated in the early twelfth century. Second, he provides more of a German perspective than a French one. And, finally, he adds information not found

²³

²⁴ Kjörmo, “The Holy Lance of Antioch,” 20-22.

Robert the Monk, *Robert the Monk’s Historia Iherosolimitana*, translated by and Carole Sweetenham (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 1-11; Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 135-138.

²⁶ Trans. in Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, vii.

Kjörmo, “The Holy Lance of Antioch,” 23.

elsewhere.²⁸

8. Guibert de Nogent: In ca. 1106-1111, Guibert, abbot of Nogent-sous-Coucy and a former student of St. Anselm, compiled and edited his *Gesta Dei per Francos*, which enjoyed but a limited circulation during the Middle Ages, perhaps because of its high Latin.²⁹ The author's main goal appears to have been to add a polished corrective to the crude Latin of the anonymous *Gesta Francorum*. As might be expected of a churchman, Guibert attributed the miraculous victory of the Franks at Antioch to the hand of God. His account contains material not found elsewhere, especially from Robert of Flanders.³⁰

The Byzantine Source for the Battle of Antioch

1. Anna Comnena: The sole surviving Byzantine source for the First Crusade, the *Alexiad*, was written by Anna Comnena (1083-1153), daughter of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118) and his wife, Irene Doukaina. She finished her account, which completed an effort begun by her late husband, Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger (d. 1137), around 1148. Though the *Alexiad* contains obvious biases in favor of her father's government, it remains invaluable as a source because it is the sole eyewitness account of the First Crusade written from the Byzantine perspective.³¹

The First Siege of Antioch

The following sections will discuss the events leading up to the first siege of Antioch. Included here is a description of Antioch, the crusaders' journey to the city, the fear and death of Yaghi Siyān, how the siege began, and the initial outcome.

The City of Antioch

The layout of the city played a critical role in the battles for its capture by the crusaders and recapture by Kerbogha's Muslim forces. Constructed on the side of Mount Silpius, with its amazingly steep slopes, the city of Antioch has high and thick walls that surround it.³² Robert the Monk reported, "The city of Antioch is eminently defensible not only because of its natural site

²⁸

Albert of Aachen, *History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, edited by Susan Edington (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 1, n. 2; Kjormo, "The Holy Lance of Antioch," 23-24.

³⁰ Guibert de Nogent, *Gesta Dei per Francos*, translated by Robert Levine (New York: The Boydell Press, 1997).

³¹ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 136; Kjormo, "The Holy Lance of Antioch," 24-25.

Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, edited and translated by Elizabeth A. Dawes (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1928).

³² Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades*, xxvii-xxviii.

but also by virtue of very high walls, towers stretching up tall and numerous defensive devices built on top of the wall.”³³ With strong city walls and only a couple of entrances into the city, the citizens and ruler of Antioch had very little to worry about, at least in terms of invasions, even though, during the first siege, the crusaders tested the viability of these walls, which enclosed an area much larger than the city itself. The walls were built into the mountain so that, during an extended siege, the ruler and citizens would be able to escape along a mountain pass; however, if the walls were ever completely surrounded, flight from inside the city would become virtually impossible.

Tradition holds that the city of Antioch was founded by Alexander the Great’s general and successor in Syria, Seleucus, and named for his Macedonian father, Antiochus, in 300 B.C.E.³⁴ There is no doubt that the city was built mainly for defensive purposes. Robert the Monk mentions other attributes that caused the city to be imposing. The walls are among the tallest structures featured in the city; therefore, they would have been visible from a great distance.

The conquest of Antioch was a goal that the crusaders had hoped to achieve from the very beginning. The crusaders did not want to take Antioch merely because it would provide a stronghold in which they could rest before traveling to Jerusalem. Antioch also held great significance for those of the Christian faith. The Book of Acts records that, “. . . it was at Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians’.”³⁵ St. Peter’s Basilica at Antioch, founded by the apostle himself in the first century, long served as one of the five great Metropolitan churches of the Catholic Church (located, respectively, at Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople).³⁶ Both Antioch and Jerusalem were Metropolitans of the Catholic Church, and, as such, each was overseen by a bishop. The Christian nickname for a follower of Christ, *Christianus*, was a Latin, rather than a Greek, name taken from the official language of the Roman Catholic Church. As Diarmaid MacCulloch has observed:

At this stage [when Antioch was a Metropolitan], the Church in Antioch had a single leader, overseer, or ‘bishop’ (*episkopos*), just like the (by then dispersed) community of Jerusalem: Ignatius—interestingly, a man with a Latin name, in the same way that the enduring Antiochene nickname for Christ-followers, *Christiani*, was a Latin rather than Greek idiom. . . .³⁷

³³

³⁴ Robert the Monk, *Historia Iherosolimitana*, 121 (Book IV, Chapter 1).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 107, n. 53; Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 153.

³⁶ Book of Acts, 11:26b (NRSV).

³⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 154.

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2009), 131.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

This quote shows the contemporary comparisons of Antioch and Jerusalem along with their ties to Rome. To the Christians living at the time, having a Muslim in power over a city and church once regarded as Christian, especially a church founded by the first pope, would have been seen as blasphemous. By 1097, however, the sole ruler of Antioch was a Muslim emir named Yaghi Siyān (d.1098), who ruled over the mixed Christian, Muslim, and Jewish residents who inhabited the city. Thus, in conquering Antioch, the crusaders would not only gain access to a port city and establish a threshold in Syria, but they would also regain control of the apostolic city that marked the birthplace of Christianity.

The Journey to Antioch

Between 1098 and 1109 the crusaders would create four new districts on the Eastern side of the Mediterranean: Edessa, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Tripoli.³⁸ During the First Crusade, the most important of these settlements, other than Jerusalem itself, was the city of Antioch. Though their numbers are difficult to estimate with any precision, prior to their arrival at Antioch, the crusader forces had battled their way across Asia Minor with heavy losses and then fought for control of the city of Nicaea where, in June 1097, the crusaders probably had still numbered approximately a combined 43,000 cavalry and infantry. These numbers would later dwindle due to starvation, disease, desertion, and death in battle, yet from time to time reinforcements also were arriving from Europe. Some 15,000 crusaders were left to besiege Jerusalem in 1099; no doubt several thousand more were present during the first siege of Antioch, but many died or deserted in the months that followed. And whereas the crusaders still possessed some 700-1000 horses at the beginning of the siege, by the time of the final battle for Antioch in June 1098 only 100-200 remained alive, and these were in very poor condition.³⁹

There were distinct motives for the entire crusade, and the taking of Antioch in the minds of the crusaders. There were certainly religious motives that allowed soldiers to continue to fight, but at the same time atone for their sins by fighting for God.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Thomas Asbridge observed, “Of all the theories assigning acquisitive motives to the First Crusaders, the most enduring and influential has been the idea that the expedition was almost exclusively populated by land-hungry younger sons deprived of inheritable territory at home by the laws of primogeniture, and thus desperately eager to establish new lordships in the East. This image is, however, profoundly misleading.”⁴¹ While the acquisition of hereditary lands was no doubt important in the Middle Ages and some of the younger sons of nobility were searching for land of their own, their motives for going on crusade, as Asbridge makes clear, were far more

³⁸

Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 112.

⁴⁰ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 61-65.

⁴¹ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 66-75.

Ibid., 67-68.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

complex. Certainly in that day the acquisition of material wealth to help offset the tremendous cost of crusading and the degree of Christian devotion that would accomplish the will of God and regain the holy city of Jerusalem for Christ could go hand in hand.⁴²

On the way to Antioch, an ambitious Baldwin of Boulogne and Tancred abandoned their vows to retake Jerusalem and branched away from the main crusader army with around 100 knights. Their route is shown below in Figure 1. It was their hope to carve out territory with the support of Armenian Christians within the cities of Cilicia (including Tarsos, the birthplace of the Apostle Paul) and especially in Armenia (including Edessa). “They were warmly welcomed, and both men soon found themselves caught up in local politics.”⁴³ This warm welcome most likely stemmed from the shared religious beliefs between the Armenians and these crusader leaders, but Baldwin became even more involved with politics in Edessa. The ruler of Edessa, “Thoros, who was officially a vassal of the Turks but in reality acted independently, . . . offered to adopt Baldwin as his successor.”⁴⁴ Sensing a great opportunity, Baldwin accepted. Then, after Thoros was conveniently and violently killed in a coup, Baldwin gained full control of Edessa. In terms of the crusade and journey to Antioch, this was a great success. Armenian Christians would support the crusaders at Antioch, but Baldwin would play no role in the forthcoming sieges and battle for control of Antioch, even though Tancred did rejoin the forces at Antioch.⁴⁵

⁴²

⁴³ Ibid., 66-75.

⁴⁴ Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades*, 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 149-152; Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, 58-59.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)



Figure 1: The First Crusade: The March from Constantinople to Antioch⁴⁶

The image above listed as Figure 1 shows the route that the crusaders took towards Antioch from Constantinople, which provided a passage through the Muslim lands. The Emperor of the Eastern lands [Byzantium], Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118)—father to Anna Comnena (1083-1153), the Byzantine chronicler who left to posterity the sole Byzantine account of the First Crusade (in the *Alexiad*)—played an important role in the crusaders’ journey to Antioch.⁴⁷ The crusaders needed and desired to pass through his lands in order to continue on their way to Jerusalem. Ibn al-Athīr reports that the emperor said, “‘Unless you first promise me Antioch, I shall not allow you to cross into the Muslim empire.’ His real intention was to incite them to attack the Muslims.”⁴⁸ This story was retold by the Muslim historian Ibn al-Athīr even though he was not an eyewitness to the event. However, Anna Comnena and other Christian chroniclers,

⁴⁶

Map of “The First Crusade: The March from Constantinople to Antioch,” in *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan V. Murray, 4 vols. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 2:328.

⁴⁸

Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 97.

Ibn al-Athīr, *Kamil at-Tawarikh*, X, 185-188, translated by Francesco Gabrieli in *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (California: University of California Press, 1969), 3-4.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

any of whom Ibn al-Athīr could have used as his source of information, give accounts of the oath that the crusaders swore to the emperor, namely, that “whatever towns, countries or forts . . . [the crusaders] managed to take which had formerly belonged to the Roman Empire, . . . [they] would deliver up to the Governor expressly sent by the Emperor for this purpose.”⁴⁹ Though this passage does not specifically refer to Antioch, Anna Comnena, the author of the *Gesta Francorum*, and Albert of Aachen all record that Bohemond and the other noblemen later renounced their oaths and promises to turn over Antioch to the Byzantine emperor after the latter, en route to Antioch to relieve the crusaders, instead returned to Constantinople upon the advice of Stephen of Blois, who had just fled from the besieged city.⁵⁰

The Fear of Yaghi Siyān

In his *History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, William, Archbishop of Tyre (d. 1185), provides historians with a brief background on the Antioch governor, Yaghi Siyān, a Turk.⁵¹ He mentions that Yaghi Siyān was a Turkic slave in the great and powerful household of the Persian sultan, Malik Shah I (1055-1092), who had been appointed governor of Antioch in 1090.⁵² Ibn al-Athīr mentions that when Yaghi Siyān learned about the forthcoming arrival of the Christian crusaders at Antioch, “he was not sure how the Christian people of the city would react, so he made the Muslims go outside the city on their own to dig trenches, and the next day sent the Christians out alone to continue the task.”⁵³ The process of digging the trench appears to have been a defensive response, or rather a way to prevent the approaching crusaders from gaining easy access to the city.⁵⁴ Yaghi Siyān also must have been worried about whether the Christians whom he had ruled for so long might turn against him and try to sack the city along with the crusaders. The interesting thing here is that both the Muslims and the local Syrian Christians were to dig the trenches.⁵⁵ Rather than only having the Christians create the trenches as a punishment for their brethren coming to claim the city, he utilized manpower of both religions, albeit separately for security reasons.

This story is also important because it shows that Yaghi Siyān was more concerned with defending his city than with having the Christian and Muslim peoples working together, even though this no doubt would have been more efficient. But in continuing his account, Ibn al-Athīr

⁴⁹ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 261 (Book X, Chapter 9); Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 110-111.

⁵⁰ Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 227-228 and 369, n. 24; Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades*, 27; Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 283-284 (Book XI, Chapter 6).

⁵¹ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, Vol. 1, translated by Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 204.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 5

⁵⁵ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 68.

Ibid.

also tell us that, when the Christians “were ready to return home at the end of the day he refused to allow them. ‘Antioch is yours,’ Yaghi Siyān told them, ‘but you will have to leave it to me until I see what happens between us and the Franks.’ ‘Who will protect our children and our wives?’ they said. ‘I shall look after them for you.’” And according to the Muslim chronicler, “He protected the families of the Christians in Antioch and would not allow a hair of their heads to be touched.”⁵⁶ Carole Hillenbrand notes this tension between Yaghi Siyān and the Syrian Orthodox Christian citizens of Antioch. “Obviously Yaghisiyan, as a Muslim Turkish overlord, was worried [about] how the local Christian population would respond to the Western Christian invaders—would they side with the Christian newcomers or remain loyal to the local Muslims with whom they lived?”⁵⁷ Erring on the side of caution, Yaghi Siyān made the Syrian Christian men leave the city and camp on the other side of the walls and trenches just in case they decided to rebel against him and side with the crusaders. The emir demanded that they stay out there until the crusaders arrived, so that he could see what it was that they desired from him. If the Christian men had joined the crusaders in taking Antioch, then Yaghi Siyān would have killed the women and children. At the same time, the Christian women and children served as a human shield against crusader aggression.

The first crusaders arrived at Antioch on October 20, 1097. Peter Tudebode, who was present, recorded that Yaghi Siyān desperately sent word to Kerbogha, requesting that a relief army be sent immediately to Antioch. “Overcome with fear of the ever-approaching crusaders, Yaghi Siyān “sent a messenger to Kerbogha, military chief of the Persian sultan, urging Kerbogha to come at the most opportune time because a very brave and formidable Frankish army had Antioch in a vise. Yaghi Siyān went on to promise his immediate surrender of Antioch to Kerbogha or great wealth if help was forthcoming.”⁵⁸ The fact that Yaghi Siyān was able to get word to Kerbogha was due to the crusaders’ inability to surround the entire city until the arrival of the main army one day later, on October 21st. Even then the reduced total number of the crusaders prevented them from besieging the back side of the city which was protected by the mountain. During the siege, this would allow the Muslims not only to supply the city, but also to sally forth periodically to harass their besiegers.⁵⁹

Yaghi Siyān, of course, knew that, even though the city could hold out for quite some time, ultimately he and his men alone would be no match for the Frankish Army. Therefore, he enlisted the help of the Atabeg of Mosul. “Yaghi Siyān has sent his youngest son, Muhammad,

⁵⁶

Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr*, X, 185-188, trans. by Gabrieli in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*,

⁵⁷

⁵⁸ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 68.

⁵⁹

Peter Tudebode, *Historia de Hierosolymitano Itinere*, 65, n. 17.

Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 162-165.

east to negotiate support from Baghdad and the rulers of Mesopotamia.”⁶⁰ Kerbogha began gathering troops to journey to Antioch; however, he would not make the journey to Antioch for several months because he needed a strategic plan to triumph over the crusaders. He also needed to build a coalition of Muslims forces.⁶¹ As reports of the crusader victory at Nicaea and their subsequent advance upon Antioch began to filter in, while still not knowing precisely when the crusaders or even his reinforcements would arrive, Yaghi Siyān began having his people gather supplies within the city such as food, weapons, and materials for building machines and defensive units in preparation for the battle to come.⁶² “They too [the citizens of Antioch], fired by an equally keen desire for the safety of the city and the general welfare, strove diligently that nothing might be wanting which might be of assistance to the citizens in a state of siege.”⁶³ In addition, the Armenian and Syrian Christian residents of Antioch were digging trenches in front of the city, from which point they could also visit the crusader camps and report back to the emir.⁶⁴ No doubt these Christians were concerned about Antioch’s fate, and perhaps their Syrian roots trumped the Christian faith that they shared with the crusaders, but they also knew that their families were being held hostage within its walls by the emir. Perhaps the emir and his advisers, too, were trying to find a way to escape.

The Crusaders Arrive and the Battle Begins

The first siege began in October 1097 and ended when the city fell in early June 1098. The author of the *Gesta Francorum* reported, “In marvelous fashion we besieged three gates of the city, since on the other side there was no place from which to besiege (them), for a very steep mountain constrained us. However, our enemies, the Turks who were within the city, were so afraid of us on all sides that none of them dared to offend any of our men”⁶⁵ Given the size of the crusader army, which even in its reduced state still numbered 10,000 or more men, the residents trapped inside the city no doubt were gravely concerned; at the same time, they also knew that taking the city would not be easy. Stephen of Blois, who was present for a time in Antioch before becoming ill and departing for home, wrote to his wife, saying, “We found the

⁶⁰

⁶¹ Ibid., 202.

⁶² Ibid., 204.

⁶³ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, 205.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Peter Tudebode, *Historia de Hieroslymitano Itinere*, 63-64.

Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum*, in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants* by August C. Krey (London: Princeton University Press, 1921), 125.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

city of Antioch very extensive, fortified with incredible strength and almost impregnable.”⁶⁶

The three gates around the front sides of the city walls are those that were besieged by the Christians. They were the Bridge Gate, Dog’s Gate, and Gate of Godfrey.⁶⁷ The other gates or entrances to the city, which the crusaders were unable to reach or block, were situated along the back wall in the mountains. Procuring supplies, for the crusaders, was necessary throughout the entirety of the six-month siege. An important location for gathering supplies for the crusaders was the port of St. Simeon, some sixteen miles distant to the west. To access the sea at St. Simeon, the crusaders needed to be able to cross the Orontes River, which bordered the city of Antioch to the west and then make the dangerous trek to the Mediterranean coast. To do so, they fashioned a make-shift bridge of boats tied together to cross the Orontes. “The Bridge of Boats may have been a rather ramshackle affair, but, as the siege continued, it gave the crusaders a crucial advantage: access to the sea.”⁶⁸ From this sea port, the crusaders could receive relief soldiers, food, weapons, and other necessities. The crusaders also took supplies as booty from Muslims that they fought on the way to Antioch; moreover, they attacked nearby towns, villages, and camps to procure supplies. Asbridge noted, “Each crusader contingent concentrated its foraging efforts on a different sector, channeling supplies back to troops at the siege front.”⁶⁹

The siege of Antioch by the crusader forces lasted six-months. While the Franks besieged Antioch, Yaghi Siyān kept the families of his Christian hostages safe just as he had promised the men whom he had exiled to the Frankish Camps. Any who tried to hurt these women and children were to face the wrath of their guardians. One purpose of keeping the women, children, and other family members of the Christians safe no doubt had been to show them that even as their brethren attacked the city, he kept his promise to them and that, if they died, it would be due to their fellow Christians and not to Muslims. Another likely rationale for keeping the women and children safe was so that Yaghi Siyān could escape from the city alive. The crusaders would not harm Christian women and children in the city; if protected them and the city fell, perhaps they would spare his life. However, things did not turn out as he anticipated. Thomas Asbridge reports, “At the same time [that the crusaders were entering Antioch], some of the native Christians still living within the city decided to turn on the Muslim garrison and began opening the city’s remaining gates.”⁷⁰ Finally, the emir’s worry had come true and his fate was sealed as he headed towards his death. The Christians who Yaghi Siyān had hoped would not betray him joined up with the crusaders; therefore, his only hope for survival was to flee the city.

How did the crusaders finally manage to break into the city? According to Ibn al-Athīr,

⁶⁶

⁶⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 158.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 209.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

an Armenian armorer named Rūzbah [or in other accounts, Zarrad or Firuz] was “offered . . . money and grants of land [by the crusaders for his help in entering the city]. They came to the window, which they opened and through which they entered.”⁷¹ The Franks then began to fight their way through the city. Unlike Yaghi Siyān, who promised to protect the families of the Christians who had dug the trenches around the city, the crusaders began slaughtering the Muslim residents. “With panic sweeping the rest of the city, Yaghi Siyan’s [*sic*] son rallied what few troops he could find and struggled up the slopes of Mount Silpius to find refuge in the fortress.”⁷² Aside from those who escaped into the citadel, no Muslim was spared, including women and children.⁷³ Thomas Asbridge reports, “Near dawn on 3 June 1098 crusaders mounted a ladder lowered by the renegade Firuz [Zarrad or Rūzbah] as Bohemond looked on. By this act of betrayal, Antioch fell to the Franks.”⁷⁴

Death of Yaghi Siyān

The ruler of Antioch panicked in fear once the Christians took over. Ibn al-Athīr tells us that the emir fled directly after the gates were opened. After traveling for some distance and then realizing what he had done, “he began to groan and weep for his desertion of his household and children. Overcome by the violence of his grief he fell fainting from his horse. His companions tried to lift him back into the saddle but they could not get him to sit up, and so they left him for dead while they escaped.”⁷⁵ Yaghi Siyān was weeping for his disgrace because he had left his family to suffer terrible fates at the hands of the crusaders. Adding to the grief that he no doubt felt throughout his body was the knowledge that he had no longer been able to keep Antioch safe and under his control. One possible explanation for the emir’s sudden fainting could be that he was older and may have suffered a heart attack. But this account also suggests that he was not as loved as he thought himself to be by those closest to him, for they left him for dead and ran for their lives in search of safety. What is perhaps most noteworthy here is that none of the members of his escape party stayed with him as he died. Of course, in their defense, his companions apparently believed him to be dying, and they themselves were already being hotly pursued; however, since they were the people whom the emir trusted the most with his life, they should have stayed with him as long as he lived and then completed their escape plan. Whatever the

⁷¹

Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period*, part 1: *The Years 491–541/1097–1146*, translated and edited by D. S. Richards, 14-15; cf. n. 79 below.

⁷² Ibid., 210.

⁷³ Ibid., 209

⁷⁴ Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, description of photo 20 which is a similar image depicted as an engraving by the 19th century French artist Gustav Doré. Also see France, *Victory in the East*, 257-258, and n. 74 above.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh (The Collection of Histories)*, X, 185-188, trans. by Gabrieli in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 6.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

case here, we are told that “an Armenian shepherd came past, killed him, cut off his head and took it to the Franks at Antioch.”⁷⁶ This is the second time that an Armenian is seen siding with the Franks, the first time being when the Armenian armorer helped the crusaders gain access to the city. The Armenians sided with the crusaders because they were also Christians and because the Armenians had been conquered and ruled by the Muslims until Baldwin retook Edessa. Meanwhile the Muslims who remained alive under the leadership of Yaghi Siyān’s son had taken to the citadel on Mount Silpius to wait for the crusaders either to leave or be killed by Kerbogha’s forces when the relief army arrived.

Robert the Monk also describes the death of Yaghi Siyān in his *Historia Iherosolimitana*.

Like Ibn-al Athīr, he too, records that the emir fled the city; however, he claims that he did so “disguised in squalid rags”; therefore, this could have been a way for Robert to describe his contempt for the emir.⁷⁷ At the same time, this suggests that Yaghi Siyān may have been trying to hide amongst the masses so the crusaders would not recognize him. An elite like the emir, dressing down in rags, might have had high hopes that he would go unnoticed, even as he reached the outskirts of the city. This was not to be the case, however. “He was unlucky enough to be recognized by the Armenians, and they cut his head off on the spot; they took it to the princes [crusader leaders] along with his belt, which they valued at 60 bezants.”⁷⁸

The Second Siege of Antioch

The second siege of Antioch is better documented than the first siege. Both the Muslims and the Christians provide their respective religious perspectives on the events that unfolded; however, differences are sometimes found within the same groups of chroniclers. As the crusaders celebrated their success in taking Antioch, Kerbogha and his army advanced to the city. According to the Christian chronicles, his forces began to arrive on June 4, 1098, just one day after the crusaders had taken Antioch, and soon they surrounded the city with the crusaders trapped inside. Running low on supplies, the crusaders sent messengers to ask for safe passage, but Kerbogha of course refused them. Meanwhile, Peter Bartholomew, a peasant traveling with the crusaders who assumed the role of a prophet, received a series of visions from St. Andrew telling him that the Holy Lance was buried in the church of St. Peter, and that with it the crusaders would win the battle. They found the Lance and after three days of processions left the city to face Kerbogha.

The Arrival of Kerbogha’s Army at Antioch

⁷⁶

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁸ Robert the Monk, *Historia Iherosolimitana*, 148.

Ibid., n. 5.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

Kerbogha, the Atabeg of Mosul, should be considered the great foe of the Christians throughout the entire second siege, not merely because he was the leader of the enemy army, but rather, because his exceptional background made him perfect for the role. Rosalind Hill, editor of the *Gesta Francorum*, observes that “Kerbogha tends, therefore, to be the subject of more speculative, even fantastical, characterization than any other Muslim leader.”⁷⁹ Kerbogha had gained his power in Mosul [located in Mesopotamia] by being an astute and merciless military commander.⁸⁰ He had many motives for fighting in the First Crusade. Above all, he wanted to take Northern Syria for himself to rule.⁸¹ Far from the sole ruler of a united Muslim force, however, Kerbogha needed time to consolidate his forces and to plan his attack on the crusaders at Antioch. Thus he planned for six months before making the journey to Antioch to face his opponents. As Thomas Asbridge has observed, “They [Kerbogha’s prospective subordinates] knew that he might one day lead the Seljuq world, and they chose now to be his ally rather than his enemy.”⁸² The reason that he was able to build such a massive army from so many different Muslim factions stemmed in large part, not only from his shrewdness, but also from his intimidating demeanor and the fear that he struck in them while they were in their presence.⁸³

As mentioned above, the purpose of Kerbogha’s coming to Antioch in the first place was from a letter sent by the late Yaghi Siyān via his son, Muhammad. As Muhammad delivered the letter, the envoys “took their hats off and threw them to the ground, they savagely plucked out their beards with their nails, they pulled at and tore their hair out by the roots with their fingers, and they heaved sighs in great lamentations.”⁸⁴ This act clearly had dramatized the severity of the situation at Antioch. The second siege began with Kerbogha’s entry into the spotlight. After months of planning and gathering troops, Kerbogha’s moment in history had finally come. “The crusaders had stolen and battled their way into Antioch, but their success came not a moment too soon. On the very next day, June 4th, Kerbogha’s army began to arrive.”⁸⁵

The Battle for Control of Antioch Begins

The arrival of Kerbogha’s forces quickly changed the crusaders’ status from besiegers to besieged. As the crusaders waited out the Muslim army inside the city, they took in their

⁷⁹

Anonymous, *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, Edited by Rosalind Hill

⁸⁰ (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 68.

⁸¹ Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 203.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 204.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 202.

Ibid., 211.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

surroundings. The anonymous eyewitness Norman crusader recorded that “all the squares of the city were filled with the bodies of the dead and no one could stay there because of the terrible stench. One could not walk through the city streets without treading upon the bodies of the slain.”⁸⁶ Though the dead littered the earth beneath their feet, there was still a twofold threat with which the crusaders had to concern themselves.



Figure 2: Modern Day Citadel of Antioch⁸⁷

Figure 2 shows the mountaintop once commanded by the citadel of Antioch. Not much of Antioch remains today, but the photo above clearly shows its formidable location. Even after the crusaders had taken the city, the anonymous Norman tells us, “the citadel of Antioch, high up on the Mount Silpius, but still within the city, was in enemy hands.”⁸⁸ The enemy [Muslims] had fled there for protection after the emir’s death. From the crusaders’ perspective, there had never been such a worrisome moment in time. Now they had to direct their attention not only to the threatening army on the outside of the walls, but also to the enemy inside the citadel as well. Meanwhile, supplies in the city were running critically low.

Dilemmas Facing the Muslim and Crusader Armies

As the struggle between these two religious armies continued, many obstacles arose for both the Muslims and the Christians. Due to the large size of the city, Antioch “presented problems to the crusaders as defenders, just as it had when they were the besiegers.”⁸⁹ By the time that the

⁸⁶

Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, VIII, 20, Edited and Translated by James A. Brundage in *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey* (Wisconsin: The Marquette University Press, 1962), 56-57.

Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, photo 19, available at: erenow.com/postclassical/thefirstcrusadeanewhistorythomasasbridge/37.html, photo 19 (accessed 12 December 2016).

Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, VIII, 20, Brundage in *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey*, 57.

Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 216.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

crusaders had taken Antioch from the Muslims during the first siege, they were short on supplies, physically weak, lacking man-power, and running out of hope. Now that they occupied the city, not only did the defense pose problems, but, with the city surrounded by Kerbogha's army, the crusaders' remaining supplies dwindled quickly. One Frankish eyewitness reminisced:

The blasphemous enemies of God kept us so closely shut up in the city of Antioch that many of us died of hunger, for a small loaf cost a bezant [a Byzantine gold coin], and I cannot tell you the price of wine. Our men ate the flesh of horses and asses; a hen cost fifteen shillings, an egg two, and a walnut a penny. All things were very dear. So terrible was the famine that men boiled and ate the leaves of figs, vines, thistles and all kinds of trees. Others stewed the dried skins of horses, camels, asses, oxen or buffaloes, which they ate.⁹⁰

It can definitely be seen that nothing was going well for the crusaders. As the amount of food diminished, the worries of the Franks increased. "The majority of the knights, expecting God's compassion, refused to slaughter their horses but did sustain themselves with their [horses'] blood."⁹¹ This way the knights still had a steed on which to ride into battle as well as their own lives sustained, but their horses clearly must have been weakened from the loss of blood. They sent messengers to Kerbogha seeking for "safe-conduct through his territory but he refused, saying, 'You will have to fight your way out.'⁹² With both a superior force and position, Kerbogha chose to await the exit of the Christians from the city.

With his arrogance running high, Kerbogha's followers were becoming agitated. Ibn al-Athīr records that Kerbogha "angered the emirs and lorded it over them, imagining that they would stay with him despite that. However, infuriated by this, they secretly planned to betray him, if there should be a battle, and they determined to give him up when the armies clashed."⁹³ With their plan kept between them and out of the ears of their leader, the lack of loyalty evinced here by the emirs in the end would constitute a major blow to Kerbogha and threaten his chance for victory. Meanwhile the crusaders had been fighting together for months and shared a religious faith and a cause; therefore, even if they were not unified, they were able to work together in their fight for the Lord. Kerbogha's gigantic army, in contrast, had been put together in a hurry and from differing regions across North Syria and Mesopotamia. The unity that they needed never came nor did the strong, firm, disciplined hand required to keep the emirs in line.⁹⁴ Carole Hillenbrand has observed:

⁹⁰

⁹¹ Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum*, 62-63.

⁹² Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, 59.

⁹³ Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 7-8.

⁹⁴ Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir: for the Crusading Period*, 16.

Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 234.

Ibn al-Qalānisi's account of the actual battle of Antioch (26 Rajab 491/approximately 29 June 1098), when the Muslims came to recapture the city, is vague and inadequate. The relieving army of Syria besieged the Franks until 'they were reduced to eating carrion'. His narrative then continues: "Thereafter the Franks, though they were in the extremity of weakness, advanced in battle order against the armies of Islam, which were at the height of strength and numbers, and they broke the ranks of the Muslims and scattered their multitudes." . . . The chronicler is honest enough to admit that the Muslims were numerically superior and that the Franks were weak with hunger.⁹⁵

Ibn al-Qalānisi's account shows that the Franks' supplies were running low and that they were so desperate for food that they had resorted to eating their horses. Even though they were physically weak, however, they would still fight and defeat the Muslim army of Kerbogha. On June 10th, the crusaders decided to attack Kerbogha before he could mount a full-scale assault on the city.

Using a small postern gate further south along the ridge of Mount Silpius they deployed a force to harry Kerbogha's camp. The crusaders managed to drive them into a retreat, but as they began to loot the camp Kerbogha issued a counterattack on the crusaders. Those who could made a chaotic flight back to the postern gate, but as a Frankish eyewitness recalled, this 'was so terribly strait and narrow that many of the people were trampled to death in the crowd.'⁹⁶

The crusaders had not planned on the counter-attack that Kerbogha ordered. The southern gate that the crusaders had destroyed and left was very narrow, so there was little to no room for all of the retreating crusaders to gain the city and escape Kerbogha's counter-attack. The crusaders themselves were shocked to see the strength and cunning of the Muslim leader and his men. The relentless attacks continued for two days. At the same time, Muslim warriors poured out of the citadel to attack the crusaders from the rear. One crusader eyewitness related that "many gave up hope and hurriedly lowered themselves with ropes from the wall tops [in an attempted suicide/martyrdom because of the lack of hope they had in beating Kerbogha's army]; and in the city soldiers returning from the encounter circulated widely a rumour that mass decapitation of the defenders was in store."⁹⁷

The death toll was high. Panic now spread throughout the city, but also throughout the crusader forces. Asbridge concludes, "The crusader leaders were able to calm their troops only by each swearing an oath not to abandon Antioch. . . . Those who stayed somehow managed to hold their ground on Mount Silpius for four long days. In part they survived through sheer,

⁹⁵

⁹⁶ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 57.

⁹⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 216.

Ibid., 217.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

bloody-minded determination and martial skill.”⁹⁸ By having the crusaders take an oath, they were ensuring that the men would not try to kill themselves or desert in time of war. Before swearing this oath, despondent crusaders were committing suicide by throwing themselves off of Antioch’s walls or by lowering themselves by ropes to face certain death at the hands of the Muslims. The crusaders managed to fend off Kerbogha’s attacks for the first few days; as they did so, they decided to construct a wall of defense inside of the city. The purpose of the wall was to “cut off the citadel from the rest of the city, thus lessening the immediate danger from that quarter.”⁹⁹ Military crusade historian John France observes, “The Anonymous twice refers to the building of this wall; on the first occasion after he tells us how the deserters fled to St Symeon, which would imply a date of June 11-12, 1098; the second was the day on which a meteor fell into the enemy camp, the night of June 13-14. It seems likely, however, that the wall could be built because Kerbogha changed the emphasis of his attack.”¹⁰⁰ Rather than concentrating his forces to attack strategic points, Kerbogha now decided to spread his forces out and attack the walls of the city on all sides. While this no doubt also spread the crusader forces thinly, the absence of a concentrated Muslim attack on the city allowed a handful of men to build a wall that would block any further internal attacks from the citadel.

The Finding of the Holy Lance

With both their hope of winning the battle against Kerbogha and their faith in God fading, the crusaders needed encouragement. At this critical juncture, just when all despaired, a poor Provençal Christian by the name of Peter Bartholomew stepped forward and, on 10 June 1098, declared that he had been given visions from God. These visions had been delivered to him periodically by St. Andrew, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, for more than a year.¹⁰¹ St. Andrew explained that the only way to rejuvenate the lost faith of the crusaders would be to locate the Holy Lance, also known as the Lance of Longinus because it had been used by a Roman centurion, traditionally named in medieval sources as Longinus, to pierce the side of Christ during his crucifixion. This same Holy Lance, St. Andrew revealed to Peter Bartholomew, lay buried in the Basilica of St. Peter at Antioch.¹⁰² As a relic, Catholics believed, this Holy Lance possessed the miraculous power of Christ, thus the ability to aid his followers whenever they needed Him most. It was now to be used to prevent the enemy from reclaiming Antioch. As Thomas Asbridge observed, “Of all the relics in the Christian world, an item from Christ’s own

⁹⁸

⁹⁹ Ibid., 218.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, VIII, 20, Brundage in *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey*, 57.

¹⁰¹ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 276.

¹⁰² Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 221.

Ibid., 222.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

life was considered to be the most precious and powerful, so the potential significance of the Holy Lance was immeasurable.”¹⁰³ It was the power of Christ embodied within the rusty weapon which, Catholics believed, had once pierced the side of Christ that would lead the crusaders to victory against the Muslim army.

During this crucial moment in the First Crusade the religious faith and emotional state of the crusaders were in such despair that the recovery of the Holy Lance would truly have seemed a miracle, perhaps too much of one to be credible. In fact, the eyewitness Raymond of Aguilers recorded that some of the crusaders refused to believe in Peter’s visions and the discovery of the Holy Lance. “The Bishop [Adhémar of Le Puy] took this tale to be nothing but a story,” we are told; “the Count [that is, Raymond of St. Gilles], however, believed it and put the narrator in the custody of Raymond, his chaplain.”¹⁰⁴ Another eyewitness, the anonymous Norman, left us the following account in his *Gesta Francorum*:

On [the 14th of June] twelve men and Peter Bartholomew collected the appropriate tools and began to dig in the church of the Blessed Peter, following the expulsion of all other Christians . . . But the youthful Peter Bartholomew, seeing the exhaustion of our workers, stripped his outer garments and, clad only in a shirt and barefooted, dropped into the hole. He then begged us to pray to God to return His Lance to the crusaders so as to bring strength and victory to His people. Finally, in His mercy, the Lord showed his Lance and I, Raymond, author of this book, kissed the point of the Lance as it barely protruded from the ground. . . . When our men [the crusaders] heard that their enemies were destined to be altogether defeated their spirits revived at once, and they began to encourage one another. . . .”¹⁰⁵

Despite Peter Bartholomew’s visions, after a full day of digging the crusaders still had been unable to find the Holy Lance. In the end, it had been Peter Bartholomew himself who had done so. Perhaps he knew its location from his visions; perhaps he knew it because he had buried it there himself; perhaps he had it in his hand as he jumped into the hole to continue the work of the exhausted crusaders. The truth will never be known, but whatever transpired in St. Peter’s Church that day, a lance had been found and the hopes of many were reborn as a result. Perhaps it was indeed the Holy Lance, but it is just as likely that Peter Bartholomew had simply picked up a lance from the masses of dead soldiers and buried it in the ground late at night while the others present were praying for its revelation. Since the bodies of dead citizens and soldiers littered the ground of Antioch, Peter Bartholomew easily could have taken a lance from a Christian or Muslim soldier’s dead body. Lances, after all, were one of the main weapons used

¹⁰³

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 222-223.

¹⁰⁵ Raymond of Aguilers, in *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey* by Brundage, 60.

Anonymous, *The Deeds of the Franks*, trans. Hill, 59-60.

during the crusades. Marius Kjørmo provides an interesting notion in his thesis concerning the authority attributed to the Holy Lance following the crusader victory:

The discovery of a piece of metal in the ground by a disreputable character might not have convinced everyone, but if the crusaders believed that the only reason for their unlikely victory was by the grace of God, that would be a testament to the authenticity of the Holy Lance. This would also explain why Bohemond and his Norman and northern-French compatriots would feel the need to confront the Provençals and demand proof that the Lance was in fact real.¹⁰⁶

What makes this so interesting is that Kjørmo states that Peter Bartholomew is a “disreputable” person. Since he was a barefooted poor man and was even accused by some of lying about the Holy Lance, it is possible that he said that he had reported these “visits” by St. Andrew in order to boost his own status and credibility among the crusader leaders.

In the *Gesta Tancredi*, Raoul of Caen claims that the entire discovery of the Holy Lance was staged and was fueled by a dispute between Bohemond and Raymond. “The visions were devised by a member of Raymond’s army, a ‘versatile fabricator of lies, Peter.’ The discovery of the lance was a fraud, for the same Peter had found an Arab spear point, which was unfamiliar to the Franks by its form, and claimed in the darkness to have discovered it during the excavation in the cathedral.”¹⁰⁷ This version of the story contains several new developments. First, the lance that is found is part of an Arab lance and not a Frankish lance. Since the lance tip was foreign to the crusaders, Peter Bartholomew could have easily claimed that this was the Lance of Longinus. Raoul, however, goes on to say that Peter Bartholomew was also a liar.¹⁰⁸

In regard to Peter Bartholomew’s finding the Holy Lance, the anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum* recorded something oddly suspicious of Peter Bartholomew. Prior to telling the crusader leaders about the visions from St. Andrew, Peter Bartholomew was visited once more. The Anonymous recorded, “But Peter, afraid to reveal the advice of the apostle, was unwilling to make it known to the pilgrims. However, he thought that he had seen a vision, and said: ‘Lord, who would believe this?’ But at this hour St. Andrew took him and carried him to the place where the Lance was hidden in the ground.”¹⁰⁹ This depicts another suspicious act by Peter Bartholomew. Had he known the exact location of the Holy Lance, then there would have been no need for the excavation to occur. His entire story is full of oddities and actions that are

¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁷ Kjørmo, “The Holy Lance of Antioch,” 71.

Raoul of Caen, paraphrased by Colin Morris in “Policy and Visions: The Case of the Holy Lance at Antioch,” in *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, ed. John Gillingham and J. C. Holt (Totowa, New Jersey: The Boydell Press, 1984), 33-45 at 38.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum*, in *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulchre of Chartres and Other Source Materials* edited by Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 214.

questionable at best. Perhaps he had truly experienced visions by St. Andrew and the lance that he discovered was the Holy Lance which once had pierced the side of Christ. And yet, by claiming to know the location of the Lance and asking everyone present to pray for him while he uncovered it, Peter would have had no trouble staging its supposed “discovery.”

The Muslim Response to the Holy Lance

The story of the Holy Lance was documented by Muslim chroniclers as well as Christian historians. In contrast to crusader accounts, the Muslim chronicler, Ibn Taghribirdi, attributes the find not to Peter Bartholomew’s visions, but rather, to Raymond of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse. According to Ibn Taghribirdi, Raymond, the cunning and sly (but also, as known from the crusader sources, deeply pious) leader of the Franks, arranged a ruse with a monk [Peter Bartholomew] by commanding him, “Go and bury this lance in such-and-such a place. Then tell the Franks afterward, ‘I saw the Messiah in a dream saying, “In such-and-such a place there is a lance buried, so go and look for it, for if you find it the victory is yours. It is my lance.”’” So they fasted for three days [beginning on June 25, 1098] and prayed and gave alms and went out to the Muslims, and they fought them until they drove them out of the town.”¹¹⁰ Clearly Ibn Taghribirdi was trying to attribute the find and subsequent Muslim defeat to crusader falsehood. Both the Christians and the Muslims, in fact, record that the crusaders processed barefoot publicly and fasted for three days after finding the Holy Lance in order to regain their spiritual faith.

The Muslim chronicler Ibn al-Athīr explains that the “Muslims said to Kerbuqa [*sic*]: ‘You should go up to the city and kill them one by one as they come out; it is easy to pick them off now that they have split up. He replied: ‘No, wait until they have all come out and then we will kill them.’”¹¹¹ His ill-advised response did not sit well with those who followed him, for they knew that this would allow the crusaders to assemble in full battle formation before beginning their attack. “When all the Franks had come out and not one was left in Antioch,” Ibn al-Athīr reported, “they began to attack strongly, and the Muslims turned and fled. This was Kerbuqa’s fault, first because he had treated the Muslims with such contempt and scorn, and second because he had prevented their killing the Franks.”¹¹² Thus the chronicler’s explanation for the Muslim defeat differs considerably from that of the *Gesta Francorum*, even though many of the details of the story are found in the sources of both sides.

Embassy of Peter the Hermit to Kerbogha

Oddly, following the discovery of the Holy Lance on June 14th, the crusaders undertook no assault for two weeks. Not until June 28th did the now-famous encounter between the two sides

¹¹⁰

¹¹¹ Ibid., 314.

¹¹² Gabrieli, *The Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 8.

Ibid., 8.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

take place. Thomas Asbridge wrote, “No evidence survives to indicate that the crusaders were actively prevented from initiating military action against their Muslim besiegers between 14 and 28 June.”¹¹³ Unclear even today is exactly why the crusaders waited two weeks before attacking the Muslims. Perhaps they simply needed time to recover from the days of ambush and attack that had preceded the discovery of the Lance. No doubt, too, their forces had been reduced by several hundred crusaders during the assault on the city. If they accepted the authority of the Holy Lance and Peter Bartholomew’s account of his visions by St. Andrew, however, it did not make sense for the crusaders to have waited to fight Kerbogha. After all, they had run out of supplies and famine and disease were already killing many of the crusaders and their horses. They were nearing the end, and only by one last valiant effort could they still be saved.¹¹⁴

At least some skepticism about the Holy Lance remained, however. Even though *a* lance had been found, the all-important question of whether or not this lance was *the* Lance that had pierced the side of Jesus during his Crucifixion remained. One reason that some of the crusaders [including Bishop Adhémar] had refused to believe Peter’s story when they had first heard it was because in 1097 the bishop had personally seen what was ostensibly the Holy Lance on display in Constantinople. Clearly only one of these lances (if even that) could be authentic.¹¹⁵ Still, most of the crusaders accepted its authenticity, perhaps because of their faith in visions and the power of relics, perhaps because they had little else in which to hope. The discovery of the Lance restored their faith, which ultimately translated into a miraculous victory over the Muslim army. As historian Hans Eberhard Mayer noted, “The immediate effects of the discovery were enormous. The army’s morale was raised and all were united in urgent determination to break the blockade and destroy Kerbogha.”¹¹⁶ But if that was the case, why did the crusaders not surge out of Antioch to attack Kerbogha’s army on June 15th?

In Albert of Aachen’s account, there is a new event that is brought center stage. During the two-week interim, even though they were short on supplies, the crusaders sent an embassy led by Peter the Hermit to Kerbogha in the hope of reaching some sort of agreement. Peter the Hermit reportedly opened with the following message:

Karbogha [sic], most renowned and glorious prince in your kingdom, I am the messenger of Duke Godfrey, Bohemond, and the princes of the entire Christian multitude: do not scorn to listen to their decisions and advice which I am carrying. The leaders of the

¹¹³

Thomas Asbridge, *The Holy Lance: Power, Devotion and Memory on the First Crusade*, [https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/GCMS/RMS-2007-01 T. Asbridge, The Holy Lance of Antioch.pdf](https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/GCMS/RMS-2007-01_T._Asbridge,_The_Holy_Lance_of_Antioch.pdf) (accessed 10 December 2016), 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*, trans. John Bennett Gillingham (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 52. Cf. Rosalind Hill’s comments in the Introduction to *The Deeds of the Franks and the other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, xxxiv.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

Christian army have decided that if you will consent to believe in Lord Christ who is the true God and son of God, and will renounce gentile superstitions, they will become your soldiers and, restoring the estate of Antioch into your hands, they are prepared to serve you as lord and prince.¹¹⁷

By this message the crusaders were saying that if Kerbogha and his men would convert to Christianity then the crusaders would become their allies. They would be willing to fight with the Muslims against whatever enemies that they encountered (which presumably might have included Byzantium). By saying that they would serve him as their superior meant that they were willing to serve him as if he were one of their own. “Karbogha [sic] scorned to listen to this, much less to do it. Indeed he instructed Peter the Hermit in his sacrilegious rites and the doctrines of the gentiles, declaring that he would never give them up.”¹¹⁸ Thus Kerbogha countered by trying to convert Peter the Hermit to Islam. Finally, Peter revealed an alternative proposal from the crusaders:

“It still seems,” he said, “to the Christian princes, that since you are reluctant to have such eminent men put under you, and you refuse to become a Christian, you should choose twenty young knights from your multitude, and the Christians will do the same, and, with hostages given on both sides, and an oath sworn on both sides—you in your God, they in theirs—they should join you in single combat in the middle. And if the Christians do not obtain victory they will return to their own lands peacefully and without injury, restoring Antioch to you. If, though, your men are unable to triumph, you and yours will withdraw peacefully from the siege, leaving the city and land to us, and you will not allow so great an army to perish in fighting one another.”¹¹⁹

Kerbogha then instructed Peter the Hermit to relay the following message to his leaders:

“Know one thing, Peter, that the Christians should choose, namely to send all their unbearded youth to us, as slaves to me and my lord the king of Khurasan, and we shall bestow on them great favours and gifts. Similarly girls who are still virgins shall have access to us, and permission to live. But men with beards or any grey hair are for beheading, with the married women. Otherwise I shall spare no one on grounds of age, but shall destroy them all by the sword, whom moreover I shall wrap in chains and iron fetters.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷

¹¹⁸ Albert of Aachen, *History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, 166.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 167.

Ibid.

There was no way that Kerbogha planned on giving up Antioch to the crusaders without a fight. The young men that the crusaders were to hand over would be personal slaves to his leaders and him; however, the virgins would most likely be raped and used as sex slaves or child brides for the men. The enslaved boys might receive the gift of life rather than any actual favors or material gifts but there is no way that a slave would be given riches. Those who were older than the preferred slaves would be slain. The married women would be murdered to prevent any children who could grow up to destroy the Muslim army. If they refused to agree to his terms, the crusaders would die fighting against Kerbogha's army. Needless to say, Kerbogha's message gave the crusaders ample reason to fear and worry. Their leaders decided that the knights and local residents should not learn what had transpired between the two sides. They thus had no knowledge of the conversation that had taken place between Peter the Hermit and Kerbogha.

A Crusader Victory: End of the Second Siege of Antioch

On June 25, 1098, the crusaders began their three days of processions from church to church, fasting and confessing their sins to the members of the clergy, and celebrating the Eucharist.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Kerbogha resided at his camp and began to create another plan of attack on the crusaders even as a member of Kerbogha's army brought him several weapons of deceased Franks.

As he sat on his throne, they brought him a Frankish sword which was in abysmal condition, blunt and covered in filthy rust. They also brought a lance in equally bad state—indeed it made the sword look good in comparison. When Kerbogha saw these, he said: 'Who can tell us where these arms were found? And why have they been brought into our presence?' . . . Kerbogha smiled and said: 'It is quite obvious that these people are completely mad. If they think they can conquer the Kingdom of Persia for themselves with this kind of weapons they are not in their right minds.'¹²²

The lance that was brought to Kerbogha suggests the possibility that the Holy Lance, later found by the Christians, was just a normal lance after all. Lances were common weapons used in the Middle Ages, and they were not difficult to make. The weapons from the dead Franks were either from the counter-attack that Kerbogha had led after the crusaders had ransacked his camp, or perhaps they were left from the first siege. There is no response to any of the rhetorical questions that the Muslim Army leader has asked. Upon seeing these Frankish weapons, Kerbogha became filled with even greater arrogance and contempt for the crusaders than that which he already possessed. This hubris led him to conclude that his enemies stood no chance against him whatsoever, a false sense of security clearly reinforced by the finding of the rusty

¹²¹

¹²² Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 232.

Robert the Monk, *Robert the Monk's Historia Iherosolimitana*, 153.

weapons.

Meanwhile, the crusaders prepared for three days with prayers and processions to ensure God's favor in the forthcoming battle. Just to be sure, however, as they were preparing to leave the city for battle, the Catholic clergy came out carrying crosses and praying for the victory of the crusaders, as well as blessing the men with the Sign of the Cross. "So we closed our ranks, and, protected by the Sign of the Cross, we went out by the gate which is over against the mosque."¹²³ Raymond of Toulouse carried the Holy Lance into battle at the front of the crusaders' ranks.

As the crusaders began exiting the city to face Kerbogha and his troops, a few Muslims attacked and killed some of them. This went against Kerbogha's orders, and so he personally stopped them from doing any more damage to their enemy. As noted above, he felt that their

efforts would be more successful if they waited for the crusaders to exit the city and then attacked the crusaders all at one time. The emirs under his leadership, however, felt otherwise.

The crusaders rallied their troops and formed their battle lines. Kerbogha finally went out to meet his enemies, but he was compelled to do so, for the most part, alone, for only a handful of his Muslim warriors stood with him. Those who did were mercenaries or members of his previous armies. Some of Kerbogha's army fled in terror as the crusaders attacked while those who had planned to betray him carried out their plan. When the crusaders attacked, they seized the opportunity to abandon Kerbogha and his abusive ways. Astounded, the crusaders watched the enemy flee in a confused state, but they rejected the temptation to follow their fleeing enemies out of fear of a possible Muslim trap. "The only Muslims to stand firm were a detachment of warriors from the Holy Land, who fought to acquire merit in God's eyes and to seek martyrdom."¹²⁴ As the final Muslims were either being killed or fleeing the Christians, "Karbogha [Kerbogha] fled with them."¹²⁵ Amazingly, the crusaders, who believed they were going towards their deaths, in fact had won the battle. Kerbogha had fled the battlefield, losing his possessions but retaining his life.

As they left, the Crusaders prepared themselves for an attack from the citadel; however, just as before (during the beginning of the sieges) there was no attack. "Within hours the Muslim garrison of Antioch's citadel surrendered and the whole city was at last truly and safely in Latin Hands. The significance of the Great Battle of Antioch cannot be over-stressed. It was, without doubt, the single most important military engagement of the entire expedition."¹²⁶

A True Victory for the Crusaders?

¹²³

¹²⁴ Anonymous, *The Deeds of the Franks and the other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 68.

¹²⁵ Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 9.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 17.

Ibid., 239; France, *Victory in the East*, 297.

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

According to both sides of the spectrum, the crusaders should have lost this battle. The only way that the Christians could have won the battle was purely by a miracle. Al-'Azimi, a contemporary of the Arab historian, Ibn al-Qalānisi, places the blame on the Muslims for their loss of the city of Antioch. "They [the Franks] were extremely weak and the Muslims were strong. The Muslims were defeated, because of the evil of their intentions."¹²⁷ Once the crusaders marched from the city, Kerbogha had no desire to meet them head on. If he had been paying any sort of attention to his enemies, rather than staying "in his tent playing chess," and if he had been more receptive to the strategies and advice of his subordinates, then the battle might have resulted in a far different outcome.¹²⁸ So although they might not have known it as they left the city and formed their ranks, the odds were actually in the crusaders' favor. The addition of the clergy carrying crosses and praying for victory while blessing the men with the Sign of the Cross only added to the crusaders' confidence and prospects for victory.

Clearly the crusaders' faith had been "replenished" after Peter Bartholomew found the Holy Lance. Had Christ helped the crusaders find it in order that they might win the battle? Or did Peter Bartholomew place the Lance where the crusaders were digging on purpose? The truth can never be known to modern historians because the only people that would know are part of history itself. From the lack of evidence, however, one can speculate, much like the Muslim chroniclers had done, that the lance discovered was not that of Longinus, but simply a regular lance that had been found by Peter Bartholomew. Later that same summer (in early August 1098), Raymond d'Aguilers reports, the now-deceased Bishop Adhémar, who had recanted of his former doubts and accepted the Lance's authenticity, was buried in the floor of the Basilica of St. Peter at the very spot where the lance had been found. Two days after his death, the bishop appeared to Peter Bartholomew. Thomas Asbridge pointed out the brilliance of the reconstructed history here. "The physical fusion of the two cults—a masterstroke of manipulation—was reinforced once Peter began relaying the bishop's 'words' from beyond the grave, revealing that Adhémar now recognized the authenticity of the Lance and that his soul had been severely punished for the sin of having doubted the relic"¹²⁹ Later Christian sources even depicted Adhémar as having carried the Lance into battle.¹³⁰ A few months after Adhémar's death, however, Peter Bartholomew felt compelled once again to defend the authenticity of the Holy Lance by undergoing an ordeal of trial by fire, as a result of which he died twelve days later.¹³¹ So the controversy over the authenticity of the Holy Lance remains, though the resulting crusader victory at Antioch is beyond dispute.

¹²⁷

¹²⁸ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 57.

¹²⁹ Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, 236.

¹³⁰ Asbridge, "The Holy Lance of Antioch," 22-23.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Ibid., 23.

Conclusion

The purpose and progress of the first and second sieges of Antioch have been analyzed by modern historians through the perspectives of various chroniclers, but there has never been a full explanation for the outcome. The first siege of Antioch, however, holds clues that can help clarify the siege that followed. As the crusaders traveled to the city of Antioch from Constantinople, they had to fight several battles before facing Yaghi Siyān and his men. By taking Antioch the crusaders would be one step closer to regaining Jerusalem. By conquering Antioch, the crusaders also would reinstate their right to control the birthplace of Christianity; controlling Antioch once again would restore its place as a Christian city, as it had been centuries earlier when it had been a Metropolitan. With Antioch's walls and defenses in their sights, however, the crusaders needed to find a way inside. They did this by bribing an Armenian armorer named Ruzbah with money and land. He provided them with access to ladders and allowed the Christian crusaders to enter the city and take Yaghi Siyān by surprise. Knowing that he held little chance of defeating the army with greater numbers and amidst the panic that seized the residents of the city, the emir of Antioch then fled, which inevitably led to his death. This allowed the crusaders to take the city rather easily; however, once news of Kerbogha's approaching relief army filled their ears, they realized the folly of their actions and the desperateness of their situation. Meanwhile, inside the walls of Antioch the crusaders wasted no time in slaughtering its Muslim residents. Men, women, children, scholars, the elderly—it mattered not to the crusaders whom they killed, so long as they could obtain their goal. Thus Muslims who might have been able to provide historical documentation of the conquest were presumably slain during the first siege.

With regard to the second siege, it seems clear that the Christian army, starving and growing weaker by the day in body and faith, should never have won the battle against Kerbogha's army. To the Muslim chroniclers, the crusaders' reliance upon the Holy Lance reflected proof that Christianity was a blind and shallow faith. The Christian historians, on the other hand, saw things differently, yet even they did not agree on the Lance's authenticity. What was clear, however, was the impact of its discovery upon the morale of the crusaders. However they might have appeared to the Muslims and even to us today, relics constituted an important component of the medieval Christian faith. Beyond the faith factor, whenever one is in great danger or filled with excitement, adrenaline pulsates through the body and allows the person (or people) to perform actions that he might not otherwise be able to accomplish. Additionally, in this case, the religious motivational speeches, prayers, and processions of the Christian leaders, coupled with the belief of many in the power of the Holy Lance, reinvigorated the crusaders and gave them the courage to face Kerbogha with little to no fear. The consequences were enormous, as Carole Hillenbrand has observed. Indeed, without a victory at Antioch it would be hard to imagine the retaking of Jerusalem or any subsequent crusades.

The real reason for the Crusader victory at Antioch is much more prosaic. Behind the

The Struggle for the Conquest of Antioch (1097-1098)

bland statements that, even though the Crusaders were hungry and weak and the Muslims were numerically strong, the Crusaders somehow managed to win the day, is the unpalatable truth that this was probably *the* turning point for the First Crusade. The Muslim commanders of Syria came together to relieve Antioch but in the decentralised political climate of the day they were unable even to stay together long enough to achieve victory.¹³²

Ibn Taghribirdi, on the other hand, attributed the Muslim defeat to the Egyptian Fatimids. He specifically blamed “al-Afdal, the vizier of Egypt, for not sending out the Fatimid armies to join the Syrian commanders: I do not know the reason for his not sending them out, [what] with his strength in money . . . “¹³³ If Kerbogha had been a better leader in kindness and mind, however, the Muslims still might have been the victors. Clearly “disunity and infighting underlay this Muslim defeat, against all expectations and against distinctly underwhelming odds, outside Antioch.”¹³⁴

From the First Crusade, and especially from the two Sieges of Antioch, there are lessons to be learned for us living today. As in the eleventh century, we still have Muslim and Christian persecution. If both religions could set aside their hatred, both past and present, they would see that they share many similarities and goals. Another lesson to be learned for Christians and Muslims today would be that it is important to study both sides of the story because each side will leave out important details; on the other hand, it is impossible for one side to know the entire chain of events from the other’s perspective.

¹³²

¹³³ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 59.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Ibid., 58.