

Background to 1096AD

Western Europe

In **1095AD** following an appeal for military aid, against the Seljuk Turks of Anatolia, by the **East Roman Emperor Alexius I Comnenus**, **Pope Urban II** in Rome proclaimed a Crusade across all the Catholic European nations, stating that all sins would be forgiven for those that chose to join the Crusade.

Europe at this time was full of landless Knights, men who had been disposed of their lands, junior sons who had no land allocated to them, hundreds of Churchmen & Nuns, seeking divine guidance, plus many vagabonds, criminals & greedy merchants that jumped at the chance to go on Crusade to make money & absolve their numerous crimes & sins. The large numbers of peasants that pledged themselves to the Cross came as a huge shock to both Pope Urban & the Emperor Alexius. However, as the ball had now been set to roll, both leaders prepared resources to manage this large movement of Christian souls.

In **1096AD** the '**People's Crusade**', led by a fraud called **Peter the Hermit** & a humble knight called **Walter Sans-Avoir** (The Penniless), caused havoc as it crossed eastern Europe, looting & pillaging other Christian communities for supplies & wealth. In many cities the Jewish populations were slaughtered, with the Roman Catholic Church rarely being able to protect them. A few smaller 'Peoples Crusader' groups were slaughtered & captured by the Hungarian State, as they had firstly been attacked by them.

However finally, after being disciplined by the Byzantine Emperor, with a few hundred Pilgrims being killed, they were shipped over the Bosphorus into Anatolia.

The numerous elements of the '**Princes Crusade**', took various routes across Europe, some overland & some by Sea, but led by the **Papal Legate Ademar Le Puy**. More disciplined than any of the 'Peoples Crusade' movements, they arrived after fewer mishaps than their predecessors, arriving at the Byzantine Court in smaller groupings & being welcomed by the Byzantine Emperor.

Western Europe at this time was mainly **Catholic Christian**, with its head being the **Pope Urban II** in Rome.

There were disputes between the Western & Eastern branches of the Christian religion, as to which one was preeminent between the two

The Byzantine Empire

Alexios I Komnenos was **Byzantine Emperor** from 1081 to 1118. After usurping the throne, he was faced with a collapsing empire & constant warfare throughout his reign, Alexios was able to curb the Byzantine decline & begin the military, financial & territorial recovery known as the Komnenian restoration.

His appeals to Western Europe for help against the Seljuk Turks were the catalyst that sparked the First Crusade. Although he was not the first emperor of the Komnenian dynasty, it was during his reign that the Komnenos family came to full power & initiated a hereditary succession to the throne.

Alexios was shocked at the large numbers of Pilgrims that arrived on the borders of his lands from the west & also appalled by the rapacious nature of the so called members of the 'Peoples Crusade'. Having seen the levels of killings, thievery & destruction that these undisciplined groups had caused enroute to Constantinople, he finally had to attack them & kill a few hundred, once they began attacking towns & cities in his Empire. However, once he had restored order, he shipped the members of the 'Peoples Crusade' across to Anatolia with haste, leaving them to find their own way to Jerusalem.

The religiously the **Byzantine Empire** at this time was under the **Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople**, who was then **Michael I Cerularius** & the mainly Grecian population were of the **Eastern Orthodox Church**.

The Armenians

In 1096, Armenian lords were a complex mix of actors, some aligned with the First Crusade, others actively resisting its advance, & some remaining neutral. The situation varied across different regions & was influenced by local power dynamics & relationships with the crusaders & other regional powers like the Seljuk Sultanate.

The situation therefore for the Western Crusaders, The Byzantines, the Seljuk's & the Armenians was rarely without danger, as the Armenians primarily looked out for themselves, allying with any power that seemed dominant at that time.

The Seljuk Empire

In 1096, the Sunni **Seljuk Empire** was in a state of fragmentation & internal conflict. Malik shah's son, **Mahmud I**, had been proclaimed sultan, but his rule was contested by his brothers **Berkyaruq**, **Muhammad I** & **Ahmad Sanjar**, as well as his uncle **Tutush I**. Tutush was killed in battle against Berkyaruq in February 1096, further destabilizing the region.

Additionally, the Seljuks were facing challenges from other rulers, including the **Artuqids**, a Turcoman tribe in northeastern Syria & the **Danishmend** dynasty, another Turcoman tribe in eastern Anatolia. Both tribes followed the Sunni Muslim faith.

Due to this lack of any centralised Seljuk control, many of the local Syrian Seljuk leaders were disunited, often sparring with each other for territory & gain. It was into this distrustful mix, that the 1st Crusade arrived.

The Fatimid Caliphate

In 1096, the **Fatimid Caliphate**, ruled by **Caliph Mustansir**, was experiencing a period of significant internal strife & decline. The Fatimids, who had previously controlled a vast empire stretching from North Africa to the Levant, were facing increasing challenges from internal conflicts & external pressures, including the rise of the **Seljuk Turks** & the impending **1st Crusade**.

The 1st Crusade forces arrived within the Fatimid sphere of influence as they took Jerusalem from the Fatimid garrison. This led to a counterattack by the Fatimids, as they had not long ago recovered Jerusalem from the Seljuk Turks.