

access to history

The Crusades

1071–1204

MARY DICKEN AND NICHOLAS FELLOWS



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Contents

| | | |
|------------------|--|-----------|
| | Introduction: about this book | vi |
| CHAPTER 1 | Context: The circumstances behind the Crusades | 1 |
| | 1 The background to the Crusades | 1 |
| | 2 Western Europe in the eleventh century | 4 |
| | 3 The circumstances in the Palestinian lands before 1100 | 11 |
| | 4 The circumstances in the Byzantine Empire before 1100 | 15 |
| CHAPTER 2 | The Council of Clermont and its impact | 21 |
| | 1 The reasons behind Urban's appeal for a crusade to go to the east | 21 |
| | 2 Urban II's sermon at Clermont | 25 |
| | 3 The response to Urban II's sermon | 30 |
| | 4 The first crusaders and their motives | 32 |
| | 5 Key debate: What were the motives of those who went on the Crusade? | 40 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 43 |
| | Question practice: OCR | 43 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 44 |
| CHAPTER 3 | The First Crusade (the People's Crusade) | 45 |
| | 1 The failure of the first wave of the First Crusade | 45 |
| | 2 The second wave of the First Crusade led by the princes | 52 |
| | 3 Key debate: Why was the First Crusade successful? | 66 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 69 |
| | Question practice: OCR | 69 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 70 |
| CHAPTER 4 | The Crusader States of Outremer | 71 |
| | 1 The establishment of the States | 71 |
| | 2 The problems facing the States | 78 |
| | 3 The survival of the Crusader States | 83 |
| | 4 Key debate: Why did the Crusader States survive? | 86 |
| | 5 The establishment of the Military Orders | 87 |
| | 6 Key debate: How important were the Military Orders in the survival of the Crusader States? | 91 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 93 |
| | Question practice: OCR | 95 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 95 |

| | | |
|------------------|---|------------|
| CHAPTER 5 | The Second Crusade | 96 |
| 1 | The fall of Edessa | 96 |
| 2 | The role of Bernard of Clairvaux in the Second Crusade | 98 |
| 3 | The roles of Louis VII and Conrad III in the Second Crusade | 101 |
| 4 | The events of the Second Crusade | 106 |
| 5 | The results of the Second Crusade | 114 |
| 6 | Key debate: Was the attack on Damascus a mistake? | 116 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 120 |
| | Question practice: OCR | 120 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 120 |
| CHAPTER 6 | The Crusader States after the Second Crusade | 121 |
| 1 | The rise of Nur ad-Din and developments in Islam | 121 |
| 2 | The Crusader States after the Second Crusade | 123 |
| 3 | The campaigns in Egypt | 129 |
| 4 | The rise of Saladin | 133 |
| 5 | The victory of Saladin at Hattin and his conquest of Jerusalem | 137 |
| 6 | Key debate: How should Saladin be viewed? | 143 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 146 |
| | Question practice: OCR | 146 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 146 |
| CHAPTER 7 | The Third Crusade | 147 |
| 1 | The preaching of the Third Crusade | 147 |
| 2 | The roles of Frederick Barbarossa, Philip II and Richard I in the Third Crusade | 150 |
| 3 | The results of the Third Crusade | 162 |
| 4 | Key debate: What did the Third Crusade achieve? | 164 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 165 |
| | Question practice: OCR | 166 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 166 |
| CHAPTER 8 | The Fourth Crusade | 167 |
| 1 | The role of Pope Innocent III | 167 |
| 2 | The Treaty of Venice | 169 |
| 3 | The attacks on Constantinople | 174 |
| 4 | The results of the Fourth Crusade | 183 |
| 5 | Key debate: Why did the crusaders attack Constantinople? | 185 |
| | Question practice: AQA | 188 |
| | Question practice: Pearson Edexcel | 188 |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|-----|
| CHAPTER 9 | Conclusion (AQA): The Age of the Crusades, c1071–1204 | 190 |
| CHAPTER 10 | Conclusion (OCR): The Crusades and the Crusader States 1095–1192 | 197 |
| CHAPTER 11 | Conclusion (Pearson Edexcel): The Crusades c1095–1204 | 202 |
| | Exam focus: AQA | 211 |
| | Exam focus: OCR | 218 |
| | Exam focus: Pearson Edexcel | 224 |
| | Timeline | 230 |
| | Glossary of terms | 233 |
| | Further reading | 235 |
| | Index | 237 |

Dedication

Keith Randell (1943–2002)

The *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to ‘cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be’. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

Context: The circumstances behind the Crusades

The Crusades were a series of wars in which western Europeans attacked Muslims in the Middle East. This was because the Muslims controlled the holiest places associated with Christianity, such as Jerusalem. The wars lasted from the late eleventh century until the thirteenth century. They involved many Europeans, mostly men but some women, as well as people living in the territories of Byzantium and in the Middle East. This introductory chapter focuses on developments which resulted in the Crusades being launched through the following themes:

- ◆ The background to the Crusades
- ◆ Western Europe in the eleventh century
- ◆ The circumstances in the Palestinian lands before 1100
- ◆ The circumstances in the Byzantine Empire before 1100

KEY DATES

| | | | |
|-------------|--|----------------|----------------|
| 1054 | Schism between the eastern and western Churches | 1095–9 | First Crusade |
| 1071 | Defeat of the Byzantines by the Turks at the Battle of Manzikert | 1147–9 | Second Crusade |
| 1073 | Gregory VII became pope | 1189–92 | Third Crusade |
| 1081 | Alexius II became the emperor of Byzantium | 1202–4 | Fourth Crusade |

1 The background to the Crusades

■ *Where and when did the Crusades take place?*

Figure 1.1 (see page 2) shows the approximate geography of the countries in the eleventh century, when the Crusades began. The countries we know as Germany, France and Belgium did not exist. The Latin Christian kingdoms, or Latin West, are so-called because of the Catholic Church in Rome – the parts of the former Roman Empire where Latin, rather than Greek, had been spoken. The Latin West can also be used to describe the Catholic parts of medieval Europe. Rome had been the largest city in the world and the Roman Empire's influence was vast, including its official state religion, Christianity, which had been adopted by the ruler at the time, Constantine the Great, in 323. Around 395, the Roman Empire became permanently divided between east and west, with the eastern Roman Empire – called the Byzantine Empire – encompassing

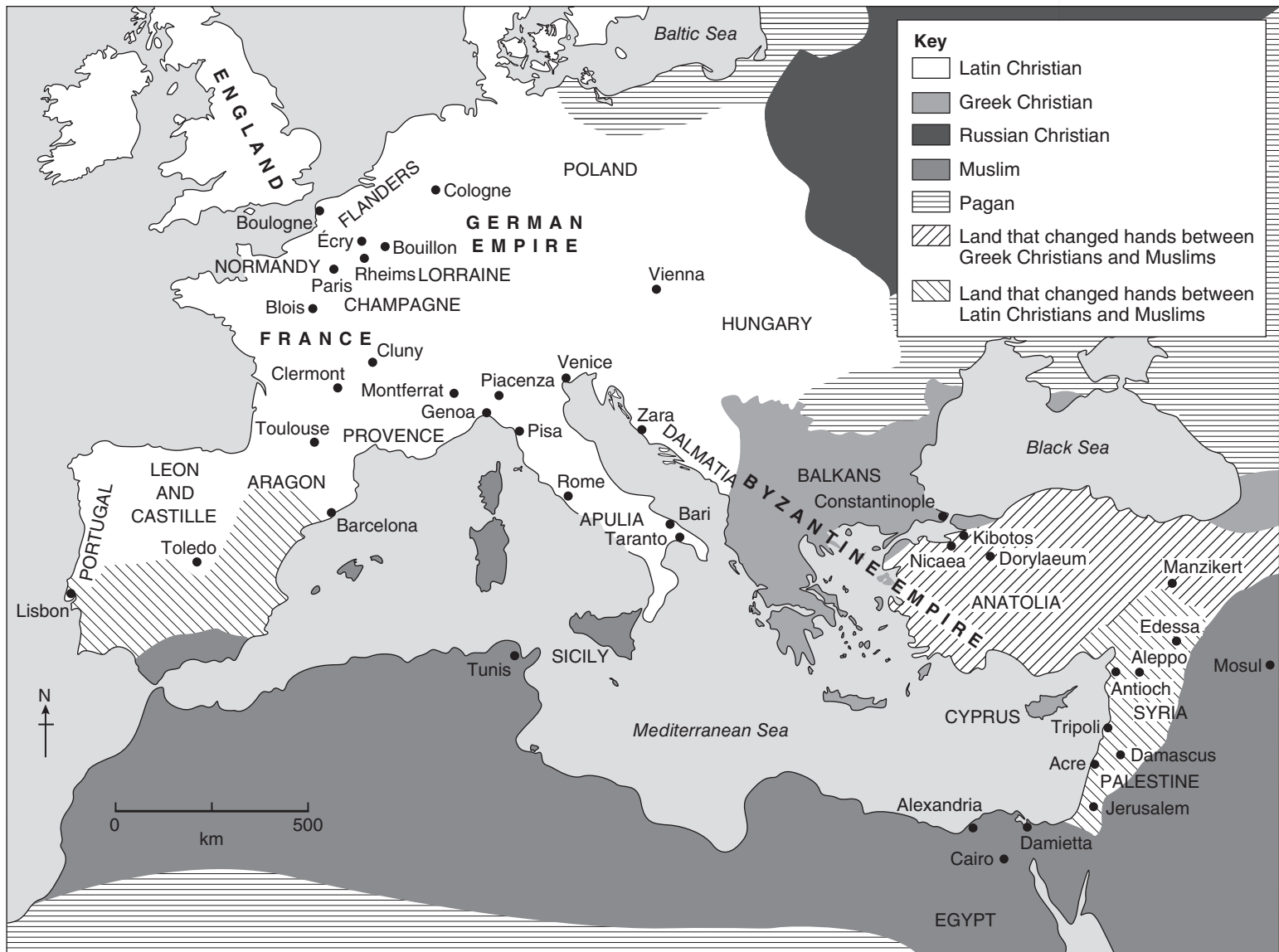


Figure 1.1 Europe, Near East and north Africa at the time of the Crusades.

southern Italy, the Balkans, modern Turkey, Asia Minor and lands south of the Black Sea. Constantine now ruled from Byzantium (later, Constantinople), and the people of the Byzantine Empire could be called 'Greek Christian' as they were part of the Greek Orthodox Church. Constantinople became the centre of the Church instead of Rome. But, in 800, Pope Leo III (died 816) crowned **Charlemagne** as Holy Roman Emperor in Rome. This was seen as a challenge by the Byzantine emperors and relations became strained. The sack of Constantinople by a crusading force in 1204 weakened the Byzantine Empire, and its last years saw it as just one of several states in the eastern Mediterranean. Constantinople was finally taken by the Turks in 1453.

From 1095 onwards there were several crusades, or wars of the cross (although they were not called this at the time), taking place in the **Muslim Near East**. This book focuses on the first four wars:

- the First Crusade, 1095–9
- the Second Crusade, 1147–9
- the Third Crusade, 1189–92
- the Fourth Crusade, 1202–4.

The First Crusade arose from a combination of factors:

- In western Europe, the popes, in order to reassert their authority and unite **Christendom**, were eager to lead a crusading movement.
- The Byzantine Empire was on the verge of collapse in the 1090s, while many Christians living in the region felt under threat from Islamic forces.
- In the Muslim Near East, Christians were under attack and deemed it essential to preserve the holy sites where Jesus Christ had lived and died, namely, Jerusalem.

History has tended, largely because of the writings of monks and clerics of the time, to focus on the central role of the pope in the crusading expeditions. This explanation was further reinforced by the creation of the Crusader States in the twelfth century. However, more recent work, particularly that of Peter Frankopan in his book *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (published in 2012), has stressed the importance of developments within the Byzantine Empire and the role of its emperor, Alexius. Frankopan argues that Alexius' call for help in a last desperate bid to save the Byzantine Empire was the crucial factor in the development of the crusading movement. Frankopan further argues that the collapse of Byzantine administration in Anatolia, the capture of Ephesus and Nicaea, the military collapse of Byzantine forces, civil war and an attempted coup were at the centre of events and led Alexius to ask for help. Pope Urban II, as a result of a sudden change in his position, was able to seize the opportunity and use the appeal to try and reunite Christendom and secure his position.

KEY FIGURE

Charlemagne (c.742–814)

Founder of the Carolingian Empire and ruled over what is now France, Germany and much of Italy and parts of eastern Europe. He was a fervent Christian, was crowned emperor by the pope and is seen as the first Holy Roman Emperor.

KEY TERMS

Muslim Near East

The area near the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, approximately equivalent to what we know today as Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Egypt.

Christendom

The Christian parts of the world, largely in Europe at this time.

SUMMARY DIAGRAM

THE BACKGROUND TO THE CRUSADES

Roman Catholic Christians:
papacy eager to lead a
crusading movement

Orthodox Christians: threat
of Islam to Christianity in
their region

Background to the Crusades

Christians under attack in Muslim Near East

2 Western Europe in the eleventh century

■ *Why did the situation in western Europe encourage crusading?*

There are many explanations for why western Europeans took up the crusading movement. These include theoretical issues such as the idea of the Just War and the Truce of God and the Peace of God movements. There are also practical motives, such as the desire of the popes to bolster their power, the wish to defeat the Muslims threatening Europe, and the need to preserve the position of the eastern Roman Empire. Finally, and most importantly, there was the issue of religion and the influence of the Church. Religion and the Church had a great hold over people's lives which, at the time, were often short and brutal. Hell was a very real fear and the offer from the Church to shorten your time there or avoid it altogether by undertaking pilgrimages or a crusade appealed to many. The issue of the right of pilgrimage to the holy places that the western Roman Empire wanted to maintain had become a major issue with the advance of the Turks into the region.

The Just War

One of the reasons why crusading became an acceptable, and even desirable, duty for a Christian knight was that it was seen as morally justified. This belief in a Just War or holy war was derived from a number of sources, including the following:

- The Bible, especially the Old Testament, was full of examples of fighting heroes, such as Joshua, King David and Judas Maccabeus. The victories of the Israelites over their enemies were viewed as triumphs for God over heathen people.

- The Greek philosopher Aristotle (c.384–322BC) had used the phrase ‘Just War’ to describe war, which was, as he put it, ‘for the sake of peace’.
- Roman writers, such as Titus Livius Patavinus, known as Livy (64 or 59BC to 12 or 17AD), added the idea of the *causa belli*, where war was justified if the enemy had broken an agreement. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43BC) believed that a Just War was one where lost goods could be recovered or where self-defence was involved.
- Early Christian writers reflected the changing situation once Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire. They saw the protection of the lands which made up the empire as reasonable and a Just War, since the empire and the Church were so closely linked.
- Finally, Augustine of Hippo (AD354–430) defined the four essential characteristics of a Just War:
 - ☐ it must have a just cause
 - ☐ it must be for defence or to recover rightful possessions
 - ☐ it must be sanctioned by a legitimate authority
 - ☐ those who fight must have the right intentions.

When the Roman Empire in the west collapsed, it was more difficult for Christian warriors to continue to believe that God was on their side, since He had clearly not saved them from defeat. But the notion was so powerful that it was soon taken up by the heirs of the ‘pagan barbaric tribes’ who had overrun Europe. Men like the Emperor Charlemagne saw their wars of conquest as holy wars against pagan infidels and their victories as a sign of divine favour. The Church gave such warriors its blessing and successive popes were thankful for the support of Charlemagne, who was eventually crowned as Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 800. The soldiers, in their turn, founded monasteries and gave lavish gifts to the Church, perhaps as a way of making up for the brutality of their way of life.

The Truce of God and the Peace of God movements

Along with the idea of a Just War, these movements contributed to the frame of mind which persuaded crusaders to embark on their journeys. They were instigated by the Catholic Church in the eleventh century with the hope of reducing the level of violence among nobles, who often took the law into their own hands and refused to recognise any central authority.

The *Pax et Treuga Dei* (the Peace and Truce of God) came about because Charlemagne’s empire, known as the Carolingian Empire, had been divided among his heirs. This led to rivalry between them and their successors and caused much of what is now France to be poorly governed. The chaos led to the emergence of a feudal society, where local lords built castles and tried to preserve their positions themselves, since the king was too weak to keep order. Their anxieties were heightened by the approach of the millennium

(the year 1000), popularly expected to be an apocalyptic event. The raids of the Vikings and their settlement in northern France were a further worrying factor. The *Pax Dei* was a peace proclaimed by local bishops who said that those who could not defend themselves (peasants, the clergy, and, later, women and children) were not to be attacked. The punishment for infringement was excommunication, but the penalty was removed if the offenders paid for what they had taken or provided some kind of reparation. The *Pax Dei* was a permanent peace, but how far it was actually observed is questionable.

The Truce of God was initially a temporary ban on fighting and guaranteed the safety of all churches, monks, pilgrims and merchants. Eventually, it forbade hostilities during Advent, Lent and Rogationtide, and on Thursdays (the day of the Ascension of Christ), Fridays (the day of the Crucifixion) and Saturdays (the day of the Resurrection). Sundays and feast days had been observed as days of peace from an earlier period. The Church Council held in 1041 regularised these agreements, which left a mere 80 days available for fighting in each year. The whole aim was to limit the extent of conflict within France, and later Germany and Italy, but to make it acceptable if redirected to other regions, such as the Middle East.

Both the Just War and the Peace and Truce of God movements contributed to the reasons why Christians were persuaded to go on crusades.

The idea of the pilgrimage

The destruction of much of Jerusalem in AD70 by the Romans meant that there were few remains of the city Christ had known. But, from the third century onwards, sites such as the cave at Bethlehem where he had been born, the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane were visited by Christians for prayer and meditation. The conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 313, and the discovery of the **True Cross** by his mother, Helena (c.250–320), led him to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Christ's body had been buried, which was thus the site of the Resurrection. This site attracted pilgrims immediately. Saint Jerome (c.374–420) lived in Bethlehem for a time and his disciples flocked there. There were fluctuations in the numbers of pilgrims according to how safe it was to travel in the Mediterranean, which was home to many groups of pirates.

By the tenth century, the pirates were less troublesome and pilgrimages abounded from Italian ports to Palestine, often via Constantinople, where the vast Byzantine collection of **relics** could be viewed. The practice of pilgrimage was encouraged by the idea that visiting holy places possessed a spiritual virtue and could even lead to a pardon for sins being given by God. The prime destinations included Rome (Saints Peter and Paul) and Palestine (Jesus Christ). Pilgrimage was encouraged by the Abbey of Cluny, founded in 910, and numbers were recorded in their records.

From 1019, the Byzantine Empire controlled the Balkans and the overland pilgrimage route, which although longer than the sea crossing now became

KEY TERMS

True Cross Believed to be the cross on which Christ had been crucified. It had been found by Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, in about 327.

Relic A body part or a belonging from a holy person, kept as an object of reverence.

safer. Hostels were built for the pilgrims and, while great lords might travel with large **retinues**, protected by armed soldiers, it seems to have been perfectly possible for small groups to travel and arrive unscathed. Yet for this situation to continue, both the Byzantine and the Muslim worlds needed to be stable. All of these ideas and developments ensured that when Pope Urban II made his appeal at Clermont in November 1095 he was already preaching to a responsive audience.

Europe in the late eleventh century

However, the situation in the Byzantine and Muslim world and western Europe in the eleventh century was far from stable. In western Europe, the century had seen Norman advances in both north-western Europe and Italy; in Spain Muslim forces were gradually being driven out, while in Germany there was unrest. The papacy was involved in a struggle with magnates throughout Europe, which often resulted in the pope excommunicating them. There was also division between the papacy and Byzantine Church (see pages 9–10). Finally, the position of the Church in the west was further weakened by the Investiture Contest (see page 9) and the installation of the **anti-pope**, Clement III, in 1084, which forced Gregory into exile.

KEY TERMS

Retinues Followers such as guards, soldiers and servants. The wealth and power of a lord were reflected in the size of his retinue.

Anti-pope A rival pope elected by opponents of a current pope. Each pope built up support where he could.

The role of the papacy

‘Papacy’ describes the realm and influence of the popes, the heads of the Roman Catholic Church, generally based in Rome. The pope in Rome ruled as the acknowledged heir of the apostle Saint Peter. His power was supported by the Donation of Constantine, a document which was supposedly a grant by Constantine to the popes of their supremacy over western Europe. (It was, in fact, an eighth-century forgery, issued to help boost papal supremacy.) Popes did not always find the rulers of Europe eager to recognise their superiority. Monarchs preferred the view that they held complete sovereignty over their realms. In certain circumstances they might appeal to the pope for support, as William of Normandy (c.1028–87) did in 1066 when he invaded England. Mostly, rulers such as Henry IV (1050–1106), the Holy Roman Emperor, defied the claims of the popes.

In the later eleventh century, popes were determined to enforce their control and to defend it by force if necessary. They raised armies, offering those who fought for them forgiveness of their sins, and categorised these wars as ‘holy wars’.

Gregory VII and the role of the papacy

In Pope Gregory VII’s insistence on recognition of his rights in the Investiture Contest (see the box, page 9), he quarrelled in a major way with the emperor, Henry IV. This led to the unedifying spectacle of the pope excommunicating the emperor, and the emperor deposing the pope and establishing his own rival pope. This then meant the further involvement of the papacy in war: Gregory recruited soldiers from all over Europe to form the Militia of Saint Peter, offering

Pope Gregory VII c.1025–85

Hildebrand of Sovara, or Gregory VII as he was later known, was born into an upper-class family in southern Italy. Gregory was educated in Rome and became a chaplain to Gregory VI. He went into exile with the pope and completed his education at Cologne. In 1058 he became archdeacon of the Roman Church. He supported the papal claim to sovereignty over the Church and over secular rulers. He favoured an alliance with the Normans in southern Italy and backed the invasion of England by William of Normandy. In 1073 he was elected pope and took the name Gregory VII.

He was determined to restore the supremacy of the papacy, to enforce **clerical celibacy** and root out **simony**. He held regular councils and wrote extensively to churchmen and rulers to enforce his views. However, his claims to overlordship were not recognised by William I of England or Philip I of France. Both kings had the backing of their bishops so there was little Pope Gregory VII could do. He excommunicated and **deposed** Henry IV in 1077, but this backfired. Henry reasserted his power, won the civil war in Germany and deposed the pope in 1080, marched on Rome and captured it in 1084. Gregory died in 1085, defeated and in exile, but his ideas about the papacy had a long-lasting impact in Europe.

KEY TERMS

Clerical celibacy

The belief that the clergy should not be married or have sexual relationships, so their focus was always on God.

Simony Paying to get an office or job in the Church.

Depose To remove a ruler or pope from their position.

them absolution of their sins and eternal salvation for their souls. Such forces could be used by Gregory to discipline those who resisted his reforms and those who took up arms against him. He made it clear that his troops were fighting in the service of God. He even planned to lead an army to aid the Christians in the eastern Mediterranean. The terms in which he explained his aims, and the heavenly rewards that his soldiers would receive, were later echoed in the preaching of Pope Urban II (see pages 25–6). He also gave his blessing to Christian knights who fought in Spain against the Arab Muslims, as the Arabs were not Christians, and promised them absolution for their sins, while maintaining that any lands they conquered were to be held from the pope as overlord. Gregory died in 1085 in exile from Rome, where his hostility to Henry IV had made him unpopular, with the anti-pope, Clement III, ruling in Rome. The emperor remained excommunicated and his subjects were not part of later crusading plans.

The cardinals loyal to Gregory elected the abbot of Monte Cassino as the new pope and he took the name Victor III, but he died in 1087 and it was not until early in 1088 that Pope Urban II was elected. However, his position was weak and he was rarely able to enter Rome.

Source A shows how Gregory VII asked for help against the Muslims.

? SOURCE QUESTION

In Source A, on what grounds is Gregory appealing for help?

SOURCE A

From a letter written by Pope Gregory VII in 1074 in response to appeals for help from Byzantium after the emperor had been defeated by the Turks at Manzikert in 1071, quoted in O.J. Thatcher and E.H. McNeal, translators, *A Sourcebook for Medieval History, Selected Documents Illustrating the History of Europe in the Middle Age*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905, p. 513.

We hereby inform you that the bearer of these letters on his recent return from across the sea [from Palestine] came to visit us. He repeated what we had heard from many others that a pagan race had overcome the Christians and, with horrible

cruelty, had devastated everything, almost to the walls of Constantinople ... and that they had slain many thousands of Christians ... Therefore we beseech you by the faith in which you are united through Christ ... and by the authority of St. Peter, prince of the apostles, we admonish you that you be moved to proper compassion by the wounds and blood of your brethren and the danger of the aforesaid empire and that, for the sake of Christ, you undertake the difficult task of bearing aid to your brethren.

Investiture Contest

This was an issue between the pope and the emperor as both claimed supreme power. It began with the pope objecting to bishops being 'invested' with the symbols of their office by their lay lord to show their fealty. The pope thought their main loyalty was to him. He excommunicated Emperor Henry IV, who insisted on investing his bishops himself.

The quarrel between Gregory VII and Henry IV developed out of the Investiture Contest. Henry declared Gregory deposed in 1076. After Henry was excommunicated, his German subjects refused to obey him and he decided to beg Gregory's pardon, which was granted.

The anti-pope was Clement III, who was made pope by Henry IV as a rival to Gregory in 1080 and was consecrated in Rome in 1084. He crowned Henry IV as emperor and was the anti-pope to Pope Gregory VII and his successors, Victor III, Urban II and Paschal II. He died in 1100.

Relations between Byzantium and Rome

In 1054 the Christian Church split. The division between the Latin and the Greek branches has never been healed.

The immediate cause of the schism between the Greek and Roman Churches in 1054 came from the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius (c.1000–59). He closed down Latin Churches and went on to deny the validity of the Roman Mass. The pope retaliated with the charge that Michael was the puppet of the Byzantine emperor. Papal representatives were sent to Constantinople to negotiate in 1054 but, while they were there, Pope Leo IX died. The relationship continued to deteriorate as the Byzantines made an alliance with the German enemies of the pope and the papacy made approaches to the Normans, the enemies of Byzantium. These complex relationships all added to the problems of the situation.

This situation formed part of the backdrop to the Crusades, although there were other causes of tension:

- *How much authority the pope had over the patriarchs.* The dominant figures in the Church at first were the Bishop of Rome (the pope), and the Bishops of Alexandria and Antioch, also known as patriarchs. Later, the Bishops of Jerusalem and Constantinople were also referred to as **patriarchs**.

KEY TERM

Patriarch A bishop, in some eastern Churches.

KEY TERMS

Trinity The belief that God is one but has three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Heresy A belief that goes against the beliefs of the established Church.

- *Open rivalry between Rome and Constantinople.* This was due to the spread of Islam, leaving the patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem marginalised.
- *Differences of language.* The western Church used Latin and the eastern Church used Greek. As time went on, fewer and fewer people understood both languages.
- *Territorial disputes.* These included disagreements about who had jurisdiction over parts of the Balkans, southern Italy and Sicily, where the inhabitants were mostly Greeks.
- *Different interpretations of the Trinity.* In the western doctrine, the Holy Spirit was referred to as 'proceeding' from the Father and the Son, while the eastern Church saw the Holy Spirit as proceeding only from God the Father.
- *Differences in perception.* The western Church was seen as more practical and logical while the eastern Church was more spiritual and mystical.
- *Clerical celibacy.* The western Church began to insist on this, while the eastern Church did not.

However, under Pope Urban II relations improved. He was in such a weak position that he moved to conciliate Constantinople, sending a delegation in 1088. He saw that the best way to secure his own position was to become the unifier of the Church and restore relations with eastern Christians. He was fortunate that the Emperor Alexius viewed him as a better ally than the German-backed Clement. His position was further helped as many living in southern Italy had Greek links and wanted to see an improvement in relations with the emperor, which were given a boost in 1081 when Urban ended the excommunication of Alexius.

Urban's position was further helped when supporters of Henry IV, who had installed Clement III, began to defect, with his son Conrad and wife denouncing the emperor. This improvement in Urban's position was shown by his announcement that he would hold a council at Piacenza in March 1095. The venue was significant as it was territory which had previously been loyal to Henry and in the heart of Clement's original archbishopric of Ravenna. Although the meeting was designed to discuss ecclesiastical affairs, such as **heresy**, its impetus was changed when envoys arrived from Constantinople. They brought the news that the eastern empire was on the brink of collapse and needed help. Urban was quick to seize the initiative; he saw that he could use this to reunify the Church and announced that he would travel to Clermont. It was, therefore, the arrival of the envoys that led to Urban's call to arms, but it was the developments outlined earlier (see pages 4–6) that ensured that large numbers would respond to his call.

SUMMARY DIAGRAM**WESTERN EUROPE IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY**

Holy war:

- Just War
- Truce of God movement
- Peace of God movement

**Western Europe
in the
eleventh century**

Reasons for a crusade:

- Popes wanted to bolster their power
- Defeat the Muslims threatening Europe
- Preserve the position of the eastern Roman Empire
- Pilgrimage to holy places

3 The circumstances in the Palestinian lands before 1100

■ *Why did circumstances in the Palestinian lands encourage crusading?*

The area of the Middle East (see Figure 1.1, page 2), including what is sometimes described as the Holy Land, had a difficult history. With a lack of natural frontiers and a key geographical position in the Mediterranean, it had been prey to successive conquerors. It was part of the Roman Empire but from the beginning there were tensions between the west and the east, which reached a climax with the conflict between Julius Caesar (100–44BC) and Marcus Antonius (83–30BC) and Cleopatra VII Philopator (69–30BC). The Roman provinces of Egypt and Syria were among the richest in the empire and thus very desirable.

Byzantine rule

Most of the people living and trading in this area were Christians and they came to resent the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople (see page 9), who was given precedence over Alexandria and Antioch. In addition, there was a strong Jewish presence in many of the larger cities, and the Jews were equally hostile to the Orthodox Christians. Descendants from all these groups were living in the area at the time of the Crusades and added to the instability there.

Persian conquest: Persian defeat

King Chosroes II of Persia (590–628) was able to exploit the problems in the eastern Roman Empire and in the early seventh century captured most of Palestine. The True Cross was taken as loot back to Persia. In 630, after Chosroes had been murdered and the Persians defeated, the True Cross was restored to Jerusalem. Keeping control of Christian sites was to be a major focus of the Crusades.

KEY TERMS

Mecca The birthplace of Muhammad and the holiest city in Islam.

People of the Book

An Islamic term referring to Jews, Christians and Sabians, or converts to Islam.

Caliph The head of an Islamic state, seen as a successor to Muhammad.

Franks Collective word for people who lived in France at the time.

The rise of Islam

While the events outlined above help to explain why the Palestinian lands were so much in dispute, a major reason for the Crusades came from the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad and the establishment of Islam. Muhammad, born in the city of **Mecca** in what today is Saudi Arabia, in 570, had extraordinary qualities in both his religious message and his political grasp. In 622 he fled to Medina with a few friends. In 632 he died as the Lord of Arabia whose armies were advancing all across the area. In 638 the Arabs took Jerusalem. They moved on to Egypt and by the early eighth century held an empire which extended from Spain to central India.

These Arab conquests had the following effects:

- Christians were not persecuted for their faith as they were a **People of the Book**.
- Christians had to pay taxes to secure their safety.
- Christian places of worship were not generally attacked.
- Some Christians converted to Islam.
- Most people spoke Arabic in the conquered areas.
- Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem continued to contain a significant number of Christians.
- The Umayyad **caliphs** ruled from Damascus. The Umayyads, one of the leading Arab families, had taken control of Syria in 661.

Divisions in Islam

There were two main divisions in Islam: the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. The Sunnis acknowledged Abu Bakr, a close colleague of Muhammad, as his successor and as caliph. They believed that only they held fast to the correct Muslim tradition. The Shi'ites would only recognise Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, as his heir. As Ali had several wives, the Shi'ites were divided as to which of his descendants would usher in the conversion of the whole world to Islam. Disunity among Muslims was to have a profound impact on the course of the Crusades.

The Abbasid caliphate

In 750 the Shi'ite Abbasids established a caliphate at Baghdad and the Sunni Umayyads fled to Spain. The Abbasids were more fervent Muslims than the Umayyads but still employed many Christian administrators. They recognised that the Byzantine Empire might revive and threaten them, so they tried to build an alliance with Charlemagne. The caliph Harun-al-Rashid (763–809) allowed Charlemagne to found churches in Jerusalem. Charlemagne was also acknowledged as the protector of Christians in Palestine and built hostels for pilgrims to use. Later legends credited Charlemagne with making a pilgrimage himself. The **Franks** who went on crusade sometimes saw themselves as the heirs to Charlemagne.

Byzantine revival

The improvement in the fortunes of Byzantium in the ninth century was partly due to the decline of the Abbasids, which led to civil war in their empire, and partly to the achievements of the Byzantine army. Successes included the reconquest of Syria, Antioch and Aleppo. The Byzantines saw these wars as being fought for the glory of Christendom, to free the **Holy Sepulchre** from the outrages of the Muslims and to destroy the power of Islam. Thus, they fought less to extend the empire and more to glorify God. The caliphs took up this theme themselves by proclaiming *jihad*.

The Fatimids

The Shi'ite Fatimids set up a caliphate in north Africa. They conquered Egypt in 969 and founded Cairo (Al Qahira) as their capital. They were initially a force for stability in the Middle East and on reasonably good terms with the Byzantines. Fatimid rule in southern Syria and Palestine was no harder on Christians than the Abbasids had been. They agreed to let the Byzantine emperor carry out repairs to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1027 and many Greeks came to the city to supervise the work.

By about 1050 the position in Jerusalem and Palestine seemed to be tranquil. The holy places were protected, trade was prosperous and pilgrimages could easily be made from Europe. However, the conquests of the Turks changed this situation.

The Seljuk Turks

The **Seljuk Turks** originated in central Asia and progressed into Persia, where they became Sunni Muslims and ruled from Baghdad, creating the Seljuk Empire, a Turko-Persian Empire that controlled a large area of land in central Asia and the Middle East.

The Seljuk Turks' advance is considered in the next section, but their main contribution was to destabilise the whole area. By 1079 they had taken over most of Syria and Palestine. Jerusalem had initially been taken by Muslims in 637 but many cities remained under **warlords**. In some places, Sunnis ruled Shi'ites, and in others, such as Egypt, it was the reverse. Most importantly, after the Seljuk Turks' capture of Jerusalem from the Fatimids in the 1070s, reports arrived in western Europe suggesting that the situation for pilgrims was deteriorating. There were rumours of forced conversions of Christians in Antioch and a rise in taxes for Christians living in Jerusalem, as well as persecution. Jews were also targeted and a synagogue was burned down in 1077. As a result, it was becoming more difficult for western pilgrims to visit the city. This all created a growing concern about Jerusalem in western Europe, which would be exploited by Alexius and would add to the melting pot from which the crusading movement would emerge.

KEY TERMS

Holy Sepulchre

The burial place of Christ, and included a church built by Constantine, a sacred site.

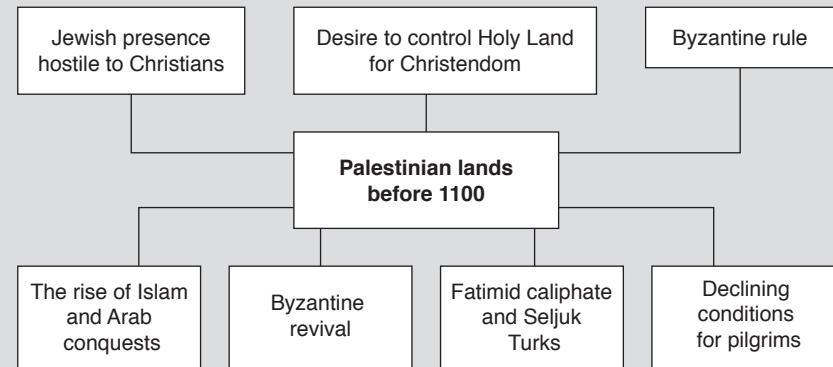
Jihad Meaning 'struggle' in Arabic; one of the duties of Muslims was to fight for the defence of their religion against non-Muslims or the infidel. The term was used to whip up enthusiasm for the war against the crusaders.

Seljuk Turks A tribe from central Asia who moved west in the tenth century and converted to Sunni Islam. They captured Baghdad in 1055 and set up the Seljuk Empire. Under Alp Arslan and Malik Shah they extended their rule to include Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and the Sultanate of Rum. But they were later pushed back by the crusaders and attacked in the east by the Mongols.

Warlords Powerful nobles who recruited mercenary forces and controlled the land around their strongholds. They fought one another much of the time.

SUMMARY DIAGRAM

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE PALESTINIAN LANDS BEFORE 1100



SOURCE B



SOURCE QUESTION

How useful is Source B as evidence of the power and authority of Alexius?



The Byzantine Emperor Alexius I (left) being blessed by Christ (right), from a twelfth-century manuscript. Alexius, like Christ, is shown with a halo to suggest that he has been chosen and blessed by God.

4 The circumstances in the Byzantine Empire before 1100

■ *Why did the circumstances in the Byzantine Empire encourage crusading?*

The Byzantine Empire had developed from the old eastern Roman empire, gradually becoming Greek in culture. It was the main barrier against the Islamic armies that were advancing from the east. However, by the start of the eleventh century it had become weak. The religion was Orthodox Christianity and the Church had grown apart from the Catholic Church in the west and in 1054 split completely with the Great Schism. There were attempts made to heal the division but they failed. A crusade would not only help to stop the Muslim advance, which the weakened empire could not do unaided, but might also lead to a restoration of religious unity between the eastern and western Churches.

Constantinople, the capital city of the Byzantine Empire, was one of the marvels of the early medieval world. It had huge fortifications, a series of stone walls up to twelve metres tall, and the population was far larger than that of the biggest cities in Europe. It attracted a vast range of merchants and fortune-seekers, and its inhabitants were more varied and cosmopolitan than in most cities. Its buildings were spectacular, with the vast dome of the Church of Hagia Sophia being one of the outstanding features. It was very attractive to crusading armies. The prosperity of the imperial family and friends of the emperor contrasted strongly with the poverty of the rest of the population, who were subjected to high taxes and a **debased coinage**.

Threats to the Byzantine Empire

In the mid-eleventh century the empire came under threat from enemies on all sides:

- The Normans took over much of southern Italy.
- The aggressive tribe of the **Pechenegs**, based on the northern banks of the Danube, began to raid the Balkans.
- The Turks erupted on the eastern fringes of the empire and, in 1055, a tribal leader, Tughril Bey (990–1063), became the **sultan** in Baghdad.

There was little effective response from the rulers in Byzantium. In 1071 there was a disastrous defeat for the Greeks at the Battle of Manzikert near the eastern frontier. Romanos IV Diogenes (died 1072) was outmanoeuvred by the Turkish general, Alp Arslan (c.1030–72/3), and captured. Arslan released him and the generosity of the Turkish leader was much admired.

KEY TERMS

Debased coinage

Where the metal content of coins is less than their face value. The process leads to higher prices.

Pechenegs A Turkish tribe who had migrated from central Asia. They were much given to war with their neighbours but were finally defeated in 1091 by a combined force of their enemies.

Sultan A powerful ruler under the authority of the caliph.

The impact of the defeat on the Byzantines at Manzikert was considerable:

- Many Byzantines living in Asia Minor panicked and relocated to Constantinople, where they would be safe.
- This put extra pressure on resources.
- Campaigns against the Pechenegs continued and cost money.
- When peasants were conscripted into the army they were not working on their farms, so food supplies ran short.
- Taxes went up.
- The Turks raided throughout Asia Minor, taking much of Anatolia and even reaching the shores of the Bosphorus.
- Robert Guiscard, the Norman leader, prepared to take advantage of the chaos and attack.

Alexius I Comnenus

Alexius I had become emperor through a coup in 1081 and built up his power in several ways (see his profile, page 17). However, as a usurper, his rule lacked legitimacy and by the 1090s he was losing political authority. The life and achievements of Alexius I form the subject matter of *The Alexiad*, written by his daughter Anna Comnena, probably between 1143 and 1153. Source C shows how she admired her father.

? SOURCE QUESTION

According to Source C, what qualities did a Byzantine emperor need in order to be successful?

SOURCE C

From Anna Komnene (edited by Peter Frankopan and translated by E.R.A. Sewter), *The Alexiad*, Book III, Penguin revised edition, 2009, p. 85.

Alexius was not a very tall man, but broad-shouldered and yet well proportioned. When standing he did not seem particularly striking to onlookers, but when one saw the grim flash of his eyes as he sat on the imperial throne, he reminded one of a fiery whirlwind, so overwhelming was the radiance emanating from his countenance and from his very presence. His dark eyebrows were curved, and beneath them the gaze of his eyes was both terrible and kind ... His broad shoulders, muscular arms and deep chest, all on a heroic scale, invariably commanded the wonder and delight of the people. The man's person indeed radiated beauty and grace and dignity and an unapproachable majesty. When he came into a gathering and began to speak, you were conscious from the moment he opened his mouth of the fiery eloquence of his tongue, for a torrent of argument won universal attention and captivated every heart.

Alexius I Comnenus (or Alexios I Komnenos) 1048–1118

Alexius was the nephew of Isaac I and had a military background. In 1081 he overthrew Emperor Nikiphorus, helped by the Doukas family, a rival to the Comnenus clan. He was able to do this as his wife, Irene, was a Doukas. He had both military ability and diplomatic

skill and so was able to keep his many enemies at bay. He built up central authority in his empire, but his dependence on the feudal nobility, who had to be placated with gifts, weakened his revenue stream. Contemporaries saw him as the saviour of the empire, but a longer-term view would envisage him as more of a stopgap. He asked for help from the west against his enemies and the result was the First Crusade, which led to the loss of territories like Antioch. He did manage to maintain his control in parts of Anatolia but he could not exert much authority over the crusaders.

Problems and solutions in Alexius I's early reign

Some of Alexius' problems spanned the entire period while others were solved by battle as they occurred (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Problems and solutions in Alexius I's early reign

| Problem | Solution |
|--|---|
| Alexius needed to build up support and ensure stability after a series of short reigns | Alexius gave appointments and positions to members of leading families to keep them loyal |
| Norman control of the Epirus, Macedonia and Thessaly | Alexius took personal command of the army and by 1084 had driven the Normans out |
| Pecheneg incursions in southern Thrace and threat to Constantinople | Alexius formed the largest army he could muster and defeated the Pechenegs totally in 1091 |
| Maintaining popularity | Alexius lived simply and his court was not extravagant |
| Religious divisions | Those deemed to be heretics were punished and senior clergy who favoured strictly orthodox views were appointed |

The problem which Alexius could not solve alone was the issue of the Turks. Initially, his relations with the Turks had been good and his position in Asia Minor in the 1080s appeared stable. After the defeat at Manzikert, Byzantine commanders had held out in many parts of Asia Minor. It was only in the 1090s when his position deteriorated, and he therefore sought help from the west. It is not easy to assess how severely he was threatened. *The Alexiad* tends to exaggerate the weakness of the situation in the empire on his accession, in order to magnify the extent of his achievements. In addition, Anna Comnena managed to gloss over some of the disasters which Alexius I suffered by implying that they had occurred before his reign began. Ambitious Byzantine families were another threat to Alexius I.

Sulayman, ally of Alexius I

One of the Turkish chieftains in Asia Minor was Sulayman, who had fought under Alexius I as a mercenary and was now used by the emperor to keep control of much of Asia Minor under an agreement made in 1081. This left Alexius I free to deal with the Normans and the Pechenegs and meant he did not have to rely on possible rivals to police the region. But the power given to Sulayman led to resentment from other generals, and Sulayman was killed by rivals in 1085. Antioch, which he had recaptured, was lost again.

Temporary recovery

Alexius I and the Sultan of Baghdad, Malik Shah (1053–92), the son of Alp Arslan (see page 16), formed an alliance. Malik Shah campaigned in person and retook Antioch. But he also ensured order in Asia Minor and did not intervene when some Turkish leaders were encouraged by lavish gifts from Alexius I to become Christians. However, the stability was not to last. While the empire seemed secure and safe by 1088, it became a very different story in the 1090s.

Defeat and disaster

Alexius I was overcome by a combination of circumstances and misfortune:

- First of all, the Pechenegs turned out to be far from beaten, attacking and capturing Nikomedia, a town north of Nicaea and only about 80 kilometres from Constantinople.
- Another ambitious Turk, Chaka, set himself up in Smyrna. He developed a fleet and began to harry the coasts of Asia Minor. This disrupted food supplies and was very worrying to the people of Constantinople. The land defences of the city were impregnable, but the Byzantine capital was far more vulnerable to attack by sea. Hardships in the city led to complaints and hostile sermons from influential figures such as John the Oxite, the Patriarch of Antioch. He argued that God was punishing Alexius I for the emperor's seizure of the crown.
- In 1092 Malik Shah died, thus depriving Alexius I of his main ally against the hostile Turkish chieftains. There was no clear heir to the sultan and so the warlords were further emboldened. Alexius I tried to regain Nicaea by making an alliance with its ruler, Abu'l-Kasim (died 1092). But on returning to Nicaea, Abu'l-Kasim was murdered by Turks who opposed any alliance with Alexius I.

There were some successes, however. Nikomedia was retaken and, in 1091, the Pechenegs were utterly defeated and this time remained quiet. Some of them even joined Alexius' armies as mercenary soldiers.

It would be very difficult to argue against the view that Alexius' position was seriously threatened by 1094. His failure to defeat the Turks raised serious concerns among the Byzantines as to Alexius' suitability to rule. There had

already been revolts in Crete and Cyprus in 1091 over heavy taxation, and trading privileges granted to Venice were seen as a threat to the position of local traders. His position was further weakened by nomad attacks in the Balkans and Serbian raids in the north-west of the empire. It was his decision to reinforce the strategically unimportant area of the north-west that seemed to confirm the need to replace him as emperor and a plot soon developed to replace him with Nikephoros Diogenes (c.1069–c.1094), the son of Romanos IV. When Alexius became suspicious he arrested Nikephoros and had him tortured until he confessed. The plot turned out to involve a large number of high-ranking figures at the Byzantine court, including family members, and Alexius proceeded to purge his government and began to rely more on foreigners and up-and-coming families from Thrace, rather than the traditional elite from Anatolia. But his hold on power remained precarious and he began to think that he needed a big success to win back the esteem of his people. Such a coup might be the recapture of Nicaea. But to do that he would need help.

The letter to Robert of Flanders from Alexius

This letter was supposedly sent by Alexius in the early 1090s. There is some debate about whether it is genuine and many scholars have dismissed it as an implausible fabrication written in the twelfth century. It indicates that the empire had suffered heavy defeats at the hands of the Turks. There is also an argument that the lands had been lost to the Turks before 1081 and so the letter is based on a false premise. Moreover, it gives a list of the treasured relics of Constantinople, which could have encouraged attacks on the city, and so seems rather unlikely. The historian Peter Frankopan, writing in 2012, argues that it reflects the reality of the situation in the empire in this period, whether written by Alexius or not. Alexius had already received military support from Robert I of Flanders (c.1035–93) in the form of 500 knights to help in the defence of Byzantium and was hoping for more.

SOURCE D

An extract from the letter to Robert of Flanders. From 'The Problem of the Spurious Letter of Emperor Alexius to the Count of Flanders', translated by E. Joranson, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 55, 1950, pp. 812–15.

O most illustrious count and especial comforter of the Christian faith! I wish to make known to you how the most sacred empire of the Greek Christians is being sorely distressed by the [Pechenegs] and the Turks, who daily ravage it and ... seize its territory ... There is widespread slaughter and indescribable killing ... of the Christians ... Accordingly, for love of God and out of sympathy for all Christian Greeks, we beg that you will lead hither to my aid and that of the Christian Greeks whatever faithful warriors of Christ you may be able to enlist ... so that they may, for the salvation of their souls, endeavour to liberate the kingdom of the Greeks; since I, albeit that I am emperor, can find no remedy or suitable counsel, but am

[continued over the page]

SOURCE QUESTION



What are the inducements that the writer holds out to those coming to aid him? From what you know of the reign of Alexius, how accurate is Source D as an account of his situation?

always fleeing in the face of the Turks and the [Pechenegs] and I remain in a certain city only until I perceive that their arrival is imminent. And I think it better to be subject to your Latins than to the abomination of the pagans. Therefore, before Constantinople is captured by them, you most certainly ought to fight with all your strength so you may receive a glorious reward in heaven.

As we have seen, such an appeal would receive a favourable hearing in the west. Given the number of knights who had already made the journey east and returned with stories of the horrific treatment of Christians at the hands of the Turks, Alexius had already been preparing the ground for an appeal with messages about the worsening situation in Jerusalem, which would strike a chord with many in the west. He was, therefore, able to exploit this concern for his own ends and link his problems to those of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, as we have seen on pages 7–10, political developments in the west provided Urban with an ideal opportunity and motive to respond.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The circumstances which led to the crusading movement arose from theories which suggested that a war against the Muslims was a Just War and from the ambitions of the papacy, which hoped to end the schism with Constantinople advantageously. The papacy had been weakened by the Investiture Contest and took this opportunity to raise its prestige. Further causes came from the expansion of Islam and the

tensions within the Islamic world between various groups, which made pilgrimages to the holy places more perilous. The final cause lay within the Byzantine Empire, where Alexius I asked for help against the threat of the Seljuk Turks. Alexius I was a usurper and the Byzantine Empire was not easy to hold together. In view of the threat from the Turks, he felt he needed outside assistance.

Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key issues in this chapter.

- 1 What was the theory behind the idea of a Just War?
- 2 What problems was the papacy facing?
- 3 Why were pilgrimages popular?
- 4 What was the connection of Muhammad with Jerusalem?
- 5 Why was Constantinople so wealthy?
- 6 What were the main problems facing Alexius I?
- 7 What factors allowed Alexius I to overcome some of his problems?

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