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Western Civilizations

4-25-17

## The Impacts of the Crusades on Western Civilization

### **Part I**

The crusades were a very important time period full of action. The crusades started in 1095 in Europe and lasted for almost 200 years . During that time in Europe, a system of feudalism existed in which there were lots of small rulers who charged peasants to use their fields. The feudal system does not allow for much social mobility. The crusades started after the Great Schism which was when two different popes claimed to be in charge. There was a pope from Rome and one from Avignon France. It was the first big split in the Christian faith. However, they took place before the black plague hit Europe. Since the crusades occurred during the dark ages, the church was very important and the most powerful entity in all of Europe. The church controlled everything in a person's life at this time in history. The crusades had a big impact on western civilization by unifying Europe, damaging feudalism, and helping to end the middle ages in Europe.

### **Part II**

The first crusade that started it all was launched by Pope Urban II in 1095. These series of battles to take the holy land occurred during 1095- 1291. The crusades did not necessarily start in one place with one group of people. People from all over Europe decided to go crusading in the name of God supposedly for the good of Christianity. The pope told people that if they went crusading, all of their sins would be forgiven and they would go to heaven. "Moreover, the sins of

those who set out thither, if they lose their lives on the journey, by land or sea, or in fighting against the heathen, shall be remitted in that hour; this I grant to all who go, through the power of God vested in me.” (Pope Urban II). The promise of forgiveness for their sins and a ticket to heaven was a pretty hard offer to give up and inspired many people to go crusading and defend the church. The Catholic church was starting to feel threatened by the rise of the Muslims, so the church decided to attack the Muslims and take the holy lands of Jerusalem. They feared that Islam would overtake Christianity. “For the Turks, a Persian people, have attacked them, as many of you know, and have advanced into the territory of Romania as far as that part of the Mediterranean which is called the arm of St George; and occupying more and more the lands of those Christians, have already seven times conquered them in a battle, have killed and captured many, have destroyed the churches and devastated the kingdom of God. If you permit them to remain for a time unmolested, they will extend their sway more widely over many faithful servants of the Lord.” (Pope Urban II).

During the 200 year time period there were about 7-10 crusades. The first four crusades are considered by some to be the most important crusades. In 1098, during the first crusade, the crusaders won Antioch in Syria which was the first success of the crusades. From then on, they took over many places on their way to Jerusalem. The crusaders took Jerusalem, their main goal, in 1099. They removed the Muslims from the area and divided it into four states. The four states were surrounded by Muslims which did not make the Muslims very happy. They fought back and captured one of the four states, Edessa, in 1144. The second crusade was an attempt to win back the land the Muslims had captured, but it was unsuccessful. In 1174, Saladin, a Muslim man, became the ruler of Egypt. Saladin was able to unite the Muslims and properly launch a war

against the Christian states. He was seen as a dandy commander and he was able to take Jerusalem back in 1187. The fall of Jerusalem spurred the third crusade. The emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick, King Richard I from England, also known as Richard the Lion-Hearted, and the king of France, Philip II joined together to fight Saladin. Frederick died very early on in the crusade. Richard and Philip were able to get some land but not much. Philip went back to his country after not having very much success. Richard then made a truce with Saladin that allowed Christians to travel to the holy lands safely. Around 1200, Pope Innocent III launched the fourth crusade. The merchants of Venice and the Byzantine Empire were trading rivals. The crusaders attacked Constantinople in an attempt to weaken the Byzantine Empire, and they succeeded. "Six more crusades were launched over the next 60 years, but they achieved very little." (World, 543).

### **Part III**

The first major impact of the crusades was that it unified Europe. The crusades gave the people living in Europe an identity and unity by giving them a common goal. Before the crusades, they were just people who lived in an area and they had almost nothing in common and often fought amongst themselves. The crusades helped decrease their fighting. "Moreover, private warfare, which was rife during the middle ages, also tended to die out with the departure of so many turbulent feudal lords for the holy land." (Banitalebi, 185). There was one thing the people of Europe had in common, religion, and the pope used that to unify the people. "The easiest way to promote a sense of European identity is to manipulate fears of Europe being invaded by enemy aliens. This is what the papacy did during the period of the crusades." (Shore, 63). Medieval Europe had a very strong feudal system with many small kings and kingdoms that would fight amongst themselves. During the crusades, they had a new goal, bigger than fighting between

themselves. "The political energy of the feudal kingdoms in Western Europe was transformed into an eastern-ward movement towards colonization" (Delanty, 34). The crusaders all wore the same symbol, the cross, which made them look like a unified front when they went crusading into the Middle East. Their strong belief in Christianity and their belief that it needed to be protected from the Muslims made them come together for a larger goal. It was not quite a sense of nationalism, because it was focused on religion, but it was a pride in their religion and need to spread and protect it and it had essentially the same effect as nationalism. "The crusades were a collective mobilization of Christendom and gave a strong sense of territorial identity to medieval Europe" (Delanty, 34). Europe was not yet a defined nation at the time and "Europeans" were not really a group of people yet, the crusades were the first step towards Europe becoming a nation.

The second major impact of the crusades was its effect on feudalism. As previously mentioned, the medieval time period was very feudal and probably the most feudal time in Europe; there was no social mobility at all. The majority of the people were poor peasants who were tied to the land. During the crusades, there was a new class, the knights, just above the peasants. Above the knights were the tenants or nobles, the rich people who had lots of power and owned land which they charged peasants to live and farm on. At the very top of the feudal pyramid was the king. The crusades were the beginning of the end for feudalism. Lots of people from every level of society went crusading during this time, from the peasants all the way up to kings. When a lot of the people who owned land went crusading, they sold their land and freed the peasants who were paying them to live on their land. With less tenants, it reduced the amount of separation among people and allowed for kings to start consolidating areas. Lots of nobles died without leaving an heir, therefore the land went to the king. Anytime a farm failed, it went to the king. "They helped

to break down feudalism by increasing the authority of kings.” (Banitalebi, 185). Lots of people died which meant there was more room for people to move up and switch classes which damaged the rigidity of the feudal system at the time. “The new rich broke into the aristocracy, and towns became a major force in the breakup of medieval society.” (Turner). Kings were now able to hire mercenaries, so the whole class of military became useless and was basically disbanded which upset the pyramid of social classes.

The third, and the most important impact of the crusades, was helping Europe get out of the middle ages. The middle ages were seen as a dark time in European history. Europe had stopped all search for knowledge and relied solely on the church for information. They were very closed away from the world and self dependent during this time. On their journey to the holy lands, the crusaders were able to see other cultures and how behind the rest of the world they were. “Entire armies travelling through the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire, and meeting up with the Islamic world, were exposed to a way of life very different from their own.” (Levin, 20). The Europeans would see these new ideas and knowledge, experience new foods and spices, and return home and share what they had learned and saw while crusading. Contact with the outside world and the spread of ideas and resources helped open up Europe and make it into the international power that it would stay as.

Also helping end the middle ages was the rediscovery of Ancient Greek texts which had been kept away from Europe for 2,000 years. The dandy concepts that the Greek philosophers had thought about were now brought back onto the scene. “Ruins from the classical Greek and Roman civilizations surrounded the Italians, making them want to reclaim the lost knowledge of their ancestors.” (Levin, 46). The Greeks’ ideas for western civilization were now accessible and people

were curious. “ This promoted new ways of thinking about the role of the individual.” (Levin, 46). The crusades brought back all of the classical ideas, such as individualism which will be a very important theme of the renaissance. These concepts will be very important in the renaissance and overall western civilization. The rebirth of the ancient Greek texts is the main cause of the renaissance. The renaissance was a very important idea in western civilization because of its advances in math, science, art, literature, and government. The ideas of democracy and government that were brought to Europe because of the crusades would be fought and debated over up until the present time.

The last way the crusades helped end the middle ages in Europe was through trade. Many trade routes had been formed during the crusades with the rest of the world, but especially the middle east. During the crusades, Middle Eastern products were brought into Europe and people started wanting more of the new exotic goods. The increased demand for products from other countries made the merchant class much more wealthy. "After the crusades, merchants got a taste of the wealth that can come by trading with the east; such as spices, silk, and so on." (Banitalebi 186). The merchants realized how profitable trade with the east could be. There was a revival of trade that had not been so big since the Roman Empire. "This lead to a rising merchant class in Italy, laying out the economic foundation for the renaissance." (Banitalebi, 186). Merchants became a whole new, powerful class because of how wealthy they were becoming off of trade with other countries. With the growth in trade, cities were able to grow. The trade between Italy and other countries is what eventually got Europe out of the dark ages and the increase in trade was a direct impact of the crusades.

#### **Part IV**

The crusades unified Europe, hurt feudalism in Europe, and helped put an end to the middle ages in many different ways. The crusades were a major event which involved many of the big powers of the world at the time and it had a huge impact on western civilizations for the next 10 centuries. The crusades unified Europe by giving Europeans a common enemy and goal. They hurt feudalism because lots of people left to go crusading and died which left room for social mobility. Finally, they started the end of the middle ages by exposing Europeans to different cultures, rediscovering old philosophical texts, and opening trade routes. Even though the crusades started out as a religious event, it ended up impacting Europe and the rest of the world in ways no one had imagined.

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