

Plan for a Crusade

Fulk of Villaret



OVERVIEW

European Christians had been trying for over a century to recover the Holy Land (Palestine) from the Muslims. Many crusades had been launched, but most failed utterly; at best, crusaders enjoyed only temporary successes. The document below suggests an ambitious plan for a new crusade and, at the same time, provides a revealing look at the difficulties that had to be overcome. The master of the Hospitallers, a religious order, wrote this memorandum in about 1305, almost three decades after the failure of the last major crusade.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What elements does the author believe are essential for a successful crusade?
 - Do you think this crusade was a success?
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In the first place we think that the best advice which our lord the pope can receive on these matters, is that the passage (*passagium*) should be undertaken and launched with prudence. For this is the foundation of the whole enterprise, if we are to avoid the obstacles which have prevented the many passages initiated [during the] 118 years which have passed to date since the holy city of Jerusalem was most recently lost, from reaching a sound and useful conclusion. It is not expedient for us to speak here of these passages, which were hindered and disturbed so that they failed to attain a salutary outcome. Anybody wishing to find out what happened may consult the writings and chronicles ... [lacuna in MS], [relating to] the first passage [after 1187] which Pope Clement III of happy memory wished to be undertaken by King Philip [II] of France, and King Henry [II] of England, when he learned that Sultan Saladin had seized the entire Holy Land from the hands of the faithful, with the exception of Tyre and Tripoli, and the other passages initiated subsequently, right up to the passage which Gregory X wished and ordered to be undertaken by King Rudolf of Germany.

Instead, we shall begin by referring to a certain passage once undertaken, which attained a praiseworthy end because it was begun well and prudently. Lord Urban II, of distinguished memory, found himself on this side of the mountains [i.e. in France] when he heard the news of the lamentable loss of the Holy Land. He summoned to Nîmes certain of the faithful, prelates and others who were in the vicinity, and preached the cross, using all his efforts to exhort the people to [join in] the passage. He repeated this at Clermont in the Auvergne, subsequently appointing Bishop [Adhémar] of Le Puy as his legate and captain, with the job of assembling the passage. [The bishop] shared this

captaincy with Peter the Hermit, who played almost as distinguished a role in the passage as the legate himself. So these men were appointed as captains to assemble the passage and lead it to the Holy Land. As far as military affairs went, the passage's captain was Godfrey of Bouillon, who won Jerusalem. So it seems to us, that if the passage is initiated now in the same manner which was employed by lord Urban [II], then with God's help it will reach the same fortunate conclusion.

This is the way it should proceed. Our lord the pope, wherever he may be, should preach the cross, exhorting and persuading Christ's people through his preaching, and through the grant of big indulgences, to cross over and win the Holy Land. He should fix a date when his passage is to commence its journey, and name the man or men who are to command the passage. We think that this [departure] date should be [soon after the preaching], because longer periods permit many obstacles and problems to come into being. Moreover, men are by nature more spirited and excited when they face the immediate prospect of achieving their desire. In addition, if a far-off date is fixed, it cannot afterwards be easily shortened, whereas if a nearby one is given, and the matter demands it, the next date can be extended to the first or second passage without too much scandal.

Turning to the appointment of captains for the passage, we think that the best thing would be for the pope to appoint a legate to act as his delegated representative. This man should be a cardinal or prelate, as long as he is a prudent individual, about whom the pope can be confident that he will possess and display greater affection and love for the Holy Land than for his kinsmen and native land. A secular knight may be placed alongside him, to give him support, and advise him to the best of his knowledge and ability, acting in the same way that Peter the Hermit did towards the bishop of Le Puy, when Jerusalem was won, as noted above. Furthermore, the pope, after preaching the cross and doing the things which we have described, should appoint as his legates reliable clerics, secular or religious. These would set out through the cities and regions inhabited by the faithful, preaching the cross, giving out indulgences, and making known the [departure] date and [the names of] the passage's captains, in the same way that we have described the pope doing.

While this is going on, it would be a good idea if the lord pope took steps enabling him to assemble a great treasure, without which such a passage would be impossible. This treasure should be used in the first place to provide the transport and equipment which it is essential to arrange before the passage sets out on its journey. And while the pope will find others more expert than us, who can better inform him as to how this treasure can be assembled, we shall say something about it at the end of this document. It follows from our advice that the pope should not summon a general council to decree and initiate the general passage, for the prelates and other churchmen who come to this council, either because they are summoned or of their own free will, would be

overburdened with expenses, and thus unable to provide as much assistance as the needs of this matter dictate.

The transport and equipment which have to be [funded] from this treasure, before the passage sets out, are as follows. The Saracens are famed for their cleverness and ingenuity. As soon as they learn that the Christians have initiated a passage, they will make haste to forearm themselves with weapons, iron, pitch, timber and everything else with which they can mount their defence. And those wicked Christians who are cursed by a blind greed for profit will strive with all their might to supply them with these things, for the Saracens are only able to get hold of them from over here, through the services of impious Christians. So when crusade preaching begins, twenty-five galleys armed with good men should be brought together and sent overseas. Together with the ships provided by the king of Cyprus, the Temple, and ourselves, they would be able to prevent the vessels of the wicked Christians from readily gaining access to Alexandria or the land of Egypt. And we believe that this modest flotilla (*armamentum*) should be set in hand now, so that the time available to the Saracens for arming and supplying themselves with the said materials be the sooner curtailed.

Afterwards, a larger flotilla should be put together to weaken the Saracens and their littoral, so that the approaching passage may the more easily and peacefully disembark, and be put in order. So following the assembly of the said twenty-five galleys, it would be expedient to organise fifty or sixty galleys as soon as possible. Half of these should be *usserii*,¹ able to carry 400 or 500 horses. For a whole year before the arrival of the passage, this flotilla would operate along the sultan's coastline, which takes more than forty days to traverse, landing at one place after another. Horse and foot would disembark, raiding and ravaging the coastal regions for half a day, more or less, depending on local conditions. In this way, when they saw the Christians' flotilla intending to disembark its men, the Saracens would be compelled to maintain armed troops, foot and horse, coming and going from place to place on the coast. [One stratagem would be] to pretend that men are landing while in practice nothing happens, then travel four or five days' distance (or as much as they can) in a single day or night, and then disembark the troops. In the course of all this coming and going the Saracens' armed forces would exhaust their weaponry and animals, and consume all that they have. [Their civilians] would abandon their settlements, and the agriculture from which most of them get their living. Their condition would degenerate to such an extent that when the passage arrived, the Lord permitting, it would achieve more than an army three times its size could do, but for the work of this [advance] party.

A short while before the passage's departure date, the captains would use the treasure to set in motion the recruitment in various regions of paid troops—crossbowmen, horsemen, footmen and other armed men, both knights and others—and bring them together for the passage. The number of paid troops should depend on the captains' estimate, based on what they see

and hear, of how many men they will have who are willing to set out from devotion. For according to the estimate of those who have witnessed the devotion shown by people, when the cross was preached in the past, so many people would commit themselves on this occasion, that it would only be necessary to pay a few, except for crossbowmen, whom we mentioned above, and a certain number of lancers (*lancearii*). Before the departure date arranged for the passage, the pope would order the master of the Teutonic Knights to make ready to cross with the passage in full strength.

Furthermore, the pope should order the kings and princes of the world through his nuncios and letters, that they should not permit any hindrance to be created in their lordships against the people of the houses of the Temple, the Teutonic Knights and ourselves; and that we should be able to export from their lands the arms, money and other things belonging to ourselves, which are necessary for the equipping of the passage. Similarly, before the date set for the passage, and following advice and discussion, the captains would make arrangements for food supplies, and for a fleet to carry the supplies and the passage. Above all, the captains must exercise forethought, so that substantial supplies are transported in the wake of the army. For many of the people who join in the passage will make the crossing so poorly and imprudently supplied, either through inadequate information or because circumstances forbid it, that unless they are assisted, they will not be able to follow the army for two months before being in danger of dying for lack of food.

We think that it is only towards the end of the period leading up the passage's departure date that its embarkation points and destination can be fixed, because as yet nobody can give definite advice on this. To do this, we need to know, or [at least] to estimate, the quality and number of the people [taking part] in the passage, as well as the condition which the enemy will be in when the passage is due to set out. For if the people who commit themselves to the passage are numerous, including a large number of able knights, the advice given would be different to that rendered if the knights were fewer. And if the condition of the enemy's forces and sites was as weak at the point when the passage is due to set out, as it is at present, it would be convenient for the passage to go to a place at which it would be senseless to [disembark], if the condition of this place were to change.

It has also to be believed that the Saracens, who are prudent people, will pay as much attention to their defence as they can, when they hear that the Christians are about to make an attack on them. They will make substantial changes to their armed forces and [fortified] places, which at the moment cannot possibly be known. So we believe that at the moment good advice or healthy counsel cannot be given on this matter. In fact, we believe that even if the future condition of the enemy and of the passage could be ascertained, it would not be a good idea to fix the destination at this point, because there is no way in which it could be kept secret from the Saracens, and they could ask for no better guidance in preparing their defences and laying dangerous

ambushes for the Christians. So these matters should be dealt with and settled as late as possible.

Now we come to the means by which the lord pope can provide for the assembly of a great treasure for the passage. In the first place, he should decree that all prelates and churchmen, religious and others, irrespective of dignity, office and status, are to pay a tenth towards the passage from all their revenues and benefices, with the exception of the Temple, Hospital and Teutonic Knights, whose contribution to the passage has to constitute not just a tenth, but all that they possess. The revenues allotted to the sustenance of the prelates of churches, in the case of all cathedral churches which are vacant, or fall vacant, should be assigned to the passage for the period of their vacancy. The first year's revenues of every vacant benefice should be set aside for the passage, from this point for the next seven years, notwithstanding any ancient custom or privilege that they should be allotted to any [other] purpose, use, or specific individual. In all churches where there are canons, the prebends which next fall vacant, up to a tenth of the canons, should be assigned to the needs of the passage; and those who control the collation should not be allowed to confer them on others.

Those holding several benefices in which they are supposed to reside, and who do not do so by permission of the Apostolic See, should retain whichever one they prefer, and hand over the others for the use of the passage. If the pope wishes, he may exclude from this those who are engaged in the service of the Roman Church, and others whom his sanctity recognises to be worthy of the favour. All the revenues of benefices whose holders do not personally provide the services, and who are not absent by licence of the Roman Church, or for a useful and important matter relating to the churches in which they hold their benefices, or by licence of their prelates, should be assigned to the needs of the passage. All the possessions of clerics who die intestate, and unable to make testaments, should be conferred on the passage. All the silver and gold vessels which prelates hold for the use of their tables and persons, excepting those which they use or are able to use for performing the divine offices in church, should go to the passage when they die.

The lord pope should write to every prelate, and others having the cure of souls, that they and others who administer the Church's sacraments under their direction should request and exhort all the sick, whom they visit for confession or other reasons, to offer something in aid of the passage to the Holy Land, enjoining it on them for the remission of their sins; and great indulgences should be granted to all who leave [money] in their testaments specifically for the passage. Those sent to preach the cross in all countries should [take with them] papal letters with written authority to the effect that those who do not wish to go [on crusade] in person may redeem their vow for money; and a trunk should be placed in selected churches where the faithful can place their alms, as well as whatever they give for the redemption of their vow. The trunk should have three keys, to be safeguarded by three trustworthy

individuals, that is to say a religious, a secular cleric, and a knight or townsperson (*burgensis*), all of whom are to be appointed by the diocesans.

Letters containing threats of excommunication should be sent through-out the entire world, to the effect that all who know, or know of, anyone who is acting as executor for the testaments of kings, princes, dukes, counts, barons, prelates or anybody else, clerics or laymen, in which something was bequeathed in aid of the Holy Land, should, within a certain [number of] days, report and disclose it to their prelates, or the prelates' vicars, in the dioceses where they come from. The prelates, or their vicars, will refer the matter to the captains appointed for the passage as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Similar letters of warning and excommunication should be sent in the case of the executors of these testaments, to the effect that they should hand over whatever they hold from their commission within a specified period, at the bidding and order of the captains of the passage. And we truly believe that many substantial sums will be extracted with [the help of] these letters.

Agreement should be reached with kings who are not participating in this passage, that they will make full restitution of those [sums] which they [still] hold from [the money] which they received from the Church's possessions for the passage to the Holy Land in times past, and which they spent on other concerns. And if they cannot return them at the moment, they should at least assign and hand over to the power and bidding of the captains some revenues from which the above [sums] may be recovered as rapidly as possible. The pope should grant to all who have to return the proceeds of usury, or other sums wrongfully acquired, that they are wholly absolved and immune, provided that they hand over whatever they can, to the collectors who are appointed for the passage.

¹ Round-hulled vessels.