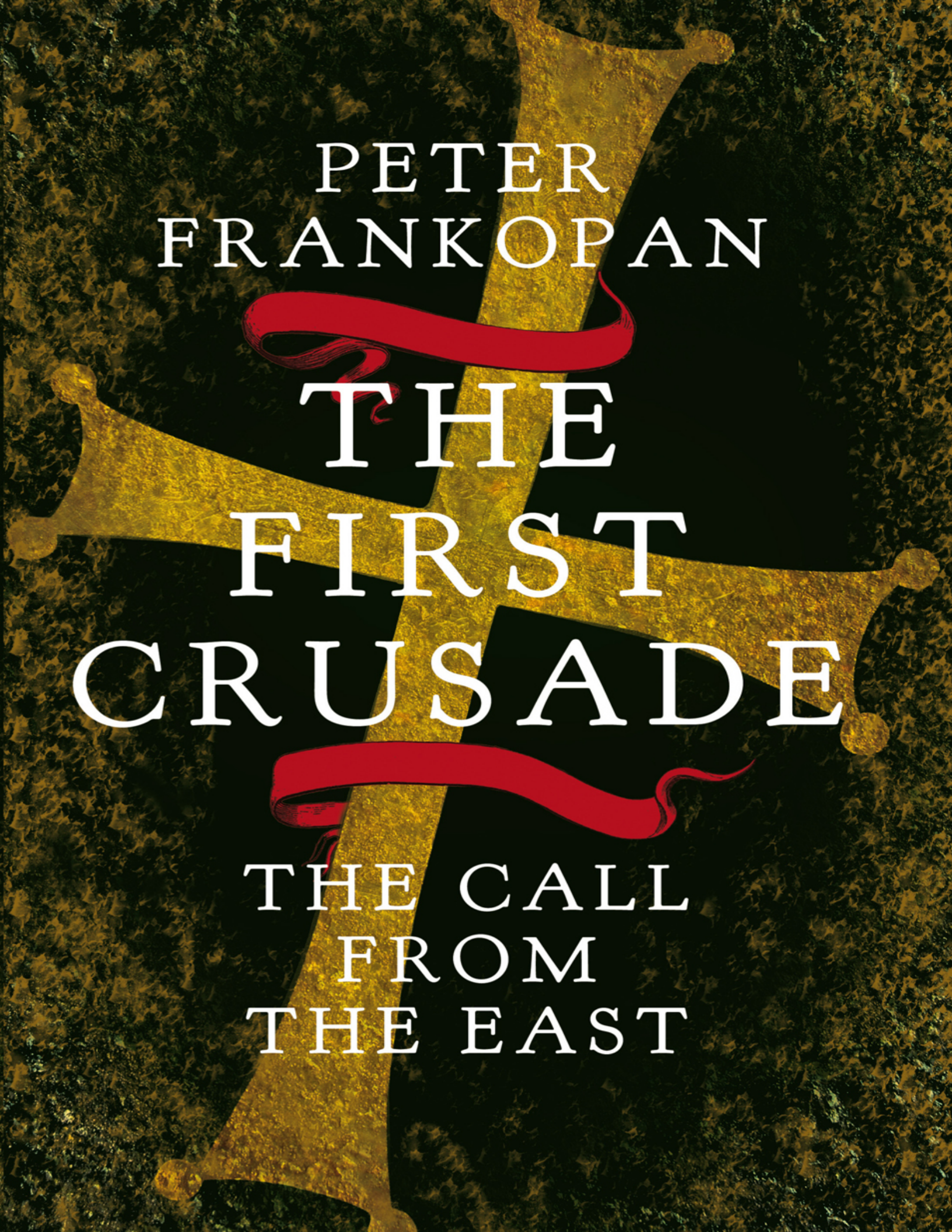
PETER
FRANKOPAN
THE
FIRST
CRUSADE
THE CALL
FROM
THE EAST

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About the Book

In 1096, an expedition of extraordinary scale and ambition set off from western Europe on a mass pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Three years later, after a journey which saw acute hardship, the most severe dangers and thousands of casualties, the knights of the First Crusade found themselves storming the fortifications and capturing the Holy City from its Muslim overlords. Against all the odds, the expedition had returned Jerusalem to Christian hands.

With its themes of the rise of the papacy, the confrontation between Christianity and Islam, the evolution of the concept of holy war, of knightly piety and religious devotion, the First Crusade is one of the best known and most written about events in history.

Yet in this fascinating and innovative study, Peter Frankopan shifts the perspective and asks vital questions that have never been posed before. Why was there an overwhelming desire to liberate Jerusalem in the mid-1090s, given that the city had been taken by the Muslims nearly 500 years earlier? What were the causes of the Crusade in the East which provoked such an overwhelming response in the West? What role was played by the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople in the genesis and execution of the expedition? In short, why was there a First Crusade?

Rather than concentrating on the pope and the knights of western Europe who have dominated the history of the First Crusade for centuries, Frankopan focuses on Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire. He brilliantly restores the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos to the heart of the story, with a series of catastrophic events in the mid-1090s serving to paint a compelling and strikingly original picture of the expedition to Jerusalem that will change our understanding of the Crusades as a whole.

About the Author

Peter Frankopan is Senior Research Fellow at Worcester College, Oxford and Director of the Centre for Byzantine Research at Oxford University. He took a First in History and was Schiff Scholar at Jesus College, Cambridge before completing his doctorate at Oxford, where he was Senior Scholar at Corpus Christi College. He has lectured at leading universities all over the world, including Cambridge, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, NYU, King's College London, and the Institute of Historical Research. His revised translation of *The Alexiad* by Anna Komnene was published in 2009.

‘A dazzling book, perfectly combining deep scholarship and easy readability. The most important addition to Crusading literature since Steven Runciman.’
John Julius Norwich, author of *Byzantium*

‘In this fluent and dramatic account, Peter Frankopan rightly places the Emperor Alexios at the heart of the First Crusade and in doing so skilfully adds a dimension frequently missing from our understanding of this seminal event. Frankopan illuminates the complex challenges that faced Alexios and deftly depicts the boldness and finesse needed to survive in the dangerous world of medieval Byzantium.’
Jonathan Phillips, author of *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*

‘Peter Frankopan’s re-assessment of the Byzantine contribution to the origins and course of the First Crusade offers a compelling and challenging balance to traditional accounts. Based on fresh interpretations of primary sources, lucidly written and forcefully argued, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* will demand attention from scholars while providing an enjoyable and accessible narrative for the general reader.’
Christopher Tyerman, author of *God’s War: A New History of the Crusades*

‘Filled with Byzantine intrigue in every sense, this book is important, compellingly revisionist and impressive in its scholarly use of totally fresh sources. It refocuses the familiar western story through the eyes of the emperor of the East and fills in the missing piece of the puzzle of the Crusades.’
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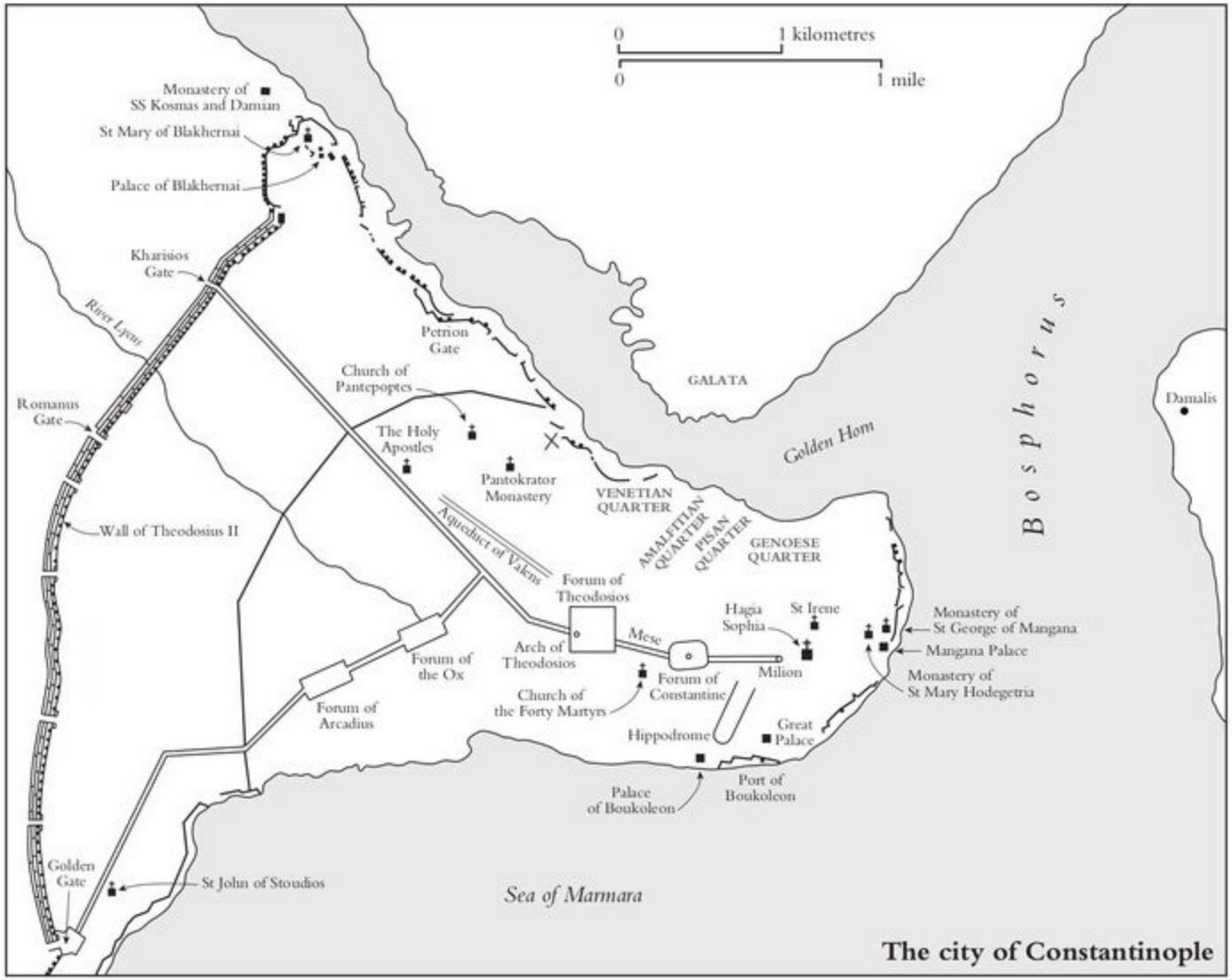
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The Byzantine Empire c. 1050
0 100 200 300 400 kilometres
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Ragusa
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Maritza
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Trebizond
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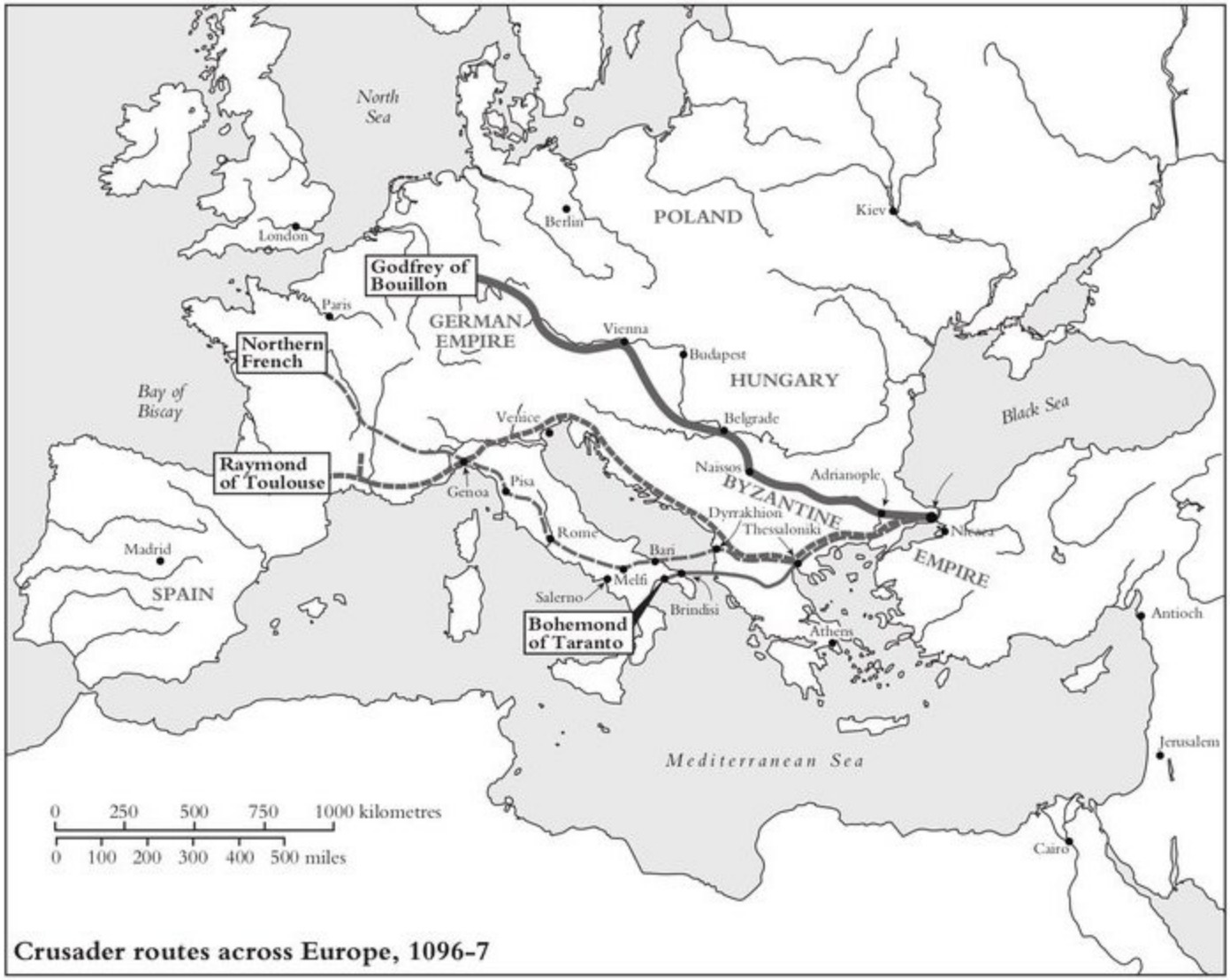

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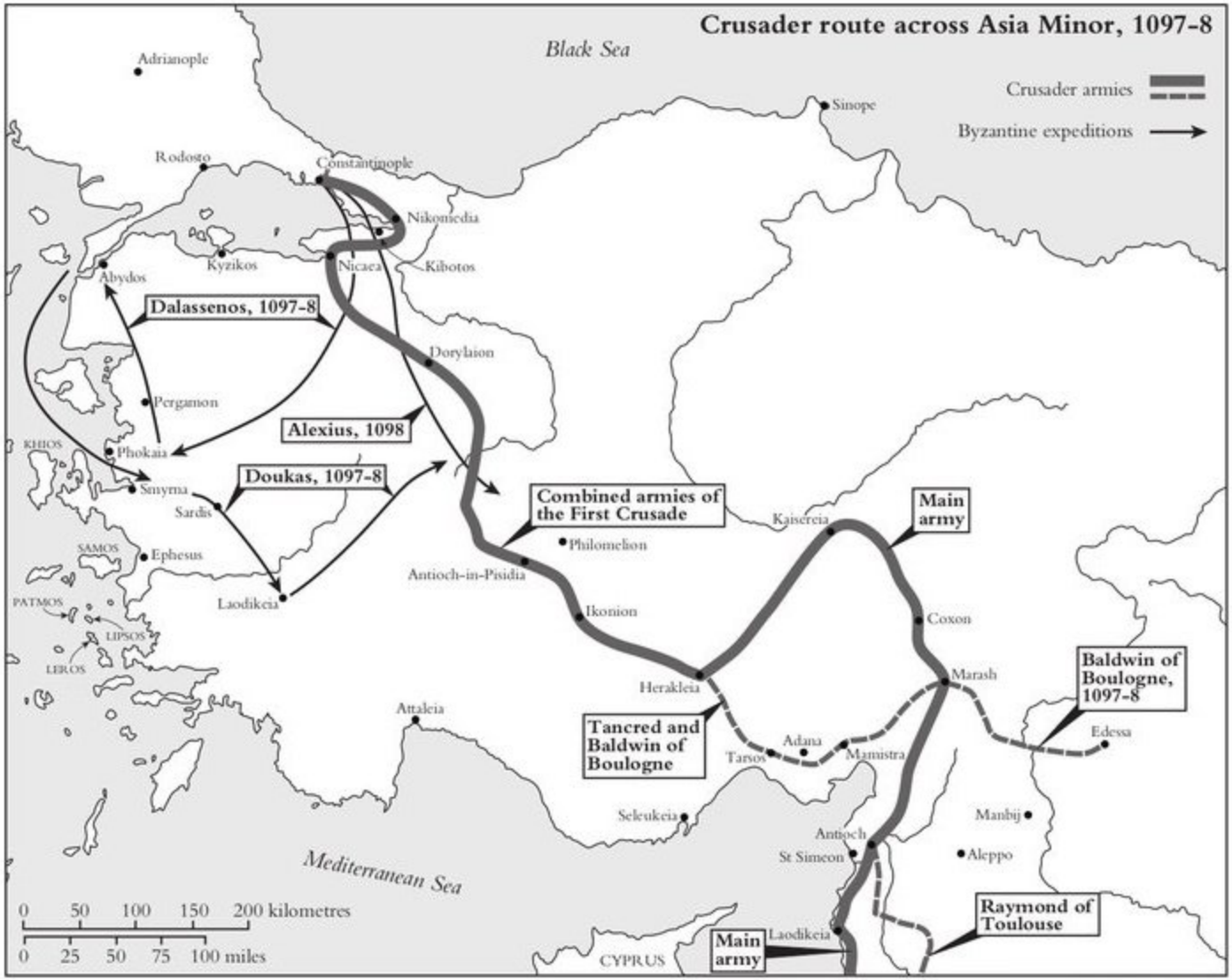
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Main army
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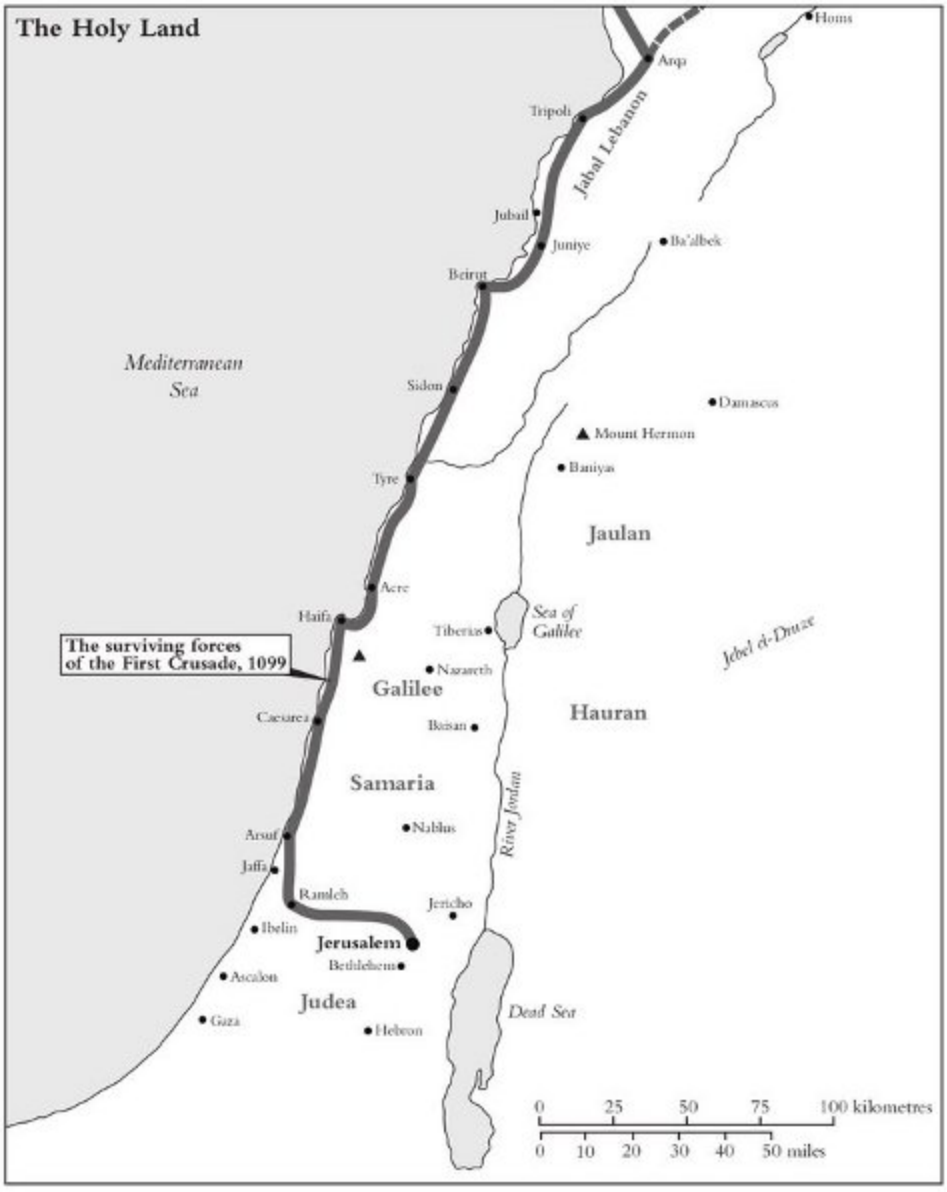
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Jerusalem
Bethlehem
Ascalon
Judea
Dead Sea
Gaza
Hebron
0 25 50 75 100 kilometres
0 10 20 30 40 50 miles

To my wife, Jessica

The First Crusade

The Call from the East

PETER FRANKOPAN

THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON

Disturbing news has emerged from Jerusalem and the city of Constantinople and is now constantly at the forefront of our mind: namely that the race of the Persians, a foreign people and a people rejected by God … has invaded the lands of the Christians [and has] depopulated them by slaughter and plunder and arson.

Robert of Rheims

An embassy of the emperor of Constantinople came to the synod and implored his lordship the Pope and all the faithful of Christ to bring assistance against the heathen for the defence of this holy church, which had now been nearly annihilated in that region by the infidels who had conquered her as far as the walls of Constantinople. Our Lord Pope called upon many to perform this service, to promise by oaths to journey there by God's will and to bring the emperor the most faithful assistance against the heathen as very best as they were able.

Bernold of Constance

Kelts assembled from all parts, one after another, with arms and horses and all the other equipment for war. Full of enthusiasm and ardour they thronged every highway, and with these warriors came a host of civilians, outnumbering the sand of the seashore or the stars of heaven, carrying palms and bearing crosses on their shoulders … like tributaries joining a river from all directions, they streamed towards us in full force.

Anna Komnene

In his essence, the emperor was like a scorpion; for while you have nothing to fear from its face, you do well to avoid

injury from its tail.

William of Tyre

Preface and Acknowledgements

As most undergraduates find, at one point in the course of their studies, the prospect of a lecture starting at 9 a.m. can feel unfair and almost cruel. I remember wearily climbing the stairs of the History Faculty in Cambridge in 1992, having to shake myself awake to take a seat to listen to the first lecture of the term on the paper I had chosen, called 'Byzantium and its neighbours, 800–1200'. Five minutes later, I was suddenly alert and transfixed, as though I had just been given a triple espresso. I was hearing about the ruthless Pecheneg steppe nomads and how they would do anything in return for pepper, scarlet silk and strips of Middle Eastern leather; I was wondering about why pagan Bulgar leaders would choose to become Christians in the ninth century; I was hearing about New Rome – the imperial city of Constantinople.

The excitement of that first lecture triggered a voracious appetite about the Byzantine Empire and its neighbours. It was a matter of course that I should want to carry on to do postgraduate research, and the only difficulty was choosing a topic. It was the reign of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos that caught my eye, with its wonderfully rich sources and many unanswered questions. It soon became clear, however, that in order to gain any real insight into the Byzantine Empire in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, I had to understand the literature of this period, and the *Alexiad* in particular; then the Greek and Latin sources of southern Italy; then the world of the steppe nomads; then the archaeology and material culture of

Constantinople, the Balkans and Asia Minor; then the history of the Crusades, the medieval papacy, the establishment of Latin colonies in the Holy Land … What had started, innocently enough, with an early morning lecture became a passion; occasionally overwhelming, sometimes frustrating, always exciting.

There are many who deserve thanks for their support and help over the years. The provost and fellows of Worcester College have provided a wonderful and sympathetic home since 1997, outstanding in their generosity and modest in the demands they have made. I owe thanks to Princeton University for awarding me a Stanley J. Seeger Visiting Fellowship, which allowed me a chance to open new avenues of research. The fellows of Harvard are also owed a debt of gratitude for making me a summer fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, where some of the ideas here took shape many moons ago. The staff of the Bodleian Library, above all the Lower Reading Room, and of the History Faculty Library have been wonderfully patient and good-humoured. The same is true of my many colleagues in Oxford where I have had the great privilege to work alongside some of the finest scholars in the field of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies.

I owe thanks to many of my colleagues in Oxford, but particularly to Mark Whittow, Catherine Holmes, Cyril and Marlia Mango, Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys, Marc Lauxtermann and James Howard-Johnston who have been generous in sharing their views of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. I am particularly grateful to Jonathan Shepard, who gave that first lecture in Cambridge, for steering me towards Byzantium and for proving an important influence since. Many others, from my undergraduate and graduate students to colleagues with whom I have discussed Constantinople, Alexios and the Crusades late into the night at conferences, are also owed my gratitude. If I have

failed to take their good advice, and that of others, I can only apologise.

Catherine Clarke has been wonderful, encouraging me to tell the story of the First Crusade afresh. This book would not have been written without her guidance and the help of her fantastic team at Felicity Bryan. Will Sulkin at The Bodley Head and Joyce Seltzer at Harvard University Press have been generous and supportive throughout. I owe thanks to Jörg Hensgen for asking difficult questions and making this book better than it would otherwise have been. Chloe Campbell has been a guardian angel, her patience and advice consistent and invaluable. Many thanks to Anthony Hippisley, and also to Martin Lubikowski for his maps. I could not be more grateful to my parents, who have inspired me since I was a boy.

My greatest debt is to my wife Jessica, who heard about nomads, Byzantium and the eastern Mediterranean on the same day that I did, as I told her excitedly about the new world I had encountered that morning. She listened patiently as I told her I had found my dream subject, and encouraged me to pursue it over the first of many cappuccinos in Clowns; this book is dedicated to her.

Peter Frankopan
July 2011

Author’s Note

I have not followed a consistent rule when transliterating from Greek, as it would seem churlish not to use well-established English forms of well-known names. Naturally, this leads to some personal judgements, which I hope are not off-putting. I have used Constantinople, Nicaea and Cappadocia, for example, but Dyrrakhion, Thessaloniki and Nikomedia. Likewise with individuals, I have used George, Isaac and Constantine, but Alexios, Nikephoros, Palaiologos and Komnenos. Western names are given in their modern form, hence William rather than Guillermus and Robert rather than Robertus. Turkish names follow the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

Where possible, I have used English translations of the major sources, rather than direct readers to the original texts. This is not always ideal, since in some cases, there are outstanding modern critical editions which will in due course lead to better and finer translations than some of those cited. Nevertheless, it seems preferable to aim for some consistency of approach than to cite some modern translations but provide my own versions of others. As with the names, I very much hope that this does not detract from the wider enjoyment of the subject matter.

Introduction

On 27 November 1095, in the town of Clermont in central France, Pope Urban II stood up to deliver one of the most electrifying speeches in history. He had spent the previous week presiding over a church council attended by twelve archbishops, eighty bishops and other senior clergy, before announcing that he wanted to give an address of special importance to the faithful. Rather than speak from the pulpit of the church in Clermont, Urban decided to deliver his words in a nearby field so all who had gathered in anticipation could hear him.

Nestled at the heart of a chain of dormant volcanoes, with the mightiest of the lava domes, the Puy-de-Dôme, clearly visible just five miles away, the Pope had chosen a spectacular setting for his sermon. The crowd strained to hear him as he began to speak on a cold winter's day: 'Dearest brethren,' he said, 'I, Urban, supreme pontiff and by the permission of God prelate of the whole world, have come in this time of urgent necessity to you, the servants of God in these regions, as a messenger for divine admonition.'[1]

The Pope was about to make a dramatic call to arms, on the point of urging men with military experience to march thousands of miles to the Holy City of Jerusalem. The speech was intended to inform and to provoke, to exhort and to anger; to generate a reaction of unprecedented scale. And it did precisely that. Less than four years later, western knights were camped by the walls of the city where Jesus Christ was crucified, about to take Jerusalem

in God’s name. Tens of thousands had left their homes and crossed Europe, spurred on by Urban’s words at Clermont, determined to liberate the Holy City.

‘We want you to know’, the Pope explained in his speech at Clermont, ‘what sad cause has brought us to your land and what emergency of yours and all the faithful it is that has brought us here’. Disturbing news had reached him, he said, both from Jerusalem and from the city of Constantinople: the Muslims, ‘a foreign people and a people rejected by God, had invaded lands belonging to Christians, destroying them and plundering the local population’. Many had been brutally murdered; others had been taken prisoner and carried off into captivity.[2]

The Pope graphically described the atrocities being committed in the east by the ‘Persians’ – by which he meant the Turks. ‘They throw down altars, after soiling them with their own filth, circumcise Christians, and pour the resulting blood either on the altars or into the baptismal vessels. When they feel like inflicting a truly painful death on some they pierce their navels, pull out the end of their intestines, tie them to a pole and whip them around it until, all their bowels pulled out, they fall lifeless to the ground. They shoot arrows at others tied to stakes; others again they attack having stretched out their necks, unsheathing their swords to see if they can manage to hack off their heads with one blow. And what can I say about the appalling treatment of women, which is better to pass over in silence than to spell out in detail?’[3]

Urban did not mean to inform the crowd which had gathered, but to galvanise it: ‘Not I but God exhorts you as heralds of Christ to repeatedly urge men of all ranks whatsoever, knights as well as foot soldiers, rich and poor, to hasten to exterminate this vile race from our lands and to aid the Christian inhabitants in time.’[4]

The knighthood of Europe should rise up and advance boldly as warriors of Christ and rush as quickly as they

could to the defence of the Eastern Church. A battle line of Christian knights should form and march to Jerusalem, driving out the Turks on the way. 'May you deem it a beautiful thing to die for Christ in the city where he died for us.'[5] God had blessed the knights of Europe with an outstanding ability in battle, great courage and strength. The time had come, he said, for them to make use of their powers and avenge the sufferings of the Christians in the east and to deliver the Holy Sepulchre to the hands of the faithful.[6]

The various accounts of what Urban said at Clermont leave little doubt that the Pope's speech was an oratorical masterpiece, his exhortations carefully weighted, his gruesome examples of Turkish oppression perfectly chosen.[7] He went on to describe the rewards awaiting those who took up arms: whoever made the journey east would be eternally blessed. All were encouraged to take up this offer. Crooks and thieves were urged to become 'soldiers of Christ', while those who had previously fought against their brothers and kinsmen were told to now join forces and fight lawfully against the barbarians. Whoever went on the journey, inspired by their devotion rather than for the love of money or glory, would receive remission of all their sins. It was, in the words of one observer, 'a new way to attain salvation'.[8]

The response to Urban's speech was rapturous. Up went the cry: '*Deus vult! Deus vult! Deus vult!*' – 'God wills it! God wills it! God wills it!' The crowd listened intently to hear what the Pope would say next. 'Let that be a war-cry for you in battle because it came from God. When you mass together to attack the enemy, this cry sent by God will be the cry of all – "God wills it! God wills it!"'[9]

Many who heard the Pope's speech were gripped by enthusiasm, hurrying home to begin preparations. Clerics dispersed to spread the word, while Urban undertook a gruelling schedule, criss-crossing France to promote the

expedition, dispatching stirring letters to regions he did not have time to visit. Soon all of France was abuzz with crusading fever. Leading noblemen and knights hurried to join the expedition. Men like Raymond of Toulouse, one of the richest and most powerful figures in Europe, agreed to participate, as did Godfrey, Duke of Lorraine, who was so eager that before setting out, he minted coins bearing the legend 'GODEFRIDUS IEROSOLIMITANUS' – 'Godfrey the Jerusalem pilgrim'.[10] News of the expedition to Jerusalem spread quickly and excitedly.[11] The First Crusade was under way.

Four years later, in early July 1099, a battered, bedraggled yet supremely determined force of knights took up position by the walls of Jerusalem. The holiest location in Christendom was about to be attacked and seized from the Muslims. Siege engines had been built and were ready for action. Solemn prayers had been offered. The knights were about to achieve one of the most astonishing feats of endeavour in history.

The ambition of the First Crusade stemmed in part from the scale of the enterprise. In the past, armies had marched long distances and defied the odds to make sweeping conquests. The campaigns of the great generals of antiquity, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Belisarius, showed how vast tracts of territory could be swallowed up by well-led, disciplined soldiers. What made the Crusade different was the fact that the western force was not an army of conquest but of liberation. At Clermont, Urban did not urge the knighthood of Europe to seize places as they journeyed east, benefiting from the resources of newly conquered towns and regions; rather, the aim was to free Jerusalem – and the churches of the east – from the oppression of the so-called pagans.[12]

Things had not proved quite so simple, however. The journey across thousands of miles had brought terrible

suffering and hardship, countless casualties and enormous sacrifice. Of the 70,000–80,000 soldiers of Christ who had responded to the Pope's call, no more than a third reached Jerusalem. Urban's envoy, travelling with the main Crusade leaders and writing back to Rome in the autumn of 1099, put the ratio of survivors to those lost in battle and disease well below this, suggesting that fewer than ten per cent of those who set out ever saw the walls of the Holy City.[13]

Pontius Rainaud and his brother Peter, 'most noble princes', for example, were murdered by robbers after travelling from Provence through northern Italy and down the Dalmatian coast; they did not even make it halfway to Jerusalem. Walter of Verva got considerably further when he went out to forage for food one day with a band of fellow knights near Sidon (in modern Lebanon). He never came back. Perhaps he was ambushed and killed; maybe he was taken prisoner and sent as a captive deep into the bowels of the Muslim world, never to be heard of again; or perhaps his end was altogether more mundane: a missed step by a heavily laden horse on mountainous terrain could easily have fatal consequences.[14]

There was Godevere, a noblewoman who chose to accompany her husband, Count Baldwin of Bouillon, on his journey east. She fell ill near Marash (in modern Turkey) and faded quickly, her condition worsening daily before she slipped away and died. This English-born aristocrat was laid to rest in an obscure and exotic corner of Asia Minor, far away from home, in a place her ancestors and kinsmen would never have heard of.[15]

Then there were others, like Raimbold Cretons, a young knight from Chartres, who reached Jerusalem and took part in the assault on the city. He was the first knight to scale the ladders that had been placed against the walls, no doubt striving for the kudos heaped on the first man to break into the city. But Raimbold's ascent had been watched by a defender of the fortifications who was no less

eager, and who dealt him a blow that took one arm clean off and severed the other almost completely; Raimbold at least survived to witness the fall of Jerusalem.[16]

And then there were the men whose mission ended in glory. The great leaders of the First Crusade – Bohemond, Raymond of Toulouse, Godfrey and Baldwin of Bouillon, Tancred and others – became household names all over Europe as a result of the capture of the Holy City. Their achievements were commemorated in countless histories, in verse and song, and in a new form of literature: medieval romance. Their success was to provide the benchmark for all later Crusades. It was a tough act to follow.

The First Crusade is one of the best-known and most written-about events in history. The story of knights taking up arms and crossing Europe to liberate Jerusalem enthralled writers at the time and has thrilled historians and readers ever since. Tales of astounding heroism, of the first encounters with the Muslim Turks, of the hardships suffered by the armed pilgrims on their journey east – ending with the bloody slaughter of the population of Jerusalem in 1099 – have echoed through western culture for nearly a thousand years. Imagery and themes from the Crusade proliferated in the music, literature and art of Europe. Even the word ‘Crusade’ itself – literally, the way of the Cross – came to take on a wider meaning: a dangerous but ultimately successful quest by the forces of good against evil.

The First Crusade captured the popular imagination because of its drama and violence. But it was not just theatre: the expedition has held its grip on the west because it shaped so much of what was to come: the rise of papal power, the confrontation between Christianity and Islam, the evolution of the concepts of holy war, knightly piety and religious devotion, the emergence of the Italian

maritime states and the establishment of colonies in the Middle East. All had their roots in the First Crusade.[17]

Not surprisingly, literature on the subject continues to flourish. Although generations of historians have written about the expedition, a remarkable school of modern scholars has produced outstanding and original work over the last few decades. Subjects such as the marching speed of the Crusader army, its provisioning and the coinage it used have been examined in detail.[18] The interrelationship between the main narrative western sources has been looked at, recently provocatively so.[19] In the past few years, attention has turned to understanding the apocalyptic backdrop to the expedition to Jerusalem and to the early medieval world in general.[20]

Innovative approaches to the Crusade have been taken: psychoanalysts have suggested that the knights who went to Jerusalem were looking for an outlet to relieve pent-up sexual tension, while economists have examined supply/demand imbalances in the late eleventh century and explored the expedition in terms of the allocation of resources in early medieval Europe and the Mediterranean.[21] Geneticists have assessed mitochondrial evidence from southern Anatolia in an effort to understand population movements in the late eleventh century.[22] Others have pointed out that the period around the Crusade was the only time before the end of the twentieth century that GDP outstripped population growth, the implication being that there are parallels to be found between medieval and modern demographics and economic boom.[23]

And yet, in spite of our perennial fascination with the First Crusade, remarkably little attention has ever been paid to its real origins. For nearly ten centuries, the focus of writers and scholars has been on Pope Urban II, his rousing speech at Clermont and the galvanising of the knighthood of Europe. However, the catalyst for the

expedition to Jerusalem was not the Pope, but another figure entirely: the call to arms issued by Urban was the result of a direct appeal for help from the emperor of Constantinople, Alexios I Komnenos, in the east.

Founded in the fourth century as a second capital from which the Roman Empire could govern its sprawling provinces in the eastern Mediterranean, the ‘New Rome’ soon became known as the city of its founder, the emperor Constantine. Constantinople, nestled on the western bank of the Bosphorus, grew to become the largest city in Europe, adorned with triumphal arches, palaces, statues of emperors and countless churches and monasteries built in the centuries after Constantine adopted Christianity.

The Eastern Roman Empire continued to flourish after the western provinces faded and ‘Old Rome’ fell in the fifth century. By 1025, it controlled most of the Balkans, southern Italy, Asia Minor as well as large parts of the Caucasus and northern Syria, and it had expanding ambitions in Sicily. Seventy years later, the picture was rather different. Turkish raiders had swarmed into Anatolia, sacking several important cities and severely disrupting provincial society. The Balkans had been subject to decades of near incessant attack, with much the same consequences. The empire’s territories in Apulia and Calabria, meanwhile, had been lost altogether, taken by Norman adventurers who conquered southern Italy in less than two decades.

The man who stood between the collapse of the empire and its salvation was Alexios Komnenos. An outstanding young general, Alexios had not inherited the throne, but seized it in a military coup in 1081 at the age of around twenty-five. His first years in power were uncomfortable as he struggled to deal with the external threats facing Byzantium while at the same time imposing himself over the empire. As a usurper, lacking the legitimacy of power through succession, Alexios took a pragmatic approach to