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Women in the First Crusade and the Kingdom of Jerusalem

Maria Carriere

Women's participation in the crusades has been attributed mainly to ambiguity in Pope Urban II's preaching and framing of the First Crusade as a kind of pilgrimage rather than a military excursion. A comparison between ranks of women during the People's Crusade and the First Crusade has been lacking in the historiography of these crusade expeditions. By analyzing attitudes and perceptions toward women, we can connect women's ability to participate in crusading to their economic status. A comparison between chroniclers and contemporaries' attitudes toward and descriptions of women in the People's and the First Crusades can provide insight into women's economic status, religious affiliation, and actions and how these factors influenced the crusades themselves. Although the People's Crusade included a range of women from different statuses beyond the peasants and included many nobles, it brought a wider variety of women into the excursion due to the inclusive preaching of Peter the Hermit. The First Crusade was officially sanctioned but also more exclusive, with restrictions on who could get involved given by Pope Urban II. Women on the other side of the conflict, often local and non-combatant women, experienced much, and occasionally more, of the violence of the crusades. Non-Christian writers occasionally described in detail the ways in which these non-Christian, non-combatant local women experienced the crusades differently from women traveling from the West. As active participants, unwilling victims, and captives of war, Greek, Muslim, and Jewish survived and died by their interactions with male and female crusaders. The First Crusade was often a violent experience for women, whose actions described in the chronicles provides significant insight into the experiences of women as they encountered crusaders from the West. Women's participation on crusade was affected by not only by their gender and their status, but by their location, religion, and allegiance, creating a noticeable impact on the actions and representations of women.

1. Pilgrimage: Connections to the First Crusade

The instigators of the First Crusade preached its inception in a way not dissimilar from the preaching of a pilgrimage. Pilgrimages were a familiar tradition in Medieval Europe, unlike the crusading counterpart. A crusade is typically defined as a holy or religious war fought for God, to advance what was believed to be God's plan.¹ At its start, the crusade's connection to God and devotional and penitential travel meant that it often involved taking the cross and other actions highly associated with pilgrimage.² Thus it will be necessary to investigate the background of pilgrimage and its relation to crusading in eleventh and twelfth century Europe to examine the place that pilgrimage held, and what this meant for women on crusade.

Pilgrimage had long been part of medieval religious practice, and from the seventh century onwards, pilgrimage was increasingly prescribed as penance for confessed sinners.³ Medieval Europe had a tradition stemming centuries of both devotional and penitential pilgrimages bound for the Holy Land, although in far smaller numbers than the crusades would bring. Though many made the pilgrimage all the way to Jerusalem, the majority of pilgrimages were closer to home, where churches and cathedrals held relics or other small objects of religious significance.⁴ Pilgrimage had an extensive history before the crusades as a remedy for sin and a means for penance, often imposed by religious and ecclesiastical authorities. Because of this, pilgrimage was a mostly ungendered action that included people of different classes and genders, imposed upon the pilgrim either as penance or as a voluntary expedition at the person's own will.⁵ Pilgrimage by 1095 was not only an acceptable but common reason to travel to the Holy Land, but it was Urban's

¹ Helen J. Nicholson, *Women and the Crusades*, (Hereford Historical Association, 2008), pages 2-3.

² Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 21.

³ James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1969) 7.

⁴ Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, 700-1500* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 3.

⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

offer of the crusades as penance in his Privilege of Urban to the Pilgrims at the Council of Clermont in 1095 that brought the sense of a penitential pilgrimage to the crusades. Urban was reported to have said, “Whoever goes on the journey to free the church of God in Jerusalem out of devotion alone, and not for the gaining of glory or money, can substitute the journey for all penance for sin.”⁶ Urban’s speech specifically disassociated the crusade from the realm of war and common incentives for war such as money and prestige. Urban instead shifted the enthusiasm to a more religious and penitential sphere: to that of a pilgrimage rather than a military excursion. Urban’s framing allowed audiences to envision the crusades as a pilgrimage in which a religious authority gave a penance (in this case, of war and travel, rather than merely travel) in return for the promise of freedom from sins.

As a result of Urban’s words and the surrounding symbols and messages of the religious war, the First Crusade could have been seen by interested parties as a penitential pilgrimage rather than a war or military endeavor. The crusaders coopted many of the insignia that earlier in the century had been linked exclusively to pilgrimage, notably including the cross and the staff.⁷ The blessing of a staff was a familiar ritual of pilgrimages by the beginning of the tenth century,⁸ and the cross had been used not only as a symbol of Christianity but as a symbol of pilgrimage since Egeria first recorded its use c. 380.⁹ The words of canon law and crusade chroniclers also denoted the ways in which the crusaders conceptualized their voyage: many referred to the crusaders as pilgrims: “*peregrini*,” before more specific terms were common when referring to the crusades like *passagium generale*, and *expeditio crucis*. The term *peregrini* marks the crusaders as a specific

⁶ Peters, Edward, ed. “The Privilege of Urban to the Pilgrims”, in *The First Crusade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 37.

⁷ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 22.

⁸ Larissa J. Taylor, Leigh Ann Craig, John B. Friedman, and Kathy Gower, ed., *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage* (Boston: Brill, 2010), Staff.

⁹ *Ibid*, Crosses and Cross Bases.

type of religious traveler rather than fighters or religious warriors.¹⁰ Because of the imagery associated with the journey, many of those who took up the cross may not have known that they were proposing to go on crusade, and because of the language and terms used to refer to the various expeditions, they may have believed they were solely going on pilgrimage.¹¹ The connection between canon law, the preaching of the crusade, and the term “*peregrinatus*,” which before that time had been used almost exclusively to refer to pilgrims, makes it probable that those undertaking the religious journey did not have the expectation of warfare that accompanied Urban’s call. The crusaders’ designation as *peregrini* regardless of their gender, background, or class status, meant that all were merely a subsection of pilgrims, regardless of origin or other distinguishing feature.¹² The legal status of the crusade and the crusaders, therefore, at least up to the thirteenth century, was not fixed, conceived, and solidified: those who went on crusade were seen as an outgrowth of the pilgrim tradition.

The special privileges granted to the crusader, including remission of sins in return for the liberation of Jerusalem, meant that the status of a pilgrim was not significantly dissimilar to the status of a crusader.¹³ The people who took up the cross around 1095 for the first time were part of centuries of pilgrimage tradition, and they would already have been familiar with the symbols and items associated with pilgrimage. They likely knew or knew of people who had undergone a pilgrimage of any length and had probably witnessed pilgrimages passing through their towns and villages. There is little doubt that crusaders were familiar with these traditions and had friends and relatives who had undergone the ritual.¹⁴ Pilgrimage had garnered a place in medieval European

¹⁰ Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*, 10.

¹¹ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 19.

¹² James A. Brundage, *The Crusades, Holy War, and Canon Law*, (Brookfield, VT: Gower, 1991), VII, 291.

¹³ Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*, 10.

¹⁴ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 18-19.

culture and practice by the eleventh century. The laws and privileges given to the crusaders by Pope Urban II solidified the sense of the crusades as a kind of pilgrimage with roots in the tradition of pilgrimage. The crusaders were saddled with the dual roles of both fighter and penitent, and the canonical placement of crusading as a religious and penitential exercise rather than classic warfare. Council of Clermont opened the crusade to the possibility of women's inclusion.

With pilgrimage firmly established as available to people of all classes and genders, questions arise of the possibility for their active participation in the crusading model that followed. The model of pilgrimage that the crusaders inherited, and that Pope Urban presented at Clermont, left open the possibility for women's participation. Nuns and married and unmarried women had a history of going on pilgrimage before 1095, and in some instances, they went in large numbers. The French chronicler Ralph Glaber notes that during the eleventh century a surge of pilgrims poured into Jerusalem, and notably, many of them were women. He writes, "At this time an innumerable multitude of people from the whole world, began to travel to the Sepulchre of the Savior at Jerusalem. First to go were the petty people, then those of middling estate, and next the powerful, kings, counts, marquesses, and bishops; finally, and this was something which had never happened before, numerous women, noble and poor, undertook the journey."¹⁵ The event was strange enough that Glaber later attributes the occurrence to the potential coming of the Antichrist, noting, "...some replied cautiously enough that it could portend nothing other than the advent of the accursed Anti-Christ who, according to divine testimony, is expected to appear at the end of the world."¹⁶ Indeed, Glaber considered the coming of the Antichrist an imminent threat, and much of the perspectives in his writing stem from this idea. Still, his writing reveals the stirring of a

¹⁵ Ralph Glaber, *Rodulfi Glabri Historiarum: Libri Quinque*, ed. and trans. John France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 201.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 205.

“new religious consciousness” that began in the eleventh century before the crusades: a phenomenon that certainly included women.¹⁷ Medieval pilgrimage had always been open to women as well as men, and Glaber’s writing suggests that women did make up significant portions of pilgrim excursions, especially during periods of renewed religious excitement.¹⁸ The inclusion of women on crusade would not have been much of a stretch to the medieval imagination either. Though in later writings he discouraged certain groups like monks from attending crusade,¹⁹ Pope Urban’s phrasing in *The Privilege of Urban to the Pilgrims* suggests that the inclusion of women was theoretically possible in the eyes of the church. Urban II reportedly said, “Whoever goes on the journey to free the church of God in Jerusalem out of devotion alone, and not for the gaining of glory or money, can substitute the journey for all penance for sin.”²⁰ Along with Urban’s reference to penance and a devotional journey, his language which implies the conceptualization of the crusade as similar to a pilgrimage, the use of *quicumque* in this instance lends credence to the notion that women were theoretically allowed to participate in the crusade by the words of the Pope himself.²¹

Though Pope Urban’s reference to a penitential and devotional excursion hinted at the possibility of the inclusion of women due to its connection to the act of pilgrimage, his language in other instances is deliberately exclusionary and occasionally expressly discourages women from participating. Pope Urban’s speech came on the heels of the clerical reform movement, in which

¹⁷ *Ibid*, lxx.

¹⁸ Christoph T. Maier, “The Roles of Women in the Crusade Movement: A Survey” in *Journal of Medieval History*, (30:1, 2004), 71.

¹⁹ Edward Peters, ed., “Urban’s Letter to the Monks of the Congregation of Vallombrosa, October 7, 1096”, in *The First Crusade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 37. Urban specifically forbade monks from joining the crusade.

²⁰ Peters, ed. “The Privilege of Urban to the Pilgrims,” 37.

²¹ Constance Rousseau, “Home Front and Battlefield: The Gendering of Papal Crusading Policy (1095-1221),” in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan Edington and Sarah Lambert, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001) 32.

the newly celibate clerical hierarchy came to ensure the male domination of the public sphere.²² In this sense with this context, clerical leaders like Urban may have framed the crusade without women in mind. Indeed, in many of the sources on the Council of Clermont, the language is particularly gendered to reference men and reinforce masculine notions of warfare and apply it to the men on crusade.²³ The crusaders were referred to by the Pope as “brothers” in many of the versions of Urban’s speech at Clermont and the Pope referenced the warfare expected to take place on the crusade. Later speeches have Pope Urban placing more specific and gendered restrictions on the participants of the crusades. In Robert the Monk’s version of Pope Urban II’s speech at Clermont, the pope explicitly dissuades women from going on crusades without guardians, placing them with old and feeble men, those “unfit to bear arms.” He writes, “And we do not command or advise that the old or feeble, or those unfit for bearing arms, undertake this journey; nor ought women to set out at all, without their husbands or brothers or legal guardians. For such are more of a hindrance than aid, more of a burden than advantage.”²⁴ This is a curiously specific remark by Pope Urban II, where in other instances he was mostly silent on precisely who could and could not participate on crusade. Robert himself wrote perhaps twenty-five years after the Pope spoke and was the only writer to mention guidelines for the inclusion of non-combatants. He included non-combatants such as the elderly and the feeble as those barred from the crusade and placed women specifically in the group of those banned from joining.²⁵ Despite this statement, Pope Urban continued to emphasize pilgrimage many more times in this speech. He referred to the insignia of pilgrimage in the version of Robert the Monk, “Whoever, therefore, shall determine

²² Jo Ann McNamara, “The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150,” in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Lees, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 11.

²³ Rousseau, “Home Front and Battlefield”, 33.

²⁴ Munro, "Urban and the Crusaders", 5-8

²⁵ Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*, 32.

upon this holy pilgrimage and shall make his vow to God to that effect and shall offer himself to Him as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, shall wear the sign of the cross of the Lord on his forehead or on his breast.”²⁶ This reference to pilgrim insignia was significant; because of this, women unsurprisingly assumed that the crusade would be open to them as well as their male counterparts.²⁷ Urban II’s recruiting tactic of employing ideas related to a traditionally unsegregated pilgrimage implied an openness to the crusades. This message of relative inclusivity, especially in comparison to traditional warfare, seems to have been understood by audiences: we know that women did join the men on crusade because accounts of both the People’s and First Crusade mentioned women. Even if one can believe that’s Robert the Monk’s transcription of exclusivity was accurate, the Pope’s restriction could never be more than a suggestion, unlike his message to the Monks of the Congregation of Vallombrosa where he was able to forbid them from going on crusade for the sake of their souls and without permission from their bishops.²⁸ Vallombrosa in 1096 was the only other time that Pope Urban forbade specific groups from participating on crusade. Many women by 1096 already had picked up crosses to join the crusade, and Urban’s later words of caution in his letters and speeches after the Council of Clermont were not timely enough to be heard and heeded.²⁹ The numbers of women in the crusade suggest that pilgrimage was of sustained importance to medieval women and they were involved in its inception. Women could, therefore, see themselves as entitled to the spiritual benefits Pope Urban

²⁶ Dana C. Munro, "Urban and the Crusaders", *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, Vol 1:2, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1895), 5-8

²⁷ Sarah Lambert, "Crusading or Spinning", in *Gendering the Crusades* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 5.

²⁸ Peters, ed., "Urban’s Letter to the Monks of the Congregation of Vallombrosa, October 7, 1096", 37.

²⁹ August. C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 33-36

offered as part of the crusade.³⁰ Women saw Urban's call to crusade as inclusive, and they saw their potential spiritual salvation as entwined in the enterprise as well.

Plenty of women were still left behind to administer estates or care for dependents, and the Pope gave them the power to keep their husbands home as well. In his message to his supporters at Bologna, Urban II stated, "Let it be the bishops' duty to permit their parishioners to go only with the advice and provision of the clergy. Nor should young married men rashly set out on the journey without the consent of their spouses."³¹ Urban in these later speeches after the Council of Clermont lays more restrictions for participation: ecclesiastical permission from clergymen, and, interestingly, spousal consent for young unmarried men. Urban's provisions at Bologna created a problem for women because they were entitled to prevent husbands from taking the cross, but were discouraged from going on crusade as unarmed participants themselves.³² Urban gave special concern for women affected by the crusade by giving them permission to prevent their husband's participation, and yet discouraged them from joining their husbands on crusade or going themselves. Urban also threatened spiritual punishment for those that dared to harm the women left behind if their husbands went on crusade. His words state, "Furthermore, the Pope condemned with a fearful anathema all those who dared to molest the wives, children, and possessions of those who were going on this Journey..."³³ Though offering women a sense of protection from the marauding crowd of crusades, the pope also placed women as part of the possessions left behind, and many chroniclers did so as well. In his chronicle, Fulcher of Chartres recounted a tearful scene of the male crusaders leaving behind their families and wives: "Oh, how much grief there was!

³⁰ Natasha L. Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007) 39.

³¹ Edward Peters, ed., "Urban's Letter to His Supporters in Bologna, September 1096", in *The First Crusade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 37.

³² Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 45.

³³ Peters, Edward, ed., "The Speech of Urban: Version of Guibert of Nogent," 36.

How many sighs! How much sorrow! How much weeping among loved ones when the husband left his wife so dear to him, as well as his children, father and mother, brothers and grandparents, and possessions however great!”³⁴ Fulcher delineated a clichéd and familiar scene to many men who had gone to war in the past: the tearful wife as the brave but sorrowful husband leaves to fight and perhaps die. The imagery is more like that of a military campaign than a penitential excursion and demarcated the crusade as youthful and masculine: one where men were the primary participants and one where women, the elderly, and children could not come along. Chroniclers like Fulcher of Chartres created an image of the crusade as a gendered space where women were left behind like most traditional military campaigns. Most chroniclers, however, still reveal that women joined the crusaders, revealing their presence later in their writings.³⁵ We find out later in Fulcher’s chronicle, for example, that women were along throughout the crusade, noting at the drowning of the pilgrims and the divinely manifest miracle that “...four hundred of both sexes perished by drowning...”³⁶ The attempt of Fulcher to write women out of the crusade indicates a conceptualization of the crusade away from the traditionally co-gendered pursuit of a pilgrimage to a more dangerous and more masculine space of war. The evidence, however, including Fulcher’s writings, reveal that women participated and joined men on crusade expeditions.

The Pope’s later restrictions placed limitations on women who wanted to go on crusade without male escorts or permission from men, yet they do still imply an ability for women who met the proper criteria to follow her husband, father, brother, or another male escort if they would allow her. Married and religious women with the proper requirements could go on crusade.³⁷ Even

³⁴ Fulcher of Charters, “The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres, Book I (1095-1100)”, Edward Peters, ed., in *The First Crusade*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 58.

³⁵ Sarah Lambert, “Crusading or Spinning”, 8.

³⁶ Fulcher of Charters, “The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres, Book I (1095-1100)”, 60. In many other places in his chronicle, Fulcher notes the presence of women, but mostly as a group.

³⁷ Rousseau, “Home Front and Battlefield: The Gendering of Papal Crusading Policy”, 34.

then, the Pope's restrictions were not as clear-cut for the laity as they were for the monks who were forbidden to go lest they pollute their souls.³⁸ The crusade vow made it possible for individual women to go on crusade, as an individual act that was difficult to manage. There was little or no practical way to regulate or control who undertook the crusade vow, meaning that the practice was open enough to include women.³⁹ Wives could follow their husbands, and their vows were generally redeemed. Wealthier women theoretically had a much more difficult time attempting to join the crusade than peasant women because of the need to keep them at home to administer their husband's estates, but under the right circumstances were free to go on crusade with their husbands and guardians. Wives of the crusaders were conceded the right by the Pope to follow husbands on crusade. Women of lesser status also presumably took up the cross with their husbands and families as well, though their presence often brought judgment from other chroniclers. The chroniclers saw women as not only burdensome but a source of sexual sin on a journey that was intended to be holy and, for the most part, celibate. This idea compounded by the papal reform movement's strong push for clerical celibacy.⁴⁰ Pilgrims traditionally abstained from sex, and a woman along with her husband on crusade raised suspicion not just of immoral behavior, but behavior that violated the pre-established guidelines for women in pilgrimages of decades past. Women's actual involvement was also particularly limited by cultural and social expectations of them, meaning their actions may have been a combination of rare and less likely to be reported on, making the picture of women's participation incomplete.⁴¹ Where women do appear in the sources for the People's and First Crusade, it will be necessary to understand their actions and their contributions to the continuation of these particular crusades.

³⁸ Peters, ed., "Urban's Letter to the Monks of the Congregation of Vallombrosa, October 7, 1096", 37.

³⁹ Maier, "The Roles of Women in the Crusade Movement", 71.

⁴⁰ McNamara, "The Herrenfrage", 11.

⁴¹ Nicholson, "Women's Involvement in the Crusades", 54.

2. Peter the Hermit and the People's Crusade

Pope Urban at the Council of Clermont did not exclude poorer people from the First Crusade, stating that the call to crusades went out “*tam divitibus quam pauperibus*” (to both rich and poor).⁴² However, if Robert the Monk's version of the Pope's speech at Clermont is believable, he deliberately delineated undesirable participants in the First Crusade, meaning that women without the proper escorts were not to join the crusading army as they departed. Contrast that statement with Albert of Aachen's take on the variety of people that joined Peter the Hermit: “In response to his constant admonition and call, bishops, abbots, clerics, and monks set out; next, most noble laymen, and princes of the different kingdoms; then, all the common people, the chaste as well as the sinful, adulterers, homicides, thieves, perjurers, and robbers; indeed, every class of the Christian profession, nay, also, women and those influenced by the spirit of penance—all joyfully entered upon this expedition.”⁴³ The People's Crusade involved a much wider variety of laypeople. Urban's call for penance and his inclusion of the poor as part of the crusade appealed to women, but the restrictions the Pope would place on women without designated guardians and those deemed unable to take care of themselves meant that many who likely wanted the opportunity for penance could not go.

The excitement and inclusion stirred up by Peter the Hermit's faction meant that traditional female sinners like prostitutes [*prostitutae mulieres*] or women without husbands or escorts had a means of traveling to the Holy Land, and because it was not under the direct control of Pope Urban, women were freer to take a solo journey with Peter the Hermit. His understanding of crusading meant that all were welcome to join, though contemporary writers like Albert of Aachen saw the variety of sinful women on the People's crusade as an indication of the class of the people

⁴² Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 134-135.

⁴³ “Peter the Hermit and the ‘Crusade of the People’ (March-October 1096)”, in Peters, ed., *The First Crusade*, 104.

themselves, tying poverty into the motivation to join the crusade where the Pope tried to leave it out. Peter the Hermit encouraged sinners to take the cross “*poenitentia ducti*” (led by penitence), a strategy which Albert of Aachen saw as particularly motivating for lower classes rather than upper classes and nobility.⁴⁴ Indeed, Albert of Aachen noted how generous and inclusive Peter the Hermit was toward the poor and suggested that might have been a motivation for sinful women and prostitutes to follow Peter the Hermit instead of the Pope. Most shockingly, Peter the Hermit was generous toward prostitutes [*prostitutae mulieres*] and was noted to make wives out of them through his gifts to their husbands.⁴⁵ Peter the Hermit actively engaged women of both noble and peasant statuses on crusade in this way. This act garnered less praise for Henry the Monk in 1115. In Henry’s case, after the ‘unchaste’ women were married, “...the Just Judge destroyed the works of the heretic [Henry the Monk]...the young men who had taken wives according to his wicked advice ran away to other parts, driven thereto either by hunger or by the debauchery of the women, and left their wives totally destitute of support.”⁴⁶ Indeed, the idea of reforming prostitutes was not without criticism and while Peter the Hermit’s attempts were met with praise, the later actions of Henry the Monk had him portrayed as a heretic. Peter the Hermit’s actions brought more women on crusade with less condemnation. Pope’s stance on non-combatants joining the First Crusade contrasted with Peter the Hermit’s actions that allowed for a far more open dynamic to accompany the People’s Crusade. Unattached women were not turned away as in the First Crusade, but instead to be made wives if possible, and allowed them to continue with the journey in order to achieve

⁴⁴ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 128-9.

⁴⁵ “Peter the Hermit and the ‘Crusade of the People’ (March-October 1096)”, 104.

⁴⁶ Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 112

salvation. Unattached women like the prostitutes that Albert of Aachen mentions were not to be turned away, instead brought into the fold through marriage or penitential practice.⁴⁷

The variety of people brought on Peter the Hermit's crusade drew comments from contemporaries. Anna Comnena's description of the People's Crusade in the *Alexiad* depicts a scene that was radically different from the approaching armies she had previously seen. She described seeing the army for the first time as a host of civilians "more numerous than the sand or the stars," and included women as an integral part of the crusading process in her parts. She noted women as those "...carrying palms and crosses on their shoulders; women and children, too, came away from their countries."⁴⁸ The variety of people included on the journey was impressive to Anna Comnena, though she seemed to see the crusader's approach more as representative of prophetic destruction. She notes that locusts preceded every group that came, and that, "The incidents of the barbarians' approach followed in the order I have described, and persons of intelligence could feel that they were witnessing a strange occurrence."⁴⁹ For many, the unique makeup of the People's Crusade signaled an upcoming disaster. The People's Crusade was indeed short-lived and disastrous. Incidents like the Battle of Civetot brought the end of the People's Crusade, and Albert of Aachen bemoaned the moral breakdown of the expedition, writing of these crusaders as a "...foolish and rebellious people."⁵⁰ Indeed, as Peter the Hermit's army of peasants and sinners progressed on their journey, contemporary writers questioned the value of allowing so many "undesirable" people and particularly many "immoral" women. Guibert of Nogent writing in 1108 saw Peter the Hermit's contingent as morally doomed from the beginning, criticizing the

⁴⁷ Kostick, "Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?", 280.

⁴⁸ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, Elizabeth A. Dawes, trans., (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 177.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Albert of Aachen, "The End of the 'Crusade of the People' The Version of Albert of Aachen", Edward Peters, ed., in *The First Crusade*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 147.

activities of the People's Crusade in Hungary because "...they burned the public granaries we spoke of, raped virgins, dishonored many marriage beds by carrying off many women, and tore out or burned the beards of their hosts."⁵¹ Guibert portrayed the lower classes of the People's Crusade generally as morally corrupt and uncontrollable. Peter himself, however, was generally praised.⁵² Albert of Aachen saw Peter the Hermit as separate from the actions of his followers and often a disapproving force against a reckless and immoral crowd, writing, "And so two months later, having become wanton and unrestrained because of ease and an inestimable abundance of food, heeding not the voice of Peter, but against his will, they entered into the region of the city of Nicaea and the realms of Soliman. They took as plunder cattle, sheep, goats, the herds of the Greek servants of the Turks, and carried them off to their fellows. Peter, seeing this, was sorrowful in heart, knowing that they did it not with impunity."⁵³ Contemporaries viewed the People's Crusade in a complicated way, which meant while they considered Peter the Hermit to be generally moral, the undesirable people permitted to join the crusade were problematic for the sanctity of the crusader's actions and put God's favor at significant risk.

The failure of the People's Crusade did not mean for contemporaries that the idea of crusading itself was unacceptable, but that the inclusion of particular kinds of people including poor people and sinful women was displeasing to God and therefore disastrous for the participants.⁵⁴ Albert of Aachen notes, "...they did not in any way turn from fornication and unlawful relationships there was excessive reveling, continual delight with women and girls who had set out for the very purpose of frivolity, and boasting most rashly about the opportunity offered

⁵¹ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert of Nogent's 'Gesta Dei per Francos'*, trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), pg 98.

⁵² Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 138.

⁵³ Albert of Aachen, "The End of the 'Crusade of the People' The Version of Albert of Aachen", 147.

⁵⁴ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 63.

by this journey.”⁵⁵ The People’s Crusade was more open to sinful women and women of lower status than Pope Urban’s officially sanctioned crusade, mainly because it was organized and executed by common people: it had the ability to be more inclusive to the varieties of people on crusade than Pope Urban’s Crusade. Its failure seemed to prove many contemporaries correct: that allowing sinners to join the crusade would bring no benefits to the crusading armies and that unattached women were dangers to the sanctity of crusading. In contrast, the First Crusade more carefully delineated which women could join and changed the way women participated as a result.

3. Women’s Participation in the First Crusade

When Pope Urban II announced the First Crusade in 1095, a significant number of women responded to his call. However, Pope Urban II did not expect women to sign up for the crusade in the numbers that they initially did.⁵⁶ The amount of enthusiasm by women for the First Crusade is confounding and has not been established with much accuracy, but historians have suggested many intriguing possibilities. There may have been incidents of forced attendance by husbands, as well as a desire to expand their cultural and religious frames.⁵⁷ Also, when compared to traditional pilgrimages, the armed nature of the crusade meant that more women might have been willing to go because it would have been safer than taking a pilgrimage alone or with their families or a group of widows.⁵⁸ Clerical writers like Albert of Aachen described this enthusiasm for a religious excursion and questioned the morality of the women who attempted to join the traveling crowd. “...There was unbridled contact with women and young girls, who with utter rashness had departed

⁵⁵ Albert of Aachen, *History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, Susan B. Edington, trans., (New York; Routledge, 2013) 49.

⁵⁶ Christoph T. Maier, “The Roles of Women in the Crusade Movement: A Survey” in *Journal of Medieval History*, (30:1, 2004), 70.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 71

⁵⁸ Natasha L. Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007), 41.

with the intention of frivolity; there was constant pleasure and rejoicing under the pretext of this journey.”⁵⁹ Albert of Aachen’s mention of sexually sinful women and young girls suggests that he, like many other clerics, saw the inclusion of women in the First Crusade as harbingers of sin. Not only this, but his words also suggest that the women were without genuine reasons for joining the crusading party and used the travel as an excuse to participate in sexual liaisons without real religious devotion. Despite this stigma, women made many crusade pledges, which suggest women’s active involvement in preparation for the crusades. As many as 10 percent of the pledges involved the crusader’s close relations, and of those, 9 percent of the sales involved were women upon whom the crusader could call for family assets when the time was necessary.⁶⁰ Guibert of Nogent describes, “...the meanest most common men and even unworthy women were appropriating to themselves this miracle [the mark of the cross].”⁶¹ Women could expect to participate in the First Crusade whether with their families or with other male relations. However, the Pope tempered his original remarks with restrictions because of the surprising number of non-combatants that signed up for the First Crusade.⁶² He required women to secure an appropriate escort and find enough supplies in order to continue. To engage in the crusade, women had to ensure they were escorted and supplied, which made it almost impossible for single women to join. Married women and mothers had more opportunity to join, though their motivations varied.

Accounts of the First Crusade make it clear that religious devotion was one of the primary reasons women joined their husbands and male relatives in taking up the cross, as the possibility of salvation and the chance to partake in pilgrimage were rare opportunities for women. As

⁵⁹ Albert of Aachen, quoted by Kostick, “Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?”, 271.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). 21.

⁶¹ Guibert of Nogent, quoted by Kostick, “Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?” 273.

⁶² Georg Strack, “Pope Urban II and Jerusalem: a re-examination of his letters on the First Crusade”, in *The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* 2/1 (2016), 55.

established earlier, women had for centuries gone on pilgrimage out of devotion or penance, and in their mind, crusade may not have presented a strikingly different approach to salvation. Of course, pure religious devotion may not have been the primary motivator for all of the women present at the First Crusade. Fulcher of Chartres noted the high number of women that accompanied the armed portion of the crusade and indicates the presence of "...women and little children", which suggests that entire families may have decided to pack up and go on crusade.⁶³ Family ties may have induced women who otherwise would not have gone on crusade to join their husbands, not only because they wanted to but also because they could, unlike other military expeditions where women would have been required to stay behind. The crusade's ambiguous status as both a pilgrimage and an armed journey allowed women to establish a presence within the traveling party. However, women's presence was limited and prevented many women from joining the First Crusade.

Class seems to have played a factor in active participation, fighting and traveling in the crusade. Chroniclers commented on noblewomen more frequently in records because of their class status and relevance to crusade leaders, and a few rare instances show their participation. One such instance occurred at the siege of Archais in 1099, Guibert of Nogent noted that "...women and the wives of the nobles, even on holidays, in flowing robes or tunics, carried off the material that had been dug up."⁶⁴ Guibert of Nogent described women's participation as part of the activity of warfare and their participation as a helpful asset to the crusading army. Guibert's mention of noblewomen points to the fact that due to the wives' noble status, their participation was more

⁶³ Fulcher of Chartres, "The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres, Book I (1095-1100)", Edward Peters, ed., in *The First Crusade*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 63

⁶⁴ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert of Nogent's 'Gesta Dei per Francos'*, trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 197.

significant to the war effort.⁶⁵ Guibert does not specifically identify noblewomen in any other instances in his writings of the crusade. It was rarer to see wives of the leaders of the crusades join their husbands because of the administrative duties noble crusaders faced back in their homelands. Most noblewomen who accompanied the crusade traveled with their brothers or other male relatives rather than their husbands.⁶⁶ However, there are cases of noble wives joining their husbands. Elvira of Castle joined her husband, Raymond of St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse, where most other leaders of crusades left their wives at home. Guibert of Nogent made particular care to note Raymond's administrative reasoning to bring his wife along, stating, "Having left behind his own son to rule his land, he brought with him his present wife and the only son he had had with her."⁶⁷ It is interesting and important that Guibert notes Elvira's unique situation, as a wife freed from her administrative duties by a son. The fact that Raymond had an already of-age son who was able to administer the estates meant that Elvira was able to join her husband where many other noblewomen could not. Elvira is thought to have joined Raymond because he was planning to stay in the Holy Land and establish a rule there, along with the couple's only son who was to join later.⁶⁸ Another noble crusader, Baldwin of Boulogne, brought his wife on crusade as well. Godehilde (or Godevere) was Baldwin's first wife and was described by Albert of Aachen as "*nobelissima*" (most noble), but gave no further description.⁶⁹ She died along with a few of the couple's children at Marash in October 1097 of illness.⁷⁰ Albert of Aachen did not note

⁶⁵ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 119.

⁶⁶ Helen J. Nicholson, "Women's Involvement in the Crusades", in *The Crusader World*, ed. Adrian Boas (New York: Routledge, 2016), 56.

⁶⁷ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, 111.

⁶⁸ Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 198.

⁶⁹ Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana: History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, Susan B. Edington, trans., (New York; Routledge, 2013) 66-67.

⁷⁰ Conor Kostick, "Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?", in *The Social Structure of the First Crusade*, (Brill, 2008), 277.

Godehilde's or any other noblewoman's specific actions on the crusades in any detail, other than to say that they joined their husbands.

Some noblewomen stayed home but actively encouraged their husbands to fight or return to the fight. One such woman, Adela of Blois, chastised her husband Stephen of Blois after his return from the crusade. She was the woman whom Orderic Vitalis called "*mulier sagax et animosa*"⁷¹ (wise and passionate woman). Orderic Vitalis suggested that her actions largely informed Stephen's decision to return to the crusade.⁷² The episode is one of the few where aristocratic women played a contributing role in the outcome of the crusade. Generally, however, aristocratic women are not noted to play much more of a role in the administrative details of the crusades and received little mention in the contemporary chronicles. The fact that many chroniclers did not mention noblewomen in detail is not entirely surprising. To be mentioned by contemporary chroniclers, women would have to have been a widow with a vast patrimony or a mother with important sons, and these women were less likely to participate in the crusade because Pope Urban II discouraged unaccompanied women from joining on crusade.⁷³ Noble women did occasionally join and participate in many ways in the crusade, but they likely did not hold much significant administrative or military influence.

Poor women and women without elevated status likely made up a larger contingent of women on the crusade. Guibert of Nogent describes poor families packing up their possessions to join the crusade, "...poor men, their cattle pulling two-wheeled carts, armed as though they were horses, carrying their few possessions together with their small children in the wagon. The small children, whenever they came upon a castle or town on the way, asked whether this was the Jerusalem they

⁷¹ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*. Volume V. Books IX and X, ed. M. Chibnall (Oxford; 1975), 324.

⁷² *Ibid*, 325.

⁷³ Maier, "The Roles of Women in the Crusade Movement", 75.

were seeking.”⁷⁴ Guibert’s description contrasts with higher-ranking women, who were less likely to be taken along on the dangerous expedition than poorer women. It is clear from Guibert’s descriptions that many families from the social order of “paupers,” came with their husbands and children on the crusade.⁷⁵ Indeed, impoverished women may have been unable to keep up the household without their husbands present. Poor women were great in number during the First Crusade, and this may have translated into the higher likelihood of a population of women who were more willing to fight alongside their male counterparts and sustain the crusade as it went along, potentially due to the nature of the crusade itself. Low-status women also could become local leaders of crusades, with a notable example being that of a woman who claimed to be the mistress of a goose, leading many people from obscurity into the fold of the crusade. Guibert of Nogent noted that “A poor woman set out on the journey, when a goose, filled with I do not know what instructions, clearly exceeding the laws of her own dull nature, followed her...” This “wretched woman” who was followed by a goose astonished the people of France, and when the goose died “...she had made of herself a holiday meal for her mistress.”⁷⁶ Guibert of Nogent commented on her unseemly behavior, revealing a bit of disdain for her manners and her willingness to kill her loyal goose as a meal for her mistress. His disdain may also reveal a distaste for her influence as a figurehead for the crusade because her fame continued to spread, and Guibert noted her as being one of the many peasant women on the crusade.⁷⁷ This woman’s story emphasized the various ways in which poorer people, and women in particular, established lore surrounding the crusade. Chroniclers questioned poor women’s sincerity for participating in crusade, but poor women continued to participate.

⁷⁴ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, 32.

⁷⁵ Kostick, “Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?,” 278.

⁷⁶ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, 255.

⁷⁷ Kostick, “Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?” 272-273.

Many chroniclers noted aged women as a part of the crusade in many places in the chronicles. In one case, Guibert of Nogent notes a woman's death during the Siege of Antioch in 1097, "Some of the citizens, however, climbed to the top of this gate and wore out our men by discharging so many arrows that a cloud of missiles flowed in the midst of Bohemund's camp, and one woman died when struck by one of the arrows."⁷⁸ Her death was notable because she was the only person on the side of the crusaders killed at that particular battle. Older women might not withstand the journey's rigors. For example, Tancred is noted as offering aid to a weakened, starving woman close to the Vardar River, and several chroniclers targeted the aged and the infirm for moving slowly and delaying the process of the army.⁷⁹ Indeed, women were mentioned as a source of displeasure and as targets for the wrath of a disapproving god. Fulcher of Chartres noted an incident during the Siege of Antioch between October 1097 and June 1098 in which women of the camp were blamed for the displeasure of God because of their sexual availability to the crusaders and were thrown out of camp for this reason to find lodging elsewhere. He writes that "After holding council, they drove out the women from the army, both married and unmarried, lest they, stained with the defilement of dissipation, displease the Lord. These women then found places to live in the neighboring camps."⁸⁰ These women were likely the wives or other female counterparts of the poorer crusading males, yet sexual contact for crusading armies was a direct violation of the procedures established in pilgrimage. Fulcher was known already to be displeased with the sexual activities of the crusaders because of the crusade's partial status as a pilgrimage. Women camp-followers were greater in number than many military campaigns of previous centuries, meaning

⁷⁸ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, 155.

⁷⁹ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 161.

⁸⁰ Fulcher of Chartres, "The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres, Book I (1095-1100)", 72.

they had a higher chance of being caught up in combat.⁸¹ Many women also returned to the battlefield to give soldiers water and supplies.⁸² The First Crusade, as an intriguing combination of pilgrimage and war, may have been a time and place where women, more than most other armed conflicts, were more likely to join the action.

There are far fewer examples of European women's direct participation during the First Crusade. One lone example of a possible instance of Frankish women fighting on crusade comes from William of Tyre. Though not an eye-witness to the Siege of Jerusalem, William of Tyre describes that "...Even women, regardless of sex and natural weakness, dared to assume arms and fought manfully far beyond their strength."⁸³ His description is, at the very least, an exaggeration, and his motivation for including this anecdote may have been to impress upon the reader the superior strength of the Frankish army in defeating the enemy: that the Franks were so successful even the women could join in on the action.⁸⁴ However, it does present the possibility that women engaged with armed conflict in a variety of ways during the conflict, enough that it would not be implausible to include them in the fighting. William of Tyre also describes women helping the male fighters in ways other than direct action, such as assisting them with water and ammunition where they could, roles not traditionally present in other armed conflicts of the period.⁸⁵ Women played other critical parts in the battles of the First Crusade. William of Tyre recounts women's emotional support of crusaders during the siege of Jerusalem, stating, "[Women] cheered the fighters to renewed courage by their words and brought them water in small vessels that they might

⁸¹ Michael R. Evans, "Unfit to Bear Arms: The Gendering of Arms and Armour in Accounts of Women on Crusade," in *Gendering the Crusades* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 53.

⁸² Keren Caspi-Reisfeld, "Women Warriors during the Crusades, 1095-1254", in *Gendering the Crusades* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001) 97.

⁸³ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily A. Babcock (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 361-362.

⁸⁴ Evans, "Unfit to Bear Arms: The Gendering of Arms and Armour in Accounts of Women on Crusade," 46.

⁸⁵ Caspi-Reisfeld, "Women Warriors during the Crusades, 1095-1254", 97.

not faint on the field of battle.”⁸⁶ The chronicler’s descriptions of these women here are primarily supportive roles, roles in which they helped the soldiers or the army in ways that did not involve them fighting themselves. The only source of women’s direct military involvement on the crusader’s side is unreliable, and the social conventions of the period likely played a role in how active women could be in military action.

There were very unlikely women wearing armor or other military garments on the field of battle. Initially outlined in Burchard of Worm’s *Decretum* c. 1012, many held prohibitions against women wearing men’s clothes before the crusade began. Burchard’s *Decretum* states, “If a woman changes her clothes and puts on manly garb for the customary female clothes, for the sake, as it is thought, of chastity, let her be anathema.”⁸⁷ Frankish women may have been present on the battlefield carrying water or ammunition, but they were probably not taking up arms and dressing in armor themselves. Still, critical acts of service by women were rarely represented by chroniclers to be achievements but of actions carried out by women as part of the collective greatness of the crusading army as a whole. However, this picture is incomplete. Women on the other side of the battles participated as victims, aggressors, and servants during the First Crusade and further into the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Women during the First Crusade experienced and participated in the sieges, battles, and travel, both as perpetrators and as victims of the violence. The chronicles describing the crusades detail some of the experiences of Christian women as they made their way to Jerusalem with their husbands, brothers, and fathers. However, this picture is incomplete. Women on the other side of the conflict, often local and non-combatant women, experienced much, and occasionally more, of the violence of the crusades. Non-Christian writers occasionally described in detail the ways in

⁸⁶ Evans, “Unfit to Bear Arms’: The Gendering of Arms and Armour in Accounts of Women on Crusade,” 55.

⁸⁷ Kostick, “Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?,” 284.

which these non-Christian, non-combatant local women experienced the crusades differently from women traveling from the West. As active participants, unwilling victims, and captives of war, Greek, Muslim, and Jewish women survived and died by their interactions with male and female crusaders. Non-Christian and Christian chroniclers alike detail the experiences of Greek, Jewish, and Muslim women as they encountered crusaders for the first time. The First Crusade was often a violent experience for women, whose actions in the wake of the First Crusade provides significant insights into the experiences of women as they encountered crusaders from the West.

4. Jewish Women in the First Crusade

The spread of people from Pope Urban's First Crusade to the broader movement of Peter the Hermit's faction brought increased violence, such as in Germany with Emicho of Flonheim and his followers in Mainz in 1096.⁸⁸ The Hebrew First-Crusade Chronicle, largely attributed to Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan, stated this threat of violence to German cities in no uncertain terms, "The crusaders with their insignia came, and with their standard before our houses. When they saw one of us, they ran after him and pierced him with a spear, to the point that we were afraid even to cross our household."⁸⁹ Fear of death at the hands of the Crusading army was a significant threat to Jewish people living in Europe. The violence of 1096 and German faction of the People's Crusade did not spare women. The notes and descriptions of the crusaders' plundering of the Germany cities often tell of the murdering of Jewish women. The story of R. Yitzhak ha-Levi, a man from Cologne who had himself been forcibly converted to Christianity, relates of the horror, "...that they have spilled the blood of righteous women because of a putrid corpse, and shed the

⁸⁸ Kenneth Stow, "Conversion, Apostasy, and Apprehensiveness: Emicho of Flonheim and the Fear of Jews in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Oct. 2001), 913.

⁸⁹ The Hebrew First-Crusade Chronicle quoted by Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 54.

blood of sucklings over the teachings of an agitator and misleader...”⁹⁰ The chroniclers understood that the violence was religiously motivated, and the strong anti-Christian language from ha-Levi depicts the death of women as a particularly egregious example of the brutality of the crusaders. Another Jewish description of the murders comes from a poem by R. Abraham which depicts similar episodes of men and women being dragged naked in Mainz.⁹¹ Jewish authors depicted the violence as motivated by Christian zealotry marked by a desire for conversion or death, and violence against women as an example of the brutality.

A few Jewish accounts give Jewish women some agency, depicting Jewish women as fighters and agitators of the crusaders. Often Jewish chroniclers depicted participation by women positively: that the Jewish women were particularly strong in standing up to the violence. There are many accounts of the actions of Jewish women during the attacks by crusaders. The Jewish chronicler Ra’avan emphasized martyrdom in his account, in which he describes a Jewish woman who killed herself in Speyer to avoid conversion.⁹² Indeed, according to many Jewish accounts, women defied crusaders by martyring themselves to avoid conversion. Jewish chroniclers defined the crusaders’ intention as “...imposing Christian religion on all of them, first and foremost on the Jewish children, and whoever would not agree to this would be killed.”⁹³ The account of Solomon bar Simson describes an intriguing moment during massacres at Mainz. Women fighting turned into women taunting the crusaders, expressing their religious resolve against the violence and their disdain for the religion of the crusaders. This incident appears in several Jewish chronicles, adding

⁹⁰ R. Yitzhak ha-Levi quoted by Simha Goldin, “Forced conversion during the First Crusade,” in *Apostasy and Jewish identity in High Middle Ages Northern Europe*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 26-27

⁹¹ Shmuel Shepkaru, “Christian Resurrection and Jewish Immortality during the First Crusade” in *Speculum*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Jan. 2014), 12.

⁹² Ra’avan quoted by Goldin, “Forced conversion during the First Crusade,” 30.

⁹³ Goldin, “Forced conversion during the First Crusade,” 28

to its credibility. Simson writes, "...the righteous women hurled stones from the windows of the enemy, and the enemy threw rocks back at them. The women were struck by the stones, and their bodies and faces were completely bruised and cut. They taunted and reviled the errant ones with the name of the crucified, despicable, and abominable son of harlotry, saying; 'In whom do you place your trust? In a putrid corpse?' The misled ones then approached to smash the door."⁹⁴ The detail of Simson's account demonstrates that Jewish women stood up to their captors and engaging in retaliatory behavior to avoid conversion, a particular, and honorable goal, in the eyes of the chroniclers. They used religious insults to make their point and even went so far as to kill their own children to avoid their conversion. Jewish women were vocal and active in the massacres in Germany, using available weapons as well as their words to actively engage with and fight back the crusaders.

The religious aspect and the extreme eschewing of conversion was a feature particular to Jewish women's actions that chroniclers often repeated. Women murdered by the crusaders were described to have kept their religion to their dying breath. One woman is mentioned several times in the chronicles, named Mistress Rachel. The mention of her by name, as well as her husband's status, suggests she was a leader against conversion and her actions encouraged other women to avoid conversion at all costs. Simson's account notes, "There were also many women there who sanctified the Name of their Creator to their last breath, not giving Him up for the crucified bastard. One of them was Mistress Rachel, the spouse of our late master, Rabbi Eleazar..."⁹⁵ She, along with many other Jewish women, was said to have refused to comply with any of the crusaders'

⁹⁴ Solomon Bar Simson, "Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson", *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades*, trans. Shlomo Eidelberg, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977) 35.

⁹⁵ Simson, "Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson" in *The Jews and the Crusaders*, 42.

demands, to their own detriment. The chronicle of Solomon Bar Simson describes the murder of the Jewish women for their refusal even to enter Christian churches, writing:

“These pure souls were brought before the churchyard, where the enemy attempted to persuade them to submit to baptism. When they arrived at the temple of their pagan cult, the women refused to enter the edifice of idolatry, rooting their feet on the threshold, unwilling to enter and inhale the odor of the offensive incense. When the errant ones saw that the women stood firm against the abomination, and, what is more, that they remained true with all their heart to the living God, they fell upon them with axes and smote them. Thus the saintly women were slain in sanctification of God’s Name.”⁹⁶

Indeed, the chronicles often describe instances of attempted rape, and the strength of Jewish women who put their lives and bodies in the crossfire of the violence for the sake of their faith.

Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan’s Hebrew First-Crusade chronicle relates:

“There was a young woman in the front of the gateway of the palace. She stretched her neck outside and said: ‘Anyone who wishes to cut off my head for the fear of my Rock let him come and do so.’...many times they wished to take her and carry her off with them. They intended [to do so] but could not, for she threw herself to the ground and made herself dead weight. Thus she remained in the palace.”⁹⁷

This unnamed woman made herself a target, but her success at avoiding death made her an outlier.

Jewish women clearly placed themselves in opposition to the crusaders, hurling insults at them and fighting back with stones and weapons. Many Jewish women lost their lives, yet the Jewish chronicles consistently describe the courage, strength, and agency of Jewish women in the face of the crusaders.

Not all women were murdered, and in fact, there is evidence of a few Jewish women living lives as destitute captors in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. One instance is a preserved letter of recommendation from a woman Jewish refugee, in which she pleaded to her congregation for her safety. The woman wrote to her congregation, “I make known to the holy community that I, a

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ The Hebrew First-Crusade Chronicle quoted by Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 292.

captive of the captives of Eretz Israel came this week from Sunbat and I am naked without a cover and without a sleeping-mat and a little boy is with me, and I am helpless. And I pray to God and address myself to the community, may it be blessed that they should do for me what they do for all who pass through.”⁹⁸ It is unclear if the woman was one of the refugees from Jerusalem, and what her status or social standing may have been. For the next ten years, the whole of the Holy Land was to become a battlefield with thousands of refugees from the cities captured by the crusaders. Her fate and the fate of other Jewish women can only be guessed. This instance ultimately confirms that probably many Jewish women were taken captive and forced to live in captivity in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Other descriptions note the Crusader States placing Jewish people as lower status as a direct result of the crusades. An anonymous contemporary letter describes the fate of women in Jerusalem in July 1099, in which it was written with a certain level of surprise that Jewish women were not violated or raped. The letter, found in the Geniza, was composed by the Karaite elders from Ascalon, lamenting the crusaders’ conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. It relates: “We have not heard-thank God, the Exalted-that the cursed ones known as Ashkenaz violated or raped women, as others do.”⁹⁹ This is a rare instance in which the mercy of the crusaders was praised rather than noted for their extreme violence and lack of mercy toward women. It demonstrated that the Christian chroniclers’ reports of mercy by crusading men may have been true in some instances. Overall, however, the Jewish chroniclers largely describe violence against women but emphasize the ways in which women stood up to the violent crusading men and demonstrated the strength of their faith. As will be examined below, Christian chroniclers

⁹⁸ Joshua Prawer, *The history of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 34.

⁹⁹ Anonymous quoted by Yvonne Friedman, “Captivity and Ransom: The Experience of Women”, in *Gendering the Crusades*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001) 128.

largely described themselves as merciful toward women, a description that stands in stark contrast to the descriptions given by victims of the crusading men.

5. Greek women and the First Crusade

Greek women were eyewitnesses, servants, victims, and aggressors during the First Crusade. Many had ample contact with crusaders and related the events of the conflict. The most famous Greek woman to be an eyewitness to the crusade was Anna Comnena, the daughter of Alexios I and an important figure in the Greek court. Comnena's account was marked greatly by her perspective as a daughter of Alexios I, and her opinion of the crusaders and their actions reflected her disposition against the crusading army. Her father's later difficulties with Bohemond may have colored her account of the crusade.¹⁰⁰ Her perspective on the Franks had both positive and negative elements. For instance, Anna characterized Bohemond as, "...so insatiably greedy of money..." but Tancred as, "...that most patient soldier..." expressing both her admiration and disdain for crusade leaders.¹⁰¹ Anna frequently fluctuated between praise and disdain for the leading men of the Crusade. Anna's biography of her father was a representative not only of the Greek perspective, and understandably she had many biases against the crusaders, but a representation of the perspective of Greek women who witnessed the crusades. She knew that the Latins differ from the Byzantines in their interpretation of theological problems and demonstrated such knowledge in her biography, saying that they, and in particular a man named Basil, "...despised our theology and misrepresented all our ecclesiastical administration..."¹⁰² She represented the crusade and the crusaders through her lens as a political actor and a follower of

¹⁰⁰ Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204: A Political History*, (New York: Longman, 1984) 144.

¹⁰¹ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad* trans. Elizabeth Dawes (Cambridge, Ohio: In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 195 & 215; Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, eds., *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001) 87.

¹⁰² Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 292.

Greek theology, but also provided her particular insight as a woman and the daughter of an emperor. The crusaders, for Anna Comnena, were a group of rowdy men and women, sinful and dangerous, without the papal justification that had been given back in France. Anna Comnena presented the First Crusade as inspired by Peter the Hermit rather than the Pope himself.¹⁰³ She described the coming of the People's Crusade in *The Alexiad*; a scene that was radically different from the approaching armies she had previously seen. She described seeing the army for the first time as a host of civilians "more numerous than the sand or the stars," and includes women as an integral part of the crusading process in her parts, saying, "...women and children, too, came away from their countries..."¹⁰⁴ The variety of people included on the journey was impressive to Anna Comnena, and the coming of women alongside the men was surprising to her. Anna's perspective on women, both Greek noblewomen and crusading women, came largely from her perspective as a daughter of Alexios I.

Anna occasionally commented on crusading women accompanying men on crusade. Anna remarked on women's' courage and bravery, and the way they even took part in the hostilities.¹⁰⁵ Anna included women as those "...carrying palms and crosses on their shoulders; women and children, too, came away from their countries."¹⁰⁶ Her thought of crusading women as particularly brave, but ultimately powerless helpers of their husbands. She does not assign them warlike traits, and her description of the women's' bravery suggests that it was rare for Greek women to see other women participate in warlike endeavors. Anna's description of the actions of common Greek women during the crusades is significant in that it does not present a contrast to her descriptions

¹⁰³ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204*, 144

¹⁰⁴ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 177

¹⁰⁵ Krijnie N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople: The West & Byzantium 962-1204*, (New York: Leiden, 1996) 71.

¹⁰⁶ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 177

of Western women. As part of the preparations for Alexios' assistance to the crusaders at the Siege of Antioch in 1097-1098, Alexios ordered all men and women in Constantinople to leave their houses, afraid that Constantinople would be left weak by his absence and the people overrun by Turkish tribes. Anna remarks the resolve of the women alongside the men to accompany the Emperor to Antioch stating, "The announcement was immediately made and the order given that each man and woman should leave their homes before the Turks arrived, and thus save their persons and as much property as each could carry. They all elected at once to accompany the Emperor, not only the men but the women too...This was the arrangement the Emperor made about the prisoners."¹⁰⁷ Anna did not reserve her reverence for the bravery of women for just Frankish women. She was impressed and made note of the ways in which Greek women showed their bravery in the face of the dangers of the crusades. This passage is interesting because it implies that Greek women, by leaving Constantinople as Alexios prepared for the Siege of Antioch, may have prepared for the battle alongside their men. At the very least, they became refugees of war by Alexios' decision to evacuate the city, and according to Anna, displayed their strength of character by choosing to join the men. Anna Comnena's father Alexios may have written a letter in which he discussed violence against women at the hands of the Turks before the crusade, and the letter was used to arouse popular support for the crusade.¹⁰⁸ One version has Alexios state, writing to Robert I of Flanders whilst imploring his aid, "When the female sex was not spared, the nature of which, however, may be excused as proper for masculinity, transgressed like animals, loosening the laws of humanity. One of them sodomitically abused a slain bishop."¹⁰⁹ Another

¹⁰⁷ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 201.

¹⁰⁸ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 279.

¹⁰⁹ My translation. Epistula Alexii I Komneni ad Robertum I comitem Flandrensem in *Epistulae et chartae ad historiam primi belli sacri spectantes quae supersunt aevo aequales ac genuinae. Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer, (Innsbruck: Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1901) 13.

version states, “When they capture noble women and daughters, they abuse them sexually in turns, like animals. Some, while they are wickedly defiling the maidens, place the mothers facing, constraining them to sing evil and lewd songs while they work their evil.”¹¹⁰ The graphic descriptions of sexual violence in this letter cannot be definitively attributed to Alexius, and most modern historians agree that the letters were forgeries, composed in the West shortly before the crusade to drum up anti-Muslim support.¹¹¹ The description clearly emphasizes the sinful nature of the Turks, and the accusation of sodomy (against a bishop, no less) further denotes the abuses of the “Turks” against Greeks. In response to the violence done against Greek women by Muslims, Anna placed her father as a source of refuge for innocent and scared women fleeing the violence of the crusade. She writes, “...there were women with babies, even men, and children, all rushing to the Emperor as if to a place of refuge. He then drew up his lines in the new formation with all the captives, women and children enclosed in the center, and returned by the same road as he had come, and whatever places he approached, he passed through with perfect safety.”¹¹² Anna understood Greek women to be brave in the face of war as well as Christian women, but for Anna, her father was the ultimate source of safety and security for women against violent men.

There is evidence that lower-class Greek women may have been servants to the crusading army. During the First Crusade, a certain unknown man named Elias left the imperial army at Thessalonica and went over to Hugh of Vermandois, brother of King Philip I of France. The suggestion was that his man was a Greek servant, and some of these Greek servants may have come to France with their new masters.¹¹³ The exchange of Greek people was a distinct result of

¹¹⁰ Boswell, trans., *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 367. Boswell's translation is based on a different source (*Patrologia Graeca* v. 131 column 565).

¹¹¹ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 279.

¹¹² Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 39.

¹¹³ Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople*, 164.

the crusade, one that may have had implication beyond simple servitude. In describing the anticipation of the Christian crusaders upon their approaching the Greek states, Guibert of Nogent in the *Gesta Dei per Francos* remarks that “...the beauty of Greek women was so great that they would be preferred to the women of Gaul...”¹¹⁴ This suggests sexual as well as cultural exchange between Greek women and the crusaders, and particularly provides insight into the expectations of crusading men as they approached foreign lands. As crusading men, there would have had expectations to remain chaste during the pilgrimage, but this insight suggests the actual practice of crusading men, especially as they moved further eastward.

Greek noblewomen often played key roles in the crusades. Anna’s writing provides insight into her ideas of herself and other noble women who were participants eyewitnesses to the crusades. Anna Comnena’s contains instances in which she wished to describe violent or significant events, but she relates that she is unable to because of the modesty noblewomen were expected to maintain. Of the Bogomils, Anna writes, “I wished to expound the whole heresy of the Bogomils, but ‘modesty prevents me,’ as the beautiful Sappho says somewhere, for though a historian, I am a woman and the most honorable of the Porphyrogeniti and Alexius’ eldest scion, and what is the talk of the vulgar had better be passed over in silence. I am desirous of writing so as to set forth a full account of the Bogomilian heresy; but I will pass it over, as I do not wish to defile my tongue.”¹¹⁵ Anna deliberately leaves herself out of describing certain actions, prevented both by her noble birth and her status as a woman. Though it is clear she witnessed or heard these events, her omission suggests a status “above” religious heresy and often violence that noble

¹¹⁴ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert of Nogent’s ‘Gesta Dei per Francos’*, trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), pg 38.

¹¹⁵ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 293. The Bogomils were a Christian sect resistant to state and church authority. In 1085 they joined Alexios I against Robert Guiscard but deserted him and many were thrown in prison.

Greek women may have conceptualized themselves as having and provides some context for the ways in which Anna describes other noble women.

Anna's *Alexiad* describes a few noblewomen who engage in battles before the crusade in ways that indicated her admiration for martial women; women for whom fighting was a duty they shouldered alongside their brothers, husbands, and sons. She describes Gaïta, the wife of Robert Guiscard, as a woman who often fought alongside her husband and even dressed in armor. Anna's father engaged in numerous battles with Guiscard before the crusades, including the Siege of Dyrrachium (modern Durazzo) from June 1081 to February 1082. Guiscard secured a complete victory, and Alexios never fully dealt with his threat before the crusades began.¹¹⁶ This, however, did not prevent Anna from speaking fondly of the women who surrounded the men, whose children would fight on crusade in the coming decades. She writes, "Leaving Salernum, he [Robert Guiscard] came to Hydruntum, and there spent a few days waiting for his wife, Gaïta (for she too accompanied her husband, and when dressed in full armor the woman was a fearsome sight)."¹¹⁷ No other woman is described as joining her husband and wearing armor, and this mention is significant in that it is the only instance of Anna describing a woman in armor and engaging in battle in her chronicle. Its relation to the crusade is tenuous: Gaïta was the stepmother and grandmother of crusaders, and Anna's praise of women dressing in armor and engaging in battle appears to have extended to the Holy Wars.

Anna's perspective on the women provides context about how women's actions in earlier battles may have colored her perceptions of noblewomen during the Kingdom of Jerusalem, after the First Crusade ended, engaging in battles, often protecting the land they ruled from invading

¹¹⁶ G. A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest* (London: Longman, 2000), 218.

¹¹⁷ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 28. Gaïta is referred to as Sikelgaita in other chronicles.

armies. For example, Anna goes into detail about an incident in 1107 in which Alexios I ordered Isaac Constostephanus to besiege a town in Lombardy ruled by the mother of Tancred and the daughter of Robert Guiscard.¹¹⁸ Anna describes her wise actions and keen maneuvering as the ruler of Hydruntum, present-day Otranto, a town in Lombardy: “[Hydruntum] is a town situated on the coast of Lombardy. This town was commanded by a woman, Tancred’s mother, it was said, whether she was the sister of Bohemond (so often mentioned in this history already) or not, I cannot say positively, for I do not know for certain whether Tancred was related to Bohemond on his mother’s side, or his father’s.”¹¹⁹ She never mentions the woman by name, but by describing her as the mother of Tancred, we know her to be Emma of Hauteville, wife of Odo the Good and daughter of Robert Guiscard. When Isaac Constostephanus reached the town and brought his ships to anchor, he made an attack on the walls the city of Hydruntum. Anna goes on to describe the character of Emma of Hauteville, who held the city from attack. She wrote, “But the woman inside who had a sound mind and a determined character...”¹²⁰ As Constostephanus attempts to take the city, Emma of Hauteville take a negotiating role in the conflict, “At the same time she sent envoys to Constostephanus confessing her allegiance to the Emperor, and promised to make terms of peace with him, and said she would come out to Constostephanus to consult him about them so that he could explain everything to the Emperor. She devised all this to keep Constostephanus in suspense, hoping that perchance in the meantime her son might arrive, and then she would throw off the mask, as they say of the tragedians, and attack him in battle. Thus while all the men inside and outside the town were hurraing and the shouts filled the whole neighborhood, and that martial woman, as I said, was holding Constostephanus in suspense by her messages and promises, the

¹¹⁸ Timothy Venning, *A Chronology of the Crusades*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 64.

¹¹⁹ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 225. Emma of Hauteville was the sister of Bohemund, making Tancred Bohemund’s nephew.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

son she expected actually arrived with his fellow-counts, at once attacked Constostephanus and routed him completely.”¹²¹ Clearly, Anna admired this woman not only for her nobility but also for her cunning negotiation and her decisive actions that prevented Constostephanus from taking her city. Described as a “martial woman,” her actions are beyond the typical realm of women, but her leadership was praised and admired by Anna. Anna, as demonstrated by her descriptions of fighting women, clearly had respect for women who engaged in political and martial battles. As these women were mothers and sisters of crusade leaders, their descriptions here indicate the admiration of feminine martial practice as strong and capable, rather than condemnable. Anna’s perspective makes it clear that womanly strength was something she believed to be critical to victory and reflected the strength of the army they often represented. Along these lines, Anna gives another interesting description of her own mother, the Empress, whom she describes as, “...courageous and steady-minded, like the woman sung of by Solomon in the Proverbs, and showed no feminine cowardice such as we see so many women generally give way to directly they hear any terrible news.”¹²² She described by Anna as a *laudata femina* (lauded woman): a woman of whom Anna had the greatest admiration. Anna’s description of noblewomen shows that shrewdness and military strength of women greatly impressed her, and she described these women favorably if they showed their martial and military prowess. It can be concluded that Anna did not consider military activity to be unbecoming for a woman and that though direct participation for women in the First Crusade was uncommon enough to be mentioned, noblewomen protecting cities they ruled or engaging in battles was a sign of strength that was worthy of garnering praise. Anna’s perspective on the First Crusade and the women within it provides a broader picture of

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 278.

how Greek noblewomen saw Greek and Western women participating in the First Crusade in ways that were atypical of traditional femininity, but important for the outcome of the crusades.

6. Saracen Women and the First Crusade

There is evidence in the records that as the Franks moved eastward, Saracen women were fighting alongside their male counterparts in defending castles and towns. Guibert noted that Saracen women arrived on the scene of the Siege of Antioch in 1097 carrying bows, arrows, and quivers to men suggesting that women on the other side of the conflict had a hand on the battlefield, helping the men who were carrying out the fighting. Saracen women in masculine garb who joined the enemy army alongside men were described as being sexually available to the crusading army, Guibert stating that the “...women dressed as though they were temples...young women came with quivers full of arrows, looking like a new form of the ancient Diana; they seemed to have been brought here not to fight, but rather to reproduce.”¹²³ This passage implies that women, as part of the extravagance of the assembled “Turks”, dressed ornately as goddesses or temples with an aim toward sex, though it is unclear with whom. Yet as an abbot himself, Guibert’s perspective of women was likely colored and his perception of these actions was influenced by his worldview. Guibert is not known to have been a reliable author, and his descriptions of women have been generally presumed to be false. Guibert goes on to make a moral judgment of the women, describing a transgression of female behavior: engaged in both warfare and illicit sexual activity. Along with joining in on the fighting, these women also distanced themselves from womanhood, according to Guibert, by casting away their babies at the end of the fighting. Guibert’s *Gesta Dei per Francos* describes an incident in which Saracen women cast away their babies while fleeing from the Franks. He writes, “When the battle was over, those who were present asserted that new-

¹²³ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, 177.

born babies, born by women brought for this purpose on the expedition, were found thrown into the grass by these women, who, in their urgent flight from the Franks, could not endure the burden, and, more concerned for themselves than for the babies, heartlessly cast them away.”¹²⁴ The *Gesta Francorum*, from which Guibert drew his chronicles, does not record this incident and it is widely thought to be an insertion by Guibert.¹²⁵ Still, Guibert’s description sheds some light on how Saracen women may have been perceived, though Guibert was known to negatively describe women. Saracen fighting women were thus selfish and anti-feminine according to Guibert: they thought only for themselves and disregarded the roles of motherhood and womanhood. Of course, this could be twisting or extension of the truth than a relation of fact as Guibert did not accompany the crusade himself. Guibert was known to insert his own commentary into his chronicle and distort the events, particularly in regard to sexuality, as Guibert understood the world to be fundamentally impure.¹²⁶ Even so, the women presented here are written to contrast with the Frankish women accompanying the crusaders by using their sexuality to entice them; their fighting was not outwardly aggressive but sexual. Guibert of Nogent represented their military actions and their masculine garments as immoral, owing to his predilection to represent Saracen women as particularly sinful compared to Frankish women. Whether true or not, Guibert sought to distance Saracen women, as enemy women, from the feminine actions of the Frankish women.

Other chroniclers mentioned incidents in which Saracen women exhibited military agency during the battles. In *Historia francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem*, Raymond d’Aguilers related a story during the Siege of Jerusalem of the death of two Saracen women, in part because of their attempts to participate in the actions of the siege. “One incident must not be omitted. Two women

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Michael R. Evans, “Unfit to Bear Arms,” in *Gendering the Crusades*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 51.

¹²⁶ Jay Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind*, (New York: Routledge, 2002) 9.

tried to bewitch one of the hurling machines, but a stone struck and crushed them, as well as three slaves, so that their lives were extinguished, and the evil incantations averted.”¹²⁷ This incident is interesting for several reasons. First, the Saracen women are seen bewitching military equipment, but their anti-Christian actions were thwarted through what seems to be divine intervention: the stone of the machine they were trying to bewitch crushed them. This image probably relates to similar passages in the *Song of Roland*, in which Muslim communities were described as harboring sorcery and magic, stating, “A thousand Frenchmen have to search the town with care, and the synagogues and mosques...no trace of sorcery or fraud will they leave in the place.”¹²⁸ It thus draws on popular imagery of black magic used in conjunction with Muslims. Second, they again are going beyond normal expectations for women and, as described by Raymond, are seemingly punished for it. The Saracen women’s attempt to bewitch instruments of war ultimately led to their death.

The most common description of Saracen women, however, is their death or capture during and after battles in which the crusaders fought. In the *Historia francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem*, Raymond d’Aguilers describes the Siege of Jerusalem in which neither men nor women were spared from death, describing: “In the morning, some of our men cautiously, ascended to the roof of the Temple and attacked the Saracens both men and women, beheading them with naked swords; the remainder sought death by jumping down into the temple.”¹²⁹ The *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum* also describes the same brutal scene of the Frankish invasion of a Saracen temple: “At last the next day shone forth, and the Franks, sorry that they had permitted those who had climbed to the top of the Temple (to whom Tancred and Gaston had given their own standards,

¹²⁷ Raymond d’Aguilers, *Historia francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem*, John H. and Laurita L. Hill, trans., (Philadelphia, 1968), 259.

¹²⁸ Jessie Crosland, trans., *The Song of Roland* (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 1999), 72.

¹²⁹ d’Aguilers, *Historia francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem*, 256.

as we said earlier) to remain alive, invaded the heights of the temple and cut the Saracens to pieces, killing the women together with the men. Some of them, preferring suicide, threw themselves from the top of the Temple.”¹³⁰ The two detailed accounts lend credibility to the incident, though each chronicle may relate the event because of the particular brutality it encapsulates. If true, the women exhibited similar behavior to the Jewish women described above: willing to sacrifice themselves to avoid conversion or other atrocities. Chroniclers used the descriptions of murdered women to emphasize in their chronicles the cruelty of the crusades. The *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum: The Deeds of the Franks* describes the Siege of Antioch, in which, “...Raymond, count of Saint Gilles, entered the territory of the Saracens, and led his army to a city called Albara, which he attacked and quickly captured, putting to death all the Saracen men and women he found there.”¹³¹ It is clear from these descriptions that the exceptional cruelty of the crusaders was highlighted in the descriptions of the chroniclers, particularly in their descriptions of the death of women.

For women, the other potential atrocities probably meant sexual assault. Understanding the sexual assault of local, non-Christian women during the First Crusade is fraught with many complications. Sexual contact during the First Crusade, as a religious expedition, was forbidden by the pilgrimage precedent. Because of this, and because chroniclers were often religious figures themselves who rarely described sexual contact, chroniclers were not willing to describe the sexual misdeeds of crusaders in explicit detail. Instead, chroniclers often resorted to symbolism or euphemism to describe the sexual assault of women, leaving readers to parse out which incidents should be taken literally, and which figuratively. Describing another incident with violent and

¹³⁰ Rosalind M., Hill ed. and trans., *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum: The Deeds of the Franks*, (London: 1962), 132.

¹³¹ Hill ed. and trans., *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, 114.

perhaps sexual implications, Fulcher of Chartres described Saracen women's fate after the Siege of Antioch in 1098. He wrote, "In regard to the women found in the tents of the foe. The Franks did them no evil but drove lances into their bellies."¹³² There is much debate about the meaning of this phrase. The Latin phrase does not provide much more insight: "mulieribus in tentoriis eorum inventis, nihil aliud mali eis Franci fecerunt, excepto quod lanceas suas in ventres earum infixerunt."¹³³ Fulcher's words both in Latin and English make it unclear whether the women were sexually assaulted or simply killed. *Ventres* can mean womb, but most commonly means stomach. In addition, the phrase "*excepto quod*" seems to suggest that the evil done to the women was solely the violence described and did not extend further into sexual violence. This cannot be shown definitively to be a euphemism, though the combination of "*lanceas*" and "*ventres*" takes on a particularly euphemistic nature to his words. Like many descriptions of sexual assault by chroniclers, it was not clearly spelled out but rather symbolically referred to, and left room for the reader to doubt the potential immorality of the crusaders.

The chronicler's descriptions of the cruelty were also offset by descriptions of leniency and kidnapping, in the form of captivity. Often keeping women alive was meant for their eventual transition to slavery and perhaps sexual violence. The *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum* goes on to write about the Siege of Jerusalem: "The Franks swiftly followed the king, annihilating multitudes throughout the city, sparing no one, except the young women who could become slaves."¹³⁴ Women, then, as a sign of mercy, were spared, but the implication here also suggests a sexual nature. This incident leaves many questions about why young women

¹³² Fulcher of Chartres quoted by Yvonne Friedman, "Captivity and Ransom: The Experience of Women", in *Gendering the Crusades* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001) 128.

¹³³ Heinrich Hagenmeyer, ed. *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, (Hiedelberg: Carl Winter's Universitatsbuchhandlung, 1890) 379.

¹³⁴ Hill ed. and trans., *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, 223.

were spared. Were they kept for sexual purposes? It is also unclear their captivity itself may have led to sexual violence and assault, though it is implied in the passage by the singling out of young women. Another potential use of symbolism to describe sexual violence lies in the *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, in which gold was mysteriously found in the wombs of women. How the gold was found and whether this phrasing is a euphemism is unclear. The *Gesta* notes, “Treasure was sought everywhere; they cut open not only chests, but the throats of the silent Saracens....They found pieces of gold in the wombs of the women who had used these areas for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended.”¹³⁵ This phrasing clearly has a sexual suggestion, though if any sexual suggestion was intended, the anonymous writer did not make it clear. The Frankish men were described to have open the wombs of Saracen women looking for treasure, and though this may symbolize a sexual act, the author of the *Gesta* leaves it unclear what exactly the men did, and what they hoped to gain, except to relate the surprise and shock of finding “gold” (literal or metaphorical) in their wombs. From the preceding sentence, it is clear that there was a connection between the symbolic actions of the crusaders described by the author and literal violence: “*silent*” Saracens were cut in their throats, the producer of sound. Due to the symbolism in the construction of the descriptions as a whole, for gold to be found in the wombs of women implies sexual violence, whether done to the corpses of the women or while they were still alive. This description, however, cannot be definitively assigned a symbolic meaning. Other authors may have used symbolism to imply sexual violence as well, however. Another example of potential sexual violence comes from Dagobert of Pisa, who relates that after the capture of Jerusalem, “...the French had to kill all of 20 years old or older, and captured all survivors, runaways, with women, to give men to the women of this people and women to the

¹³⁵ Hill ed. and trans., *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, 320.

youth...”¹³⁶ His description, too, implies the separation of young women in particular from the general crowd. In this instance, the women are to be given to the youth which could mean several things, but likely implies slavery and sexual assault. Though the sources are vague, it can be generally assumed that the First Crusade brought a lot of sexual violence to local populations, and spared women’s lives often, though their intentions may have been sexual in nature.

Often chronicles related that Saracen fighters could be spared and taken into captivity instead of indiscriminately murdered or exposed to sexual violence. This was often described by chroniclers as an act of mercy. The *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum* relates of the Siege of Jerusalem, “But this time the pilgrims entered the city, pursuing and killing the Saracens up to the Temple of Solomon...When the pagans had been overcome, our men seized great numbers, both men and women, either killing them or keeping them captive, as they wished.”¹³⁷ This description implies a vast amount of discretion involved in choosing who could be killed and who held captive and seems to come down largely to chance. It also means that even non-combatant Saracen women were in conditions of considerable danger during a crusading campaign. These stories capture the constant danger of the crusade for non-combatant women: the women were captured and killed because they failed to keep a good look-out or set an effective armed guard but were also killed simply by the misfortune of living in a city that the crusaders were seeking.¹³⁸ Though women were occasionally kept captive, many suffered violence and death at the hands of crusaders bent on capturing a particular city. Beyond the possibility of death, however, local women often faced the threat of sexual violence during the crusade.

¹³⁶ Epistiila Dagoberti Pisani archiepiscopi ad papam in *Epistulae et chartae ad historiam primi belli sacri spectantes quae supersunt aevo aequales ac genuinae*. *Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer, (Innsbruck: Wagner’schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1901) 39.

¹³⁷ Hill ed. and trans., *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, 256-57.

¹³⁸ Helen J. Nicholson, “Women’s Involvement in the Crusades,” in *The Crusader World*, ed. Adrian Boas, (New York: Routledge, 2016) 57.

What became of these Saracen women who were captured and enslaved and kept alive? There is some evidence of them in the records. Fulcher of Chartres relates that very few men were spared, but women were often sold into slavery and "...where the water wheels creaked, women worked the millstones."¹³⁹ Women who were spared thus filled in the role of a slave. In another instance discussion captured women after the war had finished, William of Tyre related an interesting story of enslaved women returned to Europe with Bohemond. Along with the "herds of slaves" captured, he describes the presence of a Saracen woman of high rank, married to a powerful chief, who was pregnant as she made her way to Europe. He then describes a scene of uncommon kindness by Bohemond, "Now upon the march the time of her travail came upon her, and with the usual pains attending childbirth, she brought forth her offspring...Wrapping her in the mantle which he was wearing himself, Baldwin left her and resumed the march with his army."¹⁴⁰ William relates to the audience the considerable kindness shown to this woman by Baldwin to impress upon the reader the kindness of mercy of the crusading army for women particularly, a strategy which has been seen in descriptions of the violence of sieges. Women were used as narrative and warfare tools to relate mercy and kindness.

Enslaved women who stayed in the Middle East fared differently. According to Jean Richard, slaves that stayed in Jerusalem were subject to harsh laws and punishments for any retaliatory violence. "...A slave who killed a Christian was hanged or, if a woman, burned."¹⁴¹ However, women again were shown some mercy, particularly sexual. "The council of Nablus laid down penalties for the rape of a Saracen woman."¹⁴² These records allow us to understand that

¹³⁹ Fulcher of Chartres quoted by Jean Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1921), 132.

¹⁴⁰ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily A. Babcock, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) 429.

¹⁴¹ Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 132

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

many Saracen women were sexually exploited as well as kept for slaves in the aftermath of the crusades. From the punishments laid down, it is clear that later these slave women were protected, but it took until the Council of Nablus in 1120 to institute any laws. As the crusaders settled into Jerusalem, taking slaves and changing laws, many took marriage into consideration. Often this meant inter-denominational marriage, many which had political and dynastic consequences.

7. Women, Marriage, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem

Despite the violence that occurred at the hands of the crusading army, the transition from crusading to the Kingdom of Jerusalem for women may have involved marriage to former crusaders. Interfaith marriages had been recently reaffirmed as forbidden, with the rediscovery in the 11th century of Justinian and a burgeoning interest in studying Roman law, particularly in Bologna. These texts, alongside Justinian's Codex, increasingly set limitations on the legal status of non-Christian groups and thus limitation on whom they could marry. Along with prohibiting Jews and Muslims to own Christian slaves or to have any position of power or authority over Christians, as well as giving Muslims the same legal status as Jews, these laws prohibit marriage and sexual relation between Christians and non-Christians.¹⁴³ Though no official law ever prohibited the union of Latin Catholic and Byzantine or other Eastern Christian women, these unions were disapproved of by authorities as well.¹⁴⁴ Of course, the existence of the laws and disapproving attitudes almost certainly meant that there were those in Europe who chose to marry Jews or Muslims, but these actions were increasingly discouraged by the church. Particularly on a religious expedition such as the crusade, it would have been frowned upon to take a local woman

¹⁴³ John Tolan, "The Legal Status of Religious Minorities in the Medieval Mediterranean World: A Comparative Study," in *Medieval Europe: Papers and Workshops of in International Spring School*, (Akademie Verlag, pp.141-149, 2010), 5.

¹⁴⁴ James M. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 195-96.

in marriage who refused to convert to Christianity. In fact, the evidence does not support widespread marriages as the crusaders attempted to settle the area.

The evidence for interfaith marriage or marriage with local women after the conclusion of the First Crusade is spotty at best. Fulcher of Chartres' most famous description gives an intriguing insight into post-crusade interactions, writing: "...some have taken wives not only of their own people but of Syrians and Armenians or even Saracens who have obtained the grace of baptism."¹⁴⁵ According to Fulcher's description, there was certainly intermarriage between the original people of Jerusalem and the Middle East with the crusaders, but the marriage was largely contingent on the faith of the locals whom the crusaders married. Fulcher's chronicle suggests that many women were willing to convert to Christianity in order to or because of their marriage to crusaders. Despite this relatively peaceful image, the reality was probably different from the picture Fulcher paints. Many women resisted conversion and marriage to a Christian crusader and were praised in their chronicles for it. One Muslim chronicler, Usama ibn Munqidh, describes the suicide of a young Muslim woman who was captured by a Frankish knight.¹⁴⁶ Many other chronicles report women resisting forced conversion, sometimes by death, and avoid the sexual and marital advancements of crusaders. In spite of the sacrificial actions of some women unwilling to convert, it remains likely that many crusaders of lower rank in Edessa and Antioch took wives from the local population, though they may have been women who were already Christian to begin with.¹⁴⁷ Little evidence of such marriages survives, aside from Fulcher of Chartres' words on the crusaders that integrated with the local population of the Levant. Fulcher wrote of this transition from Western

¹⁴⁵ Martha E. McGinty, *Fulcher of Chartres: Chronicle of the First Crusade*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941) 280-281

¹⁴⁶ Nicholson, "Women's Involvement in the Crusades," 58

¹⁴⁷ Christopher Hatch MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance: The Crusades and the Christian World of the East*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 78.

Franks to Franks integrated into the local population, “We who were Occidentals have now become Orientals. He who was a Roman or a Frank has in this land been made into a Galilean or a Palestinian. He who was of Rheims or Chartres has now become a citizen of Tyre or Antioch.”¹⁴⁸ Fulcher describes the changing of an identity and relates this change to marrying local women. Marriages were key because they symbolized a step toward integration with the local population, and women were crucial to this step whether willingly or unwillingly.

There is more evidence for the marriage of noble local women than there is for the rank and file of the crusading army.¹⁴⁹ Often the women married to noble Crusading men were Armenian, likely because they were already Christian before the crusade commenced, and thus there was no necessary conversion required to take place. Baldwin II’s choice of wife was Morfia, the daughter of an Armenian nobleman named Khoril the ruler of the city of Melitene. By her marriage to Baldwin, she was the first countess of Edessa, and she later reigned as queen in Jerusalem with Baldwin. Their children married into the leading families of the Levant.¹⁵⁰ Other members of Baldwin’s family married with local women, and in particular Armenian women. Though evidence is spotty, there is some suggestion that Baldwin may also have married his sister to the Armenian lord Levan, son of Constantine I.¹⁵¹ Other Frankish lords in Syria related to the Baldwins married Armenian women with connections to the Prince of Armenia. For example, Baldwin’s cousin Joscelin married the daughter of the Armenian Constantine I, Beatrice. Another cousin, Galeran of Le Puiset, married the daughter of Ablgharib, lord of al-Bira.¹⁵² Why were relations with Armenian noblewomen so common in particular? As said above, religion may have

¹⁴⁸ Frederick Duncan and August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, (Princeton: 1921), 280-81

¹⁴⁹ Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States 1096-1204*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 111.

¹⁵⁰ MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance*, 78.

¹⁵¹ MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance*, 77.

¹⁵² MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance*, 78.

played a role, but political reasons, as well, were crucial for the marriage of Armenian women. In particular, the Baldwins of Edessa perceived Armenian families as an avenue to bolster their own political standing, perhaps to a greater extent than their peers in Antioch, Jerusalem, or Tripoli did.¹⁵³ In addition, Edessa's population contained many Armenians, with Armenian lands close nearby, meaning the Baldwins certainly encountered more Christian Armenians than typical crusaders. These relationships were not interfaith, demonstrating an awareness of the disapproval of the church about interfaith relations, and an acknowledgment of religious differences in a manner like that which Fulcher described in his chronicle. There may have been some bend to these restrictions, however. Baldwin's wife Morfia was already a Chalcedonian Christian, but Joscelin and Galeran's Armenian wives, as relatives of the Armenian nobility, were members of the Armenian Apostolic Church and were subsequently considered miaphysites, a Christian sect that emphasizes the divinity of Jesus and was excommunicated after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. It is unlikely that members of either couple converted, though to most medieval people this theological dispute would not have carried much weight.¹⁵⁴ However, there is very little evidence of consensual intermarriage with Saracen women or other women that were not Christian whatsoever. Most other Frankish leaders, however, did not marry locally. Bohemond (once released from captivity) and Tancred of Antioch arranged marriages with women from the French royal family, seeking closer ties to Europe. Other Franks in the Levant married the sisters or daughters of fellow crusaders. Thus, while we can say that a few lower-ranking crusaders and certain noble families perhaps intermarried with local women, Christian or otherwise, it is too far to say that it was a common practice. Instead, the crusades presented a particular kind of interrelationship between local women, crusading men, and crusading women. Though many

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance*, 78

married local women, religious, cultural, and other differences may have been too great for many men, despite Fulcher of Chartres' assertion. Interestingly, it appears to have been a bigger matter for local women, who were so unwilling to marry outside their religion that they are reported to have attempted to commit suicide. Consensual intermarriage between local women and crusading men was at least a very rare event that may have not even taken place.

During the First Crusade, women on both sides of the battles were victims and active participants, using their resources and skills to survive against bloody battles and sieges. Coming from the West, women were part of the structure of the crusading army that made it able to continue: their contributions rarely overly shocking or overly praised, even if the chroniclers did acknowledge the conditions of the crusade playing out especially grievously on women.¹⁵⁵ Social expectations of women hampered the conditions in which women acted and negative perceptions of women who joined an armed conflict and a celibate pilgrimage were compounded; women were a threat to both of these excursions. During the First Crusade, Crusade leaders forced women out of camp after accusations of sexual immorality, but also joined men on the battlefield carrying stones, water, and quivers of bows. Women married their enemies, women fought back against them, and women attempted escape and begged for help from powerful allies. They were described as fanatics, powerful, courageous, and intelligent, but were also used as literary devices by chroniclers to relate the immense brutality of the crusades. The chronicles of women from the other side of the battles present a broader picture of the crusades that detail how women were able to escape forced conversion, rape, and other atrocities of war. Ultimately, the chronicles of the crusades reveal both the agency and victimhood of women as they participated and fought in the First Crusade.

¹⁵⁵ Maier, "The Roles of Women in the Crusade Movement", 68.

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