

William of Tyre, A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Seas.

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Why the Crusaders Failed

WILLIAM OF TYRE

Late twelfth century

AT THIS point I must digress somewhat from the course of my story, not to wander about aimlessly, but to bring out something of value. The question is often asked, and quite justly, why it was that our fathers, though less in number, so often bravely withstood in battle the far larger forces of the enemy and that often by divine grace a small force destroyed the multitudes of the enemy, with the result that the very name of Christian became a terror to nations ignorant of God, and thus the Lord was glorified in the works of our fathers. In contrast to this, the men of our times too often have been conquered by inferior forces; in fact, when with superior numbers they have attempted some exploit against adversaries less strong, their efforts have been fruitless and they have usually been forced to succumb.

The first reason that presents itself, as we carefully and thoughtfully study this condition of our times, looking for aid to God, the Author of all things, is that our forefathers were religious men and feared God. Now in their places a wicked generation has grown up, sinful sons, falsifiers of the Christian faith, who run the course of all unlawful things without discrimination. . . .

A second reason occurs to us in passing. In earlier times, those first revered men who came to the lands of the East led by divine zeal and aflame with spiritual enthusiasm for the faith were accustomed to military discipline; they were trained in battle and familiar with the use of weapons. The people of the East, on the contrary, through long-continued peace, had become enervated; they were unused to the art of war, unfamiliar with the rules of battle, and gloried in their state of inactivity. Therefore it is not strange that men of war, even though few in number, easily held their own even against larger numbers and could boast of their superiority in carrying off the palm of victory. For in such matters (as those who have had more experience in war know better than I), facility in arms due to long and continual practice, when opposed to untrained strength and lack of persistence, generally wins.

A third reason, no less important and effective, forces itself upon my attention. In former times almost every city had its own ruler. To speak after the manner of Aristotle, they were not dependent on one another; they were rarely actuated by the same motives, but, in fact, very often by those directly opposite. To contend in battle against adversaries of widely differing and frequently conflicting ideas, adversaries who distrusted each other, involved less peril. Those who feared their own allies not less than the Christians could not or would not readily unite to repulse the common danger or arm themselves for our destruction. But now, since God has so willed it, all the kingdoms adjacent to us have been brought under the power of one man. Within quite recent times, Zangi, a monster who abhorred the name of Christian as he would a pestilence, the father of this Nureddin who has lately died, first conquered many other kingdoms by force and then laid violent hands on Rages, also called Edessa, which even within our memory was the splendid and notable metropolis of the Medes. He took this city with all its territories and put to death all faithful believers found within its borders.

Then his son, Nureddin, drove the king of Damascus from his own land, more through the treachery of the latter's subjects than by any real valour, seized that realm for himself, and added it to his paternal heritage. Still more recently, the same Nureddin, with the assiduous aid of Shirkuh, seized the ancient and wealthy kingdom of Egypt as his own, in the manner already related more fully when the reign of King Amaury was under discussion.

Thus, as has been said, all the kingdoms round about us obey one ruler, they do the will of one man, and at his command alone, however reluctantly, they are ready, as a unit, to take up arms for our injury. Not one among them is free to indulge any inclination of his own or may with impunity disregard the commands of his overlord. This Saladin, whom we have had occasion to mention so frequently, a man of humble antecedents and lowly station, now holds under his control all these kingdoms, for fortune has smiled too graciously upon him. From Egypt and the countries adjacent to it, he draws an inestimable supply of the purest gold of the first quality known as *obryzum*. Other provinces furnish him numberless companies of horsemen and fighters, men thirsty for gold, since it is an easy matter for those possessing a plenteous supply of this commodity to draw men to them. . . .

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