



Crusading for God and Gold

The crusades were driven by religious zeal. But, as the writings of a crusader from the merchant city of Genoa reveal, profit was also a powerful motive. **Jonathan Phillips** tells his story



The looting of Jerusalem after its capture by Christians in 1099 during the First Crusade, shown in an illuminated manuscript from the 15th century

The Canons of the Council of Clermont, the official record of Pope Urban II's pronouncement of the First Crusade, in November 1095, stated: "Whoever for devotion alone, not to gain honour or money, goes to Jerusalem to liberate the church of God can substitute this journey for all penance." Compare this with the confident eyewitness assertions of Caffaro of Genoa as he described the division of spoils after the crusader capture of Caesarea in 1101:

"They first set aside one-fifteenth of the booty in the camp for the galley crews. The remainder they divided among 8,000 men, and gave to each as his share 48 solidi in the coin of Poitou, and two pounds of peppercorns, except for the rewards due to the consuls, the sea-captains, and men of

quality, which were substantial. They started their journey back to Genoa on the Eve of St James the Apostle [24 July]; and they arrived back in the month of October 1101 in triumph and covered in glory."

Here, it seems, substantial profit, fame and participation in the holy war were not at odds. The substantial volume of evidence produced by clerical writers has, rightly, led historians to place religious motivation at the top of the range of factors that drove people to set out to recover Jerusalem from the Muslims in the late 1090s. Other reasons undoubtedly also played a part in drawing people to the cross, namely, the desire for fame; the possibility of financial advantage – although crusading was an astoundingly expensive business; the acquisition of land (most crusaders returned home, however); and patronage.

That said, one important group of early crusaders has tended to receive a very bad press: the reputation of the Italian crusaders is usually one of money-grabbing merchants. Eugene Byrne, an eminent historian of Genoa writing in the 1920s, stated: "It would almost seem to them... [that] the crusade was a matter of indifference except as it affected their material prosperity."

The Venetians' prominent part in the sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1204), coupled with the Italians' persistent disdain for embargoes on trading in materials of war with Muslims during (especially) the 13th century, produced the simplistic stereotype represented by Byrne above.

The writings of Caffaro of Genoa, however, offer us a chance to reassess this for the early decades of the 12th century, not least because he was an eyewitness and a layman. Unlike

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Pope Urban II's pronouncement of the First Crusade, in November 1095



Pope Urban II preaching the First Crusade at Clermont in 1095. It became the first of several expeditions by European Christians to regain the Holy Land from Muslim control

many other First Crusaders – that is, mounted warriors from the castles and estates of the west – he came from one of the dynamic emerging mercantile cities of Italy (Genoa, Pisa and Venice), a position that offers a different perspective on the Muslim world and the relationship between money and religious motivation. Crucially, he reminds us, therefore, to recognise the range of people who took part in the First Crusade and the multiplicity of their motives.

Inspired by his experiences on crusade, Caffaro chose to record the history of his people in what became the first official civic annals in the medieval west. He also produced a history of *The Liberation of the Cities of the East* (an account of the First Crusade and its aftermath) and a short account of the capture of Almeria and Tortosa in Spain during the Second Crusade in 1147–48. Caffaro was born in c1080 and died in 1166 and thus his life spanned both the First and the Second Crusades. In an extraordinary career he was a consul for Genoa eight times and headed important diplomatic missions to the papacy and the German emperor.

God's favour

Perhaps most interesting of all for modern historians is the fact that he was a layman. Other narratives of the early crusades were almost entirely written by churchmen, such as Raymond of Aguilers (in the contingent of Count Raymond of Toulouse) or Fulcher of Chartres (with Count Baldwin of Boulogne, later King Baldwin I of Jerusalem). Churchmen had a particular perspective on the crusade and emphasised the need for participants to behave in a fashion that would ensure God's favour, as Pope Urban had outlined at Clermont.

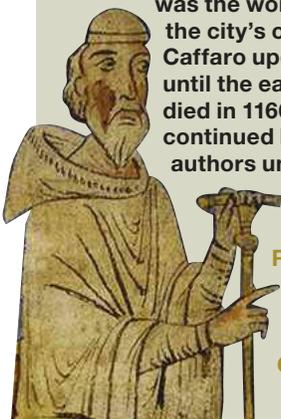
Much of what Caffaro describes falls into

Caffaro of Genoa

He wrote a history of the crusades and of the city of Genoa

Caffaro di Rustico, Lord of Caschifellone (an area just north of the city of Genoa in Liguria, north-western Italy), was born c1080. He took part in a Genoese crusading expedition of 1100–01, an episode that prompted him to start writing a record of historical events. By his early 40s Caffaro had become a man of some standing in Genoa because he was elected a *consul de communi*, responsible for administration, diplomacy and military leadership. He was re-elected on five subsequent occasions, as well as twice taking on the role of *consul de placitis*, or judge of lesser pleas.

Caffaro led a large Genoese fleet in the conquest of Minorca in 1146, a precursor to campaigns against Muslim Iberia during the Second Crusade. In 1152 he presented his account of the history of Genoa to the commune; so widely admired was the work that it became the city's official record. Caffaro updated the text until the early 1160s (he died in 1166) and it was continued by a series of authors until 1293.



Caffaro di Rustico was a man of some standing in 12th-century Genoa

the category of mainstream crusading practice and is consistent with what clerical writers described too. Thus, there are little grounds for doubting the importance of religious motivation to the Genoese. In the summer of 1096, leading French bishops offered remission of all sins if the citizens took part in the effort to recover Jerusalem. The appeal was enthusiastically received and several boats of Genoese crusaders sailed to the east where they helped in the siege of Antioch (1098), the conquest of Jerusalem and the battle of Ascalon (both 1099).

These groups were not, of course, as big or important as the contingents from northern France, Toulouse, Flanders and southern Italy, but they clearly contributed to the expedition's success. As Caffaro noted, in the aftermath of the battle of Ascalon the Genoese seized “huge treasure of gold, silver and gemstones from the sultan of Babylon [Egypt]... on Christmas Eve they arrived in Genoa and delivered a letter from the court in Jerusalem... about the capture of Jerusalem and the assistance needed”. The Genoese became far more prominent in the years immediately after the capture of the holy city and they dispatched a series of fleets to the east in 1100, 1102 and 1108 and 1109.

Several other regions of western Europe sent contingents to the Holy Land in what can be seen as lengthy coda to the First Crusade. As a result of these campaigns the Franks (as the western Europeans who settled in the Levant after the capture of Jerusalem became known) seized the coastline and established the so-called crusader states. The Genoese played a crucial role in these events because of their naval expertise and skill in constructing wooden siege machinery.

In 1101 Caffaro and his Genoese colleagues took part in the annual Easter celebrations in

...and for Gold

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Caffaro of Genoa’s eyewitness account of the division of spoils after the capture of Caesarea in 1101



A 12th-century Italian merchant, depicted on a marble carving

the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and visited the river Jordan. Soon afterwards they assisted in the capture of Caesarea, fighting their way into the city wearing crosses on their shoulders, just like all their fellow crusaders. Caffaro related a speech in which the patriarch of Jerusalem argued that “since you [the Genoese] have come to these regions in the service of God and the most Holy Sepulchre” they should believe in God’s courage rather than their own and, if they had faith, they would take the city, “its men and women, and its treasure before noon”.

Promising profit

One can argue that this is too accurate a foretelling of what happened to be plausible, but we should still take the notion of promising profit as credible. Crusading was expensive and for an army not to want the spoils of war was unrealistic. Old Testament books, familiar to the Genoese from the Matins service, offer support for this. Thus in II Chronicles 20, 20–25, the king of Judah benefited from a battle between Ammonites, Moabites and the people of Mount Seir to leave him “more jewels than could be carried” and to return to Jerusalem in triumph.

The preachers of the First Crusade were worried greed might bring divine disfavour, but for laymen there had to be, out of necessity, a long boundary before the need for money crossed over into greed.

It is true that in return for their support the Genoese extracted a high price from the rulers of the east and one that went beyond short-term profit; namely, substantial commercial privileges for themselves, such as tax reductions and areas within conquered cities. But without their involvement, the coast could not have been taken and the crusader states would have had almost no

means of remaining in contact with western Europe, meaning that hardly any pilgrims could come to the Levant to perform their religious devotions. Furthermore, the trade vital for a society to prosper would barely happen. From the perspective of the Genoese it is important to remember the very basis of their existence – as a trading city.

As the crusaders prepared to scale the walls of Caesarea, Caffaro reported that their leader, Guglielmo Testadimaglio (William ‘Hammerhead’) shouted: “Citizens and warriors of God, do not be slow in fulfilling God’s orders.” The emergence of a strong sense of civic identity is shown here, albeit one placed in parallel with their commitment as crusaders fighting for the faith. King Baldwin I rewarded the Genoese with privileges that were inscribed in golden letters on the walls of the Holy Sepulchre itself. That alone, in placing this agreement in the most holy of all Christian sites, should show us both how central the Genoese were to the king’s efforts, but also that their roles as traders and crusaders were not seen as contradictory or negative.

In the aftermath of the 1101 campaign, several important relics reached Genoa, including the head of John the Baptist and a beautiful emerald green bowl, thought to have been at the Last Supper, now in the treasury of St Lawrence’s cathedral.

The practice of sending relics back home was, of course, entirely in tune with crusaders across Europe. A large mural (a small portion of which survives) in St Lawrence’s celebrated the capture of Almeria and Tortosa from Muslim Spain where, again, the city secured large commercial rights. Once more, crusading identity is proudly advertised within the spiritual heart of the city.

Taking part in the First Crusade did not – and could not – transform Genoa’s attitude

towards the Muslim world. The city had traded with Muslim Spain, Muslim north Africa and even the near east prior to 1099 and carried on doing so afterwards; to cease doing so would have been commercial suicide.

As we continue to try to understand why the First Crusade attracted such extraordinary support from people across western Europe, Caffaro offers a distinctive and refreshing viewpoint that is a striking supplement to the numerous accounts of churchmen. As he wrote: “Whosoever desires for his own benefit or the benefit of others news from the time of the expedition to Caesarea to the present should read these writings by Caffaro... for all times the victories of the Genoese city shall be known, those who departed in 1100 and returned in 1101.”

He couples conventional religiosity with a distinctive urban, mercantile and Mediterranean voice. Through its apparent contradictions and complexities, his work should encourage us to acknowledge the variety of reasons why one particular group among the polyglot forces of the First Crusade was so committed to the Christian cause and took such pride in its achievements. **H**

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BOOKS

- ▶ **Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth Century Crusades**, MA Hall & JP Phillips (Ashgate, 2013)
- ▶ **The Crusades, 1095–1204** by JP Phillips (Routledge, 2014)

LISTEN ONLINE

- ▶ Melvyn Bragg discusses the Third Crusade in a Radio 4 **In Our Time** podcast.

bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00547ls

