

The Popular Crusade: Following Count Emicho

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Pope Urban II did not advertise the First Crusade in the region of northeastern France and the Rhineland mid-1090s. Despite the pope's absence, the zealous response to his call for the crusade continued as Peter the Hermit began preaching the cause in this area himself. As Peter and his recruited band of aristocratic and common pilgrims made their way through the Rhineland toward Jerusalem, they acted as an advertisement for the newly begun First Crusade. The passage of these French crusaders through the Rhineland set the barons of the Rhineland, who were inspired by crusading ideals, into motion.¹ Among these enthused barons was the infamous Count Emicho of Flonheim, who is in both Christian and Jewish interpretations of the event to come attributed as the main architect of the violence against the Jewish communities in 1096.²

The activities of the German barons were, although inspired by Peter the Hermit's crusading zeal, not under the direct control of Peter.³ Their ensuing anti-Jewish violence against Rhineland's well-established Jewish communities reflects an anti-Jewish element that existed in classical Christian teaching.⁴ The German band of crusaders augmented an anti-Jewish component to the already loosely established crusading goals, resulting in organized efforts to destroy major Jewish communities before heading East to fulfill the other element of the crusade.⁵ For the enemy of the Christians were not sole in the Jerusalem, they also resided much closer to home. In the ranks of Count Emicho's army of twelve-hundred men and women, were the French aristocrats Clarendon, a noble of Vendeuil and Thomas from the House of Coucy.⁶ Thomas is most known for his psychotic behavior some years after the crusade when he ravaged the countryside around Laon, Reims, and Amiens

leaving the area utterly destroyed, earning him the title of "most accursed."⁷ While many Jewish communities around the Rhine came under attack in 1096, Emicho and thus his vassal, Thomas, are only recorded as having participated in one, the attack on the Jewish community in Mainz.⁸

For two days, the army camped outside the closed gates of Mainz and waited for the other crusading parties to arrive via the King's highway.⁹ While these groups arrived, the leaders received letters of negotiation from the Jewish community of Mainz, offering the crusading party money and safe passage in exchange for peace having heard of the slaughter of the Jewish community of Speyer.¹⁰ Emicho disregarded their plea and inspired his army with the spirit of with the cause: "Let us take vengeance upon the Jews first! We shall wipe them out as a nation so that Israel's name will be mentioned no more or let them like us and acknowledge Christ."¹¹

The army found support from the local population when they opened the gates for the invading force.¹² Emicho's army confronted these Jews, who sought protection in the Archbishop Ruthard's palace, the burgrave's compound, and the priest's courtyard.¹³ After forcing the Jews to choose between conversion and death, many chose to die at their own hands. Thus, the army found many self-sacrificed Jews in the palace and the courtyard.¹⁴ The army's rampage was not finished; more Jews were hiding elsewhere in the city. There were those who hid in their homes or in the homes of sympathetic Christian neighbors.¹⁵ These Jews were also sought out, killed or forcibly converted, and their houses looted.¹⁶

At the end of the day, the success of Emicho's army was apparent, even in the face of the provisions provided to protect the Jewish people from the

crusading party, the violent attack on the city of Mainz rid the city of at least six hundred Jews, while the rest were forcefully baptized.¹⁷ The conclusion of Emicho's army happens in mid-June 1096, roughly a month after the attack on Mainz, when Emicho's army was fatally defeated by the Hungarians before ever stepping foot in the Middle East.¹⁸ After being prevented from entering the Kingdom of Hungary at the Innsbruck border, the army was thus instructed to besiege the fortress with little success. A delegation was then sent into the Hungarian town but before their return to the camp, Emicho caught wind of a conspiracy against him by this four-man delegation. In response to the threat of a coup, Emicho fled. Shortly after he was followed by many of his knights also in retreat. Thomas and Clarembold and the others who survived the battle and their flight from the Hungarians fled to Carinthia to join the other crusading forces heading toward Jerusalem. Count Emicho followed lead his followers along the royal highway to the Rhineland in retreat, leaving his looted treasures and his chance to visit Jerusalem in Hungary.

End Notes

- ¹ Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 30.
- ² Kenneth Stow, "Conversion, Apostasy, and Apprehensiveness: Emicho of Floheim and the Fear of the Jews in the Twelfth Century," in *Popes, Church, and Jews in the Middle Ages: Confrontation and Response* (Albansham, Great Britain: Ashgate, 2007), 911.
- ³ Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History*, 30.
- ⁴ Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 16.
- ⁵ Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987),
- ⁶ Albert of Aix, "Albert of Aix," in *Jews in Christian Europe: A Source Book, 315-1791*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 120.
- ⁷ Suger, *The Deeds of Louis the Fat*, trans. Richard Cusimano and John Moorhead (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 106.
- ⁸ Stow, "Conversion, Apostasy, and Apprehensiveness," 913.

⁹ Albert of Aix, "Emico: The Version of Ekkehard of Aura," in *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 102.

¹⁰ Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History*, 37.

¹¹ Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 69.

¹² Shlomo Eidelberg, trans., "The Chronicle of Solomonbar Simson," in *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusade*, 21-72. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 30.

¹³ Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History*, 93.

¹⁴ Eidelberg, "Solomon bar Simson," 31.

¹⁵ Chazan, *In the Year 1096*, 34, 60.

¹⁶ Shlomo Eidelberg, trans., "Narrative of the Old Persecutions (Mainz Anonymous)," in *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusade*, 99-115 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 114.

¹⁷ Stow, "Conversion, Apostasy, and Apprehensiveness," 918. Chazan, *In the Year*, 33.

¹⁸ Albert of Aix, "Emico: The Version of Ekkehard of Aura," in *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 101.

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