

Everyday Life of the Crusaders on the Balkan

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The everyday life of the first crusaders on the Balkans in the broad sense of the word could be defined as life en route, fighting for existence between a state of war and peace, a life of suffering and luxuries, a challenge for people who only had little experience of life outside of their homeland. In the narrow sense, the everyday crusaders' life was full of ordinary human activities comprising diet, behaviour, superstitions and prejudice, housing and entertainment.

The subject has not been studied, and sources are limited – crusade historians provide only some unprecise data. So did the Byzantine authors, only Anna Comnena gives more details especially concerning crusaders' behaviour.

The daily life of the first crusaders was organised chiefly in the open. They usually pitched camp outside the city walls, very often by the rivers and scattered around the countryside. Open market places were arranged there for them. The local people had to sell agricultural commodities to the western armies in just prices (*iusto pretio*) and precise measurements (*aequa mensura*).

Due to the fear of robbery and aggression, the local population often left or closed their towns, and the goods to be sold were dropped down by ropes from the walls (as described by Odo of Deuil).

In other cases in which the settlements were deserted the armed pilgrims were forced to take care of their own provisions.

After the town of Nish, people of Peter the Hermit had to prepare their bread by reaping the harvest of the abandoned fields and baking bread for themselves under campaign conditions (July 1096, according to Albert of Aix). The food of ordinary people consisted primarily

of bread, meat and vegetables supplemented by wine and fruit.

In this sense, the Balkan Peninsula was Promised Land for the first crusaders. Here they found abundance of wine and food cereals, cheese and olive oil, honey and vegetables. When they could not obtain the necessary provisions in the usual manner, pillages often took place. Soldiers stole herbs and everything else that was edible.

The march of the aristocrats to the Holy Sepulchre during the summer of 1096 was quite glamorous and luxurious

On the journey they did not want to miss their feudal habits like falconry, fishing, knights tournaments and other entertainment.

At the town of Belgrade during the third crusades the German emperor Barbarossa arranged a tournament, and 60 men were knighted.

The food of the noble and wealthy people was plenteous and even exotic. The Byzantine officials and some Balkan rulers donated great amounts of wine and food in the form of gifts. At the town of Nishe the duke of Lower Lotharingia Godfrey of Bouillon was endowed with wheat, olive oil and game. In the course of the third crusade (1189) the German emperor and the western princess were honoured with wine, meat and animals from the Serbian Grand Zhupan. Some feasts in Constantinople including the participation of the Byzantine emperor were also organised for them. For safety reasons some of the leaders brought their cooks and cupbearers with them e.g. the German emperor Barbarossa and Boemond of Toronto who ordered his cook to prepare the raw meat in the custom of his cuisine.

Frequently the daily routine of the crusaders on the Balkans passed under the sign of hard drinking and depravity. The French historian of the second crusade Odo of Deuil recorded that there were a few taverns in the Latin fortress outside Philippolis. In one of them, drunk Allemanoi tore into pieces a local conjurer who was performing tricks with a serpent in which they saw an evil omen. Both taverns and roadside inns became

the site of drunkenness, brawls and perhaps for sexual pleasures as well. The soldiers suffered from different illnesses caused by their way of life e.g. fever and dysentery, etc. Some of them died along the Balkan road or the battlefields, others were captured and stayed on to live here. In some way the daily life of the crusaders determined the lifestyle of the local population, and their fate became one...

Bibliography

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