

TLP CLEAR – DISSEMINATION UNLIMITED



In Obscura

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(TLP-C) WHY TODAY IS THE DARKEST DAY IN CRUSADER HISTORY

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Why Today Is the Darkest Day in Crusader History

“If you were there, you would have seen your Muslim enemy cutting the throats of monks, priests and deacons upon the altars”—Sultan Baybars

[Raymond Ibrahim](#) May 18, 2026

Few dates in medieval history witnessed as much blood and civilizational trauma as today’s date, May 18.

On that day in 1268, the great Christian city of Antioch fell to the Mamluk sultan Baybars in one of the worst massacres of the Crusading era.

Twenty-three years later—again on May 18—the last major Crusader stronghold in the Holy Land, Acre, collapsed before the armies of Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil, bringing nearly two centuries of Crusader presence in the Levant to an end.

Because I recount both catastrophes in [The Two Swords of Christ](#), what follows are excerpts illustrating how Christendom’s eastern frontier finally died—in blood, fire, enslavement, and despair.

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The Fall of Antioch — May 18, 1268

Following a recounting of the brutal conquests of Mamluk sultan Baybars, the narrative continues:

Next to fall—and terrible was its fall—was the ancient Christian city of Antioch, one of the oldest and best fortified Crusader kingdoms. In May 1268, after the Muslims had breached the city, which was swollen with some one hundred and twenty thousand Christian fugitives, many of whom were women and children, Baybars entered and ordered the city's gates shut behind him. An orgiastic bloodbath—the “single greatest massacre of the entire crusading era”—followed.

Indeed, the scale of slaughters, atrocities, and rapes visited upon the Christians of Antioch was unprecedented. Seventeen thousand Christians were massacred inside the city, and more than one hundred thousand were enslaved. In the Mamluk train was such a surplus of human booty that the price of Frankish slave women and children plummeted on the Muslim slave markets to just a few silver pieces. That said, not all would consent to rape and slavery, and “amid the usual atrocities” during the sack of Antioch, “one incident shocked even the Turks. The canonesses of St. John had cut off their noses with scissors and gashed their cheeks in order to avoid rape. The appalled Muslims slaughtered them on the spot.”

Baybars gloated over his latest handiwork in a letter to Bohemond VI, lord of Antioch, who was not present at the time of its fall:

You would have seen your knights prostrated beneath the horses' hooves, your houses stormed by pillagers and ransacked by looters...your women sold four at a time and bought for a dinar of your own money! You would have seen the crosses in your churches smashed, the pages of the false Testaments scattered, the Patriarchs' tombs overturned. You would have seen your Muslim enemy trampling on the place where you celebrate the mass, cutting the throats of monks, priests and deacons upon the altars, bringing sudden death to the Patriarchs and slavery to the royal princes. You would have seen fire running through your palaces, your dead burned...your palace lying unrecognizable, the church of St. Paul and that of Qusyan [Cathedral of Saint Peter] pulled down and destroyed.

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The situation had reached a breaking point; in the same year that Antioch was sacked, 1268, Hugh Revel, the master of the Hospital, sent a letter to Europe describing how “the tiny number of Christians” remaining in the Holy Land “are unable to resist the indescribable power of the Saracens”; they “are so stupefied at the immense damage which they have received and which they are receiving every day, that they can provide no remedy of defense.”

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The Fall of Acre — May 18, 1291

If Antioch was the great harbinger, Acre was the climactic end. For when Acre fell on May 18, 1291, it was not merely another defeated city. It was the extinction of Crusader Outremer itself—the destruction of the last major Christian foothold in the Holy Land after nearly two centuries of warfare.

Of that catastrophe, John of Villiers, master of the Hospital, “in sorrow and anguish,” wrote from his sickbed:

They entered the city on all sides early in the morning and in very great force.... We and our Convent resisted them at St. Anthony's Gate... We drove them back three times... In that action... we lost little by little all the Convent of our Order.

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He described the deaths of the greatest defenders of Acre, including [Matthew of Clermont](#) and the master of the Temple, before recounting how he himself was nearly killed by a lance thrust between the shoulders:

Our sergeants and household boys came and carried me, wounded almost to death... and thus I and some of our brethren escaped, as it pleased God... On the day that this letter was written we were still there, in great sadness of heart, prisoners of overwhelming sorrow.

As Muslim forces poured into the shattered city, panic consumed the harbor. Thousands of civilians rushed desperately toward the ships:

[The harbor] was a mass of screaming women and children, and panic-stricken soldiers, struggling to get into the boats ... Into this mob of helpless fugitives, mad with fear, rode the merciless Saracen horde, killing all whom they could reach and pursuing them into the waves of the sea.

The Templar of Tyre, who survived the bloodbath, never forgot the scenes he witnessed on that May 18:

Know that that day was terrible to behold. The ladies... and other lesser folk came fleeing through the streets, their children in their arms, weeping and despairing, and fleeing to the sailors to save them from death. And when the Saracens came across them, one seized the mother and another the child, and carried them away from place to place, and separated them from each other. Once there was a quarrel between two Saracens over a woman and she was killed by them; and another time a woman was led away captive, and the infant at her breast was thrown to the ground where the horses trampled on it, slaying it thus. There were some women who were pregnant and who were caught in the press of the flight and suffocated and died, and the life in her womb died with her. And there were some women whose husband or child was lying ill or wounded by an arrow at their lodging; they left them alone and fled, the Saracens slew them all... [N]o one could adequately recount the tears and grief of that day. The pitiful sight of the little children, tumbled about and disemboweled as the horses trampled them...! There is no man in the world who has so very hard a heart that he would not have wept to see the slaughter.

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When those Muslims who were targeting and burning churches and monasteries “out of hatred for Christianity,” barged into a monastery, they massacred dozens of Dominicans and Franciscans as they knelt and prayed at the altar.

Similarly, Dominican nuns were slaughtered while singing hymns in their church. Another group of nuns, the devoted Sisters of St. Clare, had refused to flee in order to tend the sick and wounded:

When the end came they followed the example of the sisters of the Hospital at the sack of Antioch, and by mutilating and disfiguring their countenances, provoked the indignant Muslim soldiery to slay them forthwith, and their dead bodies were seen flung into a heap in one of the streets.

And just as his predecessor, Sultan Baybars, had boasted of all the atrocities his men committed during the aforementioned sack of Antioch in 1268, so too did Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil sent a letter boasting of his handiwork to Hethoum the king of Cilician Armenia, who the sultan condemned for being “of the race of Christ.”

We have conquered the city of Acre that was the seat of the true cross.... Our glittering swords consumed all Hospitallers and Templars...[and] Teutonic Knights. We leveled their churches to the ground, they were slaughtered on their own altars, and the Patriarch himself was delivered into tribulation [though he was offered many chances to escape by boat, the elderly Nicolas of Hanapes remained in Acre until he drowned for trying to save other Christians on May 18]. And you can see a vast amount of treasure has come into the hands of our men...and so many women that they were sold for a drachma a piece. And you can see the towers of Acre have been razed to the ground and turned to a waste land.... It will be to your advantage to come personally with your lords and two years' worth of tribute to our lofty doors, as a man who values his personal safety and his kingdom and does not try to evade our great power. You can be certain that nothing will escape me after the destruction of Acre.

Following that May 18, 1291, the Crusader states were finished.

The cities, churches, monasteries, and fortresses that generations of Europeans had crossed continents to build and defend were gone. All that remained were refugees, slaves, and ruins.

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