

Antisemitism of Godfrey de Bouillon

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When, in 1095, Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade, some Christians thought it desirable to kill the Jews of Europe before proceeding so far to fight Turks in Jerusalem. Godfrey of Bouillon, having accepted the leadership of the crusade, announced that he would avenge the blood of Jesus upon the Jews, and would leave not one of them alive; and his companions proclaimed their intention to kill all Jews who would not accept Christianity. A monk further aroused Christian ardor by declaring that an inscription found on the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem made the conversion of all Jews a moral obligation of all Christians. The Crusaders planned to move south along the Rhine, where lay the richest settlements in northern Europe. The German Jews had played a leading part in the development of Rhenish commerce, and had behaved with a restraint and piety that had won the respect of Christian laity and clergy alike. Bishop Rüdiger of Speyer was on cordial terms with the Jews of his district, and gave them a charter guaranteeing their autonomy and security. In 1095 the Emperor Henry IV issued a similar charter for all the Jews of his realm. Upon these peaceful Jewish congregations the news of the crusade, its proposed route, and the threats of its leaders, broke with paralyzing terror. The rabbis proclaimed several days of fasting and prayer.

Arrived at Speyer, the Crusaders dragged eleven Jews into a church, and ordered them to accept baptism; refusing, the eleven were slain (May 3, 1096). Other Jews of the city took refuge with Bishop Johannsen, who not only protected them but caused the execution of certain Crusaders who had shared in the murders at the church. As some Crusaders neared Trier, its Jews appealed to Bishop Egilbert; he offered protection on condition

of baptism. Most of the Jews consented; but several women killed their children and threw themselves into the Moselle (June 1, 1096). At Mainz Archbishop Ruthard hid 1300 Jews in his cellars; Crusaders forced their way in, and killed 1014; the Bishop was able to save a few by concealing them in the cathedral (May 27, 1096). Four Mainz Jews accepted baptism, but committed suicide soon afterward. As the Crusaders approached Cologne, the Christians hid the Jews in their homes; the mob burned down the Jewish quarter, and killed the few Jews upon whom they could lay their hands. Bishop Hermann, at great danger to himself, secretly conveyed the Jews from their Christian hiding places to Christian homes in the country; the pilgrims discovered the maneuver, hunted their prey in the villages, and killed every Jew they found (June, 1096). In two of these villages 200 Jews were slain; in four others the Jews, surrounded by the mob, killed one another rather than be baptized. Mothers delivered of infants during these attacks slew them at birth. At Worms Bishop Allebranches received such of the Jews as he could into his palace, and saved them; upon the rest the Crusaders fell with the savagery of anonymity, killing many, and then plundering and burning the homes of the Jews; here many Jews committed suicide rather than repudiate their faith. Seven days later a crowd besieged the episcopal residence; the Bishop told the Jews that he could no longer hold back the mob, and advised them to accept baptism. The Jews asked to be left alone for a while; when the Bishop returned he found that nearly all of them had killed one another. The besiegers broke in and slew the rest; all in all, some 800 Jews died in this pogrom at Worms (August 20, 1096). Similar scenes occurred at Metz, Regensburg, and Prague.