

A MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN MARITIME REVOLUTION: CRUSADING BY SEA CA. 1096-1204

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ABSTRACT

In 1097 a small Genoese squadron of 12 *galee* and a transport galley, a *sandanum*, took around four months to make the voyage from Genoa to Saint Symeon, the port of Antioch at the mouth of the Orontes, between July and October. The much larger Pisan and Venetian fleets for the First Crusade did not attempt to make the voyage in a single season. They sailed in 1098 and 1099 respectively and wintered on the Ionian Islands and Rhodes respectively, reaching the Holy Land in 1099 and 1100.

Fulcher of Chartres, writing in the Holy Land no later than around 1102, stated pointedly that it was not possible at that time for those coming to them by sea to bring horses with them and that they suffered from a severe shortage of them. He was quite explicit that the Venetians were the first to bring horses to the Holy Land in their Crusade of 1123. Even then they brought only 300 and had to winter on Corfu. There is no other evidence for the transportation of horses by sea to the Holy Land before 1123.

Yet immediately after the First Crusade it became possible for Genoese, Venetian, Pisan and other fleets to make voyages to the East in a single sailing season. There is no evidence for any other Mediterranean Crusader fleet wintering *en route* until the Venetians in 1123, and they had a special reason for doing so: the horses.

Yet by 1191, Richard Cœur de Lion and Philip Augustus could make the voyage from Messina to the Holy Land in 3-4 weeks, in single voyages, with no extended layovers (except for Richard's illness on Rhodes). Both were carrying many horses, the Genoese contractors for Philip engaging to carry 600 and Richard's ships carrying an unknown number. If we can believe Suger of St Denis, Roger II of Sicily had earlier offered to transport the entire French army for the Second Crusade to the East by sea. That did not eventuate, but it must have already been possible, if the report is true.

For the Fourth Crusade the Venetians contracted to carry 4,500 horses and knights, and 9,000 squires on what must have been around 150 specialized horse transport galleys from Venice to Egypt. It is quite clear that it was anticipated that the voyage to Egypt, or at least to Cyprus, would be made in a single season. It did not work out that way, but that is another story.

For reasons unknown, and indeed never considered to the best of my knowledge, a maritime revolution in the transportation of Crusaders and their horses occurred during the twelfth century. Was it because of developments in ship design, especially galley design? The problem with that is that the new bireme *galea* had been developed before the First Crusade and there is no evidence of any change in design during the twelfth century. As for sailing ships, they probably grew larger, or at least there came to be more larger ones, but again there is no evidence for any fundamental change in design. Was it because of developments in logistical organization? Was it because of the development of port facilities en route? Did communities en route begin to stockpile provisions and to improve watering facilities? Was it because of the acquisition of better knowledge of the routes to the East, of where water supplies and provisions could be obtained, and of how to sail best with the prevailing winds? Did Crusader fleets learn to sail in squadrons a day or so apart so that watering could be done much more quickly? These are suggestions to be examined. The evidence to sustain any of them is minimal; however, it is clear that some fundamental changes occurred in the transportation of both men and horses.