

# How did the First Crusaders navigate the world?

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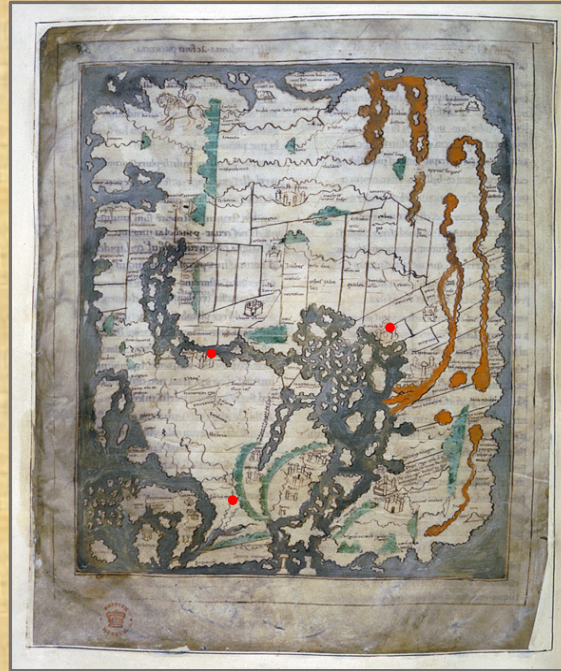
## Introduction

The First Crusade of 1095 saw the largest mobilization of manpower since the fall of the Roman Empire<sup>3</sup>. Crusaders had to travel thousands of miles to get to their destination<sup>3</sup>. Multiple routes were taken: how did they navigate? Maps as we know today were practically unknown in the Medieval times<sup>1</sup>. The artistic *mappamundi* was uncommon and inaccurate<sup>1</sup>. Did the Crusaders have to rely solely on this? I will be looking at and comparing the Anglo-Saxon Cotton map to the *Gesta Francorum* chronicle from the First Crusade.

## The *Gesta Francorum*

It gives the earliest eye-witness accounts of the First Crusade<sup>6</sup> making it the the most influential and detailed narrative<sup>5</sup>. Written anonymously during the Crusade, then Northern French Benedictine monks rewrote this chronicle in 1105<sup>5</sup>. The *Gesta Francorum* gives a narrative of the events that took place, from the first speech of Pope Urban II to the Battle of Ascalon<sup>7</sup>.

Map 1: Anglo-Saxon Cotton Map c.1050



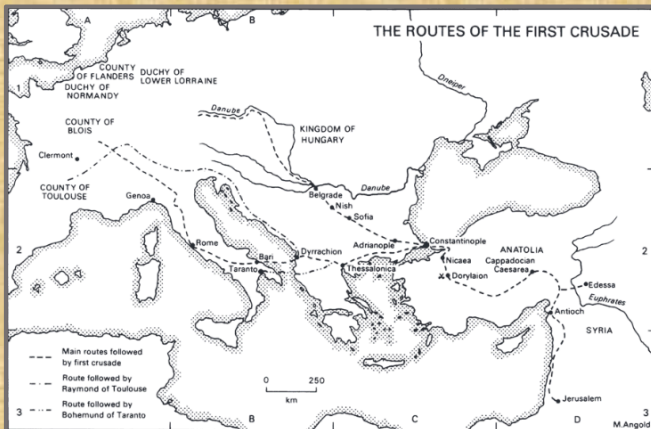
## Discussion

The lack of logistical planning by the Crusade leaders is apparent in the *Gesta Francorum*<sup>7</sup>. It is a narrative that shows the people relied on their own knowledge of the Balkans and Jerusalem from past pilgrimage<sup>7</sup>. The reasons for route decisions is not made clear in the chronicle, it only provides an itinerary of places they went<sup>7</sup>. The routes travelled are shown on map 2. The poor crusaders took the obvious route to them, the ancient pilgrim road to Asia Minor that ran along the river Danube into Hungary<sup>3</sup>. The author of the *Gesta Francorum* is thought to be one of the elites that travelled from Southern Italy<sup>6</sup>. I have marked on map 1 where the Crusades started, North is their destination of Constantinople and the right is their last destination of Jerusalem. When orientated with East on the right, the similarities to the route map shown are surprising. One role for a standard *mappamundi* would be to portray a historical narrative, similar to a chronicle, the Anglo-Saxon map is much simpler than this<sup>2</sup>. Due to its accuracy, the Anglo-Saxon map is a copy of an earlier Roman map<sup>1</sup>.

## Conclusion

Because maps are our main navigational aid, it is easy to assume they have always been so. *Mappamundi* were commonly used as teaching aides, religious symbols, or simple art to hang on the wall<sup>1</sup>. The *Gesta Francorum* could be considered as an itinerary, listing place names to be travelled to which is extremely common in the Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>. The peoples first hand knowledge of the pilgrim routes were of greater benefit to the First Crusade than a *mappamundi*. Medieval Europe was just simply a society that functioned rather well without the need of maps.

Map 2: Routes taken during the First Crusade



## The Anglo-Saxon Cotton Map c.1050 (above)

Created in Canterbury, England around 1050 by an unknown author<sup>2</sup>. As was tradition, East is at the top of the map, and the British Isles are recognisable on the bottom left<sup>2</sup>. Like many of these *mappamundi*, Jerusalem is placed near the centre<sup>2</sup>. The mapmakers reflected their religious beliefs on to their work, they were not made to catch people out by the inaccuracy of their designs<sup>4</sup>.

## References

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