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Peter Frankopan, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. xxi, 262. ISBN 978-0-674-05994-8.

Review by David Stewart Bachrach, The University of New Hampshire (bachrach@cisunix.unh.edu).

The First Crusade (1095-99) has generated extraordinary interest for more than nine hundred years. From the origins of professional or scientific historical inquiry in the nineteenth century, scholars have devoted extensive, not to say exhaustive, attention to the First Crusade and the crusading movement more generally. Strikingly, however, almost all this work, until very recently, has been from the perspective of the westerners who went on crusade, in part because so many Latin and medieval French sources were edited and published early on. In great part also, the western focus is a natural consequence of European, especially Anglophone, preeminence in the systematic study of medieval history. More recently, however, the editing and translation of eastern sources, particularly in Arabic and Hebrew, has opened new horizons in historiography; Muslim and Jewish viewpoints are emerging in greater detail. The one major lacuna, especially in English-language scholarship, and particularly regarding the First Crusade, has been the Byzantine perspective, especially that of Emperor Alexios (1081-1118), who was instrumental in bringing large western armies to Asia Minor and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. But his motives for inviting these armies to the very doorstep of Constantinople have remained unclear. In light of this, Peter Frankopan's study is welcome for the new ground it breaks in the historiography of the Crusade.

The book blends two narratives: the first—more original—account treats Byzantine history in the decades before the First Crusade. Here, Frankopan, director of the Center for Byzantine Research at Oxford University, concentrates on Byzantine politics and the military and diplomatic initiatives that Alexios took to shore up his own position and salvage his empire's fortunes in Asia Minor and the Balkans. The second—largely derivative—narrative considers the Crusade from a western outlook, from the 1080s up through the capture of Jerusalem in 1099.

Frankopan's major thesis, built on a reinterpretation of the Byzantine sources, is that Alexios sought aid from the West from a position of weakness.<sup>1</sup> This constitutes an important corrective to much current scholarship, which sees the emperor as seeking Latin troops to finish reconsolidating imperial control in western Asia Minor. Frankopan shows that Alexios's greatest political and diplomatic successes came in the later 1080s, when he gained the support of important Turkish magnates in western Anatolia. However, a change of regime in the caliphal capital of Baghdad, the death of Alexios's Muslim clients in Asia Minor, and a revolt against his rule among the Byzantine ruling class almost brought his reign to an end. Thus, the call to the West, particularly to Pope Urban II, was Alexios's last desperate gamble, one that brought enormous dividends both to him personally and to his empire.

Following a brief introduction, the volume is divided into twelve chronologically organized chapters. The heart of the book, chapters 2-6, reevaluates the Byzantine political and military position on the eve of the First Crusade. Here Frankopan offers a careful revisionist interpretation of the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnena, the daughter of Alexios. Scholars have long recognized that Anna's work, our most important extant source for her father's reign, is not a straightforward representation of reality. However, her handling of the political, diplomatic, and military affairs of the 1080s and early 1090s has not received the critical analysis it deserves. By contextualizing Anna's history within both Muslim accounts and other Byzantine works, Frankopan proves that she frequently melds several events in a single passage or spreads them over several

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1. Bernard S. Bachrach came to the same conclusion in "Papal War Aims in 1096: The Option Not Chosen," in *In Laudem Hierosolymitani: Studies in Crusades and Medieval Culture in Honour of Benjamin Z. Kedar*, ed. I. Shagrir et al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) 319-43.

different portions of her work, all to enhance the image of her father. She thereby hides or obscures the fragility of Alexios's rule and the disaster threatening his empire on the eve of the First Crusade.

The remaining chapters of the book, 1 and 7–12, provide an abridged account of the First Crusade, from its background in European politics until just after the capture of Jerusalem. These are not up to the level of Frankopan's treatment of Byzantine affairs and his detailed examination of the *Alexiad*. The narrative, which draws heavily on earlier scholarly treatments, is far inferior to, for example, John France's *Victory in the East*.<sup>2</sup> Lacking familiarity with the relevant scholarship, Frankopan treats western primary sources as if there were reliable histories.

The volume is equipped with twelve attractive black-and-white plates, as well as five maps—of Constantinople, the Byzantine empire, the crusaders' routes across Europe, and their march from Antioch to Jerusalem. A section on "Further Reading" and an index round out the book.

Frankopan's attempt to reinterpret the First Crusade sometimes suffers from poor control of the relevant western sources. He states, for example, that the crusader leadership at Antioch sent Count Stephen of Blois to beg Alexios for aid in spring 1098 (168). But all the extant sources condemn Stephen for abandoning the crusade and convincing Alexios that the siege of Antioch was a lost cause.

Frankopan frequently tries to make Alexios the principal, indeed the single, driving force behind the organization and conduct of the First Crusade. For example, he contends that Raymond of Toulouse, the most powerful of the crusader leaders, marched to Constantinople by way of Serbia in order to serve Alexios's goal of bringing to heel Constantine Bodin, the Serbian leader who had been undermining the Byzantine position in the Balkans (116). There is no basis whatever in the sources for such a claim. Further, Frankopan undermines his own case by writing that Raymond feared to come to Constantinople without his army because he thought it would weaken his hand in negotiating with Alexios (127). But why would Raymond undertake a difficult diplomatic and military mission on behalf of the Byzantine emperor, yet hesitate to meet with him when the mission had been successfully completed? The long-standing consensus in scholarship on the First Crusade is that Urban II played a leading role in sending a western army to Constantinople in order to unify the Catholic and Orthodox churches under papal leadership.

Frankopan has a much less complete command of military history than of Byzantine political and diplomatic affairs. He consistently uses the anachronistic term "knight" to denote the fighting men of the crusading army. But the Latin term *miles*, commonly rendered as "knight" in English-language scholarship, in the eleventh century simply meant "soldier," often professional soldier. Knights as a social and juridical class emerged only in the twelfth century. In this same vein, Frankopan adopts the long discredited concept of a western "feudal structure" to explain the loyalty of the western leaders to Alexios during the initial stages of the First Crusade (133). He should have followed contemporary chroniclers, such as Ralph of Caen,<sup>3</sup> and stressed the critical importance of the empire's logistical support for the crusaders in ensuring their obedience to imperial commands.

As part of his focus on knights, Frankopan also maintains that Alexios wanted to recruit large numbers of troops from the west because warfare there was dominated by cavalry, which would supplement the predominantly infantry forces of his empire (88). But western warfare was not in fact dominated by mounted fighting men, knights or otherwise. Rather, it centered on sieges, with their concomitant need for large infantry armies. And, since Alexios wanted western troops for the express purpose of besieging fortresses and fortified cities, like Nicaea, he certainly wanted not cavalry but foot soldiers and men trained to construct and operate siege engines.

One final weakness of the book is its lack of an adequate scholarly apparatus. The substitution of suggested readings for a proper bibliography makes it difficult to determine the scope of scholarly influences on Frankopan's account as well as works that were not, but should have been, consulted. The highly condensed and very limited notes mostly identify narrative sources rather than scholarly works; too often,

2. Subtitle: *A Military History of the First Crusade* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1994).

3. See *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen: A History of the Normans on the First Crusade*, ed. and tr. Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

where one would expect to find notes, there are none, as, for example, when he states his case for the prevalence of cavalry in western warfare.

Despite its shortcomings, there is much that is good and worthwhile in this book. With proper caution, it could be assigned in both undergraduate and graduate courses, and it will certainly provide food for thought to specialists in crusading and Byzantine history. But one wishes for a revised edition that would expand on the author's original and cogent arguments concerning the Byzantine East, while jettisoning extraneous material about the Western crusade.