

History

The Crusades - Lesson 1 of 6

Byzantium Under Pressure

Why did Europeans join the Crusades?

Mr Wallace



The Byzantine Empire

Since Roman times, there had been Christians living in the Eastern Mediterranean. In particular there were Christians living in the lands that today are called Greece and Turkey. The people living in the Eastern Mediterranean still called themselves Romans, but we know the area better as the 'Byzantine Empire'. This was a large empire, and its capital city was Constantinople. In the eleventh century, Constantinople was the biggest Christian city in the world. This city used to be called Byzantium, which is where we get their name.



The Byzantine Empire

While the Byzantine Empire had once been huge, over time it had lost land and was often attacked by its **rivals**. What worried them the most was a new group that appeared on their borders. This group was aggressive, spreading its religion, and settling in the area. They were called the Seljuq Turks.



The Seljuq Turks

The Seljuq Turks were originally from central Asia, but they had expanded and moved into the area we now call the Middle East. They were fierce warriors that rode on horseback and raided their enemies, stealing, killing and taking over land. They also followed the religion of Islam, and by the mid-11th century, they were the most powerful Islamic group in the world. However, the Seljuq Turks did have enemies, especially in Egypt. In order to remain the as the most powerful group in the Islamic world, the Seljuq Turks were constantly prepared to fight.



The Battle of Manzikert

Throughout the 11th century the Seljuqs kept taking over more land and there were some small clashes with the Byzantines. But in 1071 a major battle took place. This was at the town of Manzikert. Things went badly for the Byzantines from the very start. They had 40,000 soldiers, but the Byzantine Emperor split these in two and sent half in a different direction. This 20,000 strong army was not seen again. Some Islamic **sources** say they were destroyed by the Seljuqs, but it is hard to know for sure. The rest of the troops fought against the Seljuq army in Manzikert but were defeated. The Byzantine soldiers were poorly led and paid, and some even switched sides and fought alongside the Seljuqs. Even the Emperor was captured.



The Battle of Manzikert

This battle was a disaster for the Byzantine Empire. It allowed the Seljuq Turks to migrate into Anatolia. Today Anatolia is part of the country 'Turkey' which was named after the Seljuk Turks. The battle was the first of several defeats that the Byzantines experienced at the hands of the the Seljuqs. Gradually, the Seljuq Turks got closer and closer to the capital city of Constantinople, bringing the largest Christian city in the world under threat. In 1095, a new Byzantine Emperor wanted to stop these defeats and protect his people. He began looking for help, and it was to Europe that he turned.



Glossary

Rivals: enemies who it competed against

Sources: accounts of the past that are studied by historians



Questions

1. What was the capital of the Byzantine Empire?
2. What religions did the Byzantines and Seljuq Turks follow?
3. Why were the Seljuq Turks a threat to the Byzantine Empire?
4. What happened to the Byzantine army before the Battle of Manzikert?
5. Challenge question: Why was the outcome of the battle such a disaster for the Byzantine Empire?

