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## Crusade of the Great Companies 1365

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- Following **three years of preparation two parallel crusades were organised in France** to get rid of the mercenaries who infested France since the defeat at the battle of Poitiers.
- **In the preparation** the most important personalities of the era participated: **Pope Urban V, Louis I of Hungary, Peter I of Cyprus, Emperor Charles IV, Charles V of France, Peter IV of Aragon.**
- The Western Crusade led by Bertrand Du Guesclin is better known than the eastern one.
- **The Eastern Crusade had a dual purpose:** to free the Eastern part of France of the routiers and to expell the Turks from the Balkans.
- **Arnaud de Cervole, the Archpriest was chosen** to be the leader by **Urban V** because of his abilities to convince the other mercenary captains to participate in the crusade.
- Under his direction the **Great Companies left France in the summer of 1365.**
- The crusaders **left Burgundy and Champagne, crossed Lorraine and Alsace to arrive at the gates of Strasbourg.** By crossing the Rhine at Strasbourg they were supposed to **continue their way in the Danube valley towards Hungary and afterwards to the Balkans.**
- But **Strasbourg kept her gates closed** so the Archpriest was forced to go to the south to Basel.
- **A Plan B was drafted by Louis I of Hungary and Amade VI of Savoy,** the Green Count. Based on their agreement **Amade sent a letter to Arnaud de Cervole** to aks him to join to his troops and to take the galleys in Venice and sail to the Balkans.
- But the **Archpriest was killed** near Mâcon and the companies were dispersed.
- The **Green Count went on** and the continuation of the Crusade **resulted in the siege of Gallipoli, and his Bulgarian adventure where he fought together with Louis I of Hungary.**

The Crusaders' clothing



*"Of footwear and pointed helmet: Their clothes were long and expensive and had good armour and footwear. Hence the Straßburgian habit of wearing long dresses and quilted upper garments (Schecke: originally military clothes) and footwear and pointed helmets, which was previously unusual in Straßburg. But the poor of the English were barefoot and naked."*

**Jakob Twinger von Königshofen: Chroniken, Germany, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Heinemann-Nr. 2849**



# Crusade of the Great Companies of 1365



*"The first time the English came to Elsass and they had utterly big damaged done"*  
**Diebold Schilling: Spiezer Chronik, Switzerland, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Mss.h.h.I.16**

- Their **number** is estimated around **30 000.**
- It was the **biggest and certainly the most dangerous population movement of the late 14th Century** in the border regions of the Kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire.
- The preparation of the logistics just began when the mercenary companies left France.
- The migrating crusaders liked to pick young boys from among the local population to engage them as their pages.
- **The uncontrolled migration of the Crusaders wrought havoc on the provinces they crossed.**



*"First of all in our region, and certainly in the towns surrounding Reims and Chalons-sur-Marne a multitude of armed men, who are commonly referred to as the Britons, held the rural villages, countryside and the region occupied for three weeks and took almost all the goods and possessions of the villages, robbed the inhabitants, held some hostage and demanded ransom, but also slew many by sword, the virgins and widows and all women they took a liking to they raped..."*

**Strasbourg, Johannes dictus Largus von Rheims an den Ammeister Kunz Müller: giebt Nachricht über die Engländer. 31 July 1366. Archive de La Ville et l'Eurométropole de Strasbourg, AA, 81**

Defence against the Crusaders

- Organising the **defence** in a certain region **depended on many factors.** One of them was the **size of the company** that had to be dealt with: **local authorities could handle** the situation of a **few hundred mercenaries** but the **Great companies** were certainly beyond **their capacities**, not mentioning the the Crusaders who were ten times more in number than the Great Companies.
- **After the Treaty of Brétigny, successive defensive alliances were formed** from the border of the County of Burgundy to the north until Luxembourg **against the companies,** and in 1365 against the Crusaders.
- **Troops were sent from the neighbouring cities and regions** to support the defensive measures, e.g.: Bern sent troops to Basel.
- A **city could hire other mercenaries** against the crusaders as we can learn from the receipt for military services in the register of EE7 at the City Archive of Metz.
- And when it was not enough, **Metz simply purchased her liberty** from Arnaud de Cervole for 18 000 florins.
- Another **important measure** was to **invite the people from the countryside to the fortified places and walled towns** as Strasbourg did, also she forbade her citizens to leave the city with any valuable belongings.



**Colmar AA, 48 n. 1, Bischof Johannes von Straßburg, Bischof Johannes von Basel, Bischof Johannes von Gurk, Vertreter der Herzoge von Österreich in daselbst schließen gegen die sogenannten Engländer ein Bund, welcher bis zum 25 December 1362 gelten soll, April 1363**

Collaboration, Spying

A significant part of the Treaty of Colmar is **devoted to the punishment of the collaborators:**

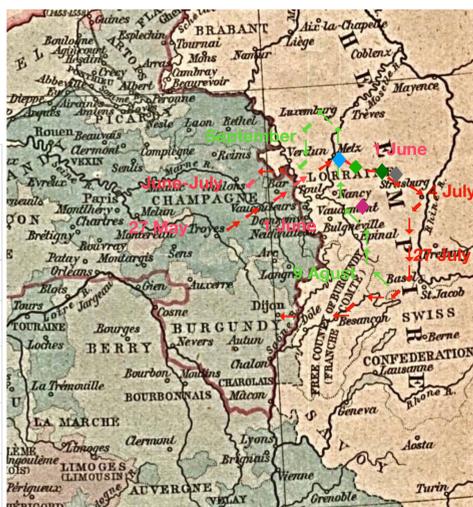
*"Or those who were dawdling or living here and would be drawn to this above-mentioned company or this wretched people or would support them, those who carried out such cruel deeds and lived such a harmful life and would stay with them and openly or in secret help them with advice or acts and this would turn out to be that person, his lord, his superiors, or the city, whom he belongs to, shall blame and sue him and punish him to the extent that he bonifies this fully and gives satisfaction for it."*

The **authorities were ruthless** with the captured collaborators and spies of the companies or those of the crusaders of 1365 as we can see in the Annales du Doyen de S. Thibébaud de Metz:

*"This year there was a man from Maigney whose name was L'Oreillard, he was seized at the mill of Dorcevalt, and put in a pillory, and dragged and thrown into the street by those of Metz, because he had helped the Bretons in several ways which one could not even describe."*

Reconnaissance of Strasbourg: Settlements where Scouts or Spies signalled the Crusaders' Appearance

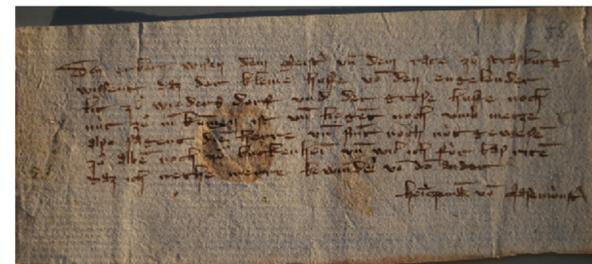
Archpriest's Crusade May-September 1365



Sign	City	Distance from Strasbourg	Number of Days before Crusaders' Arrival to Strasbourg
Blue diamond	Metz	150 km	33 days
Green diamond	Verga ville	93 km	33 days
Dark green diamond	Diedendorf	72 km	9 days
Grey diamond	Save rne	38 km	7 days
Pink diamond	Luné ville	110 km	9 days

Reconnaissance

- **Gaining information on the enemy was vital** for the cities. Strasbourg had built up a network of informants who sent 8 messages to the Council of Strasbourg between the 18th and 30th June 1365.
- **As the map indicates** the council of Strasbourg had **precise information on the crusaders' whereabouts.**
- **They gathered information directly from the crusaders' immediate environment.** Johans Schenke sent a letter to the mayor and council of Strasbourg on 27-28 June 1365, in which he informed them that he had received information from a certain Claus Alman who knew Arnaud de Cervole, the Archpriest personally.
- **Having sufficient information Strasbourg could prepare** for the crusaders' host arrival so **the council asked for and received help** from several imperial cities such as Trier, Colmar, Basel, Freiburg, Rottweil, Nördlingen and different places in Pfalz. They also **warned the people in the countryside and advised them** to seek shelter, **but many did not believe the news** and as Königshofen decribes: *"But before they invaded the country they had warned them and the Lords and their families had quickly fled. But the peasants did not believe that the English or anyone else would bravely invade the country. So not many peasants had fled and thus they suffered great damage and many were captured."*



*Knowing, that a small group of English armed men are staying at Wiedersdorf and their large group has not yet joined them, they are staying near Metz. So the lords say, and they have not yet been to Alben neither to Buckenheim, and I want to ride further so I can uncover more secrets of the others"*

**Heintzemann von Masmünster an Straßburg: über die Engländer june, 1365 Strasbourg, Archive de La Ville et l'Eurométropole de Strasbourg, AA, 81. F.58**