

Kilij Arslan I

Seljuk Turk | Sultan of Rum | Islamic Leader | First Crusade

Biography: Kilij Arslan

I, Kilij Arslan I, am the Seljuk Turkish Sultan of Rum, similar to an European king, during the first crusade. I was born in 1079 a Muslim and I am always a devout follower of Islam. I was a hostage of another Sultan when my father died, and I became Sultan when that Sultan died. I soon made Nicaea my capital and established my rule. I married the daughter of a military commander of another tribe to become an ally of the powerful Byzantines. I killed the ruler of another tribe, who sought to kill me, under the advice of the Byzantine emperor Alexius.

In the People's Crusade, the first part of the First Crusade, Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless arrived at Nicaea, taking me by surprise. They did not manage to breach the strong walls of the city, but terrorized and looted the suburbs. I wanted immediate revenge, but my advisors convinced me to wait.

Only two weeks later, French crusaders came along to Nicaea as well, taking the castle of Xerigordon by surprise. They began planning to use it as a military base but were surrounded by our Turks in a matter of days. Without water, they starved to death; the ones that came out and renounced Christianity were allowed to live in captivity, and the others were killed.

When more soldiers came at Nicaea to avenge the loss at Xerigordon, they passed through a narrow valley while my men laid in wait in nearby. They were careless: a mob of people joking and laughing without their armor on. Our arrows killed thousands of people at the start, and then light cavalry killed the rest. At the Crusader's camp a few miles back, women and children were slaughtered too. As much as 30,000 Crusaders were killed in this attack, and only 3,000 survived and were saved by the Greeks. This battle, the Battle of Civetot, I ended the People's Crusade.

In the more organized, second part of the First Crusade, a larger Frankish army had arrived. After my easy victory over the peasant's army, I dismissed the alert repeatedly. I fought again with the tribes in his country, and the Crusaders besieged Nicaea. When I returned to the capital, I realized I was foolish and was forced to surrender to the Byzantines.

I teamed up with my former enemy, the tribe of Danishmends, to fight the Crusaders, but they were unsuccessful. I retreated and fought guerilla warfare with the Crusaders, as well as destroying crop and water supplies.

Later, after capturing Bohemond, a leader of the Crusaders, we won a few victories against them. This allowed us to gain major confidence, so that we won a few subsequent battles. Afterwards, we resumed war against the Danishmends again.

Answers to Questions (based on Kilij Arslan)

1. How did this conflict begin?

The Crusaders attacked us in Nicaea by surprise, and raided our people. We were not ready, and they killed our men. We could not defend ourselves quickly enough. Only two weeks later, another group of Crusaders came and captured the castle of Xerigordon, and we surrounded and besieged them successfully. Only then did we begin our offense, avenging the Christians and wiping out much of Peter's army.

2. Justify your role in the Crusades.

This crusade was started by the Crusaders when they attacked our capital of Nicaea. We did not start it, and it is not our fault—the Europeans attacked us, and we defended our territory. They raided our suburbs and killed our innocents, taking us by surprise, and not taking on our main army. They picked on our weak, and so we avenged them. When they try to take our land, we defend it—that's what the People's Crusade have been. We had a just revenge for our losses.

3. Justify your people's actions in the Crusades (what did they do and why?). Who are your allies? Who are your enemies?

My people and soldiers did not wrong like the Crusaders, who were ruthless and immoral. They preyed on us when we weren't ready, and raided our countryside. Our men followed orders and killed ambushed soldiers of Peter in the Battle of Civetot. We then attacked the other armies in the later part of the First Crusades

At one point, we allied with the Danishmends, a local tribe, against the Crusaders; but most of the time they are our main enemy. When the European Crusaders came, they became our primary enemies.

4. What events, in your character's opinion, led the aforementioned problems and lasting effects?

The war did not really matter to us or become problematic until Nicaea was attacked by unruly soldiers. I assume the unruliness of people and the general decline of morality and standard of living in Europe led to the Crusades, so they take out their excess anger and energy on us, the Muslim Turks. The Arab Muslims took Jerusalem, so they were probably angry at us Muslims for that as well. I don't think that there were many lasting effects of the battles of the First Crusade; I think much more fighting is going to happen and power is going to change hands.

5. Who were the leaders of this fundamentalist movement?

Pope Urban II who called the men to arms was a major leader, as were Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless, who led their Crusading armies towards the Holy Land in the First Crusade. They had their armies targeted at us, and were our enemies in the People's Crusade. There were a few other leaders in the later part of the People's Crusade, such as Bohemond, who we captured with the help of the Danishmends.

Controversial Topics

- **The Christians attacked us— this is a defensive war for the Muslims.**
 - They raided our capital to begin this conflict. A few weeks later, they attacked again, and they have attacked many times over the course of the Crusades.
 - They are entering our territory; we are not fighting in Europe, but on our land, defending our capital.
 - The Christians are attempting to take the Holy Land, which is ours, from us— we are not trying to take Constantinople or any other major cities from the Europeans.
- **The Christians are ruthless, foolish, and cowardly— incompetent to own and protect the Holy Land.**
 - They arrived at Nicaea silently and stole from our suburbs and killed our men outside the city, not giving us time to rally up our troops.
 - They dared not attempt to breach our strong walls and take on our army head on.
 - They moved as a mob, careless and without their armor on, through a narrow valley to attack us.
- **The Christian cause for this fighting is not just, and it does not follow the Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.”**
 - In both our religions, “Thou shalt not kill” is a very important aspect of the religion. Even if the Pope says that your sins will be forgiven, it is not right to ignore one of the basic commandments. However, we have the right to defend our land for our religion, as the Noble Quran states, “Nor take life— which God has made sacred— unless for just cause” (Noble Quran, 17:33), and “Fight in the cause of God, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors” (Noble Quran, 2:190). As we are looking to defend our land for our religion, it is right to do so; but it is not right that the Christians fight a holy *war* against us, which surely would be considered transgressing a logical limit.
 - The Christians are just looking for glory and wealth to steal from us, with their supposed “Holy War.” We are not looking to obtain anything from this war but to keep our land.
- **We Muslims have a right to the Holy Land.**
 - The Christians are not the center of the universe, and we need to spread our religion as well. The Christians can’t keep the Holy Land to themselves forever, because it’s an important holy city to us too— it’s time we had control over it.
 - Even if the Christians were just looking to pilgrimage to the Holy Land, they don’t have to kill and destroy all the way there.

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