

Before the Crusades, Acre was known as Acco and was mentioned by that name in the Egyptian execration texts, the texts cursing pharaoh's enemies, of the 20th century B.C.E. It also figured in Egyptian inscriptions of the 15th and 14th centuries B.C.E. The flourishing Canaanite city of the 15th to 13th centuries B.C.E. was situated at Tell el-Fukhar (meaning pottery tell; it is known locally as Napoleon's Hill) about one mile east of modern Acre. Acco is poorly represented in the Bible, perhaps because it was so thoroughly Canaanite. Judges 1:31 says, "Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon." The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, mentions Acco in Judges in a list of coastal cities of the tribe of Asher. Acco was referred to as a Phoenician city in Assyrian literature of the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E. Alexander the Great took the city without resistance in 333 B.C.E. For 600 years afterwards, Acco minted its own coins.

Acco is famous in chronicles of the Crusades under the name Acre. Baldwin I, the king of Jerusalem, captured the city in 1104 with the aid of the Genoese fleet. Saladin recaptured the city for the Moslems in 1187, but Richard the Lion-Hearted and Philip Augustus, king of France, reclaimed it in 1191, after a two-year blockade and siege. Saladin, Richard and Philip negotiated an agreement to spare the Moslem garrison in exchange for the payment of 200,000 gold diners; then Philip left for France. Richard flew into a rage when negotiations with Saladin broke down. Richard had about 3,000 prisoners massacred in sight of the Moslem army still encamped near Acre.

The slide shows the interior of what is popularly called the crypt but which is evidently the refectory, or dining hall, of the Order of St. John. It was built about 1148, the year Louis VII, leader of the Second Crusade, lived at Acre.