

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 10.  
The First Crusade VI.

Hello again. Last week we followed the main Crusader army in their perilous journey from Heraclea to Antioch. This week we will follow Tancred of Hautville and Baldwin of Boulogne as they take the shorter route through Cilicia to Antioch.

Way back in Episode 5, we examined the personalities of Tancred and Baldwin. We discovered that Tancred, a southern Italian Norman, was Bohemond's nephew. Despite being only twenty years old when he set out on the crusade, Tancred has proven himself an adept military commander. He is second-in-command in Bohemond's army, and has, on many occasions since leaving Latin Christendom, taken command of the southern Norman contingent in Bohemond's absence. Baldwin of Boulogne is Godfrey de Bouillon's younger brother, originally destined for the church. He has no lands of his own in Latin Christendom. Not terribly personable and with a liking for luxury and excess, Baldwin is ambitious. In fact, he's very ambitious. Europe holds nothing for him, and unlike the many who embarked on the First Crusade for religious reasons, Baldwin saw the venture as an opportunity to advance his interests. As I said, he was ambitious. In fact, In case you missed it the first three times I said it, let me just emphasize that Baldwin was ambitious. Everyone with me on this? Right.

On September the 15th 1097 Tancred left Heraclea and headed east for the Cilician Pass in the Anti-Taurus mountains. Shortly afterwards, Baldwin also set off for the pass, taking a different route. Now it's interesting to see who did and who didn't accompany them. Tancred took with him a small group of perhaps 100 knights and 200 infantrymen. Baldwin's contingent was more than twice as big. He had with him a few hundred knights and anywhere from a few hundred to a couple of thousand foot soldiers. Neither party included non-combatants. Baldwin's wife and children remained with the main crusading army. Neither party included Byzantine representatives - they all accompanied the main army through the strategically important area of Cappadocia.

Both Tancred and Baldwin took local Armenian guides with them. Baldwin's guide was in the form of a man called Bagrat. Bagrat and Baldwin had met during the siege of Nicaea where Bagrat had been in the service of the Emperor Alexius. They struck up a friendship and Bagrat eventually joined Baldwin's staff. Bagrat's ancestral lands were located in the Armenian principalities near the Euphrates River, to the east of Antioch, and you can bet that Bagrat regaled Baldwin with tales of how fabulous that area was, and how brilliant it would be if they could visit it one day.

Anyway, both parties set out on September the 15th but Tancred and his men, were the first to the Cilician Pass, and were no doubt relieved to find it unguarded. They traveled down the mountains into the fertile Cilician plain and arrived in Tarsus.

Now, Tarsus is an interesting place. In 1097 it was located on the shores of the Mediterranean and had a handy harbor, making it the center of trade and commerce for the area. Nowadays, due to changes in the coastline over the centuries, it's located some kilometers inland. For a small place, Tarsus packs a big historical punch. Alexander the Great nearly died there. There are beautiful pools and waterfalls on the outskirts of the town. Alexander the Great bathed in one of these pools and ended up coming down with a

nasty fever, which nearly did him in. In Roman times, schools of philosophy were established in the town, which attracted scholars from across the Empire. Antony met Cleopatra here. Yes, that's right, and some years later, an impressive stone archway was built, called Cleopatra's Gate, in an attempt to attract tourists. Tourists might have been impressed by Cleopatra, but it seems that the locals weren't, as apparently, they started calling it the Bitch's Gate, and the name stuck. And then there's Saint Paul, one of the founders of the early Christian Church. Before he became Saint Paul, he was called Paul the Apostle. Before he was called Paul the Apostle. He was called Saul of Tarsus because, you guessed it, he was from Tarsus. Unusually, Tarsus has kept the same name throughout its 3000 year history, and if you are interested you can type "Tarsus", that's T A R S U S, into your Internet search engine and check it out more closely.

Anyway, in 1097 Tarsus was a thriving coastal town protected by walls and fortifications. When Tancred and his few hundred men arrived, the Turkish garrison immediately rode out to challenge them but were easily driven back, before retreating to the city behind the protection of its walls.

Now, Tancred faced a dilemma. He wanted to take Tarsus. It was strategically important from the point of view of the Crusade, and from a personal point of view, Tancred saw this as an opportunity to step out from Uncle Bohemond's shadow and seize some glory for himself. Trouble was, he just didn't have enough men to take a fortified town. He sent a messenger to ride back to Bohemond, to ask him to send reinforcements, but he really preferred to take the town himself somehow, without his uncle's help. So he engages in a bit of creative thinking and makes contact with the people inside the town. Most of Tarsus' population is made up of Armenian and Greek Christians, and they encourage Tancred to take the town.

Perhaps emboldened by this, Tancred comes up with a clever ruse. He lets the Turkish garrison know that he is just the vanguard of a massive army, which is close by, and lets them know in quite a bit of detail what the army will do to the garrison once the town inevitably falls. The Turks are rattled. Then Tancred orders his men to surround the town, which they do so, very loosely, there being not very many of them, and makes a lot of noise pretending to prepare for the arrival of the army and the invasion of the town. It works. Later that night, under cover of darkness, most of the Turkish defenders fled, and in the morning those remaining negotiated a surrender. Tancred's banner flew over the city walls, and while he hadn't yet physically made his way past the walls and into the town, the banner clearly showed that Tarsus was under his control.

Later that very day, Baldwin showed up with his much larger army and was no doubt rather surprised at this unexpected turn of events. There were no Byzantine representatives present, and for the first time since the Crusade left Latin Christendom, a town had been taken in the name of a Crusader, instead of for the Emperor back in Constantinople. Did Baldwin shake Tancred's hand, slap him on the back, and congratulate him on his conquest? Not really. Baldwin discovered that Tancred had not yet secured the town and hadn't even been inside its walls. Baldwin had a bigger army and decided that he wanted the town for himself. He was older and craftier than Tancred. He negotiated in secret with the remains of the Turkish garrison, with the result that Tancred's banner was torn down and dumped unceremoniously in a nearby marsh, and Baldwin's banner was erected in its place.

Tancred must have been mortified to find Baldwin's banner flying in place of his own, but he realized there was not much you could do about it. He was outnumbered and had been outplayed. He took his men and left Tarsus, marching eastwards.

Like Tancred, Baldwin encountered some difficulties securing the town. He had taken over two of the town's towers and was deep in negotiation regarding the surrender of the city when, lo and behold, who should appear over the horizon, but the reinforcements that Tancred had requested. Bohemond had received Tancred's plea for assistance to capture Tarsus, and had sent a contingent of 300 men to his aid. They were no doubt surprised to find no sign of Tancred, and were perhaps even more surprised to find Baldwin in nominal charge of the town. They requested permission to enter the town to rest up, probably intending to return to the main army the next day, seeing how they weren't needed here after all, but Baldwin refused to let them inside the city walls. Yes, they were Crusaders. Yes, they were technically on his side, But they were also southern Italian Normans, with a formidable reputation for fighting. And, while his own men were numerically superior to the new-comers, Baldwin was taking no chances.

Baldwin at this moment was thinking mainly about Baldwin. He had finally taken a town for himself, and his personal priority was to secure the town and hold onto it. Nothing else mattered. So the 300 men from Bohemond's army were forced to spend the night camped in a field outside the city. It was the sort of opportunity that the Turks had been waiting for. In the dead of night, most of the Turkish garrison crept out of the city and attacked the sleeping southern Italian Normans, possibly aided by former Turkish defenders who had fled the town previously and had been camping nearby. Bohemond's men were killed, all 300 of them.

Dawn rose the next morning and revealed the grisly sight of 300 Crusader bodies. Baldwin's men were appalled and set about seeking revenge for the attack. They slaughtered any members of the Turkish garrison they could find, and a big, big question-mark was hanging over Baldwin at this stage. They understandably blamed him for the event, and his authority was severely undermined. Baldwin locked himself inside a tower until his men had calmed down. He eventually emerged unscathed, but his reputation had been tarnished. Baldwin spent the next week or so securing the town and collecting booty. He left it under the control of a French garrison and continued onwards to the east.

In the Meanwhile, Tancred had already marched east and had come upon the town of Adana. The town had recently overthrown its Turkish rulers and was in the hands of a local Armenian aristocrat. Adana's new Armenian ruler urged Tancred to continue eastwards to Mamistra, as the Christian population of Mamistra would welcome any assistance to defeat their Turkish occupiers. Tancred's new Armenian ally provided him with 200 Armenian soldiers to reinforce his rather small army, and Tancred duly headed east to Mamistra.

At Mamistra, things finally went Tancred's way. The Turkish garrison fled after putting up only a token resistance, and he was welcomed into the town by its Armenian Christian inhabitants. He secured the town's fortifications, and his men were finally able to help themselves to some booty. Everything was going swimmingly, until Baldwin and his men showed up.

Tensions were understandably high between the two leaders. Tancred was still smarting from Baldwin's underhanded actions in Tarsus, and he would also now be aware that 300 of his countrymen, who had arrived at Tarsus at Tancred's request, had been killed after Baldwin refused them entry into the city. Tancred was in a much stronger position in Mamistra. He had secured the city, and his numbers had been bolstered by the troops of his new Armenian ally. He refused to let Baldwin inside the city, so Baldwin and his men set up camp on the banks of a river outside the city walls.

Tancred was convinced by his men that Baldwin's actions should not go unpunished, and he joined some of them in a surprise attack on Baldwin's camp. It was probably little more than a brawl, but it was the first time that Crusader had attacked Crusader. A couple of men were killed and more were injured. A truce was eventually declared, and Baldwin and his men left shortly after to go and join the main army at Marash, having received word that Baldwin's wife was dying. Tancred stayed in Mamistra long enough to install a Crusader garrison, then he also departed, marching his army down to the coast, where he secured the port of Alexandretta. They then continued eastwards, crossing the mountains by the Bellin pass into Syria, where they rendezvoused with the main army as it marched down to Antioch.

So the short-cut Tancred and Baldwin took through Cilicia was productive, in that the major towns in the region were brought under Crusader control. But it also highlighted the tensions which would inevitably arise when religious motives were set aside in favor of ambition and personal acquisition.

And we're not finished yet. Baldwin's journey continues. At Marash, he makes a major decision. He decides to abandon his mission to Jerusalem, and instead takes a small contingent of 100 men and heads away from the main Crusader army, towards the ancestral lands of his friend Bagrat to the east, near the Euphrates River.

Why did he do this? We don't really know. Perhaps the death of his wife affected him, and he decided that it was time to serve the interests of Baldwin instead of the interests of God, who had made him suffer the difficult journey from Latin Christendom and had now taken his wife. Perhaps his relations with the other leaders, who by now would have heard of his exploits in Cilicia, had deteriorated to the extent that he had to leave. And why take only 100 men? If the Council of Princes had sanctioned Baldwin to conquer land in the east and create a buffer to protect Crusader acquisitions near the coast, surely they would have provided him with more men. Or perhaps 100 men were all the volunteers Baldwin could muster. He was, after all, asking them to abandon their vow to march to Jerusalem. And to be honest, at this point in time, Baldwin is not exactly in the running for the Most Popular Leader In The Crusades Award.

Anyway, whatever the reason, Baldwin and around 100 knights left the main Crusader army at Marash and headed east, leaving the rest of the army to continue south to Antioch. Luckily for Baldwin, as he headed east, it became apparent that he didn't need a big army. With his friend and adviser Bagrat as his guide, he moved through land overwhelmingly populated by Christian Armenians, who saw in Baldwin an opportunity to shake off both Turkish and Byzantine rule. He and his men were welcomed with open arms. The Turkish garrisons he encountered either fled, or were killed by Baldwin's men or their new Armenian allies. Baldwin easily took the towns of Ravendel, which he placed under the rule of his adviser Bagrat, and Turbessel, which was given to an Armenian ally called Fer.

By the end of 1097, Baldwin controlled an impressive amount of territory, stretching all the way to the Euphrates River, but Baldwin's eyes were always on the big prize, and while he was at Turbessel that prize came into view. Thoros, the Armenian ruler of the great city of Edessa, was having some problems. He was unpopular with the citizens of Edessa due to his close ties with Byzantium, and his city was also under threat from the Turks. He had heard of Baldwin's conquests, and proposed an alliance with him. While not technically part of the Holy Land, Edessa had been an important city in early Christian times, and contained the burial site of the Apostle Thomas. It had also once been part of the Byzantine Empire, and it was the biggest city in the region. Baldwin was interested, very interested.

It is around this time that relations between Baldwin and his friend Bagrat began to deteriorate. It's possible that Bagrat was concerned about Baldwin's ambitions regarding Edessa, or perhaps he was ambitious himself, and wanted to shake off Baldwin's influence and rule Ravendel with greater independence. Whatever the reason, rumors reach Baldwin that Bagrat is intriguing against him, so, Baldwin being Baldwin, he declares Bagrat a traitor and orders him to be tortured until he confesses his crimes. Luckily for Bagrat, he manages to escape and then flees to the mountains.

In February 1098, Baldwin and around 80 men set out in an easterly direction. They crossed the Euphrates River, narrowly avoiding an ambush set for them by Turks from the nearby stronghold of Samosata, and some days later arrive in Edessa, to a rapturous welcome. Thoros was not only unpopular with the people of Edessa, he had no heir. After seeing the warmth with which the people received Baldwin and his men, and no doubt after also hearing some persuasive words from Baldwin himself, Thoros decides to formally adopt Baldwin, making Baldwin his son and heir.

Less than a week after the public adoption ceremony, Thoros sends Baldwin, his newly adopted son, on a mission to capture the Turkish town of Samosata. With his meager Crusading force boosted by troops from Edessa, Baldwin doesn't manage to seize the town, but he does overrun a nearby Turkish fortress, and garrisons it with his own men. This had the effect of limiting the movement of Turkish forces and reducing the number of Turkish raids. It also had the effect of making Baldwin even more popular with the citizens of Edessa.

Around this time, Baldwin became aware of a plot by a group of Edessene nobles to assassinate Thoros. And of course, if Thoros was dead, Baldwin would automatically replace him. Did Baldwin immediately warn Thoros off the conspiracy and take active measures to neutralize the threat? No, of course he didn't. Baldwin at this time was thinking mainly of Baldwin.

Historians are unaware of the extent to which Baldwin was involved in the plot. Some contemporaries alleged that Baldwin was aware of plans to overthrow his adoptive father, and that he actively supported those plans. Other sources have him effectively standing around, whistling and twiddling his thumbs, and turning a blind eye to the obvious machinations and intrigues surrounding Thoros.

On the 7th of March, the conspirators made their move. They urged the people of Edessa to rise up against their leader, and the people complied. They attacked the houses of court officials, then marched on the citadel itself. Thoros, quite rightly fearing for his life, wanted

to negotiate surrender and exile for himself and his wife. Historians aren't totally in accord about what happened next, but it seems likely that Thoros allowed Baldwin to enter the citadel to negotiate the terms of surrender. Baldwin took a solemn oath to protect Thoros before he was allowed to enter the citadel, but the following day, he opened the doors to the mob outside. The crowd of people stormed the citadel, and Thoros was killed.

In this manner, Baldwin became ruler of Edessa and the lands surrounding the city. While his rise to power was morally questionable, it was also legally questionable. Edessa was once part of the Byzantine Empire, and Baldwin had sworn an oath to the Emperor Alexius that any lands formerly within the Imperial fold would be handed back to the Emperor. But the breaking of oaths didn't seem to be such a big deal for Baldwin, and he didn't hand Edessa over to Constantinople. He kept it for himself.

Through a combination of conquest and negotiation, Baldwin consolidated his rule and subdued the Turkish strongholds within his domain. He proved himself a shrewd and capable administrator, using the talents of Armenian and Turkish officials in addition to his own French vassals. The newly widowed Baldwin also married the daughter of a wealthy Armenian aristocrat, which strengthened his grip on his newly won territory. Unfortunately, the marriage did not appear to be a happy one, and failed to produce any children.

But Baldwin had what he wanted. His territory eventually stretched over rich and fertile land to both sides of the Euphrates River. Baldwin named the area the County of Edessa, and in this way the first Crusader state was established, and the landless, unimportant, failed clergyman, Baldwin of Boulogne became Count Baldwin of Edessa.

Meanwhile, to the south of the newly-minted Crusader state of Edessa, the Crusader armies are preparing themselves for their biggest challenge yet. Join me next week as we embark on the infamous, the mighty, and the epic Siege of Antioch.

There's no further reading this week, and there's nothing else I need to add, so you can all have an early minute. Until next week, bye for now.

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