

History of the Crusades.
Episode 102
The Fall of Antioch.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Egyptian Sultan Baibars attack Christian positions in the Middle East. Numerous raids saw him win territory from the Kingdom of Acre, with the Regent of the Kingdom, Hugh of Antioch, seemingly powerless to prevent even strongly fortified castles falling into Mamluk hands. Last week's episode culminated in a devastating attack on the Kingdom of Armenia by Sultan Baibars.

Having dealt Armenia a blow from which it would never really recover, Sultan Baibars turned his attention to the Principality of Antioch. Like Armenia, the Principality of Antioch had actively supported Khan Hulagu, and like Armenia it was about to feel the wrath of the Mamluks.

Early in the year 1268 Sultan Baibars once again led his army out of Egypt. By this stage, the only town south of Acre still in Latin Christian hands was Jaffa, now an isolated Latin Christian outpost on the coast. Baibars had been on friendly terms with the Lord of Jaffa, John of Ibelin, but John had died a couple of years back, in 1266. John's son Guy had inherited the town and hoped that he might be able to reach some sort of understanding with the Mamluks. But he hoped in vain. On the 7th of March 1268 the Mamluk army appeared outside the city walls, and a mere 12 hours later it was added to the list of Baibars' conquests. While many citizens were slain, the garrison of the city was allowed to escape northwards to Acre. Baibars then set about demolishing the town, with much of its marble and wood being sent back to Egypt, where it was used to construct a mosque in Cairo.

Next in Baibars' sights was the strongly fortified castle of Beaufort. The castle managed to hold out for ten days before falling to the Mamluks. Baibars let the women and children inside the castle leave unharmed, but he captured the men and turned them into slaves. Like the strategically important former Templar Castle Safed, Baibars didn't destroy Beaufort, but instead ordered it to be repaired and garrisoned with Egyptian fighters, turning it from a Latin Christian stronghold into a Muslim one.

The Egyptians continued their march northwards, with their next stop being the city of Tripoli, capital of the County of Tripoli. Prince Bohemond, who effectively ruled both the Principality of Antioch and the County of Tripoli, was in Tripoli at this time, and the city was well garrisoned. Baibars arrived outside Tripoli on the 1st of May, but stopped only briefly before continuing his journey northwards towards his target, the Principality of Antioch, arriving outside the walls of Antioch itself a fortnight later. With Prince Bohemond in Tripoli, the defense of Antioch was left to Bohemond's Constable Simon Mansel. Upon arriving outside the city, Baibars split his army into three, with one section directed to Antioch's port, the port of St Symeon, to prevent any assistance arriving from the sea, and one section traveling inland to the nearby Syrian Gates, to prevent any help coming over the mountains from Armenia.

The bulk of the army then gathered in front of the legendary walls of Antioch. The walls were in a pretty good state of repair, and Simon Mansel was confident they would hold and protect the city from the Muslim attackers, as they had done since the city fell into Latin Christian hands more than 150 years ago during the First Crusade. Foolishly, when the

Mamluks appeared outside the city walls, Simon decided to ride out to confront them at the head of a small body of troops. He was promptly captured by Baibars and was forced by Baibars to order the garrison of the city to surrender. Understandably, the garrison decided to disobey this order.

The following day, Baibars launched his attack. The city of Antioch at this time was home to tens of thousands of Latin Christians, and they no doubt also expected that the city walls would protect them from the attack. They were about to be disappointed. The famous walls held out for less than a day. The Egyptian army broke through high on Mount Silpius, near the citadel which overlooked the city. Egyptian fighters then poured down into the town.

Ominously, Baibars ordered the city gates to be guarded and locked, to ensure that no citizens could escape. Then the pillaging and the killing began. Any people found in the streets were put to the sword. Those who sheltered in their houses, in churches, or in the citadel high on Mount Silpius were spared this fate, although they were captured and sold into slavery. So many citizens of the city became slaves that every single soldier in the Egyptian army took one home to keep. The remainder were sold at the slave markets back in Egypt. So many of them were sold at once that the price plummeted, and Muslims were able to acquire Latin Christian men, women, and children at bargain-basement prices. Some of the wealthier citizens of the city were allowed to ransom themselves, and surprisingly, Baibars released Simon Mansel, who promptly fled to Armenia. The loot the Egyptians pillaged from Antioch was staggering. Apparently it took two full days just to sort and divide the spoils of victory.

Finally, following the pattern he had set for previously conquered Latin Christian towns, Baibars ordered his men to destroy the city. When the Egyptians finally departed, they left the once mighty city of Antioch in ruins. With its citizens either killed or sold into slavery, there was no one to rebuild its houses or repair its walls. The city, which had been in Latin Christian hands for 171 years, was abandoned.

It would take centuries for it to re establish itself. Today it's part of Turkey, and it's called Antakya. It's currently home to around 250,000 people, but not much remains of its past role as the capital of one of the Crusader states. Some sections of the ancient walls still stand, high on Mount Silpius, but that's about it.

With the fall of Antioch, the Latin Christians had effectively lost an entire Crusader state. Without the protection of its major city, the only territory within the Principality to remain in Latin Christian hands was the small port of Latakia, which itself had only been gifted to the Latin Christians by the Mongols just eight years ago. Baibars had taken his revenge on Prince Bohemond of Antioch.

Baibars, however, might have been slightly disappointed that Bohemond had been holed up in Tripoli during the attack on Antioch and had not been present to witness the destruction. To be sure that Bohemond knew exactly what had taken place, Baibars decided to write him a letter, a really long letter, giving him a blow-by-blow account of the terrible event. The letter itself survives and makes fascinating reading. The words weren't penned by Baibars himself, but by his official chronicler, Ibn Abd al-Zahir, who possessed quite a turn of phrase. Having decided that Bohemond, now minus a Principality, was no longer a Prince but merely Count, the letter opened by addressing Bohemond as, and I quote "Count Such-and-Such, head of the Christian community. reduced to the title of

Count” end quote. After a dramatic and lengthy opening, the letter goes on to say, and I quote “Our purpose here is to give you news of what we have just done, to inform you of the utter catastrophe that has befallen you. On Wednesday, we left you at Tripoli, and on the first of the Holy Month of Ramadan, we besieged Antioch. While we were taking our proposition in front of the city, your troops rode out to measure themselves against us in combat. They were defeated. They came to one another's aid but failed to win the day, and the constable became our prisoner.” End quote.

The letter goes on to describe how the city was taken, and then launches into a lengthy description of the destruction wrought on the city and its residents. Although this section of the letter is quite long, I'm going to read it to you. It tells Bohemond what he would have seen had he been present at the fall of his city. At the end of the passage is a play on words concerning the "Rebel River". The Orontes River, which runs past Antioch, is called "The Rebel" in Arabic, as it runs from south to north. I just thought I'd tell you this now, otherwise you'll be scratching your heads when we reach the end of the passage.

Right, so here we go. Here's Baibars telling Bohemond what he missed out on at Antioch, and I quote “You would have seen your knights prostate between the horse's hooves, your houses stormed by pillagers and ransacked by looters, your wealth weighed by the quintal, your women sold for a short time and bought for a dinar of your own money. You would have seen the crosses in your churches smashed, the pages of the false testaments scattered, Patriarchs' tombs overturned. You would have seen your Muslim enemy trampling on the place where you celebrate the Mass, cutting the throats of monks, priests, and deacons upon the altars, bringing sudden death to the Patriarchs and slavery to the royal Princes. You would have seen fire running through your palaces, your dead burned in this world, before going down to the fires of the next, your palace lying unrecognizable, the Church of Saint Paul and that of St Peter pulled down and destroyed. Then you would have said, “Would that I were dust and that no letter had ever brought me such tidings.” Your soul would have left your body for sadness. You would have quenched its fires with the water of your tears. If you had seen your dwellings stripped of your wealth, your chariots seized at St Symeon with your ships, your galleys become, as your enemy's property, detesters of you, you would then be convinced that the God who gave you Antioch has taken it away again. The Lord who bestowed that fortress upon you has snatched it away, uprooting it from the face of the earth. You now know that we, by God's grace, have taken back from you the fortresses of Islam that you seized, as well as all your possessions in the province of Antioch; that we have brought your troops down from the citadels and have seized them by their hair and scattered them far and wide; that there is no one who could be called a rebel this side of the river, that if it could, it would not call itself that name any longer and weeps for penitence. It's tears at first ran clear, but now the blood spilled into it has dyed them red.” End quote.

Understandably, having read this letter, Prince Bohemond is said to have flown into a rage.

After the fall of Antioch, everyone seemed to pause to take stock of the situation, and we should, too. Following the fall of Antioch, what exactly did the Crusader states now consist of? Well, Latin Christian territory was now reduced to a narrow strip of land running up the coast and a few isolated inland castles. Latin Christian territory now started near Haifa, at the Templars' massive fortress, the Pilgrims Castle, and ran northwards covering the cities of Acre, Tyre and Beirut. Inland, only a handful of castles still held firm, the most important

of which was the castle of Montfort held by the Teutonic Knights. This was the current extent of the Kingdom of Acre.

Traveling further northwards, the County of Tripoli still contained the capital, Tripoli, and numerous small towns on the coast, plus the inland castle of Crac des Chevaliers, held of course by the Knights of the Hospital. The only other Latin Christian controlled territory in the region was the isolated outpost of Latakia, which was all that was left of the former Principality of Antioch.

Luckily for everyone, having reduced the Latin Christians to this vulnerable state, Baibars decided to take some time off, arranging a year long cessation of hostilities which the Latin Christians happily embraced.

And it was a good thing for the Latin Christians that they secured this short truce, as they were now facing succession issues. A few months ago, back in December 1267, young King Hugh II of Cyprus had died unexpectedly, aged only fourteen. Hugh of Antioch, who had been doing his best to govern both the Kingdom of Cyprus and the Kingdom of Acre as Regent for the young King, was himself crowned as King of Cyprus on Christmas Day, becoming King Hugh III of Cyprus.

While this cleared up the question of who was to rule Cyprus, it left the Kingdom of Acre with a giant question mark hanging over it. In Europe, poor old Conradin of Hohenstaufen had been beheaded by King Louis' ambitious brother Charles of Anjou back in October, ending any claim to the throne at Acre by the German Hohenstaufen line, which had now been snuffed out. This left everyone scratching their heads, wondering who now was the rightful heir to the Kingdom of Acre. Everyone sat down with their family trees and tried to work out what was going on.

There appeared to be three contenders for the crown: the former Regent and newly-crowned King of Cyprus, Hugh of Antioch; Hugh's cousin Hugh of Brienne; and the granddaughter of the late Queen Isabella, a middle-aged spinster called Maria. Hugh of Brienne was out of the picture, having moved back to France and settled down with a wealthy heiress.

That left Hugh of Antioch and Maria. It's safe to say that most people wanted Hugh to take up the crown. He was young, of a marriageable age, had proved himself a capable leader, and was already the King of Cyprus. Unfortunately though, Maria had the stronger claim. Being the granddaughter of Queen Isabella, she was closer in relation to the royal family than Hugh, who could only claim to be Queen Isabella's great grandson. Maria, supported by the Templars, claimed not only that she should now be crowned Queen, but that the Kingdom had previously erred by granting Hugh's grandmother Queen Alice the Regency, when it should have gone to Maria's mother Melisende, and she was probably correct.

The High Court of the Kingdom of Acre, however, decided to go with the groundswell of public support instead of hereditary fact and declared Hugh to be the rightful heir. Understandably miffed by this decision, Maria stormed off to Europe to lodge a formal complaint with the Pope. Her case was given some merit by the Papacy, but when it was debated at the Council of Lyons in 1274, representatives from Acre successfully argued that the High Court of Acre alone had the jurisdiction to decide matters of royal succession, and the matter was dropped. Hugh was crowned King of Acre on the 24th of September 1269.

Even though the succession issues have now been sorted out, things still look a little bleak for the Kingdom of Acre. But there's no need to panic just yet. The Kings of Europe are on the case and are currently preparing to set out on another Crusade. Join me next week as we see King Louis IX of France have a second crack at Crusading, unfortunately with even more disastrous results than his first attempt. And we also take a look at the intriguingly named Crusade of the Infants of Aragon. Now, just so I don't leave you hanging on this question for a whole week, no, the Crusade of the Infants of Aragon doesn't involve a bunch of babies taking up the Cross, despite its name. The two Infants in question are actually grown men. Glad we cleared that up. Until next week, bye for now.

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