

History of the Crusades.
Episode 14.
The First Crusade X.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Crusaders gain an unexpected victory at Antioch.

In doing so, they captured the stores Kerbogha was using to supply his vast army, and an array of gold and silver ornaments, including candelabras and chalices, which they used to adorn the churches of Antioch. The tents they captured were used to replace their own rotting and disintegrating gear. They even made use of Kerbogha's own impressive tent. This was an elaborate pavilion made of reams of colorful silk. It was large and imposing, containing turrets, corridors and many rooms.

So, the Crusaders are now well-fed, well-supplied and are only around three weeks march from Jerusalem. After resting and eating their fill, do they gather their newly-won possessions and start on the road to Jerusalem, the city which, after all, has been their goal since they embarked on the Crusade? No, they don't. In fact, it will be another year before the Crusaders set eyes on the holy city. So what caused the delay? We are about to find out.

On the 3rd of July 1098, three days after they defeated Kerbogha's army, the Council of Princes announced that, due to the exhausted state of the army and the hot and dry weather, they would not be starting southward on their journey to Jerusalem until the 1st of November. This decision was perhaps met with relief by some Latin Christians. They were, after all, in a weakened state after the nine month struggle to take Antioch. In other quarters, though, it was met with disbelief. They had just defeated the combined Muslim army. The Syrian resistance was now in tatters. Surely this was the perfect time to press the advantage and to move on Jerusalem. Well, that might be so, but the Princes had other concerns at this stage.

Actually, it was really only one concern, or even one question. and the question was this. Who would rule Antioch? Someone had to govern the city, and this question needed to be decided before the Crusaders departed on the next leg of their journey. The main contender, of course, was Bohemond. The Council of Princes had earlier agreed, at Bohemond's request, that the possession of Antioch would fall to whoever was able to capture the city. Bohemond definitely qualified on this account. It was his secret negotiations with Firuz which had enabled the Crusaders to enter the city, and it was under his leadership, and using his audacious battle plan, that the city was eventually won. However, there were two people standing in Bohemond's way.

Most of the leaders of the Crusade had sworn an oath to the Emperor Alexius back in Constantinople that any territory the Crusaders secured, which had formerly been part of the Byzantine Empire would be handed over to the Emperor. Antioch certainly fitted that description. Only twelve years previously, it had been one of the jewels in the crown of Imperial territory, and there was no doubt that Alexius would welcome it back. Then again, Alexius had provided no military assistance in the grueling campaign to secure the city, and there were no Byzantine representatives on hand who could support the Emperor's position.

The other spanner in the works preventing Bohemond being declared ruler of Antioch was Raymond of Toulouse. Raymond was the most senior, and by that I mean the oldest, of the leaders and the wealthiest, since he controlled most of southern France. Antioch was an impressive, ancient city, and Raymond no doubt thought it would make a fine addition to his property portfolio. Trouble was, he hadn't really done much to earn it. Possibly because he was in his fifties at the time of the Crusade, and therefore an old man in medieval terms, he had been sick for much of the campaign. His arrogant manner didn't endear him to his colleagues, and some members of the Crusading forces may have pointed out that when a particularly dangerous military engagement was about to take place, Raymond often seemed to be too sick to take part. His sickness may well have been genuine, but it didn't place him in a strong position to claim the best part of the spoils. However, Raymond was always quick to point out that the Holy Lance was the reason the Latin Christians were victorious at Antioch, and since the Lance was in possession of his southern French forces, then Raymond was partly responsible for the victory.

And so the jostling for possession of Antioch began. One of the first things to occur after the Crusaders' victory was the surrender of the citadel. The citadel on Mount Silpius was an impregnable fortress, and whoever had control of the fortress had a foothold into the possession of Antioch itself. When Kerbogha's representative in the citadel surrendered on behalf of Shams al Dawla and the other Muslims camped there, he requested a Frankish banner which he would display over the citadel's walls, indicating the surrender. Raymond, who had been sick during the great Battle of Antioch, was the first on the scene and provided the Muslims with his own banner. However, when the Muslims realized this, they sent it back, requesting instead Bohemond's banner. Bohemond, of course, was more than happy to comply. He sent his banner, and his forces to secure the Citadel, and negotiated terms of surrender with the Muslims.

For those of you who are interested in the fate of the redoubtable Shams al Dawla, from what I could discover, all the men from the citadel who surrendered either converted to Christianity and joined Bohemond's forces or were allowed to leave unharmed. So the best I could come up with was that Shams would have fallen into one of these categories.

Anyway, the jostling for position began. To counter this, Raymond occupied the ruins of the fort of La Mahomerie and started positioning his men around the Bridge Gate. In time, he managed to settle the southern French forces in the section of the city near the Bridge Gate. This was an important strategic move, as it meant he controlled the vital lines of supply to Antioch from the port of St Symeon. Nothing could come into the city from the port without Raymond knowing about it.

And Raymond started aligning himself with the Emperor Alexius, possibly because he genuinely believed the city should be handed over to the Byzantine Empire, but more probably because it undermined Bohemond's claim. When it was suggested that a small contingent depart from Antioch on an expedition to meet with Alexius and discover his intentions regarding Antioch, Raymond supported this whole-heartedly, and the envoy was duly sent. After the churches in Antioch were restored, Raymond, along with Bishop Adhemar, who wished to maintain strong ties with the Greek Church, supported the installation of Greek clergy and a Greek Patriarch as head of the Christian Church in Antioch.

As the months dragged on with no resolution to the issue, the leaders of the Crusade started branching out and controlling territory around the city. This was perhaps to give the

soldiers something to do, and also to secure supplies for the city. With the siege of Antioch lasting nine months, no crops had been planted, and the land near the city had been bled of produce. Godfrey de Bouillon and his men headed off towards Edessa, where his brother Baldwin granted him some territory. Bohemond and his forces split their time between Antioch and the fertile environments of Cilicia, and Raymond and the southern French started foraging in the area to the southwest of the city.

This was a time of discord and upheaval for the rank and file members of the army. So many of their comrades had died that alliances and allegiances were shifting and breaking. Combined with the fact that many were unhappy about the delay in the march to Jerusalem, quite a few soldiers changed camp. Soldiers fighting under Raymond of Toulouse were taunted by those under Bohemond's command. Their leaders were in conflict, and this tension filtered down to the soldiers. Knights who still had enough funds to employ their own men, broke away and led their men off to plunder and pillage distant towns, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

An example of such an expedition was that led by a knight in Raymond's forces called Raymond Pilet. He set out to the east with a small force, captured a Turkish castle, and recruited a number of local Christians to his cause. He then attempted to attack the larger, heavily fortified town of Ma'arrat al-Numan. Raymond Pilet underestimated the length of time it would take to overrun the town and failed to take enough water. His men suffered terribly in the desert heat. He was having no success at all against the town's fortifications, when forces sent by King Ridwan of Aleppo arrived to bolster the city's defenses. Many of Raymond Pilet's new recruits were unused to fighting, and the resulting battle was a decisive win for the Muslims. Many Christians lost their lives.

All these events take us up to August 1098. Hugh de Vermandois is still making his way to Constantinople to discover the Imperial intentions regarding Antioch. It's late summer in Syria, and it's hot. Most able-bodied soldiers have joined foraging and plundering expeditions, taking them far away from Antioch. Many of those remaining in Antioch are weakened, still recovering from the effects of the nine month long siege. Then disaster strikes.

A pestilence breaks out. The nature of the disease isn't clear. It's probably typhoid, but it may be the bubonic plague. It hits the town hard, and the death rate soars. In a shocking blow for the members of the Crusade, one of the victims of the first wave of the disease is Bishop Adhemar. The disease is so virulent that a contingent of 1500 fresh German troops who arrived by ship at St Symeon to join the Crusade are struck down. All 1500 of them are dead within a few days.

But of all the casualties, it is the loss of Bishop Adhemar which is felt most keenly. Not only had he been the nominal leader of the expedition, and representative of the Pope, he had taken an active role in many battles, leading contingents of men to victory in the battle near Dorylaeum, and leading the southern French troops in the great Battle of Antioch during Raymond's illness. And it would not just be his military prowess that would be missed. He was a conciliatory, binding force within the leadership group, and under his influence the ambitions and excesses of the other leaders were, to a large extent, able to be kept in check. His diplomacy and cooperation with the Eastern Church had eased tensions between the Latin Christians and Constantinople, and he was also highly respected by the rank and file members of the army. Modest, generous with his time, and always willing to impart words of wisdom, Bishop Adhemar would be sorely missed.

But one man who didn't miss him was Peter Bartholomew. He had never forgiven Bishop Adhemar for doubting the authenticity of the Holy Lance, and he was about to get his own back. Bohemond had proposed carrying Bishop Adhemar's body to Jerusalem and burying him in the holy city, but soon after his death, Peter Bartholomew began to have visions. He said that the spirit of Bishop Adhemar appeared to him and apologized for doubting the Lance's authenticity. According to Peter Bartholomew, Bishop Adhemar had been sent to Hell immediately after his death, as punishment for the sin of doubting the Lance. He repented and had been released from Hell to beg Peter Bartholomew's forgiveness. To atone for this sin, Peter Bartholomew said that Bishop Adhemar requested to be buried, not in Jerusalem, but in the very spot in which the Lance was found. There was, of course, a very convenient large hole in the floor of St Peter's Basilica in Antioch, which had been dug by Peter Bartholomew in his mission to find the Lance and, following Peter's revelations, Bishop Adhemar was consequently laid to rest in that hole.

Just as an aside, if any of you have become huge fans of Bishop Adhemar and would like to pay your respects at his burial place, from what I can discover the site of St Peter's Basilica in Antioch is now a car park. So if you do decide to visit, there won't be much to see.

This posthumous derision of Bishop Adhemar did not sit well with many of the Crusaders. Far from enhancing the power of the Holy Lance, the event focused attention on the fact that, while alive, Bishop Adhemar doubted the Lance, and many Crusaders began to share Bishop Adhemar's original doubts. As both the Lance and Peter Bartholomew were under the patronage of Raymond of Toulouse, his authority too began to be affected.

And Peter's visions did not end there. He revealed that St Andrew himself had decreed that Antioch should not be handed over to the Byzantines, but a Latin Christian leader should take control of the city. This again was directly contrary to the policy which Bishop Adhemar promoted before his death, as he was a vocal supporter of seeking the Emperor Alexius' views about the future of the city. Embarrassingly, it was also contrary to Raymond of Toulouse's pro-Byzantine policy, which he had been promoting to reduce Bohemond's claim on the city.

So, by the end of summer 1098 the question "What are we going to do with Antioch?" was no closer to being answered. To compound the problem, Hugh Vermandois and his party were attacked by Turks in Anatolia, on their trek back to Constantinople to meet with the Emperor Alexius. Hugh survived, but the resulting delay meant that he didn't reach Constantinople until autumn, and by then it was too late in the season for Alexius to send his forces to the city.

And Bishop Adhemar's death meant the Crusaders had another question to answer. Who was going to lead the expedition to Jerusalem? Bishop Adhemar had been the nominal leader of the Crusade and had no deputy or second-in-command to take his place. Bohemond was the most likely candidate for overall leadership, but it was becoming increasingly apparent that his goal was no longer Jerusalem, but Antioch. Raymond of Toulouse, was certainly keen to be named overall leader, but his abrasive personality and his frequent bouts of illness meant that he was not a popular choice. Godfrey de Bouillon could certainly hold his own in the popularity stakes, but did he have the necessary skills for overall command? It was all too difficult.

In the end, the Council of Princes came up with a novel way of resolving the issue. They decided to write to Pope Urban II, and after informing him of the sad news regarding Bishop Adhemar, they invited him to assume leadership of the Crusade. It's not as crazy as it sounds. While he is an old man, Pope Urban would not have to retrace the path of the Crusade through Europe and Anatolia. He could take a ship from Italy direct to Antioch, and Antioch, after all, was a city central to the early Christian Church and contained a church originally founded by Saint Peter himself. As heir to St Peter, the letter urged the Pope to travel to Antioch, assume his rightful position as head of the church in the city, and then lead the expedition on the last leg of its journey to Jerusalem.

Pope Urban was not persuaded by the letter. He had plenty to occupy him in Europe, and he was an old man with no military experience. The thought of leading tens of thousands of Christian soldiers on a military campaign across the desert did not appeal. He declined the offer.

In the end, All Saint's Day, the 1st of November, the date which the Council of Princes had set for departing Antioch, came and went. In early November, the Council of Princes again convened, with the leaders traveling back from their various foraging expeditions to Antioch. But the leadership issue and the question of Antioch was still no closer to being resolved. Bohemond still wanted Antioch, and Raymond of Toulouse wouldn't let him have it. The Emperor Alexius wouldn't arrive in Antioch for many months, if at all, and the Pope wasn't going to show up either. Raymond wanted to take overall command of the Crusade and lead the forces on to Jerusalem, but no one else supported him in this ambition.

The discussions between the Princes became increasingly heated, and at one stage it looked like they might come to blows. In the end, no one got hurt, but no decisions were made. The situation was a total stalemate. This gave rise to a problem. Winter was coming. Food stocks weren't adequate to get the army through another winter at Antioch, and the troops were getting restless. Towards the end of November, after all they had been through, it looked like the Crusade may just fizzle out. They were only three weeks' march from Jerusalem, but no one was going anywhere.

Then Raymond of Toulouse had a bright idea. He still controlled the Bridge Gate and the supply route into Antioch from St Symeon. With the bleak months of winter fast approaching, Raymond decides to try and secure for himself the fertile area to Antioch's south. If he controlled this territory, perhaps he could further restrict supplies into Antioch, and, by the method of starvation, loosen Bohemond's hold on Antioch. It sounded like a great plan.

The obvious target was the wealthy and strategically important city of Ma'arrat al-Numan. Raymond Pilet had unsuccessfully tried to take Ma'arrat during the summer, but Raymond of Toulouse decided that, with the backing of the southern French troops, he could succeed where Raymond Pilet failed.

The siege of Ma'arrat is one of the most infamous events of the First Crusade. Join us next week at the siege of Ma'arrat, where we witness the Crusaders taking part in wholesale slaughter and even ... cannibalism.

There's no further reading for this episode, but I thought I should mention something. You may notice from now on a slight change in the way I pronounce some French and Turkish names and places. That's because I've found a handy app that tells me how to pronounce

them. So hopefully from now on my pronunciation will be a touch more authentic. Until next week, bye for now.

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