

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 32.  
The Second Crusade IV.

Hello again. Last week we saw Pope Eugenius issue a Papal Bull calling for a Crusade, and we followed Bernard of Clairvaux as he embarked on a massive and successful recruitment drive for the Crusade. There are now tens of thousands of citizens across Europe, mainly from France and Germany, preparing to set out for the Middle East.

Now, before we join the participants of the Second Crusade as they prepare for their expedition, there are events happening in other parts of Europe that we need to take a brief look at. Crusading zeal had taken a firm hold in Europe, and while the main arena was always going to be the Holy Land, the Second Crusade ended up manifesting itself on two fronts within Europe itself.

The most significant of these occurred on the Spanish peninsula. In the spring of 1147, a fleet of ships containing Crusaders from England and northern Europe set sail for the Holy Land. They didn't end up in the Middle East, though. Instead they found themselves landing on the Portuguese coast. Now, historians have debated for many years whether this was intentional or whether the ships were driven to seek shelter in Portugal due to bad weather. On one side of the debate, the ships were leaving for the Holy Land prior to the main field of Crusaders who were going to walk to the Middle East. Clearly, the ships were going to arrive at their destination much earlier than the rest of the Crusaders, and there seems no reason for them to do this and then spend months hanging around waiting for everyone else to show up, so some historians argue that perhaps the Church had requested the sailors to call into Portugal on their way to the Holy Land. The majority of commentators, however, take a contrary view. They say that there is no way that the Church was that organized, and that the fleet was blown onto the Portuguese coast during a storm, and the whole Portuguese campaign was entirely accidental. Regardless of whether it was intentional or not, everyone agrees that the ships landed at Portugal in early June 1147 and were met by emissaries of the King of Portugal, Alfonso Henry.

For the past decade or so, the Christian King Alfonso Henry has been fighting against the Muslim occupiers of the Spanish Peninsula, and has won enough territory to establish his country's independence. His next goal was to capture the Muslim capital, the city of Lisbon. Lisbon lies in a hilly area on the banks of the River Tagus, a few miles inland from the Atlantic. It was defended by a castle situated on the top of one of its hills, the castle walls extending down to the banks of the river. King Alfonso Henry managed to convince the Crusaders to stay and assist him to take the city. The English forces were initially reluctant to take part, but after some debate they all agreed to assist the King in his campaign. And as campaigns go, it wasn't such a bad one to be part of.

The King's plan was to besiege the castle and starve its inhabitants into submission. Unlike the situation at Antioch, where this resulted in the besiegers also facing starvation, there was no chance of this happening at Lisbon. The land around the city was rich with fruit and other produce, and fish were plentiful in the river. Happily, the city store-houses were located outside the castle walls, and so were accessible by the Crusaders but not by the Muslims holding the castle. So the good news was the Crusaders weren't going to starve. The bad news was the castle was heavily fortified, and while the Christians busied

themselves building siege towers and catapult machines, it became pretty clear from the outset that the castle wasn't going to fall any time soon.

And it didn't. Four months later, the city finally surrendered on the condition that the lives and property of the Muslim garrison be spared. The Christians poured into the city, and many of them promptly broke the terms of the surrender, plundering and massacring their way around Lisbon. Lisbon was finally in Christian hands. The capture of the city strengthened the Christian grip on the peninsula, and laid the foundation for a future alliance between Portugal and England. After the campaign was over, some of the sailors headed back to sea and continued their journey to Jerusalem, but many others elected to remain behind and start new lives for themselves in Portugal.

Now, while it is unclear whether or not the battle to take Lisbon was endorsed at the time by the Pope, the other front of conflict in Europe, strangely did appear to have the backing of the Church. This involved a Crusade by Saxon, German, and Danish Christians against the pagan Wend people in the Baltic region of northeastern Europe. Unsurprisingly, it's known as the Wendish Crusade. The Wendish had for centuries held fast to their pagan beliefs, much to the consternation of European Christians. They worshiped a variety of gods and held religious ceremonies in sacred groves and springs. There had been a long history of conflict between the Wendish people and their Christian neighbors, and at a meeting in Frankfurt to discuss planning for the Second Crusade, a group of Saxon knights pointed out that they didn't need to venture all the way to the Holy Land to fight for Christianity, they could remain closer to home and fight the Wends instead. Their argument must have been persuasive.

Bernard of Clairvaux was at the meeting, and shortly afterwards he wrote a letter authorizing the extension of the Second Crusade to include the, and I quote, "complete wiping out, or at any rate the conversion, of the Wend peoples" end of quote. This letter has sparked much debate over the centuries, and we won't stop to analyze it further, other than to say it was surprising that Bernard took it upon himself to authorize this mini-Crusade, and that he was advocating the death or conversion of the pagans, which was contrary to principles he had expressed previously.

Anyway, putting the controversial letter to one side, the Wendish Crusade proceeded. Settlements were burnt, towns and villages were attacked, Wendish people were killed, but on the whole, it didn't achieve that much. The Wends certainly weren't wiped out, and most of the pagans who converted Christianity quickly reverted back to their former beliefs after the Christians departed.

Right, enough of these diversions, back to the main game. Across Germany and France preparations were underway for the coming Crusade. As we saw when discussing preparations for the First Crusade, this involved people selling up and converting as many of their assets as possible into cash. They mortgaged their property and did all they could to get their affairs in order, so they could spend a year or two away on campaign. As we found in the First Crusade, crusading is an expensive business, and many participants set about raising an amount of money which was twice or three times their annual income. Unfortunately, harvests had failed over the past couple of seasons, and there wasn't a lot of money to go around. This in turn, affected one of the key decisions made in planning the Crusade.

Before I go on to discuss this key decision, I want to turn first to another factor which distinguishes the Second Crusade from the First. Kings were involved this time. This fundamentally changed the way the Second Crusade operated. Firstly, due to the system of vassalage, it meant that vast numbers of the nobility in both France and Germany were obliged to go on the Crusade due to their allegiance to their King. Secondly, it meant that there was a clear line of command. There was to be no push-me pull-you type of conflict over who gets to make the decisions, like there was in the First Crusade. Clearly, this time, King Conrad was in charge of the Germans and King Louis was in charge of the French.

There was an interesting side-effect of the involvement of the Kings. Some people, at least must have been scratching their heads and wondering how this was all going to work once the Crusaders reached their destination. Would the Kings of France and Germany be happy taking orders from a mere Count of Edessa or a lowly Prince of Antioch? Even the Queen of Jerusalem arguably lacked the power and prestige of the European Kings. As such, would the two Kings bow to the requests and demands of the leaders of the Crusader states when they arrived in the Holy Land, or would they make their own decisions and pursue their own agendas? It would be interesting to see.

The final way in which the involvement of the Kings changed the operation of the Crusade was in its preparation. It's bad enough if you are a nobleman trying to arrange for the administration of your estates when you are away on Crusade. Who's going to oversee the household, gather the tributes, and arbitrate disagreements and conflicts between your vassals while you are away? Trying to do this if you were a King involved a whole new level of complexity. The Kings were going to be away for a year or two and, it had to be said, may be killed while on the Crusade. They had to ensure their succession plans were in order and had to place the administration of their realms in the hands of some very trustworthy advisers. King Louis chose his childhood tutor and staunch supporter of his father's reign, Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis to be Regent of France in his absence. King Conrad crowned his ten year old son Henry as joint King, so there would be no doubt about who should be his heir should he not return from the campaign. He then, similarly to King Louis, placed the administration of his realm in the hands of a senior Church official, Abbot Wibold of Stavelot and Corvey.

And now back to the point I was making before I got sidetracked. How did the downturn in the economy in Europe at the time, caused by successive failed harvests, affect the planning of the Crusade? Well, the Kings had numerous meetings with Bernard during the first few months of 1147. At these conferences and assemblies, vital decisions were made concerning the timing of the expedition and the route the armies would take. Now you might assume that the Kings would just follow the blueprint drawn up by the leaders of the First Crusade, and march their armies to the Holy Land by taking a land route across Europe to Constantinople, then across the Bosphorus, into the land of the Seljuk Turks, through Anatolia and Cilicia, into Antioch.

That was definitely an option, but there was an alternative discussed at these meetings, and that option was to travel straight to the Holy Land by sea. In theory, at least, traveling to the Middle East by sailing across the Mediterranean must have presented itself as a tempting option, and with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been a much better idea than taking the land route. But there was the fact that most of the nobility, and most of the participants in the Crusade, were from inland areas. Some had never even seen the sea, nor been on a boat before.

And then there was the clincher, cost. Even if you are a knight of means, it was going to cost a lot to pay the passage of yourself, your support group, and all your baggage on a ship for a journey of that duration. And then there were the horses. There's no way the horses will be able to travel safely on board, so if you were a knight, you would need to leave your war horse and two riding horses behind in Europe, and buy new ones when you reached your destination, and that would be a costly exercise. If the knights would struggle to meet the costs of a sea journey, the foot soldiers, the pilgrims and the general hangers-on that seemed to be attracted to these expeditions, well most of them simply would have had no hope at all of raising the fare.

King Roger of Sicily made a tempting offer to King Louis. He offered to provide a fleet of ships to the French expedition, free of charge, but this presented its own set of difficulties. Basically, King Roger of Sicily was the arch enemy of the Germans. And the Byzantines - he was also the arch enemy of the Byzantines. And the Pope - he was also the arch enemy of the Pope. Of course, this meant that, while the offer of free ships must have been tempting, had King Louis taken up the offer, he would have alienated every single one of his Crusading compatriots. Best leave the boats then.

The decision was made. Everyone will be traveling overland to Constantinople, then through Anatolia and Cilicia, to Antioch. And it turned out that perhaps the Crusaders were right to be suspicious of King Roger's motives. Once his offer of transport was refused, the Sicilian king refused to have anything further to do with the Crusade. It was decided, at the many meetings held to organize the expedition, that the French and German armies would take the same route to Constantinople, with the Germans heading off in May 1147, to be followed one month later by King Louis and the French forces. The plan was to allow the many thousands of Crusaders to forage or purchase food during their march, with the one month break between the two halves of the expedition designed to enable the locals to recover and restock their provisions.

Being the first to leave, King Conrad busied himself readying his Kingdom for his departure, in particular making sure his unruly nobles were not going to cause any problems for his Regent in his absence. Luckily, most of them were coming with him on the Crusade. The lineup was quite impressive. Accompanying King Conrad on the Crusade were his staunch allies and family members, his half-brothers, Henry Duke of Bavaria and Bishop Otto of Freising, and his nephew, Duke Frederick of Swabia. Also coming was his arch rival, Welf of Bavaria. Then there were an impressive array of nobles, clergymen, knights and foot soldiers from across the German Kingdom, from Franconia, Swabia and Bavaria, as well as Saxony and Lorraine. Even more impressive were the Kings of Bohemia and Poland, and the Counts of Styria and Carinthia, who also included themselves under the German banner. All in all, it was an impressive show of the extent of German Imperial power.

King Louis' international prestige may have fallen short to that of King Conrad's, but his expedition still had an impressive line-up. Two of his nobles from coastal domains, the Counts of Toulouse and Nimes, had ships at their disposal, and decided to sail to the Holy Land. The rest, well, they marched with Louis, and as with Conrad's entourage they included nobles, clergymen, foot soldiers and pilgrims from across France. From Flanders across to Burgundy and down to Provence, the Lords and their retinues prepared to march to Constantinople. Like King Conrad, King Louis had a core group of supporters who were to travel with him, in the form of his brother, Robert Count of Dreux and Le Perche, and of

course his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose presence also insured the involvement of her vassals in Aquitaine and Poitou.

In fact, there were quite a few women involved in the French expedition. Eleanor's presence cemented the involvement of her close circle of noble women, and the Counts of Flanders and Toulouse were also accompanied by their wives. Talking about the Count of Toulouse, he is none other than Alfonso Jordan, son of Count Raymond of Toulouse, a leader of the First Crusade who established the Crusader state of Tripoli. If you cast your mind back to Episode 20, you will recall Alfonso Jordan fled the County of Tripoli with his mother when he was just a baby, after the death of his father. And look at him now, all grown up and heading back to the Holy Land as part of the Second Crusade. I bet his father would have been proud.

Now you might have noticed something in this roll-call of people mustering to embark on the Second Crusade. Like the First Crusade, there are large numbers of European nobles, knights, foot soldiers, servants and assistants, women, clergymen and pilgrims. But unlike the First Crusade, there is no Papal Legate. There's no Bishop Adhemar equivalent. Bernard, the obvious contender for such a role, is not going on the Crusade, and instead the two Kings have been sanctioned by the Pope to lead the expedition, and they became the religious as well as the secular leaders of the Second Crusade.

Now, King Louis wasn't about to embark on the biggest and most ambitious adventure of his life so far, without appropriate ceremonies to mark the occasion. In the weeks prior to the departure of the French army, two main ceremonies were arranged in his honor. The Pope traveled to Paris and presided over an event at Saint-Denis to dedicate a series of fourteen stained-glass windows, depicting the events of the First Crusade. Two of these windows are now housed in a museum in the United States. The rest unfortunately, were destroyed during the French Revolution. Seeing the victorious exploits of the leaders of the First Crusade displayed in glorious color for all to see would have imbued King Louis and those about to set off on the Crusade with a reminder of what accolades would await them if they too succeeded in their venture.

King Louis attended another ceremony at Saint-Denis just prior to his departure. On the 11th of June 1147 he participated in a highly symbolic event designed to formally farewell the French King and sent him off on Crusade. It was a hot day, and the air inside the packed church was stifling. Regardless of this, King Louis made both the congregation and the dignitaries present, which included Pope Eugenius, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Abbot Suger, wait in the heat while he took a detour on his way to the Church. His detour took him to a leper colony. The cause of leprosy was not known in the Middle Ages, and lepers were kept segregated from the rest of the community, with most non-lepers fearing to go near them in case they caught the disease themselves. But King Louis and two companions went into the colony, an act designed to show his piety, and his fearless charity.

Upon arriving at the church, he proceeded in silence to the church altar, where he prostrated himself before a golden casket containing the bones of Saint Denis, patron saint of Louis' family and protector of France. He was then presented with the Oriflamme, a banner mounted on a golden lance that symbolized the standard of Charlemagne the Great. The Pope blessed King Louis and his companions and the ceremony was complete. King Louis was ready to embark on the greatest adventure of his life, the Second Crusade.

Join me next week as we follow the armies of King Conrad and King Louis as they journey across Europe to Constantinople.

Since we're about to embark on the Second Crusade, it's probably time to mention some books you could read if you wanted to find out more about the Second Crusade. Unfortunately, the Second Crusade is often seen as the poor cousin of the other Crusades, and there aren't many texts dedicated solely to the events of the Second Crusade. There is a book called "The Second Crusade" by Jonathan Phillips. While Jonathan Phillips has written some excellent books about the Crusades, I must say I never really warmed to this one, but it's available if you'd like to read it. And, of course, there's the ever reliable Stephen Runciman, who has written about the Second Crusade in great detail in the second volume of his series about the Crusades entitled "The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100 to 1187". Until next week, bye for now.

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