

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 33.  
The Second Crusade V.

Hello again. Last week we saw the armies of King Louis of France and King Conrad of Germany prepare to set out on the Second Crusade. This week we see them leave.

The German King set out in May 1147, leaving from Nuremberg then heading south to Regensburg, where he was joined by the Bavarian contingent. The combined German forces then proceeded to march eastwards through the German Empire towards the Hungarian border.

Now, we should try and determine the size of the German forces. As we found when trying to estimate the size of the First Crusade, it's very difficult to try and put an exact number on the individuals involved, although Odo of Deuil made a valiant attempt. In his chronicles of the Second Crusade, he stated that the combined German forces, both soldiers and non-combatants, were made up of 900,566 individuals. He said that he had obtained this figure from some Greeks who had counted the Germans as they crossed the Bosphorus. Although Odo's figure is admirably precise, historians all agree that it is way off the mark. By examining the nobility and churchmen who participated in the venture, then assessing the size of their retinues and adding in a substantial number of pilgrims, modern historians have estimated the actual size of the German force to total between 20,000 and 35,000 individuals. The French army, which followed one month later, was slightly smaller. This means that the size of the Second Crusade was on a par with, or slightly smaller than, that of the First Crusade. So the German army, numbering in the tens of thousands, marched towards Hungary.

As was the experience with the First Crusade, the first part of the march proved uneventful. The novelty of marching to the Holy Land was still fresh, food was in plentiful supply, and most people were in a happy mood. But the longer the march went on, the more fractious the Crusaders became. As the novelty wore off and they became tired of marching, tensions started bubbling to the surface. They were marching at a slower pace than the participants of the First Crusade. They averaged around 10 miles a day, so there was plenty of time for conflicts to arise, and arise they did, particularly between the different national groups: the Germans, the Slavs and the French-speaking Crusaders from Lorraine.

While there was conflict between the Crusaders, there was also potential for difficulties to arise between the Crusaders and the leaders of the lands they were marching through. During the month of June, the German army marched across Hungary. Germany had in fact been at war with Hungary only a year earlier, but the young Hungarian King, King Geza, probably after noting the size of the army, was happy to stand back and let the Germans pass through his realm.

It was in Hungary that King Conrad received his first contact with the Byzantines. A Byzantine embassy met with him and requested that Conrad take an oath before entering Byzantine territory, promising not to act against the welfare and the interests of the Emperor. The Emperor, Emperor Manuel, was justifiably anxious about the whole situation. In the First Crusade, the Byzantine Emperor Alexius had requested the Crusade be called, and was hopeful that the Latin Christian army would be able to assist him to

recover Byzantine territory in the Middle East. But that was clearly not the case with the Second Crusade. Emperor Manuel had not called for this Crusade. Instead of assisting the Empire, there was every chance that this Crusade would threaten Byzantine interests. The Empire had recently managed to increase its influence in the Holy Land and had secured a somewhat tenuous hold over the Principality of Antioch. A successful Crusade could easily put an end to that.

The Emperor had a lot on his plate at this time. Believing, correctly, that the Empire might be distracted by the massive German army heading in its direction, King Roger of Sicily decided to attack Byzantine territory in Greece. He managed to capture the island of Corfu and plundered the cities of Athens, Corinth and Thebes. Not wanting to be fighting on too many fronts at once, Emperor Manuel negotiated a peace treaty with the Seljuk Sultan of Rum, a move that aroused suspicions and feelings of hostility amongst the Germans. The Emperor was also trying to manage threats from Aleppo against Antioch, and was walking a diplomatic tightrope in his dealings with his neighbors in the Balkans, the Italian trading cities, and the Papacy. Pretty much the last thing he needed was an army of tens of thousands of Latin Christians marching towards his territory.

He wanted them to pass through his Empire quickly, and with the least amount of disruption possible. To that end, he took a leaf out of the Emperor Alexius' book, and decided to provide Imperial escorts for the army once it entered Byzantine territory. He also did his best to ensure that enough food was available for the Crusaders to purchase. But soon his worst fears were realized. As the enormous and unwieldy army traveled through the Empire, discipline began to slip, conflicts erupted, and drunken German stragglers began causing no end of trouble. Instead of paying for food, many chose to take it by force, killing any traders who refused to hand over their goods.

Unfortunately, King Conrad was discovering that while it was difficult trying to control his unruly subjects when they were living at home in the German Empire, it was equally, if not more difficult, trying to control them when they were on the march. While King Conrad was a seasoned military man, he was well over 50 years of age, an old man by medieval standards, and his health was failing. When the Byzantines complained to King Conrad about the behavior of the German Crusaders, he confessed that he couldn't control them. He began delegating more and more responsibilities to his nephew Frederick, an eager but inexperienced leader, with mixed results.

When the Crusaders were passing through Philippopoulos, a street entertainer tried to make some money by impressing the Germans with his skills as a juggler and snake-charmer. He must have been good at his chosen profession. Too good, in fact, much too good. The Germans, unable to believe what they were seeing, accused him of sorcery. A riot broke out, and houses and businesses were burnt to the ground. Emperor Manuel increased the number of military escorts allocated to the Crusaders, but instead of helping matters, fights started breaking out between the Germans and their armed escorts. In retaliation for the damage the Crusaders were causing, Byzantine locals began killing stragglers, people left behind as the army moved on. Usually these were drunken nobodies, but in Adrianople, a German noble who had remained behind to recover from an illness was killed. A furious Duke Frederick then set fire to the monastery in which the noble was staying and killed all of its occupants.

Emperor Manuel was now seriously worried. He sent an embassy to King Conrad, urging him to turn his army southwards towards the Dardanelles and away from Constantinople.

Emperor Manuel tried to convince King Conrad it would be best to cross into Anatolia down south at the Hellespont, which would ensure the safety of his capital. But King Conrad wasn't going to be swayed from his original plan. He had arranged to meet King Louis in Constantinople, and besides, he had promised his men that they would be walking in the footsteps of the First Crusaders. So he ignored the Emperor's plea and headed towards Constantinople.

Not far to the west of the city, the vast German army set up camp on a nice flat piece of ground, which also happened to be a flood plain. It can be dangerous to camp on a flood plain. Yes, you know what's going to happen next. The weather turned bad. Heavy rain started to fall. So much rain, in fact, that flash flooding occurred. A deluge of water washed across the plain, sweeping away tents, equipment, and stores, and drowning many horses and men. It's unclear how many died in this incident, but some commentators have estimated that many pilgrims and up to two thirds of the horses were lost in the flood.

Finally, on the 10th of September 1147 the bedraggled, diminished and unhappy German army arrived in Constantinople, to find that the Emperor had placed the city on high military alert. Relations between the Byzantines and the Germans had deteriorated to such an extent that Manuel thought it was possible that the German army would attack his capital. But despite his misgivings, things didn't turn out as bad as he expected. The German army was given permission to camp outside the city walls, and with a combination of promises of assistance, a steady supply of food, and a firm touch from the Byzantine army, the German army generally behaved itself. Relations were probably also soothed by the Empress, who was originally from Germany and was, in fact King Conrad's sister-in-law.

The Emperor, Manuel, of course, was keen to see the German army move on as quickly as possible, despite the fact that the French army had not yet arrived for their rendezvous. It seemed that King Conrad was done waiting for the French as well, and after camping at Constantinople for almost a month, the German army was ferried across the Bosphorus into enemy territory. Somewhat surprisingly, Conrad decided not to wait for the French there, either. He gathered his forces and, loaded up with food supplied by the Byzantines, the German army marched towards Nicaea.

The French army set out from Europe in June, with King Louis himself departing from Saint-Denis on the 8th of June 1147. As had happened with the German contingent, the mood of the army on setting out was good, with everyone enjoying the march through the French countryside. But the French quickly found out the disadvantages of being the second army to leave. There was one advantage to marching a month behind the Germans. In places where rivers were difficult to cross, the Germans had built bridges, meaning that many otherwise wet and difficult river crossings were made much easier. But really, that was the only positive to come out of it.

As they entered the Kingdom of Hungary, they found that local traders had either run out of items to sell or were charging exorbitant prices, insisting too on pre-payment for goods, then invariably giving short measure when the goods were supplied. Having experienced the German army, the locals were suspicious and unfriendly. Things were even worse when they arrived in Byzantine territory. Problems with exchange rates and the high prices charged by local sellers led many of the poorer French Crusaders to engage in pillaging and theft to obtain the necessary supplies. To make things worse, they came across German corpses rotting in the sun, as no one cared to take the trouble to bury the bodies

of the German stragglers and troublemakers. And they even found an occasional living German straggler, which invariably led to brawls and fighting. The Byzantine armed escort came down harshly on the French transgressors, and relations between the French and the Byzantines steadily deteriorated.

As was the case with King Conrad's army, the Emperor attempted to convince King Louis to avoid Constantinople and to cross into Anatolia at the Hellespont to the south. But like the Germans, King Louis refused, and on the 4th of October 1147 the French army arrived at Constantinople.

You would have to say that once the French had arrived in Constantinople, King Louis and Queen Eleanor were treated like honored guests by the Emperor Manuel. He allocated one of his fine palaces to them during their stay, and held banquets in their honor that were so lavish and extravagant that some of the more suspicious French Crusaders were worried that the food might have been poisoned. Emperor Manuel took King Louis on a personal tour of the impressive churches, palaces and shrines in the city. On the 9th of October, the feast day of King Louis' patron saint, Saint Denis, the Emperor arranged for a group of Orthodox clergy to take part in the ceremony held to honor the saint, along with a choir of eunuchs.

So Emperor Manuel basically did his utmost to sweeten relations between himself and the French King, but there were tensions. Clearly, there were tensions between the Byzantines and the Germans. There were also growing tensions between the Germans and the French. It had been clearly decided, at the many meetings held to plan the Crusade, that despite leaving Europe one month earlier than the French, King Conrad would wait for the French army in Constantinople. But he hadn't done that. King Conrad had crossed the Bosphorus without the French. Not only had he failed to wait for them in Constantinople, news was filtering in that he had decided not to wait for the French now that he was in enemy territory. Apparently, from what the French could make out, King Conrad's army was already on its way across Anatolia.

Some members of the French army who were eager for action and were tired of waiting in Constantinople while their King enjoyed Byzantine hospitality, decided to cross the Bosphorus and joined the German forces. But once they had caught up with the German army, things didn't go so well. The Germans, on the whole, were hostile towards their own French speaking contingent from Lorraine, and they certainly didn't want any more French speakers joining their ranks. They refused to give them any rations and generally did all they could to make life as difficult as possible for them. As a result, many of them returned back to Constantinople, along with some of the Crusaders from Lorraine. The tales they spread amongst the French army about the rudeness and hostility of the German Crusaders did nothing to improve relations between the two forces.

Despite Emperor Manuel's best efforts to gain the support and friendship of King Louis, there were also tensions between the Byzantines and the French. The rank-and-file members of the French force, in particular, reacted with suspicion to the way King Louis was being feted with banquets and honors. Much of their unease arose from the fact that Emperor Manuel had recently signed a truce with the Seljuk Turks. To the Latin Christians, this was incomprehensible. Why on earth would the Byzantine Emperor make peace with the enemies of Christianity, the Muslims?

Well, let's take a look. We have seen the rise and fall of Zengi further to the east, and we discussed how Zengi's sons now have their separate power bases in Aleppo and Mosul. Now we need to take a brief look at what's been happening in the Muslim world in Anatolia and Cilicia. Back in 1141 the Muslim world was rocked by the death of the Danishmend Emir Mohammad ibn Ghazi, who had risen to a prominent position of power in the region. War then broke out between his three sons as they wrestled to control their father's territory. By the end of 1142 the Emirate was split into three parts, each controlled by one of Ghazi's sons.

Unsurprisingly, the Sultan of the Seljuk Turks decided to take advantage of the situation. The Seljuk Turks and the Danishmend Muslims had a long tradition of competing against each other for control of territory, and from his base in Iconium (which is now Konya) the Seljuk Sultan of Rum, Mas'ud ibn Kilij Arslan, decided to launch an all-out attack on Danishmend territory, and he was pretty successful, conquering Danishmend lands all the way to the Euphrates River. Deeply alarmed by Mas'ud's successes, two of Ghazi's sons approached Emperor Manuel for assistance.

The Byzantine Emperor agreed to help them in return for the two sons becoming, to some degree at least, his vassals. In 1143, Manuel's army repelled an attack by Mas'ud on the road between Nicaea and Dorylaeum, but he was forced to return to Constantinople due to ill health. Again, in 1145 Mas'ud pushed forward into Imperial territory, capturing a fortress, and gaining enough of a stronghold that his successors interfered with the vital line of communication between Constantinople and Syria. By this time, Emperor Manuel had had enough. It was time to go to war. In 1146 he sent Mas'ud a formal declaration of war and gathered together the Byzantine army. He marched with his forces down the road past Dorylaeum to Philomelion. Mas'ud retreated back towards his capital, Iconium.

[Hello, Sharyn here from the History of the Crusades Podcast. We encountered a slight problem uploading Episode 33 of the podcast. For reasons which are unclear to me at the moment, the last three minutes were left off the episode when the episode was uploading to the Podomatic hosting site. So I've created this mini-episode which contains the last three minutes of Episode 33. Sorry about that. Some days, the technology just doesn't work the way it should. To make sure you're up to speed before we begin, just before the last episode was cut off, Emperor Manuel had decided to go to war against the Seljuk Sultan Mas'ud. He is marching his forces towards Philomelion, while Mas'ud has retreated back to his capital, Iconium. Right, here is the rest of your episode.]

His wife the Sultana was in the capital, so he strengthened the garrison there and then left to prepare his army, deciding also to call for reinforcements from the east. Emperor Manuel camped outside Iconium for a number of months. The city was defended by the Sultana, and the Emperor extended every courtesy to her, even contacting her when a rumor arose that her husband had died, to tell her that the story was untrue. Then he gave the order to retreat and slowly made his way back to Byzantine territory.

Historians have questioned why the Emperor made this decision, and the exact reason remains unclear. The Second Crusade had yet to get underway, so that can be discounted. Most likely, news reached him that the King of Sicily was planning to attack Byzantine interests, and his spies may also have informed him that Mas'ud managed to recruit a considerable number of Muslim soldiers to his cause in the east. Whatever the reason, the Emperor unexpectedly pulled out of the conflict and returned to Constantinople.

Then, before he was able to launch another attack, word reached him of the preparations being made for the Second Crusade. With tens of thousands of Latin Christians, some of them possibly hostile, heading his way, this was no time to be engaging in a war far away from his capital. It was fortuitous then, that Mas'ud decided right at that moment to ask for a truce. He agreed to return territory that he had recently taken from the Empire, in exchange for both sides ceasing their hostilities against each other. Not surprisingly, Manuel readily agreed, and the treaty was formalized.

For Manuel this meant that he could concentrate all his attentions on the threat from Sicily, and the approaching Latin Christian armies, without having to watch his back in Anatolia. But this didn't stop the French and German armies, who had come, after all, to fight the Muslims, seeing the treaty as a betrayal of Christian interests in the Middle East. So as King Louis, Queen Eleanor and the French army crossed the Bosphorus into hostile territory, there were tensions. A three-way triangle of tensions between the French, the Germans and the Byzantines. Which doesn't really augur well for the start of a military campaign.

Join me next week as we follow the French and German armies as they travel across Anatolia. Are the armies going to conquer all before them and arrive intact at Antioch ready to expel the Muslims from Edessa? No, not really. In fact no, not at all. It's going to be a disaster. Until next week, bye for now,

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