

History of the Crusades.
Episode 39
Frankish Revival.

Hello again. Last week we examined the changing fortunes of those in the Middle East. At the conclusion of last week's episode, we saw Nur ad-Din emerge as the ruler of territory stretching across Syria, from Aleppo in the north to Damascus in the south.

Now that Nur ad-Din has achieved his long-held objective to take Damascus, the question everyone wants to know is, what will he do next? Well, his attention didn't immediately turn to attacking the Crusader states. Why not? Well, firstly, in the years after his victory at Damascus, the Holy Land was rocked by a natural disaster in the form of a series of earthquakes. The city of Damascus escaped damage, but many lives were lost in the cities of Aleppo, Shaizar, Homs and Hama. Any plans Nur ad-Din had to attack the Franj were placed on hold while he sought to rebuild his fractured defensive walls and fortresses.

Then, a few months after the earthquakes rocked the region, Nur ad-Din fell seriously ill, so ill, in fact, that he was convinced he was dying. He ordered that he be taken by litter to Aleppo, where he made preparations for his death. He didn't die, but he was seriously ill for a year and a half. During this time, of course, there was no question of him attacking the Franj, but it did give him the opportunity to ponder the situation in the Middle East and to think deeply about the best strategy to put into play upon his recovery.

Events have been occurring in the Crusader states which affected the balance of power in the region. While Nur ad-Din had been busy using his diplomatic skills to secure a foothold in Damascus, the Latin Christians had managed to take the port of Ascalon. Remember Ascalon? Attacking Ascalon had been one of the options on the table before the Latin Christians made their fateful decision to attack Damascus. It was situated within the Kingdom of Jerusalem but was under Muslim control.

In January 1153, soon after his victory over his mother Queen Melisende, King Baldwin decided to attack the port. This was a truly ambitious venture. The port of Ascalon was held by the Egyptians and they kept the city well stocked and well defended. By land the port was surrounded by a semi-circle of well-constructed and well-maintained walls. King Baldwin mustered troops from across the Kingdom. He brought his own army to the town, accompanied by an impressive array of siege engines. The military Orders, the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller, were present with a contingent of men, and they were joined by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who brought a relic of the True Cross with him, the Archbishops of Tyre, Caesarea, and Nazareth, and the Bishops of Bethlehem and Acre.

The Latin Christians surrounded the port and began an assault on its walls. Two problems quickly became apparent. Firstly, as I've already mentioned, the walls were strong and well-maintained. As such, the siege engines were able to make little impression on them. No matter what the Christians threw at them, the walls remained unaffected. Secondly, it's very difficult to lay siege to a coastal town unless you have effective backup from the sea. Unfortunately, the Latin Christians only had 20 ships under their command. The Egyptians quickly countered this by sending 70 ships to defend the town. The Latin Christians were powerless to prevent the Egyptian vessels sailing into the port and restocking it with men

and supplies. So the siege dragged on, with the efforts of the Latin Christians having little effect.

A breakthrough of sorts occurred in late July 1153. One of the more impressive siege engines built by the Latin Christians was a great tower. It rose higher than the walls, and from it stones and fire could be rained down into the town. One night, soldiers from the town crept over the walls and set the tower alight. It burned really well, but a change in wind direction blew the flaming and collapsing structure up against the city wall. The intense heat generated by the fire cracked the masonry, and by the morning, the wall was damaged enough that it could be breached.

The Knights Templar had been manning that particular section of the wall, and they decided that they alone should be entitled to enter the town. While a couple of knights stood guard to prevent any other Latin Christians entering the town, the Knights Templar stormed into the city. Trouble was, there were only about forty of them. Clearly, in their greed to keep the best plunder to themselves, they miscalculated the defensive capabilities of the garrison inside the city. The Templar knights were all killed, the breach in the wall was repaired, and the corpses of the slain knights were hung over the ramparts.

King Baldwin then held a council to decide whether or not to continue the siege. While there were strong arguments on each side, in the end the King decided to continue. The Latin Christians threw everything they had at the city, bombarding it relentlessly with missiles from the catapults, and attacking the walls with renewed vigor. It worked. On the 19th of August, the Muslim garrison surrendered on the condition that the Muslim citizens be allowed to leave the city with their belongings. King Baldwin agreed, and the Muslims of Ascalon filed out of the city and made their way to Egypt. The victory by the Latin Christians was complete, and a notable victory it was. The city of Ascalon in Egyptian hands had been a base for Muslim incursions into the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and had enabled the Egyptians to maintain a strategic and economic interest in the Holy Land. With Ascalon now in Latin Christian hands, the pathway was cleared for the Franks to turn their attention to Egypt.

Meanwhile, to the north, events of note were occurring in the Principality of Antioch. Last week, we saw the widowed Princess Constance of Antioch reject marriage suitors from the Crusader states and the Byzantine Empire. She chose instead to marry Raynald of Chatillon, a French knight with no family connections or wealth of his own. Raynald was reportedly a very good looking man and a competent soldier, but that's pretty much the end of his positive attributes. Shortly after the couple were married and Raynald installed as Prince, word was sent to Emperor Manuel informing him of the match. Of course, as Antioch's overlord, the Emperor ought to have been consulted before the marriage, and not after it. However, Manuel decided to be generous and indicated that he would recognize the new Prince of Antioch if he fought against the Armenian leader Thoros, who was advancing into Byzantine and Crusader territory. Raynald was only too happy to comply, and with the assistance of the Knights Templar, Raynald drove the Armenians back into Cilicia. As a reward, he granted the newly conquered territory to the Knights Templar, securing an alliance with the Order.

Buoyed by his victory Raynald then set his sights on the nearby island of Cyprus. Raynald was keen to attack the wealthy island, but he lacked the money to do so. The Patriarch of Antioch, however, was exceedingly wealthy. Raynald demanded the elderly Church leader supply the funds necessary for Raynald to launch an attack on Cyprus, but the Patriarch

refused. What did Raynald do? He ordered the Patriarch be imprisoned within Antioch. The elderly man was beaten whilst in prison and sustained a number of head wounds. Raynald ordered his men to smother the Patriarch's head wounds with honey. He was then chained to the roof of the citadel for a whole day in the sweltering summer sun. The honey attracted a swarm of insects, and the old man was powerless to brush them away, his hands being bound by the chains. Not surprisingly, he relented and allowed Raynald to raid his treasury to fund his proposed invasion of Cyprus.

King Baldwin became aware of the situation and sent representatives to Antioch to demand the Patriarch's immediate release from prison. Having achieved his objectives, Raynald set the cleric free, and the Patriarch journeyed to Jerusalem, where he received a warm welcome. Prince Raynald was now free to attack Cyprus.

Cyprus was a strategically important island situated off the coast of Syria and Cilicia in the Mediterranean Sea. The island had proven a useful ally to the Latin Christians, particularly in the days of the First Crusade, when supplies of food shipped over from Cyprus assisted the starving Christians at the siege of Antioch. At the present time, the governor of Cyprus was Emperor Manuel's nephew John Comnenus. When King Baldwin heard of Prince Raynald's plans to attack the island, he was appalled and hurriedly sent envoys to the island to warn of the impending invasion, but it was too late.

In the spring of 1156, Raynald's men landed in Cyprus along with the leader of the Armenians, Thoros, and his men. Raynald had recently attacked the Armenians on the orders of the Emperor, but the Knights Templar had encouraged the two sides to make peace. To reinforce the truce, Raynald invited the Armenians to join him in attacking Cyprus, and they readily agreed. The island fell swiftly. John Comnenus and his garrison put up a gallant fight, but the invaders were too numerous and the island was quickly overrun.

Then followed three weeks of horror for the Cypriots. The victorious Franks and Armenians went on an unbridled rampage across the island, plundering, destroying, raping, and killing. The scale of the rapes and murders was staggering. Children, the elderly, and the poor were killed, while anyone of any worth was imprisoned and ransomed. Crops and livestock were plundered or destroyed, while local buildings were stripped of their wealth, then ransacked and burnt. The governor himself was taken as a prisoner to Antioch to be ransomed, along with the more important citizens and their families. Greek priests and monks from the island had their noses cut off on Raynald's orders, and were sent to Constantinople. The island of Cyprus was left reeling from this devastating event.

Not surprisingly, Emperor Manuel decided that Raynald needed to be put back in his rightful place. King Baldwin agreed. Not only did King Baldwin agree with this policy, he decided to cement his relationship with Constantinople by requesting a bride from the Imperial family. During the summer of 1157 he sent the Archbishop of Nazareth to Constantinople and was offered the hand of Emperor Manuel's niece, the thirteen year old Princess Theodora. Negotiations were finalized, and in the spring of 1158 the marriage took place. Despite the bride's young age, it seems that the marriage was, on the whole, a happy one. After the marriage had been formalized, Emperor Manuel gathered his forces and decided to march with them to Antioch. The Emperor had negotiated to join King Baldwin to present a united front to Nur ad-Din, and he also needed to put a stranglehold on the ambitions of the vicious new Prince of Antioch.

When Prince Raynald heard of the approach of the Byzantine army and the Byzantine Emperor, he knew he was in trouble. Tempted as he might be, he knew that he didn't have the manpower to take on the might of the massive Byzantine army, and a defeat on the battlefield would mean a devastating loss of power and prestige. There was only one thing for it. Raynald was going to have to apologize for his actions, and hope that his submission to the Emperor was accepted.

As the Imperial Army approached the Principality it set up camp at Mamistra in Cilicia. This was Raynald's chance. He traveled to the city, and then he and his entourage walked bare-footed and bare-headed through the town and out into the army camp. He entered the Imperial tent and threw himself down in the dust at the Emperor's feet. The Emperor chose to ignore him for a while, and when he eventually deigned to speak to him, Manuel told Ranyald that he would be pardoned on three conditions: firstly, that he hand the citadel in Antioch over to the Imperial forces whenever requested; secondly, that he supply a contingent of men for the Imperial army; and finally, that he installed a Greek Patriarch as the head of the Church in Antioch. Raynald readily accepted the terms and was dismissed.

King Baldwin had hoped that the Emperor might have treated Raynald a bit more harshly. He was surprised that he was let off so lightly, and decided to head north and have a word in person about the situation to Emperor Manuel. The Emperor granted him an audience, and their meeting was a huge success. The two men seemed to find genuine pleasure in each other's company, and Manuel ended up hosting Baldwin as his guest for ten days.

The Emperor then traveled to Antioch, where he entered the city with an appropriate degree of pomp and ceremony. Emperor Manuel rode into the city, robed in Imperial purple and wearing a crown encrusted with pearls. Prince Raynald walked beside the Emperor's horse, while King Baldwin's horse followed behind the Emperor, with King Baldwin unadorned and uncrowned. As a result of negotiations with King Baldwin, the Emperor had relented on his requirement that a Greek Patriarch be installed in Antioch, and had instead allowed the return of the elderly Patriarch whom Raynald had mistreated. The Patriarch received the Emperor into the city with all due ceremony, and Manuel ended up remaining in Antioch for a week, attending lavish feasts and showering the noblemen of Antioch with gifts and favors.

When he left Antioch with the Imperial army and headed towards the Muslim frontier, the Latin Christians were hoping that he would launch an attack on Nur ad-Din's capital, Aleppo, but it wasn't to be. Nur ad-Din sent an envoy to the Emperor and negotiated a truce. Nur ad-Din offered to release all the Christian captives in his prisons, and to assist the Empire in its campaign against the Seljuk Turks. The Emperor accepted his offer and withdrew his forces back into Imperial territory.

The Latin Christians, of course, were furious and lamented the loss of the chance of the Empire to crush Nur ad-Din. But Emperor Manuel had different priorities to those of the leaders of the Crusader states. He had heard rumors of a plot being hatched back in Constantinople, and needed to return to address this issue and other troubles in Europe. The truce with Nur ad-Din resulted in the release of 6,000 Christian captives. The vast majority of these were German knights and foot soldiers captured during the Second Crusade, but one notable prisoner was the unfortunate Bertrand of Toulouse, the illegitimate son of Count Alfonso Jordan. The leaders of the Crusader states were initially

concerned that he might once again challenge the rulers of Tripoli, but his health had deteriorated to the extent that this was not really a possibility.

The following couple of years saw some notable events in the history of the Crusader states. In 1160 Prince Raynald decided to go raiding for cattle and horses. He captured quite a few animals, but as he was driving the herd back to Antioch, he was ambushed by the governor of Aleppo and taken prisoner. Neither King Baldwin nor Emperor Manuel seemed overly keen to negotiate his release, and he remained a prisoner for the next sixteen years. In his absence, King Baldwin declared Princess Constance's son, the fifteen year old Bohemond III, also known as Bohemond the Stammerer, to be the ruler of the Principality. The actual governing of the territory was given to the Patriarch of Antioch, who was to rule until Bohemond came of age.

Around the same time, Emperor Manuel made it known to the leaders of the Crusader states that he was looking for a wife. Empress Irene had died the previous year, and Emperor Manuel was keen to remarry, this time to a Latin Christian bride from the Holy Land. He settled on the daughter of Princess Constance of Antioch, Princess Maria, and they were married in Constantinople in December 1160. The following year, Queen Melisende died in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, followed five months later, more surprisingly, by King Baldwin.

King Baldwin was only 32 years old when he died of an illness. His untimely death was deeply mourned by his subjects, and even the local Muslims came down from the hills to pay their respects as King Baldwin's body made its way in a funeral procession to Jerusalem. King Baldwin's young wife was only sixteen years old at the time of his death, and they had no children. Consequently, the crown passed to his younger brother, Amalric, Count of Jaffa and Ascalon.

Amalric was aged in his mid-twenties when his brother died, and he was quite a memorable figure. Tall and overweight, with a full beard and receding blond hair, he tried to promote himself as a pious scholar who was concerned with matters of the law and justice, but this image was somewhat negated by the fact that he tended to be a bit of a womanizer, and also possessed a raucous and distinctive laugh. When he found something funny, he would dissolve into fits of loud and unbridled laughter, much to the embarrassment of his entourage. However, as events would show, while he didn't have the charisma of his brother and didn't come across as a particularly regal or majestic character, he did possess a degree of authority and statesmanship.

Before he could be crowned King, however, there was one condition that needed to be met. He needed to get rid of his wife. Amalric had married Agnes, the daughter of Joscelin II of Edessa, four years previously. She was much older than him and was actually his third cousin. As such, their union was within the degree of consanguinity prohibited by the Church. She had a reputation for faithlessness and un-queenly-like behavior, but that wasn't what concerned the nobility. They were worried that, should she become queen, she would promote the cause of her largely landless relatives at the expense of the current nobility. So, Amalric was encouraged to have his marriage annulled by the Church prior to becoming King, which he duly did. The couple had two children, Sibylla and Baldwin, and it was agreed that, despite the annulment of their parents' marriage, the legitimacy and the inheritance of the children would be recognized.

Eight days after the death of King Baldwin, Amalric was crowned King of Jerusalem. As with many periods following a transition of power, the new leadership heralded a time of shifting priorities and policy changes. Unlike his brother, Amalric's gaze extended beyond the confines of the Crusader states. His eyes were firmly fixed on another prize, the neighboring country of Egypt. Join me next week as the spotlight swings onto a new arena of conflict, the beautiful and wealthy country of Egypt.

Now I have some news for you. This week, listener Stephan suggested that I create a dedicated Facebook page for the podcast. After some thought, I decided this was a good idea. My daughter took it on as a school holiday project, and in exchange for some extra pocket money, she created both the History of the Crusades Facebook page, which is now up and running, and a new icon for the podcast. So, "Like" us on Facebook, it'll be great. Until next week, bye for now.

End