

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 45  
The Leper King.

Hello again. Last week we saw the fall of two giants, in the form of the unexpected deaths of Nur ad-Din and King Amalric, both due to illness and both within a few months of each other. Next week we will discuss the ramifications of this for the Muslim world, but today we will be seeing how the Latin Christians dealt with the untimely death of their leader.

You may remember that in last week's episode, King Amalric was grappling with some succession issues. Around four years before his death, his successor, the nine year old Baldwin, was displaying worrying signs of something that looked a bit like leprosy. As a consequence, King Amalric was scrambling to look for alternatives to placing Baldwin on the throne. Unfortunately, he died before any of his plans came to fruition, so upon his death, the High Court in Jerusalem met to decide whom to elevate to the throne.

This is what they had to work with. Young Baldwin was now 13 years old, two years away from being able to rule in his own right. He had all the makings of a fine king. He was intelligent, quick-witted, likable, and an excellent horseman. But his right arm was dead, and the best physicians in the land had declared that this may be due to the terrible disease leprosy. No one wanted a leper king.

The disease itself was bad enough. Leprosy disfigured and deformed the body of its sufferer and rendered them seriously ill for lengthy periods of time, but it was the stigma attached to the disease that was the kicker. Lepers were despised and feared during the Middle Ages. To be afflicted by leprosy was to be cursed by God. Lepers were often driven out of communities and shunned by society. To have a King who was a leper ruling over the Holy Land was almost unthinkable.

But the good news was, young Baldwin might not be suffering from leprosy at all. Only his right arm was affected, and in the four years since the problem was discovered, the disease hadn't progressed. He had adapted admirably to only having one workable arm. He had taught himself to control his horse using only his legs, leaving his left arm free to wield a weapon, and of course he had been trained to fight using only his left hand. So there was no doubt he could lead men in battle when he was older. And when it came down to it, the fact that he had a dead right arm might be the result of one of the many unnamed, mysterious afflictions doing the rounds during the Middle Ages. It might not be leprosy at all.

The High Court also looked at the alternatives to placing Baldwin on the throne. His elder sister, Sibylla, was 14 years old and unmarried. Like King Amalric before them, the High Court quickly discounted any notion of Sibylla ruling in her own right. In the absence of her mother, Agnes, she had been raised in a convent. Pious and meek, she had little knowledge of, or interest in, politics and unlike her grandmother Melisende, did not show any aptitude for rule. Of course, she could be advantageously married and her husband could rule, but that would take time and a degree of diplomatic wrangling to achieve.

The only other contender for the throne was King Amalric's daughter by his second wife, Maria Comnena, a girl named Isabella. However, since she was only two years old, her claim was quickly discounted.

In the end, the High Court made its decision. They gave the benefit of the doubt to young Baldwin, who after all might not be suffering from leprosy. They recommended that Baldwin be elevated to the throne. The nobility of Jerusalem supported the decision, and Baldwin was crowned by the Patriarch of Jerusalem four days after his father's death, becoming King Baldwin IV. The coronation occurred on the 15th of July 1174, on the 75th anniversary of the conquest of Jerusalem by the First Crusaders, which was seen as an auspicious date.

There was, of course, one immediate difficulty. King Baldwin was two years away from being able to rule in his own right, and the High Court didn't see fit to tackle the vexed and thorny issue of who should rule as Regent on the young King's behalf. No Regent was formally appointed, and into the power vacuum that arose jumped Miles of Plancy.

Miles of Plancy was King Amalric's closest friend, and was Lord of Transjordan, the domain that was recently invaded by both Nur ad-Din and Saladin. Miles of Plancy had been seneschal, or head of the civil government of the Kingdom, since 1167. He knew the ropes. He knew what needed to be done, and it was understandable that he continue overseeing the governance of the realm. But others didn't think so. Miles of Plancy was not a popular man. He was seen by many of the noble families of Jerusalem as a bit of an upstart, who had risen higher than he ought. While it was true that he was Lord of Transjordan, he only held that title due to an advantageous marriage to the heiress of Transjordan, Stephanie of Milly. His lack of popularity was not an issue under the strong leadership of King Amalric, but after his death, all the hidden and festering grievances and feuds bubbled to the surface, and culminated in the assassination of Miles of Plancy in October 1174.

History doesn't record who was behind the assassination, but the death of Miles of Plancy heralded the beginning of many years of bitter political wrangling, conflict and factionalism in the Crusader states. A few weeks prior to the assassination, the High Court had appointed a Regent, whose role it was to rule on King Baldwin's behalf until he came of age. The choice of Regent was obvious. It was the young King's cousin, Count Raymond III of Tripoli, whose mother, Hodierna of Jerusalem, had been Baldwin's aunt.

Raymond was 34 years old and was a self-controlled, conservative character who was thin, with dark skin, medium colored hair, and piercing eyes. He had spent nine years in Muslim captivity and as a result had learned Arabic and studied Muslim ways. His approach to ruling the Kingdom of Jerusalem was a cautious one. Unlike King Amalric, he wasn't a fan of expansionism. He had no driving ambition to take the fight to the Muslims and extend the rule of Latin Christendom. He was content merely to oversee the survival of the Kingdom and to defend it against any attacks.

Right, so just to be clear, it's 1174. Young King Baldwin IV is on the throne, and Count Raymond of Tripoli has been appointed Regent. Okay, well, the next two years are going to be chaotic and just plain awful for young Baldwin.

To start with, remember that Baldwin is just thirteen years old. It's bad enough being an adolescent boy at the best of times, but Baldwin has a lot on his plate. His father has just died unexpectedly. He has been estranged from his mother since he was very young and his father whom, of course, it is likely he deeply admired and loved, was his sole parental figure. Now he's gone. His cousin Raymond is ruling on his behalf, which sounds OK, but

Baldwin doesn't agree with his conservative policies regarding the Crusader states. He wants to adopt his father's policy of expansionism, but is powerless to do so until he reaches his majority in two years time.

Also opposing Raymond's approach to the Regency, and pushing her agenda as far as she is able, is Baldwin's mother, Agnes, who has appeared out of nowhere and is doing her best to influence her son, who she hardly knows, and gain a foothold into the corridors of power.

And to top it all off, a couple of very ambitious and influential lords, who were handily in Muslim captivity for much of his father's reign, have just been released: Raynald of Chatillon, the brutal Prince of Antioch who had been taken captive in 1161; and Joscelin III of Courtenay, who would have been Count of Edessa had the County still existed, had been captured back in 1164. They emerged from prison, hungry to make up for lost time, and were all set to take full advantage of the fact that a boy sat on the throne.

Not surprisingly, considering the stress he was under, soon after his coronation Baldwin started to get sick, really sick. And unfortunately, for poor Baldwin and for the kingdom in general, it became clear pretty quickly that he did, in fact, have leprosy. The disease attacked his face and hands and left him disfigured, and he began a slow decline into ill health. His body became more and more deformed and disabled, and he suffered debilitating periods of severe illness. In time, he will be left unable to walk and see, and he will be barely able to speak, but for the moment, he is dealing with the inescapable fact that he is suffering from the most feared illness of the Middle Ages, and that his health will progressively worsen.

No one knows how quickly the illness will progress and whether the young King will in fact be able to rule it all, so like King Amalric did a few years before his death, they look around for alternative plans. Like Amalric, they seize upon Baldwin's older sister, Sibylla. Like King Amalric and the High Court, they discount the possibility of her ruling in her own right, and instead the decision is made. Sibylla needs a husband. Not just any old husband, but a husband who is capable of ruling the Kingdom of Jerusalem, either as Regent for King Baldwin, or in his own right, should Baldwin be forced by reason of your health to relinquish the throne.

The search was on to find a spouse for the fourteen year old Sibylla. In 1175, one was found. Baldwin formally invited William Longsword, who, in addition to having a very cool name, was the eldest son of the Marquis of Montferrat, to come to the Holy Land and marry his sister. William Longsword was extremely well connected. He was cousin to both the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and King Louis VII of France. His father was the wealthiest and most influential nobleman in northern Italy. If he became regent or ruler of Jerusalem, he would be in an excellent position to lobby the European leaders on behalf of the Crusader states.

William Longsword arrived in the Middle East in October 1176 and married Sibylla a few days later. The good news was that Sibylla became pregnant shortly afterwards. The bad news was that William Longsword was struck down by malaria a few months into his marriage and died. The widowed Sibylla gave birth to a son in 1177.

So, it was back to square one. Sibylla needed a husband. The King's envoys once again scoured Europe for a suitable candidate. This time, however, they needed someone willing

to marry a young widow who had already given birth to her son and heir. It was to be no easy task.

Meanwhile, in the absence of the strong leadership which may have been forthcoming from Sibylla's husband, the nobility of the Kingdom of Jerusalem split into factions. Each of the factions vied for the young and ailing King's attention and tried to influence his decisions. King Baldwin did his best to forge a safe path between his warring nobles, and to make decisions based on his own judgment instead of factional interests, but it could not have been easy.

The nobility of the realm were broadly split into two camps. The first was led by Count Raymond of Tripoli, and advocated a conservative policy against the Muslims. It was concerned more with protecting the existing borders of the Crusader states than with expanding them. In this camp was William of Tyre, a chronicler of the Crusades and a highly influential figure in King Baldwin's life. Not only had William of Tyre been King Baldwin's tutor, he had been raised in William of Tyre's household. As his mother had been absent for the duration of his childhood and his father busy with kingly duties, William of Tyre was the predominant adult in young Baldwin's life.

Unofficial head of the opposing faction was his mother, Agnes. Now Agnes is a somewhat controversial figure. She has been traditionally portrayed as a power-hungry, ruthless woman who was not above manipulating her son and other men around her to get her way. In the words of Crusader historian Stephen Runciman, and I quote "she was vicious and greedy, insatiable for men and for money" end of quote. But current historians have viewed Agnes in a different light. They acknowledged that the source of most of the information about her life comes from William of Tyre, who was a member of the opposing faction. That, together with concerns about the stereotypical portrayal of women in history, has led to a softening of views about Agnes. Maybe she's been hard done by.

Maybe she wasn't the vicious, power-hungry woman that history has made her out to be, but I'm not so sure. If I had to place a bet either way, my money would be on the traditional portrayal of Agnes. So yes, I believe she most likely was a ruthless, extremely ambitious woman. Why? Well, it's an undisputed historical fact that King Amalric was told he would not be able to be crowned King of Jerusalem while Agnes was his wife. As we discussed back in Episode 39 when King Baldwin III died unexpectedly in 1161, leaving his younger brother Amalric, as heir to the throne. Amalric had been married to Agnes for four years, and they had two children, Sibylla and Baldwin. The nobility of Jerusalem were united in their opposition to Agnes becoming their Queen. She was the daughter of Joscelin II of Edessa, and her allegiances and interests lay outside the noble families of Jerusalem, towards her family and the lost County of Edessa, but that could not have been their only concern. To insist that Amalric annul his marriage before taking the crown was really quite an extraordinary demand, and one that would only have been made had Agnes displayed traits that would make her a danger to the realm should she rise to power. So, that's my opinion, for what it's worth, and I'm going to stick to the traditional portrayal of Agnes. But you might want to keep in mind current historical trends as we discuss her influence on events which played out while her son Baldwin was on the throne.

Now, during the two years of the Regency prior to Baldwin coming of age, Agnes was doing her best to influence Baldwin, and she succeeded to a large extent. When he turned fifteen years of age Baldwin took up the Kingship in his own right, and one of his first moves was to appoint his uncle Joscelin III as Royal Seneschal, the most important

administrative position in the Kingdom. Joscelin was Agnes' brother, and his new position gave him control over the treasury of the realm.

Raynald of Chatillon, recently released from prison along with Joscelin, also rose to power at this time via an astute marriage. The violent and cruel former Prince of Antioch left prison a powerless and landless man. The death of his wife Constance, and the fact that his stepson Bohemond III became Prince of Antioch back in 1163, meant that he was without lands and influence, but not for long. He married Stephanie of Milly, the widow of Miles of Plancy. This resulted in him becoming the Lord of Transjordan, a region that was the front line of battles between the Latin Christians and both the Syrian and Egyptian Muslims. In his new position of influence, Raynald of Chatillon allied himself with Agnes and Joscelin. In their desire to take the battle to the Muslims and secure for themselves, and the realm of course, new territory and greater incomes, they were supported by the Knights Templar, who were always keen to join in any venture where money was involved.

So that is pretty much what King Baldwin IV was faced with at the beginning of his reign. He was fifteen years old and struggling with the fact that he had the dreaded disease leprosy. The adults around him were taking full advantage of both his illness and his youth to push their own agendas. The formerly powerful aristocracy of Jerusalem, led by Raymond of Tripoli and supported by William of Tyre, were losing influence, and on the rise was the ambitious and power-hungry faction led by Agnes and her brother Joscelin.

How is this going to play out? Will Baldwin manage to rule despite his illness? Or will he abdicate in favor of someone else? Who will Sibylla end up marrying? All these questions and more will be answered in a future episode. But not next week. Next week we will look at the fallout in the Muslim world caused by the unexpected death of Nur ad-Din. Join me next week as we see what's been happening in the Muslim camp.

Now, just before we finish up, I thought I'd take the opportunity to remind you all about the online presence of the History of the Crusades Podcast. Firstly, there's the website, which you can reach at [HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com](http://HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com). This is the main online resource for the podcast. It contains links to each episode, along with supporting material such as maps and pictures. You can also access the episodes directly from the site, which hosts the podcast, [Podomatic.com](http://Podomatic.com). The podcast is also on Twitter, using the name [@HistoryCrusades](https://twitter.com/HistoryCrusades). If you follow me on Twitter, you'll receive notification when an episode has been posted. I also retweet anything of relevance to the Crusades which I come across in Twitter-World, and occasionally I tweet a piece of trivia, or something light-hearted which I've found amusing about the Crusades.

Then there's Facebook. I have recently established a Facebook page (just search for "history of the Crusades podcast"), and if you like that page, you will be notified on Facebook when a new episode is released, and you'll be able to access the episodes directly via Facebook. Confusing isn't it?

Just to confuse you further, there's another Facebook group which I haven't mentioned to date, which you might be interested in. It's called "History Podcasts", and you can apply to join if you produce a history podcast or if you listen to a history podcast, which you clearly do. The History Podcasts page is basically a forum where people who make history podcasts, and people who listen to history podcasts, can all come together to discuss, well, history podcasts and history in general. Some of the discussions, which had been held recently, include: What was the most important revolution in history?; What sites

people should see when they visit Rome?; and even What to do about the negative reviews that the History of the Crusades Podcast and the Arab Spring Podcast have been receiving on the US iTunes site?. It's a great page where you can learn about the oodles of history podcasts which are available nowadays, and talk to other people interested in history, in discussions which are interesting and, thankfully, mostly well-mannered, which seems increasingly rare in online discussions nowadays. So all you have to do is apply to join the group, you'll be told the secret handshake, and then you'll be let inside the clubhouse. So search for "History Podcasts" on Facebook and join up. You won't regret it.

Well, that's about all for this week. Until next week, bye for now.

End