

History of the Crusades.
Episode 47
The Year 1180.

Hello again. Last week, we looked at the rise of Saladin. By the end of last week's episode, Saladin had extended his rule out from Egypt and across Nur ad-Din's former territory in Syria, making him the most powerful Islamic ruler for two centuries. This week we are going to take a closer look at two important events which occurred in the year 1180. The first of these events is the marriage of King Baldwin's sister Sibylla, and the second is the death of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel.

Right, marriage first, death later.

So, when we last left Sibylla she was fourteen years old and had been married to William Longsword, a well-connected European nobleman. Unfortunately, her husband died a few months into their marriage, of malaria. The young widow gave birth to a boy whom she unsurprisingly named Baldwin. Now, at this time, King Baldwin was really starting to get sick, and everyone knew it was vital that Sibylla marry again, for the future security of the Kingdom. Her husband would need to be chosen carefully, as he may be required to take over the Regency and rule the Kingdom if King Baldwin's illness worsened. In the Muslim world, Saladin was emerging as a formidable foe, and a strong Latin Christian leader will be needed to counter him. It really is difficult to overstate just how important it was that Sibylla marry an appropriate husband.

From the year 1178 onwards, after the birth of her son, King Baldwin started including Sibylla's name in official documents. She was becoming an important figure in the complex web of politics and intrigue in the Holy Land and, as stated by Christopher Tyerman in his book "God's War, A New History of the Crusades", and I quote "her re-marriage became a central issue of Jerusalem politics, taking precedence over the threat from Saladin" end quote.

Right, now before we move on and find Sibylla a husband, here's a short refresher about the politics in the Kingdom of Jerusalem at this time. There are two main factions. Count Raymond III of Tripoli and his cousin Bohemond IV of Antioch are the leaders of one faction. Being the rulers of the Counties of Tripoli and Antioch, they are clearly influential people, but their politics of appeasement towards the Muslims, and the fact that they rule outside the Kingdom of Jerusalem, means that their influence within the Kingdom itself is not so great. They of course want to change this, and increase their standing and power within Jerusalem. On the other side of the fence, we have King Baldwin's mother, Agnes, and the increasingly influential former prisoners-of-war Raynald of Chatillon and Joscelin of Courtenay, who is Agnes' brother. In the middle, you have young King Baldwin, getting sicker by the day and trying desperately to forge a diplomatic path between the factions, whilst also defending his Kingdom against Saladin's advances.

Sibylla, of course, has become a very important game-piece in the power struggle between the two factions. Both sides want her to choose a husband who they can put into play and use to their advantage. Her suitor from the Raymond of Tripoli camp was Baldwin of Ibelin. The family of Ibelin was a family on the rise. They weren't part of the established aristocracy of the Crusader states, but via a couple of astute marriages and political allegiances, the Ibelins were now a highly influential family. As an indication of how far

they had risen, Baldwin of Ibelin's younger brother Balian had recently married King Amalric's widow, Queen Maria Comnena. Baldwin of Ibelin, while not being of noble blood, was a confident soldier and an influential man, and Sibylla proclaimed herself in love with him.

Now, just a little footnote here before we proceed further. There's some dispute amongst historians about Sibylla's feelings towards Baldwin of Ibelin. Current historians range from Sibylla seemingly having no strong feelings either way regarding this suitor, while another goes so far as to state that Raymond of Tripoli and Bohemond of Antioch tried to forcibly marry Baldwin of Ibelin against her will. I prefer Steven Runciman's approach. Relying for his source on the writings of a man called Ermoul, who was in the service of Baldwin's brother Balian and was privy to the inside operations of the family, Stephen Runciman contends that Sibylla in fact pursued Baldwin of Ibelin, with the match, of course, being supported wholeheartedly by Baldwin of Ibelin's allies Raymond of Tripoli and Bohemond of Antioch.

Now, despite the fact that Baldwin of Ibelin lacked noble blood, he was popular with the people, and it's likely that he would have been readily accepted as their Regent or even their king. But before a betrothal between the two could be finalized, disaster struck. Baldwin of Ibelin was captured in battle and thrown into a Muslim prison. Sibylla wrote to him, assuring him of her affections, but Sibylla hadn't counted on her mother, Agnes.

Baldwin of Ibelin's capture and confinement was, of course, a godsend for those on the opposing faction. Agnes didn't know when Baldwin was likely to be released, so she wasted no time in trying to get Sibylla interested in a different suitor, someone allied with the Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay camp.

Now this is where it gets a little complicated, but try to stay with me. A few years previously, a knight arrived in the Holy Land. Confusingly, his name was Amalric, and he was the second son of the Count of Lusignan in Poitou. He was a good soldier and did rather well for himself in the Holy Land. He ended up marrying Baldwin of Ibelin's daughter, Eschiva. In addition to marrying Baldwin of Ibelin's daughter, he also became Agnes' lover. Right, still with me? Okay. He seems to have been a bit of a Trojan horse as far as the Raymond of Tripoli faction was concerned. Despite being married to the daughter of their ally, it seems that his heart lay firmly in the opposing camp, with Agnes.

So, together he and Agnes hatched a plan for Sibylla to marry Amalric's younger brother, Guy. Guy is still living on his father's estates in Poitou, but Amalric takes every opportunity he can to tell Sibylla how extraordinarily good-looking his younger brother is, how charming, and how brilliant in every way. Agnes, of course, keeps mentioning how Baldwin might not be a good match after all, and anyway, who wants to be betrothed to a man who might be in jail for the next decade? Gradually, Sibylla warms to the idea of considering Guy as a suitor. As soon as he sees she is willing, Amalric races back to France to fetch his little brother.

Upon arriving in the Holy Land, Guy launched an all out charm offensive against Sibylla, and she fell for him, hook, line, and sinker. So much so that, within a short period of time, she made the startling announcement to her brother King Baldwin, that she was no longer interested in her former love, Baldwin of Ibelin, but was now seeking her brother's permission to marry Guy.

King Baldwin was furious. The match on paper was a terrible one. Guy was a petty noble with no connections other than being brother to his mother's lover. Guy protested that his blood was noble, thank you very much, because he was in fact descended from a water fairy called Melusine. But being good-looking and being descended from a water fairy were, really, Guy's only assets. He was vain, weak and foolish. King Baldwin wanted to prevent the marriage. He wanted to, very much, but he was experiencing a severe bout of illness at this time and was being pestered no end by his mother and his sister to grant his consent. In the end, he gave in. During Easter, in the year 1180, Sibylla married Guy, and he became Count of Jaffa and Ascalon.

The Ibelin family, of course, were appalled by this turn of events and in an attempt to heal the slight caused to the family, King Baldwin betrothed his young half-sister, Isabella, to Humphrey IV of Toron. Because Isabella's mother, Queen Maria Comnena, was married to Balian of Ibelin, the eight year old Isabella was in fact, Balian of Ibelin's stepdaughter. Humphrey was Reynald of Chatillon's step-son, and heir to the important fiefdom of Transjordan. Yes, I know, it's complicated. The upshot was King Baldwin attempted to bridge the rift between the two factions by marrying Isabella, who had connections to the Raymond of Tripoli faction, to Humphrey, who had connections to the Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay faction. You will no doubt be pleased to hear that since Princess Isabella was only eight years old when these negotiations were taking place, the actual wedding ceremony was postponed for three years.

So this fixes everything, and the factions are no longer fighting, right? Wrong. The Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay faction were on a roll, and they knew it. They were about to take full advantage of their new-found influence. The important office of the Patriarch of Jerusalem was vacant, with the previous Patriarch having died some six months previously. William of Tyre, who you may remember, was King Baldwin's tutor and a firm member of the Raymond of Tripoli faction, had been itching for this position ever since it became vacant. He was well qualified for the role, and his appointment would have fulfilled a lifelong ambition. But Agnes had other ideas. An election for the position of Patriarch was about to occur, and she had her own candidate, Heraclius, the Archbishop of Caesarea.

Heraclius had arrived in the Holy Land from France as a barely literate young priest with no connections. He was however, unusually good looking for a priest, and he quickly caught Agnes' eye and became her favorite. Under her patronage, he rose through the ranks to the dizzy height of the Archbishop of the important seat of Caesarea, and now she was gunning for him to become Patriarch of Jerusalem, the highest ecclesiastical office in the Kingdom. Heraclius openly kept a mistress and was not really an ideal candidate for the position of Patriarch, but with King Baldwin getting sicker by the day and with the King's sister Sibylla, her husband, and her son, firmly in her power, Agnes was a very influential woman. An election was held for the position of Patriarch and Heraclius won the vote, with William of Tyre coming second. William, of course, was shattered. To rub salt into his wounds, the new Patriarch of Jerusalem excommunicated William of Tyre the following year, and William was forced to travel to Rome, arriving there in 1183, to try and get the excommunication overturned. He died in Rome and it was rumored that he was poisoned by an emissary sent by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

With the influential William of Tyre safely dispatched, the Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay faction turned its attentions to Count Raymond of Tripoli himself. Agnes and Jocelyn managed to convince the seriously ill King Baldwin that Count

Raymond was plotting against the throne. As a result, King Baldwin banned Count Raymond from entering the Kingdom of Jerusalem. This would have severely restricted Raymond's influence and ability to rule, especially considering the fact that his wife's estates were in Galilee, within the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The local aristocracy from the Kingdom were appalled at Raymond's treatment, and eventually convinced the King to allow Raymond to meet with him. Raymond was able to convince King Baldwin of his innocence, and the travel ban was lifted.

Well, we shall leave the Kingdom of Jerusalem there for the time being, with the Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay faction clearly dominating the political scene. Now we will need to turn our attention away from the Crusader states to the Byzantine Empire.

Now, I must confess I've neglected the Byzantines for the last few episodes so, while this episode is entitled "The Year 1180", we're going to start our examination of the fortunes of the Empire at this time a few years earlier, back in 1176. Right, so it's 1176 in the Byzantine Empire. Things have been going well for Emperor Manuel for the past few years. Really well, in fact. He hasn't been spending much time in the eastern part of his Empire. His mind and efforts have been almost exclusively occupied by events in the west. And really, that's fair enough. When your Empire is over 1,000 miles long and the best form of communication available to you is a dispatch carried by a horse and rider, then it's pretty obvious that you can't be everywhere at once. Emperor Manuel has managed to make huge territorial gains in the Kingdom of Hungary, and has broken the power of the mighty Italian trading center Venice, reaping huge profits for his Empire.

But good times never last, and the death of Nur ad-Din back in 1174, signaled rough times ahead. Nur ad-Din had been strongly allied with the Danishmend Turks, and as a result had managed to keep their traditional enemy, the Seljuk Turks, firmly in their place. When Nur ad-Din died unexpectedly, it left the Danishmend Turks vulnerable and without a protector. The current Seljuk Turk leader, Kilij Arslan II, pounced, annexing the territory of two Danishmend Princes. The Princes appealed to Constantinople for assistance, and in the summer of 1176 Manuel decided it was time to deal the Seljuk Turks a body-blow.

Fresh from his successes in the western part of his Empire, Manuel had an ambitious plan. He wrote to the Pope, suggesting it was time to call a new Crusade, and to enable the Europeans to safely reach the Holy Land, he decided to use the might of the Byzantine army to quash the power of the Seljuk Turks, and clear a path through their territory in Anatolia. The road through Anatolia would then be a safe one for any invading Christians.

Manuel divided his forces in two. He sent a small army under the command of his cousin Andronicus Vatatzes to Paphlagonia, to restore the territory of one of the defeated Danishmend Princes, while Emperor Manuel placed himself in command of the massive Imperial army. The Emperor and the bulk of the Imperial forces would march on Kilij Arslan's capital Iconium (or Konya, as it is now called). Unfortunately, the Paphlagonian campaign was a short and unsuccessful one. The head of Andronicus Vertatzes was presented to Kilij Arslan, as a sign of just how unsuccessful it was for the Imperial forces.

Emperor Manuel pressed on with his part of the campaign. He led the vast imperial forces through Laodicea and onto the mountainous region near the Seljuk frontier. It was here that Kilij Arslan's representatives offered Manuel a generous peace treaty, which his senior commanders urged him to accept. The mountainous terrain didn't suit a lumbering army

burdened by heavy wagons containing provisions and siege engines. As usual, the Seljuk Turk advantage lay in their agile, sure-footed ponies, who were right at home in the mountains. The Turks too would have the strategic advantage as the army made its way laboriously through the high country. The horsemen would be able to occupy the higher ground and had the benefit of knowing the terrain intimately.

But Emperor Manuel didn't listen to the advice offered by his senior commanders. A group of younger officers were eager to take the fight to the Seljuk Turks, and the Emperor shared their enthusiasm. So he rejected the peace offer, and on they pressed. Their passage through the mountains led them to a narrow pass, just beyond the ruined fortress of Myriokephalon. The pass was so narrow that the Imperial Army was stretched out for a distance of ten miles, and it was while the army was within the pass, of course, that the Seljuk Turks struck with full force. They swept down from the mountains on either side of the pass, and initially aimed their fire at the pack animals and the beasts pulling the baggage wagons. The dead bodies of the animals blocked the pass, and the Emperor and his men found themselves trapped, packed in so tightly that they could barely move their hands.

The Emperor's brother in law, Baldwin of Antioch, made a bold play to try and swing the day to the Byzantines' advantage. He led his cavalry regiment out of the pass, up the mountains, straight at the enemy. It was a bold ploy, but it didn't work. In full sight of the soldiers trapped in the pass, Baldwin's horsemen were quickly surrounded, and were all killed.

It was at this stage that the Emperor lost heart. He attempted to retreat, and his army attempted to follow him, but the way was blocked. The Seljuk Turks attacked the trapped men for the remainder of the day, picking them off like fish in a barrel, occasionally waving the head of Andronicus Vertatzes at them, just to make sure that they understood that Kilij Arslan had the upper hand. As darkness fell, Kilij Arslan sent an envoy to the Emperor, offering to withdraw if the Byzantines destroyed their fortifications at Dorylaeum and Sublaeum. Manuel gratefully accepted the terms, and led his defeated army back to Constantinople.

Historians have been scratching their heads over the centuries, wondering why on earth the Seljuk Sultan let the Imperial Army go under such generous terms, when they could have inflicted a massive defeat on the Byzantines. But in the end, history has shown us that Kilij Arslan probably achieved his goal. The Emperor completely abandoned his attempt to control Anatolia, and other than a couple of minor forays into the region, he virtually conceded Anatolia to the Turks. This, of course, was bad news for the Crusader states. It meant that any army coming to their assistance, whether from Constantinople or Europe, would need to pass through hostile territory before arriving in Latin Christian controlled areas.

In the spring of 1178, Emperor Manuel scored his final diplomatic victory when he arranged for his young son, Alexius, to marry Princess Agnes, one of the daughters of King Louis of France. And when I say young, I mean young. When the marriage ceremony took place in March 1180, Alexius was ten years old and his bride only nine.

A few weeks after the wedding, Emperor Manuel fell ill. He had never really been the same after his defeat at Myriokephalon, but after the wedding his health steadily declined. Manuel, though, wasn't concerned. His court astrologers had assured him that he had

another fourteen years left to live and would lead his army to many more victories. Consequently, the Emperor failed to put in place any Regency arrangements for his young son and heir, the recently married Alexius. The astrologists also made dire predictions about forthcoming earthquakes, and as a result, the dying Emperor ordered the evacuation of some parts of the city, and even ordered the demolition of part of his palace.

The earthquakes failed to eventuate, and by the time Manuel realized that the astrologers' other predictions may also be false, and that perhaps he wouldn't live another fourteen years, it was too late. Too sick to make any effective arrangements for his son's rule, Manuel requested that his Imperial robes be removed and that he be clothed in a simple monk's habit. On the 14th of September 1180, aged around 60, he died.

His death signaled the end of an era for the Byzantine Empire. Despite his energy and his tireless efforts to build and consolidate the Empire, historians agree that he left the Empire in a worse state than when he took the Imperial purple. He was lavish in his spending, and the coffers were depleted by his excesses. While he scored many diplomatic victories in the west, he didn't get the chance to properly consolidate them, and they proved to be only temporary successes. And upon his death, the Byzantine Empire caught the curse that seemed to be doing the rounds of the time, the curse of the boy ruler.

Join me next week, as we spend an episode in the Byzantine Empire, examining the effects of Emperor Manuel's death, and the utter chaos which resulted from it. Until next week, bye for now,

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