

History of the Crusades.
Episode 55
The Third Crusade III.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Kings of England and France set out on the Third Crusade. This week, we will examine the Crusade of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of Germany.

We've met Frederick before. He accompanied his uncle, King Conrad of Germany, on the ill-fated Second Crusade when he was young Duke Frederick of Swabia. While his uncle had a disastrous campaign, Frederick actually did rather well. Despite his age and inexperience, he not only emerged unscathed from the Crusade, he gained some valuable military experience, and took charge of the German army on occasions when his elderly uncle was sick or otherwise incapacitated. His abilities certainly didn't go unnoticed by his uncle the King. On his deathbed in 1152, King Conrad named Frederick as his successor, despite the fact that his six year old son was expected to take the German throne.

His uncle's faith in him was fully justified. Frederick was a highly competent and successful monarch. When he inherited the throne, the Kingdom of Germany was a fractured realm, full of feuding noble families who fiercely defended their territory. In addition to the German crown, Frederick was also crowned King of Italy, which was really only a nominal title. To cut a very long story short, Frederick took his crown and began to assert his power over his subjects, gradually building his realm and reputation until he was the most powerful monarch in Europe. The name Barbarossa means "Red Beard" in Italian, and Frederick was given the title by his Italian subjects due to the fact that he had, you guessed it, a red beard.

Now, you might be scratching your head and wondering where you've heard the name Barbarossa before. Well, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in World War Two was code named Barbarossa, the Nazis apparently being fans of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

Right, well at the time of the Third Crusade, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was 67 years old, which made him a very old man by medieval standards. Regardless of his age, Frederick took the Cross in March 1188, and began preparations to leave Europe on Crusade. There was a lot to organize. He appointed his son, the future King Henry VI, as his Regent to rule during his absence. You may remember from last week's episode that Henry was married to Constance, King William of Sicily's aunt. And to ensure Henry's Regency was as trouble-free as possible, Frederick ordered his main rival in Germany, Henry the Lion of Saxony, to either give up his rights over his lands, or accompany Frederick on Crusade at his own expense, or go into exile for three years. Henry the Lion of Saxony chose to go into exile.

Now, unlike the Kings of France and England, Frederick Barbarossa has decided to travel overland to the Kingdom of Jerusalem, following in the footsteps of the First and Second Crusades. There are many reasons why he chose to do this. For one, traveling by ship was prohibitively expensive and could be dangerous. One source mentions that Frederick was troubled by a prophecy which foretold that he would die in water, but this may have been reconstructed after Frederick's death. Frederick was familiar with the route to the Holy Land, having traveled on the Second Crusade when he was in his early twenties.

Traveling overland also meant that he could take a much bigger army, although the disadvantage of this was that it was difficult to prevent non-combatants and hangers-on from accompanying the army, unlike the Crusaders traveling by ship, where the passage was expensive and precluded the involvement of poorer pilgrims and inexperienced fortune seekers.

Prior to his departure, Frederick wrote to the leaders of the countries he would be passing through, the King of Hungary, the Byzantine Emperor Isaac Angelus, and the Seljuk Turk Sultan Kilij Arslan II. The King of Hungary and Kilij Arslan both wrote back, pledging to assist the German army. Emperor Isaac Angelus sent an embassy to Nuremberg in Germany to personally arrange details for the passage of the German forces through Byzantine territory. Surprisingly, Frederick also wrote to Saladin, demanding that all territory within the Crusader states be returned to the Latin Christians. Even more surprisingly, Saladin wrote back, offering to release his Latin Christian prisoners and return some churches in the Holy Land to the Christian religion, but refusing to give the territory back. Both leaders knew this meant that the way was cleared for the Germans to go to war against Saladin.

In May 1188 Frederick set out from Germany on his crusade. He was accompanied by his second son, confusingly named Frederick of Swabia, many German noblemen and a massive army, the largest single force so far to set out on Crusade. It was, of course, difficult to tell exactly how large the German army was. Estimates put the army as containing anywhere from 80,000 to 150,000 combatants, although it most likely contained around 20,000 knights and 80,000 foot soldiers. Regardless of the exact number of people it contained, everyone agreed that it was a big army. On two separate occasions during its march across Europe, chroniclers recorded that it took three days to march past a single point.

In May 1188, when Emperor Barbarossa is leaving Germany, the Kings of France and England are still starting their preparations. Richard the Lionheart hasn't yet been crowned King of England, and it will be another two years before the Kings of England and France arrive in Sicily. So Frederick is the first European monarch to leave on the Third Crusade by quite a long way.

Now, Frederick most likely recalled, from his experiences in the Second Crusade, the damage a large, un-disciplined army could do as it marched through foreign territory. So from the outset, Frederick made sure his army was tightly controlled. He disciplined the tens of thousands of combatants under his command by imposing a method of punishment for transgressors. A soldier who was drunk, rowdy and displaying loutish behavior would have one of his hands amputated. A soldier who stole goods or property on his way to the Holy Land would be executed. Frederick not only imposed these measures, he made sure they were enforced. It wasn't long before the entire army became extremely well behaved.

As a result, they passed through the Kingdom of Hungary without incident, and on the 23rd of June 1188 they crossed the Danube River at Belgrade and entered Byzantine territory. Here, things didn't go quite so smoothly. After initially having promised to assist the Germans, Emperor Isaac Angelus apparently changed his mind. He was nervous about losing Byzantine territory to the Europeans and the Turks, and had come into conflict with the Germans previously over trading rights in Italy. The Germans had also become allied with Sicily, Constantinople's traditional enemy, and Emperor Isaac Angelus was nervous. He threw the German ambassadors who he had invited to Constantinople into prison, and

he began negotiations with Saladin. Saladin, of course, was more than happy to have the Byzantine Empire on his side.

Emperor Isaac Angelus would go on to provide Saladin with information about the German army and try to delay the German forces, and Saladin would do his best to curb the power of the Seljuk Turks, who were threatening Byzantine territory in Anatolia. The Byzantine Emperor may also have been hoping that, by allying himself with Saladin, he might be able to retake Antioch and other towns which had once been part of the Byzantine Empire but which had been in Latin Christian hands since the First Crusade. The upshot of all this was that Emperor Isaac Angelus did nothing whatsoever to assist the passage of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and his German army through Byzantine territory.

Almost as soon as the German army entered Byzantine territory, there was trouble. The locals appeared to be openly hostile towards the Crusaders, and the markets and currency exchange arrangements promised by Emperor Isaac Angelus were simply not there. The Germans found the part of the route they had chosen had been fortified against them, and the informal, peaceful passage they were expecting turned into a hostile fighting march. In late August, the Germans reached the town of Philippopolis, which had been abandoned by its residents on the orders of Emperor Isaac Angelus.

As he arrived in Philippopolis, Frederick heard that his ambassadors in Constantinople had been arrested, and he also received demands from the Byzantine Emperor for a share in the spoils of any future German Crusading conquests. It was here that the Byzantine Emperor's inexperience in matters of diplomacy started to show. A massive, well-disciplined German army was passing through his territory. The army was so big that it was clear to everyone that the Germans had the upper hand, militarily. Emperor Isaac Angelus ought to have followed the lead of the Hungarian King, and done all he could to ease the passage of the Germans through his territory, perhaps at the same time forming alliances and reaching agreements with Barbarossa to the advantage of Constantinople. Instead, he decided to insult Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. In addition to throwing the German ambassadors into prison and reneging on his agreement to provide food and safe passage to the army, he deliberately failed to address the Emperor by his correct title in correspondence, and generally did all he could to irritate and annoy. Frederick responded by occupying Philippopolis and securing food supplies around the city. Having secured a base for himself, he then went on to occupy the larger city of Adrianople and the entire region of Thrace. At this stage, there were rumors that Frederick was contemplating an attack on Constantinople itself.

Perhaps realizing his error, Emperor Isaac Angelus released the German ambassadors from prison and attempted to enter diplomatic negotiations with Frederick. However, he proved inconsistent in his dealings, abruptly pulling out of negotiations when an agreement seemed imminent, and constantly changing his mind about this and that, until eventually he found himself agreeing to terms that he was not entirely happy with. He had failed to use the Byzantine army in any way to bolster his diplomatic negotiations, and in an agreement signed at the Hagia Sofia in Constantinople in February 1190, he was basically forced to give Frederick everything he wanted.

In return for not attacking Constantinople, the Germans were provided with free passage through Byzantine territory and access to markets along the way. In addition, Byzantine ships would ferry the massive German army across the Hellespont at Gallipoli, which, ironically, was pretty much exactly what Emperor Isaac Angelus had originally agreed to

before the German army had departed from Europe. Inconsistency and a lack of diplomatic tact on the part of the Byzantine Emperor had delayed the German army for around six months, allowing Saladin to shore up his defenses in northern Syria. On the Byzantine side, the governor of Thrace, Niketas Choniates, a historian and respected commentator, made the observation that the actions of Emperor Isaac Angelus during this time did nothing less than accelerate the disintegration of the Byzantine Empire.

Right, so the German army crossed into Byzantine-controlled Anatolia without incident, but problems arose when they entered Seljuk Turk controlled territory. Frederick had reached an agreement with Kilij Arslan II to the effect that the German army would be allowed safe passage through Seljuk Turk lands and would have access to food markets. However, the Sultan was experiencing some internal power struggles, and this impacted on his agreement with the Germans.

Basically, the Sultan's agreement to provide assistance to the Germans was vehemently opposed by Kilij Arslan's son Qutb Al-Din, who was married to one of Saladin's daughters. Contrary to his father's instructions, Saladin's son-in-law instructed his men to attack the German army and prevent them from accessing the food markets. Due to the size of the Crusading force, he didn't risk a full-on attack, but resorted to the successful Turkish tactic of galloping up to the marching German lines, picking off a few German soldiers with arrows, and galloping away again before the Germans could respond. As the casualties from these attacks mounted, and the men denied access to food and water began to get hungry and thirsty, morale plummeted. Troops started deserting, and some simply gave up, collapsing on the side of the road to await either death or captivity.

But the bulk of the army soldiered on, and eventually the Germans reached the Seljuk Turk capital Iconium. Saladin's son-in-law tried desperately to defend the city. Emperor Frederick divided his army in two. One half, led by his son Frederick of Swabia, attacked Iconium itself, while Frederick Barbarossa and his half of the army attacked the Seljuk Turk cavalrymen. Really, the Turks didn't stand a chance. Against the overwhelming numbers of the German forces, the city fell easily, and the Seljuk Turks in the field were unable to save their capital. The town was pillaged and looted by the Germans, who used it mostly to restock their supplies of food.

After a brief rest at Iconium, the Germans pressed on. Taking some Turkish noblemen from Iconium as hostages to prevent further attacks, Frederick Barbarossa led his army successfully into Cilicia. Really, it was an impressive achievement. While his army was a bit battered and depleted, it had fared much better than the previous two Crusading forces who had marched across Anatolia during the First and Second Crusades.

Then disaster struck. When the Crusaders were only a few weeks away from reaching the relative safety of the city of Antioch, the army came upon a river in the Plains of Seleucea in Armenian territory. It's unclear exactly what happened, but it seems that Frederick entered the river ahead of his troops, and while making the crossing his horse lost its footing and slipped, throwing Emperor Frederick Barbarossa into the water. Unable to swim and probably weighed down by his armor, Frederick drowned. His death was a massive blow to his army.

His son, Frederick of Swabia, attempted to assume command. He retrieved his father's body and ordered it to be preserved in vinegar. Then, taking a deep breath, he pressed on towards Antioch. This leg of the journey should have been straightforward compared to

crossing Seljuk Turk-controlled Anatolia, but it wasn't. Despite traveling through Christian Armenian territory, food supplies ran low, the water ran out and, in the heat of a Middle Eastern summer, disease hit the army. Thousands died and many more deserted. Despite all this, young Frederick of Swabia pressed on to Antioch.

Bodies putrefy quickly in hot weather, despite being embalmed in vinegar, and by the time the remains of the army reached Antioch, it was clear that the body of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa could travel no further. To everyone's relief, his corpse was buried in the Basilica of Saint Peter, next to the place where the Holy Lance was discovered. Desperate to have some part of his father make it to Jerusalem, young Frederick ordered the Emperor's bones to be boiled and cleaned. He intended to bury them in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but they would only make it as far as the city of Tyre and would be buried there.

Intent on completing his father's Crusade, young Frederick set out from Antioch with the remainder of the German army in late August 1190. Frederick did the best he could, but he lacked his father's authority, drive, and military expertise. Constantly losing men to hostile attacks and desertions. He made his way down the coast to Tripoli and then to Tyre. He met with Conrad of Montferrat in Tyre, then proceeded to the city of Acre, which was to be his final destination. By the time he arrived in Acre in October 1190 his force totaled only around 5,000 men.

The death of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and the resulting failure of the German Crusade was a massive blow to the Latin Christians in the Holy Land. Instead of contributing tens of thousands of well-disciplined, well-armed men to the Christian resistance, young Frederick was only able to deliver a few thousand tired, bedraggled, and disillusioned troops, whose presence or otherwise really didn't make a lot of difference to the Third Crusade.

Interestingly, Frederick Barbarossa's failed Crusade had parallels to the German military operation code-named Barbarossa in World War Two, over 700 years later. As part of Operation Barbarossa, a massive German army containing well-disciplined, well-armed troops left Germany to conquer the Soviet Union and ultimately failed in their mission. Perhaps if they had wanted to succeed, they should have called it something else.

So, we're three episodes into the Third Crusade and this is the situation. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa led an impressively large German Crusade to the Holy Land, only to die en-route, leaving his Crusade to founder. The Kings of England and France have decided to transport their Crusading forces to the Holy Land by sea, and after years of delay they have finally left Sicily and are on their way. What's been happening in the Kingdom of Jerusalem while all these preparations have been going on? The answer is: quite a lot. Join me next week as we return to the Holy Land and examine the Christian resistance prior to the arrival of the Crusading armies. Until next week, bye for now.

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