

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 59  
The Third Crusade VII.

Hello again. Last week we saw tragedy strike for King Guy at the Siege of Acre with the death of Queen Sibylla and their two daughters. We also saw Conrad of Montferrat marry the unfortunate heir to the throne, Isabella, to strengthen his claim to the crown of Jerusalem. This week, after a very long buildup, we finally see King Richard of England and King Philip of France arrive in the Holy Land.

Back in Episode 54, we saw the Kings of England and France arrive in Sicily on the first leg of their Crusade. Now, nearly four years after the disastrous defeat of the Latin Christians at the Battle of Hattin, the Kings are finally setting sail for Acre. Interestingly, the sea passage of the two Kings from Sicily reflected both their respective personalities and their approach to life. King Philip's journey was a touch dull and uneventful, but ultimately successful. He got the job done without a lot of fuss and bother. His fleet left Sicily and arrived intact some four weeks later, on the 20th of April 1191. King Richard's journey, however, was just the opposite. It involved drama, battles, life-and-death situations, storms, Oh, and he managed to conquer the island of Cyprus along the way. It was an edge-of-your-seat roller-coaster ride.

King Richard left Sicily nearly two weeks after the French King, at the head of an impressive fleet of 219 ships. His sister, Queen Joanna of Sicily, and his newly betrothed Spanish Princess, Berengaria, were also sailing to the Holy Land. Richard placed both of them on a sturdy but not terribly fast ship. At first fair winds blew, but then things started to get eventful. The winds dropped altogether, and the entire fleet was becalmed, drifting directionless in the Mediterranean for most of the day. Then the winds arrived, but they weren't fair winds at all. They heralded the beginning of a dangerous storm. The storm scattered the fleet. Instead of concentrating on following the other ships and keeping in line, the captains of the vessels needed all their skills just to keep their ships afloat.

After the storm blew itself out, King Richard set about gathering the ships back together again. To his horror, there were a number of ships missing, and one of them was the vessel containing his sister and his future Queen. Richard sent his fastest vessels out to look for the missing ships, and they were eventually found a week later, off the southern coast of Cyprus, several hundred miles away.

Now Cyprus, at this time was being ruled by one Isaac Comnenus, who had broken away from the Byzantine Empire and was running Cyprus as an independent state, with the help of some dodgy alliances with the enemies of Constantinople, including Saladin. To say that Isaac Comnenus was an unpopular ruler was an understatement. He was a greedy, cruel man who ruled the island with an iron fist. He despised Latin Christians and was particularly harsh to the island's few Latin Christian residents, but the Greeks didn't fare much better. He taxed them and thought of all sorts of inventive ways to extract as much wealth from them as possible. The result was that Isaac Comnenus had become a very rich man, ruling over a disaffected and unhappy populace.

Three of the ships that had drifted over to Cyprus after the storm had been shipwrecked on the island's rocky coast. Isaac Comnenus ordered that any survivors be imprisoned and that any goods from the ships be impounded. The surviving ships, including the one

holding Queen Joanna and Princess Berengaria, anchored in a sheltered harbor and waited to see what would happen. Isaac Comnenus couldn't believe his luck. He invited the Sicilian Queen and the future Queen of England to come ashore, regaling them with descriptions of the luxuries and comforts which awaited them. Although eager to disembark from their vessel and eat fresh food and drink fresh water, Queen Joanna sensibly declined, saying that they could not leave the ship without her brother's permission. She was concerned that Isaac's offer of luxuries was a ruse and that she and Berengaria would be taken hostage and ransomed if they left the ship. She was right to be cautious.

Immediately, Isaac's demeanor changed, and he refused to let any supplies be taken on board the ships, even denying them fresh water. Luckily, Richard came to their rescue before their stocks of water ran dry. He landed in Cyprus on the 5th of May 1191 and forced his way through the fortifications Isaac had hastily erected to prevent the ships docking and resupplying without his knowledge. He then spent the next few weeks gradually overtaking the island bit by bit, until Isaac was forced to surrender on the 31st of May.

So he hadn't even arrived in the Holy Land, and Richard had already managed to conquer a strategically important, wealthy country. Yes, the country was Christian, so conquering it didn't really fall within the parameters of the Crusade, but Richard wasn't one to quibble about things like that.

While the people of Cyprus were initially pleased to be rid of their despotic ruler, they quickly changed their minds. Richard immediately imposed a 50% tax on the lot of them, and to make sure that they remembered that they were a conquered people, he ordered all the Greek men to shave off their beards. Isaac himself was led away in silver chains, and was eventually imprisoned at the Castle Margat in the Principality of Antioch.

Now, during the few weeks that Richard spent subduing Cyprus, two events of interest happened. The first of these events was Richard's marriage on the 12th of May 1191 in a chapel dedicated to St George on the island of Cyprus. King Richard I of England married Berengaria, Princess of the tiny Kingdom of Navarre, and Berengaria was duly crowned Queen of England. Now, while weddings are all very nice, even if they are hastily prepared, slightly unplanned ones, the next event was more interesting. After arriving in Cyprus and deciding that he would spend some time there fighting Issac, Richard had sent a ship to Acre to let people know where he was and that his journey to the Holy Land had been interrupted.

King Phillip of France, of course, had arrived in the Holy Land a few weeks ago, and he quickly and understandably gave his full support to Conrad of Montferrat. As we've mentioned before, Conrad was very well connected in the French court. He was related to the French King and owed a clear allegiance to him. Therefore, in the battle for dominance between Conrad and King Guy, it was no surprise at all that King Philip backed Conrad.

This put King Guy in a difficult position. It was now absolutely vital that King Richard support him against Conrad. If King Richard arrived in the Holy Land and was somehow convinced to also back Conrad of Montferrat, then all would be lost. King Guy and his supporters would be facing a united front of Western Kings, and they might as well pack their bags, hand the crown over to Conrad, and leave. So it was crucial that King Guy gain King Richard's support, and ideally that should occur before King Richard sets foot in the

Holy Land, otherwise, Conrad of Montferrat and King Philip might be able to talk the English King into supporting their position. It was not that surprising, therefore, that around the time of Richard's wedding, in the middle of his campaign against the Cypriot ruler, King Guy and his supporters arrived on the island and requested an audience with the English King.

The next obvious question is, who are King Guy's supporters? Well, the first one is pretty obvious. He's not so much a supporter of King Guy as an enemy of Conrad. Who is the person most likely in the Holy Land to despise Conrad of Montferrat? Yes, this is a pretty easy one to guess. It's Humphrey of Toron. Humphrey had been happily married to the now heir to the crown of Jerusalem Isabella since they were children, until Conrad had forcibly removed her and married her himself. In doing so, he ensured that Humphrey would be supporting King Guy.

The next bunch of King Guy's supporters to disembark on Cyprus were the Knights Templar. Not all of them had fallen in behind the King of Jerusalem, but most of them had. The Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Gerard of Ridefort, had always been a staunch supporter of King Guy. In fact, the ambitious and reckless Gerard had really been the puppet-master behind King Guy ever since he ascended to the throne, pulling his strings and convincing him to embark on such misadventures as the Battle of Hattin. Gerard himself had recently been executed by Saladin at Acre, but a goodly portion of the Knights Templar still fell in behind King Guy. And for this money-hungry and power-seeking group of monastic knights, the move proved a savvy one. A couple of weeks after he departed for the Holy Land, King Richard sold Cyprus to the Knights Templar for the sum of 100,000 gold pieces.

King Guy's final supporter was, not surprisingly, his brother.

To Richard, they probably seemed an unlikely and un-promising bunch of people: the heart-broken, beautiful, slightly effeminate Humphrey, who was worthless on the battlefield; the recently bereaved, bumbling King of Jerusalem, who also had a dubious military record; and a bunch of rapacious, self-seeking monastic knights. The big question is: did King Richard decide to support this strange bunch of people? The answer is yes, he did. Why? Well, it was all to do with allegiances they held back in Europe. King Guy and his brother were both Lusignanians, and Richard was overlord of their ancestral lands back in France. Since Richard ruled over them, he had some obligation to support Guy over Conrad of Montferrat.

Now there's another connection between King Guy and King Richard, one that is quite surprising. So surprising, in fact, that if you're listening to this while driving, just make sure that you don't make any sudden and unexpected moves when you hear this piece of information. I don't want to cause any traffic accidents. Okay, so hold tight to that steering wheel because here it comes. The second connection between King Richard and King Guy was: they both claimed descent from the same water fairy. Yes, I know, I know. It seems unlikely, and I can see a couple of you rolling your eyes and thinking that I must be mistaken. But it's true. The chronicler Giraud le Cambrien reported that King Richard I of England was fond of claiming that he was descended from the water fairy Melusine, the same water fairy from whom King Guy claims descent. In fact, the line of Kings descended from King Richard, known as the Plantagenets, the last of whom was King Richard III of body-in-the-car-park fame, included a couple of people who reportedly also publicly claimed to be descended from Melusine.

Now this, of course, seems very unlikely to us. If a monarch or head of state today claimed that they were descended from a water fairy, this wouldn't advance their cause at all. In fact, they would be subjected to ridicule. But back in the Middle Ages, things were different. Back then, history and myth were intimately entwined. Legend blurred into fact and history was about recording stories to do with the past, with little weight placed on factual accuracy.

Some 55 years before King Guy landed on Cyprus to try and convince King Richard to support his cause, a man called Geoffrey of Monmouth had written a highly influential book called "Historia Regum Britanniae", or "The History of the Kings of Britain". In his book, Jeffrey set out the lives of the Kings of Britain, starting from the time of the Trojan Wars, around 2000 BC, to the arrival of the Saxons in the seventh century. One of the kings whose lives and times he recorded for posterity was one King Arthur, who had a wizard called Merlin as an adviser and had interacted with a water fairy known as the Lady of the Lake. Now remember, at the time Geoffrey's seminal work was published, its contents were treated as historical fact. Actually, it would be accepted as being historically accurate right up until the 16th century, so people back then were quite comfortable with legend and history being blurred together.

So who was Melusine the water fairy? Well, I think it's about time we took a closer look at the water fairy from whom two kings now claim descent. There are many variations of the Melusine story, but the one accepted by King Guy and King Richard would have gone something like this. Are you all sitting comfortably? Right. Well, let us begin.

Once upon a time, there was a water nymph who fell in love with a mortal king. They had three daughters, one of whom they named Melusine. Melusine was a rather headstrong girl and ended up defying her father the king. As punishment, her mother banished her from the kingdom and inflicted her with a curse. The curse was a slightly odd one, as curses go. It meant that Melusine was forced to spend six days of every week in the shape of a woman, but every Saturday she would assume the shape of a mermaid.

Right, so Melusine wandered aimlessly around Europe in her exiled state, until one day she found herself in a forest in France. Who do you think she met in the forest? Well, it was none other than Guy of Lusignan, the Count of Poitou. Well, they fell in love of course, and the Count asked Melusine to marry him. Melusine was quite happy to marry a mortal man, but she didn't want him to know about the curse or the fact that she was half water fairy. Consequently, she imposed a condition on their union. Melusine said that she would marry the Count only if he promised that every Saturday she could spend the day in utter privacy in a secluded room within the castle. The Count was happy to agree to this strange condition, and the couple were married. The marriage was a happy one, by all reports, and Melusine ended up bearing the Count ten children. And of course, every Saturday she would take herself away to her private room inside the castle, which conveniently contained a bath, and would spend the day in the form of a mermaid.

You know what's going to happen, don't you? Yes, that's right. After a decade or so of his wife spending every Saturday alone, the Count became curious and couldn't help wondering what on earth his wife got up to on her day off. Eventually, he could contain his curiosity no longer. One fateful Saturday, he unlocked the door to her private chamber and, well, imagine his shock. His wife had turned into a mermaid and was splashing around, complete with a giant tail, in a bath in the middle of the room. Well, if you thought

that was a shock, things were about to get even stranger. Melusine saw her husband and, furious that he had broken his vow to her, she turned herself into a dragon and flew away, never to return. The Count raised his ten children on his own, and when they were grown they married and had children themselves, with the result that half the noble families in France could trace their lineage back to Melusine.

Now you might have noticed that the Count of Poitou's name was Guy of Lusignan. King Guy of Jerusalem's name is also Guy of Lusignan, so it's not at all surprising that he claims to be descended from the Count and the water fairy. King Richard's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, was from the region of Aquitaine in France, which of course was near Poitou. As inter-marriage between the noble families in the region was common, it's not surprising that King Richard also claims descent from Melusine via his mother.

So there you have it. Not only is King Richard King Guy's overlord, they are also bonded together by the fact that they share descent from the same water fairy. Right, now, where were we? Ah, yes.

King Richard had conquered Cyprus, and agreed to ally the English forces with King Guy. Now conquering Cyprus was a savvy move. Not only did it fill Richard's coffers with money, it meant that the Latin Christians had a handy military and supply base off the Syrian coast. In fact, Cyprus would remain in Latin Christian hands right up until the year 1571, when it fell to the might of the Ottoman Empire. So the taking of Cyprus was a strategically important event.

But of course King Richard had come to win back the Kingdom of Jerusalem, so he didn't remain in Cyprus for any longer than was necessary. On the 5th of June 1191 he left Cyprus and sailed to Syria. His first port of call was the Hospitaller castle of Margat in the Principality of Antioch, where he imprisoned the conquered Isaac Comnenus. Isaac had a young daughter, and Richard kept her, placing her in the care of his sister Joanna. Richard then set sail for Tyre. However, when he arrived at Tyre he was refused admission to the city. The garrison informed him that they were acting on the orders of King Philip and Conrad of Montferrat, so King Richard's ships raised anchor and headed further down the coast to Acre, sinking a Muslim supply ship on their way. On the 8th of June he arrived in Acre. Trumpets sounded across the Latin Christian camp and bonfires were lit to celebrate his arrival.

So the stage is set. The French King and the English King have both successfully arrived in Acre with their men. The players are getting into position. King Philip and Conrad of Montferrat versus King Richard and King Guy of Jerusalem, Latin Christians versus Muslims. Things are about to get very interesting indeed. Join me next week as the English King and the French King, along with the local Latin Christians, fight to secure for themselves the vitally important city of Acre. Until next week, bye for now.

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