

History of the Crusades.
Episode 65
The Third Crusade XIII.

Hello again. Last week we saw King Richard and the members of the Third Crusade advance inland until they were only twelve miles from the city of Jerusalem. Richard then made the strategically sensible, but resoundingly unpopular, decision to retreat and head instead to Ascalon. The decision caused mass desertions from King Richard's army, and strengthened Conrad of Montferrat's position. Unbeknownst to Richard, things are also unraveling for him in England, where his younger brother John appears to be scheming to take over the throne.

In late March 1192, with winter turning into spring and the rebuilding of Ascalon proceeding to schedule, Richard reopened negotiations with Saladin. Yet again, this didn't involve a face to face meeting between Richard and Saladin, but the negotiations were delegated to Humphrey of Toron and al-Adil. The discussions took place near Acre and were very positive, and for the first time there seemed to be a realistic chance of a successful peace treaty being agreed. The Muslims proposed that the Latin Christians keep the coastal areas they had conquered and have the right to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, with Christian priests also being free to conduct services in the Holy City. This offer seemed to be initially well received by Richard, who took the unusual step of knighting one of al-Adil's sons. However, in early April, Richard broke off the negotiations and sailed back to Ascalon to spend Easter there.

Why did he throw in the towel just when an agreement seemed to be likely to be reached? Well, there are two possible reasons. Firstly, an English envoy who was visiting Jerusalem reported that he saw Conrad of Montferrat and Balian of Ibelin emerge from the city after having met with Saladin. Richard may have felt disturbed by the fact that Saladin seemed to be negotiating with the other Latin Christian faction, and may have decided to break off negotiations until Conrad's involvement was clarified. Secondly, he may have heard that Saladin was facing some trouble in the part of his realm to the east of the Euphrates River. The recently deceased Taqi al-Din's son was showing signs of disaffection, and it was possible that he might desert, and ally himself with Saladin's rivals in the area. Saladin was forced to divert resources to deal with the problem, and al-Adil himself was sent to Mesopotamia in mid May to try and resolve the issue.

But Richard shouldn't have felt too smug when he heard about Saladin's political problems. He spent a fabulous Easter in Ascalon where, to celebrate the rebuilding of the city, he provided sumptuous feasts for his followers and showered them with gifts. However, the coming of spring meant the resumption of the sailing season. The resumption of the sailing season meant that ships could bring passengers and supplies from Europe, and the arrival of passengers from Europe meant news from home. And, of course for Richard, that news wasn't good. While the desperate letter penned by his mother Eleanor of Aquitaine was yet to reach him, many of the passengers were keen to share their stories of the trouble brewing for Richard in England. One man, Robert the Prior of Hereford, told how Richard's representative in England, William of Longchamp, had been exiled from England by Richard's brother, Prince John. The tales told by the English arrivals indicated that John was throwing his weight around in England, and doing all he could to undermine Richard's position as King.

Richard received this news on the 15th of April, and it galvanized him into action. One day later, on the 16th of April, he convened a meeting of his noblemen, barons, and knights, and told them that he may need to leave the Holy Land and return to Europe. As a consequence, he invited the men to resolve once and for all the issue of leadership of the Latin Christians in the Holy Land. Did they want King Guy or Conrad of Montferrat? With their shared ancestry to a water fairy binding them solidly together, Richard had always been a staunch supporter of King Guy, but he was to discover at the meeting that he was possibly King Guy's only fan. The European barons and knights had ample time to get to know King Guy over the course of the Third Crusade, and their opinion of him was unanimous. He was inept, incompetent, and did not possess the skills needed, nor the respect of the men required, to carry on the Crusade in King Richard's absence.

So that left Conrad of Montferrat. Yes, he was ambitious and untrustworthy, and had been meeting with Saladin behind their backs, but at least if he was leader there was some chance that he could lead them to victory. King Richard yielded to the decision of his council. Conrad of Montferrat would be crowned King of Jerusalem. A delegation led by Henri of Champagne was sent to Tyre to deliver the happy news.

King Guy didn't leave empty handed. While he had lost his crown, he gained an island. King Richard had long been wondering what to do with Cyprus. The Templars had ruled it with a rough hand, and the locals looked ready to rise up and overthrow them. Would they prefer to be ruled by a good looking bloke who was descended from a water fairy? You bet they would. King Guy purchased Cyprus from King Richard and set off jauntily to meet his new subjects. His descendants would rule Cyprus for the next 300 or so years, providing a French presence in the eastern Mediterranean until the 1470s.

Right, well, when Henri of Champagne arrived in Tyre and told Conrad that he was to be crowned the next King of Jerusalem, Conrad was absolutely thrilled. He was an ambitious man and this was the prize that he had been eyeing off since he first rose to prominence. According to one source, When Conrad was told the happy news, he fell to his knees and loudly praised God, praying that he be crowned if he was deserving, but that the crown should be denied to him if he was unworthy. Considering what would happen in a few days time, this story was probably a later embellishment.

What did happen in a few days time? Well, it went something like this. On the evening of the 28th of April 1192, Conrad of Montferrat was hungry. He was eager to start his evening meal, but his wife Isabella was taking ages having a bath. Fed up with waiting for her, Conrad decided to take his meal elsewhere. He was still basking in the news that he would soon become the King of Jerusalem. He had agreed to move to Ascalon after his coronation, which pleased Richard, and everything was going to plan. Henri of Champagne had traveled to Acre to arrange the commissioning of a set of coronation robes for Conrad to wear at the ceremony, which was due to take place at Acre as soon as all the preparations were complete.

Conrad ordered his horse to be saddled and, accompanied by two guards, he rode to the residence of his friend, the amiable Bishop of Beauvais, only to find that the Bishop had already eaten. Conrad declined the Bishop's offer for him to stay anyway while a meal was prepared for him, and he set off back home to see whether Isabella had finished her bath. He was riding past the Exchange building and had entered a narrow street when he saw two men sitting on the side of the road. Some reports claim that the men were familiar to Conrad, that they were former Muslims who had converted to Christianity and had been

working in Conrad's household. Regardless of whether he knew them or not, as Conrad's horse approached, the men rose, and one of them held out a letter to Conrad. As Conrad bent down to take the letter, the man pulled out a dagger from under his robes and stabbed Conrad, while the other man leaped onto the rump of Conrad's horse and stabbed him from behind. Conrad's guards decapitated one of the assailants, while the other was captured, questioned, and later died in custody. The fatally wounded Conrad was carried to a nearby church, where he died.

The men were Assassins. They had been sent to kill Conrad by Sinan, the leader of the Isma'ilis, whom the Crusaders called the Old Man of the Mountain. The big question was, who had requested the assassination? The Assassin who was questioned was adamant that Sinan himself had ordered the killing. Apparently Conrad had confiscated a merchant ship laden with goods that the Isma'ilis had purchased. Despite repeated requests, Conrad had failed to return the goods, so Sinan ordered his death. The Assassins may also have had a political motive. They had been quietly building a power base in a region in northern Syria, and it's likely that they viewed the establishment of a northern state by the Crusaders, with Conrad as its head, as a threat to their power.

Of course, many people at the time jumped to their own conclusions. Many of Conrad's supporters were convinced that King Richard had commissioned the killing, while a Muslim chronicler revealed that Saladin had ordered the Assassins to kill both King Richard and Conrad, but the Assassins, finding killing the English King too difficult, settled on killing just Conrad. We will never know exactly what happened, but most current historians are content to conclude that it was Sinan, the Old Man of the Mountain, who ordered the assassination independently, for his own reasons of retribution and political gain.

The ramifications of the assassination were huge. Suddenly, the Latin Christians found themselves without a King of Jerusalem. King Guy was on his merry way to Cyprus, and Conrad had been slain before he had a chance to take up the crown. Isabella, as the only remaining heir to the throne, found the relaxing effect of her long bath quickly wore off, as she was given the news that she was now a widow, and most likely in some danger, as competing factions within the Latin Christian camp strove to fill the power vacuum. Hugh of Burgundy made a bold move to seize control of Tyre, but was thwarted by Isabella, who had locked herself inside the castle and was refusing to hand the keys to the city to anyone other than a representative of the King of England or the King of France.

So enter Henri of Champagne. Upon learning of the assassination, Henri immediately left Acre and headed for Tyre. Good looking, young, popular, and a competent soldier and commander, Henri was also the grandson of King Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine, which conveniently made him the nephew of both King Richard and King Philip. As he entered the city, the people of Tyre rose up and proclaimed him their new leader. King Richard also gave Henri the stamp of approval, and on the 5th of May, only a week after Conrad's assassination, Isabella and Henri were married.

The people rejoiced, and the union was a very popular one, but how did Isabella and Henri feel about it? Well, Isabella was only 21 years of age, was pregnant with Conrad's child, and found herself marrying for the third time. Unfortunately, history doesn't record whether she was happy to see the back of Conrad, or whether she genuinely grieved at his passing. If she still pined for her former husband, Humphrey of Toron, then Conrad's death may have let in a tiny ray of hope that they may be reunited. But of course, that wasn't to be, and Isabella would have known that. Humphrey, whose main role at the moment was

to act as interpreter during peace negotiations, just wasn't kingly material, and King Guy was a walking and talking example of what could go wrong when an heir to the throne married for love instead of political expediency. Henri was young, popular and good looking, which probably made her situation a whole lot less difficult.

For Henri's part, he had serious misgivings about the whole arrangement. Isabella, by all reports, was a beautiful and charming young woman, but she had been married twice before and was pregnant with another man's child. To complicate matters further, Henri really preferred not to be tied down. He was longing to return to France, and he knew that if he married Isabella and took up the crown of Jerusalem, it would be unlikely that he would ever see his homeland again. But in the end, he was persuaded by both King Richard and the obvious support of his fellow Latin Christians. Bowing to popular demand, he consented to marry Isabella. And by all reports the marriage was a happy and successful one. Henri became deeply attached to Isabella, and later on in their marriage couldn't bear to be apart from her, while Isabella found Henri a charming change from the oafish Conrad.

So what happened to the Third Crusade after Conrad's assassination? Well, the new King and Queen of Jerusalem, Henri and Isabella, set up residence in Acre, and while they were busy settling into their new roles as both a married couple and the monarchs of a troubled Kingdom, Richard and Saladin continued to try and negotiate a peace deal. Really, peace was in both their interests at this time. Conrad's death had made life a little easier for Richard. With both Conrad and King Guy out of the picture, the Latin Christians in the Holy Land, for the first time in quite a while, were united in support of their leaders.

But the improving weather meant that more ships were arriving from Europe, and with each new ship that arrived, Richard received more bad tidings from home. Although he wouldn't receive his mother's letter demanding his return to England until the summer, he could no longer ignore the fact that his younger brother John was stirring up no end of trouble back in England, and it might actually be quite a good idea to return to his Kingdom before things really got out of hand.

Saladin too was experiencing his fair share of domestic problems. The unrest in Mesopotamia gave no signs of ending any time soon, and Saladin had sent his brother al-Adil and his son al-Afdal off to try and deal with the issue. This meant that Saladin was short on commanders for any impending battles against the Crusaders.

Perhaps Richard became aware of this, because in mid-May he decided to go on the offensive. With Henri and the French army remaining at Acre, Richard launched a combined land and sea attack from Ascalon against the town of Darum, around twenty miles further down the coast. Darum was the last Muslim stronghold on the coast, and Richard took the town after five days of fierce fighting. The Muslim garrison made a bold show of defending their town, but in the absence of any Muslim reinforcements coming to assist them, they knew that their days were numbered. When Richard's men breached the city walls and poured into the lower part of the town, the garrison in the citadel surrendered. Henri and the French army arrived a day after the town had fallen and joined in the celebrations.

The relative ease with which Darum had fallen, and the new feeling of unity and optimism amongst the Crusaders, combined with the fact that Saladin's best commanders seemed

to be occupied elsewhere, meant that everyone was thinking the same thing: let's attack Jerusalem.

Richard was perhaps the only person who had misgivings about launching another offensive against the Holy City. He was torn between fulfilling his duties as the King of England, which would mean abandoning the Crusade and heading back to England to deal with his younger brother's insurrection, and his vow as a Crusader, which meant doing all he could to win back Jerusalem. He debated, he argued. He had sleepless nights. He tossed and he turned. He even spent considerable lengths of time in utter silence, contemplating his options, which was unlike him.

Some sources report that Richard's period of indecision came to an end after he came across a lowly priest from Poitou, in an orchard outside Ascalon. The two men ended up engaging in a frank discussion, with the priest beseeching Richard to fulfill his Godly duties and take Jerusalem in the name of Christianity. Whether it was this event or whether, as some modern historians have claimed, Richard realised that the urge to attack Jerusalem was so strong amongst the Crusaders that he had no choice other than to be borne along with the force of public feeling, Richard made a public declaration that he would leave England to its fate for the time being, and would stay in the Holy Land until next Easter. As the army of the Third Crusade roared its approval, the stage was set.

Join me next week, as the Crusaders once again attempt to take Jerusalem, in what will be the final episode of our series on the Third Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

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