

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 8.  
The First Crusade IV.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Crusaders victorious. They captured Nicaea, the capital of the Seljuk Turks, and the city was placed back under the control of the Byzantine Empire. Today we will see the Crusading army continue their march eastward towards their ultimate goal, Jerusalem. Opposing them in this leg of their journey were, of course, the Seljuk Turks.

The Sultan of Rum, Kilij Arslan, had suffered a blow when his capital had fallen into Byzantine hands, and it appears that he is now realizing the seriousness of the situation. In his book "The Crusades Through Arab Eyes", Amin Maalouf states that after his defeat at Nicaea, Kilij Arslan set about planning a counterattack. He started recruiting troops, enrolling volunteers, and he proclaimed jihad, or holy war, against the Christian invaders. Remember last week, when Kilij Arslan delayed his defense of Nicaea because he didn't want to concede a town in the east to his rival? Well, he now approaches his rival, the Emir Danishmend, and proposes that their forces unite against the Christians. A fervent Muslim as well as a realist, Danishmend can see that his territory is under threat, and he readily agrees to the proposal.

Informers inside the Crusader army advised Kilij Arslan that the army intended to march in a southeasterly direction towards Palestine. Initially, their march would take them through hilly terrain. The Emirs planned an ambush. They knew the area well and eventually agreed on the location for their assault. Near the city of Dorylaeum, about four days' march from Nicaea, the road narrowed to pass through a shallow valley. The surrounding hills would provide perfect cover for the Turkish cavalry. The Sultan gathered as many Turks as he could muster, and began his preparations.

Meanwhile, back in Pelecanum, the Emperor Alexius met with the Council of Princes to discuss strategy. The next major goal was to take the ancient city of Antioch, on the Syrian border a few hundred miles away to the east. The Emperor ordered his metal-nosed general Tatikios to accompany the Crusaders, along with the Byzantine troops who had fought at Nicaea. Again, Alexius reinforced to the Princes that all territory taken in Anatolia was to be handed back to the Byzantine Empire. This plan had worked well for Alexius to date, but he must have realized that the further east the armies went and the further away they marched from Constantinople, the weaker his influence over them was to be.

On the 29th of June 1097 the entire Crusading army assembled at a staging point near a bridge, having completed one day's march. Just a word here about the combined army. At this stage. It was big, too big. Estimates of its exact size vary wildly, but it probably contained between 50,000 and 70,000 people. One historian remarked that, at the time the army left Nicaea, if you were standing by the roadside and the leaders of the army marched past, it would be three days before the tail of the troops passed you. Yep, that's right. At this stage, it was taking three days for the army to march past a single point.

At the staging point, the Council of Princes decided to split the army in two. The first army, with 20,000 to 30,000 people, was to be led by Bohemond and contained the southern Italian Normans, as well as the armies of Robert of Normandy, Stephen of Blois and Robert of Flanders, as well as Tatikios and his Byzantine troops, who were to act as

guides. The second force, comprising 30,000 to 40,000 people, was led by Raymond of Toulouse and Godfrey of Bouillon. A small number of knights, probably the wounded ones, stayed back at Nicaea, under the service of the Emperor, and were put to work under the leadership of Boutoumites, repairing and guarding the recently captured city. Bohemond's army, set out immediately on the road to Dorylaeum, followed a day or so later by the remainder of the army under Raymond and Godfrey. Meanwhile, Kilij Arslan was busy preparing his ambush. He had amassed an impressive number of Turkish warriors, and they gathered behind the hills near the pass they had chosen, and waited.

At dawn on the 1st of July, the knights and foot soldiers of Bohemond's army finally come into view, and the Sultan can't believe his luck. The army seems to have shrunk. He assumes that, for some reason, a large contingent must have been left behind at Nicaea. He's quietly confident that things are going to go well for him. With the reduced size of the Crusader army, he has a slight numerical advantage, and of course he has the element of surprise working in his favor. His plan was to have his light cavalry troops swoop down upon the Franj, firing arrows upon their enemy. They will then circle back and retreat, allowing another wave of cavalry to gallop down and fire their arrows. This would continue until the enemy was in its death throes, when hand to hand combat would be used to finish them off.

Just as the sun was beginning to rise over the hills, Kilij Arslan gave the order to attack. The Crusaders were horrified to see tens of thousands of Turkish warriors bearing down upon them, screaming like demons and releasing clouds of arrows. But Bohemond kept his head. He immediately dispatched a messenger on horseback to call for urgent backup from the second army. Then he organized the force into a defensive circle on some flat ground near a marsh. His plan was to get the women, children and clerics and other non-combatants into the center, while the fully armored knights would encircle the camp, protecting them from the Turks. Everyone rushed to comply with his order. Warhorses were hastily relieved of their baggage and saddled up to prepare for battle, and wagons were placed around the perimeter to provide extra protection from arrows.

In the rush to set up the defensive formation, a group of civilian stragglers were left outside the circle, and were quickly killed by the attackers. You have to feel for the civilians at this point. This is the first time they've actually come under attack, and they are terrified. There are thousands of them inside the circle, and they can hear and see the masses of Turkish warriors in the surrounding hills. And they can do nothing more than hope for the best. A chronicler of the First Crusade, Fulcher of Chartres was inside the circle with the civilians. He reported the utter terror experienced that day. He said that the pilgrims were huddled together like sheep in a fold, trembling and terrified. A cleric tried to calm the masses by encouraging them to sing hymns. Fulcher reports that "they sang weeping and they wept singing".

Bohemond's plan at this stage was purely defensive. The knights needed to maintain the perimeter and wait for reinforcements to arrive. This, of course, was easier said than done. He had thousands of knights under his command, and if just a handful of them broke formation to chase after the Turks, then the defenses would collapse and all would be lost. You can bet that the Turks realized this, and would have taunted the knights and invited them to give chase.

But the formation held. Turkish arrows continually rained down on the soldiers, and it's likely that a few stray arrows would have made their way into the center of the circle,

taking out some civilians. The knights and foot soldiers fired their own arrows back at the Turks, but they were still ordered not to move out of formation.

Dawn turned into morning, and the sun started to rise in the sky. It was July, the middle of summer. The sun started to beat down upon the knights. The knights who were fully armored and clothed in metal. There was no shade. They started to get hot, really hot. Women from the camp started making themselves useful by carting water up to the perimeter and offering it to the thirsty knights. The morning wore on, the sun rose higher, and still the knights remained in their tight-knit circle, hot, uncomfortable, being taunted by the Turks, and being fired upon by waves of arrows.

Now, a word should be said here about the skills of Bohemond as a military commander. His own men, the southern Italian Normans, were experienced fighters, and he knew he could rely on them to obey his commands. But he also had other troops under his leadership that day, the northern Normans and knights from northern France, England, Scotland and Flanders. As we have seen in previous episodes, leaders often didn't have total control over their armies. An extreme example was the rampaging rabble of the Peasants' Crusade, but even Raymond of Toulouse, the wealthy and experienced military campaigner from southern France, was unable to prevent his men pillaging and ransacking their way through the Balkans on their way to Constantinople. As I have mentioned before, if just a handful of knights broke formation, the day would have been lost. Yet the thousands of knights under Bohemond's command obeyed their orders, and stood for hours in the sun, hot, exposed and under attack. So I tip my hat down the centuries to Bohemond, and the knights under his command, for an impressive display of army discipline, in a time where military discipline was the exception rather than the norm.

The morning dragged on and on. Hours passed, long, long hours. Meanwhile, the messenger had found the main army some miles away and had given Godfrey the grim news that Bohemond's forces were under attack by tens of thousands of Turkish warriors, and required immediate assistance. Godfrey ordered the war horns to sound, and the knights prepared themselves for battle. It's possible that the leaders met briefly to discuss tactics, but it was clear that time was of the essence, and the meeting, if it took place, would have been a quick one. There was no time to wait for the foot soldiers. It was decided that the knights would lead the charge. Godfrey's troops were ready first, and raising their battle standard, they spurred their war horses to a gallop and raced down the road.

They arrived at the scene of the battle around noon. By this time, Bohemond and his forces had held out for five long hours. Their relief at seeing Godfrey's approach must have been immense. In contrast, Kilij Arslan must have been mortified at the sight. After five hours on the battlefield, with little to show for it, and running short of arrows, he now realized that what he thought was the entire Crusading army was, in fact, only the vanguard. He immediately pulled back his fighters to a nearby hill crest.

This enabled the Crusader armies to regroup and prepare for what they did best, the mass cavalry charge. By this time, the rest of the reinforcements had joined the fray. A line of thousands of knights was formed. On the left of the line were the weary knights under the command of Bohemond and Robert of Normandy, in the center were Raymond and his men, and to the right were Godfrey's German knights and the men under the command of Hugh of Vermandois and Robert of Flanders. A message was passed down the line: "Stand fast, all together, trusting in Christ and in the victory of the Holy Cross. Today,

please God, you will all gain much booty.” The order was given, and the knights charged forward.

The Turks must have been awe-struck. This was unlike any warfare there were used to, and the sight of a lumbering line of thousands of fully armored knights atop enormous heavy horses, charging forward shoulder to shoulder, formed an impenetrable barrier against which the Turks were all but powerless. And things were about to get worse for the men under the Sultan's command. Bishop Adhemar, leading a contingent of southern French knights, had found guides to take him and his men up a narrow mountain path, and he emerged behind the Turkish forces, cutting off their main line of retreat. Outnumbered and all but surrounded, the Turkish forces were facing a worst case scenario.

Kilij Arslan retreated, and his men followed. They fled from the Crusading forces, racing their speedy ponies up through narrow, winding tracks with the Latin Christians in hot pursuit. In his haste to depart the scene, Kilij Arslan left behind his royal tent and the remains of his treasury. The Crusaders helped themselves to the booty: gold and silver, horses, mules, oxen and sheep falling to their possession. There was even a troop of camels. The Crusaders hadn't any previous experience with camels, but they loaded them up with their new possessions and put them to good use.

The battle near Dorylaeum was a costly affair for both sides. Current estimates of casualties that day are that 3000 Turks lost their lives, while 4000 crusaders died. The army spent the next three days camped by the battlefield, recuperating and burying their dead. As a result of the battle, the Crusaders developed a new level of respect for their Turkish opponents. An anonymous chronicler who was present at the battle stated “What men, however experience and learned, would dare to write of the skill and prowess and courage of the Turks. You could not find stronger or braver or more skillful soldiers.”

The battle near Dorylaeum was a close-run affair, but in the end, despite the skills of the Turkish warriors, the day was won by the Crusaders. Kilij Arslan would never again take on the might of the combined Christian armies. Instead, he employed a scorched earth policy as he retreated, pillaging and deserting cities he had occupied and destroying crops, thereby ensuring the passage of the army through central Anatolia would be as difficult as possible.

The defeat of the Turks at the battle near Dorylaeum sent shock-waves through the Muslim world. A Syrian chronicler stated: “When this event, so shameful for Islam, became known, there was real panic. Dread and anxiety swelled to enormous proportions.” If news of the Turkish defeat sent fear through the Muslim population, the opposite was the case for the local Christians. Anatolia had traditionally been ruled by the Byzantines, and the population contained large numbers of Christians. The authority of Kilij Arslan's rule was undermined by his defeat, and across Anatolia cities and towns would welcome the Crusading armies as liberators.

Well, things are looking good for the Crusaders at this point. They have conquered Nicaea and defeated the Turks on the battlefield near Dorylaeum. So I guess it's just a matter of a quick stroll across to their next destination, Antioch. Sounds easy, right? Wrong. The next leg of the journey is going to be hard. In fact, the Latin Christians will face their greatest challenge to date, but it won't be the Muslims who pose this threat, but the countryside itself and the weather. Join me next week, as we journey down the long, hard road to Antioch.

There's no further reading this week, but the observant among you might have noticed that we have removed the comments sections from the website. I love reading comments, but I discovered that I couldn't reply to the comments left at [HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com](http://HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com), and also that they were, well, invisible. So we have removed the comments facility. Don't get me wrong, I'd love to hear from you, so keep the comments rolling in, but you'll need to use the comments facility at [podomatic.com](http://podomatic.com), which hosts this podcast, or iTunes. To get too [podomatic.com](http://podomatic.com) from my website at [HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com](http://HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com), just click on the appropriate episode heading and you will be linked to the episode at Podomatic, and you can leave a comment there. By the way, a big thank you to all the people who have left comments so far. It's been terrific hearing from you, and it's really gratifying for me, knowing that people are actually listening to the podcast and even enjoying it, which is really nice to hear, so keep them coming. Until next week, bye for now.

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