

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 80  
Meanwhile, back in the Holy Land.

Hello again. The past ten episodes have been focused on events in Europe and the Byzantine Empire. This week we turn our attention back to the Middle East. What has been happening in the Holy Land while we have been away on the Fourth Crusade? Keep listening to find out.

When we last looked at events in the Middle East, back in Episode 69, the German Crusade had managed to secure the coastal cities of Sidon and Beirut for the Latin Christians, so the Crusader states consisted of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, a long, narrow strip of land stretching from Jaffa in the south up past Beirut to the north; the County of Tripoli, with its two main cities of Tripoli and Tortosa; and the Principality of Antioch, which extended from the city of Antioch to the coast.

Now I'm going to follow the lead of Steven Runciman here. In his trilogy on the history of the Crusades, he refers to the Kingdom of Jerusalem as the "Kingdom of Acre" from this point on, and I'm going to do the same. Jerusalem itself isn't part of the Kingdom anymore, and the royal seat of power at this stage is in the city of Acre. So Kingdom of Acre it is.

Right, now the Kingdom of Acre and the County of Tripoli are neighbors, thanks to the German Crusade, which saw the territory controlled by the Kingdom of Acre extend right up to the border of the County of Tripoli. However, the Principality of Antioch is in an isolated patch all on its own, surrounded by often hostile neighbors. Now we need to bring ourselves up to speed and catch up with what has been happening in each of the three Latin Christian territories.

When we last looked at the Kingdom of Acre, it was January 1198. Princess Isabella had just married husband number four, King Amalric of Cyprus, who was King Guy's brother, and they had been crowned King and Queen of their Latin Christian Kingdom. Now, at this stage, Isabella has three daughters: Maria of Montferrat, who is Conrad of Montferrat's daughter; and Alice and Philippa of Champagne, whose father was Henri of Champagne.

Queen Isabella and King Amalric ruled the Kingdom of Acre together without incident until 1205, when King Amalric died from eating too much fish. Eating too much fish seems an odd cause of death, but Queen Isabella was used to her husbands dying in unusual ways, Henri of Champagne, who fell out of a window with a dwarf, providing the obvious example. So Queen Isabella found herself a widow once again. However, she didn't have long to ponder what on earth was happening with all her husbands. Shortly after King Amalric's death, she herself followed her line of husbands to the grave.

Now I've said that the reign of King Amalric and Queen Isabella, from 1198 to 1205, was largely uneventful, and there were a couple of reasons for this. The Fourth Crusade, far from bringing manpower to the Holy Land to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslims, which was Pope Innocent's original aim, was doing the opposite. Anyone who had a Crusading yearn and who was itching to go to war on behalf of Latin Christianity had headed off to join the Fourth Crusade. The Kingdom of Acre just wasn't the center of action at this time; all the action was happening in Constantinople, and knights, and rabble-rousers left the Kingdom of Acre accordingly. Also, the Muslim world was having problems of its own

following the death of Saladin, something we'll examine a little closer shortly. Accordingly, the Muslim rulers and fighters were happy to let the Kingdom of Acre be, while they attended to their own problems.

But of course, this period of peace and stability came to an end in 1205 with the death of both King Amalric and Queen Isabella. The heir to the throne, Maria of Montferrat, was only 14 years old when her parents died. She was clearly too young to rule in her own right, so John of Ibelin, the son of Balian of Ibelin, was appointed as regent. Unsurprisingly, the Ibelin family prospered as a result of this appointment. John of Ibelin himself was made Lord of Beirut, and the Ibelin family maintained strong ties with both the nobility in the Kingdom of Acre and the nobility in the nearby Kingdom of Cyprus.

However, John of Ibelin was only ever going to be regent for a short period, until young Queen Maria came of age. In 1208 Queen Maria turned seventeen, and it was decided that it was time to find the young Queen a husband. This was a perfect opportunity to attract a powerful French nobleman to the Kingdom of Acre with all the extra financial gain, prestige and manpower that that involved. A delegation consisting of the Bishop of Acre and the Lord of Caesarea was sent to France to ask King Philip to appoint a vigorous French nobleman to accept the hand of Queen Maria in marriage and become King of Acre. You would think that France would be awash with candidates eager to take up this offer, but apparently that wasn't the case. After spending two years sifting through possible contenders, King Philip finally came up with his response. In the spring of 1210 he announced that a knight from Champagne, John of Brienne had accepted the position. If, after two years of waiting, Queen Maria and her subjects were expecting a young, powerful, wealthy Frenchman to be heading their way, well, they are about to be disappointed.

John of Brienne was old by medieval standards. He was over 60, according to Stephen Runciman, and around 40 according to the historian Thomas Asbridge, so, old. And he was pretty much penniless. He was a landless French knight who had spent most of his life as commander to the French King. In fact, his position at the French court was the reason he now found himself sailing off to a new life in the Holy Land. He had been involved in a scandalous affair with the Countess Blanche of Champagne, and it was pretty much in everyone's interest that John get as far away from the intrigues of the royal court in Paris as possible. Marrying the young Queen Maria and leaving to become a King in the Middle East seemed to King Philip to be a perfect way to solve his John of Brienne problem. So off he went.

To be fair to John of Brienne, he did have some good points. Being one of the French King's commanders for so long meant that he had a solid background in military campaigning and was familiar with international politics. Being old also meant that hopefully he was unlikely to be impulsive and hot-headed. To make John of Brienne more appealing to his future wife and his subjects, both King Philip of France and Pope Innocent gave him 40,000 silver marks, and off he went to his new home. He arrived in Acre on the 13th of September 1210 and was married to Queen Maria shortly after. On the 3rd of October, the newlyweds were formally crowned at Acre.

King John proved himself a popular and successful ruler. In 1212 he signed a five year truce with al-Adil, and everything was going swimmingly until young Queen Maria died after giving birth to her first child, a daughter named Isabella, after her grandmother, but generally known by her nickname, Yolanda. This made John's position a little tricky. He

had reigned as the Queen's husband. Now that his queen was dead, the Kingdom passed to baby Yolanda. However, John was appointed Regent to rule on behalf of baby Yolanda until she came of age, and he did so successfully until the coming of the next Crusade.

The main hiccup in his rule was his choice of a second wife. He married Princess Stephanie of Armenia, daughter of King Leo II of Armenia. In classic wicked stepmother fashion, during the year 1219 Stephanie apparently attempted to poison the four year old Yolanda. Princess Stephanie herself was found dead shortly after this event, reportedly at King John's hand.

Well, that pretty much covers the Kingdom of Acre. What's been happening at this time in the other Crusader states? Let's take a look.

The situation in the northern Crusader states was chaotic, largely due to the ambitions of Bohemond the Count of Tripoli. In 1201, when his father, Bohemond III, Prince of Antioch, died, Count Bohemond spied an opportunity, and raced northwards to the Principality of Antioch. He established himself as the Prince of Antioch, in defiance of the rights of his nephew, Raymond, who was expected to become the next Prince of Antioch.

Now head of both the County of Tripoli and the Principality of Antioch, Bohemond certainly had his work cut out for him. He had the unwavering support of the Templar knights, which was fortunate because just about everyone else was against him. King Leo of Armenia supported Raymond's claim to the Principality, as did the Hospitaller Knights and al-Adil. The Kings of Cyprus and the Kingdom of Acre sat firmly on the fence. Just to complete his troubles, Bohemond also quarreled with the Orthodox Christian Patriarch of Antioch and the Papal Legate, managing to get both Churches offside. Taking full advantage of the fact that their Count was spending so much time in the Principality of Antioch trying to fight off all his enemies there, the County of Tripoli rose in revolt in 1204, when a bunch of local noblemen decided to try and seize power. Bohemond rode down from the north to oppose them and eventually defeated them in battle, losing an eye in the process.

In 1213, Bohemond's eldest son, the eighteen year old Raymond, was murdered by the Assassins, apparently at the instigation of the Knights Hospitaller. Still, Bohemond clung doggedly onto power, right up until 1216. During that year, while Bohemond was away in the County of Tripoli, King Leo of Armenia managed, possibly with the assistance of the Patriarch of Antioch, to smuggle troops into Antioch. Bohemond's defenders in the citadel surrendered without a fight, and King Leo appointed the original claimant to the throne, Bohemond's nephew Raymond, as the new Prince of Antioch. To settle the deal, King Leo transferred the long-disputed castle at Bagras to the Templars and restored Latin Christian lands in Cilicia. After fifteen years of chaos and strife, the issue of succession in the County of Tripoli and the Principality of Antioch was finally settled.

Now, before we move on to what's been happening in the Muslim world, we need to linger a little longer in the Latin Christian camp in the Holy Land, and take a look at the operation of the military orders in the Crusader states at this time. Now, you can see from our examination of the civil conflict in the County of Tripoli and the Principality of Antioch that the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller are major political players at this point in time. Bohemond would not have been able to make a play for the Principality of Antioch without the support of the Templar Knights, and the Knights Hospitaller, bent on opposing him, took the initiative and arranged the assassination of his son. Joining the two Orders of Knights Templar, whose knights wore a white tunic with a red cross, and the Knights

Hospitaller, sporting a black tunic with a white cross, were the relative newcomers, the Teutonic Knights, who wore a white tunic with a black cross. The Teutonic knights were established during the Third Crusade, when some German Crusaders set up a field hospital outside the city of Acre.

Now, due perhaps to the isolation of the Crusader states and the tendency for local politics to be rather chaotic, the ability of the military Orders to supply trained, disciplined knights, which they could order into the field at a moment's notice, made them powerful political entities. The Orders also had strong ties to Europe, and their ability to funnel wealth and men from Europe to the Holy Land increased their power and their prestige. At this time, both the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller could supply a force of around 300 fully trained and equipped knights and 2,000 sergeants each. In times of war, this meant that they were supplying around half the total Latin Christian fighting force, so allying yourself with one or more of the Orders became vital for political advancement.

Due to their trade connections and their land holdings in Europe at this time, the Orders were also growing in wealth, and they used their excess funds to build and refurbish castles in the Crusader states. It was at this time, during the early 13th century, that the Hospitallers undertook a massive refurbishment and rebuilding program at Crac de Chevaliers, turning it into a huge and formidable fortress capable of garrisoning 2,000 men. Not to be outdone, the Teutonic Knights commissioned the building of the mighty Castle of Montfort near Acre, and the Knights Templar began building their main stronghold, the Pilgrim's Castle, which was bigger than Crac de Chevaliers and apparently could hold a garrison of 4,000 men. Unfortunately, unlike Crac de Chevaliers, the Pilgrim's Castle fell into ruin over the years and is now the site of an Israeli military base, and therefore firmly off the tourist map.

OK, last but not least, what has been happening in the Muslim world? Well, when Saladin died, it had been his intention to divide his empire between three of his sons. Al-Afdal would rule over the Ayyubid lands from Damascus, al-Zahir would rule the north from Aleppo, and al-Aziz would be stationed in Cairo, ruling over Egypt. Saladin's plan involved his sons governing their separate territories, with the eldest, al-Afdal, having overall control over his brothers from his base in Damascus. In his book of "The Crusades Through Arab Eyes", Amin Maalouf states that Saladin had been suspicious of the ambitions of his younger brother al-Adil, who had been such a good friend of the Franks. To try and keep him on the sidelines, Saladin bequeathed al-Adil Raynald of Chatillon's mighty fortress Kerak, on the banks of the Jordan River. Yes, Kerak was a huge and impressive castle, but it was also in the middle of nowhere, and was far away from the center of Muslim political life, Damascus.

Now, perhaps unsurprisingly, Saladin's plan for a fabulous empire overseen by al-Adfal didn't proceed as he had hoped. Al-Afdal was 23 years old when Saladin died. He dutifully took up his position in Damascus, but left the governing of his new territory to his vizier, preferring to spend his time with the women of his harem, and drinking and partying like there was no tomorrow.

It turns out that Saladin was right to be concerned about his brother al-Adil. Being isolated at Kerak didn't stop him at all. He successfully plotted to depose al-Afdal at Damascus and exiled him to a nearby castle, where he spent his days in a contrite manner, paying for his earlier excesses by devoting his days to meditation and prayer. In late 1198, al-Aziz, the ruler of Egypt, was killed when he fell from his horse while hunting wolves near the

pyramids. Al-Afdal made a feeble attempt to take over his brother's territory, but he was easily overthrown by al-Adil, and banished back to exile in his castle. By 1202, al-Adil, who by then was 57 years old, was the uncontested leader of a vast territory stretching from Egypt to Syria. He and his descendants will hold this land until the middle of the 13th century, while al-Zahir and his descendants will retain their lands in the north around Aleppo.

While he didn't possess the charisma or military talent of Saladin, al-Adil was an excellent administrator. Under his rule, his vast territory enjoyed a lengthy period of peace and prosperity. It wasn't all a bed of roses though. Al-Adil spent much of his time fighting off threats from his main rivals, the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia, Zangid Muslims in Mesopotamia, and the Armenian and Georgian Christians. In order to concentrate on repelling these threats, al-Adil was happy to make peace with the Latin Christians of the Crusader states. To this end, he signed a series of truces with the Latin Christians, which operated for much of the early 13th century.

Right, now that brings us up to speed with events in the Middle East, so we're all ready to embark on the Fifth Crusade. But we won't be starting our series of episodes on the Fifth Crusade next week. No, next week we will be back in Europe, looking at an event which happened a few years prior to the Fifth Crusade. It's safe to say that this event is one of the most bizarre occurrences in the history of the Crusades, perhaps even in the history of medieval Europe. Yes, that's right. Next week we will be examining the Children's Crusade. Hmm, an army of children leave Europe intent on liberating Jerusalem from the Muslims. What could go wrong? Join me next week to find out. Until next week, bye for now.

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