

History of the Crusades.
Episode 88
Emperor Frederick's Crusade II.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Crusade of Emperor Frederick II succeed, as the Muslims negotiated the return of the cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth to the Latin Christians in return for a ten year long truce.

For Emperor Frederick, this was an almighty achievement, one which cemented himself, in his own eyes at least, not only as the most powerful monarch currently in Europe but one of the most exalted Emperors of all time. The reality, however, was quite different. The Muslims of the Middle East viewed the decision of al-Kamil to negotiate away the Holy City of Jerusalem with horror, and viewed Emperor Frederick with increasing suspicion.

As we mentioned last week, al-Kamil had been busy trying to defeat his nephew al-Nasir and take Damascus. The fact that al-Kamil had just given Jerusalem, a city which had been hard-fought and won by Saladin, to the Latin Christians played right into al-Nasir's hands. No one wanted to be ruled by an Egyptian who had just given away Jerusalem, and al-Nasir's supporters made the most of al-Kamil's incredibly unpopular decision. In the end, however, military might prevailed. Al-Kamil's much larger forces surrounded Damascus and the city eventually fell, and the lands of Syria and Egypt were once again ruled by one man, al-Kamil.

As for Emperor Frederick, he was generally viewed by the Muslims with a certain amount of disquiet. Despite the fact that the Emperor spoke their language fluently and was clearly sympathetic to their religion and its practices, they just didn't know what to make of this Christian ruler who seemed indifferent to his own faith.

Likewise, the retaking of Jerusalem didn't seem to increase Emperor Frederick's popularity amongst the local Latin Christians. He still had allies within the Order of the Teutonic Knights, but not a whole lot of fans elsewhere. To many Christians, the whole 'return of Jerusalem' episode was just a little bit weird. Crusades were meant to be won on the battlefield, not with scribes and pieces of paper. It just didn't sit well with them that this arrogant blow-in from Europe, who called himself their King and who no one particularly liked, had come in, and without so much as a sword being drawn, had taken the Holy City. The fact that he had also been expelled from the Church just took the whole thing to a new level of weirdness.

Many of the local Latin Christians also had more practical concerns about the long term viability of Jerusalem. The city's defenses had been dismantled and the Latin Christians had not been provided with any land around the city with which they could protect their new possession. They were only allowed to control a narrow corridor of land connecting Jerusalem to the coast, to enable them to come and go from the city. Clearly, the city was indefensible and could be re taken at any time by the Muslims. The one stronghold which was vital to the traditional defense of the city, Kerak in Transjordan, was still in Muslim hands. Emperor Frederick had undertaken his negotiations without any input or consultation with the local nobility, and while Frederick gained the glory of having won back the Holy City, the local nobility knew that they would be faced with the difficult task of retaining the city once Frederick returned to Europe.

If any of this bothered Emperor Frederick, he certainly didn't let it show. He was too busy bathing in the golden glow of his own awesomeness. He entered Jerusalem triumphantly on the 17th of March 1229, accompanied by a small band of mostly German and Italian supporters. There was no cheering in the streets or, indeed, any sign at all that the city was celebrating the arrival of its liberator. The local Muslim population had largely been evacuated, leaving the city sparsely populated with local non-Latin Christians. The local Christians mostly preferred Muslim rule, and were unsure what the future held for them now that the city had been returned to the Latin Christians. So if Frederick was expecting to be met by crowds of cheering people, his expectations weren't met.

A small group of Muslims remained behind in Jerusalem to care for the two Muslim holy places, the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. One of these Muslims acted as Frederick's guide. He handed him the keys to the city and accompanied him to the hospital, within which Frederick decided to set up his residence.

The next day was a big one for Frederick. He went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. No priests were there, but this didn't seem to faze the Emperor. In a theatrical gesture designed to impress everyone present, he laid his royal crown on the altar and then lifted it up himself and placed it on his own head. Writing later to the current King of England, King Henry III, Emperor Frederick equated himself with King David from the Old Testament of the Bible, and described the moment in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as follows, and I quote "We, as being a Catholic Emperor, wore the crown which Almighty God provided for us from the throne of His Majesty, when of his especial grace, he exalted us on high among the princes of the world." End quote.

Convinced of his supremacy amongst all royal figures of all time, Emperor Frederick, in a gesture of goodwill, then handed the former royal residence at Jerusalem to his only real local allies, the Teutonic Knights, before touring the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque with his Muslim guide. The guide later chronicled his impressions of the Emperor, and seemed surprised at his tolerance for the Muslim faith, noting that he admonished a Christian cleric who entered the mosque with the entourage, ordering that any Christian priest who in the future crossed over the threshold of the mosque without permission should be put to death. The Emperor also reinstated the Muslim call to prayer, which had been suspended out of respect for his arrival in the city.

Frederick's self aggrandizement and his overt friendliness towards the Muslims of Jerusalem did nothing to improve his standing within the local Latin Christian community. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, who had been based near the royal court at Acre, issued an edict against the Holy City, should it receive the Emperor. The edict was delivered by the Archbishop of Caesarea, who arrived the day after Emperor Frederick's self-coronation, two days too late to prevent Frederick from entering the Holy City.

Still, the delivery of the edict had some of its desired effect. A furious Emperor Frederick abandoned his plans to stay in Jerusalem and stormed off to the port of Jaffa. He stayed there for a day and then traveled to Acre, where he expected that his re-taking of Jerusalem would enable him to subdue the Kingdom and rule over it in the same way that he ruled over his lands in Sicily, Italy, and Germany. But Emperor Frederick's attempts to impose his autocratic style of rule over the Latin Christians in the Kingdom of Acre ultimately failed. Furious at the insolence of his ungrateful subjects, Frederick attempted to throw a cordon around the city, aiming to control who entered and who left. Unfortunately for Frederick, despite the support of the Teutonic knights, he didn't have enough men to

enforce his new policy. He then heard rumors that the Patriarch and the Templars were planning to unite to overthrow German Imperial forces in Jerusalem. As punishment, Emperor Frederick considered kidnapping the Master of the Knights Templar and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and transporting them to his territory in Italy. But the two men kept themselves under constant guard, and Frederick didn't attempt to carry through with his plan.

While he was trying to bend the pesky local Latin Christians to his will, he received some shocking news from Europe. Pope Gregory IX, taking full advantage of the fact that the ex-communicate Emperor was away on Crusade, had sent the Papal army to southern Italy and had invaded Frederick's Imperial territory. Apparently, the Pope's ultimate aim was to seize control over both southern Italy and Sicily. Emperor Frederick's territory currently surrounded Rome. He held Germany and the upper regions of Italy to the north and southern Italy and Sicily to the south. Pope Gregory wanted to put an end to this and viewed the annexation of southern Italy and Sicily to the Church as a great means of doing so.

Who was in charge of this Papal army? Well, it was under the joint leadership of two men. In a case of Fifth Crusade *deja-vu*, the Papal forces invading Frederick's Imperial territory were under the command of Cardinal Pelagius and the former King John of Acre. Any ill feeling the pair may have felt towards each other during the Fifth Crusade had apparently been put aside, and they were united in their desire to take a goodly part of Frederick's Empire on behalf of the Church. For his part, Cardinal Pelagius likely wished to redeem himself for his military failures, which ultimately doomed the Fifth Crusade, while for ex-King John, now known simply as John of Brienne, it was personal. While not going so far as to blame Frederick for the death of his beloved daughter Yolanda, Frederick had been far from an ideal husband, and it was pretty apparent that the last few years of Yolanda's short life, when she was Empress, were utterly miserable. So here they were, the leaders of the Fifth Crusade taking up their swords again, this time not against the Muslims but against a different enemy of the Church, Emperor Frederick.

Now, unsurprisingly, this move by Pope Gregory raised more than a few eyebrows. Pope Gregory was careful not to label his invasion as a Crusade. His soldiers wore the insignia of the keys of St Peter rather than a cross. But to many onlookers in Europe, sending an army to invade the territory of a Latin Christian leader while said Latin Christian leader was absent taking Jerusalem on behalf of Latin Christianity, didn't really fall within the boundary of Papal authority.

Back in the Middle East, when the surprising news reached Emperor Frederick, he was faced with a stark choice. Stay in the Holy Land until his authority was fully asserted over the Kingdom of Acre, and risk losing southern Italy and Sicily, or leave the Kingdom and hurry home to secure his European territory. The choice, of course, was an easy one. Sicily, in particular, was his home and the seat of his Imperial rule, and there was no way he was going to see it fall into someone else's hands. Prior to his departure, he did all he could to stamp his authority over his wayward Kingdom. He awarded as much property as he legally could do so, to the Teutonic Knights, then appointed a local but loyal, he hoped, nobleman to rule the Kingdom in his absence. His two appointees were Balian of Sidon, a moderate nobleman whose mother was an Ibelin, and Garnier the German who, despite being German, had been in the service of King John of Acre.

His ships were ready to sail back to Europe by late April 1229, and he planned to leave the Kingdom of Acre unannounced at dawn on the 1st of May, when no one was around. But some people were around. On his way to the harbor he had to pass through the street of the butchers. The butchers were at their trade bright and early, and noticing the Emperor's entourage passing by their shops, they started to jeer, then some of them started throwing entrails, offal, and animal manure at the Imperial party. The unrest was serious enough that it warranted the attentions of John of Ibelin, who rode out to restore order. Apparently, after John and his men had seen the Emperor safely onto his ship, John bade him a polite goodbye but only received muttered curses in return.

So, after Emperor Frederick II and his Imperial forces sailed off into the sunrise, both the Kingdom of Acre and the island Kingdom of Cyprus were left in a similar predicament. Emperor Frederick was the undisputed overlord of the Kingdom of Cyprus, and he had done all he could to bring the island Kingdom firmly under his control. However, as was the case with the Kingdom of Acre, he had underestimated the resistance of the locals to his rule. With both Kingdoms now ruled by local nobility on behalf of the absent and unpopular Emperor, without the backing of an Imperial army, it wasn't difficult to see that troubled times lay ahead. In fact, civil war will break out in both territories, as those loyal to the Emperor battle to assert their authority over an increasingly disaffected populace. The war for control over the two Kingdoms will be played out over the following decade and a half, and ultimately the local nobility will prevail, shaking off Imperial control once and for all.

But all that is in the future. For now, Emperor Frederick needs to protect southern Italy and Sicily from an invading Papal army. He succeeds in doing so. In contrast to the feelings of the locals back in the Holy Land, Frederick enjoyed widespread support amongst his subjects in Italy and Sicily, and they were pretty much united in their resistance against the invading Papal forces. Emperor Frederick took only a year or so to defeat the Papal army. In 1230, Frederick and Pope Gregory IX were reconciled when they signed the Treaties of San Germano and Soprano, which resulted in the Pope officially recognizing Frederick's annexation of Jerusalem, while Frederick promised to hold genuine elections within the Sicilian Church and also return all property holdings of the Orders of the Temple and the Hospital, whose land in Italy and Sicily he had confiscated as punishment for their failure to support him in the Holy Land.

On August the 28th, 1230 the Pope lifted Frederick's ban of excommunication, and he was officially reconciled with the Church. In the third book of his trilogy on the Crusades, Steven Runciman states that of all the great Crusaders, Emperor Frederick II is the most disappointing, and I can see his point. Unlike most of his predecessors, as a Crusader, Frederick possessed a unique understanding of his Muslim opponents and was able to use this knowledge to retake Jerusalem with diplomacy instead of a sword. His great failure, however, was his total lack of understanding of the nature of local conditions, local politics, and local rule in the Crusader states and Cyprus. These regions, isolated for so long from the west, had developed their own methods of governance, and seemingly everyone but Frederick could see that imposing an autocratic, Imperial style of rule over these lands just wasn't going to work. While it was true that Emperor Frederick could rule over much of Europe with a strong hand from his base in Sicily, it just wasn't going to be as easy to extend this rule to the Kingdom of Acre and the Kingdom of Cyprus.

Despite all this, Frederick's Crusade remained close to his heart. When his tomb in Palermo in Sicily was opened in the year 1782, proudly displayed on the left shoulder of his body was his Crusader's Cross.

Join me next week as we take a look at the next campaign in the Holy Land, the Baron's Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

End