

History of the Crusades.
Episode 9.
The First Crusade V.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Crusaders emerge victorious from the battle near Dorylaeum. This week we follow them as they march onwards to their next goal, the ancient city of Antioch.

On the 3rd of July 1097 the united Crusader army set out in a southeasterly direction to cross the arid plains of Anatolia. There are a few things you need to note here. Firstly, I didn't call them the arid plains of Anatolia for nothing. They most certainly are arid. There are few natural water sources, and the landscape is too inhospitable to support many edible plants. Secondly, it's summer. During the day, temperatures will be soaring to levels not experienced by the Crusaders or their animals in their native Europe. Thirdly, the Seljuk Turks have done a pretty good job of their scorched earth policy. They have destroyed a number of wells, as well as quite a few of the old Byzantine cisterns by the side of the road, which had been designed to provide water for thirsty travellers and their horses.

And twenty years of warfare between the Seljuk Turks and the Byzantine Empire had taken its toll on the region. It would have been difficult to eke out a living in this inhospitable landscape during peaceful times, but in the past few decades, whole villages had been abandoned, fields had been left to lie fallow, and wells had dried up. The combined Crusader armies, with their tens of thousands of mouths to feed, were difficult to supply at the best of times, but now, marching through this bleak landscape, there was barely any thing for them to eat or drink.

This soon took its toll. Animals, having marched with the Crusaders all the way from Latin Christendom, began dying. Hunting dogs, birds of prey used for hawking, mules, donkeys and oxen, all started to fall by the wayside. Albert of Aachen, a chronicler who was present at the time, reported that even some of the camels died. You know things are bad when your camels start dying of thirst. Hardest hit, though, were the horses. They had been raised in the cool climate of Europe, and had been bred for strength, not stamina. They started dropping like flies. This had a huge impact on the army. The heavy warhorses that a fully armed knight would need to take him into battle just didn't exist in this part of the world. The simple fact was, once your warhorse died, it couldn't be replaced. The march across Anatolia effectively turned hundreds, if not thousands, of knights into foot soldiers. Consequently, the battle near Dorylaeum would be the last time the Crusading army would use the massed heavy cavalry charge in battle. The loss of most of its horses in the march across Anatolia would fundamentally alter the composition and tactics of the Crusading armies.

And, of course, animals weren't the only casualties. People started dying as well. Pregnant women were the hardest hit, followed by the very young and the very old. Eventually though, everyone in the army was suffering the effects of starvation and dehydration. The only plants which appeared in abundance were thorn bushes, and the desperate Crusaders rubbed with the prickly weed between their hands and chewed on it to extract the moisture. Albert of Aachen reported that on one day alone around 500 people died.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and with the death of so many pack animals sheep, goats, and even dogs were harnessed up to pull the baggage carts, and some knights chose to ride oxen rather than walk. It's not surprising that at this stage of their march to Jerusalem the Crusaders were only covering five to ten miles per day. But desperate days eventually pass, and the army finally crossed the plains and reached the region of Pisidia. Pisidia had mountains, fertile valleys, woodland, and rivers, and was the sort of terrain with which the Crusaders were familiar.

Now, I reckon if Godfrey de Bouillon was alive, he would have contacted me last week and said something like, "I'm enjoying your podcast, but I see you're doing the march across Anatolia next week, and I'd really rather you didn't mention what happened to me in Pisidia". But he isn't around anymore. He didn't contact me. And with apologies to Godfrey de Bouillon, I am going to mention what happened to him in Pisidia.

Now, as I just mentioned, this region had woodlands, and so provided excellent opportunities for hunting. Parties of knights and archers would regularly leave camp to see if they could hunt down an animal, which they would then cook over the campfire and share amongst the hungry Crusaders who were trying to regain their strength after their recent ordeal. Godfrey joined a hunting party and was separated from them, which wasn't of itself unusual. Then he came across a pilgrim, who had been out gathering kindling for the campfires. The pilgrim was being chased by a bear. By all accounts, the bear was an impressive example of the species. By this, I mean the bear was big. This was a really big bear. Anyway, Godfrey drew his sword and raced to the rescue. The bear turned on Godfrey and grappled with him, pulling him from his horse. And now, here comes the embarrassing bit. As reported by Albert of Aachen, Godfrey took a big swing at the bear with his sword, intending to cut its throat, but he missed entirely, over-balanced, and instead managed to slice his own leg. He inflicted a rather nasty injury on himself, cutting through the calf muscle and a number of sinews. Shortly afterwards, probably drawn by the roaring of the bear, Godfrey's screams of pain, and the alarmed yelling of the stick-gatherer, a foot soldier turned up, and together he and Godfrey managed to kill the bear, Godfrey all the while bleeding profusely from his leg wound.

Now you can be sure that injuring yourself with your own sword in medieval times would attract the same rolling of eyes and chuckling that accompanies the modern-day equivalent, of shooting yourself in the foot. The fact that this didn't happen to a rank and file member of the army, but to one of its leaders, the good looking and pious Godfrey, who so far hadn't put a foot wrong, made it very funny, but the fact that it involved a bear took it to a whole new level. Anyway, that's not to downplay the seriousness of the injury. Godfrey recovered, but it's likely he was left with a permanent limp. As for the bear, its size was much admired, then it was cooked up and served to the hungry masses.

Raymond of Toulouse was also ill at this time. Out of all of the leaders, the march across the desert plains had affected him the most. The army pushed on through the mountains of Pisidia, then descended to the well-fortified city of Iconium, where they rested for a while to enable Godfrey and Raymond to recover. Iconium is now the modern-day city of Konya in Turkey, and Kilij Arslan would eventually choose Iconium for his new capital, but when the Crusaders arrived in August 1097 it had been abandoned by the Turks. So the Crusaders took full advantage of its streams, orchards and fertile fields, and feeling safe inside the fortifications, they recuperated there for several days.

Just a word here about the local population. Clearly the Crusading army at this stage of their journey east was not at its best, and would have struggled had the Turks mounted an attack, but they didn't. Still reeling from the loss of Nicaea and their defeat at the battle near Dorylaeum, the Turks just stayed out of the army's way as it made its way across Anatolia.

The army was now entering territory populated by Christian Armenians. Fiercely independent, the Armenians were not satisfied living under Turkish rule. Neither were they particularly happy with the prospect of being brought back into the fold of the Byzantine Empire. They hoped the Crusaders would provide them with opportunities for alliances, and increased independence.

The army left Iconium, their next destination being the city of Heraclea, around 100 miles to the east. This involved them crossing more arid plains, but this time the local Armenians advised them to carry water for the journey. They heeded the advice, and this time their journey across the wasteland was much more comfortable. They arrived at Heraclea at the end of August, and encountered their first instance of military resistance. The Turkish garrison at Heraclea, under the leadership of the Emir Danishmend and the Emir Hasan, looked like they were ready to take on the Crusaders, but Bohemond quickly organized an attack, and the Turks retreated and fled to the north, leaving the town to the Latin Christians.

At Heraclea, the Council of Princes had a decision to make. From here, there were two ways to get to Antioch. The usual route taken by travelers involved a 220 mile trek to the southeast, taking a narrow pass, called the Cilician Gates, through the mountains, then crossing the fertile plain of Cilicia, then up over the Amanus mountain range, using the Bellin pass, which was also narrow, and then down into northern Syria and onward to Antioch. The problem with this route lay with the two mountain passes. They were both in Turkish territory, and the vast Crusader armies would be highly vulnerable to attack as they traversed the passes.

The other option was much longer. It involved taking an old Byzantine military road northwards towards Caesarea in Cappadocia, then crossing the formidable Anti-Taurus mountains, using steep but broad passes, before turning southeast to Coxon and Marash through barren, mountainous terrain. The road exited the mountains to the north of Antioch, a total distance of around 400 miles. The advantage of this route was that it was familiar to the Byzantine guides accompanying the Crusaders, and it traversed mainly Armenian territory, so the chances of coming under attack were minimal.

Debate raged amongst the Council of Princes concerning which route to take. In the end, it was decided that the main army would take the long mountainous trek to the north, while Baldwin of Boulogne and Tancred would take a few hundred knights each along the shorter road through Turkish territory. Historians remain divided as to the reasons behind this decision. While it makes sense for the main army to take the long way around, seeking support from the Armenian Christians and clearing the way to Antioch from the north, what was the point in sending Baldwin and Tancred along the shorter route? With only a few hundred knights each, they surely couldn't hope to achieve much. Did Baldwin and Tancred flatly refuse to accompany the main army, preferring to go off on a mission of their own? Or did they have the blessing of the main army? Perhaps it was a strategic decision agreed by the Council of Princes, maybe thinking it would be useful to have a path cleared

through Turkish territory, enabling Antioch to be approached in a pincer movement from two directions. I guess we'll never know.

Anyway, the upshot was that Baldwin and Tancred split from the main army and headed east into Cilicia. We'll see what happens to them in next week's episode.

The rest of the army headed north to Caesarea in Cappadocia. Their goals for the next leg of this journey were pretty straightforward. They wanted to clear the area of Turks, and either assist the local Christian Armenians to establish their own independent rule, or preferably establish Byzantine rule, to fill the power vacuum created by the ejected Turks.

Consolidating Imperial power was becoming increasingly important to the Emperor Alexius. While he must have been chuffed to have Nicaea back under his rule, an unfortunate byproduct of the Crusader success was that it had united the two great Turkish powers in the region. Instead of constantly warring with each other, the Seljuk Turk Sultanate of Rum and the Danishmend Sultanate had come together to fight the common enemy, the Franks.

While the Crusading armies were preparing to cross the mountains and descend down behind Antioch, the Emperor Alexius was busy re-establishing Byzantine rule in the west of the peninsula. He re-fortified Nicaea and secured fortresses on the road to Dorylaeum. He then launched a combined land and sea attack down the coastline. The cities of Smyrna and Ephesus fell into his hands. The Emperor was well on his way to recovering the western part of the peninsula, which would open up a road to the south coast, providing a secure supply route should the Crusaders reach Syria.

Right, back to the mountains. The journey started pretty well for the Crusaders. Garrisons of Danishmend Turks fled at the sight of the massive army, and the odd pockets of resistance were easily defeated. Alliances were made with the local Armenians, and an Armenian lord was given several villages to rule in the name of the Emperor. At the end of September, the army reached Caesarea, which had been abandoned by the Turks. They continued onwards, bringing more territory into the Imperial fold. In an act which indicated that the Byzantine forces and the Latin Christians were cooperating well at this stage of the journey, Tatikios nominated a French knight, who had entered into service with the Emperor, to rule the prosperous town of Comana, which had previously been under siege by the Danishmend Turks.

From Comana the army turned eastwards and advanced to Coxon, a thriving town set in a fertile valley below the Anti-Taurus range. The army rested here for a few days, and it was here that a rumor reached Raymond of Toulouse that Antioch had been abandoned by the Turks. Without consulting the other leaders. Raymond sent about 500 knights southwards with orders to proceed with all haste to Antioch.

Historians are divided as to Raymond's motives. Were the 500 knights merely a scouting party? Or was Raymond hoping to secure the lordship of the great city of Antioch and help himself to the best plunder and loot? We'll probably never know. The rumor turned out to be false, and most of the knights return to the main army. A handful of them remained in the area around Antioch. They conquered some forts and villages in a valley near Aleppo and established a Crusader outpost.

You can be sure, when the other leaders heard about this exploit, it would have raised a few eyebrows and some questions would have been asked. The closer the army came to their goal of Jerusalem, the more apparent the ambitions of some of the leaders would become.

From Coxon, the going got tougher. It had been challenging already. The Crusaders and their animals were weakened by their trek across the arid plains of Anatolia, and now they were crossing a formidable mountain range. The Taurus and the Anti-Taurus mountains rise to a height of 12,000 feet, and above 9,000 feet are permanently covered in snow. Between the fertile valleys the region is barren and inhospitable, with craggy peaks interspersed with ridges, gorges and canyons.

Unfortunately, the road from Coxon, which would take the army over the Anti-Taurus ranges, was in a terrible state. It had fallen into disrepair and in some places was little more than a muddy path which wound around rocky precipices and steep cliffs. It was now early October, and freezing autumn rain was drenching the Crusaders. The road was slippery, and the slightest mishap would send the unwary over the edge, to their death. To make things worse, the baggage carts simply could not traverse this type of territory and would have had to have been abandoned. With the pack animals already overburdened, the Crusaders would have been left to carry their own possessions over the steep and treacherous mountain tracks. For knights, of course, this meant carrying their extremely expensive, and very heavy, suits of armor. It was also much too dangerous to ride. Everyone would have been on foot, with the horses loaded up with luggage, all trying to keep their footing on the steep and slippery path. It must have been almost unimaginably hard for the pack animals carrying their heavy burdens. The losses, both human and animal, were great.

A knight traveling with Bohemond's army described this part of the journey as follows. "We set out and began to cross a damnable mountain, which was so high and steep that none of our men dared to overtake one another on the mountain path. Horses fell over the precipice, and one beast of burden dragged another down. As for the knights, they stood about in a great state of gloom, wringing their hands because they were so frightened and miserable, not knowing what to do with themselves and their armor, and offering to sell their shields, valuable breastplates, and helmets, for three pence or five pence, or any price they could get. Those who could not find a buyer threw their arms away and went on."

On the 10th of October 1097 the army finally made its way down into the valley that surrounded the city of Marash. Turkish garrisons fled from the city at the army's approach, and the city's Armenian population offered the Crusaders a warm welcome. Markets were set up within the city, enabling the Crusaders to restock, many having either lost or abandoned their possessions on the journey through the mountains.

Baldwin of Boulogne arrived in Marash at this stage. He was sent word that his wife Godehilde was dying and that his children were sick, so he turned his men northward and marched to Marash. After her death, he departed again.

After five days in Marash, the Crusaders, rested and refreshed, take to the road for the relatively easy final leg of the journey through northern Syria and down to Antioch. On the 20th of October they arrive at the Iron Bridge, three hours march from the city.

For those who have made it to Antioch, they have survived an impressive test of endurance. But many didn't make it. Tens of thousands of the original Crusaders who left Europe died on the journey, from starvation, exposure, exhaustion, dehydration, battle wounds, and disease. Albert of Aachen estimates that half of those who originally embarked on the journey have died by now. Between 60,000 and 100,000 people left Latin Christendom to join the first crusade. Now, as they set up camp near Antioch, 30,000 to 50,000 remain.

And not everyone is at the Iron Bridge near Antioch. Baldwin and Tancred took a short cut across the mountains with a few hundred knights each. What happened to them? Join me next week as we find out. For Baldwin of Boulogne, the journey will prove to be a very interesting one indeed.

There's no further reading this week, but I'd like to say a bit about my pronunciation. Listener Andrew kindly left a comment saying that I've been pronouncing "Stephen of Blois" "Stephen of Bloy" instead of "Stephen of Bwar", which is how it's supposed to be pronounced. So "Stephen of Bwar" it is, and thank you listener Andrew, for pointing that out. If anyone out there has any suggestions for improvements, please let me know. In particular, if anyone would like to steer me in the right direction regarding pronunciation of Middle Eastern names and places, please do so. To leave a comment, go to my Web site at www.HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com and click on the relevant episode number. Then you will be taken to the host site, Podomatic, where you can leave a comment. All suggestions will be gratefully received. Until next week, bye for now.

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