

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 97  
The Warring Merchants.

Hello again. Last week we saw King Louis IX return to Europe after his failed Crusade, and his slightly more successful four year stay in the Kingdom of Acre. Now, although the Latin Christians in the Crusader states are unaware of the fact, they are facing their final few decades as a ruling presence in the Holy Land. Before the end of the 13th century, the County of Tripoli, the Principality of Antioch and the Kingdom of Acre will all cease to exist.

When King Louis reluctantly left the Holy Land to return to his Kingdom in France, it was the year 1254. The last stronghold of Frankish power in the Holy Land, the city of Acre, will fall in the year 1291, marking the end of Latin Christian rule in the Holy Land. For the Latin Christians in the Middle East, the clock is ticking.

Now, as you can imagine, a lot happens in the Holy Land over the next forty or so years. The main threats to Latin Christian power in the Middle East can be summed up in two words, both beginning with "M": Mongols and Mamluks. But before we take a closer look at these external threats, I want to spend an episode looking at the internal troubles faced by the Crusader states during this time. So this is it, people. The end days of the Crusader states. Let's set the scene.

Prior to his departure, King Louis did all he could to ensure the Crusader states were on a sound footing and able to manage their own affairs. We saw from last week's episode that he assisted the teenage Prince Bohemond VI to commence his rule of the Principality of Antioch. He also effectively ruled the Kingdom of Acre with the blessing of its Regent, the widow of King Henry of Cyprus, Queen Plaisance, who ruled on behalf of her infant son, who himself ruled in the absence of the true monarch of the Kingdom, the son of Emperor Frederick II and Empress Yolanda, Conrad. Now, Conrad died in Italy in May 1254 having never set foot in the Holy Land, and the title of the King of Jerusalem passed to Conrad's two year old son Conradin, who will also never set foot in his Kingdom.

Now, fortunately for everyone, prior to his departure King Louis negotiated a truce with the neighboring Muslim leaders in the region. Ad-Nasir of Damascus quite rightly saw his main threats at the time as the Mamluks of Egypt and the approaching Mongols. He had no wish whatsoever to provoke a conflict with the Franks. Neither did the current Mamluk leader Aybak of Egypt. A couple of years after King Louis' departure, both Muslim rulers renewed their peace treaties with the Crusader states and extended them for a period of ten years. This was very fortunate, as the Kingdom of Acre is about to descend into civil war.

With the military Orders and the local nobility seriously depleted following the failure of King Louis' Crusade, the merchants within the Crusader states were becoming a dominant force. Trouble was, the merchants themselves were far from being united. In fact, they were bitter rivals. Three main groups of merchants within the Crusader states were vying for ascendancy, all of them originally from three different regions in Italy: the Genoese; the Venetians; and the Pisans. These three groups dominated European trade and commerce in the Middle East, and tensions between them were rising.

Trouble between them began even before King Louis left to return to France. In 1250 a Venetian murdered a Genoese merchant, and fighting broke out between the Venetians

and Genoese, which spilled out onto the streets of Acre. King Louis managed to quell the unrest, but after his departure, trouble flared again, this time over the ownership of an ancient monastery. The Genoese Quarter and the Venetian Quarter in Acre were separated by a hill. The hill itself was owned by the Genoese, but the monastery of St Sabas on top of the hill was claimed by both the Genoese and the Venetians. Lawyers were called upon to settle the issue, but in 1256 the Genoese decided to take matters into their own hands. They seized the monastery by force, and making the most of this sudden victory, the armed Genoese fighters streamed down the hill into the Venetian Quarter of the city, burning houses and seizing goods. Worst of all, from a merchant's point of view, they destroyed Venetian ships sheltering in the harbor. The Genoese were assisted in their attacks against the Venetians by the Pisans. Eventually, though, the Pisans had second thoughts about supporting the Genoese and withdrew their support, prompting the Genoese to attack and overrun the Pisan Quarter in Acre as well.

By this time, the Venetian government back in Italy had heard about the conflict and had sent a large fleet to Acre to assist their countrymen. Despite the fact that the Genoese now controlled the inner port at Acre, the Venetian ships were able to break through the chain which protected the port. Venetian fighters streamed out of the ships, and battles were fought in the streets of Acre, with the Venetians eventually occupying the monastery of St Sabas.

Unfortunately, this conflict was not just confined to the streets of Acre. Conflict between the three groups broke out in other trading cities in the Crusader states, and the nobility and rulers of the Crusader states were drawn into the dispute. In February 1258, King Henry of Cyprus' widow Queen Plaisance, decided to try and settle the matter. With her son, the five year old King Hugh II of Cyprus in tow, she traveled from Cyprus to Tripoli to meet with Prince Bohemond. Together, they traveled to Acre, where they requested the High Court of the Kingdom of Acre to settle exactly who was in charge of the Kingdom. Was it young King Hugh, with his mother Plaisance acting as Regent, or was it the absent Conradin of Germany? They hoped that once this issue was decided, whoever was in charge could then have the power to force the feuding Italians to the negotiating table.

Unfortunately, that's not what happened. While the High Court voted by a majority to support King Hugh's claim to power, which had the support of the Templars and the Teutonic Knights, the Hospitallers and the Genoese decided to support Conradin's claim. As a consequence, a general civil war broke out in the region. In an attempt to settle the dispute, the new Patriarch of Jerusalem, a man called James Pantaleon, decided to support Queen Plaisance, then appealed to the Pope for assistance. Pope Alexander IV summoned delegates from Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, and demanded that they settle the dispute. He ordered the delegates to travel to the Middle East and make peace amongst their quarreling compatriots.

The delegates duly set sail, but they were beaten to the Holy Land by a fleet of Genoese ships which arrived in Tyre in mid-1258. The 48 Genoese ships fought a battle in the waters near Acre with an opposing force of 38 Pisan and Venetian ships. The Pisans and Venetians won the day, with Genoese losses totaling 24 ships and 1700 men. As a result, the Genoese Quarter in Acre was overrun and the Genoese themselves were effectively expelled from Acre, the survivors gathering in the city of Tyre.

The following year, deciding that enough was enough, Pope Alexander sent his Papal Legate to the Kingdom of Acre to settle the conflict. By January 1261, with the assistance

of the High Court, an agreement was reached. The Genoese would maintain their settlement at Tyre, while the Venetians and the Pisans would maintain their Quarters in Acre.

This, unfortunately, didn't put an end to the matter. Tensions between the three groups continued to simmer just below the surface, to the detriment of trade and commerce in the region. And the effects of the conflict weren't confined to the Holy Land. The Latin Christian Empire of Romania, which had replaced the Byzantine Empire following the Fourth Crusade, had been on the brink of collapse for some time. The dispute between the Italians was the last straw it needed to send it down the road to oblivion.

The Venetians, who had been a driving force behind the Fourth Crusade and the establishment of the Empire of Romania, were heavily invested in the Empire. For commercial and historical reasons, they fully supported the failing Empire and were keen to see it continue. That, of course, was enough to convince the Genoese to oppose the Empire. They threw their support behind the rebel Greek Emperor at Nicaea. In return for a promise by the Greek Emperor, Michael Palaeologus, to give him preferential treatment across his Empire, now and into the future, Genoa provided Michael with financial and military aid.

In July 1261 Michael marched on Constantinople. He took the city and the Latin Christian Empire of Romania collapsed and disintegrated. The Byzantine Empire was restored. As you can imagine, however, it was just a shadow of its former self. The heady days of the powerful Byzantine Empire were long gone. The Empire cobbled itself back together as best it could and limped along as a regional power for nearly 200 years before being defeated, this time permanently, by the Turks in the 1400s.

Back in the Crusader states, things seem to be in a permanent state of conflict and unrest. The dispute between the Italian merchant powers simmered along, although open hostilities seemed, thankfully, to be a thing of the past. The Orders of the Temple and the Hospital clashed, and the nobility of the Kingdom of Acre were divided as well. Just when the Latin Christians of the Holy Land thought things couldn't get any worse, war broke out between the Principality of Antioch and the County of Tripoli. Theoretically at least, the County of Tripoli was ruled by Prince Bohemond. However, there were a handful of powerful noblemen within the County who rejected Bohemond's claim to power. In 1258, when Bohemond was in the city of Tripoli, this group of rebel noblemen rose up in defiance of Bohemond. They marched on Tripoli and laid siege to the city. Prince Bohemond was rescued by the Templars and later had his revenge, when the head of one of the ringleaders was brought to him. That put an end to the rebellion, but tensions between the County of Tripoli and the Principality of Antioch continued unabated.

Can things get more chaotic? Of course they can. This time, the chaos centered around the rulers of the Kingdom of Acre. Back in Europe, things weren't going too well for the grandson of Emperor Frederick II and Yolanda. Young Conradin is not a particularly strong leader, and an illegitimate son of Emperor Frederick is taking full advantage of this fact. In stark contrast to Conradin, Manfred the illegitimate son is ambitious, ruthless, and a brilliant strategist. In fact, to the current Pope, Manfred is worryingly similar to his father, the late Emperor Frederick. In 1258, Manfred's hour arrives, and he displaces Conradin as the King of Sicily and the King of Acre.

Three years later, James Pantaleon, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, became Pope, adopting the name of Pope Urban IV. Pope Urban decided that Manfred needed to be stopped. Realizing that young Conradin wasn't the man to stop him, the Pope instead backed King Louis' ambitious brother, Charles of Anjou, and supported his claim to the Kingdom of Sicily. Charles marched his troops into Italy and, to cut a long story short, killed Manfred. Charles was duly crowned King of Sicily with the Pope's blessing. Three years later, Conradin made a belated attempt to win back his crown, only to fail spectacularly when he was captured and beheaded. The powerful Hohenstaufen Imperial line had come to an end.

If you think all this drama in Europe is going to have a negative effect on affairs back in the Kingdom of Acre, you would be right. The Hospitallers and the Genoese had openly supported Conradin's claim to power in the Kingdom of Acre, but after he was deposed then killed, it was clear they had backed the wrong horse. Just when you thought that things couldn't get more messy and confusing in regards to the question of who actually was ruling the Kingdom of Acre, things did get more messy and confusing.

In September 1261, Queen Plaisance of Cyprus died, leaving her now eight year old son King Hugh II as ruler of both the Kingdom of Cyprus and the Kingdom of Acre. Eight year old boys can't rule Kingdoms on their own, so a Regent needed to be found. Unsurprisingly, there was stiff competition between the warring factions of the nobility as to who was going to be appointed Regent. Surprisingly, the battle boiled down to two main contenders, both of whom were also called Hugh. The Hughes battled for supremacy, and in the end, the High Court was called upon to select the correct Hugh for the job. Eventually one Hugh prevailed, and that was Hugh of Antioch.

Hugh of Antioch was a nephew of Prince Bohemond and a cousin to King Hugh of Cyprus. Thankfully, Hugh of Antioch was also a popular and competent Regent. Traveling continually between the Kingdoms of Cyprus and Acre, and bringing a degree of stability and unity to both realms, the warring factions within the Kingdoms eventually fell into line and gave their full support to Hugh. Even the Grand Master of the Hospital gave up on his hope that the Hohenstaufens may stage a comeback in Europe, and changed his allegiance to the new Regent.

So, after many years of chaos and discord, the Kingdom of Acre finally looks like it might be getting its act together. And not a minute too soon. As you may imagine, while the Crusader states have been experiencing troubled times, much has been happening in the wider region of the Middle East, and these events are about to have a major impact on the Latin Christians in the Holy Land. Join me next week as we take a look at what has been happening in Egypt during this time, and at the approaching menace, the Mongols. Until next week, bye for now.

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