

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 103  
The Last Crusades.

Hello again. Last week, things didn't go so well for the Latin Christians in the Middle East, with an entire Crusader state, the Principality of Antioch, being effectively wiped off the map following an invasion by the Egyptian Mamluk Sultan Baibars.

The Latin Christians of Europe had been viewing events in the Holy Land with concern for some time, and with the fall of Antioch, it was obvious that some urgent assistance was required. More specifically, what was needed of course, was another Crusade. As far back as August 1266 Pope Clement IV had begun to call for a new Crusade. England had been wracked by civil war, but that had come to an end in 1265, and with King Louis IX's ambitious brother Charles of Anjou securing for himself the Sicilian crown in 1266, the attentions of the people in Europe could finally focus on problems in the Middle East. King Louis of France, now aged in his early fifties, jumped at the chance to redeem the failure of his ill-fated previous Crusade, and on the 25th of March 1267 once again made a public vow to take up the Cross. Also raising their hands to mount a Crusade were Lord Edward of England and King James I of Aragon.

Lord Edward was the son of the aging King Henry III of England, and would later become King Edward I. Against his father's wishes. Lord Edward made his Crusading vow in 1268, and many of the noblemen of England, keen to put the trauma of the recent civil war behind them, followed his example. Despite the English and Spanish involvement, the bulk of the Crusaders came from France.

Unfortunately, since I'd like to end our look at the Last Crusade on a high note, all three expeditions, the French, the Spanish, and the English were complete and utter failures. We'll take a look at them one by one, starting with the largest one, the French.

As with his previous Crusade, King Louis made meticulous preparations. He personally toured his Kingdom, drumming up support from areas previously free of Crusading zeal. In his book "God's War", Christopher Tyerman states that the resulting French army can't have been much smaller than the army he took to Egypt on his first Crusade, perhaps totaling between 10,000 and 15,000 men. King Louis' first Crusade invaded Egypt, hoping to take Cairo in Egypt itself, and from there mount a rescue expedition to the Crusader states. This strategy was the same one undertaken by the Fifth Crusade, and despite recent events in the Middle East, King Louis saw no need to deviate from this plan.

At least that's how things went initially. However, at some time during 1268 or 1269 King Louis changed his mind. Now, unfortunately for us, John of Joinville didn't sign up for this Crusade, and as a consequence, we don't know a great deal about King Louis' mindset or his decision-making process. What we do know is that King Louis radically changed his plans. Instead of heading to Egypt, King Louis decided to sail to Tunis, in modern day Tunisia.

Why? Well, Tunis at this time was ruled by the Muslim warlord Abu Abdallah. Abu Abdallah was Sultan Baibars' rival in the region of North Africa, and he was also a rival of King Louis' brother Charles of Anjou, the new King of Sicily. Apparently Tunis was being

used as a base for supporters of the defeated Hohenstaufen royal Sicilian line, who were no doubt hoping to eventually oust Charles of Anjou and stage a comeback.

King Louis' plan was to use Tunis as a staging post. His Crusading armies would muster in Tunis, convert Abu Abdallah to Christianity, then the newly Christian state of Tunis would join with King Louis' army to invade Egypt. Once both Tunis and Egypt were under Christian control, it was just a matter of marching into the Holy Land, taking Jerusalem, and saving the Crusader states. Easy.

King Louis departed on his Crusade in March 1270. Copying the rituals he had used 22 years earlier, he received his Crusading regalia at Saint-Denis before entering Notre Dame in Paris barefoot, as a humble penitent Christian. Then off he went to the coast to await his ships. Unfortunately, they were late, delaying King Louis' departure until late June. With the Crusading army already starting to suffer in the summer heat, King Louis sailed with the French fleet to Sardinia, and it was only once they were safely at Sardinia that King Louis announced the change of destination. He directed his surprised army to sail to Tunis instead of Egypt. The fleet obeyed his orders, and the Crusaders arrived at Tunis in mid July. A week later they moved to Carthage, in search of a reliable water supply. There they set up camp and awaited the arrival of Charles of Anjou.

It can be hot in northern Africa at the height of summer, really hot. Unfortunately for King Louis, back in Sicily, Charles of Anjou had only just started getting his fleet organized. It would be another month before Charles' fleet would arrive in Tunis. There was nothing the thousands of French Crusaders could do but wait around, packed together in their camp, in the terrible heat.

No-one was surprised when the Crusaders started getting sick. Conditions in Crusader camps were far from sanitary, and the heat was making a life unbearable. Disease broke out, probably typhus or dysentery, and raced through the camp. The disease didn't spare the nobility. King Louis' son Tristan, the child of sorrow who was born at Damietta, died of the disease, and both King Louis and his eldest son and heir, Philip, became seriously ill.

King Louis died on the 25th of August 1270, just as the first of Charles of Anjou's ships were arriving. Legend has it that his final words were "Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Hoping to oversee the conversion of northern Africa to Christianity, King Louis instead died before his Crusade even got going. Despite the spectacular failure of his Crusading efforts, King Louis was canonized in 1297, the only Crusading King to be made a saint.

With the new King Philip III still too sick to take command, Charles of Anjou rose to the occasion. Deciding that withdrawing from Tunis was the only viable option, Charles managed to negotiate terms with Abu Abdallah. The Crusaders agreed to leave Tunis in return for an agreement to permit Christian worship in the country and the payment of 210,000 gold ounces, of which Charles decided to take a third. The now much wealthier Charles, and the disgruntled remainder of the Crusading army, left Tunis in November. Vague plans were made to sail to Acre, but a storm hit the fleet in mid-November, causing as many as forty ships to sink, with the loss of over 1,000 lives. With the Crusaders' ranks already decimated by disease, the shipwrecks were the last straw. Most of the army abandoned their vows and returned home to Europe.

King Louis' son, Philip III returned to Paris. In his book "God's War", Christopher Tyerman states that when Philip arrived home to his new Kingdom, he was bearing the bodies of his

father, his brother, his brother-in-law, wife, and stillborn son, making his entry into Paris more like a funeral procession. With the failure of his second Crusade even more spectacular than his first, King Louis proved that a pious leader, meticulous planning, and a will to succeed are no guarantees of Crusading success.

The next Crusade we will turn to is the Spanish Crusade, known as the Crusade of the Infants of Aragon. The King of Spain, King James I of Aragon, mustered a Spanish Crusading army and set sail for the Holy Land, leaving Barcelona on the 1st of September 1269. Unfortunately, the fleet was battered by a severe storm not long after they set out, and the King and most of the army decided to return to Spain. However, the King's two illegitimate sons, Fernando Sanchez and Pedro Fernandez, collectively known as the "Infants of Aragon", decided to press on. A small portion of the fleet followed them, and they sailed to the Middle East, arriving at Acre in December 1269. The Spanish Crusaders were eager to go on the offensive, and Baibars obliged them by arriving outside Acre with what looked like a modest force of only 3,000 men. The Infants of Aragon mustered their troops and prepared to attack the Muslim army, but they were restrained by some knights from the military Orders, who feared that the set-up might be a trap.

They were right to be cautious. A French force was currently heading back to Acre, having conducted some raids on Muslim positions near Montfort. They saw the small Muslim force outside Acre and immediately went on the attack. As soon as the two armies were engaged, Baibars sprang his trap. The larger portion of his force were hidden in the hills around Acre. They now poured out from their hiding places and surrounded the French, who were all killed.

Watching in horror from the safety of Acre, a contingent of men were eager to go to their rescue, but this time the two Spanish commanders, having learned their lesson, restrained them. Fully realizing that it could have been them laying dead in the fields outside Acre, the Infants of Aragon seemed to lose enthusiasm for their Crusade, and they headed back to Spain with their troops shortly after.

Last but not least, we turn to the Crusade of Lord Edward of England. Like the Infants, Lord Edward managed to make it to the Holy Land, arriving at Acre nearly eighteen months after the Spanish, on the 9th of May 1271. Edward was in his thirties at this stage, and was heir to the English throne. His arrival, along with his wife, Eleanor of Castile, and a small fleet of thirteen ships carrying around 1,000 men, caused quite a stir. King Hugh I of Acre, who was also King of Cyprus, traveled to Acre to join him, as did the Prince without a Principality, Prince Bohemond of Antioch. Lord Edward's plan was to rally the Latin Christians of Cyprus and Acre and combine them into one large army. That army, with the assistance of the Mongols, would then join with Lord Edward's small army to attack and defeat Baibars.

It was a good plan, but it didn't work. Not all of the Latin Christians wanted to see Baibars defeated. The Venetians had formed lucrative trading agreements with the Mamluks, and were supplying the Egyptians with timber and metal, which they used to create armaments, and the Genoese were doing their best to muscle in on this arrangement. The Cyprian forces, from the safety of their island which wasn't threatened by the Muslims, had no real interest in risking their lives for their counterparts in Acre, and Lord Edward's diplomatic overtures to the Mongols proved fruitless. Lord Edward led numerous minor forays into Muslim territory, but he soon realized that, without a bigger army, there were limits to what he could achieve.

By the spring of 1272, after having spent a year in Acre, Lord Edward came to the realization that diplomacy was the way forward. Without the larger army he was after, Lord Edward couldn't defeat Baibars. Instead, he decided to aim a little lower. He would merely seek to preserve the two remaining Crusader states for the moment. The defeat of Baibars and the re-taking of former Latin Christian territory would have to wait for another day. It was time for a truce.

Sultan Baibars could also see the sense in a truce. He knew it was only a matter of time before the Crusader states fell into Muslim hands, provided there was no further intervention by the West. Baibars' aim in signing the truce was to prevent another Crusade. The truce between Sultan Baibars and the government at Acre was negotiated with the assistance of the King of Sicily, Charles of Anjou. According to Steven Runciman in the third book of his trilogy on the Crusades, it was also in the King of Sicily's interests to arrange a truce. The ambitious Charles of Anjou had thoughts of one day adding the Crusader states to his realm. Currently he was occupied with thoughts of attempting to conquer Constantinople. The truce would preserve the Crusader states in their current small, conquerable form until he was ready to give them his full attention.

So on the 22nd of May 1272 the truce was happily signed by Sultan Baibars and King Hugh of Acre. The truce guaranteed the Crusader states in their present form for a period of ten years and ten months, along with the right to use the pilgrim route to Nazareth.

While Baibars was happy to sign a truce with the leaders of the Kingdom of Acre and the County of Tripoli, he was not so keen to make peace with Lord Edward. In fact, he decided to assassinate him. Possibly due to the fact that Lord Edward would one day become the King of England, and had made it clear that he intended to return to the Holy Land with a large army to defeat the Muslims, Baibars decided he needed to be eliminated. He hired an assassin who spent some months infiltrating Lord Edward's private retinue, posing as a native Christian. Then in late May or June, 1272 while Lord Edward was in his private chambers, the assassin struck. He lunged at Lord Edward with a dagger. Lord Edward managed to deflect the blow and instead of inflicting a fatal wound, he only received a relatively minor cut near his hip. The assassin was captured and beaten to death.

Fearing that the dagger may have been poisoned, Lord Edward was administered with an antidote. He was quite ill for a few months, whether from the cut itself, the poison, or the antidote, it's not clear. A few weeks after the assassination attempt, he received news that his father, the elderly King Henry III of England, was dying. It was time to return home. In late September 1272 Lord Edward set sail for England. By the time he eventually made it home, his father had died, and Lord Edward was crowned King Edward I on the 19th of August 1274.

King Edward never did make it back to the Holy Land. Instead, he focused his attentions on problems closer to home, particularly in Scotland. Scotland proved to be a constant headache for King Edward, and he was determined to conquer those pesky Scots once and for all. He savagely put down a rebellion by William Wallace of "Braveheart" fame, and was attempting to do the same to Robert the Bruce when he died in 1307.

So, with a ten year truce operating in the Holy Land, I bet you're thinking that everything is going to be nice and quiet for the next ten years. Well, you're wrong. Join me next week as

King Hugh of Acre tries to deal with internal strife within the Kingdom, and Baibars turns his attentions towards the Mongols. Until next week, bye for now.

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