

History of the Crusades.
Episode 105
Party Like There's No Tomorrow.

Hello again. Last week we saw internal strife arise once again within the two remaining Crusader states. The strife was so bad that King Hugh, the King of Acre and the King of Cyprus, decided to leave the troublesome Kingdom of Acre to its own devices. He retired to his remaining Kingdom, the much easier to rule Kingdom of Cyprus, and didn't bother raising any objections when Charles of Anjou, the King of Sicily, declared himself the King of Acre in 1277.

Also in the year 1277, Sultan Baibars died unexpectedly in Damascus. This news was greeted with jubilation by the Latin Christians of the Middle East, who hoped for the collapse and demise of the powerful Mamluk Sultanate. For a while, it looked like their hopes might be realized. Baibars' son and heir was a young man called Barakah, but he proved to be an inept ruler, spending the first couple of years of his reign trying unsuccessfully to quell in-fighting between Egypt's powerful Emirs. It all became too much for Sultan Baibars' top commander in Syria, al-Mansur Qalawun, an ex slave who was a legendary for the massive price he attracted when he was sold in the slave markets as a young man. He had grown into a powerful soldier and military commander and rose to become Sultan Baibars' right hand man in Syria. In August 1279, Qalawun decided that he had had enough of Barakah's ineffective attempts at ruling, and he gathered the Syrian troops together and marched on Cairo. Barakah promptly abdicated, and four months later Qalawun proclaimed himself Sultan. Vanquishing the army of the governor of Damascus, who also proclaimed himself Sultan in 1280, Qalawun eventually asserted his control over the late Sultan Baibars' vast territory.

Around about this time, the Mongols decided to take advantage of Qalawun's inexperience as the commander of the Egyptian and Syrian forces, and launched a major raid into Syria. Deciding they could use all the help they could get to try and break the Muslim stranglehold on the region, the Mongols requested assistance from the Crusader states. But it won't surprise anyone that the Latin Christians were in a state of internal disarray, and their response to the Mongol call to arms was virtually non-existent. King Leo III of Armenia joined with the Mongols and was accompanied by a handful of Knights Hospitaller, but that was the extent of the Frankish contribution to the military campaign.

All the leaders of the Crusader states decided instead to seek a peace treaty from Qalawun. In the year 1283, the treaty was renewed and formalized. It was proclaimed for a period of ten years, ten months, ten days and ten hours (see what they did there?), and covered the cities of Acre and Sidon, and all the orchards, lands and vineyards surrounding the cities and the villages dependent on those cities. Tyre negotiated a separate truce with the Egyptians. The northern cities of Tripoli and Latakia were not included, and this is an important point to remember. Neither was the Hospitaller castle Marqab, one of the few remaining Latin Christian fortresses.

Right, well the Mongols, the Armenians, and a handful of Knights Hospitaller are mobilizing and marching into Muslim territory, seeking to destroy the armies of the new Sultan Qalawun. How did that pan out? Well, as the Mongol army moved into Syria, the Egyptian army gathered in Damascus, then marched northwards to meet the invaders. The two armies met in the field outside the city of Homs. In the end, the day was won by the

Egyptians. Although the two sides seemed evenly matched, the commander of the Mongol forces was wounded in the fighting, and this seems to have affected his will to fight. He ordered a general retreat. The army of King Leo found itself isolated during the retreat and suffered heavy losses as a result. The Egyptians prevailed and Qalawun proved that he could defend and protect his territory.

With most of the Latin Christians in the Holy Land happy to sit back and relax, now that peace terms had been negotiated with the Egyptians, what was happening back in Europe? Were the western monarchs and the Papacy intending to muster another Crusade to come to the assistance of the dwindling and vulnerable Crusader states?

Well, back in the mid 1270s, Pope Gregory X had done his best to call for another Crusade. He summoned a council at Lyon for this purpose. The only monarch to attend the meeting was the elderly King James I of Aragon. Both King Philip III of France and King Edward I of England were distracted by affairs within their own kingdoms. Despite these setbacks, Pope Gregory persisted. He managed to convince King Philip to take up the Cross, and ordered fortresses within the Crusader states to be repaired. But his efforts came to nothing. It seemed that, while everyone was happy to talk about a Crusade to the Holy Land, no one was actually keen to take any action. When Pope Gregory died in 1276 his Crusade died with him.

King Edward of England, however, continued to take an interest in Middle Eastern affairs. He kept in touch with the Knights Hospitaller and was keen to see the Latin Christians in the Holy Land combine with the Mongols to defeat the Egyptians. Following the Battle of Homs in 1281, the Prior of the English division of the Knights Hospitaller, who was present at the battle, wrote to King Edward describing what took place. Interestingly, he told King Edward that both King Hugh and Bohemond VII didn't make it to the battle on time, which was stretching the truth a little, as both King Hugh and Bohemond had made peace with Qalawun and never intended to take up arms against him.

What about Charles of Anjou, the current self-declared King of Acre? What assistance was he providing? Well, Charles was facing some pretty serious issues back home in Sicily. On the 30th of March 1282, the Sicilians decided they had had enough of Charles of Anjou and his French knights. To show just how unhappy they were with their French ruler, they rose up in revolt and killed every Frenchman on the island kingdom. Charles himself wasn't killed, but the Sicilian revolt started a chain reaction which led to the total collapse of Charles' empire. He had planned to overtake Constantinople and had won territory in the Balkans to further this aim, but with his power base in Sicily destroyed, his eastern Mediterranean interests soon followed suit, and Charles was left empty-handed.

Back in the Holy Land, Charles' representative Roger of San Severino suddenly found himself running a Kingdom without any real backing. He was recalled back to Italy. Before he left, he handed over his position as administrator of the realm to his seneschal, Odo Poilechian.

In 1283 King Hugh of Cyprus decided to take back the Kingdom of Acre. Along with two of his sons, he set out from Cyprus to Acre but was blown off course, landing instead at Beirut, where he was well received. He sailed down the coast to Tyre where things started to go wrong. To start with, his royal standard fell into the sea, and an enormous ceremonial cross carried by a procession of clergymen who had come to greet him, slipped and crushed the skull of a bystander. Understandably, King Hugh took both of

these as ill omens. Then his son and heir, Bohemond, died. To make matters worse, no one came down from Acre to greet him, the Templars at Acre, preferring the compliant government of Odo Poilechian.

King Hugh died at Tyre the following year. He was succeeded by his seventeen year old son John, who was crowned King of Cyprus in May 1284. He then traveled to Tyre, where he was crowned King of Acre. However, he was only really recognized as King of Acre by his subjects in Tyre and Beirut. King John's reign only lasted a year. He died in May 1285, and was succeeded by his younger brother Henry, who, aged fourteen, was crowned King of Cyprus. Perhaps understandably, Henry decided not to venture to the Crusader states to claim his other crown, and remained in Cyprus.

Meanwhile, Qalawun decided to punish the Knights Hospitaller for siding against him with the Mongols. The towns and fortresses in the northernmost regions of the Crusader states were not covered by the treaty of 1283, and Qalawun decided to take full advantage of this fact. In April 1285, Sultan Qalawun marched to the Hospitaller castle at Marqab. The castle stood on the summit of the mountain, and the Egyptians dragged a huge number of catapult machines up the side of the mountain, and began pummeling the castle walls. The castle was equipped with its own catapults, and they began hurling missiles back at the Egyptians, managing to destroy or disable many of their machines.

The castle held out against the Egyptians for more than a month, but its walls were finally breached when the Egyptians successfully undermined one of the castle towers, known ironically as the Tower of Hope, bringing it crashing down. The garrison surrendered, and Qalawun took possession of the fortress.

Around the same time as the Hospitaller castle fell into Muslim hands, news reached the Holy Land that Charles of Anjou had died. He was succeeded by his son Charles II of Naples, who was much too busy fighting a civil war in Sicily to worry about the faraway Kingdom of Acre. Sensing an opportunity, young King Henry of Cyprus sent a representative to Acre to assess his support within the city. Surprisingly, he did seem to have some supporters. The Orders of the Hospital and the Teutonic Knights openly backed him to become the new King of Acre, and after some hesitation, the Templars also came to the party. Native French knights living in the city however, still supported Odo, who was refusing to resign as the governor of Acre.

Young King Henry made his move and sailed to Acre. Odo was eventually persuaded that the majority of the city was against him, and he reluctantly vacated the royal palace in Acre. King Henry of Cyprus was crowned King of Acre at Tyre on the 15th of August 1286. What do you do when you are a fifteen year old boy who has just secured another crown for himself? Well, you hold a party. King Henry returned to Acre and held a fortnight of festivities. This was not just a minor celebration. This was two weeks of banqueting, tournaments, pageants, plays, music, games, and general merry-making, and the people of Acre lapped it all up. They partied like there was no tomorrow. In the third volume of his trilogy on the Crusades, Steven Runciman writes that not for a century had there been such a splendid festival in the Crusader states. And really, it's great to see them kicking up their heels and having a terrific time because, well, dark days are ahead.

After the party was over, King Henry's advisers recommended that he returned to Cyprus. He did so, leaving Balian of Ibelin in charge of Acre.

Meanwhile, in the Mongol camp, strange happenings were afoot. Khan Hulagu's son Abaqa died in 1282 and his brother was named as successor. To the shock and amazement of many, Abaqa's brother became the new Khan, then promptly converted to Islam, changed his name to Ahmed, and started calling himself Sultan instead of Khan. While the Mongols were still reeling from the shock, Ahmed traveled to Cairo to negotiate a peace treaty with his fellow Muslim and new best buddy, the Egyptian Sultan Qalawun. It really came as no surprise to anyone when Ahmed was murdered in 1284 and replaced with Abaqa's son Arghun, who assured everyone that he wouldn't convert to Islam, although he did seem to lean towards Buddhism as a religion, which was unsettling to some. Despite his preference for Buddhism, Khan Arghun's best friend was a Nestorian Christian, and his influence meant that Khan Arghun developed not only an interest in saving and preserving Christian religious sites in the Holy Land, but he also decided that Jerusalem should be re-taken and given back to the Christians. How would he achieved this? Well, he would call for another Crusade.

It was pretty clear that the ailing and reduced Crusader states couldn't muster enough men to wrestle Jerusalem back from the Egyptians, so in 1285 Khan Arghun wrote to Pope Honorius IV in Rome, to suggest that Latin Christian forces from Europe combine with the Mongol army to retake Jerusalem. Khan Arghun didn't receive a response to his suggestion, but that didn't seem to discourage him. So passionate was his conviction that the Europeans and Mongols should join to preserve the Holy Land for the Christians, that in 1287 he sent an ambassador, Rabban Sauma, to travel to the West to drum up support for his proposal.

Rabban Sauma's journey was nothing short of remarkable. He traveled first to Constantinople, where he received a warm reception from the current Emperor Andronicus. After visiting the beautiful church Hagia Sofia, Rabban Sauma made his way to Rome. Unfortunately, Pope Honorius had just died and his successor had not been elected. He was treated with derision and suspicion by the Cardinals, so he decided to head on over to France, where he spent a delightful time at the court of young King Philip IV. King Philip personally escorted Rabban Sauma around the beautiful Sainte-Chapelle, which had been built by the now saintly Crusading King, King Louis IX, and promised him that he could rely on the support of the armies of France in his bid to retake Jerusalem.

The next stop was the court of King Edward I of England. Rabban Sauma was mightily impressed by the intellect and energy of King Edward, who came up with a raft of practical suggestions on how to conduct the Crusade. Unfortunately though, King Edward, despite professing his support for the idea, wouldn't commit to an actual date for his departure to the Holy Land. Returning back to Rome, Rabban Sauma met with the newly ordained Pope Nicholas IV. This time, he was warmly welcomed and found the new Pope just as friendly and helpful as the Kings of France and England. Rabban Sauma celebrated Mass with the Cardinals and received Communion directly from the Pope himself. He left Rome to travel back to the Middle East, laden with gifts and vague promises of assistance.

As you can probably guess, the Crusade so promisingly encouraged by Khan Arghun never came to pass. Although Rabban Sauma was clearly a charismatic and persuasive diplomat, the monarchs of Europe and the Pope were just too caught up in domestic troubles and affairs in the west to concern themselves with another Crusade to the Holy Land. Following the death of Charles of Anjou, the civil war in Sicily seemed to enmesh both the Papacy and the King of France, and the King of England was caught up trying to conquer Wales and planning his conquest of Scotland.

The last valiant attempt, by the Mongols of all people, to mount a Crusade to save the Crusader states and recover Jerusalem therefore failed. The bell was now tolling across the Holy Land, spelling doom for both the Kingdom of Acre and the County of Tripoli. Join me next week as another Crusader state bites the dust, in an episode ominously titled "The Fall of Tripoli". Until next week, bye for now.

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