

History of the Crusades.

Episode 20.

The Crusader States: The County of Edessa and the County of Tripoli.

Hello again. Last week we looked at the fortunes of one of the Crusader states, the Principality of Antioch. This week we will take a closer look at Antioch neighboring states, the Counties of Edessa and Tripoli.

You might recall, way back in Episode 10, that the County of Edessa was the first Crusader state to be established. It was created by Godfrey de Bouillon's brother, Baldwin of Boulogne, who named himself Count Baldwin of Edessa. I've posted a map of the Crusader states on the website at HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com, and you can see from just glancing at the map that, of all the states, Edessa looks to be the most vulnerable. The other three states, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Tripoli, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, all hug the coast, with their eastern borders not stretching too far into Muslim territory. Not so with the County of Edessa. It has no coastal territory. It shares its western border with the state of Antioch, while the remainder of the territory juts out like a peninsula into Muslim lands. Like Antioch, the area covered by the County of Edessa was once part of the Byzantine Empire, and as such contains a fair amount of native Christians, mainly Syrian Jacobites and Armenians. However, in the more recent past it has been under Seljuk Turk rule, and as such also contains a fair amount of Muslims. If you're getting the idea that the area covered by the County of Edessa was a hotchpotch of different religious groups and ethnicities, with no real bond tying all the residents together, then you are exactly right.

The County of Edessa was not the sort of place you could successfully govern from one central seat of power. It had no natural borders. Its people were a diverse, mixed bunch. Within the county were Muslim towns, Armenian towns and towns whose populations were a combination of people from the Islamic and Christian faiths. On top of this, it had traditionally been wild border territory, subject to constant skirmishes, warfare, and territorial disputes. On the positive side, it contained some valuable fertile land, particularly near the Euphrates River, and as a result, some quite prosperous towns.

Wisely, Count Baldwin decided not to attempt to administer his County via a central seat of government. Instead, the Franks secured for themselves a number of key strategic towns across the territory. From these garrisons, they were able to administer the surrounding area, making use of Armenian and Muslim bureaucrats to levy taxes and tributes on the surrounding countryside and villages. As I have stated, some of these places had prospered from their fertile lands, with the result that the wealth Count Baldwin managed to extract from his County rivaled that of the other states, even the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Back in Episode 18, we saw Baldwin take the throne on the Kingdom of Jerusalem, naming Baldwin of Le Bourcq, known as Count Baldwin II, as his successor in Edessa. We also saw Count Baldwin II joined by his cousin Joscelin of Courtenay in 1102. Joscelin was given the area of the County west of the Euphrates, around Turbessel, to rule.

The rule of Edessa was very much dependent on the politics of the Muslim territory surrounding the County. When the Muslim Emirs were fighting each other, or when a Muslim leader had died and there were disputes about his successor, the Latin Christian leaders of Edessa took advantage of the instability and led incursions into Muslim territory,

expanding their County's borders. However, when the Muslim leaders united against the Franks, or when a strong Muslim leader emerged who was able to muster an army against the Latin Christians, then Edessan territory would be threatened.

When we last saw Baldwin II and Joscelin, they had been captured by Muslim forces following their defeat at the Battle of Harran in 1104. Count Baldwin II was to spend the next four years in captivity in the city of Mosul. As we have seen, Tancred, the Regent of Antioch, was more than happy to rule Edessa while Baldwin and Joscelin were being held captive. He made no effort to free either of them, and in fact had declined to exchange Baldwin for a Seljuk princess he had captured. As you could imagine, this did nothing to improve relations between Baldwin and Tancred.

During 1107 the Muslim leader Il-ghazi, who had been holding Joscelin captive, found himself in need of resources to fund an expansionist campaign. He negotiated with Joscelin's subjects in the Edessan city of Turbessel for Joscelin's release, for a ransom amount plus the promise of military aid. The citizens of Turbessel duly promised the sum, and Joscelin was released. The following year, Joscelin successfully negotiated with the Emir of Mosul for Baldwin's release.

Upon his release, Baldwin attempted to take the reins of power back from Tancred, but Tancred, having enjoyed the income from the prosperous Edessan cities and the convenience of being able to draw troops from the Edessan territory, was reluctant to hand Edessa over. He argued that when the area was part of the Byzantine Empire, the area of the County of Edessa had been ruled by a governor located in Antioch. Accordingly, he asked Baldwin to swear an oath of subservience to him. Not surprisingly, Baldwin refused. The conflict escalated, and by September 1108 both Baldwin and Tancred began raising armies. The four years Baldwin spent in captivity in Mosul must have gone rather well, for part of Baldwin's army consisted of 7,000 Muslim troops supplied by his new friend, Chavli of Mosul.

With their armies duly raised, the two Latin Christian leaders went to war. Tancred was outnumbered but managed to hold his ground. In the end, there was no clear victor, but there were 2,000 Latin Christian casualties. The Patriarch of Antioch, Patriarch Bernard, who also served as Patriarch for the County of Edessa, stepped in to negotiate a truce. He reminded Tancred that he was only meant to rule Edessa while Baldwin was in captivity. When the Patriarch was able to produce witnesses to attest that Tancred had promised Bohemond that he would relinquish rule of Edessa upon Baldwin's release, Tancred realized he had no cards left to play. He reluctantly agreed to hand Edessa back to Baldwin, but the tensions between the two leaders remained, and Tancred continually attempted to obtain tributes from Edessa.

In 1110 the Seljuk Sultan of Baghdad mustered a large force against the Latin Christian occupiers. His first target was the County of Edessa. He laid siege to the city of Edessa, but was forced to back down and withdraw after being confronted with the combined Latin Christian forces from Antioch, Jerusalem and Tripoli.

Following the victory, King Baldwin I of Jerusalem decided to take the opportunity to put a halt to Tancred's territorial ambitions. At a council of arbitration, he accused Tancred of inciting the Muslim attack on Edessa. In his book "The Crusades", Thomas Asbridge states that this charge was almost certainly manufactured, but it did have the effect of showing

Tancred that the Latin Christian leaders were siding with Edessa, and from then on he appears to have ceased his demands for tribute from the County.

But as one conflict died down, a new one emerged, this time between Baldwin and Joscelin. Joscelin's lands around the city of Turbessel were productive and wealthy, and it was clear that he enjoyed the support of the people he ruled over. In contrast, the lands around the city of Edessa, where Baldwin was based, had suffered from raids and a lack of people to work the land. Baldwin was also less popular than Joscelin, particularly among the Armenians. This situation was making Baldwin increasingly uncomfortable, and at the end of 1112 he summoned Joscelin to Edessa on the pretext of discussing his succession plans. When Joscelin arrived, Baldwin accused him of failing to supply the city of Edessa with sufficient produce from his own territory, and had him arrested and thrown in jail. He was released after he agreed to hand all his territory in the County back to Baldwin. Now landless, Joscelin made his way south to Jerusalem, where King Baldwin I granted him the Principality of Galilee.

Relations between Edessa and Antioch improved after Tancred's death in 1112. Tancred's replacement, Roger of Salerno married Count Baldwin's sister, and Roger's sister, Maria, later married Joscelin. After the death of King Baldwin I, Joscelin, somewhat surprisingly, was instrumental in promoting Count Baldwin II for the position of King of Jerusalem. He was successful and Count Baldwin II became King Baldwin II of Jerusalem in April 1118. In return, Joscelin was rewarded by being given the task of ruling Edessa as the vassal of King Baldwin II. He did so with skill and flair, eventually becoming the most influential of all the secular leaders in the Crusader states. And along with his fortunes rose the fortunes of Edessa.

In 1131 Joscelin was inspecting the preparations his army was making to besiege a small castle near Aleppo. A mine his men had prepared collapsed beneath him, and he was fatally injured. On his deathbed, he ordered his son, also called Joscelin, to lead the Edessan army in a bid to rescue a nearby town which was being attacked by Turkish forces. The younger Joscelin refused, stating the Edessan army was too small for the task. The older Joscelin, carried on a stretcher, then took over from his son, leading the Edessan forces in a clash with the Turks. Upon seeing that the older Joscelin was not dead, and was in charge of the army, the Turks backed down. Upon being told of the victory, Joscelin ordered his stretcher to be placed on the road, and then he died, giving thanks to God. The younger Joscelin took up the reins of power in Edessa, becoming Joscelin II.

Right. We shall leave Edessa there for the moment and turn to Antioch's southern neighbor, the County of Tripoli. When we last left Raymond of Toulouse, he had been placed under arrest on the orders of Tancred after one of the disastrous Crusades of 1101. Tancred released Raymond, but only after he had signed away any claims to land in northern Syria. This left Raymond scratching his head and trying to find a way to secure territory for himself in Frankish Outremer.

Just a word here about the term "Outremer". It is the first time I've used it, so it deserves a short explanation. "Outremer", meaning "the land beyond the sea", was the French term for the region we now refer to as the Middle East, after the First Crusade, just so you know.

Raymond had plenty of land back in Europe, but ever since he arrived in the Holy Lands, he had been keen to secure for himself a part of it. He had wanted Antioch but didn't get it. He had wanted Jerusalem but didn't get it. He had just signed away his rights to any territory in northern Syria, so he turned his gaze southwards. And it wouldn't have taken long for an idea to formulate. Between the Crusader states of Antioch to the north and Jerusalem to the south, there was a clear gap, an area of coast which was not under Latin Christian control. If this region was to be conquered, it would link the territories of Antioch and Jerusalem together nicely. And best of all, smack bang in the middle of this unconquered territory, was the beautiful city he had admired, and likely coveted, on his march to Jerusalem, Tripoli. That settled it, Raymond of Toulouse's new plan was to take Tripoli and create his own Crusader state based around the city.

Upon his release following his arrest by Tancred, Raymond journeyed south, and despite having an army of only 300 men, he managed to take the small coastal town of Tortosa, to Tripoli's north. Raymond didn't have enough troops to capture Tripoli itself, so he concentrated his energies on securing small towns in Tripoli's vicinity. Towards the end of 1103 he set up camp on the outskirts of Tripoli and decided to build a huge castle there. It was completed the following year, and Raymond moved in along with his wife. He called the Castle "Mount Pilgrim". From his fortification, he was able to control the land approach to Tripoli. However he had no access to naval forces, and the city could still be supplied by sea. Raymond was injured when a burning roof fell on him during an attack on his castle, and he died six months later on the 28th of February 1105, aged in his mid-sixties.

His death created some problems, as it was unclear who had the right to succeed him. Up for grabs were his extensive land holdings in the south of France and his burgeoning territory near Tripoli. He had a son, the impressively named Alfonso Jordan, who was living at Mount Pilgrim. The trouble was, Alfonso Jordan was only a few months old, and no one wants to be ruled by a baby. Babies are incapable of making administrative decisions, and so can only rule with the assistance of a regent, and that's when things can get murky.

Raymond also had an illegitimate older son, Bertrand of Toulouse, who had been ruling Raymond's lands in southern France during his absence in the Holy Lands. Raymond's men at Mount Pilgrim chose for their leader Raymond's cousin William Jordan, Count of Cerdanya, who had recently arrived in the Middle East.

Baby Alfonso Jordan and his mother decided to move back to the safer surrounds of southern France. Their arrival in France caused some problems for Bertrand. He had been ruling his father's lands in Latin Christendom for ten years, but clearly baby Alfonso Jordan, as Raymond's legitimate son, had a much better claim to the territory. Bertrand considered his options, then left for the Middle East. It's possible that Raymond's widow agreed to abandon baby Alfonso Jordan's rights to territory in the Middle East in exchange for the security of the wealth and extensive lands in southern France.

Bertrand raised an army of 4,000 men, composed of cavalry and infantry forces. He sailed for the Holy Lands in 1108, accompanied by his army, his young son Pons, and a squadron of Genoese ships. On his way to the Middle East, Bertrand dropped into Constantinople, where he was granted an audience with his father's ally, the Emperor Alexius. The meeting went well, Bertrand swore allegiance to the Emperor, and in return received valuable gifts and the promise of Imperial favors.

Next he pulled into Antioch, where he met with Tancred. This meeting did not go well, which isn't that surprising considering that Bertrand started the meeting by demanding that Tancred cede to him the parts of the city of Antioch once occupied by Raymond. Tancred countered this opening move by saying that he would consider this request if Bertrand and his army helped him retake land in Cilicia from the Byzantine Empire. Of course, Bertrand had just sworn allegiance to the Byzantine Emperor, so he had to refuse the offer. Accordingly, Tancred ordered him to leave the Principality of Antioch, and sent him on his way without supplies or assistance of any kind. Bertrand sailed on down to the port of Tortosa, where he was welcomed as Raymond's son. The next day, he sent a message to William Jordan at Mount Pilgrim, demanding that he surrender all of Raymond's lands in the Middle East to Bertrand.

But William Jordan, not surprisingly, was in no mood to do this. He had been working hard since Raymond's death. He had consolidated Raymond's territory and had extended the holdings, taking the city of Arqah, which Raymond himself had unsuccessfully attempted to conquer during the First Crusade. He was a legitimate blood relation of Raymond, whereas Bertrand was only an illegitimate son. He refused Bertrand's demands and sent a message to Antioch asking Tancred to intervene on his behalf. Bertrand responded by sending a message to King Baldwin of Jerusalem asking for his support. King Baldwin responded by calling a meeting of all interested parties and Latin Christian leaders, outside Tripoli.

Here, King Baldwin announced his decision. Raymond's heritage would be split between the two men. William Jordan would be granted rule over Tortosa and the newly conquered Arqah, while Bertrand could try to take Tripoli and will be granted Mount Pilgrim and the surrounding lands. If either man died, his territory was to pass to the survivor. William Jordan swore allegiance to Tancred, while Bertrand swore allegiance to King Baldwin, apparently ignoring the fact that he had already sworn allegiance to the Emperor Alexius.

Now that the question of Raymond's inheritance was resolved, Bertrand wasted no time in concentrating his efforts on taking Tripoli. And it didn't take too long. Tripoli's lifeline had been its unimpeded access to the sea, but Bertrand's Genoese fleet was able to put a stop to that. Surrounded by Latin Christians on land and with their port blockaded, the Governor of Tripoli surrendered. He was a peaceful man and preferred negotiation to confrontation, so he sent a representative to King Baldwin asking that all citizens of Tripoli who wished to leave be able to do so, and that those who remained be able to keep their possessions but, as Frankish subjects, pay a yearly tax. The Governor himself requested permission to move to Damascus with his troops.

King Baldwin agreed to these terms, and on the 12th of July 1109, the Latin Christians took possession of Tripoli. Bertrand's men behaved well, restraining themselves from plundering and pillaging the town, and generally sticking to the terms of surrender. But it seems the message didn't get through to the men from the Genoese ships. They poured into the town, sacking, looting, and bent upon destruction. Before they could be restrained they killed many citizens, and in the chaos, the Great Library of Tripoli, which housed over 100,000 books, one of the largest collections in the Middle East, was burnt to the ground along with all of its contents.

When the chaos had died down, Bertrand installed himself as ruler of the city. He named himself the Count of Tripoli. His position as ruler of Tripoli and its surrounding territory was secured with the death of William Jordan shortly after the city surrendered. He died in

strange circumstances, apparently after having been shot with an arrow after intervening in a dispute between two grooms. There were, of course, whispers that Bertrand was behind the death, but nothing was proven. Bertrand then found himself sole ruler of the new territory, which he called the County of Tripoli. He ruled under allegiance to the King of Jerusalem, and on his death in 1112 he was succeeded by his young son Pons, who married Tancred's widow Cecilia after Tancred's death later the same year.

Pons ended up ruling the County of Tripoli for an impressive 25 years. For much of his rule, he attempted to achieve independence for his County from the Kingdom of Jerusalem, but was unable to do so. Upon his death, in 1136, following his defeat by a Damascus army, Pons was succeeded by his son, Raymond II.

And that's where we leave the County of Tripoli for now. Join me next week as we take a closer look at the final Crusader state, the Kingdom of Jerusalem. I've uploaded a map to the website at HistoryOfTheCrusades.webs.com, showing the Crusader states at around the time we've been discussing. I hope you find it useful.

Before closing, I'd like to say a huge "thank you" to the people who answered my call for help and donated money to the podcast. Please accept this as a heartfelt thanks. It's very much appreciated. Until next week, bye for now.

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