

History of the Crusades.
Episode 30.
The Second Crusade II.

Hello again. Last week we saw the rise to power of the fearsome Muslim warlord Zengi, and we saw a three-way tussle for power in the Holy Land between Zengi, Emperor John of the Byzantine Empire, and the leaders of the Crusader states.

The end of last week's episode heralded a shift of power in this struggle, as the Byzantine Emperor John died and was replaced by his youngest son Manuel. King Fulk also died, leaving Queen Melisende to rule the Kingdom of Jerusalem with her young son, Baldwin III. While King Fulk hadn't been a great king, he had managed to keep Zengi in check, while at the same time using his position to soothe tensions and quarrels between the leaders of the Crusader states. Now, with his death and with a woman and a child on the throne, this looked like it was all going to be thrown out the window.

Raymond, Prince of Antioch, decided to take full advantage of the deaths of the Emperor and the King of Jerusalem. He decided to invade Cilicia, knowing full well that the new Emperor would be required to remain in Constantinople to secure his accession to the purple. Raymond didn't just invade Cilicia. He made sure that he destroyed as much Byzantine property as possible. While the new Emperor Manuel couldn't personally lead a counter-attack, he ordered a force to be dispatched to Cilicia by sea, to push back Raymond's invasion, and push back they did. The army drove the soldiers of Antioch out of Imperial territory and all the way back to the walls of Antioch itself. In retribution for Raymond's wanton destruction of Byzantine towns, fortresses and strongholds, the Byzantine army laid waste to the land around Antioch, then marched along the coastline of the Principality, destroying any ships they found beached on the shore and plundering anything of worth.

And it wasn't just the Byzantines that Raymond was knocking heads with. Some months earlier, he had sent troops northwards, conquering land near Aleppo. Raymond might have even attempted to take Aleppo itself, but he was prevented from doing so by Joscelin who, apparently out of the blue, made a truce with the governor of Aleppo. This act, of course, did nothing to improve relations between the two Latin Christian leaders, which had been steadily deteriorating for some time.

Zengi was keeping a close eye on these events. He operated an extensive network of spies and watched the growing conflict between Raymond and Joscelin with interest. He didn't actually need spies to tell him that things were really looking up for him. That was pretty obvious. The Byzantine forces, which had posed the main threat to his expansion, were occupied in Constantinople, and the young Emperor seemed unlikely to adopt his father's policy of aggression towards Zengi any time soon.

Then there was Damascus. Zengi's eye had been on Damascus from the start, and now it seemed almost inevitable that it would soon fall into his hands. The last time he had tried to take the city, he had been prevented from doing so by the army of the King of Jerusalem, to whom the Damascan leader had appealed for help. But now, with a woman and a boy holding the reins of power in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Damascus was looking much more vulnerable. Basically, the territory that he had so long coveted was there for

the taking. The only decision he needed to make at the moment was which of these ripe plums was he going to pick first?

In the end, he decided to head north. Before turning his attention to Damascus to the south, he first wished to expand his power base in Iraq and strengthen his ties with the Sultan of Baghdad. As such, he needed to conquer and subdue a number of minor warlords and princes who controlled small parcels of land to the east of the Euphrates River. This was close to Crusader territory, and one of the princes called upon Joscelin for assistance. In return for land, Joscelin agreed to provide military assistance to the prince. He gathered his best soldiers and departed from Edessa in the autumn of 1144, marching down the Euphrates River, apparently with the aim of cutting off Zengi's line of communication with Aleppo.

It turned out that this wasn't a smart move. Joscelin must have known that Zengi's army was somewhere in the vicinity, yet he had just taken all of his soldiers out of his main city, leaving it undefended, as a chronicler at the time pointed out, by shoemakers, weavers, silk merchants, tailors, and priests. It was true that Edessa was a heavily fortified city, and perhaps Joscelin assumed that its defenses would hold out against any attack that might occur. Nevertheless, his decision to remove his army from his main city was to have major repercussions for the Latin Christian occupation of the Middle East.

I guess you can pretty much tell what's going to happen now. Zengi's spies informed him that Joscelin had left Edessa with his army, leaving it undefended. Conquering Edessa wasn't part of Zengi's game plan, but it was an opportunity that presented itself pretty much out of the blue, and Zengi wasn't one to let a chance like this pass him by. He quickly issued new orders, and his army, happily equipped with the necessary machinery to besiege a large city, wheeled around and headed for Edessa, arriving at the city walls on the 28th of November.

A chronicler who was in Edessa at the time, a Jacobite bishop called Basil, recorded that Zengi's troops were as numerous as the stars in the skies, and that the fields all around the city were covered with tents housing Zengi's men. Zengi himself pitched his tent to the north, opposite the Gate of Hours, on a hill which overlooked the Church of the Confessors. Edessa itself was situated in a valley and was protected by strong triangular walls embedded in the hills which surrounded the town.

Once Zengi had settled in and his army were in a position to begin the siege, he sent an envoy into the town to negotiate terms with the defenders. In the absence of any senior military men, the defense of the town had fallen to senior figures within the clergy. The Latin Christian Archbishop of Edessa, Hugh the Second led the defense, supported by two native Christians, the Armenian Bishop John and our chronicler, Basil the Jacobite Bishop. Basil was keen to negotiate a truce with Zengi, but he was overruled, the other clergy confident that reinforcements would be arriving soon to save them.

Trouble was, there weren't really any reinforcements arriving soon. Joscelin had moved his army back to the County of Edessa's second largest city Turbessel, but his army was much smaller than Zengi's, and he knew that if he attacked before reinforcements arrived his army was likely to be annihilated. At least if he remained at Turbessel he could block any troops coming from Aleppo to assist Zengi.

Right, so, reinforcements. Who is going to come to Edessa's aid? Joscelin sent word to Antioch and Jerusalem. Queen Melisende called a council and was authorized to dispatch an army to go to Edessa's aid. She duly did so, and the army started its long march northwards. As for assistance from Antioch, there was none. On one hand, this is surprising. Raymond, Prince of Antioch, is Joscelin's overlord and therefore obliged to come to his aid. Also, it's pretty clear that if Edessa falls, Antioch will be the next city in Zengi's sights. On the other hand though, it's not so surprising. The relationship between Raymond and Joscelin has been deteriorating for some time, and Raymond was quite happy to sit on his hands while Joscelin's capital city took a pummeling. The end result of this was: reinforcements were on their way in the form of the army of the Queen of Jerusalem, but they were going to take a while to travel all the way from the southernmost Crusader state to the northernmost one.

Meanwhile, the siege continued. Zengi's siege engines hurled projectiles into the city, and more worryingly, teams of under-miners were making progress underneath the northern wall. While it's true that Edessa's defenses were formidable, the defenders inside the city had no military training, and were unaware of how to conduct an effective counter-siege. Particularly as regards the under-miners, the attempts by the Edessan defenders to block their progress were unsuccessful. Zengi's men dug beneath the northern wall near the Gate of the Hours and replaced its stone foundations with wooden joists and beams. They filled the spaces between the beams with animal fat, sulfur and naphtha, and then started a fire. It was Christmas Eve, 1144.

The fire took hold and the wooden beams burned and collapsed, causing the massive wall above to subside. As soon as the dust cleared, Zengi's men poured through the gap into the city. The Turkish soldiers began killing the citizens indiscriminately and in a panic, many men, women and children fled to the upper citadel. Unfortunately, the gates to the citadel had been barred under the orders of the Archbishop, and in the resulting chaos, many thousands of people were trampled to death, pressed against the locked gates in a suffocating mass. Those who weren't trampled were slain by Zengi's troops, including Archbishop Hugh, who, having ordered the gates to be locked, had been desperately and hopelessly trying to restore order outside the citadel.

Zengi himself intervened to stop the slaughter, then he went about securing the city. He ordered all the Latin Christian men within the city to be killed, and all the Latin Christian women and children were rounded up to be sold into slavery. He then ordered all the Latin Christian churches within Edessa to be destroyed. Once this was carried out, he proved himself to be quite a lenient occupier. He spared the native Christians, the Armenians, the Jacobites, and even the Greeks, allowing them a degree of autonomy and going so far as to encourage them to bring their compatriots from adjacent lands inside the city to re-populate it.

But if the native Christians were okay with how things turned out after Zengi's invasion, the Latin Christians weren't. The fall of Edessa sent shock-waves through the Crusader territories, and beyond to Europe itself. And it's not difficult to see why. The County of Edessa jutted out into Muslim territory, forming a barrier between the Turks of Iran and the Turks of Anatolia. With the city of Edessa and its surrounds in Muslim hands, this barrier crumbled. Most worrying of all, it gave the Muslims a strategic advantage over the next major Crusader city, Antioch. Edessa was the first Middle Eastern city to be taken by the Crusaders. Now it had fallen to the Muslims. Everyone was thinking the same thing. Now that Edessa had fallen, were the rest of the Crusader cities also going to be conquered?

Were they're going to fall one by one, like a pack of dominoes, until Jerusalem itself reverted back to Muslim control? After fifty years of occupation, things were looking decidedly shaky for the Crusaders.

Zengi, on the other hand, was reveling in his victory. Conquering one of the major Crusader cities had bought him much glory and earned him many titles. So many titles, in fact, that his name became rather unwieldy. Theoretically at least, when Zengi was addressed, either verbally or in writing, it was proper to use all his titles, which now officially formed part of his name. To give you an idea of the difficulties that this may have caused, here is Zengi's name, with all the titles awarded to him after the fall of Edessa. Right, here goes. "The Emir, the General, the Great, the Just, the Aid of God, the Triumphant, the Unique, the Pillar of Religion, the Cornerstone of Islam, Ornament of Islam, Protector of God's Creatures, Associate of the Dynasty, Auxiliary of Doctrine, Grandeur of the Nation, Honor of Kings, Supporter of Sultans, Victor over the Infidels, Rebels, and Atheists, Commander of the Muslim Armies, the Victorious King, the King of Princes, the Son of the Deserving, Emir of the Two Iraqs and of Syria, Conqueror of Iran, Atabeg Abu Said Zengi Ibn Aq Sunqur, Protector of the Prince of the Faithful". Wow! Impressive.

The big question that everyone wanted answered was: What was Zengi going to do next? Was he going to stick to his original plan and head south to attack Damascus or, having had a taste of the accolades arising from reclaiming land from the Franks, was he going to turn his attention to the next likely Crusader target, Antioch? Prince Raymond of Antioch certainly thought this was a possibility. While Joscelin was determined to make the best of a bad situation, creating a new capital at Turbessel and doing his best to fashion a new, smaller county comprising land west of the Euphrates River, Raymond decided to go, cap in hand, to Constantinople, to ask the Emperor for military assistance. This was going to take some doing. Raymond wasn't exactly the Emperor's favorite subject. He had, after all, recently raided Imperial territory and wantonly destroyed Imperial property. It was time to be contrite, very contrite.

Raymond traveled all the way to Constantinople to seek an audience with Emperor Manuel, but the Emperor refused to meet with him. Determined to show the Emperor how sorry he was, Raymond made his way to the tomb of Emperor John and knelt before it, asking forgiveness. Manuel then agreed to meet with him, and treated him well, granting him gifts and promising him a financial subsidy. He didn't, however, go so far as to offer immediate military assistance. In the end, that didn't matter.

Zengi's network of spies reported that Raymond had met with the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople, and this fact alone was enough to make Zengi decide to turn his back on the city of Antioch for the moment, and concentrate his military efforts elsewhere, specifically on Damascus. he returned to his long-held goal, and decided to march south and take Damascus. He moved his army to Aleppo, and in the summer marched his men down the Euphrates River towards Damascus. On his journey, he stopped at a town called Qal'at Ja'bar, where a local Arab ruler refused to recognize him as overlord. Consequently, Zengi besieged the town. He had hoped that the siege would be over in a few days, but the town was heavily fortified and well stocked with supplies, and three months later the siege was still continuing.

During the siege on the night of the 14th of September 1146, Zengi fell into bed after one of his legendary drinking sessions. He stirred during the night and woke to find one of his

eunuchs, a man of French descent called Yarankash, drinking wine from his own personal goblet. Clearly, the eunuch hadn't expected his master to awake and had decided to help himself to some wine using Zengi's own cup. Zengi flew into a rage and told the eunuch that he would be severely punished the next day. Then Zengi fell back into a deep sleep. Fearful of the threat of punishment, Yarankash took a dagger and stabbed Zengi repeatedly as he lay in his bed. The eunuch then fled to Qal'at Ja'bar and was granted entry into the city, after reciting what he had done. Zengi didn't die immediately. A close aide found him some hours later, close to death. He asked Zengi who his attacker was, but Zengi was unable to answer. Not long afterwards, he died.

The death of such a powerful ruler had an immediate effect. His once disciplined army fell apart. After plundering Zengi's personal supply of treasure, it scattered and raided the countryside looking for spoils. Zengi's two sons swooped in, and divided Zengi's territory between them. His elder son, Saif ad-Din Ghazi, took over the city of Mosul, while his second son, Nur ad-Din, was proclaimed the leader of Aleppo. Then, of course, Zengi's enemies took full advantage of the turn of events. The ruler of Damascus reoccupied the nearby town of Baalbek and became overlord to the towns of Homs and Hama. Raymond of Antioch led raids into Muslim territory as far as the walls of Aleppo, and Joscelin decided to retake Edessa.

Central now to the battle between the Crusaders and the Muslims was Zengi's second son, Nur ad-Din, the new ruler of Aleppo. A different man entirely to his father, the 29 year old Nur ad-Din was tall, dark-skinned, and clean shaven except for a goatee beard. A pious man of high principles, he didn't drink alcohol and turned his back on luxury and excess, preferring to dress in simple clothes and live on a modest income, in stark contrast to some of the local Princes who were his vassals, who taxed their people heavily to fund their lavish lifestyles. Nur ad-Din seemed to have inherited his father's military talents, but not his cruelty. Instead, he steadily gained the respect of his soldiers through his austere ways, his statesmanship and his courage. During his 28 year long reign, it would be Nur ad-Din who would rally the Muslim world against its French occupiers.

Nur ad-Din didn't have much time to settle into his new city Aleppo, when he received news that Joscelin had managed to retake Edessa, although it wasn't quite as impressive as it sounds, and possibly "retake" is the wrong word for Joscelin's actions at Edessa. He had earlier made contact with some Armenians and Jacobites within the city, and convinced that the native Christians would support him, Joscelin set out for Edessa with a small army. He arrived at the city on the 27th of October and managed, with the help of his new Christian allies, to break into the city. Once inside, though, things didn't go to plan. The Muslim garrison had been warned of Joscelin's plans, and Joscelin's bid to take them by surprise failed. Instead, he found a well prepared Islamic force that his small army could not hope to overpower.

While he lingered in the city trying to decide what to do next, word of his actions reached Nur ad-Din at Aleppo. He quickly gathered his forces and marched towards Edessa. Caught between the approaching army and the city's Muslim garrison, Joscelin slipped out of the city during the night, along with many of the town's local Christians. Nur ad-Din caught up with Joscelin near the Euphrates River, and a battle took place. The Franks were holding their ground against the Muslims, until Joscelin decided to risk a counter attack. It was unsuccessful. The French army was driven back, and it broke and scattered. Joscelin was wounded in the neck but managed to escape to Samosata with the Jacobite Bishop Basil. The native Christians in the army, abandoned by their leader, were all killed.

Nur ad-Din then secured Edessa, driving out the Christian population, and ensuring only Muslim residents remained.

Edessa, one of the oldest Christian cities in the Holy Land, never recovered its role as a Christian outpost. Today it is in south western Turkey. It's called Sanliurfa, or Urfa, and while the old city boasts some beautiful Islamic architecture, very little of its ancient Christian past can be seen.

Nur ad-Din settled back to consolidate his territory in Syria, but it wasn't long before some disturbing reports started reaching him from Constantinople. It was rumored that the Franj were massing an enormous army in Europe, and this vast force was intending to head his way with one goal: to retake Edessa. Join me next week as we follow events in Europe, and see citizens across Latin Christendom answer once again the Pope's call for a Crusade.

Right, now for something a little different. Listener Harry Dimopoulos from the USA contacted me a while ago with some interesting information. He was born and raised in Constantinople, which of course is now Istanbul, and later moved to the U.S. He married an American woman who has just recently found out that she is related to the Comnena family. To be specific, her 26th great grandfather is the Emperor Alexius Comnena, who featured heavily in the First Crusade and who we mentioned again in last week's episode. Anyway, Harry is quite chuffed to learn that he unwittingly married into the Byzantine Imperial family, and he and his wife were wondering whether there are any other listeners out there related to Alexius, or any of the Comnenas. So if you're listening to this and are in fact related to the Emperor Alexius and would like to make contact with Harry, you can find him on Facebook, or you can email him at dimophg@comcast.net, and that's all lower-case letters. So contact Harry, he'd love to hear from you. Ah, the History of the Crusades Podcast, uniting descendants of Byzantine Emperors. Until next week, bye for now.

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