

History of the Crusades.
Episode 35.
The Second Crusade VII.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Second Crusade start rather badly for the Latin Christians. The mighty German army was defeated by the Turks while traversing the route taken by the First Crusade, and the remnants of the army joined up with the French army, taking the coast road towards Antioch. When we left the Crusaders last week, they were at the small town of Antioch in Pisidia, where the Turks had taken refuge behind the town's walls.

Wisely, the Latin Christians decided not to pursue the Turks further and left them sheltering within the small town. They marched onwards, and three days later, around the 4th of January 1148 they arrived at Laodicea, where they had hoped to restock. Two disappointments awaited them. Firstly, they had now merged with the road taken by Bishop Otto and the non-combatant section of the German forces. Unfortunately, the road was littered with German corpses, indicating that things hadn't gone so well for the German contingent. Secondly, Laodicea was abandoned. The reputation of the Latin Christians had preceded them. The citizens of Laodicea, learning of the army's approach, gathered all their supplies and items of value and vanished into the mountains. There was nothing to trade, nothing to eat, and nothing to plunder. The city was totally deserted. The Crusaders spent a fruitless day trying to locate the townspeople, then decided they had better move on. To say things were grim at this stage is an understatement.

It's still fifteen days or so march until they reach the coastal town of Adalia. It's the middle of winter, and the terrain is mountainous. It's cold and it's miserable. Laodicea was the last major town on the way to the coast, and the Latin Christians were hoping to restock there. Now they can't. To make things worse, they are deep in Seljuk Turk territory. They've left the safety of the Byzantine-held coastal land behind, and now they have to contend with enemy attacks, as well as the hunger, the cold, and the mountainous terrain. Not surprisingly, discipline slips. The cold and hungry French and German troops leave their lines frequently to forage for food, and the only part of the army to maintain its discipline are the Knights Templar, a contingent of which has been accompanying the French from the outset.

On the 6th of January 1148 the army faced a natural obstacle in the form of Mount Cadmus. This was a mountain of impressive size, and King Louis and the French nobility decided to allocate an entire day to crossing it. Now the combined Crusader army at this stage numbers around 20,000 people. The narrow and winding mountain paths mean that the army can't march in its usual formation. Instead, it's strung out in a single very long line, around six miles long. Now the plan was for Geoffrey de Rancon, a French noble from Eleanor of Aquitaine's lands, to lead the vanguard of the army up the mountain path to a plateau. He was to wait there for the second section of the army to arrive.

The second section was by far the most vulnerable. It contained the baggage trains, as well as the injured and the non-combatants. King Louis would then commence the climb, leading the rearguard of the army. Well-hidden, the Turkish scouts watched with interest as Geoffrey de Rancon began his climb. As we know from Episode 26, Queen Eleanor and her ladies accompany Geoffrey in the vanguard. Despite his clear orders, Geoffrey didn't wait for the rest of the army on the plateau. As you know, he instead led the

vanguard down to a sheltered valley, possibly on the orders of his Queen. He failed to send word of his change of plan back to the main army, and the middle section comprising the baggage train started its ascent.

Now, this wasn't a pleasant part of the army to be in for this part of the journey. The mountain paths were narrow, steep, and in places very slippery, and the pack animals found the going very difficult. Particularly in the higher reaches of the mountain, a stumble could mean an animal fell from the path, down the steep mountainside to their death, and that's exactly what happened. Occasionally, a pack animal would stumble and fall, which would send panic along the line, making the other animals difficult to control. It took all the effort and concentration of the men accompanying the animals to control them, and they were really looking forward to reaching the plateau, where they could rest protected by the soldiers of the vanguard. But of course, when they finally reached the plateau, there was no one there. There they were, the exhausted members of the baggage train, with their exhausted pack animals, vulnerable and exposed. And of course, you know what happens next.

The Turks attacked. The members of the central part of the army were under attack, and the rest of the army were utterly unaware of the situation. The plateau was too far away from both the vanguard, camped in a valley further down the mountain, and the rearguard, who had just started their climb, for anyone to realize what had happened. The baggage train wasn't set up as a fighting force. They usually left the fighting to the soldiers to the front and the rear of them while they remained protected in the center. But this time, there was no one to protect them. It was turning into a massacre. Some members of the group were ordered to hurry back down the mountain and send word to the King. They succeeded in their task, and the rearguard made a hasty dash up the mountain to come to the aid of their compatriots, but that was easier said than done. The fully armed knights found the terrain difficult, as did their horses, whereas the Turks could just lie in wait and pick them off one by one with their arrows, before vanishing back into the rocky landscape.

The loss of life on the part of the Crusaders was terrible. King Louis himself only just managed to escape, by hauling himself behind a rock using a tree root. And it was really the falling darkness that saved the baggage train and the rearguard of the army from total annihilation. By the time Geoffrey de Rancon had sent scouts back to discover the whereabouts of the army, around 7,000 Latin Christians had been killed, and most of the baggage had been taken by the Turks. For his error, Geoffrey de Rancon was relieved of his duties and eventually returned to Europe in disgrace.

Despite this massive setback, the army regrouped, and the next day made its way down the other side of the mountain onto the plain below. Thankfully, for the Latin Christians, the Turks didn't seem keen to attack them on the plain. But the going wasn't exactly easy. They had largely run out of food for both people and for horses, so the horses were sacrificed. Grain that ordinarily would have been used to feed the animals was ground and made into crude slabs of bread, which was cooked over campfires along with, you guessed it, horse meat.

And of course, morale was low. Any illusions the French may have had of marching victorious to the Holy Land and driving the Muslims out of Christian territory had pretty much vanished with their defeat on Mount Cadmus. Discipline within the army was tight on their march to the coast. In contrast to their straggly efforts while climbing Mount Cadmus, the army marched in formation, staying in their sections.

This new level of discipline can be attributed to one factor. King Louis, after his disastrous defeat, had decided to hand control of the army over to the Templars, a rather surprising move which probably reflects the lack of confidence in his own leadership the King felt after his recent defeat, and his desire to reach the coast without further Christian loss of life. The Templar knights ruled the army with a strict hand, and the new level of discipline paid off. While the army came under attack on four separate occasions on their march to the coast, the attacks were effectively repulsed, and the army limped into the coastal town of Adalia on the 20th of January 1148.

Adalia was neither a large nor a wealthy town. It was a small coastal settlement, a Byzantine outpost surrounded by poor countryside, regularly attacked by Turks. The townspeople had already tried to cope with the influx of German pilgrims under Bishop Otto. It was winter, and they weren't really provisioned to cope with thousands of hungry French and German soldiers. The Byzantine governor of the town was an Italian man called Landov. He did his best to accommodate the needs of the Crusaders, but he didn't have a lot to work with. Provisions were scarce, and what spare food there was, was sold at exorbitant prices. To continue their journey overland, the Crusaders needed to purchase horses and enough provisions to sustain the army through the bleak, wintry landscape. It became clear pretty quickly that the town of Adalia could supply neither of these things.

King Louis was faced with a decision. He could either re-provision the army and lead them on a forty day march across difficult coastal terrain while being attacked by Turks, or take a three day sea journey from Adalia to Antioch. While it seems pretty clear that everyone would be choosing the sea option, it wasn't quite that simple. For the same reason that Adalia was unable to supply enough food and horses for the thousands of Crusaders, it was also unable to supply enough ships. Adalia was a minor seaport, and it was the middle of winter. There simply weren't enough ships available to carry the entire army. King Louis came up with the pious idea of placing the sick and injured soldiers on the few ships available, leaving everyone else to take the longer land route, but he was overruled by his noblemen.

The Crusaders were delayed in Adalia for more than a month, with the ship's unable to leave due to winter storms. There was plenty of time to debate who would be leaving on the ships and who would be marching overland. The end result was, I guess, predictable. When the weather cleared, King Louis and his household boarded the ships, along with the wealthy knights. Left behind were the poorer knights, the foot soldiers, the injured, the Germans, and the non-combatants. To ease his conscience, the King gave governor Landov the sum of 500 marks, urging him to use the money to care for the sick Crusaders and to procure more ships to send the remainder by sea. If no ships could be found, King Louis urged the governor to use the money to pay for a Byzantine escort to accompany the men overland to Tarsus in Cilicia. Louis also left two noblemen behind to take charge of the remainder of the army, the Counts of Flanders and Bourbon.

The day after the King departed with his small fleet of ships, the Turks attacked. They poured down from the mountains onto the plain and attacked the Crusader camp. Most of the knights had departed on the ships, and without enough cavalry to mount a counterattack, the army was vulnerable. The governor gave the Crusaders permission to move inside the city walls for protection, but really everyone just wanted the Crusaders to leave. The town's resources had been stretched to the limit by these thousands of uninvited guests, and their presence was inducing attacks by the Turks. The governor

managed to find a few more ships, but again they weren't enough to carry the entire expedition. The Counts of Flanders and Bourbon followed King Louis's earlier example and boarded the ships themselves, accompanied by their friends and the remaining knights. They then set sail for the port of St Symeon.

Deserted by their leaders, the thousands of remaining foot soldiers and pilgrims were urged by the governor to start their long journey to Cilicia. Theirs is an unhappy tale. Constantly harassed by Turks and unable adequately to defend themselves, many died of arrow wounds or starvation. Odo of Deuil reported that thousands of men were taken prisoner by the Turks. Odo even goes so far as to say that many of the men, questioning their faith after being abandoned to their fate, converted to Islam. A few hardy souls made their way eastwards through the bleak, cold and unforgiving landscape. Historians don't know exactly how many of these men made their way successfully to Antioch, but it could not have been many.

The sea journey from Adalia to the port of St Symeon near Antioch usually took three days, but King Louis's ships were beset by winter storms, and the journey took longer than usual, with some of the ships taking three weeks to complete the journey. When they eventually arrived at Antioch, the royal party was given a lavish welcome. In Episode 26, we saw, through Queen Eleanor's eyes, the degree to which King Louis and his Queen were feted during their stay in the ancient city. However, among the luxuries and the exotic delights of Antioch, there was serious business to be discussed. The arrival of King Louis and his knights had the potential to change the ballgame in the Crusader states. Despite their depleted ranks, the French Crusaders still boasted many experienced knights, enough to make a real difference in any battle against the Muslims.

Raymond, Prince of Antioch and Queen Eleanor's uncle, was keen to use King Louis's forces to attack Nur ad-Din's capital Aleppo. The situation in the principality of Antioch had become increasingly precarious. Nur ad-Din had established himself securely in the area, and had been increasing his territory, advancing on French outposts and fortresses in the borderlands and picking them off one by one. Count Joscelin was fully occupied in Turbessel, trying to defend his diminished County from incursions by Nur ad-Din's forces. Prince Raymond had been itching to take the offensive and attack the heartland of Nur ad-Din's growing empire. Now at last, with the arrival of King Louis's troops, he finally had the manpower to contemplate such a move.

But King Louis wasn't convinced. He was receiving envoys from across the Crusader states, asking for his assistance. Count Joscelin requested that he use his men to expel the Muslims from Edessa. Raymond of Tripoli asked that he help him recover the castle at Montferrand, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem himself arrived in Antioch to plead in person for King Louis to take his men to Jerusalem. The Patriarch was also able to inform Louis that King Conrad had arrived in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, after having sailed from Constantinople to Acre. Faced with so many choices, King Louis was racked with indecision. Queen Eleanor was urging him to launch an attack on Aleppo, an option which actually does seem to have been the most sensible use of King Louis' forces. But King Louis was suspicious of the Queen's motives, and her growing friendship with her uncle Raymond.

His personal motive for embarking on the Crusade was to journey to Jerusalem and atone for his sins, so he ignored all the other requests, and in the middle of the night he kidnapped his reluctant Queen, who by this time had expressed her wish to renounce her

crown and remain in Antioch with her uncle, and journeyed with her and his army southwards to Jerusalem.

When King Louis arrived in Jerusalem, he found it bursting to the seams with Crusaders. Not only had King Conrad arrived in the city, but a fleet of ships had arrived from various locations across Europe. The southern French nobility arrived in their ships, led by Count Alfonso Jordan of Toulouse, closely followed by the veterans of the siege of the city of Lisbon. We don't know how many survivors from the overland trek from Europe to Anatolia made it to Jerusalem. King Louis and the French nobility who had sailed the last leg of the journey to Antioch were certainly present, but unfortunately we don't know whether any of the intrepid souls who made their way overland to Antioch actually made it to Jerusalem. Even without the French and German foot soldiers, the force assembled in Jerusalem was the largest European force seen in the Holy Land since the First Crusade.

Now that all these armed and eager fighters for Christianity were mustered in Jerusalem, the big question was, what were they all going to do? As you all know, the original aim of the Second Crusade was to retake Edessa from the Muslims. So, should the Latin Christians march all the way north and retake the city of Edessa? The answer to this question was a resounding no. The trouble was, there wasn't much to retake. The city's Christian population had been killed or driven out of the city and its fortifications damaged, possibly beyond repair. While to retake it would be a symbolic move against the Islamic forces, that's all it would be. The city now served no real purpose for the Christians. It was no longer home to any Christians and was of limited strategic value. So, with the retaking of Edessa off the table, the question remained. What were all these Latin Christian forces going to do?

Well, of all the options on the table, they ended up choosing the least likely of them all, Damascus. They decided to attack Damascus. Why Damascus? What was behind this fateful decision. Why didn't they settle on a more sensible option, such as attacking Aleppo? What on earth were they thinking? And the attack on Damascus itself, how is that going to work out? Join me next week as we answer all of these questions. Until next week, bye for now.

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