

History of the Crusades.
Episode 56
The Third Crusade IV.

Hello again. Last week we examined the failed Crusade of the German monarch, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. This week we are back in the Crusader states, looking at the events in the Kingdom of Jerusalem prior to the arrival of the French and English armies.

Now, remember back in Episode 53 when Joscius, the Archbishop of Tyre, set out on his journey to Europe in 1187 to drum up support for a Crusade? His first port of call was Sicily, and after King William II of Sicily had recovered from the shock of the news that Jerusalem had fallen, he sent a fleet of ships to the Holy Land. Those ships, comprising around 50 vessels and 200 knights, arrived in 1189 and immediately made themselves useful, protecting Antioch and Tripoli while patrolling up and down the northern Syrian coastline, constantly on the lookout for Muslim vessels.

Small contingents of Crusaders were beginning to arrive from Europe at this time. While the German army is making its way through Byzantine territory and the English and French armies are still at home, preparing to set out on crusade, any Christian fighters who made their way to the Holy Land were welcomed, and most ended up in Tyre, where they fell under the command of Conrad of Montferrat. At this time the cities of Tripoli, Antioch and Tyre are the only ones remaining in Latin Christian hands. Tripoli was playing host to Queen Sibylla, who had fled there after the fall of Jerusalem. Count Raymond of Tripoli died in the autumn of 1187, and the city was now under the rule of his successor, Prince Bohemond III of Antioch. Following the Queen to Tripoli were all the supporters of the royal family of Jerusalem. Bohemond was also ruling Antioch at this time. And Tyre, well Tyre was still a thorn in Saladin's side and a magnet for Latin Christian resistance.

Saladin spent most of 1187 and 1188 attempting to subdue the remaining Latin Christian castles in the Holy Land, which was understandable, and releasing high profile Latin Christian prisoners, which was less understandable.

Stephanie of Milly attempted to trade the surrender of Castle Kerak for her son, Humphrey of Toron, who had been imprisoned after the Battle of Hattin. With her husband having been executed, Stephanie understandably was keen to have her son back by her side, and was willing to trade one of the Kingdom's most formidable castles to secure his release. The garrison at Kerak however, was having none of it. Humphrey wasn't really a man's man. He had done his bit by fighting at Hattin, but he really was more a scholar than a soldier, and the garrison thought he definitely wasn't worth the mighty fortress of Kerak. So they refused to surrender the castle. Saladin was informed of this and, remarkably, decided to give Humphrey back anyway, for free, possibly reinforcing Humphrey's worthlessness in the eyes of the garrison.

In the end, the garrison probably should have made the trade. Kerak was an isolated fortress, and Saladin had cut all of their supply lines. Once they had eaten all their animals, they faced a stark choice: surrender or starve. They chose to surrender, handing Kerak over to Saladin in November 1188. The nearby castle of Montreal held out for another six months, then it too surrendered to Saladin. Saladin spent an uncomfortable winter in Galilee, where, to a picturesque backdrop of snow on the surrounding hills, and

with his tents collapsing in the mud due to the incessant rain, he secured the Hospitaller castle at Belvoir and the Templar castle Safed.

As the year 1189 rolled around, Saladin seems to have made some surprising choices. By this time, he must have been aware that another Crusade was on the horizon, and would certainly have known that Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was coming his way. The obvious place from which the Latin Christians were going to make a stand was Tyre, yet Saladin, at this time, made no attempt to take the city. It was true that he had tried and failed to take Tyre back in 1187, but surely now it was even more urgent that the city be conquered before reinforcements arrived. But did Saladin attack Tyre at this time? No, he did not. Instead, he spent all of spring and part of the summer of 1189 concentrating on Reynald of Sidon's castle at Beaufort, a relatively insignificant and isolated fortress in the County of Tripoli. Reynald of Sidon could speak fluent Arabic, and apparently he conducted lengthy conversations with Saladin, touching on subjects such as religion, and spending ages negotiating detailed conditions for the castle's surrender, while at the same time ordering his garrison to strengthen the castle's defenses. In the end, the castle did in fact surrender, but at the cost of many months of Saladin's time.

Around about this time, Saladin made a startling decision. He released his most high profile prisoner, King Guy, for no apparent reason. Queen Sibylla had been pestering Saladin for some time to release King Guy. From her base in the city of Tripoli, she wrote him letter after letter, pleading and cajoling and begging him to release her beloved Guy from captivity. Then suddenly, in the summer of 1189, Saladin did exactly that. In exchange for, well, nothing, Saladin released King Guy after he swore to go overseas and relinquish his Kingdom. Along with him, Saladin released a group of the King's most avid supporters, including his brother Amalric.

The prisoners were released near the city of Tortosa in northern Syria, and Guy, interpreting the conditions of his release in a liberal manner, took himself to the island of Ruad, which was only a few hundred meters from the Syrian coast. Well, he did have to sail to get there, so I guess that, technically, he was overseas, but it probably wasn't what Saladin had in mind when he imposed the condition. Queen Sibylla made her way to the island as soon as she received the happy news, and the devoted couple were reunited.

So, why did Saladin release King Guy? Well, no one really knows. It was true that he was about as useful as Humphrey of Toron as a bargaining chip. Saladin had already tried to exchange King Guy for the city of Ascalon, but the people of Ascalon had shown no desire whatsoever to go out of their way to free the man who had led the Kingdom to its disastrous defeat at the Horns of Hattin. So it was likely that Saladin knew that he wouldn't be able to exchange King Guy for anything of use. Perhaps he believed him to be a spent force. Perhaps he believed that the King would honor the conditions of his release and return to Europe. Perhaps he believed that releasing him would lead to discord and division within the Latin Christian resistance. The truth is, we really don't know.

Saladin himself was under quite a bit of pressure at this time, as we've seen before in the history of the Crusades - it is one thing to conquer a land, and it is another thing entirely to hold onto it once it has been conquered. There was dissension in the Muslim ranks. Saladin didn't really have the spiritual support of the Caliph for his achievements, and he no doubt knew that there was a massive army or armies heading his way from Europe. Saladin was of Kurdish descent. Back then, as now, the Kurds were a minority group in the Middle East, and Saladin was trying to hold together a mixture of Muslims from various

ethnic backgrounds. Arabic, Egyptian, Turkish, and Persian Muslims were all happy to take orders from a Kurdish commander when they had the mutual jihadi focus of taking Jerusalem, but now that their goal has been achieved, many men were questioning why they were still out in the field, and feelings of hostility and discord were starting to bubble to the surface. With all the pressure that he was under, it's quite likely that Saladin's decision to release King Guy was a simple and uncharacteristic error of judgment.

So what came of this error? Well, King Guy didn't stay on his island for long. He managed to get a cleric to absolve him from the pesky oath he had made to Saladin. The cleric conveniently advised Guy that, since the oath had been made under duress to an infidel, it was in fact invalid, and Guy had no obligation to obey it. It was with a clear conscience then, that Guy and Queen Sibylla left the island and sailed back to the mainland, intent on reclaiming their Kingdom. They spent some time in the cities of Tripoli and Antioch, planning, regrouping, and garnering support for their cause. Surprisingly, they did have some supporters. The Templars were on their side, as were some of the old noble families from Jerusalem. Prince Bohemond grudgingly gave King Guy a vague promise of assistance, and full of confidence, King Guy marched south to Tyre. Once there, he intended to thank Conrad of Montferrat for doing such a great job of looking after the city in his absence. He would then set up his royal Kingdom in Tyre, and from there he and Queen Sibylla would rule justly and wisely and await the arrival of the armies from Europe, who would then drive Saladin out of the Kingdom, and everything would return to normal. Easy.

Except things didn't quite work out that way. To Guy's shock and horror, when he arrived at Tyre, Conrad wouldn't even let him into the city. He found Tyre's formidable gates barred against him. When King Guy demanded to be received in the city as King, Conrad responded that Guy had forfeited his right to the throne when he was defeated at Hattin. Consequently, Conrad had taken it upon himself to hold what was left of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in trust for the Kings of Europe. When the Kings arrived, they would decide who would rule the diminished Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Conrad was pretty confident that he would be chosen over Guy. Unlike Guy, Conrad had shown that he had the ability to be an effective military commander, a skill that obviously was going to be needed in these troubled times. In addition, Conrad was very well connected. He was related to both the French King and Emperor Barbarossa, and was willing to bet that they would choose him over the not-so-well connected Guy.

Thoroughly disconcerted, Guy and his supporters marched back to Tripoli. There they formulated Plan B. There's only one word to describe Plan B. Plan B was crazy. It was so crazy, in fact, that only someone like Guy, who was totally lacking in any kind of experience in formulating military strategy, could have dreamt it up. But the weirdest thing about Plan B was, it actually ended up succeeding. So what was Plan B?

Well, Plan B involved Guy marching his very small army, numbering only a few thousand men, down the coast, past Tyre, and on to Acre. They would then lay siege to the city. Yes, they were a couple of problems with Plan B, one being that Guy had no hope of storming Acre's formidable defences with only a few thousand men, and that even if he did manage to do so, the Muslims inside Acre outnumbered King Guy's army and would probably defeat them. Then there was the fact that the only other Christian fighters nearby, at Tyre, were hostile to his cause, and the additional fact that Saladin, with his massive

army, was only a few days march away. But Guy wasn't too fazed by these problems and decided that he would face them as they arose.

So in the blistering summer heat of 1189 King Guy and the tiny army of the Kingdom of Jerusalem raised their banners and set off jauntily on their way. On their journey south, they stopped off at the city of Tyre, making camp outside its walls. At this point, it's likely that Guy realized, or someone else told him, that he was going to need more men, and really the only source of Christian fighters in the Holy Land at this time was, Tyre. And Guy was in luck. Some reinforcements had recently arrived in Tyre from Italy. However, the Italians had fallen out with Conrad, and were happy to throw their lot in with King Guy.

Now, there's something you should note here. While King Guy has very little support in his own Kingdom, overseas and in Europe in particular he's still seen as the King of Jerusalem, and enjoys all the advantages that flow from that position. He's viewed in Europe more as a tragic victim of the Battle at Hattin, rather than the cause of the Latin Christian defeat. And it's Guy and not Conrad who the Europeans see as being the legitimate ruler in the Holy Land. So many fighters coming from Europe, if given the option, are going to flock to King Guy's side. And that's exactly what happens. Bolstered by the fresh and eager Italian knights and foot soldiers, and with a fleet of Italian and Sicilian ships following his passage down the coastline, King Guy sets off again, arriving outside Acre on the 28th of August 1189.

Now, when King Guy and his handful of soldiers arrived at Acre, the armies of England and France were still at home, preparing to leave on Crusade. King Henry II of England died a month ago, and in six days time his son, Duke Richard, will be crowned King of England. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and the German Crusaders are still making their way through the Byzantine Empire. Saladin is around 41 miles away from Acre at Castle Beaufort.

The protracted negotiations Saladin has been engaged in with the Lord of Beaufort, Reynald of Sidon have been dragging on for months. A three month deadline imposed by Saladin for the surrender of the castle expired in mid-August, but Saladin is no closer to taking the castle. Reynald has just requested a nine month long extension on the surrender agreement, which Saladin has understandably rejected. Castle Beaufort is situated to the east of Tyre, and it's likely that Saladin thought it vital to take the castle, as otherwise it would leave his army exposed to attack from the rear should the Muslims launch an assault on the Christian stronghold of Tyre.

While he was at Beaufort, Saladin was advised that King Guy and a small army were on the move, and were heading down the coast towards Acre. Had Saladin left Beaufort at this point and ridden south to intercept Guy, it's likely that the Latin Christian force would have been resoundingly defeated. There's a narrow pass which Guy and his army had to negotiate on their way to Acre. Had he been inclined to do so, Saladin could easily have cut the Latin Christian forces off at this pass, and victory would have been almost assured. So why didn't Saladin do this? Well, historians have speculated that either Saladin didn't take the army seriously due to its small size and the past military reputation of its commander, or he thought it to be a diversion designed to trick him into leaving Beaufort. Regardless of his reasoning, the result was King Guy and his small force of men arrived in Acre unimpeded.

Now, we've discussed Acre briefly in a previous episode, describing its importance as a commercial center in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Well, we'll now look at it in a little more detail. Acre was an absolutely ancient city. It was one of the oldest continually occupied sites in the Kingdom, with evidence showing that people were living there as early as 3000 BC. The city of Acre is built upon a peninsula which juts out into the Gulf of Haifa. Often described as being hook-like or nose-like in shape, at the time of the Crusades the peninsula was heavily fortified by a square set of walls which reached past the peninsula into the sea. The western and southern walls bordered the sea, while the northern wall blocked access to the peninsula, The eastern wall was the most interesting. It extended down over the land and quite a way into the sea, where it met up with the southern wall. Only a small gap was left in the sea wall, enabling a ship to enter inside the square shape created by the walls into a very sheltered harbor. There was another, smaller, even more protected harbor formed inside the hook shape created by the peninsula. A great chain ran across the entrance to the inner harbor, which could be raised to block access to enemy ships.

The fortifications were bolstered by two formidable and imposing towers, the names of which were equally formidable and imposing. The Cursed Tower was built on the peninsula and formed the corner for the northern and eastern walls, while the Tower of Flies was built on a rocky outcrop in the sea, and it formed the corner of the eastern and southern walls. The harbor at Acre was one of the few on the coast which could provide shelter for ships in all weathers. Consequently, it became a magnet for sea trade, and Acre developed into a wealthy centre for commerce. It was also a favored royal residence. When not at their palace in Jerusalem, the royal family would often travel to the coast and stay at Acre.

Now, when King Guy arrived at Acre in August 1189 with his small army, he set up camp on a hill outside the city known as Mount Thoron. Thoron provided some defensive protection for the Latin Christian forces, while the view from the top of the hill enabled them to see the approach of any enemy forces. The army dug in and prepared to attack the city. Thus began one of the most bizarre and unlikely military campaigns in the history of the Crusades, the Siege of Acre. The battle for Acre would rage for the next two years. Join me next week as we continue our examination of the epic Siege of Acre.

Now, just before I go this week, I wanted to mention once again the music of Cary Lewincamp. Cary kindly gave permission for me to use an extract from one of his compositions as the intro music for the podcast, and CDs of his work are available to purchase via his website. Just visit www.cary.com.au, that's CARY.com.au. You can also download individual songs from iTunes. It's great music. You should check it out. Until next week, bye for now.

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