

## **The Failure of the Second Crusade**

### *Hue M*

Unlike the spectacular success of the First Crusade, the Second Crusade, launched in 1145, is generally regarded as a disaster for the Christian West. Even those who took part in the Crusade saw it as a failure. According to William of Tyre:

Thus a company of kings and princes such as we have not read of through all the ages had gathered and, for our sins, had been forced to return, covered with shame and disgrace, with their mission unfulfilled.... henceforth those who undertook the pilgrimages were fewer and less fervent. (Brundage, 1962, p120)

Brundage claims that the failure of the Crusade to achieve any victories whatever in the east emboldened Muslim military leaders, destroyed the myth of western prowess in arms, and was to be responsible, at least in part, for causing the Muslim states of the east to draw closer together, to unite for further attacks upon the Latin states. He says that the end of the Second Crusade saw the Muslims preparing to unite, for the first time, against the Latin intruders in their midst, while the Latins, for their part, were divided sharply against one another. (p.124)

Thus, although the new Crusaders set out with high hopes, their ambitions fell short of their achievement, and they returned home in disgrace. Yet, according to Runciman (1952, p.288) no medieval enterprise had started with such splendid hope. What had caused this sorry result?

In 1145 the news that Edessa, the oldest Christian state in the east, had fallen caused Christian society in the west to reel with shock. There was an immediate call for a new crusade. However, surprisingly enough, there was not an overwhelming response. Eugenius first appealed to the young King Louis of France. In December of that same year he addressed a papal bull to the king, proclaiming a new crusade:

...We therefore beseech, admonish and command all of you, and we enjoin it for the remission of sins, that those who are on God's side - especially the more powerful and noble men - that they gird themselves manfully and attack the pagan multitudes.. liberate the Eastern church, and strive to wrest many thousands of our captive brethren from their hands... (Brundage, 1962, p.87)

Eugenius called on the Abbot of Clairvaux, Bernard, to preach and inspire the French nobility. Leading the way was perhaps two of the most powerful kings in the western world, King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany.

The march east was mainly because Edessa had fallen but there were other factors as well. Pope Eugenius had recently acquired his office and immediately barred from the city by a communal government. He had not yet been able to enter Rome and could do little himself to help Edessa, but the manner in which he dealt with the Muslim infidel was likely to be noted. While he had the support of Louis VII and Conrad, he needed Conrad's help to regain the city of Rome. (Runciman, p.256) So the pope sent a bull, *Quantum praedecessores*, to Louis, who responded enthusiastically himself but when he called a council to discuss the matter the response was not nearly as encouraging. The King was needed at home and could not easily leave to be involved in a crusade. When Eugenius heard about this matter he sent St Bernard to Vezelay where the King and his court were spending Easter. Bernard had

huge success in Vezelay. 'Men begun to cry for crosses "Crosses, give us Crosses!"'(Runciman, 1952, p.253) the material prepared for crosses soon ran out and Bernard tore up his own cloak to make more. Bernard wrote to the pope a few days later: You ordered; I obeyed; and the authority of him who gave the order has made my obedience fruitful. I opened my mouth; I spoke and at once the crusaders have multiplied to infinity. Villages and towns are now deserted. You will scarcely find one man for every seven women. Everywhere you see widows whose husbands are still alive. (St Bernard, letter no. 247)

But Bernard did not stop there. He continued to preach the crusade in Burgundy, Lorraine, Flanders and, finally, Germany, where again he had huge success among the common people. It was not until two days after Christmas in 1146 when Bernard appeared before Conrad and addressed the king in the role of Christ himself: 'man' he cried 'what ought I to have done for you that I have not done?'(Runciman, 1952) After this none too subtle persuasion Conrad took the cross. The Pope was not happy when he heard of the German kings' involvement, for he was concerned by the problem of a divided command. Besides, he needed Conrad's help in Italy. However, though he was not pleased by the news, it was too late.

Although there were a few minor armies from England, Belgium and Sicily, the two main bodies came from Germany and France and were led by kings. The second crusade seemed to be getting off to a strong start although Pope Eugenius had his reservations about a crusading army divided by two different leaders. It was that kind of power struggle which almost cost them the First Crusade. However, despite the pope's doubts, the Second Crusade was already in progress and there was no going back.

International politics was already affecting the crusade. Roger of Sicily offered to transport both the French and German armies by sea but neither saw fit to accept, Conrad refusing for personal reasons while Louis because the Pope did not support Roger's involvement in the crusade. Both kings chose to travel by land.

The events that followed their departure are fairly clear in the sources. Conrad was the first to set off, in May 1147. He was accompanied by a host of great nobles: King Vladislav of Bohemia, King Boleslav IV of Poland, as well as his nephew and heir, Frederick, Duke of Swabia, and the bishops of Metz and Toul. Runciman describes the host as 'a turbulent army.' (p.259) They moved through Hungary without incident but were met there by Demetrius Macrembolites, an ambassador from the Byzantine court, who asked Conrad to swear an oath to do nothing against the welfare and interests of the emperor. After taking the oath, Conrad crossed the Danube into imperial territory on 20 July, with assistance from the Byzantine navy. He was given an official welcome at Sofia by the emperor's cousin, Michael Paleologus. After this, however, relations between the Germans and the Byzantines became very sour. The German army lacked discipline and the aging Conrad could not control his forces. They pillaged their way east, killing any who opposed them. The emperor sent troops to escort them through Byzantine territory, but this failed to quell the disorder and there were many violent incidents even before Conrad's host reached Constantinople.

In the meantime, king Louis and the French contingent were on the march. They had set off in June, a month behind the German force. Louis' contingent included his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was also niece to Raymond, Prince of Antioch. The Countesses of Flanders and Toulouse and many other great ladies travelled with their husbands. The army also

included a contingent of the Knights of the Temple, led by their Grand Master. According to Runciman, (1962, p.263) some of the French hurried on ahead, to link up with the Germans. They found the Germans unfriendly, refusing to spare them rations, and relations between the two armies became embittered. Both sides developed a dislike for their Byzantine hosts. As Runciman points out, it 'did not augur well for the success of the Crusade.'

The French arrived in Constantinople by 4 October where they were well received by the emperor, who nevertheless moved them on across the Bosphorus as quickly as possible. By November they arrived at Nicaea where they linked up with Conrad and the Germans, and learned of a major defeat suffered by Conrad's army. When the German army left Constantinople Manuel made sure to warn them to stick near the coast. But Conrad had other plans. He wished to go through the interior, like the army of the First Crusade. In truth, however, his army was ill-prepared for this route and soon lacked both food and water. On the 25th of October the army came across a small river (at Dorylaeum, near the site of the victory of the First Crusade.) The Seljuk army attacked. It was "not a battle but a massacre." (Runciman, p.268). There is no doubt that this battle was a major factor in the over-all failure of the second crusade.

The two kings now joined forces and decided to take the coast road southward, keeping within Byzantine territory. At Ephesus, Conrad's health deteriorated and he returned without his army to Constantinople, where the Emperor himself nursed him. He remained here for the next few months, until a Byzantine naval squadron escorted him to Jerusalem in March 1148. In the meantime, the combined army, led by king Louis, struggled through Anatolia and across the mountains towards Antioch. The journey was a nightmare of cold, hunger, and attacks by Turkish horsemen.

The two armies eventually reached Attalia, in modern Turkey, from where the cavalry and Louis' royal household embarked by ship to the Holy Land, leaving the foot soldiers to fare for themselves. According to Runciman, fewer than half of them finally reached Antioch.

So far, the failure of this crusade can be detected in a number of ways. To begin, the bad discipline of the German army and the foolish decisions of its leaders had reduced its numbers dramatically. Further, while staying in Constantinople the Germans practically destroyed the palace at Philopatium, an act which did nothing to improve the native Christians' opinions of the crusaders. When the Byzantine emperor Manuel suggested that Conrad should take steps to discipline his troops, Conrad responded by threatening to come back a year later to take over Manuel's empire. It can be imagined that this idle threat did not help the crusaders' cause.

But Manuel had more at stake than just the palace. He had mounting problems with a local Turkish rebel leader, Mas'ud, and when Mas'ud offered him a treaty he had little choice but to accept. Because of this recently formed alliance, Mas'ud and his agents could go freely through the empire, giving them access to the crusading army. Those who fell behind were easy targets for Turkish attack.

...While the Turk unceasingly harried and inflicted death upon the crowd of people on foot, who were unable to keep up. Pitying the fate of the suffering people, who were dying both from famine and from arrows fired by the enemy. (Monumenta Corbeiensia p152-3)

When the crusading army found out about this treaty they could not understand Manuel's actions. Distrust and hostility developed between the Crusaders and their fellow Christian Greeks in the Byzantine Empire.

But the most significant mistake was still to come. The decision was made that the remaining crusading force would mount a full scale attack on Damascus. This was suicide. There were many faults in this plan. Damascus was a walled city with a strong garrison and, perhaps more importantly, the people of Damascus wished to remain on friendly terms with the Christians. Not surprisingly the attack failed and soon after the crusaders returned home in disgrace.

But then certain people whom we had no reason to distrust treacherously alleged that the city was impregnable on that side, and they led us to another position where there was neither water for the army nor could anyone gain entry. Everyone was annoyed and also upset by this, and we retreated, abandoning the enterprise as a failure. (Monumenta Corbeiensia 225-6)

According to Runciman, the failure of the Second Crusade was caused by the truculence, ignorance and folly of its noble leaders. (1952, P288). He rejects the notion that the cause of defeat was the treachery of the emperor. The real reasons for the failure of the second crusade may never be known but it is pretty safe to assume that there were four main factors. Firstly, the lack of discipline among the German soldiers. Second, the treaty made by Manuel with the Muslims; thirdly Conrad's decision to ignore Manuel's advice and travel through the interior, thus losing many men; and finally, by far the most important, the decision to attack Damascus. Nothing could be gained by this move and in fact much was lost.

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