

William of Tyre

Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum (History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea)

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Fall of Edessa

In that same year, [1144] during the time which elapsed between the death of King Baldwin's father and Baldwin's elevation to the throne, one Zengi, a vicious man, was the most powerful of the Eastern Turks. His city, formerly called Nineveh, but now known as Mosul, is the metropolis of the region which was earlier called Assur. Zengi, its lord and governor, at this time laid siege to the city of Edessa, more commonly called Rohas, the greatest and most splendid city of the Medes. Zengi did this, relying on the numbers and strength of his men and also on the very dangerous strife which had arisen between Prince Raymond of Antioch and Count Joscelyn of Edessa. The city of Edessa lies beyond the Euphrates, one day's journey from the river. The aforesaid Count of Edessa, contrary to the custom of his predecessors, had ceased to live in the city and made his constant and perpetual abode in a place called Turbessel. He did this both because of the richness of the spot and because of his own laziness. Here, far from the tumult of the enemy and free to pursue his pleasures, the count failed to take proper care of his noble city. The population of Edessa was made up of Chaldeans and Armenians, unwarlike men, scarcely familiar with the use of arms and accustomed only to the acts of trade. The city was only rarely visited by Latins and very few of them lived there. The safekeeping of the city was entrusted solely to mercenaries and these were not paid according to the type of service they performed or the length of time for which they were engaged indeed, they often had to wait a year or more for the payment of their stated wages. Both Baldwin and the elder Joscelyn, when they held the county, made their home permanently and customarily in Edessa and took care to have the city supplied with food, arms, and other necessary items from nearby places. They had thus been able both to maintain themselves in safety and also to overawe the neighboring towns with their strength.

There was, as we have said before, bad feeling between Count Joscelyn and the Prince of Antioch a feeling that was not hidden, but rather had become an open hatred. For this reason, each of them took little or no care if the other were attacked or suffered misfortune. Rather they rejoiced at the other's catastrophes and were made glad by the other's mishaps.

The aforesaid great prince, Zengi, took the opportunity offered by this situation. He gathered innumerable cavalry forces throughout all of the East; he even called up the people of the cities neighboring Edessa and brought them with him to lay siege to the day. He blockaded all of the entrances to the city, so that the besieged citizens could not get out and so that those who wished to help them could not get in. The resulting shortage of food and provisions caused great suffering for the besieged. The city, however, was surrounded by a formidable wall. In the upper town there were high towers and down below there was the lower town where the citizens could take refuge, even if the city itself were taken. All these defenses could be of use against the enemy only if there were men willing to fight for their freedom, men who would resist the foe valiantly. The defenses would be useless, however, if there were none among the besieged who were willing to serve as defenders. Towers, walls, and earthworks are of little value to a city unless there are defenders to man them. Zengi found the town bereft of defenders and was much encouraged. He encircled the town with his forces, assigned the officers of his legions to appropriate stations, and dug in. The catapults and siege engines weakened the fortifications; the continual shooting of arrows

tormented the citizens incessantly; and the besieged were given no respite. It was announced, meanwhile, and the news was also spread by rumor, that the city of Edessa, a city faithful to God, was suffering the agonies of a siege at the hands of the enemy of the faith and the foe of the Christian name. At this news the hearts of the faithful, far and wide, were touched and zealous men began to take up arms to harass the wicked. The Count, when he heard of it, was stricken with anguish. Energetically he assembled his forces. . . . He went around admonishing his faithful friends. Humbly he besought his lord, the Prince of Antioch and, through messengers, he forcefully urged the prince to assist him in his labors to free Edessa from the yoke of future servitude . Messengers bearing news of this sinister event came even to the kingdom of Jerusalem, bearing witness to the siege of Edessa and to the misfortunes suffered by its citizens. The queen, who had charge of the kingdom's government, on the advice of the council of the nobles which she consulted, sent her kinsman, Manasses, the royal constable, Philip of Nablus, and Elinander of Tiberius, together with a great multitude of soldiers with all speed to Edessa that they might give the Lord Count and the suffering citizens the comfort which they desired.

The Prince of Antioch, however, rejoiced in Edessa's adversity and paid small attention to his duties for the common welfare. He was little concerned that personal hatred ought not cause public harm and made excuses, while he put off giving the aid which had been requested.

Zengi, meanwhile, pressed continual assaults on the city. He ran the gamut of attacks and left nothing untried which could harass the citizens and aid him in gaining control of the city. He sent sappers through trenches and underground tunnels to undermine the walls. As they dug passages beneath the walls, they buttressed these with posts, which were afterward set on fire. A great part of the wall was thus broken down. This breach in the wall, more than 100 cubits wide, gave the enemy an entrance into the city. The enemy now had the approach they had desired. Their forces rushed together into the city. They slew with their swords the citizens whom they encountered, sparing neither age, condition, nor sex. of them it might be said: "They murder the widow and the stranger, they slay the orphan, the youth, and the virgin, together with the old Man." The city, therefore, was captured and delivered to the swords of the enemy.

The more prudent or more experienced citizens rushed to the citadel which, as we have said, was in the city. This they did so that they might at least preserve their lives, their children, and their wives, if only for a short time. At the gate there was such a crush of people trying to enter that, because of the press of the crowd, many were suffocated and died miserably. Among these was the most reverend Hugh, the Archbishop of the city. He is said to have expired in this fashion together with several of his clerics. Some of those who were present would blame his miserable end on the Archbishop himself, for he is said to have collected a vast sum of money, Had he used this for soldiers, it would have been helpful to the city, but he preferred to heap up his treasure like a miser rather than to consider his dying people. Thus it happened that he received the reward of his greed by perishing with his people....

Thus while the Prince of Antioch, overcome by foolish hatred, delayed rendering the help he owed to his brothers and while the count awaited help from abroad, the ancient city of Edessa, devoted to Christianity since the time of the Apostles and delivered from the superstitions of the infidels through the words and preaching of the Apostle Thaddeus, passed into an undeserved servitude.

Siege of Damascus

Ascalon is one of the five cities of the Philistines. It is situated on the seashore and is shaped like

aDamascus is the largest city of lesser Syria and is its metropolis, for as it is said, "Damascus is the head of Syria." [Is. 7:8] The city is also known as the Phoenicia of Lebanon and is named after a certain servant of Abraham who is believed to have founded it. The name means "bloody" or "dripping with gore." The city is located on a plain in a land which is barren and arid, save where it is irrigated by waters brought down for its benefit through ancient canals. A stream descends from a nearby mountain ridge in the highlands of that area and is channeled through the various lower sections of the region so as to fertilize the barren fields.

Since there is an abundance of water, the surplus is used to nourish the orchards of fruit trees which are located on either side of the stream. The stream flows along the eastern wall of the city. When the kings came to the place which had been agreed upon, namely Daria, which was close to Damascus, they organized their lines for battle and settled the order of battle for their legions lest, if they went ahead in disorderly fashion, quarrels should break out among them and hinder their common task.

By the common decision of the princes it was agreed that the King of Jerusalem and his men were to go first, principally because they were supposed to be familiar with the lay of the land. They were supposed to open the way for the rest who were following them. The French King and the men of his expedition were ordered to take the second, or center, place, so that, if necessary, they could assist those ahead of them. The Emperor, by the same token, was ordered to keep in the third and last place, so that he would be ready to resist the enemy if perchance they should attack from the rear. He was thus to make the forces ahead secure from behind. When the three armies had been placed in proper order, they moved the camp forward and attempted to approach the city.

On the western side of Damascus from which our troops approached, and on the northern side, too, the city enclosed far and wide by orchards which are like a dense woods or a shady forest, extending five miles or more toward Lebanon. These orchards are enclosed by mud walls-rock is not plentiful in that region-so that their ownership will not be in doubt and also to keep out trespassers. The orchards are, therefore, enclosed by defensive walls in such a way that each man's possessions are identified. Paths and public roads, though they are narrow, are left open so that the gardeners and those who have charge of the orchards can make their way to the city with the animals which carry the fruit. These orchards are the city's greatest protection. Because of their density, because of the number of the trees, and because of the narrowness of the roads, it seemed difficult-indeed, almost impossible-for those who wished to approach Damascus to do so from that side. From the beginning, however, our princes had decided to bring the army in through this area to gain access to the city. There was a double reason for this: on the one band, it was done so that after the most securely guarded areas in which the Damascenes had the greatest faith had been occupied, what remained would seem easy and would be more readily accomplished. On the other hand, the approach was made in this way so that the army would not be deprived of the benefits of food and water. The King of Jerusalem, therefore, sent his fighting formations in first through those narrow orchard paths. The army could scarcely make headway and did so with great difficulty, both because it was hemmed in by the narrow roads and also because it was hindered by the ambushes of the men who were hidden in the thickets. Also, the army had sometimes to engage the enemies who appeared and seized the circuitous paths.

All the people of Damascus came out together and descended upon the aforesaid orchards in order to block the army's passage both by stealth and by open attack. There were, furthermore, walls and large, tall houses among the orchards. These were defended by soldiers whose

possessions lay nearby. They defended the orchard walls by shooting arrows and other missiles and allowed no one to approach them, while the arrows shot from on high made the public roads exceedingly dangerous for those who wished to pass through them. Nor were our men beset with formidable obstacles only on one side. Rather, on every side there was equal peril for the unwary and danger of sudden and unforeseen death. There were, moreover, men with lances hiding inside of the walls. When these men saw our men passing by, they would stab them as they passed, through little peepholes in the walls which were cleverly designed for this purpose, so that those hiding inside could scarcely be seen. Many are said to have perished miserably that day in this way. Countless other kinds of danger, too, faced those who wished to pass through those narrow paths.

As our men became aware of this, they pushed on more fiercely. When they had broken down the barricades in the orchards, they occupied them eagerly. Those whom they discovered within the walls or in the houses, they pierced with their swords or threw into chains as captives. When the townsmen who had come out to defend the orchards heard this, they feared that they would perish as the others had. They left the orchards and returned to the city in droves. Thus, when the defenders either had been slaughtered or had been turned to flight, a free path forward lay open to our men.

The cavalry forces of the townsmen and of those who had come to their assistance realized that our army was coming through the orchards in order to besiege the city and they accordingly approached the stream which flowed by the town. This they did with their bows and ballistas so that they could fight off the Latin army, which was fatigued by its journey and also so that they could prevent the thirsty men from reaching the river and the water which was so necessary for them. Our men hurried to the river, which they had heard was nearby, in order to relieve their thirst, which had grown intense from the difficulties of their labors and the dense clouds of dust which were raised by the feet of horses and men. There they saw such a multitude of the enemy that they halted for a time. After a while they collected their men. They were given strength and hardiness by necessity. Once and then again they strove to get to the water, but in vain. While the king of Jerusalem and his men struggled vainly, the Emperor, who commanded the formations in the rear, demanded to know why the army was not moving forward. He was told that the enemy had seized the river and that they were blocking the progress of our men. When he learned of this, the Emperor was angered and, together with his lieutenants, he speedily made his way through the French King's ranks to the place where the fight for the river was going on. They dismounted from their horses and became infantrymen-as the Germans are accustomed to do in the crisis of battle. With shields in hand they fought the enemy hand-to-hand with swords. The enemy, who had earlier resisted valiantly, were unable to withstand the attack. They relinquished the river bank and fled at full speed to the city.

In this combat the Lord Emperor is said to have performed a feat which will be remembered through the ages. It is related that one of the enemy was resisting manfully and vigorously and that the Emperor with one blow cut off this enemy soldier's head and neck with the left shoulder and arm attached, together with part of his side-despite the fact that the foe was wearing a cuirass. At this deed the citizens, both those who witnessed it and those who learned of it from others, were thrown into such a fright that they despaired of resisting and even of life itself.

When the river had been won and its banks had been freely yielded, the Crusaders camped far and wide around the city, with the advantage of using freely the orchards, for which they had so strenuously fought, as well as the river. The townsmen were astonished both at the amazing number of our troops and at their courage. They began to be troubled about their own men and

whether they could withstand us. They feared a sudden attack by us and counted nothing safe when they considered what kind of men they had discovered us to be in the previous day's battles. They conferred, therefore, and with the ingenuity which is characteristic of those suffering misery and adversity, they had recourse to desperate devices. In all the sections of the city which faced our camps they heaped up huge, tall beams, for they could only hope that while our men were working to tear down these barriers they might be able to flee in the opposite direction with their wives and children. It seemed evident to our men that if the divine favor was with us the city would soon be taken by the Christians. But it seemed otherwise to Him Who is "terrible in his judgments of the sons of men." [Ps 9:4] The city, as we have said, was in despair and its citizens held no hope of resisting or of being saved, but rather they were packing their bags and preparing to leave. At this point, for our sins, they began to work on the greed of our men. Using money, they attempted to conquer the hearts of those whose bodies they could not overcome. With consummate skill they proposed a variety of arguments to some of our princes and they promised and delivered a stupendous sum of money to them so that the princes would strive and labor to lift the siege. They persuaded these princes to assume the role of the traitor Judas. Corrupted by gifts and promises, led on by greed, the root of all evil, these princes fell in with the crime. By impious suggestions they persuaded the kings and the leaders of the pilgrims, who trusted their good faith and industry, to leave the orchards and to lead the army to the opposite side of the city. To camouflage their plot they alleged that on the opposite side of Damascus, which faced south and west, there were neither orchards to strengthen the city nor any moat or river to hinder their approach to the walls. The wall, they said, was low and was made of sunbaked bricks and it would scarcely withstand the first attack. There, they asserted, neither engines nor any great force would be needed. In the first attack the wall could immediately be torn down by hand and it would not be difficult to break into the city...

The kings and all the leaders of the army believed them and they deserted the places which they had earlier won with so much sweat and at the cost of the lives of so many of their men. They transferred all of their formations and, under the leadership of the traitors, they camped on the opposite side of the city.

There they found themselves located far from access to water, deprived of the abundance of fruit, and lacking almost all supplies. They were saddened and they discovered, all too late, that they had maliciously been led to move from a region of abundance.

The food supply in the camp began to run out. Before the men had set out on the expedition, they had been persuaded to believe that the city would be quickly taken and they had brought along provisions for only a few days. This was especially true for the pilgrims, nor could they be blamed for it, since they were unfamiliar with the country. They had been persuaded, too, that the city would be taken at once in the initial attacks and they were assured that in the meantime a large army could be fed on the fruit supply which they could get for nothing, even if all other food were lacking.

The doubtful men deliberated publicly and privately as to what they were to do. To return to the places they had left seemed hard, even impossible, for, when our men had left, the enemy saw that what they desired had been accomplished. They had entered those places more strongly than before and had barricaded the roads by which our men had earlier entered. They had blocked them by piling up beams and large rocks and had sent in an immense company of archers who made access impossible. To attack the city from the area where the camps were now located would, on the other hand, involve delay; but the lack of food supplies would not allow a long

respice. The pilgrim princes consulted one another. Seeing the manifest discomfort of the men whose spiritual care and whose Crusade had been confided to them and knowing that they could make no headway, they decided to return, despising the false pretenses of the men who had betrayed them.

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. They returned to the kingdom by the same route over which they had come. Henceforth, so long as they remained in the East, they regarded the ways of our princes with suspicion. With good reason they turned down all their wicked plans and henceforth the leaders of the Crusade were lukewarm in the service of the Kingdom. Even after they had returned to their own lands they constantly remembered the injuries they had suffered and detested our princes as wicked men. Nor were they alone affected. For they also caused others who had not been there to neglect the care of the kingdom, so that henceforth those who undertook the pilgrimages were fewer and less fervent. Even today those who come are careful lest they fall into a trap and they strive to return home as soon as possible.