

marriage. When the Count saw what a serious situation he had created he took fright and said that he repented. They accepted his apologies, forgave him for his defection and begged him to join them against the Muslims and to give them his help in the defence of their lands. The Count agreed to make his peace and be reunited with them and returned with them to the Frankish King, and so peace was restored between them after all that had happened. But God saw to it that it did them no good. Infantry and cavalry mustered and marched from Acre to Saffuriyya, but they were reluctant and demoralized.

The Battle of Hittin

(IBN AL-ATHĪR, XI, 351-5)

While the reunited Franks were on their way to Saffuriyya, Saladin called a council of his amīrs. Most of them advised him not to fight, but to weaken the enemy by repeated skirmishes and raids. Others however advised him to pillage the Frankish territories, and to give battle to any Frankish army that might appear in their path, 'Because in the East people are cursing us, saying that we no longer fight the infidels but have begun to fight Muslims instead. So we must do something to justify ourselves and silence our critics.' But Saladin said: 'My feeling is that we should confront all the enemy's forces with all the forces of Islām; for events do not turn out according to man's will and we do not know how long a life is left to us, so it is foolish to dissipate this concentration of troops without striking a tremendous blow in the Holy War.' So on Thursday, 23 rabi' II/2 July 1187, the fifth day after we encamped at Uqhuwana, he struck camp and moved off up the hill outside Tiberias, leaving the city behind him. When he drew near to the Franks, however, there was no one to be seen, for they had not yet left their tents. So he went back down the hill with his

army. At night he positioned troops where they would prevent the enemy from giving battle and then attacked Tiberias with a small force, breached the wall and took the city by storm during the night. The inhabitants fled for refuge to the citadel, where the Countess and her children were, and defended themselves there while the lower town was sacked and burned.

When the Franks learned that Saladin had attacked Tiberias and taken it and everything in it, burning the houses and anything they could not remove, they met to take counsel. Some advised the King to meet the Muslims in battle and chase them out of Tiberias, but the Count intervened to say: 'Tiberias belongs to me and my wife. There is no question that Saladin is master there now and that only the citadel remains, where my wife is immured. For my part, if he takes the citadel, my wife and all my possessions there and then goes away I shall be happy enough. By God, I have observed the armies of Islām over the course of the years and I have never seen one equal to Saladin's army here in numbers or in fighting power. If he takes Tiberias he will not be able to stay there, and when he has left it and gone away we will retake it; for if he chooses to stay there he will be unable to keep his army together, for they will not put up for long with being kept away from their homes and families. He will be forced to evacuate the city, and we will free our prisoners.' But Prince Arnāt of al-Karak replied: 'You have tried hard to make us afraid of the Muslims. Clearly you take their side and your sympathies are with them, otherwise you would not have spoken in this way. As for the size of their army, a large load of fuel will be good for the fires of Hell. . . .' 'I am one of you,' said the Count, 'and if you advance then I shall advance with you, and if you retreat I shall retreat. You will see what will happen.' The generals decided to advance and give battle to the Muslims, so they left the place where they had been encamped until now and advanced on the Muslim army. When Saladin received the news he ordered his army to

withdraw from its position near Tiberias; his only reason for besieging Tiberias was to make the Franks abandon their position and offer battle. The Muslims went down to the water (of the lake). The weather was blazingly hot and the Franks, who were suffering greatly from thirst, were prevented by the Muslims from reaching the water. They had drained all the local cisterns, but could not turn back for fear of the Muslims. So they passed that night tormented with thirst. The Muslims for their part had lost their first fear of the enemy and were in high spirits, and spent the night inciting one another to battle. They could smell victory in the air, and the more they saw of the unexpectedly low morale of the Franks the more aggressive and daring they became; throughout the night the cries *Allāh akbar* (God is great) and 'there is no God but Allāh' rose up to heaven. Meanwhile the Sultan was deploying the vanguard of archers and distributing the arrows.

On Saturday 24 rabī' II/4 July 1187 Saladin and the Muslims mounted their horses and advanced on the Franks. They too were mounted, and the two armies came to blows. The Franks were suffering badly from thirst, and had lost confidence. The battle raged furiously, both sides putting up a tenacious resistance. The Muslim archers sent up clouds of arrows like thick swarms of locusts, killing many of the Frankish horses. The Franks, surrounding themselves with their infantry, tried to fight their way toward Tiberias in the hope of reaching water, but Saladin realized their objective and forestalled them by planting himself and his army in the way. He himself rode up and down the Muslim lines encouraging and restraining his troops where necessary. The whole army obeyed his commands and respected his prohibitions. One of his young mamlūks led a terrifying charge on the Franks and performed prodigious feats of valour until he was overwhelmed by numbers and killed, when all the Muslims charged the enemy lines and almost broke through, slaying many Franks in the

process. The Count saw that the situation was desperate and realized that he could not withstand the Muslim army, so by agreement with his companions he charged the lines before him. The commander of that section of the Muslim army was Taqi ad-Din 'Umar, Saladin's nephew. When he saw that the Franks charging his lines were desperate and that they were going to try to break through, he sent orders for a passage to be made for them through the ranks.

One of the volunteers had set fire to the dry grass that covered the ground; it took fire and the wind carried the heat and smoke down on to the enemy. They had to endure thirst, the summer's heat, the blazing fire and smoke and the fury of battle. When the Count fled the Franks lost heart and were on the verge of surrender, but seeing that the only way to save their lives was to defy death they made a series of charges that almost dislodged the Muslims from their position in spite of their numbers, had not the grace of God been with them. As each wave of attackers fell back they left their dead behind them; their numbers diminished rapidly, while the Muslims were all around them like a circle about its diameter. The surviving Franks made for a hill near Hittin, where they hoped to pitch their tents and defend themselves. They were vigorously attacked from all sides and prevented from pitching more than one tent, that of the King. The Muslims captured their great cross, called the 'True Cross', in which they say is a piece of the wood upon which, according to them, the Messiah was crucified.¹ This was one of the heaviest blows that could be inflicted on them and made their death and destruction certain. Large numbers of their cavalry and infantry were killed or captured. The King stayed on the hillside with five hundred of the most gallant and famous knights.

I was told that al-Malik al-Afdal, Saladin's son, said: 'I was

¹ According to the Qur'ān, which preaches the Docetic doctrine, it was not the true person of Christ, but only a simulacrum, that was crucified.

at my father Saladin's side during that battle, the first that I saw with my own eyes. The Frankish King had retreated to the hill with his band, and from there he led a furious charge against the Muslims facing him, forcing them back upon my father. I saw that he was alarmed and distraught, and he tugged at his beard as he went forward crying: "Away with the Devil's lie!" The Muslims turned to counter-attack and drove the Franks back up the hill. When I saw the Franks retreating before the Muslim onslaught I cried out for joy: "We have conquered them!" But they returned to the charge with undiminished ardour and drove our army back toward my father. His response was the same as before, and the Muslims counter-attacked and drove the Franks back to the hill. Again I cried: "We have beaten them!" but my father turned to me and said: "Be quiet; we shall not have beaten them until that tent falls!" As he spoke the tent fell, and the Sultan dismounted and prostrated himself in thanks to God, weeping for joy.' This was how the tent fell: the Franks had been suffering terribly from thirst during that charge, which they hoped would win them a way out of their distress, but the way of escape was blocked. They dismounted and sat down on the ground and the Muslims fell upon them, pulled down the King's tent and captured every one of them, including the King,¹ his brother, and Prince Arnât of Karak, Islâm's most hated enemy. They also took the ruler of Jubáil, the son of Humphrey (of Toron), the Grand Master of the Templars, one of the Franks' greatest dignitaries,² and a band of Templars and Hospitallers. The number of dead and captured was so large that those who saw the slain could not believe that anyone could have been taken alive, and those who saw the prisoners could not believe that any had been killed. From the time of their first assault on Palestine in 491/1098 until now the Franks had never suffered such a defeat.

When all the prisoners had been taken Saladin went to his

¹ Guy of Lusignan.

² The Grand Master, Gerard of Ridfort.

tent and sent for the King of the Franks and Prince Arnāt of Karak. He had the King seated beside him and as he was half-dead with thirst gave him iced water to drink. The King drank, and handed the rest to the Prince, who also drank. Saladin said: 'This godless man did not have my permission to drink, and will not save his life that way.' He turned on the Prince, casting his crimes in his teeth and enumerating his sins. Then he rose and with his own hand cut off the man's head. 'Twice,' he said, 'I have sworn to kill that man when I had him in my power: once when he tried to attack Mecca and Medina, and again when he broke the truce to capture the caravan.' When he was dead and had been dragged out of the tent the King began to tremble, but Saladin calmed and reassured him. As for the ruler of Tripoli, when he escaped from the battle, as we have described, he went to Tyre and from there made his way to Tripoli. He was there only a few days before he died of rage and fury at the disaster that had befallen the Franks in particular, and all Christendom in general.

When Saladin had brought about the downfall of the Franks he stayed at the site of the battle for the rest of the day, and on the Sunday returned to the siege of Tiberias. The Countess sent to request safe-conducts for herself and her children, companions and possessions, and he granted her this. She left the citadel with all her train, and Saladin kept his word to her and let her escape unmolested. At the Sultan's command the King and a few of the most distinguished prisoners were sent to Damascus, while the Templars and Hospitallers were rounded up to be killed. The Sultan realized that those who had taken them prisoner were not going to hand them over, for they hoped to obtain ransoms for them, and so he offered fifty Egyptian *dinar* for each prisoner in these two categories. Immediately he got two hundred prisoners, who were decapitated at his command. He had these particular men killed because they were the fiercest of all the Frankish warriors, and in this way he rid the Muslim

people of them. He sent orders to his commander in Damascus to kill all those found in his territory, whoever they belonged to, and this was done.

A year later I crossed the battlefield, and saw the land all covered with their bones, which could be seen even from a distance, lying in heaps or scattered around. These were what was left after all the rest had been carried away by storms or by the wild beasts of these hills and valleys.

THE SULTAN SALADIN AND HIS ARMY ENTER FRANKISH TERRITORY

(‘IMĀD AD-DIN, 18-29)

In the morning the Sultan began to review the army in the field, like a cloud heavy with rain, a tempestuous sea of dust, a swelling ocean of whinnying chargers, of swords and cuirasses. He marshalled his gallant knights and his battalions who swept like a cloud over the face of the earth, making the dust fly up from earth to the Pleiades and sending the crows, to escape the dust, flying as far as Vega. The plain broke the seal of dust, lethal messages of impending disasters were fixed on the messenger-pigeons of death; the ribs of the bows longed to enclose their embryos the arrows, the curved arrow was careful to keep to its place on the right, the shot arrow was united to the bow-string; the bows were faithful to their oaths of vengeance and every battalion rose up in search of retribution. On the day of the review the Sultan came forward to set the army in order, to divide it into sections and to draw up its ranks far and near. To every amir he assigned a duty, to every knight a post, to every lucky champion a station, to every ambush a place, to every combatant an opponent, to every burning spark someone to extinguish it, to every company (of Franks) someone to destroy it, to every flintstone someone to strike it, to every blade someone to whet it, to each action a command, to each