

Medieval Sourcebook:

Ernoul: The Battle of Hattin, 1187

Account of the Battle of Hattin, 1187 by a local Frank, "Ernoul", written soon after 1197

Now I will tell you about King Guy and his host. They left the spring of Saffuriya to go to the relief of Tiberias. As soon as they had left the water behind, Saladin came before them and ordered his skirmishers to harass them from morning until midday. The heat was so great that they could not go on so that they could come to water. The king and all the other people were spread out and did not know what to do. They could not turn back for the losses would have been too great. He sent to the count of Tripoli, who led the advance guard, to ask advice as to what to do. He sent word that he should pitch his tent and make camp. The king gladly accepted this bad advice. When (the count) had given him good advice he would never take it. Some people in the host said that if the Christians had gone on to meet the Saracens, Saladin would have been defeated.

As soon as they were encamped, Saladin ordered all his men to collect brushwood, dry grass, stubble and anything else with which they could light fires, and make barriers which he had made all round the Christians. They soon did this, and the fires burned vigorously and the smoke from the fires was great; and this, together with the heat of the sun above them caused them discomfort and great harm. Saladin had commanded caravans of camels loaded with water from the Sea of Tiberias to be brought up and had water pots placed near the camp. The water pots were then emptied in view of the Christians so that they should have still greater anguish through thirst, and their mounts too. A strange thing happened in the Christian host the day they were encamped at the spring of Saffuriya, for the horses refused to drink the water either at night or in the morning, and because of their thirst they were to fail their masters when they most needed them. Then a knight named Geoffrey of Franc Leuc went to the king and said, 'Sire, it is now high time for you to make the poleins with their beards dear to the men of your country (i.e. Poitou)'.^[1] It was one of the causes of the hatred between King Guy and the Poitevins and those of this land, that the men of that land sang a song in Jerusalem which greatly annoyed the men of the kingdom. The song went:

Maugré li polein,
Aurons nous roi Poiteven.

['Despite the poleins,
we shall have a Poitevin king. ']

This hatred and scorn led to the loss of the kingdom of Jerusalem.

When the fires were lit and the smoke was great, the Saracens surrounded the host and shot their darts through the smoke and so wounded and killed men and horses. When the king saw the disadvantageous position the host was in, he called the master of the Temple and Prince Raynald and told them to give him their advice. They counselled him that he must fight the Saracens. He ordered his brother Aimery, who was the constable,^[2] to organise the squadrons. He organised them as best he could. The count of Tripoli who led the advance guard at their arrival led the first division and was in front. This division included Raymond, the son of the prince of Antioch, with all his company and the four sons of the lady of Tiberias, Hugh, William, Ralph and Otto.^[3] Balian of Ibelin and Count Joscelin made up the rear guard. Just as the divisions were being put in position and the battle lines ordered, five knights from the count of Tripoli's division left him and went to Saladin and said, 'Sire, what are you doing? Go and take the Christians for they are all defeated'. When he heard these words he ordered his squadron to move forward, and they moved off and approached the Christians. When the king was aware that Saladin was coming against him he ordered the count of Tripoli to charge. It is the right of the barons of the kingdom that when there is a host summoned by the king (ost banie) in their lordship, the baron on whose land the battle is to take place leads the first

division and is out in front, and on entering his land leads the advance guard and on leaving leads the rear guard. Because of this the count of Tripoli took the forward position, since Tiberias was his. The count and his division charged at a large squadron of Saracens. The Saracens parted and made a way through and let them pass; then, when they were in the middle of them, they surrounded them. Only 10 or 12 knights from the count's division escaped them. Among those who escaped were the count of Tripoli and Raymond, son of the prince of Antioch, and the four sons of the lady of Tiberias. When the count saw that they were defeated he did not dare go to Tiberias which was only 2 miles away, for he feared that if he shut himself up in there and Saladin found out he could come and take him. He went off with what company he had and went to the city of Tyre. After this division had been defeated the anger of God was so great against the Christian host because of their sins that Saladin vanquished them quickly; between the hours of tierce and nones[4] he had won almost all the field. He captured the king, the Master of the Temple, Prince Raynald, Marquis Boniface, Aimery the constable, Humphrey of Toron, Hugh of Gibelet, Plivain, lord of Botron, and so many other barons and knights that it would take too long to give the names of all of them; the Holy Cross also was lost. Later, in the time of Count Henry (of Champagne, "Lord of the Kingdom of Jerusalem" 1192-7), a brother of the Temple came to him and said that he had been at the great defeat and had buried the Holy Cross and knew well where it was; if he had an escort he would go and look for it. Count Henry gave him his leave and an escort. They went secretly and dug for three nights but could not find anything; then they returned to the city of Acre.

This disaster befell Christendom at a place called the Horns of Hattin (Karnehatin) 4 miles from Tiberias on Saturday 4 July 1187, the feast of St. Martin le Boillant,[5] Pope Urban III (1185-7) governing the apostolic see of the church of Rome, Frederick (I Barbarossa) being emperor in Germany, Philip (II Augustus), son of Louis (VII), king of France, Henry (II) au Cort Mantiau, king of England, and Isaac (II), emperor in Constantinople. the news of it struck the hearts of those faithful to Jesus Christ. Pope Urban who was at Ferrara died of grief when he heard the news. After him (the pope) was Gregory VIII who was of saintly life and only held the (papal) see for two months before he died and went to God. After Gregory came Clement III (1187-91) to whom Archbishop Josias of Tyre brought a truthful account of the news as you will find written below.[6] When Saladin had left the field with great joy and great victory and was in his camp, he ordered all the Christian prisoners who had been captured that day to be brought before him. They brought to him first the king, the master of the Temple, Prince Raynald, Marquis Boniface,[7] Humphrey of Toron, Aimery the constable, Hugh of Gibelet and several other knights. When he was them all together before him he told the king that he would have great joy and would consider himself greatly honoured now that he had in his power such valuable prisoners as the King of Jerusalem, the Master of the Temple and the other barons. He ordered that a syrup diluted with water in a cup of gold be brought. He tasted it, then gave it to the king to drink, saying: "Drink deeply". The king drank, like a man who was extremely thirsty, then handed the cup on to Prince Raynald.[8] Prince Raynald would not drink. When Saladin saw that he had handed the cup to Prince Raynald, he was irritated and told him: "Drink, for you will never drink again!". The prince replied that if it pleased God, he would never drink or eat anything of his (Saladin's). Saladin asked him: "Prince Raynald, if you held me in your prison as I now hold you in mine, what, by your law, would you do to me?". "So help me God", he replied, "I would cut off your head". Saladin was greatly enraged at this most insolent reply, and said: "Pig! You are my prisoner, yet you answer me so arrogantly?". He took a sword in his hand and thrust it right through his body. The mamluks who were standing by rushed at him and cut off his head. Saladin took some of the blood and sprinkled it on his head in recognition that he had taken vengeance on him. Then he ordered that they carry the head to Damascus, and it was dragged along the ground to show the Saracens whom the prince had wronged what vengeance he had had. Then he commanded the king and the other prisoners to be taken to Damascus, where they were put in prison as was appropriate for them.

NOTES

1. Geoffrey of Franc Leuc was presumably a member of a family which had been in the Kingdom of Jerusalem from at least as early as the time of Baldwin II, and so was himself a polein, i.e. a man born in the East and not an immigrant. [#Return to text at n. 1](#)
2. Aimery of Lusignan, constable of Jerusalem by 1181 and later king of Cypurs and Jerusalem. [#Return to text at n. 2](#)
3. The four sons of Eschiva of Tiberias by her first husband. Ralph of Tiberias was later famous as a jurist. [#Return to text at n. 3](#)
4. i.e. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.. This is probably allegorical, being the period Jesus was on the cross. [#Return to text at n. 4](#)
5. St. Martin of Tours is sometimes called "callidus". July 4th , a day noted in this country for other reasons, is celebrated in the Roman Church for the saint's ordination and translation. [#Return to text at n. 5](#)
6. This is not in the portion translated here, but to be found in the printed edition of Le Mas Latrie, p. 115. [#Return to text at n. 6](#)
7. Boniface of Montferrat is famous for his leadership of the 4th Crusade rather later. Presumably the reference here as elsewhere in the chronicle is to his brother, William 1135-88. [#Return to text at n. 7](#)
8. Bernard Hamilton, "The Elephant of Christ: Reynald of Chatillon", Studies in Church History 15 (1978), 97-108 traces the career and impact of the man who has most claim to have brought about the Hattin Campaign and the end of the First Latin Kingdom. [#Return to text at n. 8](#)

Source.

<http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/~prh3/259/texts/ernoul.htm>

This translation is taken with very minor amendments from a Beta version made by Peter Edbury c. 1975 of the old edition by Le Mas Latrie, pp. 62-9. For a real scholarly translation from Ruth Morgan's critical edition, see now Peter Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade* (Scolar Press: Aldershot, Hants., 1996).

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Paul Halsall, July 1998
halsall@murray.fordham.edu