

**‘The Lord put His people to the sword’:
Contemporary perceptions of the Battle of
Hattin (1187)***

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* This quotation is taken from Malcolm Barber and Keith Bate’s forthcoming *Letters from the East*, to be published by Ashgate in 2008. I am indebted to the authors for allowing me the use of this previously unpublished primary source material.

Statement of Aims

Much scholarship has been written on the build-up, course and results of the battle of Hattin. Such studies have focussed on the tactical and topographical aspects of the battle and have sought to understand the reasons for the Frankish defeat to the Muslims using the categories of modern military historical analysis, such as generalship, strategy, tactics, weaponry and terrain. This study will seek to argue that such categories were of secondary importance to both Christian and Muslim contemporaries who either fought in the battle or lived through the summer of 1187 when compared with religious explanations. It will also seek to show that religious aspects of the defeat were the most difficult for Christian contemporaries to understand. By stressing that both Christian and Muslim contemporaries recognised that the battle was an example of divine judgement for Christian sinfulness it is hoped that Riley-Smith's positive understanding of Hattin will be shown to be incompatible with the views expressed in the sources. By using Christian and Islamic sources it is hoped that this study will provide a more holistic and balanced understanding of contemporary understandings of the battle than has previously been provided. No other study of Hattin has examined contemporary perceptions of the battle using both perspectives and so it is hoped that this will give historians a deeper understanding of the importance of religion in Crusading warfare.

Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	The rarity of pitched battle and the decisive nature of Hattin	13
III.	The loss of the True Cross	21
IV.	Divine judgement and human sinfulness	30
V.	Conclusions	38
VI.	Bibliography	40

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I. Introduction

On 4 July 1187 the greatest field army ever assembled by the Kingdom of Jerusalem was annihilated by a Muslim force under the command of Saladin in a pitched battle at the Horns of Hattin.¹ The defeat had devastating consequences for the Crusader states in the Holy Land. Andrew Ehrenkreutz accurately described the situation when he wrote that ‘In one single day Saladin routed virtually all local Christian forces capable of defending the Crusader establishment in the Near East.’² With the complete destruction of the Frankish army, the towns and cities of the Kingdom were left defenceless, and Saladin was able to overrun the region unchallenged. So overwhelming was the victory at Hattin that Jerusalem itself succumbed on 2 October, less than three months later.³ Indeed, it is difficult to exaggerate its importance. As Joshua Prawer commented, ‘the Crusaders lost the battle, and with it a kingdom which had existed for eighty-eight years, since the conquest of Jerusalem in July 1099.’⁴ A single battle had decided the fate of the Holy Land.⁵

The battle of Hattin was one of the most significant battles of the Crusader period and was also one of the most decisive battles of the Middle Ages. It is therefore no

¹ N. Housley (1987). ‘Saladin's Triumph Over The Crusader States: The Battle of Hattin, 1187’, *History Today* 37:7, pp.17-23 at p.23; P.J. Cole (1993). ‘Christian Perceptions of the Battle of Hattin (583/1187)’, *Al-Masaq* 6, pp.9-39 at p.9.

² A.S. Ehrenkreutz (1972). *Saladin*. State University of New York Press, New York, p.202; see also P.J. Cole (1993). “‘O God, The Heathen Have Come Into Your Inheritance’ (Ps.78.1): The Theme of Religious Pollution In Crusade Documents, 1095-1188”, in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, pp.84-111 at pp.104-105.

³ Contemporaries recognised that the Holy Land was now defenceless and that without help the fall of Jerusalem was inevitable. See for example the letter from Eraclius to the Pope, in P.W. Edbury (ed.)(1998) *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade*. Aldershot, Ashgate, pp.162-163 at p.163 written c.5-20 September; for detailed discussion of this and other letters see below.

⁴ Prawer, ‘Hattin’, p.500.

⁵ R.C. Smail (1972). *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193*. Cambridge, University Press, p.16; see also J.F. Verbruggen (1997). *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages: From the Eighth Century to 1340*. Woodbridge, Boydell Press, p.317.

surprise that it has left its mark on the historiography of the period.⁶ There is a vast and ever-increasing amount of secondary literature on Hattin including three major reconstructions of the battle.⁷ The recent publication of articles by DeVries and Ehrlich has only served to underline this continued fascination with Hattin.⁸ Furthermore, D. S. Richards' translations of the works of Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Shaddad, Barber and Bate's forthcoming collection of *Letters from the East* and the ongoing publication of titles in the series *Crusade Texts in Translation* will ensure that the existing corpus of primary literature for the entire Crusading period will continue to be bolstered by the availability of sources in translation, many for the first time.⁹ This will continue to fuel research into Crusader studies and ensure the vitality of the discipline in the twenty-first century. So whilst the popularity of Hattin is partly due to its importance in the course of Crusading history, it should also be seen as the result of the explosion of research and scholarship on the Crusades that began in the 1950s and continues to show no sign of abating.¹⁰ Indeed, as John France has commented in his recent bibliographical survey of medieval warfare, 'no aspect of medieval history has been as lively and expansive as crusader studies'.¹¹ It is therefore

⁶ J. Praver (1980). 'The Battle of Hattin', in *Crusader Institutions*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp.484-500 at p.484; see also idem, p.xiv.

⁷ Praver, 'Hattin'; M.C. Lyons and D.E.P. Jackson. (1982). *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*. Cambridge, University Press, pp.255-266; B.Z. Kedar (1992). 'The Battle of Hattin Revisited', in B.Z. Kedar (eds.) *The Horns of Hattin*. Variorum, London, pp.190-207. For more on the reasons for historians' fascination with Hattin see Housley, 'Saladin's Triumph over the Crusader States', p.17. Housley suggests two reasons: the importance of Hattin as a turning point in the Crusades and that Hattin is fascinating in its own right due to the Franks decision to fight on 'exceptionally unfavourable, even suicidal terms'.

⁸ K. DeVries (2004). 'The Battle of Hattin, 1187: Beginning of the End', *Medieval History Magazine* 5, pp.24-31; M. Ehrlich (2007). 'The Battle of Hattin: A Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold?', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 5, pp.16-32.

⁹ D. S. Richards (2006-). *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh*. 3 Vols. Aldershot, Ashgate; Richards, (2002). *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*. Aldershot, Ashgate; M. Barber and K. Bate (eds.) (forthcoming, 2008). *Letters from the East*. Aldershot, Ashgate. *Crusade Texts in Translation*. (1996-). Aldershot, Ashgate. There are currently 15 volumes in the series.

¹⁰ J. Riley-Smith (1993). 'History, the Crusades and the Latin East, 1095-1204: A Personal View', in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, pp.1-17 at p.1.

¹¹ J. France (2001). 'Recent Writing on Medieval Warfare: From the Fall of Rome to c.1300', *Journal of Military History* 65:2, pp.441-473 at p.469.

important that both Hattin and its secondary literature are viewed within this wider context of historiographical development and research.

Historians have rightly recognised the battle of Hattin as ‘a climax’ in the history of Crusade.¹² It was a turning point which has rightly been seen as dividing Crusading history.¹³ With it Sir Steven Runciman concluded the second volume of his *History of the Crusades* and Jonathan Riley-Smith closed his chapter on crusading in its adolescence.¹⁴ This is not surprising; as Alan Murray commented, ‘In the lives of medieval states, there were few caesuras as definitive as the events of the summer of 1187 proved to be for the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.’¹⁵ However, despite its importance as a definitive and climactic moment in Crusading history, Hattin has surprisingly been largely overlooked in many major surveys of the subject. The only existing monograph focussing entirely on the battle was written for a popular audience.¹⁶ Its importance has often been implicitly rather than explicitly acknowledged in this works, with the details of the battle often being only briefly sketched out. So whilst Lyons and Jackson and Smail devoted an entire chapter or section to Hattin, Mayer, Richard, and Riley-Smith skimmed over it in only a few pages, preferring instead to focus on the consequences of the defeat.¹⁷ This is likely the result of a presumption that any student of the Crusades is already familiar with

¹² Kedar, ‘Hattin Revisited’, p.190. See also Housley, ‘Saladin’s Triumph over the Crusader States’, p.20.

¹³ R. Irwin (1995). ‘Islam and the Crusades, 1096-1699’, in J. Riley-Smith (ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*. London, BCA, pp.217-259 at p.235.

¹⁴ S. Runciman (1952). *A History of the Crusades*, Vol.2. Cambridge, University Press, p.460, 472-73; J. Riley-Smith (1987, 2nd ed. 2005). *The Crusades: A History*. London, Continuum, pp.109-111.

¹⁵ A.V. Murray (1998). ‘Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ’: The Relic of the True Cross in the Armies of the Kingdom of Jerusalem’, in J. France and W.G. Zajac (eds.) *The Crusades and their Sources: Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton*. Aldershot, Ashgate, pp.217-238 at p.217.

¹⁶ D. Nicolle (1993). *Hattin 1187: Saladin’s Greatest Victory*. London, Osprey.

¹⁷ Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin*; Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp.189-197; H.E. Mayer (1972). *The Crusades*. Oxford, University Press, pp.131-132; J. Richard (1999). *The Crusades, c.1071-c.1291*. Cambridge, University Press, pp.207-208; Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, pp.109-11.

the specific details of the battle due to the existence of articles on it and that there is therefore no need to re-emphasise Hattin. Whilst this reason may be genuine, there is a very real danger that the importance of the battle is forgotten within the grand sweep of Crusading history and the over-arching argument of the historian, whose focus has usually been elsewhere. So whilst Riley-Smith acknowledged that the defeat at Hattin was ‘catastrophic’, to him this was due almost entirely to the resultant fall of Jerusalem and the loss of the Holy Land.¹⁸ It is important that Hattin is judged on its own and not solely in the light of these subsequent events. It is insufficient to simply say that Hattin was important; historians need to articulate why it was so, and once done to dwell and expand upon this point in order to clearly emphasise its weight in the wider historical context. Otherwise their judgements, though emphatic, may otherwise appear to be a few words in a cursory paragraph. So whilst useful articles have been written on Hattin, they have often been very similar in nature, and have drawn upon the topographic and tactical aspects of the battle for modern explanations of the defeat.¹⁹ This has left little room for the opinions of contemporary chroniclers and eyewitnesses of the battle, which have been largely ignored. There is therefore a danger that the viewpoint of contemporaries will also be forgotten.

Contemporaries immediately recognised the devastating nature of the defeat. Indeed, Hattin alone was enough to lead the Papacy to call for a new crusade to the Holy Land. Riley-Smith must surely have realised this as he acknowledged that *Audita*

¹⁸ Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p.111.

¹⁹ For topography see Kedar, ‘Hattin Revisited’; Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin*; Z. Gal (1992). ‘Saladin’s Dome of Victory at the Horns of Hattin’, in Kedar (ed.) *The Horns of Hattin*, pp.213-215. For a discussion of tactical aspects of the battle see Smail, *Crusading Warfare*; J. Richard (1952). ‘An Account of the Battle of Hattin Referring to the Frankish Mercenaries in Oriental Muslim States’, *Speculum* 27:2, pp.168-177. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp.317-318; J. France (1999). *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300*. London, University College London Press, pp.8-15; J. France (2000). ‘Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation to Eastern Conditions in the Twelfth Century’, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 15:2, pp.49-66 at pp.60-61.

tremendi, the general letter calling for a new crusade, had been drafted by Pope Urban III before news of the fall of Jerusalem had reached Western Europe.²⁰ However, this did not stop him from overlooking contemporaries' perceptions of the defeat at Hattin. These played only a small part in Riley-Smith's general understanding of the development of crusading history. Indeed, looking at the battle with the benefit of over eight hundred years of hindsight he was able to take a much more positive view of it, arguing that Crusading 'thrived on disaster' and that 'Christian sentiment needed the shock provided by Saladin's blitzkrieg' in 1187.²¹ Furthermore, he argued that Hattin actually revitalised the Crusading movement, which had been at a low ebb since the failure of the Second Crusade in 1148,²² thus allowing it to 'come of age'.²³ Whilst the movement had for most of the twelfth century been largely 'inchoate', the defeat at Hattin and the resultant fall of Jerusalem were just the tonic needed to revive the movement and take it from adolescence into full maturity.²⁴ However, this is not how contemporaries viewed the events of 1187. They did not have the benefit of hindsight and so could not view Hattin in this way. As Beryl Smalley helpfully commented, 'The amazing victories of the First Crusade naturally led to the expectation that 'France Overseas' had come to stay. We have to share this confidence when we read medieval histories of the Crusades and consequently we must also share contemporaries' heartbreak at the disaster that had so suddenly

²⁰ Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p.137; Historians are in general agreement on this point. See also J.A. Brundage (1962). *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey*. Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, p.163.

²¹ Riley-Smith (2004). 'The Crusades, 1095-1198', in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (eds.) *The New Cambridge Medieval History IV, c.1024-c.1198 Part I*. Cambridge, University Press, pp.534-563.

²² N. Housley (2006). *Contesting the Crusades*. Oxford, Blackwell, p.51

²³ Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 'Crusading Comes of Age, 1187-1229', pp.137-182. See also p.112: 'In the responses of Western Europeans to the news of the disasters in Palestine in 1187 Crusading came of age'.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.112; idem 'Crusading in Adolescence, 1102-1187', pp.112-136 and 'Crusading in Maturity, 1229-1291', pp.183-214. The events of 1187 were therefore seen as bridging the gap between the two periods.

befallen them in the Holy Land.’²⁵ Once this is taken into account it is clear that it would have been impossible for contemporaries to share Riley-Smith’s positive outlook on the events of 1187. This is indeed confirmed by the surviving sources which clearly show that contemporaries in both the Holy Land and across Western Europe were devastated by the defeat at Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem, and that this led to ‘a shared desperation and sense of responsibility’ amongst them.²⁶

There is therefore a very real need for historians of the subject to return to the sources in order to understand what contemporaries thought about Hattin. Although Penny Cole recognised this problem and voiced her concerns about it, her calls have remained unheard within a field dominated by the views of Riley-Smith. In 1993 she published an important article entitled ‘Christian Perceptions of the Battle of Hattin (583/1187)’, which currently remains the only study whose sole focus is on how contemporaries viewed the battle in its immediate aftermath.²⁷ In it she made clear the problematic nature of the existing scholarship on Hattin:

For Latin Christians in the East, the battle of Hattin was traumatic. As news of the disaster spread, many of them felt moved to provide some written account of the engagement and to explain the defeat. A close reading of their works reveals that factors such as generalship, strategy, tactics, weaponry, and terrain, which modern military historians commonly adduce to explain the results of battles, were held to be of less importance than considerations of faith. This is

²⁵ B. Smalley (1974). *Historians in the Middle Ages*. London, Thames and Hudson, p.121.

²⁶ Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, p.87.

²⁷ P.J. Cole (1993). ‘Christian Perceptions of the Battle of Hattin (583/1187)’, *Al-Masaq* 6, pp.9-39.

immediately evident in the letters which were sent to the west directly after the battle.²⁸

The focus of historians such as Smail, Prager and Kedar on the traditional reasons for the Frankish defeat at Hattin, though useful, was of secondary importance to contemporaries. Of much more importance were religious explanations, which were a consequence of their theological worldview. Whilst few have engaged with Cole's argument or recognised its importance, the problem that she recognised has been acknowledged amongst some historians. Alan Murray has for example recently emphasised the importance of the theological aspects of Hattin in his important study of the military role played by the relic of the True Cross in the armies of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. He wrote that 'For contemporaries...one of the most traumatic aspects of the disaster of Hattin was the loss of a relic which was believed to have been part of the Cross of Christ...it threatened the whole belief system of those who had previously trusted its powers'.²⁹ So although few historians have acknowledged it, Cole's article must nevertheless be recognised as the starting point for any serious examination of Hattin. This study will therefore seek to highlight the importance of contemporary perceptions of the battle by building on her work.

In 1993, the same year as Cole published her article on Hattin, a number of other Crusading historians began to voice concerns about another weakness of their discipline. Maya Shatzmiller first hinted at this problem in 1993 when in her introduction to a collection of essays she expressed that they were written with a desire 'to balance the traditional European view [of the Crusades] with an Islamic

²⁸ Cole, 'Christian Perceptions', pp.9-10.

²⁹ Murray, 'Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ', p.217.

perspective'.³⁰ Even more significant were the comments made by Riley-Smith in his article within that volume. He discussed the development and assessed the (then current) state of the history of Crusading, writing that 'the history of the Latin East would be transformed...were Islamic studies to be given the prominence they deserve. It is curious how peripheral they have so far proved to be'.³¹ Historians have therefore recognised that there is a major imbalance within Crusading studies in that the vast majority of the existing scholarship on it has been written from a European, and traditionally Christian perspective, whilst the Islamic perspective has been largely neglected. This situation has not been helped by an unwillingness on the part of western historians to learn Arabic or by the fact that few Arabic and Islamic historians have devoted their attentions to the study of the Crusades. As a result there is much more western historiography in existence on the subject.³² The first major response to this problem came in 1999 with the publication of Carole Hillenbrand's groundbreaking work, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*.³³ Hillenbrand was conscious of the need to redress the massive imbalance within Crusader studies. Indeed, her work was written for this specific purpose.³⁴ It therefore provided a massive injection of life into the discipline. From the outset Hillenbrand was also fully aware of the limitations of her work. In seeking to redress the imbalance she presented a one-sided view of the Crusades, from the Muslim perspective alone. However, she recognised that what the discipline ultimately needed was 'the full, composite story of the Crusades', which would only be possible through 'the drawing together of evidence from both sides of

³⁰ M. Shatzmiller (1993). 'Preface', in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, p.vii.

³¹ Riley-Smith, 'A Personal View', pp.4-5.

³² *Ibid*, p.5; Shatzmiller, 'Preface', p.viii.

³³ C. Hillenbrand (1999). *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*. Edinburgh, University Press.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.1-4.

the divide to illuminate each other',³⁵ and therefore 'to weigh up the evidence from all sides...in order to gain a more holistic view of the Crusades'.³⁶ It is the task of current Crusade historians to take up this challenge.

The purpose of this study is therefore to build on the ground-breaking work of both Cole and Hillenbrand by examining contemporary perceptions of Hattin through detailed analysis of both the Christian and Muslim sources. It is hoped that this holistic approach will provide a more balanced, and therefore more accurate understanding of how contemporaries viewed Hattin, and that this will in turn help Crusading historians gain a fuller understanding of this aspect of the subject. This will be done through detailed analysis and comparison of the surviving letters and that were written in the summer of 1187 in the immediate aftermath of Hattin and of the chronicles written in subsequent years.

The Crusades had a dramatic effect on the historiography of the period. Their scale and importance meant that ancient models could not compare with the events that contemporary historians and chroniclers were witnessing and so they were freed from their dependence on such models. They had to find new ways in which to express themselves and so their writing became more spontaneous and daring. Smalley found that defeat in battle provided a stronger stimulus for writing than victory and so led to much heart-searching amongst the Christians.³⁷ They therefore dwelt at length on the causation of military defeats such as Hattin and explained them in terms of divine judgement.³⁸ Whilst Smalley argued that such interpretations were shallow and was

³⁵ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, p.613.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.1.

³⁷ Smalley, *Historians*, p.122

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.122.

pleased that the Crusading period witnessed the development of historiographical analysis beyond religious explanations into a deeper and more accurate examination of military, political and other non-religious factors, her conclusion should be treated with caution.³⁹ Religious explanations may seem unsatisfactory for modern historical analysis of warfare but they are, nevertheless, of great importance and value because they provide historians with an opportunity to understand contemporary perceptions of these events. This study will attempt to show that such perceptions are of equal importance to modern analysis and therefore to modern historical understanding of Crusading warfare.

The medieval world was highly religious. The Bible was the most influential book in Christendom and its ideas permeate through most of the writings which have survived from the period.⁴⁰ The Koran was equally important in the Muslim world. Both holy books are frequently referenced in the writings of the Crusading period and the sources for Hattin are no exception. They were written by theologically inclined authors who viewed the conflict between the Franks and the Muslims in the Holy Land as a religious war. This is certainly true of the Muslim chroniclers Imad ad-Din and Ibn al-Athir.⁴¹ Indeed, Ibn al-Athir drew heavily on Imad ad-Din's earlier history of the period and so their work is closely related.⁴² Ibn Shaddad's biography of Saladin was written in light of the victories at Hattin and Jerusalem and therefore used a thoroughly religious discourse to portray the general as pious and god-fearing. His

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.157.

⁴⁰ B. Smalley (1952). *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p.xxvii.

⁴¹ P. Partner (1996). 'Holy War, Crusade and *Jihād*: An Attempt to Define Some Problems', in M. Balard (ed.) *Autour De La Premiere Croisade*. Paris, Publications De La Sorbonne, pp.333-343 at pp.337-340.

⁴² Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, Part 1, p.3.

victories were therefore explained in terms of jihad.⁴³ The Christian writers were no different. Their analysis of Hattin was defined in terms of moral decay and divine punishment.⁴⁴ This can be seen in all of the Christian sources that have been used in this study. They were either written by members of the highly religious military orders and by Christians within the Latin East. All found that religion provided the most sufficient explanation for the defeat at Hattin. Whilst the Christian sources were written in summer of 1187 and the chronicles were written within five years of the battle (other than the *Old French Continuation of William of Tyre* which was written in the Holy Land in the c.1240s), the Muslim sources were most written some decades later in the early thirteenth century. Only ‘Saladin’s Hattin Letter’ was written immediately after the battle. Whilst this may bring the accuracy of their accounts of the battle into question, this will have little bearing on this study of contemporary perceptions of Hattin. Indeed, it may even be seen as a strength because it will enable the historian to see if the ways in which the battle was perceived changed over time. So whilst the letters have been studied because Cole argued that the importance of religion is ‘immediately evident’ within them,⁴⁵ the chronicles have been used to see if these religious themes remained central to contemporary understandings of Hattin in the years and decades following the battle.

The structure of the argument has been broken down into three sections, each exploring one aspect of contemporary perceptions of Hattin. The first chapter will examine the rarity of pitched battle in medieval European warfare and therefore the decisive nature of Hattin. The purpose of this chapter is to present the current historical understanding of the battle in terms of modern military analysis. The second

⁴³ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp.180-6.

⁴⁴ Smalley, *Historians*, p.122, 157.

⁴⁵ Cole, ‘Christian Perceptions’, p.10.

and third chapters will then argue that this explanation of Hattin was of secondary importance to contemporaries who placed much more emphasis on religious explanations of the battle's outcome. The second chapter will therefore examine how and why contemporaries were affected by the loss of the relic of the True Cross and the third chapter will examine how contemporaries understood the defeat and explained it in terms of divine judgement for human sinfulness. The second and third chapters are therefore closely related. This analysis will show that Christian contemporaries were strongly affected by Hattin and recognised that the scale of the defeat was unparalleled because of its religious nature. Indeed, it will be seen that both Muslims and Christians recognised the importance of religion.

II. The rarity of pitched battle and the decisive nature of Hattin

In seeking to give reasons for the outcome of Hattin much recent writing on the subject has employed the categories of modern military analysis, such as generalship, strategy, tactics, weaponry, and terrain. The importance of the concept of pitched battle within the historiography of the subject should also be seen as a product of this approach. Indeed, the dominance of such tactical and topographical explanations was completed with the publication of Kedar's article in 1992, which is now recognised by many historians as the most accurate reconstruction of the battle.⁴⁶ In his article, Kedar argued that both sides recognised how important a victory in pitched battle would be for them and so were willing to fight at Hattin in 1187.⁴⁷ In order to understand this, it is first necessary to examine the historiography on the subject. The rarity and decisive nature of pitched battles has long acknowledged by historians. Indeed, much has been written on the subject.⁴⁸ John Gillingham has shown that the rarity of battle in medieval European warfare was due largely to a 'reluctance to fight'.⁴⁹ Although success in battle was nearly always the quickest and most certain way of achieving the objects of war, it was often avoided due to the high risk of defeat and its consequences.⁵⁰ It was therefore seen as being a highly problematic method of warfare and so was avoided for this reason. It was not a normal part of medieval

⁴⁶ Kedar, 'Hattin Revisited'.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.192.

⁴⁸ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp.12-13, 16; P. Contamine (1984). *War in the Middle Ages*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p.304; J. Gillingham (1984). 'Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages', in J. Gillingham and J.C. Holt (eds.) *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J.O. Prestwich*. Woodbridge, Boydell Press, pp.78-91; J. Gillingham (1989). 'William the Bastard at War', in C. Harper-Bill et al (eds.) *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*. Woodbridge, Boydell Press, pp.141-158; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp.317-318; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp.518, 544, 579; J. France (1999). *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300*. London, University College London Press, pp.12-14, 217; J. France (2000). 'Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation to Eastern Conditions in the Twelfth Century', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 15:2, pp.49-66.

⁴⁹ Gillingham, 'The Science of War', p.81.

⁵⁰ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p.12.

warfare.⁵¹ Thus battles were only usually fought in exceptional circumstances, when they seemed unavoidable.⁵² Henry II never fought a battle, whilst Richard I and Philip Augustus each fought only one. Ravaging and besieging were instead preferred as more low risk methods of conducting warfare in medieval western Europe.⁵³

How then did western warfare adapt to conditions in the Latin East? Hillenbrand found that there were many more references in the Muslim sources to small-scale engagements such as raids, skirmishes, ambushes, and even sieges than for pitched battles, which were comparatively rare.⁵⁴ She therefore argued that much of the fighting between the Muslims and the Franks 'was more desultory and mundane than pitched battles with all their attendant pomp, bloodshed and expense'.⁵⁵ However, John France has recently questioned this conclusion.⁵⁶ He argued that in due to their significant numerical inferiority and the constant threat of invasion, the Franks were forced to develop 'an aggressive style of war which depended on readiness to face their Islamic enemies in battle.'⁵⁷ The Franks were constantly at war and so aggressive tactics and a reputation for ferocity were needed if they were to survive in the Latin East.⁵⁸ They were therefore much more willing to seek battle and much more confident in the way they conducted it, making full use of the mass cavalry charge. So whilst pitched battle remained a relatively rare part of Crusading warfare, it was not as rare as historians such as Hillenbrand have argued. France has shown that the Franks were 'ready to accept it to a degree unknown in the West.'⁵⁹

⁵¹ Gillingham, 'The Science of War', p.91.

⁵² Gillingham, 'William the Bastard at War', pp.145, 157; Gillingham, 'The Science of War', p.81.

⁵³ Gillingham, 'The Science of War', p.81, 84.

⁵⁴ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, p.579.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp.518, 544.

⁵⁶ France, 'Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation', p.61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.56-7, 60-1.

⁵⁸ France, *Western Warfare*, p.217.

⁵⁹ France, 'Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation', pp.60-1.

So whilst the historiography has traditionally recognised the infrequency of battle and the relatively small size of the field armies of medieval Europe, France has shown that warfare in the Latin East was different. He also pointed out that the largest armies of all were raised for the Crusades to the Holy Land. At Hattin 20,000 Franks faced a Muslim force of about 30,000.⁶⁰ So whilst it is true that pitched battles were uncommon in medieval warfare it must be remembered that ‘when great issues were at stake there was a readiness to accept battle, and enormous efforts were made to raise large forces and sustain campaigns’.⁶¹ Such was the case in 1187. Both Guy de Lusignan and Saladin needed a decisive victory and so were prepared to accept the huge risks involved in meeting in pitched battle. Guy knew that due to the numerical inferiority of the Franks, mustering a large field army that was of sufficient strength to challenge the Muslims meant weakening the garrisons of the towns. By doing so he consciously deprived the Kingdom of its defensive capacity. Defeat in battle would therefore lead its total collapse.⁶² But Guy had been deeply unpopular with many of his nobles since his accession to the throne in 1186 and so knew that a major victory was needed ‘to silence his critics; he could not afford to allow Saladin’s build up of troops and incursions into Christian territory to go unchallenged.’⁶³ He was therefore willing to risk everything on a single encounter with the Muslims.⁶⁴ As for Saladin, during the 1170s and 1180s he had pursued a rather half-hearted policy of jihad against the Franks. Jotischky therefore argued that by 1187 ‘his own credibility was at

⁶⁰ France, *Western Warfare*, pp.12-13.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.14.

⁶² Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp.33, 67, 104; P.W. Edbury, (1993). ‘Propaganda and Faction in the Kingdom of Jerusalem: The Background to Hattin’, in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, pp.173-189 at p.176.

⁶³ Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, p.1; Edbury, ‘The Background to Hattin’, p.189.

⁶⁴ Edbury, ‘The Background to Hattin’, pp.177-8, 189; A. Jotischky (2004). *Crusading and the Crusader States*. Harlow, Pearson Education, p.101; Ehrlich, ‘A Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold?’ pp.20-3

stake, for having so long demanded to be taken seriously as a mujahid he now had to deliver Jerusalem to Islam...he could not afford another inconclusive campaign.⁶⁵ Whilst Hillenbrand was right to argue that this may have been prudent because a major campaign may have provoked another Crusade from Europe, such a policy was not spectacular and it was not going to bring about the defeat of the Franks or the return of Jerusalem to Islam.⁶⁶ Kedar therefore concluded that ‘nothing short of a clear-cut showdown would give him victory over the Franks.’⁶⁷ Guy and Saladin were therefore in similar situations in 1187. They were both under pressure to produce a decisive victory and recognised that this could only be produced in pitched battle. They were therefore much more willing to fight than they would normally have otherwise have been and the stakes were considerably higher. Smail was therefore right to conclude that Hattin exemplified the devastating possible consequences of a wrong decision to enter into battle.⁶⁸

Contemporaries recognised that the scale of Hattin was unparalleled. In a single battle almost all of the Frankish field army were either killed or captured. Writing in the Holy Land in either 1191 or 1192, the anonymous author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* commented that ‘So many were slaughtered there, so many wounded, so many thrown into chains that they were completely destroyed...Ancient times produced no events as sorrowful as this’.⁶⁹ The Muslim chroniclers were equally aware of this. Imad ad-Din, Saladin’s close friend and personal secretary, commented that at no point during the Crusading period ‘had the

⁶⁵ Jotischky, *Crusader States*, p.120.

⁶⁶ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, p.186.

⁶⁷ Kedar, ‘Hattin Revisited’, p.192.

⁶⁸ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p.16.

⁶⁹ H.J. Nicholson (1997). *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: a translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*. Aldershot, Ashgate, p.33.

Muslims' thirst for victory been quenched to the extent it was on the day of Hattin'.⁷⁰ Similarly, Ibn al-Athir, the great Arab historian and chronicler who was writing at some point in the early thirteenth century proudly concluded his account of the battle by stating that

Seeing the slain, you would not imagine that anyone had been taken alive, while seeing the captives, you would think that none could have been killed. Since the Franks appeared on the coast in the year 491 [1098] they had not suffered such a reverse.⁷¹

Ibn al-Athir's work, the *al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh*, was not completed until shortly before his death in 1233 and so it is clear that almost half a century after the event, Hattin continued to be remembered as one of the most important Muslim victories of the entire Crusading period. It was the largest victory that they had experienced since the arrival of the Franks in the Holy Land. The scale of the defeat shocked Christian contemporaries and reverberated throughout the Latin East and across Western Europe.⁷² With a single victory, the Muslims felt that they had gained revenge for all their previous defeats at the hands of the Franks. In his biography of Saladin (written between 1198 and 1216), Ibn Shaddad, a close friend of the general's who joined his service as army judge in 1188, wrote that the major defeat at Ramla in 1177 had now been 'mended'.⁷³

⁷⁰ Imad ad-Din, in E. Hallam (ed.) (1989). *Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Wars Between Christianity and Islam*. London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, pp.157-160 at p.160.

⁷¹ D.S. Richards (2007). *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh*, Part 2. Aldershot, Ashgate, p.323.

⁷² Prawer, 'Hattin', p.484.

⁷³ Richards, *History of Saladin*, p.54.

It is therefore clear that both the Muslims and the Christians recognised that Hattin was an extremely decisive battle. Historians have argued that contemporaries recognised that this was because of the fact that it was a pitched battle. This idea was expressed most clearly in the sources by the famous Anglo-Norman writer, Gerald of Wales. Writing in either 1188 or 1189 about his experiences of preaching the Third Crusade in Wales, he made it clear that he felt that the Holy Land had only fallen to Saladin because he had been able to ‘win a victory in pitched battle and so seize the kingdom of Jerusalem.’⁷⁴ Gerald was not alone in thinking this. The idea is expressed in almost all of the sources for Hattin. The author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* therefore recognised that because of the defeat at Hattin ‘the fortresses of the country could be easily occupied, as their defenders had been slaughtered.’⁷⁵ The Muslims also recognised this.⁷⁶ Saladin’s confidence can clearly be heard amidst the rhetoric of his letter. He wrote that ‘his armies were able to move freely through the countryside ‘while the fears of the unbelievers are confirmed and their fate is near. The standards of clear victory are fluttering’.⁷⁷

After the defeat at Hattin, the Frankish inhabitants of the Kingdom of Jerusalem were under no illusions as to the reality of the situation which they faced. With no field army to protect the countryside, Saladin was free to roam unchallenged.⁷⁸ This point was made particularly clear in the letters that were sent by inhabitants of the Kingdom to Western Europe during the summer of 1187. In his letter written in July or early August, Terricus desperately urged Pope Urban III and Philip of Alsace to come to

⁷⁴ Gerald of Wales, *The Journey Through Wales*, in L. Thorpe (ed.) (1978). *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales*. London, Penguin, p.74.

⁷⁵ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.35.

⁷⁶ Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, p.460; Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p.16.

⁷⁷ C.P. Melville and M.C. Lyons (ed. and trans.) (1992). ‘Saladin’s Hattin Letter’, in Kedar (ed.) *The Horns of Hattin*, pp.208-212 at p.210.

⁷⁸ ‘Saladin’s Hattin Letter’, p.210.

their aid, writing that ‘we can in no way retain these cities... Therefore deem it worthy to send help as soon as possible to us and to the Christians of the East, at present all but lost, so that...the remaining cities may be saved’.⁷⁹ The tone of a letter written to Archumbald, the Hospitaller master in Italy, in August or early September was equally desperate. He was told that ‘Unless these remaining cities and the very small remnant of eastern Christians are aided quickly, they too will succumb to the pillaging of the raging gentiles who are thirsting for Christian blood.’⁸⁰ But no aid came and by September the fate of the Kingdom was inevitable. In his letter to the Pope written just before the siege of Jerusalem began, Eraclius made it clear that the city would be unable to defend itself from the impending attack. He wrote that ‘if the Turks, having now recently won the battle [of Hattin], were to come to the holy city, they would find it devoid of all human defence.’⁸¹ Eraclius’ worst fears were realised with the fall of Jerusalem on 2 October.

The recent historiography on Hattin has therefore argued that both Christian and Muslim contemporaries recognised that the collapse of the Kingdom was the outcome of a single pitched battle.⁸² It is argued that the Christians understood the nature of the defeat in purely military terms and that this is what shocked them most. However, this argument should not go unchallenged. Although valuable insights have been gained into the military aspects of the defeat, the conclusions of such historians as Smail, France and Kedar have been in one sense rather limited. Whilst contemporaries clearly recognised the decisive nature of the pitched battle at Hattin and that the fall of Jerusalem was therefore inevitable, the rest of this study will show that they always

⁷⁹ Terricus, pp.115-6

⁸⁰ Letter to Archumbald, Hospitaller master in Italy, sent before news of the surrender of Ascalon (4 September) had reached the author, in Edbury, *Conquest of Jerusalem*, pp.160-2 at p.162.

⁸¹ Eraclius, p.163.

⁸² Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p.16.

recognised that the military defeat was caused by religious factors. Gerald of Wales therefore wrote that it was God who had allowed Saladin to win a victory in pitched battle at Hattin.⁸³

⁸³ Gerald of Wales, p.74.

III. The loss of the True Cross

Whilst contemporaries were shocked by the decisive nature of the defeat at Hattin, much worse for them was the capture of the relic of the True Cross during the battle. This was believed to be a fragment of the original cross on which Christ had died. After being rediscovered in 1099 it was set in precious metals and embedded within a larger wooden cross. Although it was usually kept in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, where it featured prominently in the festivals of the Latin Church and as an object of pilgrimage and therefore revenue, it quickly came to perform an even more important role on the battlefield. Indeed, Murray has shown that it was taken into battle at least thirty-one times between 1099 and 1187.⁸⁴ Recent scholarship has shown that its presence on the battlefield was seen as a sign of divine favour and protection that would guarantee the Franks victory in battle.⁸⁵ Its usage should be seen in the wider context of the proliferation of saints' banners and relics being carried onto the battlefield which indicated a growing clerical acceptance of war.⁸⁶ The True Cross was the most important of all the relics in the Holy Land. It was venerated before battle and its strength was invoked for victory; it was carried into battle at the head of the Christian army and the writer of the *De Expugnatione* recorded that the units rallied around it at Hattin.⁸⁷ The Qadi al Fadil recognised the important role that it played in crusader warfare when he wrote that 'they did not ever go forward into a danger without having it in their midst; they would fly around it like

⁸⁴ Murray, 'Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ', pp.221-2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pp.225, 228-9; D. Gerish (1996). 'The True Cross and the Kings of Jerusalem', *The Haskins Society Journal* 8, pp.137-155 at p.137, 139, 154; G. Ligato (1996). 'The Political Meanings of the Relic of the Holy Cross among the Crusaders and in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: An example of 1185', in M. Balard (ed.) *Autour de la Premiere Croisade*. Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, pp.315-330 at p.319; Cole, 'Christian Perceptions', pp.11-2.

⁸⁶ Gerish, 'The True Cross', p.137.

⁸⁷ J. Riley-Smith (1978). 'Peace Never Established: The Case of the Kingdom of Jerusalem', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5:28, pp. 87-102 at p.92; *De Expugnatione Terrae Sanctae Per Saladinum Libellus*, p.158.

moths around the light.’⁸⁸ The importance of the True Cross to the Frankish armies is therefore difficult to exaggerate. As Riley-Smith has written, ‘its presence was believed to give the faithful a strength against which pagans could not prevail and at least one defeat was considered to have been sustained because it had not been brought along.’⁸⁹ Indeed, in most battles where it was present the Franks were either victorious or the encounter was seen as being indecisive. Many major victories were obtained with it, often over Muslim forces that were numerically superior.⁹⁰ It is therefore no surprise that, as Elisséeff has written, by the second half of the twelfth century Muslims had come to view the Cross as ‘the principal symbol of the Frankish enemy’.⁹¹

Although Ligato claimed that the use of the Cross in battle was ‘normal and expected’,⁹² after collecting all the references to it Murray was able to conclude that the relic was not present at every military engagement. It was rarely used during periods of relative security such as the 1130s and 1140s but was used much more frequently in the latter half of the twelfth century, when the Kingdom was increasingly under serious threat of invasion.⁹³ He was therefore able to conclude that ‘in general...the relic was used defensively, in cases of great danger, usually with a field army which comprised the near totality of the military levy of the Kingdom.’⁹⁴ Such was the situation at Hattin in 1187. Saladin had invaded Galilee with a massive force and Guy responded by mustering all the soldiers of the Kingdom, as well hiring

⁸⁸ Quoted in Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, p.307.

⁸⁹ Riley-Smith, ‘Peace Never Established’, p.92.

⁹⁰ Murray, ‘Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ’, pp.221, 227.

⁹¹ N. Elisséeff (1993). ‘The reaction of the Syrian Muslims After the Foundation of the First Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem’, in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, pp.162-172 at p.169.

⁹² Ligato, ‘Political Meanings of the Relic of the Holy Cross’, p.319.

⁹³ Murray, ‘Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ’, pp.222-3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.227.

a large mercenary force. The Franks were outnumbered and their ranks had been weakened by the loss of a large number of the Knights Templar at the Springs of Cresson in May 1187. Guy was consciously risking the fate of the entire Kingdom on a single battle and so the presence of the True Cross was needed to ensure divine favour and to boost morale. Its reputation for ensuring victory meant that it was immediately brought from Jerusalem to the Frankish camp at Saffuriyah.⁹⁵ Indeed, Saladin's letter records that the Cross was only set up after Guy saw that the Muslims had taken Tiberias.⁹⁶ This is significant because it shows that the presence of the Cross in battle was only deemed necessary once the Franks realised the seriousness of the threat posed to the Kingdom. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and only then did the Franks recognise the need for divine support. But the presence of the Cross could not stop the Franks from being routed at Hattin. Almost all of them were either killed or captured in battle, and the Cross was itself captured by the Muslims and was probably later taken to Damascus where it was destroyed.⁹⁷

The loss of the True Cross weighed far more heavily on the Franks than any other aspect of the defeat at Hattin, including the high death toll.⁹⁸ As part of the cross on which Christ had died the relic was unique in status. The descriptions of the Cross are telling of its significance. The writer of the *De Expugnatione* called it 'the precious wood of the Lord, our redeemer';⁹⁹ the writer of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* described it as 'the life-giving wood of the Cross of Salvation';¹⁰⁰ and Eraclius put it well when he described in horror how the Cross, 'once and only given for our

⁹⁵ *De Expugnatione Terrae Sanctae Per Saladinum Libellus*, p.154.

⁹⁶ 'Saladin's Hattin Letter', p.211.

⁹⁷ Hamilton, *The Leper King and his Heirs*, p.234.

⁹⁸ Kedar, 'Hattin Revisited', p.206; Cole, 'Christian Perceptions', p.10.

⁹⁹ *De Expugnatione Terrae Sanctae Per Saladinum Libellus*, p.159.

¹⁰⁰ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.33.

salvation' had been captured by the Muslims.¹⁰¹ The faithful therefore felt an intense attachment to it.¹⁰² As Cole has written, 'the cross stood at the very core of the Christian faith, a reminder of the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and of the omnipotent sovereignty of God.'¹⁰³ The symbol of the cross epitomised Christianity and Hillenbrand found that even the Muslims recognised that it formed the Franks 'emotional focus'.¹⁰⁴ She wrote that 'both sides felt the overwhelming need to destroy the symbols of the other's faith. Breaking Crosses was a symbolic act in which Christianity was defeated and Islam triumphant.'¹⁰⁵ Saladin's victory at Hattin would therefore have been incomplete without the capture and destruction of the True Cross. Indeed, it seems likely that Saladin may have deliberately targeted the Cross at Hattin, knowing that its capture would lead to the immediate collapse of Frankish morale and therefore to Muslim victory. This is reflected in the Muslim sources. Imad ad-Din, Saladin's close friend and secretary, for example wrote that 'when the Great Cross was taken great was the calamity that befell them, and the strength drained from their loins...It seemed as if, once they knew of the capture of the Cross, none of them would survive that day of ill-omen'.¹⁰⁶ Some decades later Ibn al-Athir wrote that after the capture of the Cross the Franks 'were sure they were doomed to death and destruction.'¹⁰⁷ Such was the importance of the Cross, that contemporaries argued that its loss changed the course of the battle. This should not be dismissed as merely rhetoric. Both Cole and Murray have emphasised the important role that the Cross

¹⁰¹ Eraclius, p.162.

¹⁰² Riley-Smith, 'The Crusades', p.357.

¹⁰³ Cole, 'Christian Perceptions', p.11.

¹⁰⁴ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, p.304-5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.305.

¹⁰⁶ Imad ad-Din in F. Gabrieli (1969). *Arab Historians of the Crusades*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp.125-39 at p.137.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn al-Athir in *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, Part 2, p.323.

played in boosting Frankish morale.¹⁰⁸ Its capture at Hattin would have immediately affected the course of the battle.

Murray was therefore right to recognise that the loss of the Cross was one of the most important aspects of the defeat at Hattin.¹⁰⁹ The author of the *De Expugnatione* lamented its loss, writing that

The Saracens gathered around the Lord's wooden cross, the king, and the rest, and destroyed the church...What can I say? It would be more fitting to weep and wail than to say anything. Alas!...the precious wood of the Lord, our redeemer, was seized by the damnable hands of the damned? Woe to me that in the days of my miserable life I should be forced to see such things...¹¹⁰

The main symbol of Christianity had fallen into the hands of pagans. There was a sense in which the Franks felt that they had failed or even betrayed Christ by allowing this to happen. It was difficult for the author of the *De Expugnatione* to imagine a worse situation. Here too the wider implications of the loss can clearly be seen. It was thought that the capture of the Cross not only led to the defeat at Hattin and the collapse of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, but that this single action symbolised the defeat of Christendom and the destruction of the church. Gerish has highlighted the strong connection between the cross and the Crusading movement that it came to symbolise.¹¹¹ Its loss therefore signalled the failure of Christian efforts to hold the Holy Land for Christ. So whilst the capture of the Cross was disastrous enough in itself, Murray has rightly argued that contemporaries found these wider implications

¹⁰⁸ Cole, 'Christian Perceptions', p.13; Murray, 'Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ', p.218.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, 'Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ', p.217.

¹¹⁰ *De Expugnatione Terrae Sanctae Per Saladinum Libellus*, pp.158-9.

¹¹¹ Gerish, 'The True Cross', p.143.

much more difficult to take. Its loss ‘threatened the whole belief system of those who had previously trusted its powers; how was it possible for such a powerful relic to be captured, and its followers killed or imprisoned?’¹¹² Salvation had been obtained by Christ’s death on the cross, so why then had its powers failed the faithful at Hattin? There were no easy answers to such questions. It is therefore difficult to exaggerate the extent to which the loss of the True Cross devastated contemporaries across Christendom. Imad ad-Din was right to write that ‘its capture was for them far more important than the loss of the King and was the gravest blow that they sustained in that battle...for it was the supreme object of their faith’.¹¹³

Contemporaries sought biblical parallels to help them make sense of situation and to understand why the Cross had been captured. The chronicler of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* wrote that

Ancient times produced no events as sorrowful as this, because neither the capture of the Ark of the Lord nor the captivity of the kings of the Jews can compare with the disaster in our own time, when the king and the glorious Cross were led away captive together.¹¹⁴

The importance of the Old Testament for providing a theology of war can here be seen. In this instance it was used to attempt to provide an explanation for the defeat at Hattin. It is significant that the writer drew parallels with the capture of the Ark of the Covenant as recorded in 1 Samuel 4. In order to ensure victory against the Philistines and to avoid further defeat, the Israelites took the Ark into battle. The glory of God

¹¹² Murray, ‘Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ’, p.217.

¹¹³ Imad ad-Din in Gabrieli, p.137.

¹¹⁴ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.33

was believed to rest on top of the Ark and so the Israelites believed that its power could be used to save them from their enemies and to guarantee victory. Its presence in battle boosted the morale of the Israelite army and drove fear into the hearts of the Philistines, but the Israelites were nevertheless defeated and the Ark was captured. This led to a widespread feeling that the glory and presence of God had departed from them and that divine favour had been lost. The parallels between the capture of the Ark and the capture of the relic of the True Cross at Hattin were therefore both striking and immediately obvious.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the writer of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* was not the first to recognise them. The connection was first made by Fulcher of Chartres in 1120 when he stated that ‘Alas, what will we do if God permits us to lose the Cross in battle as the Israelites once lost the Ark of the Covenant?’¹¹⁶ This highlights the fact that contemporaries knew that the loss of the Cross, if it ever occurred, would be both theologically problematic and emotionally traumatic. However, once this fear became a reality the Franks found that even the parallel with the Ark of Covenant was insufficient. It was felt that nothing could compare to the crisis that had befallen them at Hattin. There were separate biblical instances of when the Ark had been taken and when different kings of Israel had been led into captivity but even they could not compare ‘with the disaster in our own time, when the king and the glorious Cross were led away captive together.’¹¹⁷ Although the example of the Ark of the Covenant was not wholly adequate, its usage nevertheless shows that religion provided a framework through which contemporaries could interpret natural events such as the defeat at Hattin.

¹¹⁵ E. Siberry (1985). *Criticism of Crusading, 1095-1274*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, p.82.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Murray, ‘Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ’, p.224.

¹¹⁷ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.33.

The parallel with the Ark of the Covenant also gave the Franks some cause for hope. The biblical narrative records that the Ark was returned to Israel almost immediately after its capture, because its presence amongst the Philistines had triggered divine judgement upon them. The parallel with the Ark of the Covenant may therefore have been included in the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* in order to imply that the Cross could be recovered. This theory would certainly help to explain the continued references to the Cross in the Christian sources written in the years after Hattin. This included the idea presented by the princes and ecclesiastics from beyond the sea that Saladin had thrown the relic into a fire but had been unable to destroy it and so stored it away ‘for safe-keeping’ because he feared its power.¹¹⁸ Another rumour that developed was that the Cross may have been buried by one of the Templars during the battle. This resulted in the digging up of the battlefield over five years later, but nothing was ever found.¹¹⁹ Both rumours claimed that the Cross had not been destroyed and so the Christians could therefore continue in their belief that it would one day be recovered, signalling the return of divine favour to the Crusader armies and so guaranteeing eventual victory in the Holy Land.¹²⁰

Christian contemporaries recognised that the loss of the relic of the True Cross at Hattin was a low point in the history of Christendom. Although Mayer argued that the shock of the defeat at Hattin was sufficient to re-ignite crusading fervour across Europe, Riley-Smith was right to highlight that it was in fact the loss of the Cross which in particular aroused such sentiment.¹²¹ It was this, more than any other aspect of the battle, which triggered a shared sense of desperation and responsibility across

¹¹⁸ Letter from the Princes and Ecclesiastics from beyond the sea to Frederick Barbarossa, written in late July 1187, in Barber and Bate, *Letters from the East*.

¹¹⁹ The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, p.47.

¹²⁰ Cole, ‘Christian Perceptions’, pp.14-15.

¹²¹ Mayer, *The Crusades*, p.136; Riley-Smith, ‘The Crusades’, p.557.

Europe, brought its wars to an end and in so doing forced its kings to re-focus their resources on launching a new crusade to the Holy Land.¹²²

¹²² Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, p.87; Jotischky, *Crusader States*, p.156.

IV. Divine judgement and human sinfulness

In attempting to explain the defeat at Hattin and give reasons for it, Cole has shown that considerations of faith were of much more importance to contemporaries than any other military or political factors. For them, the fundamental cause of the defeat was not Muslim superiority in battle or even Frankish inferiority, but rather divine judgement as a punishment for Christian sinfulness.¹²³ This notion should not be disregarded for more modern interpretations because it is a major theme of the sources on Hattin. Late twelfth century Europeans lived in a thoroughly spiritual world where the natural and supernatural interacted and where God was an ever-present reality, frequently intervening in human events.¹²⁴ The area of warfare was no exception. John Gilchrist has shown that the Middle Ages witnessed the emergence of a theology of war that remained prominent throughout the period, and which strongly influenced contemporary understanding of the Crusading movement.¹²⁵ As Elizabeth Siberry has written, ‘the Crusades were seen as holy wars and as such were believed to be sanctioned and even commanded by God. It was thought that he intervened and decided the outcome of battles’.¹²⁶ So before Gerard of Ridefort and the Knights Templar engaged a large Muslim force at the Springs of Cresson in May 1187 the sources write that ‘they prayed to the Lord of Hosts...in whose hand victory lies’.¹²⁷ Nor were these ideas of divine sovereignty and intervention limited to the Christians. In seeking to portray Saladin as pious and God-fearing, Ibn Shaddad wrote that ‘He always sought out Fridays for his battles, especially the times of Friday prayer, to gain

¹²³ Cole, ‘Christian Perceptions’, pp.9-10

¹²⁴ Riley-Smith, ‘Peace Never Established’, pp.98-9.

¹²⁵ J. Gilchrist (1993). ‘The Lord’s War as the Proving Ground of Faith: Pope Innocent III and the Propagation of Violence (1198-1216)’, in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, pp.65-83 at p.66.

¹²⁶ Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, p.69.

¹²⁷ Princes and Ecclesiastics.

the blessing of the preachers' prayers on the pulpits, for they were perhaps more likely to be answered.'¹²⁸ Indeed, in his account of the battle of Hattin he noted that the Muslims had only been victorious because Allah had predestined it.¹²⁹ Both sides therefore recognised that divine support was essential if victory was to be won.

If the Crusades were holy wars commanded and sanctioned by God, how then was the defeat at Hattin to be understood? Military reverses were difficult to explain, especially because it was thought that they were being fought on behalf of a sovereign and immanent God. This created a dilemma in the minds of contemporaries and one that needed to be resolved.¹³⁰ The formulation of a theology of war based largely on the Old Testament was here very influential in providing the solution. The Christians saw themselves as the Israelites whilst their Muslim enemies were portrayed as being either the Ishmaelites or Philistines.¹³¹ Whilst the Christians were fighting on behalf of God, the Papacy made it clear that the Muslim enemy was the instrument of the devil and that they were guided by the powers of darkness.¹³² Saladin was therefore portrayed as the Antichrist by the author of *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*.¹³³ Within this theological framework, military successes against the Muslims were attributed to

¹²⁸ *History of Saladin*, p.72; For further discussion of this see Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp.180-2. The writing of Ibn Shaddad has heavily influenced her understanding of Saladin.

¹²⁹ *History of Saladin*, p.73.

¹³⁰ Riley-Smith, 'Peace Never Established', pp.98-9.

¹³¹ Y. Katzir (1986). 'The Conquests of Jerusalem, 1099 and 1187: Historical Memory and Religious Typology', in V.P. Goss (ed.) *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange Between East and West During the Period of the Crusades*. Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, pp.103-113 at p.104, 106; J. Gilchrist (1988). 'The Papacy and War Against the 'Saracens', 795-1216', *The International History Review* 10, pp.174-97 at p.188; Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, p.82.

¹³² Gilchrist, 'The Papacy and War', p.191; see also P.J. Cole (1993). "'O God, The Heathen Have Come Into Your Inheritance" (Ps.78.1): The Theme of Religious Pollution In Crusade Documents, 1095-1188', in M. Shatzmiller (ed.) *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*. Leiden, Brill, pp.84-111 at p.107.

¹³³ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.26; see also M. Jubb (2005). 'The Crusaders' Perceptions of their Opponents', in H.J. Nicholson (ed.) *Palgrave Advances in the Crusades*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.225-244 at p.236.

divine will and defeats to divine judgement for human sinfulness.¹³⁴ As Gilchrist has written, ‘The divine will governed both victory and defeat.’¹³⁵ Here too, the Old Testament metaphor of the Christians as the Israelites came to the fore. In the aftermath of a defeat it was argued that God allowed the enemy victory over His people ‘in order to cleanse them, to prepare them for the promised land.’¹³⁶ Major judgements therefore befell the Christians in the Holy Land ‘because of our sins’, a concept known as *peccatis exigentibus hominum*.¹³⁷ Just as the Lord had punished the Hebrews for their sins, he now permitted the Christians to be defeated by the Muslims at Hattin.¹³⁸ Therefore in the letter to Archumbald, it is reported that the defeats at Cresson and Hattin occurred only because God had allowed them ‘as a consequence of our sins’.¹³⁹ Yet as Katzir noted, this explanation by no means acted as ‘a remedy for the trauma’.¹⁴⁰ Christians across Europe found this truth difficult to take. So although Gerald of Wales recognised that the defeat at Hattin was a result of divine judgement which was ‘never unjust’, he admitted that this was ‘sometimes difficult to understand’.¹⁴¹

Contemporaries made it clear that the defeat at Hattin was not only passively permitted by God but that He had been on the field of battle and had actively destroyed the Franks.¹⁴² One of the most dramatic descriptions of this can be found in the letter from the princes and ecclesiastics from beyond the sea to Frederick Barbarossa written in the immediate aftermath of the battle. In their account of Hattin

¹³⁴ Gilchrist, ‘The Papacy and War’, p.189.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.191.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.192.

¹³⁷ Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, p.69; Katzir, ‘Religious Typology’, p.109.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p.82.

¹³⁹ Letter to Archumbald, p.161.

¹⁴⁰ Katzir, ‘Religious Typology’, p.109.

¹⁴¹ Gerald of Wales, p.74.

¹⁴² Cole, ‘Christian Perceptions’, p.10.

they wrote that ‘the Lord put his people to the sword.’¹⁴³ Furthermore, as Eraclius told the Pope, ‘the anger of the Lord has come upon us and His terrors have put us to confusion.’¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the author of *The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre*, writing in the Holy Land in the 1240s recalled that ‘the anger of God was so great against the Christian host because of their sins that Saladin vanquished them quickly’.¹⁴⁵ Even more dramatic in tone was the narrative from the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*. This included a prophecy foretelling the defeat which used biblical quotations from the Psalms to convey the extent of God’s anger. These scriptures portrayed Him as the divine warrior exercising judgement on His people, and were thus in keeping with the medieval Old Testament theological framework of war. In describing the defeat at Hattin the chronicler found it

...sufficient to refer to the Scripture: ‘The Lord has bent his bow, and made it ready; he has also prepared for him the instruments of death’ [Psalm 7 vv.12-13]...the Lord ‘gave His people to the sword’ [Psalm 78 v.62] and – as the sins of humanity demanded – He gave up his inheritance to slaughter and pillage.¹⁴⁶

It is significant that in speaking of divine judgement at Hattin both the letter from the princes and ecclesiastics from beyond the sea and the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* used the imagery of Psalm 78:62 of the Lord killing His people with the sword. Indeed, this metaphor was also used by Saladin of Hattin when he wrote that ‘the gleam of God’s sword has terrified the polytheists’.¹⁴⁷ This shows that the way in which the two sides understood divine judgement were almost identical. It would also seem to suggest that

¹⁴³ Princes and ecclesiastics.

¹⁴⁴ Eraclius, p.162.

¹⁴⁵ *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, p.47.

¹⁴⁶ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.32.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Saladin’s Hattin Letter’, p.210.

in the years following Hattin, the way in which contemporaries understood the defeat did not change. Divine judgement was believed to be ongoing until the armies of the Third Crusade arrived in the Holy Land. This is supported by a letter written by Hermenger, Provisor of the Hospital to Leopold, Duke of Austria in November 1188, over a year after both the defeat at Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem. In it Hermenger described how God was still judging the Holy Land because of the sins of the people. He wrote that God was ‘Exercising His just and reasonable anger and rage’ and in allowing their situation to ‘worsen from day to day.’¹⁴⁸ Contemporaries therefore believed that God was still angry with His people even after Hattin. Although the preaching of the Third Crusade began on 29 October 1187 with the issuing of the general letter *Audita Tremendi* by Pope Gregory VIII, Frederick Barbarossa did not leave Germany until 1190 and the armies of Richard I and Philip II did not reach the Holy Land until 1191. During these years the situation in the Latin East grew increasingly desperate and so it is no surprise that the author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* portrayed the events in such a negative way. Furthermore, whereas before Hattin only those in the Holy Land were blamed for Christian defeats there, in its aftermath the Papacy developed the concept of *peccatis exigentibus hominum* and blamed the defeat on the sins of Christendom as a whole.¹⁴⁹ It was thought that the West’s refusal to respond to the repeated and increasingly desperate appeals for aid from the Crusader states during the 1170s and 1180s had, as Jotischky has written, ‘left no alternative but for God to allow Saladin victory’ at Hattin.¹⁵⁰ It was this which

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Hermenger, Provisor of the Hospital to Leopold, Duke of Austria, November 1188, in Barber and Bate (forthcoming) *Letters from the East*.

¹⁴⁹ Excerpt from *Audita Tremendi*, in Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p.137.

¹⁵⁰ Jotischky, *Crusader States*, p.156.

when coupled with the capture of the True Cross resulted in a shared sense of responsibility and desperation being felt amongst the Christians of Western Europe.¹⁵¹

So the defeat at Hattin was seen as being a consequence of human sinfulness. But what sins were the Franks guilty of committing? The author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* wrote that

...the Lord's hand was aroused against His people – if we can properly call them 'His', as their immoral behaviour, disgraceful lifestyle, and foul vices had made them strangers to Him...So the region from which other areas had received religion now became an example of all immorality. The Lord saw that the land of His Nativity, the place of His Passion, had fallen into the filthy abyss. Therefore He spurned His inheritance, permitting the rod of His fury, Saladin...to rage and exterminate the obstinate people...He preferred the Holy Land to serve the profane rites of Gentiles for a time than for His people to flourish any longer.¹⁵²

The immorality the Franks in the Crusader states had angered God. He had therefore used Saladin to judge them in order to rid the Holy Land of their sinfulness. However, whilst the chronicler painted a highly moralistic picture of the sins of the Franks his examples of their sins are generic and therefore vague. Siberry has shown that immorality and excess were always given as reasons for Christian defeat.¹⁵³ Much more specific was the reason given by the author of the *De Expugnatione*. He recorded that King Guy and his nobles using treasure sent to them by Henry II of

¹⁵¹ Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, p.87.

¹⁵² *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.23

¹⁵³ Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, pp.101-2.

England in order to hire mercenaries and thus raise a force of sufficient size to match that of Saladin. The army was therefore unusually large and the result was that

They gloried in their multitude of men, the trappings of their horses, in their breastplates, helmets, lances, and golden shields, but they did not believe in God, nor did they hope in the salvation of him who is the protector and saviour of Israel. Rather, they were taken up with their own thoughts and became vain.¹⁵⁴

For the writer of the *De Expugnatione*, it was Frankish pride and godlessness that had led to the defeat at Hattin. They were confident that they had guaranteed victory for themselves by raising such a large army and therefore trusted in their own strength rather than in the protection and salvation of God. It was because of their pride and their rejection of God that He had used Saladin to destroy them at Hattin. W.B. Stevenson accurately summed up contemporary Frankish feeling when he wrote that ‘their army was lost, their king was a prisoner, but worst of all their God for their sins had forsaken them. The cross, their pledge of victory, was taken away. They were unworthy to possess it for they had lost their faith in the Saviour who was crucified on it.’¹⁵⁵

Whilst concepts of divine judgement led to a shared sense of desperation across Western Europe, they also allowed for some hope. Though the defeat at Hattin was a devastating blow to Christendom, contemporaries believed that the Holy Land could and would, be retaken. True repentance would lead to both forgiveness of sins and to

¹⁵⁴ *De Expugnatione Terrae Sanctae Per Saladinum Libellus*, p.154.

¹⁵⁵ W.B. Stevenson (1907). *The Crusaders in the East: A Brief History of the Wars of Islam with the Latins in Syria during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Cambridge, University Press, pp.248-9.

eventual victory over Islam.¹⁵⁶ People in Europe were therefore urged to take up the cross as a proof of repentance.¹⁵⁷ This was believed to a method of regaining divine favour and of obtaining salvation and is the message of the letters sent from the Holy Land to Europe in the aftermath of Hattin. In their letter the princes and ecclesiastics from beyond the sea urged that the West come to their aid and in doing so to gain ‘the redemption of your souls’.¹⁵⁸ God did not want His land being ‘soiled by the enemies of Christ’.¹⁵⁹ It was felt that he had merely used Saladin as an instrument of his fury in order to punish the Franks. Indeed, by the time of the Third Crusade, a belief emerged amongst the Franks within the Holy Land and probably even across Europe that Saladin knew that he had only defeated the Christians at Hattin because the God of the Christians had allowed him to. The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* records that ‘it is said that he often used to say that he got this victory not through his power but through our sin’.¹⁶⁰ This idea is therefore likely to have been developed to give the armies of the Third Crusade confidence in battle because knowing that Saladin had not triumphed at Hattin in his own strength, coupled with the return of divine favour to the Crusader armies, meant that the Muslims could now be easily beaten.

¹⁵⁶ Jotischky, *Crusader States*, p.156.

¹⁵⁷ Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p.137; Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, p.81.

¹⁵⁸ Prince and ecclesiastics.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, p.34.

V. Conclusions

Hattin was recognised as being an extremely important battle by both Christian and Muslim contemporaries. This was immediately evident and it remained a reality long into the thirteenth century. Whilst both Christians and Muslims understood that Hattin was a decisive military defeat because it occurred in pitched battle, they recognised the surpassing importance of religious explanations for the defeat. The Franks firmly believed that God had judged them because of their sins and so had actively destroyed them on the battlefield. It was this which most troubled the Christian writers and triggered great emotion in their writings which is incompatible with Riley-Smith's positive assessment of Hattin. Muslim chroniclers also credited their victory to divine judgement. They believed that Allah had used Saladin to destroy the Christians. Their explanations were therefore almost identical. What Gilchrist said of the Christian theology of war was thus equally true for the Muslims: 'the divine will governed both victory and defeat.'¹⁶¹ So whilst Christian contemporaries recognised Hattin as a decisive military defeat, it was its religious causation which weighed most heavily upon their minds. Indeed, the loss of the relic of the True Cross was the most traumatic aspect of the battle for them to understand because its capture symbolised the departure of divine favour from the Frankish army and therefore confirmed that the defeat was a result of divine judgement. The Muslim chroniclers also recognised the importance of the Cross. Once the relic was captured, the fate of the Christians was sealed. Their attachment to it was intense, and with its loss their morale collapsed and the Muslim victory became inevitable. Therefore, in seeking to understand the outcome of Hattin, both Muslims and Christians wrote accounts of the battle which

¹⁶¹ Gilchrist, 'The Papacy and War', p.191.

were based almost entirely on their theological understanding of war. Both sides saw every aspect of Hattin through this religious lens. Religion provided the explanation for the Christian defeat and also gave them some cause for hope of eventual victory in the Holy Land. Divine sovereignty had caused both the Christian defeat and the Muslim victory. The princes and ecclesiastics from beyond the sea were therefore in no doubt as to the ultimate reason for the defeat, writing that ‘Amid the noise of the trumpets and the neighing of the horses, the Lord put His people to the sword.’¹⁶²

¹⁶² Princes and ecclesiastics.

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