



November 25, 1177

The Montgisard Battle: a leper 16 old king and 500 riders break the army of Saladin

The Battle of Montgisard was fought between the Ayyubids and the Kingdom of Jerusalem on November 25, 1177. The 16 year old King Baldwin IV, seriously afflicted by leprosy, led an out-numbered Christian force against the army of Saladin. The Islamic force was routed and their casualties were massive, only a fraction managed to flee to safety.

More than wisdom and courage, what made Baldwin IV a great king was his indomitable faith – a virtue he demonstrated at the famous battle of Montgisard. After the attack on Egypt was cancelled, Philip of Flanders took his army to campaign in the northern territories of the kingdom, where Raymond of Tripoli joined him. The move left Jerusalem in a precarious situation. Very few troops had stayed behind to defend the capital and the king's condition had worsened.



Saladin was quick to seize the opportunity and directed his main army of 26,000 elite troops toward Jerusalem. From his sick bed, Baldwin summoned what little strength he had and rode out to meet his adversary with less than 600 knights and a few thousand infantrymen. By this point Baldwin's strength was so deteriorated many thought he would die. Bernard Hamilton quotes a contemporary Christian writer who described the king's condition as "already half dead."

Realizing the impotence of the king's force, Saladin ignored him and continued his march to Jerusalem until Baldwin intercepted him near the hill of Montgisard, only 45 miles from Jerusalem.

Seeing the overwhelming Muslim army, the Christians became petrified. However, such desperate situations afford great men an opportunity to show their mettle, and

Baldwin rose to the challenge. Dismounting his horse, he called for the Bishop of Bethlehem, to raise up the relic of the True Cross he carried. The king then prostrated before the sacred relic, beseeching God for success. Rising from prayer, he exhorted his men to press the attack and charged. Historian Stephen Howarth describes the battle that ensued:

“There were twenty-six thousand Saracen horsemen, only a few hundred Christians; but the Saracens were routed. Most were killed; Saladin himself only escaped because he rode a racing camel. The young king with his hands bandaged, rode in the forefront of the Christian charge – with St. George beside him, people said, and the True Cross shining as brightly as the sun. Whether or not that was so, it was an almost incredible victory, an echo of the days of the First Crusade. But it was also the last time such a great Muslim army was beaten by such a small force.”

Deluged by heavy rains and suffering the loss of roughly ninety percent of his army, Saladin returned to Cairo in utter defeat. Years later, he would refer to the battle disdainfully as “so great a disaster.”

Realizing that divine assistance was largely responsible for his triumph, Baldwin erected a Benedictine monastery on the site, dedicated to Saint Catherine of Alexandria, on whose feast day the victory had been won.



Battle of Montgisard painting by Charles-Philippe Larivière

Leper King Baldwin IV

Baldwin IV was born in Jerusalem of King Amalric and Queen Agnes of Courtney in 1161. Intellectually and physically gifted as a boy, he seemed well equipped to inherit the Crusader kingdom.

Four years later, King Amalric died suddenly. Despite his sickness, Baldwin was crowned king by the unanimous decision of the High Court of Jerusalem. Since he was only thirteen, his nearest relative, Miles of Plancy, became regent. Shortly thereafter, Miles was murdered and Raymond of Tripoli replaced him.

In 1176, Baldwin came of age and took charge of the kingdom at the tender age of 15. During the two years since his coronation, his condition had worsened, and was now clearly discernable as leprosy.

Nevertheless, he possessed the strength and character necessary to rule. As historian Stephen Howarth aptly put it: “Baldwin assumed full power, and soon showed that he

made up for any disability with sheer nerve...”

One of Baldwin’s first actions as king was to reject the peace made with Saladin and raid the lands surrounding Damascus. This forced Saladin to quit his attack in Aleppo and adopt a defensive posture. Later that year, the young king led another raid in the Bekaa valley in Lebanon and Syria, and defeated an attack led by Saladin’s nephew.

In the first months of his reign, Baldwin proved his capacity to rule. By countering Saladin with an attack on Damascus rather than a frontal assault at Aleppo, Baldwin demonstrated maturity and wisdom beyond his years.

The Sufferings of a King

The glory of triumph did not relieve the increasing effects of Baldwin’s leprosy. As time wore on he would lose the use of his limbs and eyes. However, never once did he use his sickness as an excuse to shirk his duty.

Although he tried to abdicate several times, he immediately resumed his responsibilities when he realized there was no one suitable to replace him. Shortly after his victory at Montgisard, Baldwin wrote to King Louis VII of France:

“It is not fitting that a hand so weak as mine should hold power when fear of Arab aggression daily presses upon the Holy City and when my sickness increases the enemy’s daring...I therefore beg you that, having called together the barons of the kingdom of France, you immediately choose one of them to take charge of this Holy Kingdom.”

When his request was ignored, the king began looking for a suitable husband for his

sister Princess Sibyl. She was the oldest in the family and whoever she married would inherit the kingdom.

Baldwin hoped she would wed someone from Europe, thus securing western protection for the kingdom after his death. He made arrangements for a marriage between Sybil and Hugh of Burgundy, but the plans fell through.

To force Baldwin’s hand and control Jerusalem’s future, Raymond of Tripoli and Bohemond of Antioch then planned a *côup*. Their efforts failed because when they arrived at the capital, Sibyl was already married to Guy de Lusignan.

Although Baldwin had hoped to abdicate to Guy after the marriage, his brother-in-law was a great disappointment. Limp-wristed and disliked by many of the crusader barons, Guy was not suitable to reign and Baldwin was forced to remain on the throne. Arguably, these internal struggles cost Baldwin more anguish than the leprosy that continued to devour his body.

In 1183, the king became blind and unable to use his hands and feet. He appointed Guy de Lusignan permanent regent.

However, when the heir proved unable to unify the Crusader barons and refused to engage Saladin, while commanding the largest Christian force ever assembled in the Holy Land, Baldwin removed his regency and once again shouldered the kingdom’s responsibilities.

Later in 1183, the king’s half-sister Isabel married Humphrey IV of Toron at the Castle of Kerak. Although Baldwin was too sick to attend the wedding, many other influential Christian leaders were present. The

opportunity to capture them was too tempting for Saladin to resist.

He surrounded the castle and besieged it in the midst of the celebration. Though utterly incapacitated, Baldwin took it upon himself to rescue the entrapped nobles. Blind and lame, he ordered that he be carried into battle on a stretcher.

Realizing that the king had arrived to succor the fortress, Saladin signaled the retreat without engaging the Christians. The same scene was repeated when Saladin again tried to take the Castle of Kerak in 1184. Once again, Saladin retreated when Baldwin was brought into battle on a stretcher.

Deprived of all strength and power, Baldwin had triumphed over his lifelong enemy one last time.

Resolving Succession and Death

Later in 1184, Baldwin contracted the illness that would eventually take his life. The problem of succession had been somewhat resolved in 1183, when Baldwin crowned his five-year-old nephew, Baldwin V, co-king in order to exclude Guy de Lusignan from the throne.

While modern readers may find this harsh, Guy had openly defied the king twice, once going so far as betraying his feudal vow. Such defiance could not go unanswered.

Starved for viable options, Baldwin appointed Raymond of Tripoli temporary regent. When it became clear that the king was in fact on his deathbed, Jerusalem needed a more permanent solution until King Baldwin V came of age.

The leper king deferred this all-important decision to the High Court, who chose Raymond of Tripoli. Having done his best to

provide for his kingdom, Baldwin IV relinquished his soul to God on May 16, 1185 and was buried in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

THE ROYAL HOUSE OF GEORGIA



His Royal Highness Crown Prince Nugzar Bagrationi-Gruzinski the head of the Georgia Royal House and the rightful heirs to succeed the throne of the kingdom of Georgia... May God Bless The Prince.



HRH Princess Anna of Georgia, daughter of Prince Nugzar wearing the medal of the royal order of Gruzinski's royal family. HRH Princess Anna of Georgia, above, together with her father supporting family's cause.