

The Major Sources for the Battle of Tours

(1) [*The Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar, c. 13*](#)

Ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hanover, 1888), p. 175.

At the same time, Duke Eudo broke his agreement. When he learned about this from messengers, Prince Charles moved his army and crossed the river Loire, putting Duke Eudo to flight, taking away many spoils, which he had plundered from his enemies twice that year, before returning to his own country. Then Duke Eudo, seeing that he was defeated and ridiculed, stirred up the treacherous nation of the Saracens to aid him against Prince Charles and the nation of the Franks. They marched out with their king, named 'Abd al-Rahman, crossed the Garonne and reached the city of Bordeaux. They burned the churches and killed the people. They went on to Poitiers, where they burned the Basilica of St Hilary, painful as it is to say; and they intended to overthrow the house of the Blessed Martin. Against them, Prince Charles fearlessly prepared his battle lines and raced upon them like a warrior. With Christ's help he overran their tents and hastened to crush them in battle. King 'Abd al-Rahman having been killed, he struck them down, driving out the army. He fought and he won. In this way did the victor triumph over his enemies.

The Chronicle of Fredegar is an anonymous chronicle, originally compiled in the 660s. *The Continuations* were made in the eighth century, with the material for the years between 721 and 751 being commissioned by Childebrand, brother and trusted lieutenant of Charles Martel. This has two implications. The first is that the passage above was composed by 751 at the latest, possibly in connection to the coronation that year of Charles' son Pippin as the first Carolingian king. The second implication is that it is very much telling the story of the battle from the Carolingian perspective, centring Charles as the hero.

(2) [*The Chronicle of 754*](#)

Ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 11 (Berlin, 1894), pp. 361-362.

In the year 769 [Spanish era], and the twelve-and-a-halfth year of his [Byzantine Emperor Leo III's] imperial rule, and the 113th year of the Arabs [AH] and the ninth year of [Caliph] Hisham's reign, Abd al-Rahman, a warlike man, was rejoicingly hastened to power, having been greatly favoured by all for almost three years. And although he was much endowed with courage and glory, one of the people of the Moors, named Munnuza, hearing that the judges were oppressing his own people throughout the country of Libya with their wicked recklessness, made peace without delay with the Franks and prepared a tyranny against the Saracens of Spain...

And a duke of the Franks named Eudo had, for the sake of the alliance, given his daughter to him [Munnuza] in marriage in order to postpone harassment by the Arabs and bend him to his will...

[Munnuza is defeated and killed. His wife is sent to Damascus with the other booty.]

Then 'Abd al-Rahman saw the land filled with the multitude of his army, trampling the sea and the mountains of the Pyrenees as though they were flat, made an expedition within the lands of the Franks, and in entering smote them with his sword, to the point that, after Eudo had prepared for a battle beyond the river called Garonne or Dornonia and his army

had been scattered into flight, only God could know the number of those who died or were killed. Then 'Abd al-Rahman pursued the aforesaid Duke Eudo, wishing to plunder the church of Tours and destroy its palaces and burn its churches. But there he confronted the consul of interior Francia or Austrasia named Charles, a man experienced in war and military affairs from an early age, who had been warned by Eudo. There, after nearly seven days of tormenting each other in skirmish, they at last prepared for battle. While they fought fiercely, the people of the North, like an unmoving wall, stayed frozen in formation like a line of ice. In a blink of an eye, they put the Arabs to the sword. The Austrasian people, with great strength in their limbs and an iron hand throughout the hard fight, killed the king when they found him, striking him in the chest. Immediately when night put off the battle, they despicably put up their swords and, seeing the innumerable camps of the Arabs, they saved themselves for battle another day. Rising from their sleeping bags at dawn, the Europeans beheld the tents and camps of the Arabs' canopies located and ordered as they had been. Not knowing that they were all empty and supposing that the Saracens' phalanxes were prepared for battle within, they sent scouts and found that all the Ishmaelites' columns had escaped, and that all of them were secretly fleeing home, passing the night in tight formation. The Europeans were anxious lest they might have concealed themselves on a hidden path as a stratagem. Stunned in every way, they hunted the surrounding area in vain, Making no further effort to find the aforesaid people, they returned to their own countries rejoicing with their booty and the evenly divided spoils.

Like the *Continuations to Fredegar*, the *Chronicle of 754* was written in Latin by someone sympathetic to the Franks. Unlike the former, the latter was composed in al-Andalus, by a Christian probably in the south-east in 754, hence the name (it is also known as the *Mozarabic Chronicle*). This perspective is reflected by the more detailed description of the events leading up to al-Ghafiqi's campaign, and the way the chronicler's camera follows the invasion north, whereas the *Continuations* centre on Charles Martel.

(3) [*Bede, Ecclesiastical History, V.23*](#)

Ed. Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum* (Oxford, 1896), p. 349.

In the year of our Lord 729, two comets appeared around the sun, striking great terror into those that saw them. One went before the sun rising in the morning; the other followed it sinking in the evening, as if foreboding dire calamity for East as well as West. Certainly, one anticipated the day's beginning and the other the night's, so that they might act as a sign that evils threatened mortals at both times. They bore a fiery torch to the north, as if to start a fire. They appeared in the month of January, and remained for nearly two weeks. At that time, a very serious plague of Saracens plundered the Gauls with miserable slaughter, and not long afterwards they paid a fitting price for their perfidy in the same province. In that that year the holy man of the Lord Egbert, as we said above, passed to the Lord on Easter day and soon after, when Easter was done, that is, on the day of the seventh ides of May [9th May], King Osric of the Northumbrians left this life...

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is one of the most celebrated histories of the early medieval period. It was composed at the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow and read in draft form by King Ceolwulf of Northumbria. The passage translated above contains a reference to a destructive Muslim raid in Gaul in 729 which suffered a speedy reverse. Because no such campaign is recorded for that year anywhere else, it has been suggested that Bede confused his chronology and actually described 'Abd al-Rahman's invasion here. Although Bede himself claimed to have finished the *History* in 731, before the Battle of Tours, there are grounds for believing that he

continued working on it for some years after that, making such an identification possible. Alternatively, this might be a reference to the sack of Autun in 725, although it's unclear what retribution the raiders suffered in that case. If this is a reference to the Battle of Tours, this would be both our earliest source and interesting evidence that it was big enough news to reach Northumbria.

(4) [*Vita Pardulfi cap. 15*](#)

Ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH SRM 7 (Hannover, 1920), pp. 33-34.

Another time, when the nation of the Ishmaelites had entered the town of Poitiers and the lofty mayor of the palace Charles had come to vanquish them and, having won the battle and laid low the enemy, he captured their spoils and recovered their captives. For this reason, many of the same nation of the Ishmaelites took flight and they returned through certain places. They butchered any Christian man they found and, wherever they encountered monasteries or holy places, they endeavoured to burn them with fire. And thus it was made known that they were coming at speed to the monastery of the man of God Pardulf. And when the servant of God heard this, he said to the brothers, 'My sons, if they come to the monastery's doors, offer them food and drink, for they are tired from the journey.' What do you think: by what charity was he inflamed, he who endeavoured to prepare feasts for pagan warriors? Then the brothers of the aforesaid monastery, who surrounded him on all sides and attended him, brought a wagon which had been prepared and covered with a covering so that they might lead him to a deserted place so that he would not be in peril from that most abominable nation. But the man of God, armed with the Holy Spirit, would not consent to their petition, saying that he would not leave that place until the end of his life. Then all the brothers who were there fled, and only the man of God remained, undaunted, and one low-ranking servant, Euphrasius by name, remained secretly so that he could see his end. And when they were already approaching the monastery's gate from a distance, the aforesaid Euphrasius came to the man of God and said: 'Father, do not stop praying, because they are at this moment approaching the monastery gates'. Then the man of God, not fearing the moment of his death but looking out for the boundary of his abbey, prostrate in continual prayer, exhorted the Lord, saying 'Impede them, O Lord, and scatter the war-making nation, and permit them not to enter this monastery's gates today.' Suddenly, all of them gathered in one force and, struck with great terror, speaking amongst themselves in their own language, stood for a long time and then went down the road which they were about to take. And the servant of God remained, rejoicing and undaunted.

The *Life of St Pardulf*, abbot of Guéret in the Limousin at the end of the seventh century, was written in the mid-eighth century, a few decades after Pardulf's death. It was composed by an Aquitanian author, and is much less hostile to Duke Eudo. Still, the writer's focus here isn't really on the battle at all: it's on Pardulf's holiness maintaining his monastery unviolated by molesting troops.

(5) [*Vita Eucherii cap. 8*](#)

Ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH SRM 7 (Hannover, 1920), pp. 49-50.

Meanwhile, the abominable nation of the Ishmaelites left their own home and came to plunder the province of Aquitaine, threatening peril with their army, plundering all the moveable goods; they tried to assault the cities and castles. Hearing this, Prince Charles, having gathered the nations and joined the Burgundians and the Franks, going to meet

them with a great army, and plundering their army with his army, having obtained the victory, went home with great spoils. When he came to the city of Orléans, crossing the river Loire, leaving the meal which had been prepared, he made for the town of Paris, and commanded the blessed Eucherius to come after him. He, although knowing plots had been prepared against him, did not refuse, fulfilling the commands not of the prince but of God, freely throwing himself headfirst down a perilous drop, 'submitting himself', as the blessed apostle Peter said, 'to every human creature for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.'

The *Life of St Eucherius* is a near-contemporary source (c. 740), describing the life of Bishop Eucherius of Orléans. Eucherius - as you can tell from the text - was, or rather became, an enemy of Charles Martel, and his *Life* is correspondingly hostile to him. Rather as in the case of the *Vita Pardulfi*, here too the battle is a backdrop for a tale of persecution. It really just functions as an explanation of Charles' itinerary, and how it puts Eucherius into his tormentor's path.

(6) [Paul the Deacon, HL, VI.46](#)

Ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS rer. Lang. 1 (Hannover, 1878), pp. 180-181.

At that time, the nation of the Saracens passed from Africa at the place called Ceuta and invaded all Spain. Then, after ten years, they came with their wives and little ones and entered the Aquitanian province of Gaul as if to dwell there. Charles [Martel], at that time, had a disagreement with Prince Eudo of Aquitaine. They nonetheless gathered together as one, and fought together against the same Saracens. Indeed, the Franks came upon them and killed three hundred and seventy-five thousand Saracens. From the Franks side, only one thousand five hundred fell there. Eudo and his men came upon their camp and killed many in a similar way, and plundered everything.

The *Historia Langobardorum* was written at the very end of the eighth century by Paul the Deacon, an Italian monk who had been active at Charlemagne's court. We've included this account for completeness, basically, because it's hopelessly garbled. Paul seems to date the battle to the late 710s, and the casualty figures he gives are taken from the *Liber Pontificalis*' description of the battle of Toulouse we mentioned above. This time, though, Charles Martel has been plopped into the mix. In essence, then, whatever this says about the way the battle was memorialised by Charlemagne's time, it's not much help when dealing with the battle itself.

(7) [Chronicle of Moissac](#)

Ed. Ir. J.M.J.G Kats and David Claszen, *Chronicon Moissiacense Maius* (University of Leiden Research MA thesis, 2012), p. 114.

In the year 732, 'Abd al-Rahman, king of Spain, crossed through Pamplona and across the Pyrenees with a great army of Saracens and besieged the city of Bordeaux. Then Eudo, prince of Aquitaine, having gathered an army, went to meet him in battle on the river Garonne. But once battle had commenced, the Saracens were victorious. Eudo fled and lost a great part of his army, and thus the Saracens next began to pillage Aquitaine. Eudo came to Charles, prince of the Franks, and asked for his help. Then Charles, having gathered a great army, went to meet them, and once battle was joined in the suburbs of Poitiers the Saracens were vanquished by the Franks. 'Abd al-Rahman fell in battle there with his army. And those of them who remained fled and returned to Spain. Charles, having received the spoils, returned in glorious triumph to Francia.

The *Chronicle of Moissac* was produced in the early ninth century, with its final entry pertaining to 818. It's a universal history, which reorganises and extends Bede's *Chronica Maiora* (not his *Ecclesiastical History*). The editorial tone is pro-Carolingian and it draws upon sources such as the *Continuations of Fredegar*. But [as I've discussed elsewhere](#), it was composed in Septimania, right next to the frontier with al-Andalus, by someone who clearly had access to information about Muslim Spain unavailable elsewhere in the Frankish world. Their account of the campaign is more detailed than other contemporary Carolingian annals and draws upon their mysterious 'Southern Source'.

(8) Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *The Conquest of Egypt and North Africa and al-Andalus*

[Trans. by Daniel König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe* \(Oxford, 2015\), p. 191.](#)

'Ubayda [b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, the governor of Ifriqiya and thus also in command over al-Andalus] had appointed 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Abd Allah al-'Akki over al-Andalus who was a righteous man. He raided the Franks who are the fiercest enemies of al-Andalus, pillaging a lot of booty and defeating them. ... Then he set out to them on another raid where he became a martyr with his entourage. According to what Yahya has transmitted from al-Layth, his death took place in the year 115/733.

There are not many references to the Battle of Tours in the Arabic sources, and most of the ones that exist are very late. The earliest however is this reference in *The Conquest of Egypt and North Africa and al-Andalus* by Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (d. 871), which is one of the oldest surviving Arabic histories. As he indicates in the passage, Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam drew upon the earlier work of the Egyptian scholar and jurist al-Layth b. Sa'd (d. 791). The latest material discussed by al-Layth comes from just before the 'Abbasid revolution in 750 and the most recent work on him suggests that he might have stopped writing his history around then, so this report may date from within twenty years of the battle.