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RÉSUMÉ – Cet article contribue au débat en cours chez les historiens de la question militaire, en se concentrant sur la principauté d'Antioche et ses guerres avec ses puissants voisins turcs, entre 1099 et 1164. Il montre que cet état, placé dans des conditions précaires aux frontières de la chrétienté, est menacé de disparaître en cas de grande défaite et cherche donc à expliquer pourquoi les Francs prennent si souvent le risque de se lancer dans des batailles rangées, alors qu'ils ont beaucoup à y perdre.

MOTS-CLÉS – histoire militaire, croisades, Antioche

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ABSTRACT – This article contributes to debate amongst military historians by focusing on the principality of Antioch and its wars with neighbouring Turkish powers between the years 1099-1164. It makes the point that this state lived a precarious existence on the frontiers of Christendom and had a great deal to lose from a major defeat. This article consequently seeks to explain why the Franks would so frequently chance pitched battles when they had so much to lose.

KEYWORDS – history, Crusades, chronicle, Antioch

RISKING BATTLE

The Antiochene frontier, 1100-1164

When the warrior writer Usama ibn Munqidh captioned his Frankish enemies as ‘the most cautious of all men in war’, he can’t possibly have known how much trouble he was going to cause modern historians¹. Usama’s statement has sat at the heart of an ongoing debate in which studies have first defined and then redefined the Eastern Franks’ appetite for major pitched battles against their Turkish and Fatimid opponents, reaching very different conclusions. Some have suggested that Latin Eastern commanders were unwilling to risk such large-scale encounters². *Prima facie* this view makes sense because it chimes with the commonly-held view that commanders in Western Christendom were equally reluctant to fight battles, except in the most desperate of circumstances³. By contrast, J. France has suggested that the rulers of the Crusader States were far more willing to give battle than has hitherto been supposed and

1 Usama Ibn Munqidh, *The Book of contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, trans. P. Cobb, London, Penguin, 2008, p. 25.

2 See J. Gillingham, “Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages”, *Anglo-Norman Warfare: Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Military Organization and Warfare*, ed. M. Strickland, Woodbridge, Boydell, 1992, p. 197; C. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, p. 522; R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 138-139, also makes a similar point but only for the period after 1127.

3 This article will not rehearse the lengthy historiography on attitudes towards battle in Western Christendom beyond observing that the notion that commanders tried to avoid battle has been nuanced or challenged by several historians. See, for example, C. J. Rogers, “The Vegetian ‘Science of War’ in the Middle Ages”, *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1, 2002, p. 1-19; L. J. A. Villalon, “Battle-Seeking, Battle Avoiding or perhaps just Battle-Willing? Applying the Gillingham Paradigm to Enrique II of Castile”, *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 8, 2010, p. 131-154. For Gillingham’s riposte, see J. Gillingham, “Rejoinder: ‘up with Orthodoxy!’ In Defense of Vegetian Warfare”, *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2, 2003, p. 149-164. For a survey of the historiography, see J. France, “Battle, Historiography of”, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Medieval Technology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, vol. 1, p. 128-129.

were fully prepared to give battle when the need arose. He argues that this more front-footed approach represents an adaptation to the rather different military/political environment of the Near East⁴.

This important issue is central to the Latin East's military history, but the majority of studies to deal with this question have tended to focus their attention on the kingdom of Jerusalem, rather than the northern states. Antiochene battles, such as the Roger of Salerno's famous defeat at the *Ager Sanguinis* (1119) or the post-Second Crusade debacle of Inab (1149) have received some attention, but there has been no study focusing specifically on the Antiochene Franks' readiness to engage in major battles⁵. As will be shown, the surviving evidence rewards closer attention in revealing their approach to large-scale encounters. Consequently, this article seeks to explore the Antiochene Franks' attitude towards battle, whilst drawing occasionally upon examples of battles from the southern Crusader States where appropriate.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF DEFEAT IN THE PRINCIPALITY OF ANTIOCH AND THE OTHER STATES OF THE LATIN EAST

It has long been observed that fighting a pitched-battle was a dangerous business, primarily because of its inherent perils. Christendom's commanders, both in the west and the east, were aware that a major

4 See J. France, "The Crusades and Military History", *Chemins d'Outre-Mer: Études d'histoire sur la Méditerranée médiévale offertes à Michel Balard*, ed. D. Coulon et al., Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2004, p. 345-352; J. France, "Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation to Eastern Conditions in the Twelfth Century", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 15, 2, 2000, p. 60; J. France, "Crusading Warfare", *Palgrave Advances in the Crusades*, ed. H. Nicholson, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2005, p. 73; Y. Lev, "The *Jihād* of Sultan Nūr al-Dīn of Syria (1146-1174): History and Discourse", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 35, 2008, p. 264.

5 There have been some book chapters and articles, however, which have explored individual battles: for example, A. Mallett, "The battle of Inab", *Journal of Medieval History*, 39, 1 2013, p. 48-60; N. Morton, *The Field of Blood: the battle for Aleppo and the Remaking of the Medieval Middle East*, New York, Basic Books, 2018. For broader studies incorporating the principality's political/military history, see T. Asbridge, *The Creation of the principality of Antioch: 1098-1130*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2000; A. D. Buck, *The Principality of Antioch and its frontiers in the Twelfth Century*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2017.

defeat could result in the death or captivity of a state's leading knights and nobles (and consequently its major landowners and regional governors). The obstacles and costs involved in raising and re-equipping a new force could be equally prohibitive. Generals would also have been aware that, should matters take a turn for the worse, there was a real chance that they could lose their reputation, their kingdom and/or their life.

These were formidable concerns for the medieval commander and they all hold true for the Crusader States, especially the principality of Antioch. While no king of Jerusalem lost his life in battle during this period, and only one was taken captive whilst reigning as king⁶, no less than three Antiochene rulers were killed in combat and three were taken captive⁷.

Likewise, the territorial losses suffered following a major defeat in the Crusader States could be catastrophic. The major case study here of course is the battle of Hattin, which represents the example *par excellence* for the danger that a substantial reverse could lead to the implosion of a kingdom's entire defensive infrastructure. In the wake of Hattin in 1187, the kingdom of Jerusalem collapsed and when, several years later, the first contingents of the Third Crusade began to arrive, all the kingdom's major cities had fallen to Saladin, except Tyre in the north. The battle also opened a path for the swift reduction of both the principality of Antioch and the county of Tripoli which both lost much of their hinterland.

Antioch also furnishes its own case-study for such dire post-battle losses (if not quite so bad as Hattin): Harran. This confrontation took place in 1104 when a combined Edessan and Antiochene force first besieged the town of Harran before withdrawing to deflect an attack against Edessa led by the Turkish commanders Suqman and Jokermish. As the allied Frankish force approached to relieve Edessa, the Turks retreated, drawing the Franks far from their own borders, before heavily defeating them on 7 May near the Balikh river. In subsequent weeks the principality's territories shrank dramatically, both as the victorious Turks advanced upon their eastern borders and also as other factions

6 Baldwin II of Jerusalem (taken captive in 1123).

7 Antiochene rulers killed in battle: Roger of Salerno (1119), Bohemond II (1130), Raymond of Poitiers (1149). Antiochene rulers taken captive: Bohemond I (1100), Reynald of Chatillon (1160/1161), and Bohemond III (1164).

seized the opportunity to challenge Frankish rule. The Byzantines retook Antioch's major port of Latakia and stepped-in to take control of the Antiochene-held towns on the Cilician coastlands to the north, following a spate of local rebellions⁸. Other garrisons abandoned their posts and fled to Antioch, while several further towns threw out their Frankish overlords and welcomed forces despatched by Ridwan, Turkish of Aleppo (who had not participated in the battle of Harran⁹).

The catalogue of disasters resulting from this battle makes the point that a comprehensive defeat in the Levant entailed a dangerously high risk of causing a cascade of further losses. The Levantine Franks were minority rulers governing a far broader population composed of many different communities including Eastern Christians, Muslims and Jews along with other smaller groups. The Franks lacked the manpower or financial resources to replace substantial casualties, either in men or horses, while there was always a danger that the non-Latin population would join forces with the victor, intensifying the pressure¹⁰. In addition, the Turks' highly-mobile cavalry armies were exceptionally well suited to making as much chaos as possible across rural settlements, once a Frankish frontier had been denuded of its main army. Following the great Antiochene defeat at the battle of the Field of Blood (1119) near al-Atharib, Turkman raiders reached as far as the Black Mountain region of the Amanus mountains in the north and the Mediterranean coastline in the west as they spread out to despoil the landscape¹¹. In short, the Franks were extremely exposed to the risks of failure just as the Turks were superbly well equipped to exploit any victory.

8 See Ralph of Caen, *Tancredus*, ed. E. D'Angelo, Turnhout, Brepols, 2011, p. 126.

9 See Kamal al-Din, "Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep", *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Orientaux*, Paris, 1884, vol. 3, p. 592; for an excellent overview, supported by maps, of these territorial losses, see Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, p. 54-58.

10 Al-Sulami specifically foregrounds the Franks' weakness during their early years of maintain sufficient warhorses; see Al-Sulami, *The Book of the Jihād of 'Alī ibn Ṭābir al-Sulāmī (d. 1106): text, translation and commentary*, ed. and trans. N. Christie, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2015, p. 235. Admittedly rebellions against Frankish authority were rare, but the potential remained; see B. Z. Kedar, "The Subjected Muslims of the Frankish Levant", *Muslims under Latin Rule, 1100-1300*, ed. J. M. Powell, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 154-160.

11 See Kamal al-Din, "Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep", p. 619; Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abū'l Faraj: the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician commonly known as Bar Hebraeus*, trans. E. Wallis Budge, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1932, vol. 1, p. 249.

Another factor compounding the dangers of defeat was the contested political environment of the Near East during this period. This was a region where many different factions, whether Turkic, Arabic, Byzantine, Armenian or Frankish, jostled for power in close proximity. In this heated arena the various combatant parties spent much of their time waiting for any sign of weakness among their neighbours. The defeat of one party could immediately provoke other previously-uninvolved rulers to launch their own attacks, leading to a generalised feeding frenzy of competing factions all seeking to claw their pound of flesh from a wounded neighbour. The Byzantine attacks made upon the principality of Antioch following Harran (mentioned above) provide one example of this ‘piling on’ of neighbouring powers. Another example can be seen in the progressive enfeeblement of the county of Edessa following the fall of the city of Edessa in 1144 to the Turkish ruler Zengi. As it became clear that the county could not defend its borders in the following years, both the Anatolian Turks and Nur al-Din (Zengi’s heir and ruler of Aleppo) staged repeated attacks upon the county; essentially competing to grab as much land as possible. William of Tyre described county’s death-throes as being “crushed incessantly between two millstones¹²”. A major defeat, whether through siege or battle, could have catastrophic consequences.

Admittedly this was not always the case. At times it was politic to maintain a defeated party’s existence out of fear that an even stronger enemy might take its place¹³. This was the explanation attributed by Ibn al-Athir to Nur al-Din when discussing the events following the Antiochene defeat at Artah in 1164. He explains that having secured a substantial victory over the Franks, Nur al-Din chose not to take advantage of Antioch’s weakness because there was a danger that this would provoke the Byzantines to intervene decisively from the north, take control in Antioch, and become far more dangerous enemy than their Frankish predecessors¹⁴. This was a serious concern that may well have played its part in maintaining Antiochene independence. Certainly,

12 William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. R. Huygens, Turnhout, Brepols, 1986, vol. 2, p. 781.

13 See M. A. Köhler’s thesis on this: M. A. Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades*, trans. P. M. Holt, ed. K. Hirschler, Leiden, Brill, 2013, *passim*.

14 *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh.*, ed. and trans. D. S. Richards, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, vol. 2, p. 167.

the return of Antioch to Greek control was a longstanding Byzantine objective¹⁵. Geopolitical logic of this kind could prevent the complete destruction of a crusader state at times, but even so the history of the northern crusader states also furnishes examples of the exact opposite scenario.

THE ANTIOCHENE APPETITE FOR BATTLE

Consequently, there are grounds for suggesting that the rulers of the Crusader States probably had more to lose from a major battle than many of their contemporaries in the West. It is all the more remarkable then that – despite the increased risks – they fought so many battles. Where J. Gillingham has argued that major rulers in Western Christendom fought few or no battles (Henry II of England, none; Philip Augustus of France, one; Richard I of England, two/three¹⁶) the principality of Antioch fought at least eleven between 1100 and 1164¹⁷. A serious case could also be made for several others including the encounters at Kella in 1100¹⁸ Shaizar in 1111¹⁹, Azaz in 1124²⁰. Identifying precisely

15 For discussion, see J. Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, London, Hambledon, 2003, *passim*.

16 See Gillingham, “Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages”, p. 196-197.

17 This number includes all those battles which meet the below criteria. It includes all battles fought either within the principality of Antioch itself or those where the principality's main army (at times led or supported by forces from Jerusalem) took a leading role in encounters within its main theatre of operations in Northern Syria. It excludes those occasions when Antiochene contingents supported the Jerusalemite army, defending the kingdom's borders to the south. These battles are: Harran (1104), Artah (1105), the encounter between Aleppo/Antioch and Mosul/Edessa (1108), Tell Danith (1115), Field of Blood (1119), Second Battle of Tell Danith (1119), Azaz (1125), Qinnisrin (1133), Yaghra (1148), Inab (1149), Artah (1164).

18 See Kemal al-Din, “Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep”, p. 588.

19 The sources differ on whether there was a battle in 1111. For discussion, see Edgington's comments in Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana: History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, ed. S. Edgington, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007, p. 818-819, n. 84.

20 See Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus chronicle of the Crusades*, ed. and trans. H. Gibb, Mineola, New York, Dover, 2002, p. 170; Kamal al-Din, “Extraits de la Chronique d’Alep”, p. 640. For other encounters we lack sufficient detail to make a judgement, such as the ambush where Bohemond II was killed in Cilicia; although it is not impossible that this was a battle.

how a 'battle' should be defined (as opposed to a large skirmish or an embattled fighting march) is occasionally problematic when drawing up such lists of 'battle-level' encounters, but for the purposes of this investigation a 'battle' in the Near East has been defined as an encounter which satisfies the following criteria:

1. Any encounter in which two commanders both sought to defeat their opponent (i.e. a 'fighting march' in which the Frankish commander sought only to reach a given location and not to give battle would not qualify, unless it evolved into a pitched battle).
2. An encounter ending in the defeat or forced withdrawal from the battlefield of at least one army consisting of over 3000 soldiers, or at least 350 Frankish heavy cavalry.
3. An encounter which did not take place across an intervening rampart or other permanent – rather than field – fortification (i.e. a siege).
4. An encounter which was deemed worthy of remembrance by the writers of more than one culture.

These criteria have been selected to capture the major qualities typically associated with the concept of a 'battle': scale, purpose, context, and regional impact.

To restate the problem, the points raised so far represent a seeming dichotomy. On one hand, the Antiochene Franks had more to lose than most medieval rulers from fighting pitched battles, yet on the other, they took part in such encounters with far greater frequency. This requires an explanation.

A survey of these battlefield encounters reveals a striking pattern that goes some way to answering this problem. Seven (arguably eight) of the eleven abovementioned battles (and two of the 'possibles') took place when the Franks were on the defensive, either during, or directly following, a Turkish attack on the principality of Antioch. Among these defensive encounters the course-of-events was remarkably similar. In all these cases the battle was a response to a Turkish invasion into the principality, rather than being the product of an Antiochene attack upon Turkish territory. In most of these cases, the Turks first attacked a frontier stronghold and then fought a battle when confronted by a

Frankish relief force. Examples fitting this precise pattern include the battles fought after Turkish attacks upon: Ma'arrat al-Nu'man (1115), Al-Atharib (1119), Azaz (1124 and 1125), Inab (1149), and Harim (1164)²¹. Consequently, when discussing the Frankish appetite for 'battle', it is necessary to emphasise that these were predominantly attempts to ward off invasion, rather than battles fought as part of an offensive operation. This is not to say that the Franks could not be highly aggressive in their warcraft – they could be very bellicose – only that they tended to express their expansionist impulses through raiding and occasionally sieges, not pitched-battles.

Notably, the Antiochene propensity for fighting battles predominantly whilst on the defensive is mirrored by the Crusader States to the south. Before 1125 the kingdom of Jerusalem exclusively fought pitched battles in defensive scenarios; beating off multiple Egyptian invasions despatched out of Ascalon and also the Damascene ruler Tughtakin's attacks upon Tiberias, the most important taking place in 1113. Likewise, during the period 1109-1164, the battles fought in Tripolitanian territory against the Turkman commander Bazwaj in 1137, Zengi in 1137 and Nur al-Din in 1163 were solely responses to invasion. By contrast, only very rarely did the Franks actively seek out their enemy's forces for a major encounter during offensive operations and these tended to occur only when the Franks had very substantial forces at their disposal (often including large numbers of recently-arrived crusaders) or following a major victory. Baldwin II's invasions towards Damascus in 1126 and 1129 and the battles they provoked are rare examples of such encounters and they occurred in unique circumstances, the former following Tughtakin's (ruler of Damascus) defeat the previous year, and the latter with the support of a large crusading army.

An example which underlines' the Franks very different approaches to battle during offensive and defensive campaigns can be seen in Baldwin II's campaign in Northern Syria in late 1124-1125. This expedition began soon after Baldwin's release from Turkish captivity in August 1124. Almost immediately, the king (then acting ruler of Antioch) assembled a powerful coalition comprised of Frankish, Turkish and Arab troops and marched to besiege the great northern Syrian powerhouse of

21 The Second battle of Tell Danith (1115/1119) does not quite follow this pattern but it was certainly fought as a defensive stroke.

Aleppo. The conquest of this city was a longstanding strategic goal for the Crusader States and its fall would have markedly tilted the regional balance of power towards the Franks²². Nevertheless, Baldwin chose to lift the siege and yield this long-term ambition upon learning that Aqsunqur, ruler of Mosul, was marching Aleppo's relief. He made this choice even though, firstly, his important Arab ally Dubays was intent upon seeking battle with Aqsunqur²³, secondly, Aleppo's garrison was small and the city's ruler was absent²⁴ and, thirdly, Aqsunqur's army does not seem to have been especially strong²⁵. In short, Baldwin II refused battle during an offensive campaign even though he stood to gain enormously from the conquest of Aleppo and even though he was confronted with inferior forces.

This decision stands in stark contrast to Baldwin's conduct a few months later. On this occasion, Aqsunqur – having secured Aleppo for himself – invaded the principality of Antioch in alliance with the Damascene ruler Tughtakin. This combined Turkish force then took Kafartab before besieging Azaz. Baldwin II responded to this attack by gathering his supporters and marching upon Azaz, without Arab or Turkish allies, where he fought and won a battle against the large opposing Turkish coalition²⁶. The disparities between Baldwin's conduct are striking. He refused battle when the odds were in his favour and when he stood to gain a major prize, *but when he was on the offensive*. But he accepted battle when the odds were severely against him, and when he stood to gain very little beyond defending the frontier, *but when he was on friendly territory and on the defensive*. The strategy was clear: battles were far more acceptable when fought on home ground and in defence. Admittedly Baldwin did go on the offensive in the south the following

22 The earliest reference to the Frankish aspiration to conquer Aleppo can be found in Guibert of Nogent's chronicle: *Dei gesta per Francos et cinq autres textes*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, Turnhout, Brepols, 1996, p. 338.

23 See "Anonymous Syriac chronicle", trans. A. Tritton, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 92, 1933, p. 96. For discussion on this siege, see Morton, *The Field of Blood*, p. 123-164; T. S. Asbridge, "How the Crusades could have been won: King Baldwin II of Jerusalem's campaigns against Aleppo (1124-1125) and Damascus (1129)", *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 11, 2013, p. 77-86.

24 See Kamal al-Din, "Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep", p. 647.

25 See Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana (1095-1127)*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, Heidelberg, 1913, p. 754.

26 The most detailed account of the campaign can be found in "Anonymous Syriac chronicle", p. 96-98.

year, launching a campaign out of the kingdom of Jerusalem and seeking battle with Tughtakin, but that was presumably an attempt to exploit Tughtakin's weakness in the wake of his defeat at Azaz.

FREQUENT AND DEFENSIVE BATTLES

The plot thickens. It is now necessary to explain both why the Franks tended only to accept battle in defensive scenarios as well as to render some explanation for the fact that they fought so many battles despite the risks involved. The answers to both issues are bound together – they reflect the Franks' attempts to recalibrate their tactics to answer the Turks' warcraft.

J. France is entirely right to caption to the military encounters between the Franks and Turks as a “clash of contrasts”²⁷. The Turks fought in a very different manner to their opponents. Their primary tactics were those of the Central Asian Steppe where nomadic commanders sought to employ their peoples' traditional skills in horsemanship and archery to the greatest possible effect on the battlefield. Armies made up of mounted archers were formidable instruments of war, almost unknown in Western Christendom. Some commanders along Christendom's eastern margins might have heard stories about their predecessors' historic wars with the Magyars, who are reported by Regino of Prüm to have fought in much the same way, but there is little to suggest that these former experiences influenced the First Crusaders or the later defenders of the Crusader States²⁸.

By the twelfth century, the Turks' traditional steppe tactics remained central to their warcraft but they were also being remoulded somewhat as the Turks slowly acclimatised themselves to life in the Near East, slowly adopting Islam and gradually defining their power by territorial holdings rather than tribal groupings²⁹. They started to gather

27 J. France, “Warfare in the Mediterranean region in the age of the crusades, 1095-1291: a clash of contrasts”, *The Crusades and the Near East*, ed. C. Kostick, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, p. 9.

28 See Regino of Prüm, “Chronicon”, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, ed. F. Kurze, Hanover, vol. 50, 1890, p. 133.

29 Given that the Turks were essentially post-nomadic by this stage it is difficult to apply some of the principles outlined by Morillo which are founded on nomadic cultures that

slave-soldiers (*Ghulam*) and to employ the arms and armour commonly used in the region, but their basic tactical approach to warfare was fundamentally unchanged.

The Turks' two main advantages – mobility and massed archery – help to explain why their Frankish opponents were so reluctant to engage in battle whilst fighting offensive campaigns in enemy territory. As mentioned briefly above, the Turks' horsemanship and longstanding experience both in hunting and in the control of great herds provided an excellent basis for harrying and destroying a beaten enemy. If defeated during an offensive campaign, the remnants of a Frankish army would not simply be permitted to perform an orderly withdrawal. Instead they would typically be submerged beneath a deluge of swarming Turkish attacks from all quarters. An example of the kind of pressure that the Turks could bring to a retreating Frankish army can be seen in Tancred's attempt to march back to Apamea (Antiochene territory) following his attempt to conquer the town of Shaizar in 1111. The campaign began in September 1111 when a combined Christian army first gathered at Apamea and then set out to confront the Munqidhs of Shaizar who were supported by Mawdud of Mosul. The Franks advanced upon the town and then fought an indecisive encounter (possibly a battle – the accounts are not clear on this point) against their Turkish and Arab enemies which compelled them to withdraw. They then began an agonised retreat back to Apamea (which is only about c.15 miles to the north-west). The Franks tried to make camp on two occasions on the return journey and both times they were forced against their will to resume their march by the relentless pressure exerted by their foes. In the event, even though their army was (1) unbroken, (2) led by expert commanders like Tancred and Baldwin I of Jerusalem, (3) only had to cover a short distance, and (4) had opted to march at night to disrupt Turkish archery (a technique they picked up during the First Crusade) this was clearly a tortured journey demonstrating just how dangerous the Turks could become one they sensed that their foes had rendered themselves vulnerable³⁰.

are 'non-territorial': S. Morillo, "Battle-Seeking: The Contexts and Limits of Vegetian Strategy", *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1, 2002, p. 31.

30 See Usama Ibn Munqidh, *The Book of contemplation*, p. 80-81. For night marching during the First Crusade, see B. S. Bachrach and D. S. Bachrach, "Ralph of Caen as a Military

More catastrophic case studies demonstrating the damage that Turkish light cavalry could inflict upon *broken* Frankish armies can be seen in the abortive attempts to cross Anatolia made by the three main waves of the 1101 Crusade and Conrad III's army during the Second Crusade. In all cases these very large forces were worn down, defeated, and then put to flight by the Turks. The chroniclers for these campaigns tell very grim tales reporting the aftermath of these armies' collapse and the massive casualties inflicted as the fleeing survivors were hunted down by the victorious Turkish light cavalry³¹. The memory of such experiences would have gone some way to dissuading later commanders from seeking battle whilst in enemy territory. Without the protection afforded by a nearby place-of-retreat, such as a stronghold or fortified town, the Turks' impressive mobility could substantially dilate the consequences of defeat for a Frankish commander.

The Turks were well aware of this advantage and, at times, they deliberately sought to goad Frankish armies into pursuing them away from their sources of help so that they could isolate them in unfamiliar territory and then magnify the scale of their victory. As mentioned above, the battle of Harran provides one such example, and another can be seen in the manoeuvres which took place before the battle of Artah 1164. Describing this latter Frankish defeat, Ibn al-Athir specifically reports that Nur al-Din tried to provoke the combined Frankish forces into following him away from their own lands before instigating a battle. He comments that Nur al-Din moved his army "from Harim to Artah to encourage them [the Franks] to follow him, so he would have them in his power because they would be far from their territory if they met him in battle³²".

The thought of Turkish cavalry hunting down the fleeing remnants of a defeated Frankish army would have been a sobering thought for any Frankish commander contemplating an offensive operation, but this would only have been one reason among many to avoid pitched battles during offensive campaigns. The Turks' considerable mobility

Historian", *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages: Realities and Representations, Essays in Honour of John France*, ed. S. John and N. Morton, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, p. 95.

31 See Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, p. 614-618; Odo of Deuil, *De profectioe Ludovici VII in Orientem: The journey of Louis VII to the east*, ed. and trans. V. Berry, New York, Columbia University Press, 1948, p. 92-96.

32 *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol. 2, p. 147.

had many applications. They could cut a Frankish army's communications with its home territory and harry foragers. This happened during many campaigns and was instrumental to Baldwin II's defeat during his attack upon Damascus in 1129³³. Turkish cavalry could also slow a Frankish advance, repeatedly attacking their marching columns and forcing them to fight for every mile of their advance. This occurred on many occasions, particularly in the south, such as during King Fulk's attempt to seize the city of Bosra in 1147³⁴. They frequently used their troops to deny the Franks access to water, either by destroying wells – such as during the 1101 Crusade³⁵ – or by stationing troops to block accessible watering points at nearby rivers – such as during Tancred's attack on Shaizar in 1111³⁶. The combined effect of these tactics was to make it very difficult indeed for a Frankish commander to have any hope of success when conducting any offensive campaign in close proximity to a major Turkish army, still less when seeking a pitched battle. After all, the Turks were so well equipped to harass, isolate, and destroy a slow-moving Frankish army. Over time of course the Franks adapted to these strategies by: marching in close formation (the famous 'fighting march'³⁷), marching at night, and by developing their own light cavalry (Turcoples). Even so, while these hybrid tactics may have helped them to resist or temporarily avoid the Turks; they do not cumulatively represent a decisive counter-measure of such magnitude as to deny the Turks their great advantage in war. Consequently, the image of a collapsing Frankish army, disintegrating far from help and surrounded by Turkmen goes some way to explaining why the Franks only risked battle during offensive war in the most exceptional of circumstances.

Turning now to the question of why the Franks fought battles so frequently whilst on the defensive, the answer must simply be that they did not have a choice. Of the seven defensive battles mentioned above (nine including the two 'possibles'), six were fought to ward off invasion while the seventh took place following the battle of the Field of Blood when the Turks were already ranging freely across Antiochene territory.

33 See William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, p. 620-621.

34 See William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, p. 726-731.

35 See *Frutolfi et Ekkehardi chronica necnon anonymi chronica Imperatorum*, ed. F.-J. Schmale and I. Schmale-Ott, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972, p. 168.

36 See Usama Ibn Munqidh, *The Book of contemplation*, p. 80.

37 See Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 156-165.

In these scenarios the Franks were confronted with the challenge of devising a strategy that would compel their enemies to abandon their attack and depart from Frankish territory.

The tactical options available to Antiochene commanders suffering invasion, however, were far fewer than those open to contemporary commanders in distant Western Christendom³⁸. Unlike their western counterparts, they could not attempt to cut their enemies' supply lines because, firstly, the Turks could provision themselves from their own herds (often brought along on campaign) and, secondly, because this kind of action required light cavalry warfare which was the Turks' great strength. Equally they could rarely afford to 'sit-out' their enemies' attacks in their strongholds and wait for them to go away. The Turks were expert raiders and when eventually the Franks re-emerged from their fastnesses they would find that their former estates were in ruins. Consequently, these approaches were scarcely ever attempted³⁹. Another choice was to buy-off an enemy, but this option was equally problematic. Paying off enemies was always a risky choice because it won short-term security at the cost of offering an enemy a long-term incentive to renew their attack. All these approaches were viable options in Western Christendom – at least in some locations/scenarios – but they were scarcely ever suitable in the east.

There were only two remaining alternatives: (1) to adopt a 'shadowing' strategy or (2) to directly relieve the beleaguered stronghold with a major field army, thereby risking battle. Both these options were possible. Shadowing tactics were employed – albeit rarely – in the Crusader States. This approach to war essentially entailed commanders physically blocking an enemy's path across the frontier by entrenching their forces

38 For discussion on defensive strategies, see Morillo, "Battle-Seeking", p. 26.

39 The county of Edessa occasionally responded to attacks in this way and the county's defenders seem to have sought refuge behind stone walls when Mawdud attacked in 1111. Certainly the surviving sources mention no attempt to confront Mawdud until his forces were withdrawing from Edessa (at which point Albert of Aachen says that Joscelin set out in pursuit of one Turkish contingent); see *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Atbir*, vol. 1, p. 156; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus chronicle of the Crusades*, p. 114; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, p. 810-812; Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography*, p. 244; Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, p. 549-551. C. Marshall, *Warfare in the Latin East, 1192-1291*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 176-177 and 182, however describes a rather similar approach being employed in the Latin East during the later period 1192-1291.

in a strong location and refusing either to budge or to give battle. The clearest example of this for the northern Crusader States occurred during Baldwin II's defence of Antioch in the 1120s⁴⁰. In 1122 the Artuqid ruler Ilghazi twice tried to attack Zardana but on both occasions was compelled to withdraw when Baldwin II stationed his army at the nearby fortified monastery of Hisn ad-Dair, but refused to engage in battle⁴¹.

It is not difficult to see why Frankish commanders might employ shadowing tactics. This approach enabled them to block an enemy invasion whilst conserving their manpower (a vital consideration in the Latin East). These tactics were also used further south in the kingdom of Jerusalem. Famously, the great debate before the battle of Hattin 1187, when King Guy and his nobles discussed how they should tackle Saladin's recent invasion, centred on the question of whether they should try to shadow Saladin's forces or alternatively to march out to relieve the recently besieged city of Tiberias. The initial consensus was to adopt shadowing tactics; to hold their position in close proximity to Saladin, thereby conceding Tiberias, but preventing the Turks from penetrating any further into the kingdom. This approach had been reasonably successful in the past, helping the Franks to fend off a similar attack in 1183 so it made sense to suggest that it should be adopted again. Nevertheless, after the meeting, Guy was dissuaded from this course of action and convinced instead to relieve Tiberias and, by extension, to stage a frontal attack upon Saladin's army.

Guy's decision to jettison a 'shadowing' approach was not unjustified. Despite its *prima facie* appeal, there were problems with this kind of strategy. Refusing battle looked weak – even cowardly – in the eyes of Christian knights, afire with stories of knightly deeds and convinced in their belief that God would grant them victory⁴². Likewise weakness could not be shown to the Turks. A major enabling factor underpinning the foundation of the Crusader states had been the fearsome reputation

40 Roger of Antioch similarly refused battle in 1115 against Bursuq of Hamadhan near Shaizar, although this cannot really be said to be 'shadowing' tactics. He did not want to give battle because he wanted to wait for the arrival of reinforcements from Jerusalem. See Walter the Chancellor, *Bella Antiochena*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, Innsbruck, 1896, p. 69.

41 See Kamal al-Din, "Extraits de la Chronique d'Alep", p. 632-633; Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, p. 82-84.

42 *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr (1184-1197)*, ed. M. R. Morgan, Paris, Geuthner, 1982, p. 43-47.

the First Crusaders had won for themselves against their Turkish adversaries. Refusing battle was not consistent with the maintenance of that image. Likewise, if a ruler sought to adopt shadowing tactics against an opponent, who had already instigated a siege against a friendly frontier castle (i.e. Tiberias in 1187), then it was necessary for that ruler to accept the fact that he was essentially abandoning that stronghold and its defenders to their fate. This would have been a bitter pill to any ruler to swallow who felt any obligation to his troops, but especially for the Crusader States whose territorial footprint was so slight that major fastnesses could not gamely be thrown away uncontested. These were the kinds of arguments that were among those which dissuaded Guy from adopting shadowing tactics in 1187 and they also presumably explain why the Antiochene Franks were equally cautious about adopting this approach. Having said this, Baldwin II in 1122 seems to have overcome the inherent deficiencies in this course-of-action by managing – somehow – simultaneously to adopt shadowing tactics, to refuse battle, and to successfully drive Ilghazi away from Zardana. Exactly how he managed this is unclear. The sources are too slight. Still it must have been a unique set of circumstances because he did not attempt this kind of approach again.

The remaining option was to march directly to the relief of the beleaguered stronghold. This was by-far the most common reaction to a Turkish invasion and the frequency with which this response was adopted hints at the conspicuous drawbacks surrounding all the other alternatives. This approach did not necessarily mean that the Frankish army was deliberately seeking battle, but at the very least it had to be prepared to threaten battle if it was to have any chance of success⁴³. Antiochene commanders might well have hoped that the Turks would raise their siege and concede the fight upon hearing news of the relief army's approach. This occasionally happened and certainly, by using their main field army in conjunction with a major frontier fortress, the Franks were confronting the Turks with their greatest possible deterrent. In such a scenario, the Franks essentially transferred the decision about whether to give battle onto the Turks. When news arrived of the imminent arrival of a Frankish relief force, the Turks could choose either to lift the siege, or they could fight.

43 Borrowing terminology from S. Morillo, "Battle-Seeking", p. 26.

The Turks often chose to fight and indeed they seem to have been far more eager to engage in battle than their enemies, even when facing a Frankish field army supported by a stronghold in close proximity. Their willingness to stage a pitched battle in this scenario explains the vast majority of the battles that took place in these circumstances. The Turks had strong grounds for adopting a battle-seeking posture. They were nearly always numerically superior to the Franks and they could compensate for battlefield casualties with far greater ease. New manpower could be sourced relatively easily from the Turkmen tribes of the northern Jazira and Ibn al-Qalanisi frequently mentions the rulers of Damascus summoning new forces/allies from this region⁴⁴. Other troops could be raised from the heartlands of the sultanate in Iraq. Heavy defeat and loss of territory were also potentially less ruinous than for their Frankish counterparts, given that their landholdings were immeasurably more extensive. When the Turkman ruler Balak lost his city of Saruj during the First Crusade, he adopted a roving lifestyle, fighting for a variety of masters, before re-asserting himself as a territorial power when the chance occurred several years later⁴⁵. The Franks did not have this kind of luxury. Also, the Turks' considerable mobility combined with the fact that their enemies were slower-moving and on the defensive, diminished further the consequences of defeat; after an initial pursuit the Turkish horsemen could simply scatter and return home. All these factors gave the Turks strong incentives to adopt 'battle seeking' strategies, meaning that the Franks would have to accept battle on a semi-regular basis whether they liked it or not. The explanation then for the relatively high number of battles during this period lies more with the Turks' approach to battle than with the Franks.

⁴⁴ See Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus chronicle of the Crusades*, p. 81, 158-159, 197, 285, 305.

⁴⁵ For Balak's loss of Saruj, see Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, p. 176-178. What we know of his subsequent career comes largely from Ibn al-Athir's chronicle, although many authors took a greater interest in his actions when he became involved in the wars of Northern Syria in the early 1120s. There is no standard work on Balak, but for a good summary, see T. El-Azhari, "Balak (d. 1124)", *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Murray, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2006, vol. 1, p. 129-130.

IMPLICATIONS

Ultimately, the pitched-battles fought between the Antiochene and Turkish enemies reflect the cross-cultural nature of warfare along the Antiochene frontier. Both sides had their strengths and weaknesses. Very broadly, the Franks were deficient in reinforcements and, to some extent, mobility. They compensated for these problems by: developing major frontier fortresses, raising light-cavalry forces, identifying counter-measures to Turkish archery, and building a warcraft centred upon discipline, caution and their main battle-winner: the heavy cavalry charge. The Turks for their part were deficient in heavily armoured forces – cavalry or infantry – or by extension in troops capable of competing with the Franks in hand-to-hand combat. Their responses included: making full use of their considerable numbers, exercising caution when engaging in hand-to-hand combat, maximising the advantages inherent in their considerable mobility, arming their troops with armour-defying maces, enhancing their siege-craft and in some cases developing more heavily armoured cavalry contingents.

As this article has demonstrated, both sides learned to adapt themselves to their opponents but their revised tactics proved more effective in some military scenarios than in others⁴⁶. The Franks seem to have recognised that the idea of staging major battle-seeking invasions into Turkish territory was simply too dangerous to contemplate in any but the most unusual of situations. Their forces were not suitable for an aggressive campaign against an army of mounted archers, unless they had major support from the west or some other substantial circumstantial advantage. Their inability to compensate for this deficiency may go some way to explaining why the Franks never managed to conquer one of the big inland centres of power that barred their path to the conquest of the entire Near East: Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo. Their principle offensive tactic was heavy raiding but, as their attacks upon Aleppo (1110s-1120s) or Damascus (1120s) prove, raiding could weaken

46 A good starting point for discussion on the Franks/Turks adaptations to one another's tactics can be found in France, "Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation to Eastern Conditions in the Twelfth Century", p. 49-66.

these cities but much more pressure was needed to bring about their overthrow. In defensive scenarios the Franks were more ‘battle-willing’⁴⁷, but this was seemingly through lack of alternatives and they still tended to avoid battle where possible⁴⁸.

In practice, the Antiochene Franks fought most of their pitched battles for the simple reason that they were vital for their continued existence⁴⁹. Their survival traded on the maintenance of their fearsome reputation and this often necessitated fighting major encounters. Equally the security of their borders demanded that they relieve besieged strongholds – necessarily requiring them to threaten battle – because the other possible counter-measures were either ineffective or could only be applied in specific circumstances. Their general behaviour suggests that they preferred *in principle* to avoid battle – and so Usama ibn Munqidh is undoubtedly correct to characterise them as cautious in war – but nonetheless the political context of Northern Syria and the front-footedness of their enemies frequently required them frequently to grudgingly deploy for battle.

Their predilection for defensive over offensive battles was a pragmatic stance, but it may also go some way to explaining the ultimate failure of the Latin Eastern project. The Antiochene Franks fought most of their battles in defensive scenarios where they had very little to gain and a great deal to lose. If the Franks lost then the doors were open for their enemies to conquer multiple fortresses and to raid the principality’s heartlands. If the Franks won then their victory served simply to maintain the *status quo*. A victorious Frankish army might gain a few small settlements by treaty or capitalise on their enemy’s temporary weakness by launching a major raids, but that is all. They would certainly never gain the kinds of advances that their Turkish enemies achieved after Harran in 1104 or the Field of Blood in 1119. Consequently, the Franks’ military stance created an imbalance in the potential impact of battle, tilting the odds in favour of the Turks, even though – ironically – it was a strategy designed to conserve their position.

47 Borrowing terminology here from Villalon, “Battle-Seeking, Battle Avoiding or perhaps just Battle-Willing?”, p. 131-154.

48 In 1164 at Artah they were goaded into seeking battle with Nur al-Din following his attack upon Harim but this was rare; see *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Atbir*, vol. 2, p. 147.

49 See France, “Crusading Warfare and its Adaptation to Eastern Conditions in the Twelfth Century”, p. 60.

There were exceptions to this battle-hardened, yet battle-avoiding, behaviour. The advent of a major crusade could supply a temporary abundance of troops which *could* permit the Franks to be far more aggressive. Still, the big crusading armies tended to fight their wars out of the kingdom of Jerusalem, rather than in the northern states, and on the rare occasion that a big army from Western Christendom did enter Antiochene territory (such as Bertrand of Saint Gilles' army in 1109, or the survivors from Louis VII's army in 1148) the principality's rulers tended to quarrel with the newcomers, who in any case seem to have intended only to pass through Antioch rather than rendering it aid⁵⁰.

Turning now to the historiography, the great work on campaigning in the Latin East during this period is naturally R. C. Smail's *Crusader Warfare*⁵¹. This hugely influential study offers a highly nuanced argument concerning the Eastern Franks' approach to battle. R. C. Smail presents the Franks as pragmatic fighters who sought to incrementally build up their position with strongholds whilst launching campaigns with limited territorial ambitions. He observes that the Franks were cautious in war because battle was a dangerous business and they had limited manpower. The first generation of Frankish conquerors (up to 1127) often wanted to fight big battles because the creation of the Crusader States required a degree of aggression if it was to be successful, but later generations learned to avoid battles because they conferred little advantage so the Franks achieved their goals instead by refusing battle when confronted by a major enemy or using fighting marches.

R. C. Smail's thesis requires revision. The Antiochene Franks *do* seem to have fought more battles in their early years than in later decades and yet it is striking that most of these were still defensive. Their frequency owes more to their Turkish enemies – who were still in process of learning to be wary of the Frankish heavy cavalry – than to a deliberately battle-seeking approach by the Franks. Moreover, R. C. Smail over-emphasises the use of blocking/shadowing tactics. Rather than being a standard tactic characteristic of the post 1127 period, this approach seem rather to have been employed sparingly throughout this period

50 See Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, p. 776-778; William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, vol. 2, p. 754-755.

51 See Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 138-140.

(both before and after 1127) at times of intense need⁵². Overall, the Antiochene Franks' approach to battle seems broadly consistent during the period 1099-1164. The defeat at Harran and the later problems encountered during offensive campaigns (such as the 1111 campaign) may have reinforced the Franks' conviction that battle-seeking during offensive campaigns was too dangerous to contemplate, but even in the wake of the First Crusade, there are few examples of Frankish armies from any region deliberately seeking battle against an enemy which did not pose an imminent threat to their own borders⁵³. Even the First Crusaders themselves manifested a curiously defensive approach to battle, never seeking a pitched battle against an enemy's army unless it was clear that they were intent on staging an attack.

Turning to the historiography surrounding broader Medieval European attitudes towards battle, this article serves neither to confirm nor disprove the core precepts of the much debated 'Gillingham paradigm' (that Christendom's commanders preferred not to fight battles given the risks involved). Fundamentally the Eastern Franks were indeed battle-avoiding in their behaviour, but this was clearly through force of local circumstances and it would be difficult to argue that it was an inherited preference carried across from Western Christendom. The Levantine theatre hosted a very different kind of war fought against an enemy whose military culture blended influences from their peoples' formerly nomadic way of the life and the agricultural Islamic world of the contemporary present. This article's two main contributions to this particular debate are firstly to add another voice to those who have stressed that the Western Christian approaches to pitched battle cannot be reduced to a single dominant overarching orthodoxy. It is necessary to recognise diversity in military practice and political context across different cultures and frontiers. Secondly, J. Gillingham presents his argument – that Western European commanders tended to adopt a defensive strategy and to avoid battle – as an extrapolation and development upon the arguments made in R. C. Smail's magisterial work⁵⁴.

52 As Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 140-148, curiously seems to acknowledge a few pages later.

53 The exceptions I have in mind are predominantly the battles fought by Amalric in Egypt.

54 This is suggested in Gillingham's "Richard I and the Science of War", p. 195, 197, but it becomes rather clearer in his article "Rejoinder: 'Up with Orthodoxy!'", p. 153.

Nevertheless, his seeming belief that lessons can be learned about warfare in mainland Europe from a study on campaigning in the Latin East is highly problematic given the very different environments in which these campaigns were fought. As both this article, and R. C. Smail's *Crusading Warfare*, demonstrate, the Eastern Franks' tactics represent a highly-evolved adaptation to Turkish tactics which cannot easily be transposed elsewhere.

This article has endeavoured to lay bare an important aspect of the Antiochene Franks' strategic thinking and, reflecting upon their conduct, it is possible perhaps to speculate about the broader mentality implied by their behaviour. The conservatism of their tactical behaviour along with their dogged unwillingness to risk battle when far from their strongholds stresses a sense of isolation and insecurity that was perhaps the logical extension of their quest to build a principality in unfamiliar surrounds, far from mainland Europe and yet so close to enemy centres of power⁵⁵.

Nicholas MORTON
Nottingham Trent University

55 R. Ellenblum has argued persuasively that the kingdom of Jerusalem experienced a long period of relative peace and security from *c.* 1115-*c.* 1167, but this was almost certainly not the case in the north which pre-1167 experienced long periods of warfare which, by drawing-in the region's various combatant factions, may actually have served to shelter the kingdom of Jerusalem further to the south. Admittedly, as the Turkish-ruled regions to the east were consolidated under Zengi and Nur ad-Din there were longer periods of peace when these rulers concentrated their attention elsewhere. See R. Ellenblum, *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 176 and *passim*.