Accounts of the Battle of Tours

The Chronicle of 754 (Isidore of Beja)


Then Abderrahman, [the Muslim emir] seeing the land filled with the multitude of his army, crossed the Pyrenees, and traversed the defiles [in the mountains] and the plains, so that he penetrated ravaging and slaying clear into the lands of the Franks. He gave battle to Duke Eudes (of Aquitaine) beyond the Garonne and the Dordogne, and put him to flight---so utterly [was he beaten] that God alone knew the number of the slain and wounded. Whereupon Abderrahman set in pursuit of Eudes; he destroyed palaces, burned churches, and imagined he could pillage the basilica of St. Martin of Tours. It is then that he found himself face to face with the lord of Austrasia, Charles, a mighty warrior from his youth, and trained in all the occasions of arms.

For almost seven days the two armies watched one another, waiting anxiously the moment for joining the struggle. Finally they made ready for combat. And in the shock of the battle the men of the North seemed like North a sea that cannot be moved. Firmly they stood, one close to another, forming as it were a bulwark of ice; and with great blows of their swords they hewed down the Arabs. Drawn up in a band around their chief, the people of the Austrasians carried all before them. Their tireless hands drove their swords down to the breasts [of the foe].

At last night sundered the combatants. The Franks with misgivings lowered their blades, and beholding the numberless tents of the Arabs, prepared themselves for another battle the next day. Very early, when they issued from their retreat, the men of Europe saw the Arab tents ranged still in order, in the same place where they had set up their camp. Unaware that they were utterly empty, and fearful lest within the phalanxes of the Saracens were drawn up for combat, they sent out spies to ascertain the facts. These spies discovered that all the squadrons of the "Ishmaelites" had vanished. In fact, during the night they had fled with the greatest silence, seeking with all speed their home land. The Europeans, uncertain and fearful, lest they were merely hidden in order to come back [to fall upon them] by ambushments, sent scouting parties everywhere, but to their great amazement found nothing. Then without troubling to pursue the fugitives, they contented themselves with sharing the spoils and returned right gladly to their own country.

The Chronicle of St Denis

Source: Ibid.

The Muslims planned to go to Tours to destroy the Church of St. Martin, the city, and the whole country. Then came against them the glorious Prince Charles, at the head of his whole force. He drew up his host, and he fought as fiercely as the hungry wolf falls upon the stag. By the grace of Our Lord, he wrought a great slaughter upon the enemies of Christian faith, so that---as history bears witness---he slew in that battle 300,000 men, likewise their king by name Abderrahman.
Then was he [Charles] first called "Martel," for as a hammer of iron, of steel, and of every other metal, even so he dashed: and smote in the battle all his enemies. And what was the greatest marvel of all, he only lost in that battle 1500 men. The tents and harness [of the enemy] were taken; and whatever else they possessed became a prey to him and his followers. Eudes, Duke of Aquitaine, being now reconciled with Prince Charles Martel, later slew as many of the Saracens as he could find who had escaped from the battle.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam (d. 871)


‘Abd al-Rahman was a worthy man who made expeditions against the Franks. They are the remotest of the enemies of Spain. He gained much booty and overcame them...Then he went on another excursion and he and all his companions suffered martyrdom for Islam. His death...took place in the year 115 [733-34].

Anonymous Muslim Source


The Moslems smote their enemies, and passed the river Garonne, and laid waste the country, and took captives without number. And that army went through all places like a desolating storm. Prosperity made those warriors insatiable. At the passage of the river, Abderrahman overthrew the count, and the count retired into his stronghold, but the Moslems fought against it, and entered it by force, and slew the count; for everything gave way to their scimitars, which were the robbers of lives. All the nations of the Franks trembled at that terrible army, and they betook them to their king Caldus [Charles Martel], and told him of the havoc made by the Moslem horsemen, and bow they rode at their will through all the land of Narbonne, Toulouse, and Bordeaux, and they told the king of the death of their count. Then the king bade them be of good cheer, and offered to aid them. . . . He mounted his horse, and he took with him a host that could not be numbered, and went against the Moslems. And he came upon them at the great city of Tours. And Abderrahman and other prudent cavaliers saw the disorder of the Moslem troops, who were loaded with spoil; but they did not venture to displease the soldiers by ordering them to abandon everything except their arms and war-horses. And Abderrahman trusted in the valour of his soldiers, and in the good fortune which had ever attended him. But such defect of discipline always is fatal to armies. So Abderrahman and his host attacked Tours to gain still more spoil, and they fought against it so fiercely that they stormed the city almost before the eyes of the army that came to save it; and the fury and the cruelty of the Moslems towards the inhabitants of the city were like the fury and cruelty of raging tigers. It was manifest that God's chastisement was sure to follow such excesses; and fortune thereupon turned her back upon the Moslems.
Near the river Ovar [Loire], the two great hosts of the two languages and the two creeds were set in array against each other. The hearts of Abderrahman, his captains and his men were filled with wrath and pride, and they were the first to begin to fight. The Moslem horsemen dashed fierce and frequent forward against the battalions of the Franks, who resisted manfully, and many fell dead on either side, until the going down of the sun. Night parted the two armies: but in the grey of the morning the Moslems returned to the battle. Their cavaliers had soon hewn their way into the center of the Christian host. But many of the Moslems were fearful for the safety of the spoil which they had stored in their tents, and a false cry arose in their ranks that some of the enemy were plundering the camp; whereupon several squadrons of the Moslem horsemen rode off to protect their tents. But it seemed as if they fled; and all the host was troubled. And while Abderrahman strove to check their tumult, and to lead them back to battle, the warriors of the Franks came around him, and he was pierced through with many spears, so that he died. Then all the host fled before the enemy, and many died in the flight. . . .