

## = Battle of Halmyros =

The Battle of Halmyros , known by older scholars as the Battle of the Cephissus or Battle of Orchomenos , was fought on 15 March 1311 between the forces of the Frankish Duchy of Athens and its vassals under Walter of Brienne and the mercenaries of the Catalan Company , resulting in a devastating victory for the Catalans .

Engaged in conflict with their original employers , the Byzantine Empire , the Catalan Company had traversed the southern Balkans and arrived in southern Greece in 1309 . The new Duke of Athens , Walter of Brienne , hired them to attack the Greek ruler of neighbouring Thessaly . Although the Catalans conquered much of the region for him , Walter refused to pay them the salaries owed , and prepared to forcibly expel them from their gains . The two armies met at Halmyros in southern Thessaly ( or at the Boeotic Cephissus , near Orchomenos , according to an earlier interpretation ) . The Catalans were considerably outnumbered and weakened by the reluctance of their Turkish auxiliaries to fight . The Company did have the advantage of selecting the battleground , positioning themselves behind marshy terrain , which they further inundated with water . On the Athenian side , many of the most important lords of Frankish Greece were present and Walter , a prideful man and confident in the prowess of his heavy cavalry , proceeded to charge headlong against the Catalan line . The marsh impeded the Frankish attack and the Catalan infantry stood firm . The Turks , seeing that battle was joined in earnest , re @-@ joined the Company , and the Frankish army was routed ; Walter and almost the entire knighthood of his realm fell in the field . As a result of the battle , the leaderless Duchy of Athens was taken over by the Catalans , who ruled that part of Greece until the 1380s .

## = = Background = =

In 1309 , the Burgundian noble Walter of Brienne was selected as the Duke of Athens in Frankish Greece after the death of Guy II de la Roche . At that time the Greek world was in turmoil owing to the actions of the Catalan Company . These were a group of mercenaries , veterans of the War of the Sicilian Vespers , originally hired by the Byzantine Empire against the Turks in Asia Minor . Soon , however , mutual suspicion and quarrels brought about an open conflict ; evicted from their base in Gallipoli in 1307 , the Catalans marched west through Thrace and Macedonia , until , pressed by Byzantine troops under Chandrenos , they entered Thessaly in early 1309 .

The arrival of the marauding Company , some 8 @,@ 000 strong , in Thessaly caused concern to the region 's Greek ruler , John II Doukas . Having just availed himself of the death of Guy II to throw off the tutelage of the Dukes of Athens , John turned to Byzantium and the other Greek principality , the state of Epirus , for aid . Defeated by the Greeks , the Catalans agreed to pass peacefully through Thessaly to the south , towards the Frankish principalities of southern Greece . Walter of Brienne , who in his youth had fought against the Catalans in Italy , spoke Catalan and had gained the Catalans ' respect , now hired the Company for six months against the Greeks , at a high price : four ounces of gold for every heavy cavalryman , two for every light cavalryman and one for every infantryman , with two months ' payment in advance . Turning back , the Catalans captured the town of Domokos and some thirty other fortresses , and plundered the rich plain of Thessaly , forcing the Greek states to come to terms with Walter .

The Catalans gave Walter a remarkable success , which brought him accolades and financial rewards from Pope Clement V , but the Duke now declined to fulfil his end of the deal and pay the remaining four months ' pay . Instead , Walter picked the best 200 horsemen and 300 Almogavar infantry from the Company , paid them their arrears and gave them land so that they would remain in his service , while ordering the rest to hand over their conquests and depart his lands . In response , the Catalans offered to recognize him as their lord if they were allowed to keep some of the land they had taken to establish themselves , but Walter rejected their proposal and began preparations to expel them by force . To this purpose , the Duke of Athens assembled a large army , comprising his own feudatories ? among them the most prominent were Albert Pallavicini , Margrave of Bodonitsa , Thomas III d 'Autremencourt , Lord of Salona and Marshal of Achaia , and the barons

of Euboea , Boniface of Verona , George I Ghisi and John of Maisy ? as well as reinforcements sent from the other principalities of Frankish Greece .

= = Battle = =

Three sources report in some detail on the events before and during the battle , all of them drawing on first @-@ hand Catalan accounts and reflecting the Catalan point of view : the near @-@ contemporary chronicle of Ramon Muntaner , the Aragonese version of the Chronicle of the Morea , and the account found in the history of the Byzantine writer Nikephoros Gregoras ( ca . 1359 ) . According to the Chronicle of the Morea , the Catalan army comprised 2 @,@ 000 cavalry and 4 @,@ 000 infantry , at least 1 @,@ 100 of whom were Turkish prisoners captured during their previous campaigns , and whose skill as archers they had come to value . Many of these Turks had even converted to Christianity . The sources differ on the size of Walter 's army : Gregoras reports 6 @,@ 400 cavalry and 8 @,@ 000 infantry , the Aragonese version of the Chronicle of the Morea puts it at more than 2 @,@ 000 cavalry and 4 @,@ 000 infantry , while Ramon Muntaner asserts that it comprised 700 knights and 24 @,@ 000 infantry , mostly native Greeks . Modern scholars consider these numbers to be clearly exaggerated , but they do suggest that the Athenian army had numerical superiority over the Catalans .

Ramon Muntaner and Gregoras place the site of the battle at the Boeotic Cephissus , which resulted in the identification of the battle with that locality in older literature , including the standard history of Frankish Greece by William Miller , but also repeated in more recent works . The Chronicle of the Morea on the other hand places the battle at " Halmyros " , apparently the town of the same name in southern Thessaly . William Miller rejected this identification on the basis of the topography described by Muntaner , but the discovery of a 1327 letter by the Venetian statesman Marino Sanudo , which was not published until 1940 and which also places the battle at Halmyros , has altered the scholarly consensus , and Halmyros is now the commonly accepted site of the battle .

Faced with a numerically superior , but less experienced enemy , the Company assumed a defensive position , taking care to select a battleground that favoured them . They chose a naturally strong position , protected by a swamp which , according to Gregoras , they further enhanced by digging trenches and inundating them with water diverted from the nearby river . The Catalans themselves took up positions on dry ground behind the swamp , arranging themselves in a solid line , but the sources give no further details as to their exact disposition . The Athenian army on the other hand assembled at Lamia . On 10 March 1311 , Walter of Brienne composed his testament there and led his army forth . On the eve of battle , the 500 Catalans in the Duke 's service , stricken by conscience , went to him and asked for leave to rejoin their old comrades @-@ in @-@ arms , saying that they would rather die than fight against them . Walter reportedly gave them permission to leave , replying that they were welcome to die with the others . At the same time , however , the Catalans ' Turkish auxiliaries took up a separate position nearby , thinking the quarrel was a pretext arranged by the Company and the Duke of Athens to exterminate them .

Walter was reputed for his bravery , bordering on recklessness , and was confident of success , as evidenced by his haughty reply to the 500 mercenaries . Walter 's pride and arrogance , combined with his numerical advantage and his innate belief in the superiority of heavy noble cavalry over infantry , led him to fatally underestimate his opponent and order a charge across even such an adverse terrain . Impatient for action , according to Muntaner Walter formed a cavalry line of 200 Frankish knights " with golden spurs " , followed by the infantry , and placed himself with his banner in the vanguard . The Frankish attack failed , but the reason is unclear ; Muntaner 's description is short and provides no details , while Gregoras states that the heavy Frankish cavalry got completely stuck in the mud , with the Almogavars , lightly armed with swords and darts , dispatching the knights , encumbered by their heavy armour . This is the commonly accepted version among scholars as well . The Chronicle of the Morea on the other hand implies that the battle was hard @-@ fought , which as military historian Kelly DeVries notes seems to contradict Gregoras , and that the marsh possibly simply reduced the impact of the charge instead of bogging it down entirely . What is clear is that the Catalans held , and that the Duke and most of his men fell . As the two lines

clashed , the Turkish auxiliaries , reassured that this was not a ruse , descended from their camp upon the Athenian army , panicking and routing what remained of it .

Gregoras reports that 6 @, @ 400 cavalymen and 8 @, @ 000 infantrymen fell in the battle , the same number he gives for Walter 's forces . According to Muntaner , 20 @, @ 000 infantrymen were killed , and only two of the seven hundred knights survived the battle , Roger Deslaur and Boniface of Verona . Like the numbers for the overall number of troops involved in the battle , these numbers are unverifiable and probably exaggerated , but they are nevertheless indicative of the scale of the Athenian defeat . In addition , other senior members of the Frankish nobility are known to have survived : Nicholas Sanudo , later Duke of the Archipelago , managed to escape the battlefield , and a few others such as Antoine le Flamenc , who is known to have participated in and survived the battle , were probably captured and later ransomed . Walter 's head was severed by the Catalans , and many years later was taken to Lecce in Italy , where his son buried him in the Church of Santa Croce .

= = Aftermath = =

According to DeVries , the battle was " significant and perhaps even could be defined as decisive " . Almost the entire Frankish elite of Athens and its vassal states lay dead in the field , and when the Catalans moved onto the lands of the Duchy , there was scant resistance : the Greek inhabitants of Livadeia immediately and willingly surrendered their strongly fortified town , for which they were rewarded with the rights of Frankish citizens ; Thebes , the capital of the Duchy , was abandoned by many of its inhabitants , who fled to the Venetian stronghold of Negroponte , and plundered by the Catalan troops ; and finally Athens itself was surrendered to the victors by Walter 's widow , Joanna of Châtillon . The entirety of Attica and Boeotia passed peacefully into the hands of the Catalans , and only the lordship of Argos and Nauplia in the Peloponnese remained in the hands of Brienne loyalists . The Catalans ' Turkish allies however refused the offer to settle in the Duchy , and instead , taking their share of the booty , departed to return to Asia Minor , only to be attacked and almost annihilated by the joint forces of the Byzantines and the Genoese as they were trying to cross the Dardanelles a few months later .

Lacking a leader of stature , the Catalan Company turned to their two distinguished captives : at first they asked Boniface of Verona , whom they knew and respected , to lead them , but after he declined , they chose Roger Deslaur instead . Deslaur proved unequal to the task , however , and the hostility of Venice and the other Frankish states compelled the Catalans to seek a powerful protector . Thus they turned to Frederick II of Sicily , who appointed his son Manfred as Duke of Athens . In reality , the Duchy was governed by a succession of vicars @-@ general appointed by the Aragonese Crown , often cadet members of the Aragonese royal family . The most successful of the vicars @-@ general , Alfonso Fadrique , expanded the Duchy into Thessaly , establishing the Duchy of Neopatras in 1319 . The Catalans consolidated their rule and survived a Briennist attempt to recover the Duchy in 1331 ? 32 . In the 1360s , the twin duchies were plagued by internal strife , including a quasi @-@ war with Venice , and increasingly felt the threat of the Ottoman Turks , but another Briennist attempt to launch a campaign against them in 1370 ? 71 came to naught . It was not until 1379 ? 80 that Catalan rule faced its first major setback , when the Navarrese Company conquered Thebes and much of Boeotia . Finally , in 1386 ? 88 , the ambitious lord of Corinth , Nerio I Acciaioli , captured Athens and claimed the Duchy for himself from the Crown of Aragon . With his capture of Neopatras in 1390 , the era of Catalan rule in Greece came to an end .

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