



God's Wolf: The Life of the Most Notorious of All Crusaders: Reynald de Chatillon

Jeffrey Lee

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In 2010, a parcel bomb was sent from Yemen by an al-Qaeda operative with the intention of blowing up a plane over America. The device was intercepted before the plan could be put into action, but what puzzled investigators was the name of the person to whom the parcel was addressed: Reynald de Chatillon - a man who died 800 years ago. But who was he and why was he chosen above all others? Born in twelfth-century France and bred for violence, Reynald de Chatillon was a young knight who joined the Second Crusade and rose through the ranks to become the pre-eminent figure in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem - and one of the most reviled characters in Islamic history. In the West, Reynald has long been considered a minor player in the Crusades and is often dismissed as having been a bloodthirsty maniac. Tales of his elaborate torture of prisoners and his pursuit of reckless wars against friends and foe alike have coloured Reynald's reputation. However, by using contemporary documents and original research, Jeffrey Lee overturns this popular perception and reveals him to be an influential and powerful leader, whose actions in the Middle East had a far-reaching impact that endures to this day. In telling his epic story, God's Wolf not only restores Reynald to his rightful position in history but also highlights how the legacy of the Crusades is still very much alive.

God's Wolf: The Life of the Most Notorious of All Crusaders: Reynald de Chatillon **Details**

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From Reader Review God's Wolf: The Life of the Most Notorious of All Crusaders: Reynald de Chatillon for online ebook

Randhir says

The start had me nodding off and then the book took off. I had got my impression of Reynald de Chatillon through various books on the Crusades and also after seeing the film Kingdom of Heaven. It is to the credit of Jeffrey Lee that he has effectively resurrected Reynald and made him into a unique hero post the Second Crusade and the battles on the killing fields of Palestine and Syria. Reynald de Chatillon stands out be it in the defence of the County of Antioch or the defence of the Kingdom of Jerusalem against Saladin. So effective was his fight that despite having spent 15 years in the dungeons of Aleppo, he was one knight who was feared the most by the Muslims. The hatred of his memory reverberates through the centuries and even as late as 2010 a major terrorist incident was averted in Chicago with his name still featuring in their memory. A poor second son, he sought adventure in the Levant and got it in full measure. A father of Kings and Queens, he is also credited with an expedition against the holy cities of Islam. At the Battle of Mont Gisard he inflicted such a signal defeat on Saladin that he took years to recover. The Book is peopled with rip roaring adventure and blood curdling battles and all true. For all those interested in History, especially of the Middle East, and its impact on events even now, I unhesitatingly recommend this book. For budding authors I suggest they examine how research is done

Helena Schrader says

This book is pseudo-history and as such dangerously misleading.

God's Wolf: The Life of the Most Notorious of All Crusaders – Reynald de Chatillon
By Jeffrey Lee

One Star – Pseudo-History

The conventional portrayal of Reynald de Châtillon as a “rogue baron,” whose brutal and fanatical policies led directly to the destruction of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem, has long been in need of revision. Professor Bernard Hamilton, one of the leading historians of the crusades, argues persuasively in his biography of Baldwin IV, for example, that Reynald de Châtillon’s strategy in the last decade before the Battle of Hattin was both brilliant and effective. Even the infamous Red Sea Raids, usually treated as appalling piracy, Hamilton notes, were a highly effective means of undermining Saladin’s authority and support among his fellow Muslims. I therefore bought this book eager for a more detailed and more fully documented account than Hamilton provided in passing.

Instead, I was confronted by a work dressed-up as if it were scholarly ? with footnotes and bibliography ? but, in fact, not only cluttered with errors but intentionally manipulative of the primary sources to the point that it borders on fraud. To put it simply: sometimes he cites a source that, when consulted, in fact says the opposite of what he has written. More commonly, he simply dismisses as “biased” or ignores it altogether primary sources when they contradict his thesis. More serious still, however, is Lee’s tendency to omit important relevant facts from his narrative whenever they get in the way of his polemic ? apparently on the assumption that his readers will be so ignorant that they will not notice. Alternatively, Lee makes bald assertions without bothering to give a source of any kind. Last but not least, Lee’s logic is bizarrely biased.

Below are some examples of all these practices for those who need evidence to be convinced.

Citing Sources that say the Opposite:

Lee cites the highly respected history written by the Archbishop of Tyre, the tutor and chancellor of Baldwin IV, when claiming that the King was too ill to fight at the Battle of Montgisard. However, Tyre's account of the Battle of Montgisard explicitly states that the King called up what knights he had, that the King rode to Ascalon, that the King led his knights out to confront Saladin in a day long battle, that the King followed Saladin's plundering forces up the coast, and – joined by the Knights Templar – that the King decided to give battle “at the eighth hour of the day” despite having many fewer troops. Far from being the commander at the battle (as no man could be in the presence of the king), Châtillon is not even listed as the commander of one of the divisions. Tyre lists him along with several other noblemen including the Uncle of the King, the Count of Edessa, and the barons of Sidon, Mirabel and Ibelin. (Note: the custom of the Kingdom of Jerusalem gave the baron in whose territory a battle was fought the honor of leading the vanguard; Montgisard was fought in the lordship of Ramla, meaning that the Baron of Ramla would have led the van – not, as Lee claims – Châtillon.)

Omission of Relevant Facts:

1. The High Court and Constitution of Jerusalem: Lee's entire description of Sibylla and Guy de Lusignan's usurpation of the throne in 1186 is cast as the legitimate queen (Sibylla) supported by the “loyal” Châtillon against a coup attempt by the Count of Tripoli and his cronies. Lee's account conveniently ignores both the High Court of Jerusalem and its role in the election of the king. The point Lee either ignores, forgets or intentionally conceals is that the crown of Jerusalem was NOT hereditary. The king was chosen by the High Court of Jerusalem (and there is a huge body of very sophisticated legal writing to support this!), and no one could legally wear the crown without the consent of the High Court. Far from being a loyal supporter of the legitimate monarch, Châtillon actively supported an illegal putsch by crowning Sibylla against the wishes of the majority of the High Court. She was not the “legal” queen of Jerusalem as Lee would have us believe (although I suspect he knows better himself.)
2. The Springs of Cresson: Although Lee otherwise frequently cites the *Chronique de Ernoul*, he doggedly refuses to follow this source's description of the events leading up to and the slaughter of the Templars at the Springs of Cresson. He thereby omits the important attempts by leading members of the High Court to reconcile Tripoli and Lusignan. Yet scholars believe that the description of the events surrounding the engagement at Cresson is the most accurate and verifiable piece of the entire (lost) chronicle because it is the section in which Ernoul identifies himself as having been personally present. In short, there is a firsthand account. Furthermore, this part of the chronicle (that takes up fully six pages of text in the Ashgate translation, or paragraphs 23-28 of the original) is very precise. But Lee discredits the passages that all other scholars consider credible with a dismissive footnote in which he remarks: “Ernoul spun a convoluted yarn about the Battle of Cresson.” In other words, the firsthand account by an eyewitness that Lee otherwise quotes as absolute truth is suddenly just “spinning tales” while Lee, living over eight hundred years later and half way around the world, knows the “truth.” Really?
3. The Count of Edessa at Hattin: Lee argues that everyone who escaped from Hattin alive were “precisely the forces most opposed to Guy's faction...” (p. 264). He conveniently “forgets” or overlooks the fact that the Joscelyn de Courtenay, Count of Edessa, the uncle of Queen Sibylla, and a core member of putsch that illegally made Guy king a few months early, also escaped from Hattin alive. Edessa's escape undermines and exposes the absurdity of his Lee's entire thesis, namely: that a traitorous clique of nobles around the Count of Tripoli deliberately lost the battle ? strangely by charging with leveled lance straight into the center of the

Saracen lines.

Bizarre Logic: In describing the Battle of Hattin, Lee writes: “The charge was the Franks’ most fearsome weapon. To opponents it seemed that a mounted mailed knight could ‘drive a hole through the walls of Babylon.’ In close formation wedged together so tightly that some horses might even be lifted off the ground” (really? I wonder if Lee has even ridden a horse in his life, but ok), “the charge, with its cutting edge of couched lances, could prove unstoppable.” (p. 262) So far so good. This is all well-known, accepted fact (except for the fanciful bit about horses being lifted off the ground), but two pages earlier when he mentions the Count of Tripoli’s charge into the very teeth of the Saracen army he calls it “fleeing the field.” Indeed, he imputes that not only Tripoli but Ibelin (who was almost certainly not with Tripoli) and Sidon (who he never mentions by name) all just “fled,” while “Reynald de Châtillon stood and fought loyally beside the king.” (p. 260.)

This is nothing short of turning the facts on their head. A charge is charge, and, it is not inherently less “brilliant” or less effective, just because it is led by the Count of Tripoli rather than by Reynald de Châtillon. You cannot rationally call two groups of men doing exactly the same thing ? charging the center of the enemy line with levelled lances ? two different things, simply because one group is led by your hero and the other by your villain. Indeed, it would be more rational to characterize a charge after the disintegration of the army when the field was already lost as running away (and deserting the infantry) than a charge that took place at the height of the battle, when it might have succeeded. With any Frankish charge, as Richard the Lionheart knew and proved, what matters is timing, and Châtillon had once before landed himself in Saracen captivity because he failed to charge at the appropriate time.

Manipulation of Sources and Half Truths:

1. Aftermath of the Springs of Cresson catastrophe: Having told an apparently fabricated account of the Springs of Cresson that deviates from the rare first-hand account provided by Ernoul, Lee describes a delegation allegedly sent from King Guy to the Count of Tripoli to “censure Raymond for his actions.” Lee provides verbatim quotes of the exchange between the king’s messenger and Tripoli ? and cites a Muslim source (p. 249). So we are to believe that Saladin’s secretary was sitting in the room during an exchange between two Christian leaders? This is grossly misleading. The first-hand accounts that other scholars follow make it clear that the delegation of nobles was on their way to Tiberias to meet with Tripoli before the catastrophe at Cresson and their message was one of reconciliation, not censure.
2. Baldwin IV’s Leprosy: Lee consistently portrays Baldwin the IV as a crippled and disfigured invalid. This is false. In reality Baldwin was neither disfigured nor handicapped when he came to the throne and his condition only deteriorated significantly after Montgisard – where, as I pointed out above, he commanded his army from horseback. Indeed, according to Tyre (who was Baldwin’s tutor and chancellor, and one of the sources Lee repeatedly cites), Baldwin IV was “more skilled than men who were older than himself in controlling horses and in riding them at a gallop.” (quoted in Hamilton, *The Leper King*, p.43.) Even at the Battle on the Litani which occurred two years after Montgisard, Baldwin IV fought on horseback at the head of his troops. (Note: Ridley Scott in his otherwise inaccurate film “*The Kingdom of Heaven*” was more accurate on this point; he has Baldwin IV reminiscing about Montgisard, saying how he had then been beautiful and strong.)
3. King Richard’s Support for Chatillon’s “Faction”: Lee attempts to show that Richard the Lionheart was an admirer of Châtillon by claiming: “...Richard embraced Reynald’s faction and backed the claim of Guy de Lusignan to the disputed throne of Jerusalem.” Aside from the fact that Richard had other motives for favoring Lusignan quite irrelevant to Châtillon’s support for a usurper, Lee conveniently leaves out the fact

that Richard soon recognized his error, changed sides, and endorsed “the party led by Reynald’s bitter enemy, Balian of Ibelin.” Indeed, not only did Richard recognize Conrad de Montferrat as king of Jerusalem, he personally appointed “Reynald’s bitter enemy, Balian of Ibelin” as his own envoy in his negotiations with Saladin – an extraordinary mark of both trust and respect. Lee doesn’t want his readers to know that since it might cast doubt on his depiction of Ibelin as a lackey of Tripoli, so he just ignores the judgment of – in Lee’s own words – “the great King Richard himself.” (Lee, p. 281-282.)

Baldly Inaccurate Statements: These are littered throughout the book and I’ve only selected three examples to underscore my case.

1. Lee arbitrarily declares that Isabella of Jerusalem was 12 when she went to Kerak to live with her future husband under Châtillon’s guardianship; historically she was 8.
2. Lee claims Muslim troops garrisoned Tiberius against King Guy in 1186; utter fantastical nonsense.
3. Lee dismissively claims that medicine of the period was “no more than base superstition, with treatment usually exacerbating any malady.” (p. 11). In fact, as experts such as Piers Mitchell (*Medicine in the Crusade*, Cambridge University Press, 2004) make abundantly clear, medical practice at this time was remarkably sophisticated, made extensive use of anesthetics, saved many lives, and – with respect to trauma treatment – was not very different from medical practice today.

I could go on for almost as many pages as *God’s Wolf*, but that would be a waste of everyone’s time.

Patrick Sullivan says

Good history book that is specific enough to have new information (for those of us who read history frequently) but not too specific that it loses the casual reader. While I think the poor review left by another commenter is not justified (most of the issue that commenter had was that she interpreted the passages differently) in a broad sense but that doesn't mean it is a perfect book. The book suffers from 'defensivitis' which some authors hold when they have a strong opinion on something and that shines through at times. The author sometimes goes out of his way to show that Raynold wasn't as bad as historical texts indicate - which is probably true but it can get tiring. A good example of this is the palpable sense of disgust at Count Raymond. A writer of history should show more restraint. Specifically, he indicated that Raymond may have converted to Islam while in captivity. While that is certainly possible, there are other logical reasons for Raymond having struck a deal with Saladin, principally that he may have seen that near impossibility of defeating Islam and maintaining a Christian presence. The actions taken by a man trying to step down the violence would look similar to a man who had a secret conversion in captivity. It is worth investigating whether Raymond was a secret Muslim but that is a charged topic in 2017. One must remember (and Jeffrey pays homage to his) that during this time Islamic culture was superior to European culture in many ways, Byzantine culture was most certainly superior to medieval Europe. So Raymond could have been a secret Muslim and Balian could have been a greasy and untrustworthy character or they just saw the writing on the wall well before the Battle of Hattin and sought alliances and relationships for when the inevitable defeat of the Christian forces in the middle east their heads would avoid being impaled on a spike.

Lydia Wednesday says

This book was full of typos and mistranslations. Sometimes the translations were misleading.

I wanted to like this book, but I didn't.

Louise says

In this biography of Reynald de Chatillon Jeffrey Lee poses an alternate view of how Jerusalem was lost between the Second and Third Crusades. Fortunately, for readers like me who are new to this era of history, the concept was introduced late in the book. Up to the argument the book appears to be (to this general reader) a straightforward and entertaining history.

Since little is known of the early life of his subject, Lee sets the stage with how Europe's second, third, fourth (etc.) sons who would not inherit the family estate were raised for warfare. Reynald would have been a typical noble youth who followed the call to arms and joined Louis VII in the Second Crusade. When the Crusading armies left the region Reynald stayed.

Reynald won the hand of Constance, Princess of Antioch who rejected suitors of royal blood to marry this mere nobleman. Not content to be a stay at home Prince, he continued his life of warfare. In an unprovoked attack on Edessa, he became a POW for 15 years. He amazingly held mind and body together and (through the highest ransom paid to that time) made a stunning comeback.

Reynald is as good at marriage as he is in warfare. He not only marries well a second time (Constance passed while he is in captivity) he arranges marriages for his children and stepchildren such that his grandchildren become rulers.

Lee takes you through the battles, the moves, the politics and the jealousy/rivalry within the Christian community. Reynald's most intense rival was Raymond, King of Tripoli (they shared time in the same prison as POWs) who is thought to have "gone native". His view was to come to agreement with the Muslims whose territory the "Franks" conquered while Reynald seems to want to solidify the Christian gains and take more territory.

The thesis of this book (as you learn at the end) is that Raymond is ultimately responsible for the loss of Jerusalem not only for his retreat at the Battle of Hattin, but other previous smaller acts. The author feels that Reynald was steadfast and consistent throughout and died a hero in contrast to the desertion of Raymond at this critical time. Historians (so it seems) have blamed the loss on Reynald's hyper-aggressive moves (Edessa, along the Red Sea, caravans through Oltrejordan to name a few). Raymond hardly seems a hero either. When you are new to this slice of history, it is hard to weigh the evidence.

There are interesting side stories and people, such as the earthquake while Reynald was in prison, the material on Eleanor of Aquitaine on the Crusade and her stay in Antioch, Manuel, the Byzantine Emperor who seems to be both patient and cunning and Baldwin III the leper King of Jerusalem.

The maps are excellent! (Yes. I mean the exclamation point. I like simple and clear.) There are several color plates, most interesting are the photos of the fortresses. The Index worked for me.

If you are like me and know little of this time, there is a lot here for you in this short, readable book.

CHARLES SCOTT JOHNSON says

A well written book on a subject that I have very little knowledge. If you are interested in the Crusades and the European states in the middle east, this is a good place to start gathering background.

Emesskay says

The goal of this book is the rehabilitation of the historical figure Reynald de Chatillion, who the author believes was given a bum rap by history. Whether he achieved this is hard for me to say.

Reynald de Chatillion was an adventurer knight - a younger son without many prospects (because of the rule of primogeniture in that time - the eldest son inherits everything). He would have to be a man at arms in another court. He answers the call for Crusade because it is an opportunity to not only redeem his sins, but also a possibility of getting some lands and riches for himself.

I have never found myself wanting to argue with a book before. I know a fair amount of medieval history, and found the author's interpretation of certain events different strongly from mine. The reason it took me so long to read it is because after getting halfway through the book, I ended up starting over and reading this book with a pen, so I could scribble my opinions in the margins. I **never** write in books. Mostly I read a book, I enjoy it or I don't, but I don't find myself trying to argue with one. This one just irritated me so much, I felt like I had no other choice.

Because the author's portrayal of certain events and figures that I do know a lot about differs from my understanding, when we move to the subject of Reynald, it is hard for me to trust the author. I find it ironic that the author complains that the sources chronicling all the events in the Crusades are biased against Reynald, yet he has no problem using biased sources and claiming that Eleanor of Aquitaine had an incestuous relationship with her uncle (who was Prince of Antioch before Reynald - long story - but it is unlikely that she did so, and the sources that claim she did really hated Eleanor).

The other thing that drove me nuts was this: Reynald was captured by the Muslim forces and held prisoner for 15 years. During that time we pretty much have no information on how Reynald was treated, what happened to him, how he felt, etc. So the author details the experiences prisoners of war from WWII and the Vietnam war and extrapolates how Reynald must have felt or thought. It is possible that what the author says is how Reynald thought or felt, but we don't know. Either Reynald didn't write it down, or it was written down but lost in the sands of time.

The author is a persuasive writer, and he can spin a good yarn. If I knew less about this era, maybe he would have convinced me that Reynald wasn't such a bad guy, he was just a product of violent times, acting as you would expect a knight to act in those times. However, I am just not buying it, because I just can't trust the narrator.

Anirvan Ghosh says

For more than 900 years, Reynald de Chatillon has been known as a barbarian who slaughtered Muslims in 12th-century Turkey, which was a crucial clashing point between the Christian crusaders and Islamic rulers.

This book sets the record straight, by proving that he was a brave warrior, and did acts of brutality, just like other knights of that time. It is important to remember that in that era, fighters were praised for defeating the enemy, with little regard to how violently they did that.

The book also shows that he was a brilliant military strategist, and not really a knight who enjoyed killing people, as he has been previously portrayed. Reynald won several contests against armies of Saladin, the powerful ruler of Syria and Egypt, who was the biggest foe of the crusaders and intent upon spreading Islamic rule through military force.

Jeffrey Lee also sets the record straight about Raymond, a knight who has been erroneously shown to be of good character and calm disposition in earlier works of history. Lee dug up records from that time which show that Raymond betrayed Reynald and his king during Saladin's biggest attack, which ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem. Saladin would rule the holy city for the rest of his lifetime, and it stayed in Muslim hands for the next 700 years, until the British Army beat soldiers of the collapsing Ottoman Empire in the First World War and restored control.

The book is a fast-paced read, and very well-researched. This is a great example of how history can be so interesting.

Alex Sarll says

Because one is always loath to give the ludicrous 'War on Christmas' crowd an opening, I thought it'd be nice to read something about a notable christian this December - and what better exemplar than "ultimate crusader" Reynald de Châtillon, a 12th century man still so loathed in the Middle East that a 2010 al-Qaeda bomb intended to detonate over Chicago was hidden in a package addressed to him? Reynald was a big part of the reason I specialised in mediaeval rather than modern history; his truce-breaking raids on caravans and pilgrims were the epitome of an age when one mad bastard with a sword could change the course of history, which was always going to be an easier sell than trying to make a teenager care about the spinning jenny. It's a little disappointing, then, to find Lee offering a rather equivocating account in which Reynald's raids were far more strategic than impulsive (despite their incredibly counterproductive long-term consequences)...but also everyone was doing stuff like that, and the only reason Reynald gets worse press over it is factional bias by the chroniclers. You know that (possibly deleted, I forget) scene in *Four Lions* where the cell ideologue explains how bin Laden was a hero for attacking the US, even though he didn't actually do it and it's all a stitch-up? Yeah. Not quite that, but also not entirely not that.

Now, bear in mind that I'm not entirely opposed to revisionism – or perhaps re-revisionism? - when it comes to the crusades. I agree with Lee that Reynald's great rival, Raymond of Tripoli, was an utter weasel, and that his portrayal by certain histories and films as some kind of proto-dove in is anachronistic in the extreme. And it's true too that it's absurd to paint the islamic world as innocent victims of christian aggression, or Saladin as some epitome of chivalry when he was quite happy to murder unarmed prisoners by his own hand...but when Richard the so-called Lionheart turns up at the end, he's described in glowing terms, and

Lee never seems to find the moment to mention that his chivalrous rep is equally bullshit. A couple of times it's noted that Saladin enjoyed getting Sufis, religious scholars and the like to execute prisoners, because their incompetent efforts stretched out the suffering and gave the audience a good laugh - but it's never really made clear that this experience was very nearly as traumatic for the unwilling executioners as it was for the condemned, rather than being a jolly jape for them too, akin to the vicar's knowingly terrible turn in the church panto. In short, it feels a bit like Lee is taking sides. Not just Reynalt over Raymond, either, but between the faiths. And...really? Still? Now? While they continue to squabble over Jerusalem like toddlers, albeit via proxies on the christian side? There's an instructive parallel early in the book, a brief Middle Ages For Beginners section aimed at the entirely novice reader, where Lee compares the knightly education to that of a modern child soldier - except operating in a world which broadly approves of that behaviour. And it's dead on. I'd also add the teenagers who think they're gangsters, the ones who get in ludicrous yet deadly scuffles in buses or chicken shops. As an outsider, does one take sides, depending on whose turf it is, who disrespected whom? Or does one merely sigh and wish they'd all sit down, shut up and grow up? For me, the crusades are pretty much that writ large. Not least because, contrary to what the self-declared modern heirs of either side might say, they weren't even very convincing as a clash of civilisations. Neither side was above allying with their supposed opponents against other factions among their co-religionists - Raymond versus Reynalt, Saladin versus the Zengids being only the most obvious examples here of common practice. To whatever extent either side really believed in the faith for which they were supposedly fighting*, it was only Reynalt's audacious attempt to raid Medina itself that really served to unite the islamic world against the christians. The Franks, meanwhile, instead deciding to take their infighting to a new level, culminating in Raymond's treacherous and/or cowardly retreat from the battle which would mark Reynalt's end. Though you have to admire Reynalt's line before that fight, when it's pointed out how badly outnumbered he is: "They are indeed many. But the fire is not daunted by the size of the woodpile."

I don't want to give the impression this is entirely a disappointing book, though. Yes, I'm surprised by the plaudits it got from the likes of Dinshaw**** and Frankopan. Yes, the writing could be better - consider the sentence "In any case, the quest for glory and the avoidance of shame are two sides of the same coin", which doesn't seem to me to be doing anything at all. And yes, every time the chronicler Fulcher is mentioned, I'm only capable of picturing him as comedian Rich Fulcher, of *Boosh* and *Snuff Box* fame**. But there are good bits too. The aforementioned child soldier comparison. The bits of blood and thunder for which even Lee can't provide too much rationalisation, like when Reynalt strips an annoying patriarch, smears him in honey, and then chains him on the battlements in the Antioch sun all day - treatment from which I think most high-ranking clerics could still benefit ("Still against condoms and homosexuality, your holiness? Well, not to worry, there's plenty more honey where that came from"). The portrait of the brave young leper king of Jerusalem, Baldwin IV, really conveys his astonishing achievements over a gulf of centuries. The understandable impact of Reynalt's 15 years of captivity on his willingness to live and let live is given appropriate weight, as is the caveat that even afterwards, he was still happy to ally with the Bedouin against their more rooted co-religionists. And even if I don't entirely buy it as regards Reynalt and his rivals, I definitely agree with the general point that the chroniclers' assessments of mediaeval royals were often incredibly unfair, and yet somehow still tend to colour the received wisdom today***. But overall, I'm left with an uncomfortable sense of an apologia for someone whose whole interest resides in how awful he was. And as when you get claims that Caligula was fine really, it rather seems to strip the point out of history. Not just by making it less fun, though that too, but because our own era should show that the truth is seldom all that fussed about being plausible, and often you do get ridiculous monsters bestriding the world's stage.

*On the one hand, these days it's easier than ever to believe that irrational assessments of the world are a big mover in people's decisions, even at the cost of sacrificing their own best interests. On the other, when you look at all the factionalism, it seems like then as now, short-sighted greed was a bigger factor still.

**This last, in fairness, is not really Lee's fault.

***For example, Richard the so-called Lionheart arguably being an even worse king than John. And Henry I being at least as beastly as William Rufus, yet getting a better press just through being less ginger, less queer and less fun.

**** [added after original post: reading Dinshaw's full review, that was some very strategic quotation on the cover - <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/09/a...>]

happy says

In 2010 Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula attempted to send a printer full of explosives to the United States, set to explode over an American city and bring down the aircraft carrying it. That in and of itself made the news when it was discovered (before the airplane left Arabia), to whom the package was addressed was also startling. It was addressed to a man who had been dead some 800 years, Raynald de Chatillon. With this book, Jeffery Lee tries to explain why a 12th century crusader made such an impression on Islamic Holy Warriors that he would still be on their minds in the 21st century.

Starting with St. Bernard of Clairvoux preaching Crusade in the 1140's, the author looks at how and why people would join a crusade. This portion of the narrative is weak on details of Raynald. As with others in that time period, not much is recorded of his childhood and early adulthood. This section of the book is filled with "he might have..., he could have, he possibly..." What little is known of his childhood is that he was a younger son of minor Burgundian nobility and had no real prospects in France. The author fills this section out with what the childhood and teen years were like for the sons of the nobility.

The author then looks at the Second Crusade itself – its accomplishments and failures. Raynald still doesn't figure much into the narrative. He finally shows in the records in the accounts of the siege of Ascalon. Even then not much is recorded about what he did, just that he was brave and did honorable deeds. It is here that he begins his remarkable rise in the courts of the Outremer. He is granted the hand of the widowed Princess of Antioch. The author speculates this might have been a love match, because she turned down many more powerful and notable suitors. With his marriage he becomes one of the movers and shakers of the Crusader World. This section describes the split in Islam that allowed the Christians to gain their foothold in the Holy Land. The author also looks at the disunity of the Christian world. This includes Raynald's problems with the Count of Tripoli, the Archbishop of Antioch, who was the regent of Antioch before Reynald came on the scene and didn't want to give up his power. He even had problems with the Byzantine Emperor Manuel.

The author makes the point that above all else Raynald was a warrior. He was always raiding, whether it was the Islamic lands of Nur-al-din or the isles of the Byzantine Empire – specifically Cyprus, he was leading forces in war. This leads to his capture while returning from raiding Nur-al-Din's territories. He has such a reputation that in spite of the fact he worth quite a ransom, Nur-al-Din refuses to even consider it. He keeps Reynald prisoner until he dies – some 15 yrs. According to the author, the written record has little about his captivity, so this leads to more "he might have, he could have..." type of speculation. The author does do a respectable job of telling the reader what life was like in a medieval prison. He is eventually ransomed by Nur-al-din's successor for a then record amount - 120K pieces of gold.

Reynald's years after his release, are also well told. During his captivity his wife dies, so he no longer Prince of Antioch (though he kept the title) but, he once again makes a good marriage. He weds the Lady of the Outrejourdon, the area on the east bank of the River Jordon. This area overlooks many of the trade routes between Damascus and Egypt along with the pilgrimage routes to Mecca and Media. His controlling/raiding

these routes despite a truce with the Muslims and along with his raiding in the Red Sea earned him the hatred of Saladin and led to what happened after his final battle – the debacle at the Horns of Hattin in 1187. After the Crusader defeat, Reynald is not offered up for ransom unlike most of the Christian leaders, but is killed personally by Saladin. This is one of the few times Saladin is recorded as personally killing anyone.

While mainly known as a warrior, the author takes pains to relate his successful diplomacy. He was able to marry his children and stepchildren into many of the leading houses of Europe. This included one daughter marrying the King of Hungary and another the Byzantine Emperor.

All in all this is a good look at one of the most important Christian Commanders of the last half of the 12th Century as well as the politics of the Outremer. The author tries to put Reynald in context with the era he lived in and refute the reputation he has gathered down the centuries. I found this an easy read and in my opinion deserves a solid 4 star rating for GR.

Pinko Palest says

a very interesting subject, but the author does protest too much in striving to make a hero of Reynald de Chatillon. Also, it doesn't quite succeed in making him seem alive, as one would expect of such a biography. Perhaps a bit more social history of the period would have been in order

JQAdams says

Lee takes on an interesting challenge task here. He's trying to be starkly revisionist, arguing that Reynald de Châtillon was actually more competent and nuanced than the typical portrayal of him as the backwards, violent enemy of Saladin might have you believe. And he's trying to do that in a thoroughly populist, mass-market biography of the man with few pretensions to scholarly form -- it's the sort of book where endnotes will be about things like Eva Green being "impossible to miscast" -- so that people steeped in the relevant academic literature are going to haughtily reject it: you can while reading it note moments where you think "well, that's going to totally rile up the traditionalists."

For my tastes, the book tries a little too hard to be a crackling page-turner; before every chapter there's a breathless page-or-so "you are there!" presentation of a key dramatic moment of Reynald's life. But I realize medieval history, especially that involving the interaction of Western Europeans with the Islamic world, is a hard sell to most people, so maybe that's necessary. And dramatization is in any case often most of what there is to work with, since there are some pretty big blanks in the historical sources about Reynald, especially during his childhood and during several years he spent as a prisoner in the middle of his career. So it's a readable introduction to a historical moment that still resonates strongly in some parts of the world, as long as you don't take everything here as settled gospel.

VillaPark Public Library says

God's Wolf is a fresh look on the medieval crusader Reynald de Chatillon and his notorious escapades during the Second Crusade. Most other media that I have seen on Reynald (both academic and fictional) place him at the evil end of the ethical spectrum, from the movie Kingdom of Heaven to other secondary

source books on the Crusades. Utilizing primary sources, Jeff Lee makes a strong argument that Reynald was less of a sadist butcher and more of a victim of circumstance and financial opportunist. The Crusades and Jihads of the time were rife with carnage and barbaric acts seldom seen in modern times and it is difficult to judge our antiquated predecessors through the same lens that we today utilize for similar issues. Regardless of opinions, the actions of Reynald and his contemporaries echo throughout history and affect many aspects of our lives today. From a writing perspective, Jeff Lee keeps this historical biopic from being a slog and maintains fresh, interesting, and educated narrative chapters, similar to a print version of the Hardcore History podcast.

If you would like to learn more about the Crusades, try *The Crusades* by Thomas Asbridge or *God's Armies* by Malcolm Lambert.

For fiction stories try *The King's Ransom* by Sharon Kay Penman or *The Dark Monk* by Oliver Potzsch

Antigone says

As the second son of a nobleman in 12th century Europe, your options were pretty slim. You could hang around the house and learn the running of the family's estate - just in case your older brother died or proved to be such an idiot that he could only operate as a figurehead. Few young men sought the depth of those shadows. You might, on the other hand, select the path of the priesthood. A religious career, if it were to turn lucrative in wealth and power, would require excellent social skills, a manipulative bent, and a lot of resilience. It's a long game, and a dry one. You had to have the temperament. The third and final choice would've been to hit the road as a warrior. It was, after all, the Age of Chivalry; knights, troubadours, Eleanor of Aquitaine. You could purchase your gear, hone your skills and hire yourself out. Plenty of lords were looking to pad their forces. For those of a more mercurial bent, there existed bands of armored mercenaries. True ambition, though, could only be slaked in the Holy Land - where kingdoms, it was said, were ripe for the picking. A bold soul could wrest himself a castle and a crown and a people.

Reynald de Chatillon was an ambitious man.

He was also rash, ruthless, selfish, predatory, and profoundly aggressive.

Arriving in the Middle East under the banner of Louis VII, he shrugged off defeat at Mount Cadmos and set his eye, instead, on the fresh widow of Raymond of Antioch. Upon pledging his loyalty on the field of Ascalon, King Baldwin granted the request of her hand. The regent of Antioch, however, was not to prove as obliging. Patriarch Aimery preferred the power remain in his keeping; no upstart knight could be permitted a turn at these reins. Once the matter was made clear to him, Reynald had the clergyman taken up to the roof of the citadel, smeared with honey, and left to roast in the sun. The insects had him begging by nightfall. He yielded not only leadership but threw in his wealth as well.

Reynald is one of the darker and more dangerous figures in the history of the Crusades. It is no overstatement to claim him Saladin's *bête noire*. He was trouble from start to finish and, as such, has received condemnation from historians ever since. Jeffrey Lee has come to say: Hey, maybe the bro was just a product of his time.

And I suppose it takes one to know one.

Because sometimes I find myself stumbling into this twenty-first century. Not quite sure which turn I took or door I opened, only that I'm suddenly literarily knee-deep in conversation with a chatty barista of indeterminate intent. And he's telling me about a "Muslim bogeyman" and how "there was booty: sacks of it" and how Jerusalem had become "a decadent, licentious party town." And I look around, only to find critics applauding this sort of "blockbuster sensibility" while I...well, I am achieving a keen understanding of the phrase: *to hell in a handbasket*.

Just the coffee, sir. And my change, if you don't mind.

Luke Gracias says

God's Wolf is a well researched and truly entertaining look at the life of Reynald de Chatillon. A much maligned character, Jeffrey Lee casts Reynald in the mould of an eternal hero.

Rightly or wrongly, the actions of Reynald are both bold and brazen and in many ways so far removed from the norms of his day that it makes for interesting conjecture.

The book also features the legendary Saladin in a different light and goes against the grain of the Ridley Scott film 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

An interesting look at life in the 12th Century.
