

SPIRITUAL CONNOTATIONS OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST CRUSADE (1095-1099). THE "TERRORS" OF THE 11TH CENTURY

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Abstract: At the beginning of the year of Our Lord 1095, marking the escape from a succession of spiritual, social and natural calamities that had fallen over the world in the last century, no one would have expected a turn of events like the one that triggered the Great Campaign in the East. The Muslims occupied Jerusalem for four centuries and, despite the increasingly frequent anti-Christian rage of the Sunni or Shiite governors of the Holy City, by virtue of an old oriental custom, still dominated the appearance of a stability, "bought" by the Christians with good money. But the memory of the "terrors" of the 11th century could never be erased. The nightmare of the enemies of the Cross was about to be accomplished: the shaping of a militant Christian conscience in an Europe that rediscovered its vigour and unity under the banner of the Crucified and Ressurrected One.

Keywords: Christianity, the First Crusade, Middle Ages, Islam, terrors.

Introduction

From the Renaissance to the present day, different currents of thought, stuck in the stereotypes of the "Dark Ages", have endeavoured to depict this illustrious period of humanity as an apocalyptic context, full of millenarian superstitions in which the confused people, completely enslaved to the "religious ideology" promoted by the Popes, whose only resort would have been the cult of the Saints, with the related pilgrimages, would have set in motion to conquer an evolved, exotic, "democratic" East mastered at that time by the more "innocent" and more "peaceful" populations: Seljuk Turks, Sunni Arabs, Semites, Shiite Egyptians, *etc.* More and more scientists today make it difficult to support such stereotypes, arguing that "*there is nothing in the chronicles of the time stating that in the year 1000 is perceived a society full of anxiety because of the closeness of the end of the world*"¹.

Perhaps it would be odd to find out that in the Middle Ages, at that time painted in such dark colors, the community, based on the personal commitment of each of its members, was much stronger, and the bondage relations based on very well negotiated contracts, were not enslaving but, on the contrary, generating mutual rights and obligations. For example, most of the peasantry retained its independence, including a certain prosperity, until the end of the Middle Ages. "*Is still in circulation the idea about the abject poverty of all these peasants who would have dragged naked and hungry at the feet of their masters, when, in fact, many of them (we also refer to the Transylvanian serfs) had eight pairs of oxen, four horses and a hundred and fifty pigs*"². In contrast, the Renaissance, with its "order", despite the indisputable assets it has given to the world, was the one that introduced the widespread enslavement and exploitation (we could call it "industrial") of the peasantry.

Therefor, the so-called "*terrors of the year 1000*" are authentic anxieties, but not on the part of the people of the 10th-11th centuries, but rather of the "young Western culture" which,

¹ ***, *100 de puncte fierbinți din istoria Bisericii*, Ed. Sapienția, Iași, 2011, trad. Pr. Ioan Bișog, p. 127.

² Ioan-Aurel POP, „*Din mâinile valahilor schismatici...*”. *România și puterea în Regatul Ungariei Medievale (secolele XIII-XIV)*, Ed. Litera, București, 2011, p. 11.

from the Renaissance to our times, obsessively cultivates the myth of the supposed "darkness" of the 5th-14th centuries, and the contempt for those who lived then for the simple and only reason that they did not share the behavior and values of pagan Greek-Roman society. *"Because the artists, scholars, literati of the 5th-14th centuries - that is, cultured people or medieval creators - with very few exceptions, did not imitate classical Greek-Latin works, they were treated with contempt and disregard for a long time, them and their works. Of course, a Gothic church does not resemble a Greek temple, but not because the Middle Ages people did not know how to make Greek temples, as it was thought for a while, but because they were not interested on this, because they had another sensitivity, another conception of divinity and creation. But the idea that between the "old world" and the "new world" - an imitation of the old one - there is a "middle" one, without any personality, dark, inappropriate, as a sort of accident of history, has been insinuated in some writings, and then generalized"*³.

But those written above doesn't mean that Christian Europe didn't cross troubled times that have placed its very existence in jeopardy. As you will read below, at least three disastrous events threatening the fabric of medieval society provoked Christianity to respond. The First Crusade had undoubtedly more reasons to take the sword, but none of them mattered more than the spiritual trauma induced by the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher, the utterly defeat of the Christian armies at Manzikert and the numerous crimes being committed against the peaceful pilgrims by Seljuk troops.

1. The Destruction of the Holy Sepulcher

At the beginning of the 11th century, Jerusalem was under the rule of Egyptian fatimides. Although the Shiite Dynasty in Cairo had been benevolent to Christians, especially to improve relations with Byzantium, in order to obtain a coordinated fight against the common enemy from Baghdad, its name links to one of the most painful events for Christendom: the dismantling of the most important sanctuary of the Church, the Holy Sepulcher.

The first edifice, built by Saint Constantine the Great and improved by Justinian I, was destroyed by the Persians in the invasion of 614. The memory of the Church could never be healed completely after this act of aggression.

The new construction, raised by Saint Modest, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, will be destroyed at the command of the one who received the cognomen of "*Arab Caligula*". In the year 996, on the throne of the Living Imam, as the seat made of gold, ivory and precious stones of the Fatimid emperors was called, was climbing the sixth caliph, then at the age of twelve.

His name was Abū'Alī Manṣūr, better known by the title received at the crowning of Al-Hakim bi Amr al-Lāh (Ruler through Allah's will), or Al-Hakim as he was detained by posterity.

Nephew, from his mother's side, of the Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, this young man quickly turned out to be mentally unbalanced. After he attained his majority, he began killing and arresting Christians and Jews. Ordering the burn down of the Alexandria Library is another stain on the name of this sinister character. In one of the rages, Hakim caught his former teachers and killed them personally. In 1004, he decreed the prohibition of the Easter celebration and the closure of all Christian churches in his kingdom. Christians were forced to wear iron crosses, and the Jews wooden jungle and bells to signal their presence to Muslims.

From jealousy to the Holy Light, according to some chroniclers, out of greed for the rich gifts brought by the pilgrims to the Holy Sepulcher on the occasion of participating in the ritual of descending of the Holy Light of the Resurrection, according to others, Al-Hakim ordered the complete plundering and destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the month of September of the year 1009.

³ Ioan-Aurel POP, „*Din mâinile valahilor schismatici...*”. *Românii și puterea în Regatul Ungariei Medievale (secolele XIII-XIV)*, pp. 9-10.

But the tyrant's death, which occurred in February 1021, relieved Cairo of the immediate response that Islam would have expected from the Christian world. The new caliph, Zahir, the nephew of Al-Hakim, was a calm person with balanced judgement who worshiped Jerusalem and respected the Christians. He again offers protection to Christians, both native and pilgrims, in free manifestation of their religion. His Jewish grand vizier, Al-Tustari, encouraged his co-religionists to resume their worship and old occupations before Al-Hakim's persecution.

The Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Monomach, builds, between 1042 and 1048, with the agreement of caliph Zahir of Egypt, a new elegant church on the place of the Holy Sepulcher, described by a Persian traveler as: "*An extraordinary spacious building that could house 8,000 people, built by the most skilled craftsmen of marble in all colors, adorned with Byzantine brocades woven with gold and paintings*"⁴.

The crusader Kings of Jerusalem will have the great merit of bringing together, through successive renovations, all the chapels and churches of Golgotha under the same roof. The one who completed this project was Queen Melisenda in 1149.

In the case of the *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolymitanorum* and the additional document of *Descriptio Sanctorum Locorum Hierusalem*, their author or authors would have marveled and prayed into the building of Emperor Constantine the Monomach.

The shock wave caused by the destruction of the Church of the Tomb of Christ is rapidly spreading throughout the world, unintentionally triggering a growing need for Christians to defend the Holy Places. The responsibility to defend the pilgrim's paths and their holy destination had been taking shape strong enough.

2. The Disaster from Manzikert (19'th of August 1071)

On the background of the open conflict between the great lords of the palace and the military aristocracy, Byzantium experienced the worst period of its existence. The political crisis forced the 11th century Basileis to become simple toys, impersonal exponents of the civilian aristocracy, whose only interest was to maintain the fortune of the court and the capital at the expense of the provinces, mostly controlled by the army seniors. The city's fortunes did not show any understanding of the terrible realities that were happening beyond the walls of Constantinople.

The aristocracy of the palace relied on excessive bureaucracy to block any initiative that could have saved the country but would have disturbed its comfort, on a mortgaged diplomatic mission to keep the enemies away from its own commercial interests and, last but not least, on a tight tax entirely passed on the military and the common people. Alas, at all time periods, the excess of bureaucracy was the first and most conclusive sign of corruption, it is easy to see that the rich courtier families of Constantinople (the Dukas noble family is an example) did not have the moral force, nor the ability, to respond promptly and appropriately to the challenges of the Seljuks in the Orient, of the Pecheneg, Cuman, Uz and Hungarian invaders in Europe.

The Imperial Army, the glory of Nikephoros II Fokas, John Tzimiskes or Basil II the Macedonian, had become a polished carcass on the outside, but in fact full of incompetent and corrupt officers, poorly trained and overstretched, in number and equipment, by the other powers of the world.

The party of the army (the Comneni being the most respected among the military at that time) was revolted on issues as the cutting of funds destined to the army and the cancellation of rights of those valiant *akrites*, heroes who, according to the ancient Roman tradition, were real estates near the enemy border, being exempt from taxes in exchange for the obligation to maintain and train a squad capable to repel the Muslim bands that would have ventured to cross.

⁴ Simon SEBAG MONTEFIORE, *Ierusalim-biografia unui oraş*, p. 206.

Many akrites (knights), who were deprived of subsidies, crushed by poverty and forced to deal permanently with the boldness of the predator raids, without any notable help from the great army, devalued by the bureaucrats, had to obey the new barbarian rulers or to leave their estates and retreat behind the walls of Constantinople or on the properties of the great aristocrats where they were getting greater security for the moment.

The total lack of pragmatism at the top leadership of Byzantium ruled by clerk-emperors such as Constantine X Dukas (1059-1067) will determine a deep penetration of the Turkish forces led by the energetic sultan Alp Arslan.

Under the pressure of the military, in 1068, an illustrious family-born soldier who had previously occupied the difficult rank of Duke of Paristrion, and now he was the military governor (strategos) of Serdica, Romanus Diogenes, is called to imperial purple by marriage to Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa, widow of Constantine X Dukas and the niece of Patriarch Michael Cerularius.

As soon as he ascends on the throne, the emperor mobilizes the armies to stop the Turkish advancement in Cappadocia. In two successful campaigns conducted personally, in the years 1068 and 1069, the emperor succeeds, even with the emptied treasury and the weakened army, to halt for a moment the advance of Alp Arslan's forces.

Encouraged by the success achieved against a superior army, Romanus IV Diogenes is launching in 1070, a third campaign, targeting the liberation of Armenia, another great source of valiant soldiers for the Byzantine army. Thus, he advances until August 1071 with a large, but non-homogeneous, force to the battlefield of Manzikert (in Armenian Malazgard), south of Theodosiopolis (Erzerum). Alp Arslan had already declared jihad against Byzantium, and had collected under his flag a large army, composed mainly of riding archers, with whom he rushed to cut the Emperor's path. The two armies will face in combat on 19th of August 1071.

Even betrayed, in the thick of battle, by the Uz mercenaries, who took Alp Arslan's side, by the French mercenaries ruled by the captain Roussel de Bailleul and the troops under Andronic Dukas's command, who suddenly withdrew from the battle, the brave Romanus IV is defeated with great difficulty by the Seljuk horde. After giving displays of countless acts of heroism on the battlefield, the Emperor himself is taken prisoner. He was brought before the Sultan. Alp Arslan appeared courteously to his rival, and commanded everyone to show him deference for the chivalrous way he had behaved on the battlefield. Asked about what he would have done if he had been victorious and the Sultan prisoner, Romanus Diogenes replied that he would have his prisoner dragged naked on the streets of Constantinople and then he would have executed Alp Arslan at the Hippodrome.

The Sultan, smiling, replied: "*My punishment is much harsher. I forgive you and let you free*". There was no irony. The Sultan understood very well the flaws of the "most Christian" society in Constantinople. The Dukas already fulfilled their ambitions by imposing a family member on the throne. Michael VII (1071-1078) received the crown in exchange for the loss of Asia Minor, the military and economic very core of the Empire, in favor of the Seljuk State.

Romanus IV Diogenes was freed by the pagans only to be dishonored, blinded, and reduced to the death of a political detainee by his former subjects. After all, the crowd has never endured too much the rule of honest people. The circle of "peace at all costs" and the promises of "future rewards", offered with morbid generosity by demagogues, took priority over the exhortation, diligence, and discipline that both the enlightened Emperors and the Church of Byzantium offered to their own shepherded people. The crushing defeat of Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes (1068-1071) at Manzikert, in 1071, by the Sultan Alp Arslan (1063-1073), to which decisively contributed the defection of the Uz mercenaries and the non-involvement of the troops controlled by the Dukas family, mostly opened the mind of the enemies of the Empire on the possibility of capturing the world's metropolis⁵. This caused the recurrence of a prophetic

⁵ Ilie GRĂMADĂ, *Cruciadele*, Ed. Științifică, București, 1961, p. 39.

nightmare, that of the fall of Constantine's city, which will ruthlessly haunt all the actions of the Empire, and will, finally, cause a controlled, but unhelpful – I would say "fatal" – closure of the Byzantine civilization to other Christian nations.

3. Islam, Seljuks and the Violation of Pilgrim Immunity

The Islam⁶ occupied Jerusalem for more than four centuries. "*Forty-six years after Mohammed's escape from Mecca, his disciples appeared with weapons in their hands under the walls of Constantinople. They were animated by a true or false word of the prophet, that of the first army that would siege the city of Caesars, shall have all the sins remitted, that the long line of Roman triumphs would rightly be transferred to the conquerors of New Rome, and that the riches of all nations were deposited in well-chosen heart of empire and trade. As soon as the caliph Mu'awiyya had suppressed his rivals and strengthened his reign, he aspired to redeem the sin of shedding his own citizen's blood through the success and glory of his holy expedition*"⁷.

The fast spread of Mohammedanism on three continents and the occupation of the powerful Hellenic cultural centers in Asia and Africa⁸, is due solely to the policy pursued by the first caliphs, namely to the apparent exemption from the burden of Byzantine taxes: "*The Arabs have emerged everywhere as representatives of the fiscally depressed lower-class; they had neither the Court nor the hierarchy, and thus the subjugated population was more joyful with the Arabs than with the Byzantines, so it naturally happened the fast repudiation of the Byzantine rule by this fact that the population itself chose the Arabs*"⁹.

The popularity it gained among monophysite, samaritan and Jewish ethnicities in these vast and prosperous territories, for which "liberators" represented the lash of God's vengeance upon the rapacious Romans¹⁰, all corroborated with a tolerant and flexible initial policy, allowed the Mohammedan civilization to soak, as a sponge, with the ancient cultures that it came into contact with. "*Islam is the authentic Byzantine, liberated from any inner contradiction. It is the sincere and total reaction of the Oriental Spirit against Christianity, a system in which dogma is closely linked to the laws of life, in which the individual belief is in full agreement with the social and political state. It is known that the anti-Christian movement that manifested itself through imperial heresies led in the seventh and eighth centuries to two doctrines, one of which (that of monothelism) indirectly denied human freedom, and the other (the iconoclasts) implicitly rejected the divine phenomenality. The direct and explicit affirmation of these two errors constituted the religious essence of Islam, who see in man a finite form without any freedom, and in God an infinite freedom, without any form. Between God and man, situated at the two opposite poles of existence, there was no common bond, any materialization of the divine and any spiritualization of man being excluded; religion was reduced to an entirely external relationship between the Almighty Creator and the freedomless creation which didn't owe nothing to the Master except blind devotion (this is the meaning of the Arab Islam)*"¹¹.

Islam has brought under its roof a melting pot of cultures, the Mosaic, the Byzantine and the Persian being its main, which he has crafted, over time, in a mixture of its own¹². After it subdued the intellectual elites from the conquered provinces and incorporated them into a

⁶ Under the generic roof of Islam, several ethnicities and civilizations are to be found: the Saracens, the Moors, the Mameluks, the Seljuk Turks, the Ottoman Turks, the Tartars, the converted Europeans, etc.

⁷ Edward GIBBON, *Istoria declinului și a prăbușirii Imperiului Roman*, vol. III, Ed. Minerva, București, 1976, trad. Dan Hurmuzescu, p.83.

⁸ Nicaea, Caesarea of Cappadocia, Antioch, Damascus, Beirut, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Leptis Magna, etc.

⁹ Nicolae IORGA, *Stări sufletești și războaie*, Ed. Nemira, București, 1994, p.70.

¹⁰ S. B. DAȘKOV, *Împărați bizantini*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1999, trad. Viorica și Dorin Onofrei, p.132.

¹¹ Vladimir SOLOVIOV, *Rusia și Biserica Universală*, pp.33-34.

¹² Lect.Univ.Dr.Marius TELEA, *Orient, Occident și lumea islamică. Conflicte și încercări de refacere a vechii unități romane*, p.552.

pragmatic system, non-spiritual in the first phase, which presented itself, at the beginning, as very attractive through its generosity and flexibility, the Islam and its Caliphs will patronize the transmission of ancient experiences to Western culture. "The first four Caliphs kept the capital of the Caliphate in Medina. Primii patru califi au menținut capitala Califatului la Medina. Dar Mu'awiyya stabilește capitala la Damasc. But Mu'awiyya establishes the capital at Damascus. From now on, the Hellenistic, Persian and Christian influences gradually intensify over the entire Umayyad period... The Abbasids continue and deepen this process of assimilation of the cultural and Mediterranean heritage... Al-Mansūr and his successors are installed with all the pomp of the Sassanid emperors. The Abbasids heavily rely on the bureaucracy, mostly of Persian origin, and on the royal army, recruited from the Iranian military aristocracy. Converted in majority to Islam, the Iranians adopt the Sassanid policy, administration and etiquette patterns. The Sasanian and Byzantine styles dominate the architecture. It is also the era of translations, Este totodată epoca traducerilor, through the Syriac language, of the works of Greek philosophers, doctors and alchemists. Under the reign of Harun Al-Rașid (788-809) and his successors, the Mediterranean civilization of the late antiquity knows a first Renaissance, of Arabic expression..."¹³.

During this period of tolerance, some of the Christians were well received by the Caliphs, and the skill, intelligence, and culture that they proved, propelled them in functions of the utmost importance. An example of this is Saint John of Damascus, who held, for some time, the title of minister (vizier) of the Caliphate of Damascus¹⁴.

Old pilgrimage routes of Christians have been protected and the inviolable status of the pilgrim was considered a highest rank principle in the policy pursued by the great kingdom of the descendants of Mohammed. Even after the throne ascension of the Abbasid dynasty (which moves the seat to Baghdad), the responsibility to protect the travelers of faith on their way to the Holy City was a sacred rule so that the thousands of Christians undertaking the journey were not hindered by the new rulers. The Sunni-Shiite schism has not overwhelmingly affected the law of protecting pilgrims. Any Christian could, in principle, reach Jerusalem safely if he paid a fixed fee to the Muslim authorities. But things got worse after the Seljuk Turks entered on the high stage of History. The penetration, first as the mercenaries of the Abbasid caliphs, of the Seljuk Turks, a warrior tribe from Central Asia, relatively recently converted to Sunni Islam, generated a new nuance to the political relations in the Orient. The Seljuks, like all the peoples of the steppe, were not accustomed to respect signed treaties and old customs, at least not in the manner in which the countries with tradition did.

The gradual takeover by the Turks of the military power of the Caliphate of Baghdad, for the main purpose of looting, has led to a long-lasting instability that has been manifested primarily through the effective destruction of ancient pilgrimage routes and the ignition of perilous circumstances for pilgrims. This will be taken with surprise and concern by all the great political and military actors of the East. Turkish behavior towards Christian pilgrims differed considerably from that of the Arabs. The cruelty, their greed for gold and precious objects, predisposed the Asian adventurers to the almost general violation of the immunity status which the pilgrims of all religions had since antiquity.

In 1064, the entire Christian world was shaken by the news of the massacre in which the Great Flemish pilgrimage ended. Led by Arnold, archbishop of Bamberg, 7,000 northern pilgrims advanced to nearby Jerusalem. Most of them were robbed and sacrificed under Seljuk sword.

Various Turkish emirs, formally subordinated to the Sultan, always provoked, according to their tribal tradition, the Byzantine borders and more than once they were coming back loaded with prey and slaves. Some of them founded Muslim principalities around some important Greek

¹³ Mircea ELIADE, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase*, vol.III, pp. 90-91.

¹⁴ Pr. Dumitru FECIORU, *Teologia icoanelor la Sfântul Ioan Damaschin*, în *Ortodoxia*, nr.1, ianuarie-martie, 1982, p.31.

or Armenian city, creating true bases of operations, focused in particular on looting, ransoms and slave trade. To this dangerous situation nobody could resist, until the Crusaders came.

Seljuk bands of bloody brigands, looking for loot, roamed the main commercial roads of Asia. Even when an emir settled, with his followers, in a region, establishing somewhat normal relations with his new subjects and with the neighbors, he could not bring, even at the medium level, the security of the roads that crossed his territory, because endlessly swarms of warriors led by Turkish captains, like him, transited, insatiable of gold and prey, to and from the diminished and increasingly impoverished provinces of Byzantium.

Sultan Alp Arslan (1064-1072), the great-grandson of the legendary prince Seljuk, the first known commander to the Seljuk mercenaries, will definitively impose the rule of the Turks in the Sunni East, formally under the Abbasid flag. He brings by the sword, under the obedience of his emirs, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Armenia, Georgia, and, last but not least, Anatolia (the richest economic and recruitment base for Constantinople), which will later prove to be a fatal loss to the Byzantine Empire.

His successor, Malik Shah (1072-1092), continued the consolidation of the Seljuk-controlled empire and its expansion eastward, up to the border of China.

Sultan Barkyaruq, the son of Malik-Shah, led the empire of the Seljuks from 1092 to 1105. Theoretically, all the provinces controlled by the Seljuk captains were subjected to his rule. In practice, after the death of Malik Shah (1092), every Turkish ruler had become independent and in fierce competition to all the other satraps.

At the beginning of the First Crusade, the Abbasid caliph Al Mustazhir (1094-1118) was the descendant of the Pontiff Sovereigns of the Sunni Islam. He was no more than a powerless symbol of the old Arab kingdom, which entered into a long agony after the death of Harun Al - Rashid (809), being completely at the beckon call of the Seljuk Sultan. The Caliph was saved sometimes only because the blood of Mohammed flowed in his veins. Al Mustazhir was therefore hostage to his own palace, his main activities being poetry and arts. *„The Abbasides will continue to reign, it is true, for four centuries. But they will no longer govern. They will only be hostages in the hands of their Turkish or Persian soldiers, capable of open and shut the doors of leadership at will, often resorting to homicide. To escape such a fate, most Caliphs will give up any political activity. Nailed in their own harem, they will devote themselves exclusively to the pleasures of life, becoming poets or musicians, collecting beautiful perfumed slaves. The Prince of Believers, which has long been the incarnation of the glory of the Arabs, has become the living symbol of their decadence. And Al Mustazhir...is even the representative of this race of lounge Caliphs”*¹⁵.

In Cairo, in the other Islamic kingdom, formally reigned the child Caliph Al-Musta'li (1094-1101). The actual exercise of power belonged to the Grand Vizier. Shahinshah al-Afdal, a former Christian, Armenian-born slave-soldier, 39 years old, was the real master of the great Shiite empire of Egypt. Between him and Alexius I Comnenus there was an alliance treaty against the common enemy: the Sunni caliphate of Baghdad, controlled by the Seljuks. The Fatimids were Shiites organized in an independent Caliphate with the capital city at Cairo and there was a blood feud between them and the Abbasids.

In 1073, with the help of the Turks, the Fatimid rule over Jerusalem was removed. Turkish General Al-Atsiz, the retriever of Palestine, sent by the order of Alp Arslan, sieges the Holy City with his troops of Kwarezmian riders, subjecting it to a depredation of apocalyptic proportions. Shortly after that, Al-Atsiz is assassinated and another Turkish warrior, Ortuq bin Aksab, occupies Jerusalem and its surroundings, governing it on behalf of the Sultan of Damascus and the Caliph of Baghdad.

In July 1098, correlating his action with the advance of the Crusaders, the Grand Vizier of Egypt, Al-Afdal, headed north to the head of a huge army, eliminating any encountered Seljuk

¹⁵ Amin MAALOUF, *Cruciadele văzute de arabi*, Ed. Proiect, București, 2007, trad. Marian Tiu, p. 61.

opposition. After a siege of forty days, Jerusalem, led by the emir brothers Soqman and Il-Ghazi, sons of Ortuq, (vassals of Sultan Duqaq of Damascus), surrenders. For a brief period, Palestine had become a Fatimid province. Shortly after this event, Al-Afdal will regret this strategic move, which will position Egypt, for a few centuries, in direct conflict with the fighters of the Cross.

Conclusions

In early 1095, Pope Urban II convened a large council in Piacenza. At this council, which functioned as the supreme court of the West, decrees were issued against the simony, the clergy's marriage, and the schism in the Church. The cases of Bertha of Holland, the Queen of France and of Adelaide / Praxeda of Kiev, the Empress of Germany who complained of the adultery and injustice of their husbands Philip I (1060-1108) and, respectively, Henry IV (1084-1105), were analyzed and resolved.

The emissaries of Basileus Alexius I of Byzantium were present. They exposed, at the invitation of Pope Urban II, the situation in the Orient. The old Islamic solidarity was corroded. Malik Shah's death, in 1092, led to a long race for succession, and the area dominated by the Sunni Islam was completely ravaged. The Turkish leaders fought each other to enlarge the influence of the small states they had previously created at the expense of Byzantium. Anatolia, the old pearl of the Crown of Basileis, was now disorganized. The roads were no longer maintained or guarded; only those who did not value their own safety ventured themselves in the most holy pilgrimage to the Sepulchre of our Saviour. The difficulties encountered by the Eastern Christians under the domination of the Seljuks were neither neglected. The byzantine diplomats called for Christian responsibility to protect those in need. The enumeration of the disasters the Christian Orient had passed over in the past decades convinced the participants that the security of all Christendom was in danger and that, sooner or later, each one would be required to take the weapon in the service of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. Both the Pope and the Bishops left Piacenza impressed by the eloquence of the imperial messengers. Each participant was tormented by the words of the Savior at the Last Supper: „*But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one*” (Luke 22, 36).

At the end of the summer of 1095, the Pope wrote to all the French bishops to join him at the council he will hold in Clermont from 18th to 28th of November the same year.

On November 27, in front of an impressive audience, Urban held a mobilizing sermon, as a result of which "*the Franks, upon hearing such reports, forthwith caused crosses to be sewed on their right shoulders, saying that they followed with one accord the footsteps of Christ, by which they had been redeemed from the hand of hell*"¹⁶.

The decisions adopted at Clermont contributed to the enlistment of a large number of people in the Crusade. It included the forgiveness of sins and the exoneration of secular punishments, for the crimes of the past, of those who would participate in the Crusade with pious intention. All the assets of the warriors were placed under the protection and administration of the Church, following that, at their homecoming, to be returned entirely to them.

The volunteers took the vow that they would start their trip to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God 1096, at the latest, receiving the sign of the cross on their clothes as a memento of devotion. The perjurers and deserters will be excommunicated. Regarding the matter of Eastern Christians, Council of Clermont's decisions stated that this campaign is not a mere conquest war, but one for the liberation of the Christian brethren persecuted by the heathen, and for the liberation of the places of worship defiled by the barbarians. In all the regions reconquered from the pagans, all the rights and all property formerly owned by the Eastern Churches were to be fully retroceded. The general assembly of

¹⁶*Gesta* I, 1.

the cruciate troops was to be held at Constantinople, in full co-operation with the armies of Emperor Alexius¹⁷.

Generalized disorder, the fall of the Arab empire into the hands of the ruthless Seljuk warlords, the tribal rivalry of the Turkish princes, the endless skirmishes between the small Mohammedan dominions and, first of all, the revolt reaction of the Christian nations and the need for retaliation triggered by the total disregard of the steppe nomads for the pilgrim immunity, generated the favorable context for the great Christian offensive to recover the East.

The process was irreversible, and the most frightening nightmare of the enemies of the Cross was about to start. Envoys often circulated between Constantinople and Rome bearing, at an unprecedented frequency, the message of Unity.

Under threat, Christianity was easily redesccovering its time-honored solidarity that helped the Church to defeat any opposing power, for centuries.

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