

THE WESTERN PLANS TO CAPTURE BYZANTIUM FROM THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CRUSADES TO 1204*

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With the beginning of the crusades, the envy of Europe towards Byzantium which had lasted since centuries, has come to the surface of their policy. As it is known, the crusades were a military action organised with the political motive of driving the Turks who have advanced towards the West since the XI. Century, out of Asia Minor. This action had also included however, the desire of the Roman Church to overcome the Patriarchy of Constantinople (İstanbul) and establish its power over the East thus becoming the only power in the Christian World¹.

Undoubtedly, the Popes played a greater part in nourishing this idea that moved Europe of those times. The Popes aimed at strengthening their power in the West and establishing it in the East as well. They needed to unite the Western and Eastern Churches for this purpose. This would increase their influence in greater parts of the World. But they knew that this would be impossible with the Byzantine Empire on their way and wanted to eliminate it in the first place. This could not be done in a straightforward manner and they have chosen to hide their intentions behind the unification of the churches.

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¹ Işın Demirkent, *Haçlı Seferleri*, İstanbul 1997, pp. 1-4; same author "Haçlı Seferleri Düşüncesinin Doğuşu ve Hedefleri", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi Prof. Dr. Hakkı Dursun Yıldız Hatıra Sayısı*, No.35, 1994, pp. 65-78; same author "Haçlı Seferlerinin Mâhiyeti ve Başlaması", *Haçlı Seferleri ve XI. Asırdan Günümüze Haçlı Ruhu Semineri (26-27th May 1997)*, İstanbul 1998, pp 1-14

Gregorius VII. who has been the Pope between the years of 1073-1085 was one of the most enthusiastic defenders of this idea. He has always shown Constantinople as a target in all his letters, wrote to the kings, dukes and counts in Europe. A letter he has written to the duke of Burgundy, he stated his intention to move towards Constantinople, as soon as it was captured by the Normans, because he had Christian brethren there, who were awaiting his aid. In another letter he claimed that the heart of Christianity was destroyed by the pagans, and he was not in accord with the church of Constantinople over the issue of the Holy Spirit and there had to be a final solution to these issues². The Pope had even planned to engage personally in a Crusade under his command, in the year of 1074. With this crusade, he marvelled about driving the Turks finally out of Anatolia and assemble a Council in Constantinople, after succeeding in this war. In this council the Christians of the East would offer him their thankfulness and accept the power of Rome, with great eagerness. The Pope could not realise this dream³. Because he had other problems in the West to care about. Strange as it is, the Pope took Byzantium still as a target, even when he was handling these problems. Pope Gregorius VII. was caught in a struggle with the German King Heinrich IV (1056-1106) and needed allies to overcome him. And he tried to convince the Norman Robert Guiscard who had an eye on the throne and the lands of Byzantium. Robert Guiscard had, as Anna Komnena had written later: "Aiming to swallow the Byzantine Empire with great appetite, had started to grind his teeth already"⁴. Robert Guiscard has approached this offer by the Pope positively and has promised to aid him, however this was never the case. Because Robert had let know, that his first and most important duty was to prepare for a war towards Byzantium⁵.

² A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire (324-1453)*, Madison-Milwaukee 1964, II, pp. 395-396.

³ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, London 1951-54. Turkish Trans. Fikret Işıltan, *Haçlı Seferleri Tarihi*, Ankara 1989, I, p. 77.

⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiade*. English Trans. E.R.A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnena*, London 1969, Book I, XIII, p. 63. Turkish Trans. Bilge Umar, *Anna Komnena. Alexiade*, İstanbul 1996, p. 51.

⁵ Anna Komnene, *op. cit.*, Book I, XIII, p. 65. Turkish Trans. pp. 52-53. See. Sibyll Kindlimann, *Die Eroberung von Konstantinopel als politische Forderung des Westens im Hochmittelalter*, Zürich 1969, pp. 31 f.

Robert Guiscard has first conquered the lands of the Eastern Roman Empire in Southern Italy and in the Summer months of 1081, he aimed to occupy one of the most important cities of the Byzantines, namely Dyrrhakion, after laying a siege from the sea and on land⁶. Eastern Roman Emperor Alexios has asked the Pope for helping him against the Normans, but could not even receive a reply to this pledge. Because the Pope was on the side of the Normans and the defeat and surrender of Byzantium would be of a great advantage for him. Against all resistance, the city of Dyrrhakion was conquered by Robert. Robert Guiscard was encouraged by this successful war attempt and he instantly laid siege on the lands of Epirus, Macedonia, Tessalia, and Larissa that belonged to the East Romans. But he had to leave this region by various reasons and inherited his son Bohemund with this struggle⁷. Bohemund has won some struggles against Alexios, but lost a decisive battle at Larissa and could never forget this defeat. Anna Komnena write that he had always felt great hatred towards Alexios because of this defeat and has expected to revenge it all the time⁸.

Pope Urbanus II. (1088-1099) as one of the sucesors of Gregorius VII, also felt thought that it was necessary to erase Byzantium from the Earth. According to Fulcherius⁹, Urbanus II has invited the Western World to struggle to drive the Turks away from the Byzantine lands he called "our lands" (regionibus nostrum), during the Council of Clairmont. This means, Also Urbanus had the aim of uniting the Churches in faith and ruling over a united Christian World. But, this could only be realized by moving towards the East with a war campaign.

⁶ Anna Komnene, *op. cit.*, Book IV, p. 135. Turkish Trans. p. 131; Runciman, *op. cit.*, I, p. 58; Georg Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, Turkish Trans. Fikret İşıltan, *Bizans Devleti Tarihi*, Ankara 1991, p. 330.

⁷ Ferdinand Chalandon, *Histoire de la Domination Normande en Italie et en Sicile*, New York 1960, I, pp. 258 ff; same author, *Essai sur le Règne d'Alexis I er Comnène (1081-1118)*, Paris 1900, I, pp. 63 ff; Ostrogorsky, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

⁸ Anna Komnene, *op. cit.*, Book X, p. 319. Turkish Trans, p. 313.

⁹ Fulcherius Carnotensis, *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem peregrinantium RHC occ. III, I, III, 4, p. 315*. English Trans. R. Ryan, *Fulcher of Chartres. A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem 1095-1127*, Knoxville 1969, p. 66.

The Europeans became excited and raged over the speeches delivered by Urbanus and started the first Crusade. Emperor Alexios received the news from the coming of 5 Army Groups commanded by Aristocrats, with horror. The Emperor knew the Westerners only too well, being mercenaries who served in the Byzantine army. The Byzantines had also shared this anxiousness. They also did not trust their brethren in faith, coming from the West. Soon they were proven right in their fear. As soon as the Crusaders had left their own countries, they had started to attack villages and kill innocent people who came in their way, during their track through Hungary into the East.

When the crusaders arrived in Constantinople, they have started to hazard their environment and harass the local people around it. Alexios wanted to protect his Empire from their aggressive and unruly behaviour and asked them to take a vassal's oath towards himself. He thought to have guaranteed his Emperor status by this act. However, the Chief of the French Army, the Duke of Lower Lorraine, Godefroi de Bouillon has made great efforts not to take this oath and the Byzantines had to live through days and hours of fear. Godefroi suddenly declared his will to conquer Constantinople while the Pope and the Aristocrats could not express it freely. He not only looted the outskirts of the city, but also collected his soldiers in front of the city walls. On 2nd of April 1097 he set fire on the door of the city wall around Blachernae Palace and attacked to conquer the city in its consequence. But this attempt was vigorously prevented by Alexios¹⁰. Godefroi had to transfer his troops to the Asian side and Constantinople was thus freed from this assault.

The crusaders have continued to pursue their idea to conquer Byzantium during the Crusades in the Year of 1101. As the Lombards had arrived at the city, they instantly started with engaging into fights and looting their environment¹¹. Emperor Alexios has ordered to transfer the Lombards at once to the Asian shores and to settle them at a quarters near Nikomedia. But the Lombards did not even hear this order. They were angered and attacked the city walls and the Palace of Blachernae. This was an open challenge to the Byzantine Empire. But also the Lombards were not successful in their attempts.

¹⁰ Anna Komnene, *op. cit.*, Book X, pp. 319 f. Turkish Trans. pp. 313 f; Runciman, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 115 f.

¹¹ I. Demirkent "1101 Yılı Haçlı Seferleri", *Prof. Dr. Fikret İşıltan'a 80. Doğum Yılı Armağanı*, İstanbul 1995, p. 26.

In consequence, their Lord was given presents by and has apologised from the Emperor and they were finally transferred to the Asian shores¹².

This hostile attitude of the West towards Byzance was also obvious during the Second Crusades. Byzantine historian Kinnamos relates that their intention to free Jerusalem was only an excuse for the conquest of the Byzantine lands¹³. This shows us that the West still pursued the idea of the conquest of Byzantium and Byzantines were full aware of this situation. The news that the German armies under the command of Konrad were approaching the city filled Emperor Manuel with horror. He did not trust these Germans and feared that they would incur great losses to his lands and his people. He instantly sent emissaries to the German King Konrad and asked him to take an oath for not harming anyone or anything in his land or otherwise they would not be allowed for a free passage through the Byzantine lands. Manuel informed them of every possible assistance if they have not come with treachery plans and without good will. The treachery plans as he mentioned were nothing but their intention to conquer Byzantium¹⁴.

The Germans arrived in Constantinople on 10th of September 1147. The King was given quarter in the Pikridion Palace on the opposite shore of the Golden Horn. Konrad had asked Emperor Manuel for ships to pass through the Golden Horn or otherwise he would arrive next year with a greater army and conquer Constantinople, he had threatened¹⁵.

¹² Albertus as one of the crusaders historians relates of this assault and means that the Lombards could enter the palace in two parts by using force and first they killed a young boy, a relative and one of the domesticated lions of the Emperor. See. Albertus Aquensis, *Liber Christianae Expeditionis pro Ereptione, Emundatione et Restitutione Sanctae Hierosolymitanæ Ecclesiae*, RHC. occ., IV, viii, 4-5, p. 561 f. German Trans. H. Hefele, *Albert von Aachen. Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges*, Jena 1923, II, pp. 75-77; Kindlimann, pp. 98 f; Runciman, *op. cit.*, II, p. 16; Jamies Lee Cate "The Crusade of 1101", *A History of the Crusades*, Publisher. K. Setton, Madison-Milwaukee-London 1969, I, pp. 353-354; Demirkent, "1101 Yılı...", p. 27.

¹³ Ioannes Kinnamos, *Historia*. Turkish Trans. I. Demirkent, *Ioannes Kinnamos'un Historia'sı (1118-1176)*, Ankara 2001, p. 55.

¹⁴ Kinnamos, *op. cit.*, Turkish Trans, p. 55; E. Altan, *İkinci Haçlı Seferi*, Ankara 2003, p. 30.

¹⁵ Kinnamos, *op. cit.*, Turkish Trans. p. 60; Odo de Deuil, *De Projectione Ludovici VII in Orientem*, Publ. and Engl. Trans. V.G. Berry, *The Journey of Louis VII to the East*, New York 1948, p. 49; B. Kugler, *Studien zur Geschichte des zweiten Kreuzzuges*, Stuttgart 1866, pp. 124f; Wilhelm Bernhardi, *Konrad III*, Leipzig 1883, pp. 616 f; Altan, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 f.

King Louis of France who also had participated at the Second Crusade was met with real warmth and sympathy by Emperor Manuel and was quartered at the Palace of Philopation. But others in the army of King Louis such as Bishop Godefroi of Langres and a group around him, have advised to Louis VII. to conquer the cities and castles of Byzantine lands and to assault Constantinople by forming an alliance with the Roger, King of Sicily who was a sworn enemy of the Emperor Manuel¹⁶.

The unsuccessful outcome of the Second Crusade has affected Louis VII, the King of France, very negatively. According to Louis, Emperor Manuel was fault in this defeat and he felt great resentment against him. He planned an alliance with his enemy Roger, the King of Sicily. Roger proposed a crusade towards Byzantium in order to revenge for the failed one and Louise and his men were incredibly delighted at this occasion. As usual, they were greatly supported by the clerics. Pope Eugenius III, Head Priest Suger and Bernhard de Clairvaux have supported them. But the outcome was in vain and a new Crusade could not be organized¹⁷. Thus, the idea of conquering Byzantium had to be postponed for the future.

Finally this idea came to the agenda, together with the third Crusade. Selahattin Eyyubi had destroyed a Crusader's Army in Hattin on 4th of July 1187 and had re-conquered Jerusalem on 2nd of October 1187. This caused great turmoil in the West. And a new Crusade towards the East was instantly decided. The third crusade would be joined by Kings as the Second one. Fredrick Barbarossa the German King, Philippe II Auguste, the King of France and Richard the Lion Heart as the King of England were the most popular personalities in this Crusade. The hostile attitude towards Byzantium especially from the German King Fredrick Barbarossa was quite interesting. Friedrich saw a concurrent in Byzantium because he claimed to be the only Emperor in world. The Kings of England and France had preferred to travel by sea to the Holy Lands. Friedrich had chosen the passage of land and he had to pass through the

¹⁶ Odo de Deuil, *op. cit.*, p. 59; Altan, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁷ Bernhardi, *op.cit.*, p. 810; Chalandon, *Les Comnène*, II, pp. 335 f; E. Curtis, *Roger of Sicily and the Normans in Lower Holy 1016-1154*, London 1912, pp. 235 f; Kindlimann, *a.g.e.*, pp.170 f; Runciman, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 237 f; Altan, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

Byzantine lands in its consequence. Byzantine Emperor Isaakos Angelos (1185-1195) did not want such a great army to pass through his lands. Friedrich sent to Angelos a letter with a very heavy content. In this letter he claimed to be able to conquer Byzantium with his great army in an easy manner. He asked his son Heinrich VI to come before the city walls of Constantinople with a fleet and he asked the Pope to open a new Crusade against Byzantium. The Emperor and the King were very near to engage in a war but they eventually decided to settle their dispute. The King was given passage across the Straits of Dardanelles and the attempt to conquer Constantinople thus came to an end¹⁸.

Heinrich VI (1190-1197) was the son of Fredrick Barbarossa and he also had his own plans for conquering Byzantium. He was wed to Konstanze, the daughter of Norman King Guillaume II and had got the Norman heritage by marriage¹⁹.

According to Niketas, Heinrich was waiting for an opportunity to attack Byzantium, but he had doubts as well. Still, he sent some emissaries for insulting the Byzantine Emperor Isaakios and complained for various needless reasons. (February-March 1196). As the heir of Guillaume II., he claimed the lands between Dyrrhakion and Saloniki, that were once conquered, but then lost by the Normans. He asked for the withdrawal of Byzantium from this region as well as a great sum of money. Then, he further claimed that he should be declared as the King of Kings and the Lord of all Lords and a fleet should be sent by Byzantium for the service of the German people in Palastine²⁰.

Emperor Aleksios Angelos III, who ascended to the throne for Emperor Isaakos has started to search new ways for a settlement with Heinrich. He was ready to pay 50 Kentenare (1600 kg) of gold per year. But Heinrich died

¹⁸ Ostrogorsky, *op. cit.*, p. 377; Runciman, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 11-12; Demirkent, *Haçlı Seferleri*, pp. 150-151; K. Zimmert "Der Friede zu Adrianopel (Februar 1190)", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* (1902), pp. 303-320; same author, "Der Deutsch-Byzantinische Konflikt vom Juli 1189 bis Februar 1190", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 12 (1903), pp. 42-77.

¹⁹ Ostrogorsky, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

²⁰ Niketas Khoniates, *Historia*. Publisher, I. Bekker, *Nicatae Choniatae Historia*, CSHB, XXII, Bonn, 1835. Turkish Trans. Demirkent, *Niketas Khoniates'in Historia'sı (1195-1206)*, İstanbul 2004, pp. 30-31.

suddenly, before the money was sent (September 1197) and thus Byzantium was once again saved from a catastrophe²¹.

The non ending attempts of the West towards Byzantium were at last successful during the Fourth Crusade and Constantinople became subject to an occupation and plunder, unknown in its history.

Even this conquest of Constantinople by the Western powers has not ended their endless hostility towards Byzantium. When Constantinople came under Byzantine rule in 1261, the West became agitated again. Particularly the objective of the King of Sicily and Naples, Charles d'Anjou who was the brother of the Franch King Louis IX. was to destroy Byzantium and establish another Latin empire in Constantinople. Under such a danger, Byzantium has sought the help of the Pope Gregorius X (1271-1276) against its brethren in faith. The Pope made again the condition of unification of the churches of Rome and of Constantinople. Only the plans made by VIII. Mihail Paleologos could save Byzantium from the hostility of Charles d'Anjou. But the Crusadermentality could not be stopped. Later, after the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in the middle of the XV. Century (1453), Europeans have tried to reconquer Istanbul from the Ottomans. The various Crusades against the State of the Ottomans over the Balkan peninsula were the consequences²².

Keywords: Byzantium, The Crusades, Europe, Pope Urbanus II, Constantinople.

²¹ Niketas, *op. cit.*, pp.32 f. See. Kindlimann, *op. cit.*, pp. 205 ff.

²² Ostrogorsky, *op. cit.*, pp 420 ff; Demirkent, "1082-1302 Yılları Arasında Bizans-Venedik İlişkilerine Kısa Bir Bakış", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, Prof. Dr. Fikret İşıltan'a Hattıra Sayısı, İstanbul 2004, pp. 149 f. See. Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades. From Lyons to Alcazar. 1274-1580*, New York 1955.