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Multiculturalism in Medieval Mediterranean World

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At the end of the eighties in the eleventh century, Turk-Seljuks threatened Byzantine. Alexios I Komnenos, emperor of Byzantine, asked Pope Urban II for help. In 1095, Pope Urban II declared the first Crusades. He gathered all the priests and representatives of the cathedral in Clermont, where knights from all of Europe came to listen to his speech. The Pope blessed all of them and promised that each of them would be forgiven of all the previous sins if he participated in the Crusades:

“I, or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ's heralds to publish this everywhere and to perse all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those Christians and to destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends. I say this to those who are present, it is meant also for those who are absent. Moreover, Christ commands it.”(Fulcher of Chartres' account of Urban's speech)

Pope Urban II declared that the main reason for these wars should have been a desire to free Christian places from Muslims. Despite what he said in his speech, the reasons were absolutely different. If we take a look of political situation in Europe at the end of eleventh century, we will observe that most of the countries were experiencing economic hardship. Most of the knights were “lacklands” who had to find some other source of income because the heir of the family was usually the first-born sons. Thus, many of these “lacklands” became plunderers

who robbed people on the main roads of Europe. Others, however, preferred to join the church and became priests. Therefore, the number of priests and bishops increased significantly which meant that the church would need more land. Starting a war against Muslims, who occupied a “Christian land”, was beneficial for both the church and the knights of Europe.

The crusades started in the eleventh century and lasted until the sixteenth century. Most of the nations in Europe participated in the Crusades, but this event influenced each of these nations differently. For instance, Britain, France, and Germany were most influenced by the Crusades. Although these nations spent more resources than any other to fight against Muslims, it is critical to remember that other countries that contributed were affected by the Crusades drastically in the political sphere. As I am a representative of one of the world’s oldest nations, Georgia, I would like to illustrate the influence of the Crusades on Georgia versus its influence on neighboring countries and settlements.

Georgians suffered from the Crusade mostly during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The three monarchs who ruled Georgia during the crusades and whose reign was associated with first and fourth crusades are: King David IV, King Tamari and King Lasha-Giorgi. Each of these monarchs had some kind of connection with the Crusades; some received aid from the Crusaders and some even lent aid to the Crusaders.

The first time Crusaders appeared at the end of the eleventh century in Georgian history, during the reign of King David IV. According to David’s historian, the “Franks” were the Crusaders. This was their appellation not only in Georgia, but in the entire Near East as well. By 1095, Turk-Seljuks had great power in Georgia. Citizens had to pay an extremely large contribution in order to stay safe. However, the Turk-Seljuks forces began to weaken as soon as

the Pope declared the beginning of the Crusades. When the Crusaders marched out of Byzantine in 1096, King David IV had already strengthened his army and positioned it in Georgia. In 1099, after the victory of the crusaders, he refused to pay tribute to the Turks:

“Franks came out that time and took Jerusalem and Antioch, and by the god’s will Kartli¹ survived, King David got stronger and increased his army, did not give any toll to Turks, so these could not stay during winter and had to leave” (History of Georgia, page 409)

Later, in 1121, Crusaders also helped King David VI to win the battle of Didgori, one the most important battles in the history of Georgia. According to sources, David IV was quite popular among the Crusaders. As Ioane Bagrationi states in his encyclopedia, *Quaerere*, the king of Jerusalem, Baldwin II, had a covert relationship with King David as they often met secretly.

After the reign of David IV, Crusaders do not appear much in Georgian history until 1204, the year when the Crusaders destroyed Constantinople during the fourth Crusade. Georgia was ruled by King Tamar during that time and the country was secure in its economy and military. In fact, Georgia was so strong that it was able to create the empire of Trebizond based on the remains of Constantinople. Trebizond was ruled by Alexios I Megas Komnenos, who was quite close to the Georgian Royal family. The fourth Crusades greatly influenced the creation of this empire and developed both the economic and political situation in Georgia. The Empire of Trebizond became a shield for the south-western part of the country. The enemy coming from south-west would first have to cross Trebizond and lose most of its soldiers there, thus coming to Georgia without enough energy to fight effectively.

¹ Eastern part of Georgia, which was occupied by Turks

During the reign of Lasha-Giorgi, Georgians even planned to join the Franks in their next Crusades, however the death of the king and appearance of Mongols in Caucasia prevented that. Pope Honorius III wrote a letter to the King, saying, “the brilliant and august Emperor, Frederick king” intended to start the campaign one year after the festival of John the Baptist. Georgians had initially planned to join King Frederick, but, because of the Mongol invasion and sudden death of the king, Georgians failed to carry out their plan. I believe that, if Georgians had been able to fulfill their plan, this relationship between Georgians and Crusaders would be short-lived as Crusaders were more oriented on acquiring wealth rather than bringing freedom to Christian lands. I believe that Georgians would not support such greed and eventually would stop participating in the Crusades.

As mentioned above, the Crusades had a great influence on Georgia as it helped my country beat Turk-Seljuks, strengthened its position in the south-western part and overcome economic hardship. However, Georgians were not the only ones influenced by this event. Armenia was another country that experienced the influence of Crusades, too. The Kingdom of Cilician Armenia experienced that impact more than Greater Armenia as it had personal contact with Crusaders:

“That is the way in which Armenians, both those in Cilicia who came into personal contact with the Crusaders and those in Greater Armenia who experienced the Crusades less directly, interpreted the arrival of the Frankish armies.”(Laiou, A. E., & Mottahedeh, R. P. (n.d.))

The first source about the Crusades is from 1098 and describes Crusaders as people from “western nations of heroes who crossed the sea to expel the foreign tyrants who held in dishonor

the holy places and priests of God.” Just as Georgians referred to Crusaders as “Franks,” Armenians referred to Franks, Romans, or Latins as “Westerners. ”

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