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1. THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION IN 1095

THE geography of the world as men pictured it in the late eleventh century differed hardly at all from the conceptions formulated in classical times. It is important to note this before taking a closer look at the history of the crusades for, when the crusades were over, this, together with much else, had changed. Although the teaching of Ptolemy of Alexandria was generally accepted in the early Middle Ages, his theory of the spherical shape of the earth—a Greek doctrine which was fiercely opposed by the Romans—had been almost completely forgotten owing to the great influence of the encyclopedist, Isidore of Seville. But by the end of the crusading period a growing acquaintance with Ptolemy's own writings had given a new lease of life to this theory. Above all, a very great deal had been learnt about the inhabited world which lay east of Europe. This was new knowledge, based on the descriptions of travellers, and not merely the revival of traditional learning. By contrast, in the earlier period between the heyday of the Roman Empire and the start of the crusades, the frontiers of the known world had remained relatively stable, although some advances had been made as a result of the spread of Christianity into Germany, Scandinavia, and some parts of the Byzantine Empire.

From a European point of view the centre of gravity of the world of 1095 still lay in the Mediterranean lands. It was here that the pope lived; here were the capitals of the eastern and western empires, Constantinople and Rome. The imperial crown of the West was worn, it is true, by the kings of Germany, but a king of Germany (or rather, to use his contemporary title, a king of the Romans) could obtain that crown only from the hand of the pope and at Rome. Moreover, with the exception of Spain, the Mediterranean Sea was the great dividing line between the two world-religions, Christianity and Islam. Broadly speaking, the north coast was Christian, the south coast Muslim. In places where the Muslims had advanced north of this line they had either already been forced to retreat, as in France (c. 973) and Sicily (1091), or they were now in the process of doing so.

It might have been expected that Europe would be united as it gathered its strength for a vigorous counter-attack on the Muslims whose invasions had caused so much misery during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries. But although the continent had recovered from the direct consequences of these invasions and those of the Vikings and Magyars, and was once again in the ascendant, there was still no question of there being anything remotely approaching a coherent European political structure such as had once been supplied by the Carolingian Empire. Indeed on the eve of the crusades Europe was caught up in fierce internecine struggles. In the Investiture Contest the papacy, reformed and strengthened during the course of the eleventh century, attempted to shake off the protecting hand of the secular power. The visible symbol of this power was the royal practice of installing bishops and abbots in their offices by investing them with ring and staff. By virtue of the so-called 'proprietary church law' (*Eigenkirchenrecht*), the king then claimed rights of lordship over them. In the nature of things the pope's most important opponent in this contest was the emperor. Henry IV (1056–1105) broke completely with the pope and recognized an anti-pope, Guibert of Ravenna, as Clement III (1080–1100). The climax of the Investiture Contest—Henry IV's penance at Canossa (1077) and then the collapse of the position of his papal opponent, Gregory VII (1073–85)—was, it is true, already past; none the less the emperor was still excommunicated and agreement a long way off. It did not come until the Concordat of Worms in 1122. At any rate when a pope planned a crusade he left the emperor out of his reckoning.

But neither could he count upon the kings of France and England. Philip I of France (1060–1108) had been excommunicated in 1094 for sending his wife Bertha packing. William Rufus of England (1087–1100), a son of William the Conqueror, was still preoccupied with the consolidation of Norman power in England. His policies, anyway, were usually extremely anti-clerical. North Italy was caught up in the imperial-papal struggle; South Italy had only recently been subjugated by the Normans who had driven out the Byzantines and Saracens. In the Iberian peninsula the kings of Asturia-Leon, Navarre, Aragon, and Portugal were all engaged in expelling the Muslims, though not until 1492 was complete success finally achieved.

Since 1054 not even the Christian Church had been at one. On the surface, the schism, still unhealed today, was the result firstly of an interpolation of the creed by the West which the Eastern Church was unable to accept, and secondly of the liturgical prob-

lem of whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used at communion. But just as important as the growing differences in theology and ritual were matters of politics—church politics like the question of the primacy of Rome and secular politics like the rivalry between the two 'Roman' empires of East and West. The cultural differences between the Greek-speaking East and the Latin West were too great for the unity of Christendom to survive for long.

Not that all relations between East and West had been broken off since 1054.¹ On the contrary, the wish for a union of the Churches permeated papal policy throughout the Middle Ages, and time and again it had an influence on the history of the crusades. In Rome it was recognized that the schism in no way freed the West from a responsibility towards their Christian brothers in the East. Even before the crusades in 1074 Gregory VII had wanted to organize an expedition to help the Eastern Empire against the invading Seldjuks—though presumably he hoped thereby to reap advantages of his own. Then in 1078 he completely reversed his policy when a marriage alliance which he had just helped to arrange between Robert Guiscard, the Norman ruler of south Italy, and a Byzantine princess, fell through as the result of a palace revolution in Constantinople. Pope Gregory excommunicated the new emperor and then the next one—Alexius Comnenus (1081–1118), who also obtained the imperial throne by means of a palace revolution. In him, after long years of internal dissension, Byzantium had again found an energetic ruler. In these circumstances there was no immediate chance of a union of the Churches.

In 1071 the Normans had captured Bari, the last Byzantine stronghold in Italy. Ten years later, just when Alexius Comnenus ascended the throne, they moved on to attack the empire itself at Epirus. With Venetian help Alexius was able to drive the Normans back; then Robert Guiscard had to return home to deal with unrest in south Italy, where he died in 1085. The Venetians came out of it best, for they obtained far-reaching commercial privileges in return for their help. These privileges undermined the traditional trading system of Byzantium, established the long-lasting political influence of Venice in the Adriatic and provided a spring-board for further expansion towards Constantinople, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Levant.

For Byzantium, however, the Muslims presented a greater threat than the Normans. Very soon after Muhammad's death it had become clear that the new religion was possessed of an enormous

political energy. Borne up by the idea of the jihad, the holy war, the Arabs forced their way east and west in a breathtaking expansion of power. (Whereas the Christian holy war was, in theory if not always in practice, a defensive undertaking, the jihad was right from the beginning a war of aggression.) In the second half of the seventh century they conquered the whole of North Africa. In 711 the Ommayad Tariq crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and destroyed the Visigothic kingdom of Spain. Not until 732, when the Carolingian Charles Martel won the Battle of Poitiers, was the Arab torrent dammed. But the Arab conquest was not confined to this part of Europe. In the East they posed a serious threat to Byzantium. In the West they overran Sicily in the ninth century and established themselves in South Italy, where, in 982, they decisively defeated the Roman Emperor Otto II. From bases on the coast of Provence they devastated South France and Switzerland. They controlled the Alpine passes, and it was on the Great St. Bernard that they captured Majolus, the universally venerated Abbot of Cluny in 972. This notorious ambush marked a turning point. Gradually energetic counter-attacks were organized and the Arabs were driven out of France and, by the Normans, out of Italy and Sicily. In Spain, however, they were more firmly established and here the *Reconquista* lasted until the end of the Middle Ages.

Islam too was torn by schism, between Sunnite and Shi'ite. The development of this split must be traced in rather more detail since it had considerable influence on Muslim history in the period of the crusades.² It went back to the situation at the death of Muhammad. One group recognized Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's close associates, as caliph, i.e. as the prophet's representative. The other group believed that Ali—as Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law—had a better claim by virtue of his kinship. And in fact Ali did become the fourth caliph. Ali's supporters called themselves Shi'ites (Shi'atu Ali means Ali's party) and would recognize only his descendants as caliphs. The opposing party called themselves Sunnites because they believed that they had held fast to the correct tradition. (Sunna means the orally transmitted sayings of Muhammad.) The Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad were Sunnites since they had to be very orthodox in order to make up for being upstarts who had wiped out the legitimate Ommayad caliphs of Damascus.

On the other side because Ali had had several wives it was inevitable that the Shi'ites too would split up. They all agreed that the line of Imams (the successors of Ali) would have to come to an end at some time, because the last Imam would work on in conceal-

ment in order to reappear as the Mahdi, an eschatological saviour who would bring justice to the world and convert all men to the Shi'a. But they could not agree on which of the Imams was the last one. Depending on the number of Imams they recognized the different Shi'ite sects were known as the 'Fivers', the 'Sevensers', and the 'Twelvers'. The last made up the moderate wing of the Shi'ites, while the 'Sevensers' who regarded the seventh Imam, Ismail, as the Mahdi—and were therefore called the Ismailites—formed an extremist group. Thanks to their leaning towards social revolution and to their close links with the Muslim guilds they were able to increase their numbers and, in 909, to found the Fatimid caliphate of North Africa (after 973 at Cairo) as a rival to the Abbasids of Baghdad.

The Fatimid caliph was now looked upon as the Mahdi. Even so he soon became as dependent on the army and bureaucracy as was his rival in Baghdad. When, in 1094, al-Afdal the vizier of Egypt chose a pliable younger son, al-Mustali, as the new caliph, thus passing over Nizar, the eldest son of the previous ruler, the Fatimids lost the support of the Ismailites. Within the Ismailite movement the centre of gravity shifted to its extreme wing, the Nizarites, the Persian branch of which became famous as the Assassins. The name derived from a corrupt Latin form of hashish, the drug with which they were said to intoxicate themselves. Tightly organized under a kind of 'Grandmaster' they elevated murder to the level of a religious duty as well as a political weapon. Early in the twelfth century some of them settled in North Syria. Savagely persecuted by the Sunnites they became a source of insecurity and terror for Sunnite and Christian alike. The troubadours of the thirteenth century gave eloquent expression to the fear felt by the Christians. Above all the Assassins fought to prevent the creation of a united Sunnite front which would have been directed against them just as much as against the Christian states formed as a result of the First Crusade. In this way they gave indirect help to the crusading states.

The world of Islam which had once been a domain of the Arabs was given a new political structure by the arrival of Turks from Central Asia.³ Originally shamanist in their beliefs the Turks became Sunnite Muslims during the tenth century. In a sense they saved Islam because they brought to it the warrior spirit of the nomad just at the time when the political drive of the Arabs was fading. Particularly important were the Seldjuks, Turkish tribesmen who within little more than fifty years built up an immense empire which stretched from Khorassan and Persia to the

Caucasus, from Mesopotamia to Syria and Palestine and as far as the Hijaz, the birthplace of Islam. The orthodox caliphs were freed from the Shi'ite overlordship of the Persian Buyids only to become tools in the hands of the Seldjuk sultans. Sultan Alp-Arslan (1063-73) pushed still further west and in 1071 defeated the Byzantine army at Manzikert in eastern Anatolia. From that date on Turks migrated almost imperceptibly into Anatolia and slowly but surely undermined the Byzantine provincial administration. The reign of Sultan Malik Shah (1077-92) witnessed the final expulsion of the Byzantines out of what was the real power house of their empire. This left the Greek Church of Anatolia in a difficult position and at the same time it added to the problems facing pilgrims on the land route to the Holy Land, though not so much as scholars once thought. But for Byzantium the loss of Anatolia remained a catastrophe^{3a}.

It cannot be proved that the Turks actually did oppress the Christians in the East, as western sources, among them the speech attributed to Urban II at Clermont, maintained. In the conquered districts the native Christians were treated just as they always had been by the Muslims—as a subject minority population who paid taxes but who enjoyed the protection of Islamic law and a certain measure of freedom of worship. What happened to them at the time of the conquest was the inevitable result of war and was felt by all sections of the population. In particular the non-Melkite Churches of the East, Jacobites and Nestorians who did not speak Greek and who had been oppressed by the Greek Orthodox Church on account of their leanings towards monophysitism and other heresies, had no reason at all to regret the change. Their writers sang the praises of Malik Shah, who after the disturbances of the conquest symbolized the restoration of order, just as loudly as did the Muslim chroniclers. Apart from the persecution under Caliph Hakim (1009), there is no evidence of anti-Christian pogroms in the eleventh century. The persecution unleashed in Jerusalem by the Turcoman Atsiz in 1078 was definitely anti-Fatimid in character and the Christians were probably spared. It is significant that no appeal for help was ever sent to the West by the eastern Christians. When Urban II and the propagandists for the crusade emphasized the persecution of the Eastern Christians it was either because they did not know the real situation or because they wanted to arouse a vague feeling of resentment in Europe.

In Europe too the Byzantine emperor had a Turkish problem to face. The Petchenegs, a tribe of Turkish origin now settled in the Danube valley, allied with the Seldjuks of Asia Minor, and in

1091-2 they attacked Byzantium on two fronts. But in April 1091 Alexius, with characteristic forcefulness, defeated the Petchenegs so decisively that they practically disappeared from history. In Asia Minor, however, the Seldjuks were too firmly established for Alexius to be able to strike as effectively against them. He had to be content with coming to terms (1092) with Sultan Kilij Arslan (1092-1107). When the great Seldjuk empire broke up on the death of Malik Shah in 1092, Kilij Arslan's share of the inheritance was a part of Anatolia out of which the Rum-Seldjuk sultanate of Iconium (Rum means [East-] Rome) was gradually built up. The treaty of 1092 gave Alexius a respite from Seldjuk attacks and allowed the sultan to consolidate his own position in Asia Minor.

In Syria, however, Malik Shah's death led to serious disintegration lasting for more than a decade, by the end of which there had emerged a system of Seldjuk emirates so delicately balanced that the least alteration in the political relations of one with another necessarily involved the reconstruction of the entire system. This explains the incessant variation in the complicated pattern of Syrian alliances in the first half of the twelfth century. The newly created crusading states immediately became extra pieces on the political board.

Meanwhile there had been changes in the West. Gregory VII had died in 1085 and after the brief pontificate of Victor III, Urban II (1088-99) had become pope. As a diplomat he was more flexible than Gregory and he tried to improve relations with Byzantium.⁴ In 1089 he sent an embassy of reconciliation to Alexius and released him from the sentence of excommunication. Alexius too was conciliatory and so between emperor and pope friendly relations were established which neither side wished to endanger by undue emphasis on the theological disagreements. Alexius was ready to continue the old practice of inserting the pope's name into the patriarchal lists (the diptychs) if Urban would send a satisfactory statement of faith within a fixed period of time. Nothing came of it because Urban was not prepared to do this, but neither of them treated it as vital so no harmful consequences followed. Urban was quite content that Alexius, now that he was safe from the assaults of the Normans and on tolerably good terms with the pope, should break off the negotiations with the Emperor Henry IV which he had earlier keenly pursued.

For his part Alexius could now concentrate on re-organizing the Byzantine army which had been declining in standard ever since its overwhelming defeat at Manzikert. One way of doing this was by hiring western mercenaries. One of the reasons he entered into

negotiations on Church unity with Urban II may have been his hope of obtaining such men. Western mercenaries were nothing new in Byzantium. In earlier centuries an élite of foreign troops had formed the Varangian Guard at Constantinople. Despite the traditional enmity between Normans and Greeks there had often been contingents of Norman soldiers in the ranks of the Byzantine army; their fighting spirit was well-known and much feared. Even though Byzantium enjoyed a respite from war after 1092 this did not mean that Alexius could afford to do without mercenaries. Thus when he met Count Robert of Flanders on a pilgrimage he asked the count if he could supply him with such troops. And when, in March 1095, Urban II held a council at Piacenza to deal generally with Church reform, it was not surprising that envoys from the Byzantine emperor were also present to let it be known how welcome western mercenaries would be. Clearly they exaggerated the dangers facing the empire and so in papal circles men came to hold the opinion that only drastic measures could save Byzantium—and at the same time the Christian Church in the East—measures which might then lead to a reunion of the Churches under the primacy of Rome. Our information on the Council of Piacenza comes from the chronicler Bernold of Constance, and it is today generally accepted as being trustworthy though there was once a good deal of doubt on the subject. The discovery, some twenty years ago, of a thirteenth-century Byzantine chronicle tended to confirm Bernold's account for although itself written much later, the chronicle appears to contain excerpts from reliable contemporary historians. It also tells us that when Alexius appealed for help at Piacenza he deliberately emphasized the idea of help for Jerusalem because he anticipated that this would prove an effective propaganda slogan in Europe. In reality, of course, his own aims were quite different. He hoped to reconquer Anatolia and a crusade was the last thing he wanted. He had expected some mercenaries, in contingents small enough to be easily controlled, not the huge armies of knights which in fact set out on the first crusade. If he could have foreseen what was about to hit him he would probably have been very reticent indeed. But the keyword, Jerusalem, had been spoken and events now took their course. Little more than six months after the appeal for help at Piacenza, Urban II, at Clermont, called for a crusade.

2 · THE ORIGINS OF THE CRUSADES

POPE URBAN II opened the Council of Clermont on 18 November 1095—the moment that has gone down in history as the starting point of the crusades.⁵ Since the summer of that year he had been travelling through south and south-east France; at Le Puy on 15 August he issued the summons to the council. Although Urban had made careful preparations for a discussion of the question of a crusade by the Church assembly, there was at first nothing which gave any hint of the extraordinary events which were to follow. The council was attended mostly by French bishops and it dealt mostly with internal Church affairs which particularly concerned the French clergy; with general questions of reform, lay investiture, and simony; as well as with the adultery of the king of France. Also on the agenda was the peace of God, i.e. the prohibition of feuding on certain days and the immunity of certain people, places, and things. The pope's presence meant that the Peace of God movement which had hitherto been organized on a purely regional basis, was now recognized by the papacy and its application was extended to cover the whole Church. Only one of the decrees of the Council dealt with the crusade. It laid down the conditions under which a crusader qualified for a spiritual reward.

The moment which gave the council its special place in history came right at the end on 27 November. On this day the pope was due to make an important speech. So many clerks and laymen gathered to listen to him that the meeting had to be held in a field outside the town. We have four reports of Urban's speech. None of them is unquestionably authentic. Some were written after the turn of the century; and they all differ considerably from one another. None the less it is possible to reconstruct his speech in rough outline, though naturally the actual words are irrecoverable.⁶ With Gallic eloquence Urban painted a vivid picture of the supposed oppression of the Christian Churches in the east. The Seldjuks had occupied Asia Minor; the churches and Holy Places had been destroyed and defiled by heathens. Now even Antioch, the city of St. Peter, had been taken. Here then was a noble task