IMPORTANCE OF MALAZGIRT VICTORY FOR THE ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

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A state of disintegration reigned in the Islamic world during the first half of the XIth Century. Petty States were increasingly formed out of the Abbaside Caliphate which had lost its political power and was exposed to dismemberment.

Seeing the feeble condition into which the Islamic world has fallen, the Byzantine Empire had gone into attack since the middle of the Xth Century, and begun to retrieve one by one the territories it had lost to the Moslems. Thus, with the exception of the Çukurova region, Iskenderun and Antakya areas, Southeastern Anatolia and Diyarbakir acquired by the Moslems at the cost of bitter struggles, the entire region of East Anatolia was retaken by the Byzantines. During the first half of the XIth Century the frontiers of Byzantium extended from Azerbaijan in the East to the Syrian city of Latakia in the South. The situation was extremely critical for the Islamic world. A new onslaught by Byzantines to conquer the remaining parts of Syria and even Egypt was expected any moment. In fact, there was no political force to stop or counteract such a new Byzantine assault. The Islamic World, unable to rid itself out of the heavy political crisis into which it had fallen, was far from possessing any power to resist Byzantine aggression.

It was in this critical situation that a brand new element introduced was the Oguz Turks. The truth is that, a tribe of Oguz Turks who had been under the rule of Seljuks had crossed over to Khorasan (1035). Under the command of their able leaders like Tugrul Beg these Turks inflicted several defeats on the all-powerful State of Gazneli, and founded the Seljuk State in Khorasan in 1040.

Tugrul Beg was succeeded by his nephew Alparslan. Alparslan, like his father Çaghrî Beg and his uncle Tugrul Beg, also had great aims. Heading these aims his determination was to create a unity in the Islamic World under the administration of a single political power. When Alparslan was marching on Egypt and Syria with this purpose in mind,

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he was informed that the Byzantine Emperor Romanos Diogenes was already on the move with a huge army of 200,000 men.

After the foundation of the Seljuk State in 1040, the advent of Oguz hordes in great masses from the motherland had caused scarcity of land and pasture in Iran. This was the reason why they were dispatched to areas neighbouring the Byzantine borders. Princes of Seljuk Dynasty were brought to the head of Oguz clans which settled near the Byzantine borders in increasing numbers. These long-haired Turks bore large bows and long lances, and were extremely skillful in fighting on horseback. They steadily conducted raids on Byzantine territories, and brought back their booty. Tugrul Beg who was one of the two founders of the Seljuk State had travelled only once as far as Malazgirt on account of his intense occupation in Iran and Iraq. The Byzantine Empire which constituted a great threat for the Islamic World could not put up a serious resistance against these raids, in consequence of which it sent special emissaries to Tugrul Beg to ask for a peaceful settlement of their dispute. In order to please Tugrul Beg the mosque in Istanbul which had been in a ruined state for ages had been carefully repaired, and Tugrul Beg's coat-of-arms consisting of three arrows and a bow was placed above its entrance. But because Tugrul Beg demanded that Byzantine Emperors should pay a yearly tax as they formerly did to the Abbasides, the peace agreement was not realized, and the raids continued.

The raids conducted against Byzantine territories were still more intensified during the reign of Alparslan. The attacks were now directed toward Central Anatolia, and the cities of Kayseri, Amorion and Konya were captured for the first time by the Turks. Romanos Diogenes had therefore gathered together a huge army with the hope of giving an end to these Turkish onslaughts.

Realizing the danger threatening his Empire, Alparslan was forced to give up the idea of marching upon Egypt, and decided to return to East Anatolia. When the Byzantine Emperor who was then in Malazgirt heard of Alpakslan's arrival at Ahlat, he was greatly amazed and did not want to believe the news. The clash between the advanced guards of the two sides ended in a Turkish victory, and Vasilakes, the Commander of the Advance Guards, who was taken prisoner was sent to the Abbaside Caliph in Baghdad, together with the confiscated Great Cross.

The Byzantine army which had pitched tent near Malazgirt, had spent the night in great anxiety, because the Seljuk soldiers immediately seized
anyone emerging from the army camp, and the noise of the drums and trumpets shattered their morale. Alparslan approached to a distance of one league to the Byzantine army camp at dawn on August 24, 1071 and settled on the banks of a stream. Both sides were determined to engage in a pitched battle.

Alparslan, who was fully aware of the magnitude and excellent equipment of the Byzantine army, tried to gain time by offering peace through the intermediary of the Abbaside Caliphate. It was seen clearly from the attitude of the Byzantine Emperor toward the emissaries he received in audience that his firm conviction in the final victory was not shaken in the least on account of the defeat his advanced guards had suffered and the attempts of the Turkish soldiers to upset their morale. As a matter of fact, the Emperor's first question to the group of Turkish emissaries was to ask whether Isfahan or Hamedan was considered preferable in their view, because he planned to have his horses spend the winter in Hamedan, while he himself desired to stay in Isfahan. In this way, he had made clear his ultimate aim.

The Caliphate Emissary's reply to the Byzantine Emperor is really worth dwelling upon. He said, "It will no doubt be good for the horses to pass the winter in Hamedan. As for yourself, I cannot tell."

It is seen that the Byzantine Emperor did not accept even to discuss the peace offer. In point of fact, when the Delegation of Emissaries asked him to agree to a peaceful settlement and return to his own land, the Emperor said: "I shall not return before I pay back in kind to the Moslem Realm what they did to the Byzantine Greeks. How can I return after the colossal sums I have spent for this campaign?"

So, the battle about to be fought was not a defence measure to stop Turkish raids in Anatolia, but a means to the realization of still greater aims. The Emperor's words reflected clearly his aggressive intentions.

It was evident, on the other hand, that Alparslan's purpose in this war was to defend his land against an impending invasion.

It might be wise, here, to analyze Alparslan's reasons for accepting this war. Alparslan had made two declarations before entering the war; one addressed to the leaders of the Army stationed at Khoy which was taken as the base of operations, and the other to the Army at large. In his first declaration he advised the Commanders that remained faithful to him to be extremely patient, pointed out how hazardous the war may turn
out to be, reminded them that they would owe their victory to God, and asked them to gather around and obey Melikshah in case he died and to place him on the throne as his successor. This declaration which should be taken as a kind of "political will" reflects the iron determination and tenacity of the Turkish Emperor in the face of great danger. The second point that Alparslan wanted to stress in his declaration was that this was not only a military, political and national war, but also a religious one concerning the whole Moslem World. He meant to defend in this war not only the Great Seljuk State, but also the religion of Islam.

Celebrations of the victory held in Baghdad which was regarded as the spiritual capital of the Moslems, and in other cities showed strongly that the Pitched-Battle of Malazgirt was supported by the Islamic World as a whole.

Addressing his army in the field of battle after the Friday prayers, the Seljuk Sultan said: "No matter how few we may be, and no matter how great in number our enemies may be, I shall plunge on them at this very moment when all the Moslems in the world are praying for us. I shall either be victorious and realize my aim, or I shall die fighting and go to the paradise. Those who want may follow me. There is no Sultan, here, commanding; nor is there a soldier being commanded. I am one of you, today; I am a Moslem warrior fighting together with you. Those who will follow me and dedicate their lives to the Great God will be received in Paradise. Eternal fire and infamy await the deserters."

After expounding the reasons for the war, Alparslan's decision to let the members of his army free to join it, excited all the more the zeal of his warriors for the coming clash. It should not be difficult to guess, how effective the psychological factor had been when he renounced all his titles and authority and declared himself as one of them. It showed that he valued the life of each and every soldier as much as he did his own, and considered him his equal.

Receiving his address with warm applause, the Army said in reply: "O, Great Sultan; We are your servants. We shall be behind you, no matter what happens. Do what you think right."

Alparslan's acts and gestures increased all the more the effect that his words had created. At mid-day on Friday he gathered together his last War Council, he discussed once again with his commanders the strategy he planned to implement in the war, and performed his prayers together with his army. Then he stood up, threw off his bow and arrows, tied a knot
at the tail of his white horse according to the Turkish tradition, and seized his sword and mace. The army as a whole followed suit.

The Seljuk Ruler wore a white robe. He said, “This will be my shroud, if I die.” After giving a war cry, he spurred his horse and dashed forward. A thick cloud of dust rose from the ground when his army followed him in a compact mass.

The explanations given so far show how the Seljuk Sultan tried to make up for his enemy’s superiority in number and what his real objective was. While the Byzantine Emperor had planned to realize greater aims after the victory he was so sure of winning, Alparslan thought of nothing but the victory, and made his plans accordingly.

When the battle began, it was seen that the Turkish forces did not follow the classical fighting order, and that the companies which marched to the front line freed their arrows on the enemy, and then retired, leaving their place to the next line of warriors. The Seljuk army seemed to be on the retreat. The Byzantine Emperor who was intent on giving a pitched battle marched forward with his infantry forces, hoping to meet the Turkish troops somewhere, to fight them out and obtain a decisive result, but the Turks were scattering right and left instead of gathering in a mass. This did not prevent the Turks from re-appearing at the first occasion and thrusting themselves on their enemies with fierce war cries, thus impeding the Byzantine attacks. As a result, the right flank of the Byzantine army was forced to take the flight. This caused the withdrawal of the Byzantine rear lines. The first line that was encircled was the central line commanded by the Emperor himself. All at once he found himself and his soldiers under a hail of arrows and stones. The Byzantine Emperor asked for the assistance of his left flank forces which had so far remained inact, but the Seljuk troops gave him no such chance. Thus, completely isolated and deprived of reinforcements, the Byzantine Emperor continued to fight sword in hand until he was taken prisoner.

It had been a terribly fierce battle. Greater part of Byzantine soldiers had been killed, a good many soldiers with their commanders, including the Emperor himself, were taken prisoner, and only a handful of them had saved their lives by fleeing here and there.

It was for the first time that in history a Byzantine Emperor fell prisoner to a Moslem Ruler.

When the Sultan returned to his camp still tired because of pursuing the deserters personally together with his army, one of his commanders
informed him that a slave of his had taken the Byzantine Emperor prisoner. The Seljuk Ruler who did not to believe the news, called in audience the slave who had captured the Emperor and asked him to tell his story. The slave explained that when he saw a horseman in the thick of battle with a double cross on his helmet and surrounded by a group of Russian Guards, he dashed forward to kill him, but heard someone cry, “Don’t kill him, he is the sovereign’. The Sultan rewarded him and placed him among his special guards.

The Byzantine Emperor was brought in audience in fetters. In accordance with the Turkish tradition the Sultan struck the Emperor softly on his back with his whip. This was followed by a very interesting dialogue between the Sultan and the imprisoned Byzantine Emperor as follows:

Sultan:— “Didn’t I send you the Caliph’s emissaries in order to establish friendly relations between us? But you refused the offer. Didn’t I send you my envoy to ask for the return of my enemies? But you refused my request. Didn’t I send you a messenger and tell you to go back to your own land? But you said you had gone into too much expense to go back, you gathered together a huge army, you came as far as this point, you found what you thought a hopeful situation, and you were determined to pay back to Islam what treatment you got from it. What did you get as a result of your unruly act?”

Emperor:— “I gathered together a great army composed of different races in order to conquer your lands, and I spent a great deal of money. The fate of my country and of my person is in your hands. In this situation I stand before you. Stop scolding me, and do what you want.”

Sultan:— “What would you do to me if you had won the victory?”

Emperor:— “If you were thus left to my mercy, or to that of my men, I would have ordered them to cut your head off, or to hang you.”

Sultan; (aside):— “God knows he has told the truth. He would have lied if he had spoken otherwise. He is an intelligent and brave man; therefore he does not deserve being killed. (Then aloud) What do you think I will do to you?”

Emperor:— “There are three alternatives: First, you will kill me; second, you will exhibit me before the public in the lands which I planned to conquer; and as for the third alternative, there is no use telling you that, because you will not do it anyhow.”
Sultan:—“And what is that?”

Emperor:—“You pardoning me; your accepting the treasures I will offer you, your concluding an agreement of friendship between us two; your considering me a serf to your throne; and your returning me to the land of Greeks as one of your commanders and your “Regent” You will gain nothing by killing me; they will enthrone someone else in my place.”

Sultan:—“I never thought of anything else than pardoning you. Buy yourself off.”

Emperor:—“Would the Sultan deign to say how much?”

Sultan:—“Ten million Dinars (approximately two and a half billion Turkish Liras).

Emperor:—“You would be justified if you would ask for the annexation of the Land of Greeks as a whole for granting my life; but ever since I became their Emperor, I spent the Greek People's money, confiscated their property and drove them to poverty in order to organize armies and wage wars.”

Thus ended the historical conversation between Alparslan and his prisoner Romanos Diogenes, but the discussions continued, and the Byzantine Emperor had to accept the following terms:

1. The Emperor will pay a ransom of 1,500,000 Dinars for his freedom.
2. He will also pay the Seljuk Emperor an annual tribute of 300,000 Dinars.
3. He will send to the assistance the Seljuk Emperor as great a force as demanded, when needed.

Believing that these were only conditions for his freedom, the Byzantine Emperor asked the Seljuk Ruler to allow him to set out on his journey back before someone else replaced him on the throne, in which case he would be unable to fulfill his obligations. But Alparslan reminded him that the bargain would not be over before he agreed to return the newly captured provinces of Antioch, Urfa, Menbick, and Malazgirt, together with the Moslem prisoners taken by the Byzantines. The Emperor said in reply that it was beyond his power to return these provinces there and then, that upon his safe return to his land he would send troops to these provinces and deliver them to the Sultan, but that no one would heed him if he gave such an order now. As for the prisoners, the Emperor promised to put them on their way as soon as he reached his country and to treat them gently.
It must be noted that the conditions for the settlement of the dispute were quite lenient when compared with the magnitude of the victory that was won. Furthermore, the fulfillment of almost all the conditions depended on the Emperor’s safe return to his throne.

It was only after reaching this agreement that the Byzantine Emperor’s manacles and fetters were untied, but he still had to wait until the morrow to receive a truly Royal treatment. As a matter of fact, when the Byzantine Emperor was received in audience by the Seljuk Ruler on Sunday he found his confiscated throne ready for him. The Sultan made him sit next his own throne, and declared his decision in the following words:

“I have accepted you as my friend, because I am convinced that you are worthy of my trust. I send you back to your land, and return you to your throne.”

Upon this official declaration, the Emperor kissed the ground in gratitude before the Sultan.

Sultan Alparslan delegated a force of 200 men to act as body-guards to the Emperor during his trip. He himself accompanied the Emperor for a distance of one league (6 kms.) to see him off. The Emperor insisted that he should walk on foot by the side of the Sultan’s mount, but Alparslan did not allow any such humiliation. The two Rulers embraced each other before separation, and the Byzantine Emperor sent the accompanying bodyguard back when he reached the city of Sivas.

Romanos Diogenes heard that someone else had been placed on the Byzantine throne, when he was still in Sivas. He fought for his legitimate right, but was finally captured by ruse, and was blinded by a style. He died (1072) not long after.

If the same conditions had remained in existence, or in other words if Romanos Diogenes had reclaimed his throne, the Battle of Malazgirt would continue to be looked upon as the greatest battle ever recorded in history, but would not have produced such far reaching and extensive results. But the fact that Alparslan’s vassal and ally Romanos Diogenes lost his cause and died did not leave any chance for the Turks to profit from the outcome of the great pitched battle. Feeling deep sorrow of his ally’s disastrous end, Alparslan took the oath to avenge him, and while he himself conducted a campaign in the direction of Central Asia, he commissioned the Sons of Kutalmis, who were to be the future founders of the Seljuk State of Anatolia, to conquer this region. After the Agreement was thus
annulled, the raids on Anatolia were re-opened, and the Battle of Malazgirt regained its true value. It is for this reason that this Battle constituted a decisive turning point in the conquest of Anatolia and its becoming the motherland of the Turks; because there were the following deep-rooted differences between the battles waged before and after this major clash:

1. Because the Byzantine army was annihilated at Malazgirt, the Turkish raids on Anatolia did not meet any serious resistance.

2. As a result, the invasion was realized with great speed. While former Turkish attacks took twenty-five years to reach The Sea of Marmara, the Turkish raiders were to leave no ground untrodden in the shores of the Aegean and the Marmara within two years and had even captured Uskudar (Scutary) on the opposite shore of Istanbul proper.

3. In former battles, the Turkish raiders generally returned to their bases in Ahlat and Aleppo, carrying with them their booties; but this time they decided to stay in Anatolia. Although it can be said that lack of sufficient force to drive them out of Anatolia played the main role in their decision, it can also be claimed that the Turks had begun to identify themselves with this land and to look upon it as their future mother-country.

4. Nevertheless, it is also true that these attacks were the continuation of raids conducted before the Battle of Malazgirt. The fact that Turkish raids reached Mid-Anatolia almost in no time and continued to extend in all directions from that point is not just a coincidence.

5. The establishment of a number of local Turkish States not long after this date constituted an actual manifestation of this policy and an important stage in the conquest of Anatolia and its adoption as the mother-country of the Turks.