

The Manzikert Campaign from an Ottoman Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the battle of Manzikert, which marked the beginning of a new period, through the-as-yet unpublished manuscript of the sixteenth-century Ottoman historian, Ahmed ibn Mahmud. Since it has little fresh to add to what we know from earlier texts, its value lies in the handling of his material. Though it is modelled on the account of the Arab writer Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, there are numerous rearrangements and deliberate omissions. All these elements serve to meet Ahmed's compositional goal which should be seen through the prism of Alp Arslan's devoted faith to God that decided his victory at Manzikert.

KEYWORDS

Ahmed Ibn Mahmud, Saljūq-nāma, Manzikert (battle of), Alp Arslan, Romanos IV Diogenes, Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, al-Husayni

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1. INTRODUCTION

Soon after his ascendance to the throne, Alp Arslan conducted his first successful campaign in Caucasus. In 1065 he became governor of Ani and in about 1068 annexed numerous Georgian areas. Meanwhile, the emir Afshin with his troops was marching unmolested through the eastern part of Asia Minor. It was then when Byzantium decided to carry out an offensive against Seljuk aggression. In 1068 Romanos Diogenes, a soldier by profession, ascended the throne with the purpose of clearing eastern provinces of the Seljuks. His first two expeditions in 1068 and 1069 met with some success, but nothing significant. In 1071, he set out his third expedition which culminated in the battle of Manzikert. Alp Arslan, at that time, was leading a military operation against Northern Syria, aiming to expand his sphere of influence and bring territories controlled by Arab emirs under his suzerainty. His foremost target, however, was a plunder-rich offensive against the Fatimids of Egypt.¹ Upon news of the emperor's advance with a sizable army, the sultan, who had been left with a limited number of horsemen, abandoned all his plans in Syria and forged his way into Armenia. Diogenes, following the northern route, arrived at Theodosiupolis (mod. Erzurum). He sent off the mercenary and picked forces to Akhlat, and assaulted Manzikert with the remainder of his army. After reducing the fort and the city, he headed in a southerly direction towards Akhlat to join the forces already there. It was at that time when the foraging party was harassed by the advanced body of the sultan's army. Diogenes called upon the troops at Akhlat for help, but received no response; hence he decided to proceed to battle with the remaining troops. On Friday 26 August, the two armies were lined up against each other close to Manzikert. The Byzantines were tricked by the feigned retreat of the enemy and suffered a sound defeat, while the emperor was taken captive to the sultan. He was released eight days later, after he signed a peace deal with the victor of the battle.

There is a plethora of sources, written in several languages, which deal with the event in question. This was a significant milestone in Byzantine history, given that it opened the doors to the systematic conquest of Asia Minor by the Turks. It is worth noting that Carole Hillenbrand (2007), in her anthology of Muslim sources, does not mention the account of Ahmed ibn Mahmud,² though this sixteenth-century writer is the sole extant representative in Ottoman literature. His source is, as yet, unpublished; and the way he brings his material together serves to point out the didactic aim of his story, which is only partially identical with that of his core source: the *Mi'rāt al-zamān fi ta'rīh al-a'yān* of the Baghdadi historian Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi.³ So, in this study, we discuss his reconstruction of the battle of Manzikert. Ahmed transmits accurately the substance of his source and proceeds to some reworkings of the material available to him. He furthermore incorporates and redeploys other stories of preceding writers, but also gives some new narrative elements, unattested elsewhere. These features, along with several exaggerations and some conspicuously deliberate omissions, define the framework within which Ahmed builds his own version of the battle, as we will see in the last section of this paper. And his version may also reflect on how the Ottomans in general saw Alp Arslan's victory long after the Seljuk era.

¹ A deeper analysis of Alp Arslan's aims in Syria is provided by Beihammer 2017: 152–155.

² The idea for this article was generated from a reference to Ahmed in a talk Professor Speros Vryonis Jr. gave at the sixteenth International Symposium that was held in Athens (8–11 May, 1997) by the Institute for Byzantine Research (1998: 240).

³ On Sibṭ and his work, see the entry by Cahen (1971: 752–753) in the *EP*, vol. 3. Transliteration of names, terms, or toponyms follows the books of Vasiliev (1935), Hillenbrand (2007), the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (1991), and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition (1960–2005).



2. AUTHORSHIP

Al-Mawla Ahmed Ibn Mahmud, the son of the *imām* (*imām-zāde*), was an Ottoman scholar and historian from Bursa (d. 1569/1570) who was taught by famous religious professors. Later, he worked as instructor (*mudarris*) at several *madrasas* in Bursa and Istanbul. As a writer, Ahmed was highly prolific and most of his works have survived today. His writing output includes poetry, linguistics, history, and Islamic topics. The first reference to his name is found in the bibliographical work of *New'ī-zāde Aṭā'ī* – it dates back to the first half of the seventeenth century – who depicts Ahmed as the most distinguished intellectual of his era.⁴ The account of the battle of Manzikert is in his historical book, entitled *Saljūq-nāma*.⁵ This probably was the earliest attempt to write a history of the Great Seljuks in the Ottoman Empire. It covers the period from the age of Tuqaq, the Seljuk's father, to the emergence of the Ottoman principality. In all likelihood, Ahmed wished to record and elaborate the roots of the Ottoman dynasty. The aims however of his writing are obscure, while the date of his book's composition is unknown.⁶ It is a mere suggestion that he finished the *Saljūq-nāma* in the last months of his life (Merçil 1969: 227–228).

The text survives in only two manuscripts. The first is kept in the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford, and the second is preserved in the Selimiye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi at Edirne.⁷ The oldest is the Bodleian's manuscript that dates back to 1011 (1602/1603). Though the other one has no date of copying, Erdoğan Merçil (1969: 220), who went through both manuscripts, assumes that it is a seventeenth-century work too. The Bodleian's manuscript is complete, while the second is mutilated at the beginning. There is no printed edition of the original text, but a partial translation into modern Turkish by Merçil (2011). The *Akhbār al-dawla al-saljūqiyya* of al-Husayni became the skeleton on which Ahmed's account was built,⁸ but he also made use of the works of other Arabic, Persian, and Syrian writers such as Ibn al-Qalanisi, Ibn al-Jawzi, Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, al-Isfahani, Ibn al-Athir, Bar Hebraeus, and Mustawfi (see Merçil 1969: 228–230; 2009: 397–398).⁹

As for the Manzikert campaign, things are reversed: the telling features of Ahmed's account have their roots in Sibṭ who has taken over the narrative from Ghars al-Ni'ma Muhammad [he was a very influential person close to the caliph of Baghdad. His text, lost to date, was based on personal experience and official government documents (Cahen 1962: 60–61)]. Excerpts from al-

⁴ It is titled *Hadā'iku'l-Hakā'ik Fi Tekmiletīṣ-Şakā'ik*. A critical edition of the text has been published by Donuk 2017. The relevant reference is in pages 536–537.

⁵ Some scholars have disputed Ahmed's authorship. Yinanç (1944: 11), for example, speculates that the *Saljūq-nāma* has been written by Muhammad bin Majd ad-Din; but he has found little support with this theory. For more on this issue, see discussion in Merçil 2011b: 12–14.

⁶ To our knowledge, except Merçil's study on Ahmed ibn Mahmud, no other in-depth study, has been undertaken as yet which analyses the *Saljūq-nāma* in its broader context.

⁷ It was previously stored in Edirne's Bâdi Efendi Library.

⁸ On the authorship of *Akhbār al-dawla al-saljūqiyya* and its sources, see Ayaz 1985: 9–30.

⁹ Although our project does not aim at a philological analysis of Ahmed's *Saljūq-nāma*, we tried to locate the manuscript at the Bodleian Library. Our attempt, however, did not meet with success. We contacted Professor (now retired) Erdoğan Merçil, but regretfully he keeps no copy of it. Thus, our article is based exclusively upon a digital copy of the manuscript that the Selimiye Yazma Eser Library kindly sent us. According to Merçil, the two manuscripts (with the exception of the first missing leaves of the one held in the Edirne's library) are very identical in their content and wording. For the sake of convenience, the pagination of Merçil's translation will be provided in square brackets. Also we are greatly indebted to Professor Mükerrrem Bedizel Aydın for helping us to overcome some difficulties in the reading of the copy available to us.



Husayni's work have also been used, but only to fill in missing information to Sibṭ's account. These excerpts are leavened with elements of Islamic legitimacy. Al-Qalanisi is also mentioned once, in a reference to the numerical strength of the two armies. A few segments which derive from an unnamed source (or perhaps sources) are also identified in the text. Their origin, though, cannot be traced, given that these segments are not found in any of the early Muslim texts. Ahmed's quite extensive description also includes two poems that will not concern us in this paper. The first uses literary devices to narrate battle scenes (Ahmed 20a [2011: 107]), while the second poem is inserted after the reference to the wind that blew in the face of the sultan's men and deals with his prayers to God for help (Ahmed 20a [2011: 108]).

3. ALP ARSLAN'S MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN SYRIA

Ahmed, who patterns his work around Sibṭ's account, gives a lengthy survey of the sultan's expedition to Upper Syria. The narrative account begins with the year 462 (1069/1070)¹⁰ when Alp Arslan in short time reduced Arjish and Manzikert.¹¹ Going from thence towards Edessa, he sent orders to the emir Afshin¹² to encroach on imperial territory and hunt down the Turkoman chieftain Erisgen (Arisiaghī).¹³ The relations of the two men had been clouded over owing to Erisgen's devastating inroads in Asia Minor. Being afraid of his brother-in-law's anger and reaction, Erisgen sided with the Byzantines following his victory against Manuel Komnenos at Sebasteia (mod. Sivas) in Spring 1070.¹⁴ After the aforementioned cities, it was the turn of Mayyafariqin (Martyropolis), which was under Arab control, to fall to Alp Arslan. The inhabitants surrendered, paying more than one hundred thousand *dīnārs*. The same fate befell Severak (Sebābarōk)¹⁵ with all the adjacent outposts.¹⁶ In the meantime, another detachment assaulted Harran, making its people seek shelter in the fort of Rafīqa (mod. al-Raqqā). But after a short while, they declared their allegiance to Alp Arslan, choosing to ransom their lives with gold.¹⁷

It was 6-Safar 463 (November 13, 1070), when the sultan pitched camp in front of the walls of Edessa (mod. Urfa). The historian gives an alternative date of 2-Rabī' al-Awwal 463 (it cor-

¹⁰ Kafesoğlu (1988: 48) places the outset of the sultan's expedition in July 1070, while Beihammer (2017: 153) in August/early September.

¹¹ Ahmed 19b [2011: 90]. The sack of Arjish (Artze, 'Argish) and the massive slaughter of its inhabitants are also mentioned by Attaleiates (2011: 114.28–115.5) and Bar Hebraeus (1976: 219), while Sibṭ (2011: 166), on the other hand, confines himself to merely stating that the Seljuks killed some citizens in the two cities and took others into slavery.

¹² Having been established on Mt. Amanus (mod. Nur Dağları) since 1066/1067, Afshin made continual inroads into Byzantine territory. He sacked Antioch (mod. Antakya), Melitene (mod. Malatya), and raided as far west as Chonai (mod. Honaz). Cahen 1934: 626; Vryonis 1971: 94; Başan 2010: 76.

¹³ For more information on Erisgen, the sultan's brother-in-law, see Cahen 1934: 625, and Peacock 2015: 54–55.

¹⁴ See Attaleiates, 2011: 110.5–19; Bryennios 1975: 101.1–103.7. For Erisgen's image in Greek texts, where he is referred to as Chrysoskoulos, see Shliakhtin 2016: 286–288.

¹⁵ This Byzantine city also escaped the pillaging, paying one thousand *dīnārs*. Sibṭ 2011: 166; Bar Hebraeus 1976: 219.

¹⁶ We learn from Bar Hebraeus (1976: 219) that before advancing on Severak, Alp Arslan seized Amida (mod. Diyarbakır).

¹⁷ Ahmed 19b [2011: 90–91]; Bar Hebraeus (1976: 217–218) ascribes these raids to Kemūštakīn (Gümüş-Tekin) who later was assassinated by Afshin in Akhlāt. But further down in the text (219) he has Alp Arslan occupy those places. He concedes, though, that he has consulted two manuscripts, one Persian and one Arabic (222). In this light, it must not come as a surprise to us that his account contains, in some points, intermingled information.



responds to December 8, 1070), clarifying that this piece of information comes from another writer whose name, however, is not provided. This is shrouded with some mystery, because neither Sibt nor al-Husayni writes anything about it.¹⁸ Also there is no concrete indication that Ahmed has used other material from this unknown text in his own account. After the city refused to capitulate, Alp Arslan – so the story goes – began the assault,¹⁹ but met with stubborn resistance from the Edessenes.²⁰ In his effort to break the bonds of the siege, Diogenes despatched an envoy with a letter to Alp Arslan. Once the two sides concluded an agreement, the citizens began to collect money for the tribute.²¹ But when the stones for the catapults were thrown away and the tree trunks that filled up the moat around the walls were burnt, they violated the pledge. Ahmed makes no assertion as to why that happened. We learn however from the Coptic Orthodox bishop Ibn al-Muqaffa'²² that a Syrian soldier in the Seljuk army wrote a message on an arrow, which he shot into the city walls, to inform the inhabitants that the sultan secretly intended to plunder the city.²³ The failure of that agreement, Ahmed states, incurred the sultan's ire. It is unknown why he put the blame on the shoulders of Diogenes' envoy and wanted to have him executed. The execution was finally impeded by the vizier Nizam al-Mulk, arguing that it is particularly unjust and unusual for a sovereign to order the death of an envoy. His words appeased the sultan who changed his mind and sent the envoy back with honours. Meanwhile, shortage of food supplies and tiredness brought about distress in the Seljuk army. The sultan, thus, resolved to lift the siege and march on to Aleppo (Ahmed 19b–20a [2011: 91–92]; Sibt 2011: 166).

He crossed the Euphrates River and, moving southwards, he arrived at Badāya²⁴ on 14-Rabī' al-Ākhir 463 (January 19, 1071). Then, he pushed forward towards Aleppo by way of Manbij (Hierapolis), but did not assault its walls. If we may believe the thirteenth-century Syrian chronicler Bar Hebraeus (1976: 220), there was an agreement between Alp Arslan and Diogenes.²⁵ The latter propounded to exchange Manbij²⁶ for Arjish, Ahklat, and Manzikert. Further, he committed himself to paying an annual tribute. Alp Arslan acquiesced²⁷ and continued his journey, while his very name spread terror wherever he passed through. In this light, the Arab governor of the city Mahmud bin Zuabe refused to greet and pay respect to him at the instigation of his friend Ibn

¹⁸ The most likely explanation is that this information is lifted from an anonymous source.

¹⁹ The numbers of the sultan's army are absurdly inflated by Ibn al-Muqaffa' 1959: 304–305: six hundred thousand horsemen and foot soldiers, not counting the attendants.

²⁰ As regards the duration of the siege, sources do not converge. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (1959: 306–307) reports that the sultan stayed at Edessa forty five days in total, while the fighting itself continued for thirty eight days. The Armenian chronicler Matthew of Edessa (1993: 132) writes fifty days. Without quoting any source of information, Cahen (1934: 627) argues that Alp Arslan vehemently besieged Edessa for one month.

²¹ Ibn al-Muqaffa' (1959: 305), asserts that the process of negotiations between Basil – son of Alousianos and governor (*doux*) of the city – and Alp Arslan lasted seven days. Sibt (2011: 166) informs us that the money tribute amounted to fifty thousand gold *dīnārs*. See also, Bar Hebraeus 1976: 219.

²² For a short biography of Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa', see the entry by Labib (1971: 885–886) in the *EP*, vol. 3.

²³ Ibn al-Muqaffa' 1959: 305. Matthew of Edessa (1993: 131) says nothing about the truce negotiations. He writes that despite the Seljuks' presence before walls of the city for eight days, the Edessenes, being scared to death, stayed inactive until a soldier from the sultan's army warned them to prepare for the impending assault.

²⁴ It is located northeast of Manbij. Beihammer (2017: 153) argues that the sultan billeted his troops at that region until the end of March.

²⁵ For a detailed biography of *Gregory Abū'l-Faraj*, also known as Bar Hebraeus, see Wallis Budge's introduction to the text.

²⁶ The city had been reduced by Diogenes in the 1068 campaign. The Greek historian Michael Attaleiates (2011: 86.11–87.25) provides a first-hand account of the siege of Hierapolis.

²⁷ Cahen (1934: 627) speculates that Diogenes' proposal was made two months later.



Han. The caliphal envoy Naqib al-nuqaba had already intervened to conclude a compromise between Mahmud and Alp Arslan, but his effort fell to the ground.²⁸ By Ahmed's account, the Seljuk army arrived at Aleppo (Ḥalab) two days before Jumādā al-ʿĀkhir expired, which corresponds to 1 April 1071).²⁹ Shortly after the siege began and the battle flared up, Mahmud left the city at night and humbly presented himself in the tent of the sultan to pledge allegiance and pay a large sum of money. The latter treated him with kindness. He bestowed upon him a robe of honour, and sent him back to Aleppo.³⁰ The scene is reminiscent of Alp Arslan's generous behaviour to Diogenes, following the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert. The sultan did not omit to ask Mahmud about his friend, Ibn Han. When he was told that he had sought shelter in Damascus, he ordered his people to bring him back, and treated him with honour too (Ahmed 20b [2011: 96]; Sibṭ 2011: 168).

Once again, the historian turns his attention to Erisgen, and particularly to his arrival at the fortress of Derbent³¹ which was governed by a Greek woman – her name was Maryam. Erisgen asked permission to pass through her land on his way to Constantinople, but she refused. Thus, the two sides began to prepare for war. Diogenes, upon learning the news, despatched against the Turkoman chieftain his army under the overall command of Manuel Komnenos.³² Bar Hebraeus (1976: 220), on the contrary, states that Maryam governed the fortress of Tzamandos (mod. Kuşkalesi) and attributes those pillaging raids to Afshin. While marching through Cappadocia with his men, as the Syrian chronicler says, they found themselves in harsh winter conditions. He asked her to enter the city and buy food supplies; otherwise, he threatened to wreak havoc in the whole land. Maryam acceded to his request. Ahmed writes that Erisgen informed in advance that he had not come into Anatolia with bad intentions. His aim was to run away from Afshin; but Manuel did not pay heed to his explanations. As a result, the two sides clashed in battle at Sebasteia. Erisgen won the victory and brought his opponent into captivity. The victor offered to release the Byzantine general, if he was granted asylum. Manuel acquiesced and the two men departed for Constantinople.³³ From Scutari, Afshin sent to the emperor, requesting him to deliver Erisgen, but he did not receive a positive answer. In retaliation, he resumed his incursions and moved eastward towards Akhlat.³⁴ On his arrival there he sent a message to the sultan, informing him that his progress across Asia Minor met with no opposition. Pleased at the news, the sultan departed from Aleppo – having first appointed his son as deputy –³⁵ and headed for Tābriz.³⁶ It seems that Ahmed's narrative breaks off abruptly; but his reference to Erisgen's defection and Afshin's attempt to bring him back from Byzantium should not be taken

²⁸ Ahmed 20a–20b; 2011: 93–96; Sibṭ 2011: 166–168. Further details on the dialogue process between the caliphal envoy and Mahmud are provided by Ibn al-Athir 2002: 169 and note 30.

²⁹ Cf. Cahen (1934: 628) who places the sultan's arrival at Aleppo towards the beginning of May 1071.

³⁰ Ibn al-Athir claims that Mahmud was accompanied by his mother Mani'a, and she was the one who first talked to the sultan. Richards 2002: 170. Beihammer (2017: 154) suspects that this occurred on 4 May 1071.

³¹ As Merçil (2011: 97, note 135) also remarks, this place is the modern Pınarbaşı, and therefore it should not be confused with Derbent (Bāb al-Abwāb) in the Caucasus.

³² Sibṭ (2011: 168) mistakenly names Komnenos as Michael, and Ahmed 20b [2011: 97] reproduces this error.

³³ Ahmed 20b–21a [2011: 96–98]; Sibṭ 2011: 168–169. Erisgen's appearance in the palace of Constantinople and the honours he received from Diogenes are recorded by Attaleiates 2011: 110.20–111.2; and Bryennios 1975: 103.7–8.

³⁴ On the background of Erisgen's defection to the Byzantines and Afshin's response, see Beihammer 2017: 150–151.

³⁵ This piece of information derives from the *Akhbār al-dawlat al-Saljūqiyya* of al-Husayni 1985: 116.

³⁶ Ahmed 21a–21b [2011: 98–99]; Sibṭ 2011: 169. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (1959: 308) narrates that Alp Arslan, on his way back from Aleppo, passed from Edessa once again. He stayed for four days without fighting.



as a genuine digression. It works more as an introduction to the sultan's shift from the Syrian to the Anatolian field of operations.

When the emperor was told about Afshin's incursions, he decided to take steps against the Seljuks and issued orders for the mustering of a large army. Meanwhile, the sultan despatched two delegates (Aytegin Süleymani and Mahmud Khan are their names) to Damascus for the purpose of reading the sermon in the name of the caliph of Baghdad. He also ordered a new coinage to be struck with the caliph's name on it.³⁷ At almost that time, an emperor's messenger came to meet the sultan. His request for the return of Manbij and Manzikert roused the latter's harsh bitterness and sent him back to the capital of Byzantium without a consenting answer. Thus, the battle between the two commanders was now inevitable. It is not clear what the origin of this detail in Ahmed's account might have been because it is not contained in the texts either of Sibt or al-Husayni (21a [2011: 98–99]). Its accuracy, therefore, is quite dubious, given that Manbij had been under Byzantine control since 1068, and it did not change hands in the meantime.

4. THE MILITARY ENCOUNTER AT MANZIKERT

The total strength of Diogenes amounted to six hundred thousand soldiers. It was a multi-ethnic army that consisted of Greeks, Franks, Ghuzz, Persians, Armenians,³⁸ and Rus. It seems that Ahmed gives credence to Sibt (he lifts from the work of Ibn al-Qalanisi) rather than to al-Husayni who reduces the size by half.³⁹ The composition of the army is not recorded by Sibt. Al-Husayni, on the other hand, makes no reference to Rus. Some Muslim chroniclers claim that the Rus were the first who were defeated in the preliminaries to the battle of Manzikert (to this, we will turn later). It is most probable that the information derives from a different source text; yet, it is difficult to be identified. The army was followed by thousands of servants and workmen, and by two thousand four hundred carts which were being dragged by two water buffaloes each. They carried nails, horseshoes, weapons and siege machines. Among them we learn that there was a massive mangonel – pulled by one thousand two hundred men – that could throw huge stones; each stone weighted up to ten *qintārs*.⁴⁰ Diogenes' treasury, Ahmed writes, included one million *dīnārs*, ten hundred thousand silk robes, gold saddles, gold and silver jewellery, and certain other precious things (Ahmed 21b [2011: 99–100]; Sibt, 2011: 170).

The Muslim lands (Rayy, Syria, Egypt, Khurasan, and Iraq) were divided up and allotted to thirty-five thousand commanding officers as fiefs.⁴¹ The goal Diogenes had in mind was to take up summer quarters in Persia. Ahmed next inserts into his narrative an episode that is located at a later point in Sibt's text, and particularly in Alp Arslan's dialogue with the enslaved emperor. This episode was an omen that occurred before the campaign began. At the very moment when

³⁷ Sibt (2011: 168) talks about the delegates at Damascus, but not about the release of the new coinage. Ahmed 21a [2011: 98–99].

³⁸ The Armenian troops formed the nucleus of the army's fighting strength. Such is the opinion of Charanis (1963: 20), which seems to be endorsed by Cheynet (1980: 424); and (Andrews 2009: 91). On their role in the battle of Manzikert, see Vratimos 2020b: 73–89.

³⁹ Even al-Husayni's figure (1985: 116) of three hundred thousand troops seems to be magnified significantly.

⁴⁰ *Qintār* (*kantar* in Ottoman-Turkish) is a weight measure.

⁴¹ It is noted that no number is specified in the account of Sibt (2011: 170), while al-Husayni says nothing about it. On this, see Hillenbrand 2007: 85, note 125.



Diogenes was praying for victory inside the church of Hagia Sophia, the idol (بت) of Jesus fell down in the direction of *qibla*. And this was repeated for three consecutive days. It is important to point out that, unlike Ahmed, Sibṭ uses the word Cross (صليب) instead of idol.⁴² The relocation of the episode in Ahmed's account should not be treated lightly. It is a rather fair certainty that it serves as a portentous introduction to the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert.

The news of Diogenes' campaign surprised the sultan who had been with four thousand warriors.⁴³ He despatched his wife with the heavy baggage to Hamadhan,⁴⁴ and commanded his vizier Nizam al-Mulk to fit out an army for him. Alp Arslan himself delivered a rousing speech which ended with a warning to his men: if it is his fate to die in the upcoming battle, his son Malikshah should take his place on the throne.⁴⁵ Next, he made a drive towards the Armenian plateau,⁴⁶ while ten thousand Kurds were assembled on his way.⁴⁷ In the meantime, Alp Arslan's advance guard attacked the reconnaissance troops of the Byzantines and wiped them out.⁴⁸ It is notable that chroniclers who draw upon the text of Ghars al-Ni'ma (e.g. Ibn al-Jawzi and his grandson Sibṭ) do not refer to the ethnic identity of these troops. Yet, chroniclers who copy from 'Imad al-Din, state that a detachment of ten to twenty thousand Rus was routed at Akhlat.⁴⁹ Ahmed goes on to report that their leader was captured and his nose was cut off, while the Cross they carried was despatched to Hamadhan and from there to Baghdad. The size of the Byzantine army stroke terror into the heart of every Muslim, but the sultan himself remained fearless (Ahmed 21b–22a [2011: 102]; Sibṭ, 2011: 169).

The caliph ordered that a prayer should be read out from the pulpits for the sultan and his men. It was written by Abu Sa'īd bin Mawsilaya⁵⁰ and sent to the *khatibs* (preachers). The prayer itself is not found in Sibṭ's account. It is a rather abridged version, although imbued with much stronger religious sentiment, of the one given by al-Husayni, and goes as follows:

O God of the worlds, responder to those who call on [You], responder to prayers of desperate people, raise the banners of Islam and the banner of *Sharī'a*, and make Alp Arslan victorious against the infidels. Give greatness to the helpers of Islam, render polytheism and polytheists inferior, and destroy the genres of polytheism and infidelity. Keep the polytheists and infidels away from Muslims and hamper them. Assist the ones who – in obedience to You and in their intention to help our religion – are going for *jihād* in Your path against infidels and obstinates with their own selves and their properties; do not deny their needs,

⁴² Ahmed 21b [2011: 100–101]; Sibṭ, 2011: 172–173. For the Arabic text, see Sümer and Sevim 1971: 33.

⁴³ Al-Husayni (1985: 117) points out that Alp Arslan was accompanied by fifteen thousand horsemen.

⁴⁴ Other chroniclers, whose accounts stem from the work of 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, have Tabriz (e.g. Al-Bundari, 59; Ibn al-'Adim, 74; Rashid al-Din, 90). These texts have been translated into English by Hillenbrand 2007.

⁴⁵ The speech is similar to that found in Sibṭ's account but longer, because it is loaded with extra religious references (Ahmed 21b [2011: 101]; Sibṭ, 2011: 169). See also Ibn al-Athir (Richards 2002: 170).

⁴⁶ While being at Edessa on his way back from Aleppo, the sultan was informed about Diogenes' advance on Muslim lands by Naṣr ibn Naṣr ad-Dawlah. Then, he left Syria and pressed forward against the emperor (Ibn al-Muqaffa' 1959: 308).

⁴⁷ This reference to an auxiliary force of Kurdish warriors is not found elsewhere. Sibṭ, 2011: 170.

⁴⁸ This combat might be recorded, though indirectly, by Attaleiates too. See discussion in Vratimos 2020: 161–162.

⁴⁹ E.g. Al-Bundari (Hillenbrand 2007: 59); Ibn al-Athir (2002: 170). Although Shepard (1975: 218–219, and note 17) remarks that the word *rūs* also carries the meaning of 'heads' in Arabic, he is convinced that this is a clear-cut reference to Russians.

⁵⁰ He was a *munshī* (writer or secretary) who had entered the service of the Abbasid caliph al-Qa'im in 432/1040 and retained his post until his death (497/1104). Ayaz 1985: 219, note 286.



help and assist them. Insult their foes, make the arms [of Your warriors] so long that they may reach wherever they wish, and may attain their desires. Raise the banners of Alp Arslan, protect him from the foes, back him with Your support, and strengthen him with Your help. Fill the hearts of his warriors with victory and confidence. Drive the infidels away from them. Kill them with the hands [of Alp Arslan's] warriors and destroy their abodes. May Your good fate, success, and sacred help be everlasting on their banners. He refused the desires of his heart for Your sake, and, giving his own self and his property in Your path, he is going for *ghazā*. He plans to make *jihād* against your enemies. O Lord, You say in the evidence of Your Old Word [i.e. Qur'an] that You offer the opportunity to those who go for *jihād* in Your path, and render them victorious over their foes. You are the Lord of the worlds and the truest speaker. Your saying and commitment are true, Your word is right. Now the holders of [true] religion and the believers in the Oneness of Allah, who are with Alp Arslan, are going to give their all and are going to turn their attention to the path of *Sharī'a*. O You most gracious of the gracious ones and best of helpers, destroy their foes too, fill them with the victory and with Your grace, make them victorious over their foes and make them achieve their goals and purposes. Shield them from the enemies of [our] religion with Your grace. Keep them safe from the stratagems of their foes and guard [them]. May they achieve their goals by being surrounded with Your goodness. Make them victorious with Your help and wipe out the enemies of our religion and the helpers of misguided people. (Ahmed 22a [2011: 102–103]. Cf. al-Husayni 1985: 117–119).

Diogenes arrived at Manzikert, while the sultan reached a place called al-Rahwa.⁵¹ It was 15-Dhu'l-Qa'da 463 (August 14, 1071). An alternative date is given the 25-Dhu'l-Qa'da 463 (24 August) but, once again, our historian does not name his source. He despatched an envoy to the emperor, requesting him to respect the treaty that the caliph had brokered for them,⁵² and to abandon his plan to attack on Muslim lands. The emperor, having the false impression that no one was able to stop the progress of his enormous army with fourteen thousand carts⁵³ full of money and weapons, responded that his expedition would be terminated in Ray. Not only this, but he offered to cede land in order to make the sultan subservient to Byzantium.⁵⁴ It is quite reasonable that the emperor's provocative answer roused very great bitterness (Ahmed 22a–22b [2011: 103–104]). By reason of this, the sultan responded with a rather offensive message whose content resembles the one found in the text of al-Husayni (1985: 124):

⁵¹ Al-Husayni (1985: 119) names the place Zhrā, while Matthew of Edessa (1993: 135) Toghotap. Its exact location, however, is as yet unknown.

⁵² It is most probable that Ahmed has misconstrued Sib's writings (2011: 169–170) which are found later in his text: the sultan upbraids his captive who earlier rejected the truce negotiations despite the active interference of the caliph's delegates. None of the existing sources record any treaty or agreement between the two leaders with the caliph's intervention.

⁵³ There is a notable difference between the fourteen thousand carts and the two thousand four hundred carts that he mentioned earlier.

⁵⁴ Here, Ahmed seems to draw upon *Akhbār al-dawlat al-Saljūqiyya*. Since Ayaz's translation (1985: 124) of the passage is not fully compatible with the text provided by Sümer and Sevim (1971: 10), I cite the translation by Hillenbrand 2007: 56. It may be of some interest to say here that al-Husayni, as he concedes, collected this information directly from a merchant on the bank of the Oxus River who, in turn, had heard this detail from his elders.



O irreligious infidel, and commander of cursed people, you should have known that you have not come here by yourself, and you have not performed this deed by your own ingenuity. You know that God intervened and brought you here to give your wealth and possessions as spoils to Muslims. You should have known that you will become my captive, my slave and almsman with the help of Allah. Some of your soldiers will be captured and fettered, while the rest will be sent to the hell in coffins. All your treasures and your possessions will become possessions of Muslims and spoils for those who believe in the Oneness of Allah. Do not run away, but be ready when the time comes. You will see how you and your soldiers will be led into captivity with fetters around their necks, how each of you will be dragged lamenting away, while your treasure will go into my treasury. Be patient to see how all of your wealth and possessions are going to become mine. Defend yourself if you are a man. (Ahmed 22b [2011: 104–105]).

The *imām* Abu Nasr Muhammad (al-Hanafi) warned the sultan that he is fighting for Islam. He suggested him to wait until Friday and face his opponent at the time when the preachers pray from the pulpits for the victory of his warriors against the ‘infidels’. On either side religious preparations were undertaken. In the Byzantine camp the Gospel reciting was held in the presence of monks, priests, and high-ranking military officers (Ahmed 22b [2011: 105]). Friday started out in Alp Arslan’s camp with the prayer and his talk to his warriors:

You must know that today there is no sultan or commanding sultan but Allah. Judgement and [divine] decree for His worshippers are all from God. There is no giver, receiver, or governor, but Him. I am – just like you – a worshipper and a feeble almsman of Allah. Now, let us all be supporters of the religion of Islam and of the Prophet’s *Sharī’a*. Let us cooperate together and battle against the infidels.⁵⁵ (Ahmed 22a–22b [2011: 106]).

Alp Arslan threw down his bow and arrows, and picked up his sword as a means of encouragement to his warriors, also instructing them to do likewise. Next, he advanced against the Byzantines with the boldness of the panther. Ahmed’s borrowings from al-Husayni, as concerns the battle of Manzikert, are completed with the Divine Providence in the glorious victory of Islam over Christianity: the Muslims were about to take flight when a dusty wind blew into their eyes. Alp Arslan dismounted from his horse to entreat God. He kept on entreating until the wind changed direction to blow in the face of the Byzantine soldiers.⁵⁶ The battle went on until evening when the imperial army turned to flight. During the pursuit, which continued until next morning, many Byzantines were killed and only a few escaped. The pursuers entered the enemy camp and

⁵⁵ The sultan’s talk, which is absent in Sibī’s text, is another small piece of evidence pointing to an informational connection to al-Husayni’s work (1985: 119–121).

⁵⁶ Ahmed 22b–23a [2011: 106–108]; al-Husayni 1985: 121–122. This is also repeated by the fifteenth-century Persian historian Mirkhwand (see, Hillenbrand 2007: 101). Attaleiates, on the contrary (2011: 124.25–125.5), attributes the Byzantine defeat to the act of betrayal of the commander of the rearguard, Andronikos Doukas, who retreated with his troops when the battle raged the hottest. Attaleiates’ testimony may be complemented with additional evidence from the *Hyle Historias* of Bryennios, who comments that ‘he (i.e. Andronikos) was not at all friendly towards the emperor’ (Gautier 1975: 115.13–14). Yet, it is not our concern here to discuss the reasons for the outcome of the battle.



looted Diogenes' treasures.⁵⁷ Many in the camp shared the same fate with their comrades, while the rest were led away into slavery (Ahmed 23a–23b [2011: 108–109]; Sibt 2011: 170).

The narrative shifts to the Seljuk camp where Sa'd al-Dawla Gawhara'in met the sultan to inform him that one of his *ghulāms* captured Diogenes. Before the battle began, Nizam al-Mulk had treated him with scorn saying: let him follow us, for he might bring the emperor into captivity. The *ghulām*, at the sultan's request, described how it happened: he attacked a man surrounded by soldiers, and was about to kill him. One of them yelled that he was the emperor of the Byzantines. Then, Alp Arslan ordered the captive to be brought before him. He struck him three blows, and reprimanded him for having disregarded the oaths he had sworn. Diogenes justified himself on the grounds that he had spent a great deal of money and effort in gathering a large army to penetrate into Muslim territory. To the question what he would do if he were the victor on the battlefield, the emperor admitted that he would have badly mistreated Alp Arslan. The latter, admiring his honesty and sincerity, asked him to guess what fate awaited him. Diogenes mentioned three options: to execute me, to make a public spectacle of myself in your domain, or to pardon and release me. Finally, the sultan pardoned the enslaved emperor, and the two men concluded a pact of friendship.⁵⁸ The dialogue continues with negotiations for the ransom Diogenes had to pay for his release. The final amount was settled at one million five hundred thousand *dīnārs*, while three hundred sixty thousand *dīnārs* had to be paid on an annual basis. Diogenes also pledged military support to the sultan, the concession of several cities and fortresses (including Antioch and Edessa), and the release of all Muslim prisoners.⁵⁹ Then, Alp Arslan ordered the fetters to be taken off and a drinking cup to be offered to Diogenes who thought it was for him and tried to drink it, but was prevented. He was indicated to bare his head first, untie his hair, put his face to the ground, and then to serve the sultan.⁶⁰ Diogenes did it. And when later he came back to his tent, he allocated ten thousand *dīnārs* to the slaves who served him and to the soldiers who guarded him⁶¹ (Ahmed 23b–24a [2011: 109–111]; Sibt, 2011: 171–172).

On the next day, a throne was set up for Diogenes. Alp Arslan himself dressed him in his garments and put on him his crown, as befitting an official royal festivity. He afterwards instructed him to bend down in the direction of Baghdad and kiss the ground. In doing so, Diogenes showed his respect to the caliph. Alp Arslan allowed him to return to his country, and raised a white silk banner for him with the saying: 'there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. He moreover accompanied Diogenes for some distance, and also gave him two chamberlains together with one hundred soldiers ordered to protect him during his travel to the capital. The two men embraced one another while mounted on horseback, and then the sultan left him (Ahmed 24a [2011: 111–112]; Sibt, 2011: 172).

The rest of the story follows Sibt who quotes the size of the two armies, as recorded by Ibn al-Qalanisi: Diogenes had gathered six hundred thousand soldiers, while Alp Arslan had been

⁵⁷ For more details on the spoils, see Cahen 1934: 636.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of Diogenes' eight days in captivity, see Vryonis 2001: 439–450. The paper includes the relevant translation of Sibt's account in pp. 444–446.

⁵⁹ By al-Husayni's account (1985: 125), Diogenes proposed an annual pay package of up to one million *dīnārs* and Alp Arslan acceded to the proposal. For more on the peace deal, see Leveniotis 2008: 184–196 and Cahen's (1934: 638–639) conclusions.

⁶⁰ According to the fourteenth-century historian Rashid al-Din, the two men were drinking red wine. Hillenbrand 2007: 93.

⁶¹ This detail is not recorded elsewhere.



with only four thousand warriors. After his glorious victory, the sultan wrote to the caliph about the battle, sending also Diogenes' crown together with some precious spoils.⁶² The caliph's congratulatory response is given by al-Husayni (1985: 125–126), but is not iterated by Ahmed who chose instead to end his own account with the victor's departure for Rayy and Hamadhan (Ahmed 24a–24b [2011: 112–113]; Sibt, 2011: 173).

CONCLUSIONS

Ahmed ibn Mahmud lived long after the event of concern to us here, and accordingly he could not rely on oral evidence or archival sources. Thus, he had no alternative but to make use of manuscripts of posterior historians. He should not, however, be regarded as a mere copyist who compiled his work in the 'scissors and paste' manner; nor does he simply weave his different sources together into one narrative. Instead, he seems to have carefully read the material he had on hand before he reworked it. Unlike writers like Ibn al-Athir or Bar Hebraeus, whose accounts are quite confusing and, at points, contradictory, Ahmed relocates certain excerpts to fit them better into his own narrative sequence which is interrupted only once: when he inserts a digression on Ibn al-Qalanisi's reference to the numbers of the opposing armies. Doubtlessly, its placement in the story at precisely the same point where Sibt ibn al-Jawzi cites the very same information should be seen as a clear-cut evidence of the interrelations between the two accounts. But even the careful copyist Ahmed falls into a striking contradiction: there is a serious discrepancy between the two thousand four hundred carts in the initial description of the imperial army and the fourteen thousand carts Diogenes mentioned to the envoy sent by Alp Arslan on the eve of the military encounter. In the first part that deals with the Seljuk expedition to Upper Syria, Ahmed slavishly follows the account given by Sibt, apparently because al-Husayni has nothing particular to say except the employment of Alp Arslan's son as deputy in Aleppo. It also contains a few new narrative elements, such as the alternative date of the sultan's arrival at Edessa, his encampment at Badāya, and the minting of a new coin with the caliph's name. These elements certainly provide a supplement to our knowledge of the military operation; but since their origin is hard to be identified, we may arrive at only tentative conclusions about their accuracy. The protagonist in the first part is the sultan who later becomes God's tool for bringing down the Christian empire; hence, the second part is by far of greatest interest because of the independent way in which Ahmed handles his sources. He draws upon the Manzikert account recorded by Sibt, although he seems to be more fascinated with that of al-Husayni. Select borrowings from the latter's work have been inserted into the narrative to facilitate the points that the Ottoman historian is trying to get across. His account up to Diogenes' arrival at Manzikert includes various rearrangements of his material which aim at a more precise chronological framing of the historical items, mingled, at some points, with fictitious reconstructions. The most notable are: Diogenes' peace agreement with the sultan after the caliph's initiative, and the ten thousand *dīnārs* that the enslaved emperor allotted to his slaves and wardens. It seems to suggest that an arrogant and erratic emperor turned into an obedient ally of a benevolent sultan, symbolising the subjugation of an unreliable Christianity to a reliable Islam.⁶³

⁶² Sibt (2011: 173) states that this happened on 23-Dhu'l-Hijja (September 21, 1071).

⁶³ This is reflected in the emperor's words to Alp Arslan: 'I will be (even) more obedient to you than your slaves' (Al-Husayni 1985: 125).



Though lack of criticism is an asset, Ahmed shapes his narrative to his own ends. He was well acquainted with al-Husayni's text; yet he does not allude to his source's statement that the Byzantine forces consisted of three hundred cavalry and infantrymen.⁶⁴ Likewise, he does not allude to al-Husayni's reference to the fifteen thousand mounted archers who accompanied the sultan to Manzikert. He reiterates only Sibt and al-Qalanisi's swelling numbers to highlight a much wider disparity between the two armies, and on this ground to stress the magnitude of the victory. His borrowings from al-Husayni aim at building up a better picture of the event. More than this, they aim at defining the didactic goal of his account. They are embellished with strong elements of anti-Christian feeling which are disclosed in the works of most of the Muslim narrators of the battle (Hillenbrand 2007: 123–125). In our case here, this is clearly illustrated in Romanos Diogenes' prayers at the church of Hagia Sophia where Ahmed emends the word for Cross to that for idol, stigmatising the Byzantines as idolatrous pagans. The Ottoman historian fosters the image of Alp Arslan as a brave fighter (he is notably compared to a panther) who did not lose his courage when his men were terrified by the size of the imperial army, but does not promote the image of a shrewd strategist who carefully drew up the plan of battle in the most efficient and effective way. The sultan is portrayed as a devout adherent to Sunni Islam⁶⁵ who would have not managed to win the battle without entreating God to reverse the direction of the winds. But even this was not enough. It was the persistence of his entreaties that brought positive results, because until then the Byzantines had allegedly almost turned his own troops to flight. Sibt (2011: 170) has the sultan announce to his assembled troops that he decided to join battle on Friday at the time of prayer. Ahmed, however, chose to follow al-Husayni's account that has the *imām* be the one who advised Alp Arslan to do so. It is sensible, thus, to conjecture that the caliph's congratulatory letter to Alp Arslan is purposely missing from Ahmed's account. For him, it is not the sultan's heroism to be singled out. It is the Oneness of God's magnificence who has the power to vanquish the largest armies, acting as guardian against infidel or obstinate rulers. From this viewpoint the sultan is turned from a main character in the first part of Ahmed's tale into a secondary character in the next. Such Islamic dimensions formulate the message that the Ottoman writer is trying to convey to his reader: only the intensive prayers and entreaties of the deeply devoted leader brought about the divine intervention. It was only then that the victory changed hands.

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⁶⁴ Hillenbrand (2007: 115) sees parallels with the Prophet Muhammad's victory against the large Meccan armies.

⁶⁵ There is an ongoing debate as regards the Seljuks' conversion to Islam during the times of Tughrul Beg and Alp Arslan. The most recent views concur that the process was of longer duration than initially thought. Peacock 2015: 9. Cf. Beihammer 2017: 112. On the contrary, Morton (2015: 109–118) shows certain cases that the Seljuks did compromise their Sunni identity in the name of political interests.



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