

THE DIPLOMATIC BYZANTINE CEREMONIAL DURING THE PERIOD OF THE FIRST FOUR CRUSADES (1095-1204)

Raul Constantin TĂNASE*

ABSTRACT:

THE PERIOD OF THE FIRST FOUR CRUSADES CONTRIBUTED TO THE REDISCOVERY OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE BY THE EUROPEAN NATIONS AND INCREASED THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CONTACTS BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE DIPLOMATIC BYZANTINE CEREMONIAL IS ONE OF THE REFERENCE FRAMES OF THE CULTURAL-IDEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE TWO CHRISTIAN WORLDS. AS FULL EXPRESSION OF THE IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY, THE PROTOCOL REPRESENTS AN INDICATOR OF THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY BETWEEN GREEKS AND LATINS, AS WELL AS A MANNER OF LEGITIMATION AND ASSERTION OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT'S SUCCESSORS CLAIMS OF UNIVERSAL HEGEMONY IN FRONT OF FOREIGN NATIONS. THIS STUDY AIMS TO ANALYZE THE COMPONENTS OF IMPERIAL CEREMONIAL AND HOW THIS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PERFORMANCE OF DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST IN THE PERIOD OF THE HOLY WARS.

KEY WORDS: CEREMONIAL, BYZANTINES, LATINS, DIPLOMACY, CRUSADE.

INTRODUCTION

The complex phenomenon of the Crusades and its multiple meanings has been the subject of numerous specialized studies, both in the Romanian space and the foreign one. The appeal to history and spirituality of Byzantium must be understood not only as a simple way of rehabilitation of the past but also as a hermeneutic effort to extract from the paradigm of the past the useful principles for the present¹. The Byzantine empire remains the frame within the Christian religion developed, formulated its basic dogmata and norms and place of apparition of numerous works of art, literature and culture, giving rise to higher forms of spiritual experience. Triggered in response to the Muslim conquest since the seventh century, the Crusades present a particular significance for the establishment of the frame in which the Latins and the Byzantines will interact during the following centuries. The Byzantine diplomacy showed

* PhD. Candidate, Faculty of Orthodox Theology at University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania. Contact: tanase.raul@yahoo.com

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¹ Radu Preda, *Biserica în stat: o invitație la dezbatere*, (București: Scripta, 1999), 131.

flexibility and it has always accommodated to the international context in order to preserve and achieve the objectives of the empire of Constantine the Great. The awarding of gifts for gaining the confidence of enemies, the matrimonial alliances, the development of a complex system of titles and dignities to reward the allies of the Byzantine Emperor, the oath provided by Western seniors, the banquet organized during the visits of the ambassadors, the kiss of peace, all were diplomatic strategies by which the Greeks tried to assert their superiority and achieve their goals.

THE CEREMONIAL WITHIN THE BYZANTINE DIPLOMACY (XI-XII CENTURIES)

The diplomatic ceremonial was a precise image of the Byzantine imperial ideology, whereby it was highlighted the privileged place of the emperor and of the Greeks in terrestrial and cosmic order. The protocol determinates the functioning of the imperial court and society as a whole, whereas all subjects were invited to participate in it through different roles that could be assigned to them. The Byzantines considered the ceremonies as a symbolic and incontestable affirmation of their faith and superior culture. The ceremonial held, as first goal, the confirmation of the glory and authority of basileus, who was crowned by God himself and the special place of the empire that he ruled in the earth and universal hierarchy². As God's lieutenant on earth, the emperor was his telluric correspondent. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the imperial power, within the palace of Constantinople, was exercised with order and measure, reproducing the harmonious movement which the Demiurge imparted to cosmos³. Like the universe, the basileus represents the God's creation, being chosen to exercise His will through him⁴.

The imperial ideology was reflected by the fundamental principle of order (*taxis*). The emperor held the supreme position in the hierarchy of the world and its relations with the subjects were dominated by the idea of the imperial cult. The terrestrial hierarchy constituted the precise image of the heavenly hierarchy, whereby each had a well established roll, the basileus being placed in the top of the hierarchical system⁵. The ceremonial emphasizes the distance between the chosen deity and the others peoples. The contempt of the Westerners was caused by the fear to see their dignity and autonomy underestimated through the medium of protocol, even if symbolically. In some circumstances, the hostility took the form of inferiority complex in front of the grandeur and sophistication of the Byzantine civilization; other time, this fear translated into a simple rejection of what was different and foreign. The chroniclers often showed distrust on the diplomatic ceremonial because it was difficult to determine what attitudes aimed to honoring the soldiers of Christ and what intended to denigrate them. The role of the protocol was to intimidate and impress the potential opponents of Byzantium and to constrain them to support the interests of Constantinople in times of tension.

² Zoe Antonia Woodrow, *Imperial ideology in middle Byzantine court culture: the evidence of Constantine porphyrogenitus's de ceremoniis*, (Durham University: Durham theses, 2001), 191.

³ Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *Le livre des cérémonies*, tome I, trad. par Albert Vogt, (Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1935-1939), 2.

⁴ Alain Ducellier, "La ville qui règne", *Constantinople 1054-1261. Tête de la chrétienté, proie des Latins, capitale grecque*, dirigé par Alain Ducellier et Michel Balard, (Paris: Éditions Autrement-Collection Mémoires n° 40, 1996): 41.

⁵ Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Histoire de Byzance*, deuxième édition, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 7.

The politics towards the Crusaders was influenced by the interests and prestige of the empire and after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Latins, the adoption of a distant and ambivalent attitude towards them has become a constant in the Greek politics. The desire to preserve the control over the capital and the Balkan provinces, the right to recover the old territories, the fear of exposing the emperor and his armies to excessive risks and the diplomatic preoccupation favoring good relations with the Muslim power, attracted a feeling of suspicion from the soldiers of Christ. For Alexios and the Byzantines, the Franks were barbarians, formidable in battle but uncultivated, changeable and greedy⁶. The diplomatic weapons of the basileus consisted in: divide to govern, impress by the imperial pomp, the manifestation of the attachment to the Crusaders' leaders by offering generous gifts, the oath of fidelity that he uses after to his advantage⁷. The letters to leaders of the crusades represented for the Byzantines the first contact with foreign authorities. The messages for the Latin seniors often expressed friendship, brotherhood and filial love, confusing for the soldiers of Christ doubting sincerity of the emperor⁸. The Western chroniclers interpreted the favors and gifts of the basileus towards the occidental leaders as a sign of perfidy of the Byzantines.

The standard characteristic and essential of the protocol of reception of the foreign sovereigns was the solemnity; the dramatic introduction of the ambassador to the basileus sitting on a imposing throne was followed by the permission given to the sojourner to sit on a shorter chair near the emperor⁹. The program included also banquets, processions, a tour of the monuments and Christian shrines, especially those holding holy relics¹⁰.

The political Byzantine ideology is reflected generally in the various rituals and symbolic references circulating during various ceremonial occasions and confirming, in a visual and collective manner, the imperial precepts¹¹. The ritual differences, intended to exalt the imperial power were directed according to a strict protocol, which regularized or limited the access to the emperor in order to establish a distance between him and his subjects, between the divine and the human world; this settlement also emphasized the divine and inaccessible character of the Greek sovereign. The dignity of the others officials was quantified by the proximity and farness unto the successor of Constantine, considered the thirteenth apostle, in the various rituals and processions which exalts its unique status. The order of the imperial court was governed by a complex system of priorities (*taxis*)¹², at the core of the organization and performance of imperial governance, which determined the rank of the various dignitaries and their role in the ceremonies. The clothes and purple shoes represented the obvious signs of

⁶ Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. II, trad. de Marina Marinescu, prefață și note de Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca, (București: Minerva, 1977), X, V, 4, 84.

⁷ Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. II, XII, V, 2, 182.

⁸ Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique du Royaume Franc de Jerusalem de 1095 à 1184*, tome premier, trad. de Geneviève et René Métais, (Paris: 1999), II, XIII, 69; Odon de Deuil, „Histoire de la croisade de Louis VII”, in: *Collection des Mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France*, ed. M. Guizot, no. 68, (Paris: Librairie Chez J.L.J.Brière, 1825), II, 295.

⁹ Jean Kinnamos, *Chronique*, traduit par J. Rosenblum, (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1972), II, 83, 64-65.

¹⁰ Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique du Royaume Franc*, tome second, XX, XXI-XXIII, 351-358; Paul Magdalino, *The empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 242.

¹¹ One of these is the Hélène Arhweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975), (Hélène Ahrweiler, *Ideologia politică a Imperiului bizantin*, trad. de Cristina Jinga, (București: Corint, 2002)).

¹² For this concept see Ahrweiler, *Ideologia politică a Imperiului*, 123-135.

divine election to the emperor. As a messenger of God, only he had the right to use the imperial insignia. The emperor could not be overturned, because he was desired by God, the Only One that could replace him¹³.

Two privileged moments staged the imperial majesty; one, irregular, the victory, and the other, regulated by an annual calendar, the banquet. After significant victories, the emperors organized triumphal processions in the city. Often, before the procession were placed icons, which let you understand that Basileus was only God's instrument. For example, John Tzimiskes and John IInd, had organized the processions with the icon of the Theotokos. Symbolically, after the old Roman model, the Greek sovereign stepped on the neck of the opponent defeated in front of the people gathered on the hippodrome while the prisoners of war were forced to parade.

The Greek leader awarded various honorary titles to foreign legates in order to determine their rank and mission in relation to the empire¹⁴; in some cases, they were ranked according to the level of subordination to the basileus¹⁵: slaves, sons, brothers and friends. In Byzantium, war had a defensive character, being preferred the diplomacy and the peaceful means. One of these means was represented by the interference in the internal affairs of foreign countries that it wanted to destabilize. The psychological warfare aimed to demoralize the opponent in order to avoid the military intervention as much as possible. The matrimonial alliances were used to integrate the imperial families into hierarchical system; by these, the Greek sovereign became the head of a genuine family that should ideally encompass the whole world and whose members could not turn against him¹⁶. The others nations were naturally subordinated to the empire which always had the ability to rule. Therefore, any foreign attack was seen by the Greeks as a simple rebellion of the rebel subjects, who were tempted to stand up against the obedience¹⁷. Any attack of the enemy represented imprudence, assimilated to that of slaves who contested the authority of the master¹⁸. At the end of the eleventh century, Alexius Comnenus perfected a system of dignities and titles, in order to impose imperial ideology outside Byzantine empire but also to reward his partisans¹⁹.

The model of the diplomatic audience presented by Liutprand of Cremona was still in use in the XI-XII centuries, even if minor changes had appeared meanwhile. Liutprand visited Constantinople twice; firstly for Berenger's recognition as king of Italy by the Byzantine emperor, afterwards, to negotiate a marriage between Otton II, the son of Otton I, and a Byzantine princess, Theophano. The second expedition has

¹³ Emanoil Băbuș, *Bizanțul între Occidentul creștin și Orientul islamic (sec. VII-XV)*, (București: Sofia, 2006), 47.

¹⁴ Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. I., trad. de Marina Marinescu, prefață și note de Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca, (București: Minerva, 1977), III, IV, 1-3, 121-122; vol. II, XII, V, 2, 182.

¹⁵ Marc Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades: les Byzantins vus par les chroniqueurs du monde latin (1096-1261)*, (Sherbrooke: Éditions universitaires européennes, 2012), 118.

¹⁶ Alain Ducellier, *Les Byzantins. Histoire et culture*, (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1988), 127.

¹⁷ Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. I, p. XVIII.

¹⁸ Alain Ducellier, *Le drame de Byzance. Idéal et échec d'une société chrétienne*, (Paris: Hachette, 1976), 162.

¹⁹ For example, Alexius appointed his brother, Isaac, *sebastocratos*, on Taronites, his brother-in-law, *protovestiaros* and *protosebastos*, on Adrian, his brother, *protosebastos*. Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. I, III, IV, 3, 122; Ferdinand Chalandon, *Essai sur le règne d'Alexis I^{er} Comnène (1081-1118)*, (Paris: A. Picard et Fils, 900), 56.

not reached its goal²⁰. The first embassy, in 949, contains a detailed description of the imperial protocol. Liutprand was invited to Magnaura and was impressed by the byzantine pomp. In front of the throne of the basileus was a bronze tree whose branches were hung different species of birds that drew different sounds. The throne was made in a manner which expressed both humility and grandeur. Huges lions of wood and bronze, covered with gold, seemed to ensure safety; hitting the ground with the tail, they were roaring in a frightening manner. The purpose of these machines was to impress through the pomp of the imperial court and the ceremonial constituted a tool for persuasion, emphasizing the political, legislative and administrative power. Liutprand was introduced to Greek sovereign by two eunuchs. While he made his entrance, the lions were roaring and the birds were singing different songs, so that the bishop of Cremona was encompassed of fear and admiration²¹. By three prostrations, Liutprand adored the emperor who sat on the throne wearing other clothes. The discussion was made through the *logothet*, and afterwards the ambassador was driven into the bedroom that he had been given. Liutprand received many gifts and was invited to the imperial banquets²². In spite of these fantastic elements, the solemn appearance was not diminished. The mysterious nature of the protocol was symbolized by the curtain, that separated the Constantin's successor from ambassadors during the audiences, signifying his divine and inaccessible nature²³.

The negotiations were preceded by an exchange of letters, after which were sent delegates presenting the requests²⁴. After an exchange of gifts, took place an official reception of ambassadors at the court²⁵. The ambassadors were forced to perform the ritual of worship - *proskynesis* (προσκύνησις), which consisted in doing homage to the emperor by three prostrations to the ground²⁶. It was considered an introduction to negotiation and in some cases was perceived as a humiliating gesture. Odon of Deuil noticed this unworthy practice when the byzantine ambassadors were received by Louis VIInd: "the king had received the envoys of the basileus who bowed their head and body, knelt and prostrated before him and his officials. At that time, the Greeks were transformed into women, giving up all the strength of virility in their heart and language. However, they have not gained our trust and nor they have gained for them the smallest dignity"²⁷. The fact that a sovereign was sitting when the delegate appeared in front of him was a proof of his position and for the emissaries a solemn sign of respect and consideration²⁸. It was forbidden to speak in the presence of basileus, unless the latter launch invitation to do so; this formality, σιλέντιον, must be rigorously observed, whereas the smallest violation of this rule was considered a

²⁰ Liutprand de Crémone, *Ambassades à Byzance*, traduit du latin par Joël Schnapp, (Toulouse: Anacharsis Éditions, 2004),101.

²¹ Liutprand de Crémone, *Ambassades à Byzance*, 36.

²² Liutprand de Crémone, *Ambassades à Byzance*, 38.

²³ And in the twelfth century the curtains had an important place in the ceremonial as observed in the case of Amalric's reception in 1171. Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique du Royaume Franc de Jerusalem de 1095 à 1184*, tome second, XX, XXII, 354.

²⁴ Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique du Royaume Franc de Jerusalem de 1095 à 1184*, tome premier, II, XIII, 69.

²⁵ Yvonne Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies. Captivity and Ransom ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, (Brill. Leiden, 2002), 38.

²⁶ Liutprand de Crémone, *Ambassades à Byzance*, 8; Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique du Royaume Franc de Jerusalem de 1095 à 1184*, tome second, XVIII, XXIII, 239-240.

²⁷ Odon de Deuil, *Histoire de la croisade de Louis VII*, III, p. 318.

²⁸ Yvonne Friedman, „Peacemaking. Perceptions and practices in medieval Latin East”, *The crusades and the Near East. Cultural histories*, ed. Conor Kostick, (Routledge, London and New York, 2011), 243.

sacrilege. The indirect contact with Constantine's successor was achieved also when the subjects kissed the hands and legs of Byzantine sovereign, these parts of the body being covered with purple gloves and footwear and even with a veil. During the audience, the Greek emperor remained seated while the delegates were forced to stand up²⁹. The exchange of words were running through interpreters³⁰, who provide translations, because it was forbidden to speak around the sovereign, given his divine nature. Interpreters were used to increase the symbolic distance existing between the Byzantine sovereign and the others³¹.

The gifts of the byzantine governor depended on the importance and the rank of the ambassadors and the existing relations between the two nations. The gifts had the aim to strike visitors's eyes and to seal the concluded alliance³². According to the chroniclers, if the words and actions of the basileus didn't inspire confidence, the gifts offered by him in the context of ceremony disguised unspoken intentions. Albert d'Aix noticed that what Godfrey of Bouillon distributed to his knights of the part of Greek sovereign, was returning to the treasury of the emperor in exchange for food they bought; not only the money that they received from Alexios but also the one who had brought from their home countries³³. The chroniclers believed that the offerings represented a manifestation of the betrayal of the Greeks and many Western leaders have fallen into their trap because of greed. The byzantines easily remarked the avarice of the latins; Anna Comnena is presenting the Franks who had always open their greedy mouths to riches³⁴. Alexios I, who had at his court many Westerners, was familiar with some of the values of Western medieval society, among which was the fact that the wealth and generosity of the sovereign must be the basis of power and authority. Therefore, it was natural to take advantage from this knowledge to win the trust of the soldiers of Christ. The gifts were means by which Westerners fell catch to the fake of Byzantines. The fear towards the gifts of Constantine's successors constituted a distant echo of Virgil's warning that in any gift were hidden their perfidious intentions. This theme is recurrent in the writings of later chroniclers: Guillaume of Tyr mentions the sentence *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* twice in his work , while Odon of Deuil affirms that this sentence was often repeated even by laymen³⁵.

The model of diplomatic audience from the tenth century was preserved with its essential elements during the period of the Crusades. However, the diplomatic ceremonial was a dynamic reality and could undergo certain changes according to the different circumstances of time. The instructions included in the book *De ceremoniis* represent an idealized image of what was meant to be the protocol and not an accurate representation of what was happening in reality. The main rituals concerning the worship of emperor and expressing the imperial ideology were present also in the

²⁹ Odon de Deuil, *Histoire de la croisade de Louis VII....*,II, 295.

³⁰ Odon de Deuil, *Histoire de la croisade de Louis VII....*,II, 296.

³¹ Liutprand de Crémone, *Ambassades à Byzance....*, 13.

³² N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople. The West and Byzantium, 962-1204: Cultural and political relations*, (Brill, Leiden. New York. Köln, 1996), 57.

³³ Albert D'aix, „Histoire des faits et gestes dans les régions d'outre mer depuis l'année 1095 jusqu'à l'année 1120 de Jésus Christ”, vol. I, ed. F. Guizot, in: *Collection des Mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France*, tome 20-21, (Paris: Librairie Chez J.L.J.Brière, 1825), II, p. 65.

³⁴ Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, vol. II, X, VI, 4, p. 89; XI, IX, 2, 151; X, V, 4, 84.

³⁵ Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique du Royaume Franc de Jerusalem de 1095 à 1184*, tome premier, XI, VI, 378; tome second, XX, II, 261; Odon de Deuil, *Histoire de la croisade de Louis VII*, II, 296.

twelfth century. The changes that have occurred refer to the fantastic elements described by Liutprand of Cremona, especially the mechanical creatures surrounding the throne of *chrysotriklinos*. However, the machines (*automata*) were not completely absent in Byzantine scenes from the twelfth century, as Robert of Clari said shortly after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204; thus, in the hippodrome were human and animal sculptures that could be animated by magic.

CONCLUSION

The period of holy wars and the receptions offered by the Greek sovereign, had determined an active diplomacy throughout which the imperial power tried to assert its incontestable role in terrestrial order. The protocol, as a tangible manifestation of the diplomatic process and of the Byzantine imperial claims, was intended to contribute to the relaxing of animosity between Byzantium and the West during the Crusades. Despite an increase of tension, the greek diplomacy had as purpose the protection of Constantinople and avoiding military conflict with the West. Therefore, we can conclude that the ceremonial whereat the latins were subjected was less rigorous as the one of tenth century, although its ideological importance remained unchanged. The flexibility shown by some emperors in applying formal norms characteristic to imperial function, sometimes aroused the indignation of the subjects, because they considered the concessions of the leaders unworthy of august dignity. Despite these reproaches, the adaptability and flexibility of the Greek sovereign during the ceremonial often facilitated better relationships with Westerners. The oath asked to the western leaders, the gifts, the creation of the complex system of titles and dignities to reward the adherents of the Greek emperor, the kiss of peace, the matrimonial alliances, the banquets offered to ambassadors, constituted diplomatic strategies through which Byzantines tried to preserve their own positions and achieve their goals.

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