

EUROPEAN « GOLDEN FLEECE » ORDER AND ANTI-OTTOMAN COALITIONS

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The history of the “Golden Fleece” Order in Europe dates back to the 15th century and coincides with the epoch of formation of anti-Ottoman coalitions. Its founder, is Philip III the Good, Duke of Burgundy, whose one of the most powerful countries in Europe stretched from Switzerland to the Netherlands. Philip dedicated the introduction of this order to his own wedding (1430, January 10).

The protectors of the “Golden Fleece” order are Virgin and Andrew the First-Called Apostle, and the motto is “Not a bad reward for labor”. Its charter emphasizes that the Order was founded for chivalry and exceptional love and benevolence. His knights wore special clothes, which have remained unchanged to this day.

Philip III was a great lover of ancient myths. He was particularly attracted by the legend about the Golden Fleece, which he related to his family history. In particular, how one of his ancestors passed the way of the Argonauts and arrived in Colchi, where he was captured. The following circumstance attracts attention. Philip the Good saw the connection between this legend and the organization of the campaign against the Ottomans from the beginning. The following fact is also important. He was going to take part in the campaign against the Ottomans if the crusade planned by the Pope had not failed.

This European order is interesting from various points of view, both in reference to the Black Sea, and in terms of Georgia's connection with the West, as well as with anti-Ottoman coalitions. A question arises. Why did the Europeans take as the main European award an order, which was superior to the highest order of all the European kingdoms, and even called the “Golden Fleece”. Obviously, this name leads to the Colchian world and seafaring of Colchis, to the Black Sea, and this cannot be accidental. The romanticization of the past was observed both in Europe and in Georgia at different times during the period of anti-Ottoman coalitions, the legend of the Golden Fleece was distinguished by its recognizability and popularity.

European missionaries who came to Georgia, showing their great interest in Georgia and its history, paid special attention to Medea and the Argonauts. They also emphasized that the Ottomans suffered the biggest defeat and disaster in the battles with the Georgians. They considered this also in the general Christian perspective. This conditioned also the event that the Europeans included Georgians everywhere in the plans of the anti-Ottoman coalition. It is significant that after the beginning of the anti-Ottoman movement the Europeans for the first time addressed the Georgians, and they responded immediately, and the Georgians especially mention this in their correspondence with the Europeans.

In relation to the “Golden Fleece”, it is important that the missionaries draw attention to Georgia as a maritime country and note the connection of Georgia with the seas and marine life. In this regard too, the importance and role of the Black Sea, its strategic location, were especially considered. De Peyssonnel (XVII-XVIII cc.) emphasized Georgia's location between the Black and Caspian seas. And the Europeans of this period, while touching on the maritime themes in their works, also mentioned the factor of Christian Georgia, which they considered a part of Europe.

For centuries, for the West the Black Sea was also one of the ways to meet the Georgian world, it was so during the period of anti-Ottoman coalitions too, when the Black Sea gained even greater political charge, especially against the background of the tendency of Islamization of the Black Sea, which Georgia was confronting. Posing the question in this way gives us a reason to note that the historical excursion of the West in connection with the “Golden Fleece” and its presentation as an order should not be accidental. In fact, in the form of this order, emphasis is placed on the importance of the Black Sea, which for the Europeans was also the way to India, and the Georgian kings always especially noted this in their relationships with them. The relevance and international importance of the connection of the Black and

Mediterranean seas were also well understood in the West. We have also mentioned how the Europeans, in particular even the Italians, at what extent saw Georgians as serious rivals on the Black Sea, and because of them, unlike Constantinople, they could not achieve privileges in Trabzon. Taking this circumstance into account and calling on appropriate materials, we proved that the Italians moved the Catholic center from Myrna to Tbilisi, the capital city of that country, where they saw the most serious rival in the form of Georgians on the Black Sea and in Trabzon (XVI century).

The Historian Giuseppe Canale especially notes that trade on the Black Sea conditioned enrichment of Venice, Pisa and Genoa, the Golden Age. The Roman Church also received the largest income from trade with the Black Sea.

In connection with Georgians, Europeans focus on one more circumstance, which is directly related to their great authority in the international arena. Europeans used to wear Georgian clothes while traveling in the Middle East to feel themselves safe and secure. According to F. Avril, "everyone was afraid of this dress in Persia". In addition, one French traveler writes: How did the Turks consider them to be Georgians as they were dressed in Georgian clothes and treated them with amazing respect.

After the overthrow of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottomans, this Order, in a situation containing danger for the Georgian and Western Christian worlds, was also perceived from the general Christian point of view as consolidating Christians. For this purpose, they attached great importance to giving international resonance to the "Golden Fleece" Order. As mentioned, by doing so, also the focus was put on the region as the most important part of the world, which significantly determined world politics from ancient times.

So, the importance of the "Golden Fleece" Order should be analyzed, first of all, in the context of anti-Ottoman coalitions, since its origin is mainly related to this event of international importance, which was manifested in the mobilization of the Christian world (including Georgia). For Georgia itself, first of all, it was to free itself from the Muslim world. As for the Europeans, they were interested in a stable situation in Georgia. So, the Order of the "Golden Fleece" should be also considered a kind of symbolic confrontation between the Christian world and the Islamic world.

The Black Sea has been within the limits of Europeans' interest for centuries, and in the Middle Ages they gave the Black Sea their names: "Mere Nigrum" (Black Sea), "Mare Maggiore" (Great Sea), "Mer Noir" (Black Sea), etc.

We also paid attention to the dynamics of the popularity of the "Golden Fleece" Order. Along with its growth, information about Georgians and the importance of their involvement in anti-Ottoman coalitions also increases. The fact that Georgians were the first to establish contact with its founder, Philip III the Good Burgundian, is also to be taken into account. We do not consider it accidental that as soon as Giorgi VIII establishes a connection with him, he immediately focuses on the Black Sea as a part of the anti-Ottoman movement. He includes Trabzon as well, and this merits attention for the Georgian policy on the Black Sea was related to the interests of Trabzon, which the Ottomans knew well and opposed them in every way.

As it is known, Trabzon, which in the Middle Ages was also referred to as the "Land of the Mingrelians", was a part of the ancient Colchian world from time immemorial, and once upon a time the Black Sea was also called the "Sea of the Colchians" (Strabo), and even earlier, according to European maps, the "Pasiani Sea", which is the same Colchis Sea. It is also significant that the Europeans at a certain stage of the anti-Ottoman movement called this sea the "Sea of the Mingrelians" (for example, on De Vita's map), which is a late reflection of the above-mentioned names. In addition, the "Sea of the Mingrelians" (was denoting also Western Georgia) was opposed to the "Kara Deniz" (which means the Black Sea). This means that the Europeans reflected the contradictions and political antagonism on the names of the Black Sea. It should be noted here that the missionaries who came to Georgia, called Levan II, the leader of Odishi who supported the anti-Ottoman coalition, "Chief of Colchis" and "King of Colchis". This historical excursion evokes also associations with the Order of the "Golden Fleece".

Neither is accidental that Georgians care about Jerusalem in the conditions of the anti-Ottoman movement, since Jerusalem was an important center of the anti-Ottoman movement. As we can see, the Europeans, especially the Italians, observed the influence and positions of the Georgians not only on the Black Sea, but also in Jerusalem, based on the existing rivalry between them.

So, since ancient times, Georgia has attracted attention with its strategic location, connection with the Black Sea, and also the Argonauts throughout the Middle Ages. They obviously also had in mind the promotion of Colchis by chroniclers, writers and artists related to the Colchian world over the centuries and the presentation of the Colchian world also from a maritime perspective. We think that all these factors led to the recognition of the "Golden Fleece" as the highest order of Europe. "The Order of the Golden Fleece", together with the activation of the past, was well suited to the situation created in the anti-Ottoman movement and the international politics of that time in general. The following circumstance also attracts attention. The increase in popularity of the "Golden Fleece" Order corresponded to activation of the Georgian and European world in the anti-Ottoman movement.

During the reign of the King Philip II of Spain (1558-1598), an important event took place and under the auspices of the "Golden Fleece". We mean the naval battle of Lepanto in 1571. The Ottoman fleet was defeated in this battle. This prevented advancement of the Ottomans towards Europe. Don Juan, the illegitimate son of Charles V (1500-1558) and half-brother of Philip II, a Knight of the Order of the "Golden Fleece" was leading this battle.

A descendant of Philip the Good of Burgundy, the only daughter of Charles the Bold marries the future Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian Habsburg. From this time onwards, the Order of the "Golden Fleece" will become the main order of the Habsburg dynasty.

The founder of the "Golden Fleece" Order, Philip the Good of Burgundy, was not only active in the political arena, he was also a famous philanthropist. His activities coincide with the zenith of development Dutch art and the greatest artists - van der Eyck, van der Weyden, Hugo van der Gus and others were creating. The thing is that in 1450 Hugo Van der Weyden made a portrait of Philip the Good, with the order and a necklace of the "Golden Fleece". After that, in 1460 Van der Weyden created portraits of Philip's son, the future prince Charles the Bold, and portraits of Philip's illegitimate son Anthony, decorated with the Order of the "Golden Fleece". The same should be said about the portraits of Charles V (1599-1558) created by the genius Titian (one of them is on horseback). Such portraits were also created later. For example, the portrait of Louis XV by Charles van Loo and others.

The "Golden Fleece" Order has never ceased its existence and is still one of the most prestigious orders. Its knights are Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, Emperor Kohito of Japan, former King Albert II of Belgium, Queen Margaret II of Denmark, King Harold V of Norway, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, former Secretary General of NATO Javier Solana, and others.