

## **“That Dreadful Day”: The Battle of Manzikert**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Battle of Manzikert in 1071 resulted in a period of decline for the Byzantine Empire (although it would last in some shape or form for almost 400 years). This “dreadful day,” as the Byzantines called it, was one of the most influential battles in history.<sup>1</sup> The result changed the entire region, sending shockwaves through both the Christian and Islamic worlds and opening the floodgates to Turkish incursion into the most strategically important region of the empire.<sup>2</sup> It could have been mitigated, but the battle and its aftermath was a disaster for the Byzantines and had great ramifications for not only the Byzantine Empire, but for the course of history in this region of the world. It, and the decade of civil war that followed, resulted in the Byzantine request for aid from the Pope, precipitating the First Crusade.

**Keywords:** *Byzantine, Seljuk Turks, Turcoman, Anatolia, Romanus, Alp Arslan, Shi’ite, Sunni*

## **“Ese día terrible”: La batalla de Manzikert**

### **RESUMEN**

La batalla de Manzikert en 1071 resultó en un período de declive para el Imperio Bizantino (aunque duraría de alguna forma durante casi 400 años). Este “día terrible”, como lo llamaron los bizantinos, fue una de las batallas más influyentes de la historia. El resultado cambió toda la región, provocando ondas de choque en los mundos cristiano e islámico y abriendo las compuertas a la incursión turca en la región más estratégicamente importante del imperio. Podría haberse mitigado, pero la batalla y sus consecuencias fueron un desastre para los bizantinos y tuvieron grandes ramificaciones no solo para el Imperio bizantino, sino para el curso de la historia en esta región del mundo. Esto, y la década de guerra civil que siguió, resultó en la solicitud bizantina de ayuda del Papa, lo que precipitó la Primera Cruzada.

**Palabras clave:** Bizantinos, turcos selyúcidas, turcomanos, Anatolia, romanos, Alp Arslan, chiítas, sunitas

## “可怕的那天”——曼齐刻尔特战役

### 摘要

1071年曼齐刻尔特战役导致拜占庭帝国一段时间的衰落（尽管该帝国会在某种形式上持续近四百年之久）。这一被拜占庭人称为“可怕的一天”，是史上最具影响力的战役之一。战役结果改变了整个地区，对基督教和伊斯兰教带来了冲击，同时为土耳其人的入侵打开大门，进入该帝国最具战略重要性的区域。此战本可以得以缓解，然而战役及其后果对拜占庭人而言是一场灾难，并对拜占庭帝国以及该地区的历史进程造成了巨大影响。该战役以及随之而来的十年内战导致拜占庭帝国向教皇寻求援助，加速了第一次十字军东征。

关键词：拜占庭人，塞尔柱土耳其人，土库曼人，安纳托利亚，罗曼努斯四世，阿尔普·阿尔斯兰，什叶派，逊尼派

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**T**he Emperor Romanus Diogenes, surrounded by his Varangian Guard, stood his ground and fought. However, the Seljuks had his group surrounded and his reserves left the field without fighting. He fought well until his horse was killed from underneath him, and his sword hand was wounded.<sup>3</sup> Finally, he surrendered. Thus the Battle of Manzikert of 1071 ended, and a period of decline for the Byzantine Empire began (although it would last in some shape or form for almost 400 years). This “dreadful day,” as the Byzantines called it, was one of the most influential in history.<sup>4</sup> The defeat changed the entire region. It sent

shockwaves through both the Christian and Islamic worlds and opened the floodgates to Turkish incursion into the most strategically important region of the empire.<sup>5</sup> The results could have been mitigated, but the battle and its aftermath were a disaster for the Byzantines and had great ramifications for not only the Byzantine Empire, but for the course of history in this region of the world.

The Seljuk Turks were a nomadic steppe-warrior group that had great success in establishing themselves to the east of the Byzantine Empire. They had seceded from the Oghuz tribe, and

led by their namesake leader Seljuk, moved into Transoxiana and eastern Persia about 1000 B.C.<sup>6</sup> By this time, the Persian Umayyads had been divided into sub-states and local dynasties. Later, the Islamic Abbasids of Persia had taken power, but fought ruinous civil wars with one another and were not as powerful as they had been.<sup>7</sup> They hired the Seljuk Turks as mercenaries and the Seljuks soon took over. They considered themselves the protectors of Sunni Islam.<sup>8</sup> By 1055, the Seljuk Turks were at the outskirts of Baghdad.<sup>9</sup> Seljuk's grandson, Tughril Bey, took over without opposition.<sup>10</sup> The Sunni Abbasid caliphs remained spiritual leaders, but the Seljuk Turks ruled the empire.<sup>11</sup> Tughril Bey died in 1063 and Alp Arslan, his nephew, succeeded him.<sup>12</sup> He was a strong warrior, and devoted to the Sunni religion.

Alp Arslan came to power in his early thirties and continued the expansion of the Turkish domain to the west and south.<sup>13</sup> There were two reasons for this. First, as a Sunni, he despised the Shiite Fatimids of Egypt who ruled Syria and Palestine as subject states.<sup>14</sup> Second, although the Seljuk Turks had become a little less nomadic for the most part, their kinsmen, the Turcomans, had not.<sup>15</sup> These nomads were not interested in the glory of the Sunni religion, but wanted land for their herds of ponies and sheep. The Seljuks liked to push the Turcomans to the periphery of their empire to soften up enemies, and also because they were undisciplined and hard to control.<sup>16</sup> The vast plateau of Anatolia was perfect for them. By keeping them busy on cam-

paigns, the Seljuks kept them from creating chaos and diverting Alp Arslan from his planned campaigns against the Fatimids.

Although the Byzantines and Seljuks made a treaty in 1055, this did not stop the Turcomans, and eventually Alp Arslan, from raiding into Asia Minor.<sup>17</sup> He led a huge expedition into Armenia and captured its capital, Ani, in 1064.<sup>18</sup> He burned all of its churches to the ground and massacred or carried off much of its population to be sold into slavery.<sup>19</sup> Alp Arslan wanted to secure the Armenian meadow lands for the Turcomans and then turn his attention to the Fatimids.<sup>20</sup> He drove into Anatolia unopposed and sacked Cappadocian Caesarea, which was far from the eastern frontier; they pillaged Caesarea and desecrated its cathedral of St. Basil.<sup>21</sup> Turcoman raiders plundered far into Anatolia, pillaging Cappadocia and Cilicia, where no attacks had happened for over a century.<sup>22</sup> This was one of the reasons Romanus eventually campaigned eastwards.

At about the time Romanus was moving towards him in 1071, Alp Arslan was trying to solidify his border so he could focus on the heretic Shi'ite Fatimids, the number one priority for the devout Sunni.<sup>23</sup> He passed through western Armenia, taking Manzikert and Khelat, and captured or received tribute from the border towns of Edessa, Aleppo, and Antioch.<sup>24</sup> Alp Arslan was shoring up his defenses on the western border of his territory (the eastern edge of Byzantium) so he could drive south. At this point, the Seljuk Turks were at

their strongest and Alp Arslan's army was mobile and effective.

The Seljuk army was a typical light cavalry army of the steppe who were masters of the hit-and-run tactic.<sup>25</sup> They wore little, if any, body armor and carried a saber and possibly a javelin, but relied mainly on a short composite bow.<sup>26</sup> This short recurve bow was very powerful and allowed the Turk to shoot quickly in any direction from horseback, firing up to 12 arrows per minute.<sup>27</sup> Their short stirrup, or "forward seat," positioned the warrior over the shoulder of the horse instead of square on the horse's back, which greatly facilitated archery from horseback.<sup>28</sup> Their horses, or "steppe ponies," were strong and highly trained for warfare.<sup>29</sup> The Seljuk Turks liked to use their mobility to hover just within bowshot of their enemy—striking from a distance with their powerful bows and then fleeing when the enemy offered a pitched battle, twisting their torsos and firing backwards at their pursuers, a maneuver called the "Parthian shot."<sup>30</sup> They also excelled in the "feigned retreat," sometimes retreating for days to draw their enemies into a trap of a larger body of warriors or just tiring them out and waiting until the enemy formation became scattered, and then wheeling and striking when the opportunity presented itself.<sup>31</sup> If a pursuer seemed vulnerable in any way, the Turks would counterattack and swarm over their enemy, killing both men and horses.<sup>32</sup> The Seljuk Turks were very strong in 1071, but the Byzantine Empire was in a completely different situation.

The Byzantines, of course, had a long history as the Eastern Roman Empire, but the Byzantine government and army had come upon difficult times in controlling the empire by the time of the battle. Emperor Basil II had expanded the empire, and the army was stronger than any neighboring force.<sup>33</sup> He had taken over Armenia and Antioch, threatening the local Muslim leaders of Damascus and Aleppo so much that they had agreed to pay tribute in order to be left alone.<sup>34</sup> However, after Basil II died in 1025, the Byzantine army had declined, mostly due to neglect and a reliance on mercenaries. His brother, who succeeded him, was incompetent and the throne passed on to aristocratic families like the Monomachus and the Ducas.<sup>35</sup> These rulers were more interested in their own interests than in protecting the frontiers. In addition, they were afraid of revolt by popular military leaders. They neglected the army and changed Basil's practice of protecting the peasantry against the powerful landowners who wanted to expand their estates. They became extremely wealthy, but the thematic armies, based on citizen-soldiers that came from the landholding peasants, dried up.<sup>36</sup>

The reign of Constantine IX Monomachus between 1042 and 1055 caused extreme discontent and decay in the army.<sup>37</sup> His massive luxury building projects were expensive and ended up debasing the currency. For a long time, the Byzantine gold coin was considered "the Dollar of the Middle Ages."<sup>38</sup> However, he decreased its gold content. Part of this was intentional, to pay for war against the Pechenegs in the east after

they crossed the Danube.<sup>39</sup> However, it effectively lowered army pay by about one-fifth.<sup>40</sup> He then reduced the size of the army, feeling it to be too large and costly and a threat to rebel.

Constantine IX did not seem to be able to tell which of the troops were necessary and which were not. He allowed even the best of the thematic troops to become ineffective, decommissioning 50,000 troops from the Armenian theme on the northeast frontier. This was exactly where the Seljuk Turks began raiding a few years later.<sup>41</sup> These same troops had defeated the Seljuks in battle as late as 1048.<sup>42</sup> His successor, Michael VI Stratioticus, indulged the civilian aristocracy and victimized the military aristocracy.<sup>43</sup>

The military revolted in 1057, and under the general Isaac Comnenus, defeated Michael VI. Emperor Isaac I Comnenus immediately worked to rebuild the empire, but he contracted a fever and died after only two years on the throne.<sup>44</sup> His successor, Constantine X Ducas, was even worse than his most recent namesake—the themes were further disbanded, the treasury was squandered, and the military made even poorer. He also began a bloody persecution of the Monophysite Armenians.<sup>45</sup> This helped widen a severe rift between the Byzantines and the resentful Armenians, which manifested at Manzikert.

By this time, the civil aristocracy had little to fear from the military any longer, but neither did their many outside military threats. The Normans were taking Byzantine Italy, tribes were

invading the Balkans, and the Seljuk Turks were threatening the east. When Constantine X Ducas died, the Ducas aristocratic family lined up to be the next emperor. However, his wife, the Empress Eudocia, tricked them all and married a young military aristocrat, Romanus IV Diogenes, in 1068.<sup>46</sup> Although he had capability, his rule was short-lived.

An experienced and brave military leader, Romanus IV Diogenes had distinguished himself in war against the Patzinaks and had a high reputation among the military.<sup>47</sup> He also had a good reputation as an administrator, but when he became emperor in 1068, he faced many obstacles, which ultimately he could not overcome. The civil aristocracy resented him, especially the Ducas family, who thought they had been robbed of their rightful throne. He had a demoralized army made up mostly of mercenaries, which was frequently on the brink of mutiny.<sup>48</sup> Inadequate pay and lack of supplies had crippled the army. The soldiers were often simply unwilling to fight.<sup>49</sup>

When Romanus came to power, the empire's eastern frontier was collapsing. However, he recognized the threat of the Turks and tried to get the army into fighting shape. There had been no large imperial army campaigning in the eastern regions for 20 years. He knew he had to reassert imperial presence there and if possible, thoroughly defeat the enemy.<sup>50</sup> Armenia was in danger of collapsing and the Turks were still raiding into Cappadocia and threatening Anatolia.<sup>51</sup> During the first two years

of his rule, he ranged throughout Anatolia with his mostly mercenary army, trying to find and fight bands of Seljuk Turks.<sup>52</sup> He had a few successes against small bands of Seljuks. The expedition of 1068 was very successful, plugging the hole in defense of Syria and showing the Turks there were consequences for raiding.<sup>53</sup> However, his position was still dire.

Comnenus was still under a lot of pressure and trying to consolidate his position. His critics in Constantinople lamented the losses in Byzantine Italy. In the meantime, paying this army was expensive and he strong-armed the aristocracy to get the money to pay for it, which increased unrest.<sup>54</sup> Every time he left Constantinople, he feared intrigues behind his back. He needed a great victory to consolidate his position and prestige. He wanted to secure his throne and intimidate the Turks through military defeat, and so he put together a large army consisting of some natives and a horde of mercenary troops, including Normans, and Eurasian steppe warriors, Bulgars, Pechenegs, and Uzes.<sup>55</sup> He took along a prominent member of the Ducas family, Andronicus, nephew of the former emperor, in part as leverage against intrigues back at the capital while he was gone.<sup>56</sup> Finally, with an army of around 48,000 men, he crossed the Bosphorus and marched towards Alp Arslan.<sup>57</sup> This army was very different from the Seljuk Turk army.

The Byzantine army was also dependent on cavalry, but they preferred a heavily armored soldier who was both a mounted lancer and an archer

(although by the time of Manzikert, many of the mercenaries did not have this skill), fusing the strengths of heavy and light cavalry into one.<sup>58</sup> They also relied on light infantry, which wore little armor and carried a composite bow or javelin, a shield, and an axe for close combat.<sup>59</sup> The third part of a typical Byzantine army consisted of heavy infantry, which wore mail armor, helmets, and carried a large shield, a long spear, and a sword, and fought in a phalanx.<sup>60</sup> The heavy infantry normally formed up behind the heavy cavalry to take advantage of the confusion caused by the cavalry charge. They used the light infantry to protect the heavy troops from light cavalry, as they could fire their arrows further from a more stable platform (the ground).<sup>61</sup> Theoretically, this army could stand up to any other army, and the situation at hand was ripe for these leaders and armies to collide—they did so at Manzikert.

Romanus had bad luck and made bad decisions from the start. He had started out with the largest Byzantine army of the entire 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> During the course of the campaign, Romanus split his army. He sent a large part, led by general Joseph Trachaneiotes, to Kheilat, north of Lake Van, while he went towards Manzikert.<sup>63</sup> Trachaneiotes never joined the battle at Manzikert. We do not know why. Trachaneiotes was a respected general who had about 25,000 men, probably as many as the entire Seljuk army, including many of the most experienced, best soldiers in the army.<sup>64</sup> Byzantine historian Michael Attaleiates (who was present during the campaign) hints that Trachaneiotes was

scared off when the entire Seljuk Army showed up, saying:

when their commander learned of the attack of the sultan against the emperor himself he took all the men around him and fled ignobly through Mesopotamia to the land of the Romans, giving no thought to his lord nor to what is seemly, the coward.<sup>65</sup>

Muslim historians say Trachaneiotes was taken by surprise by Alp Arslan and defeated, although there is no mention of any engagement by Byzantine sources.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps he was a traitor controlled by the Ducas family. Interestingly, after Romanus' death in 1072, Trachaneiotes was awarded the coveted governorship of Antioch by the Ducas. Was this a reward for betraying Romanus?<sup>67</sup> In any case, no word was sent to Romanus, thirty miles away.<sup>68</sup> Also, Romanus had sent much of his light infantry away with Trachaneiotes.<sup>69</sup> This left the heavy cavalry and infantry without light infantry protection. Romanus had to fight the battle of Manzikert with less than half of his army, and without the piece which was most effective against steppe warriors. However, he still had more troops than the Seljuks, and Alp Arslan did not even want to fight the Byzantine army.

Romanus captured the largely undefended town of Manzikert but did not have long to savor the victory, as his army was soon harassed by Seljuk bowmen.<sup>70</sup> A contingent of Turkish Uze mercenaries crossed over to the Seljuk side.<sup>71</sup> Even though Michael had administered oaths to the Uze mercenaries to ensure their loyalty, they were

still Turkish.<sup>72</sup> This showed the loyalty problem with some mercenaries, and caused distrust in the army. Alp Arslan, knowing he was still outnumbered and wanting to conserve his forces for the attack on the Fatimids, offered a peace treaty to Romanus. The Seljuks did not prefer pitched battles and the only quarrel they really had with the Byzantines was over Armenia, which they could possibly divide.<sup>73</sup> However, Romanus refused. Romanus wanted a decisive military victory to not only remove the Seljuk threat, but also to consolidate his political power. He knew that it would be difficult to keep this army together if he marched back without fighting. He also knew that the campaign had been very expensive, and he probably would not be able to afford to raise another large army in the future.<sup>74</sup> Finally, in light of his lack of political support in Constantinople, he probably wondered if he could even save his throne if he did not fight.<sup>75</sup> The next day, in August 1071 (the exact date is disputed), Romanus advanced with his main army.

During the decisive battle, Romanus ignored normal strategy used against steppe warriors and, eager for a decisive victory, pressed an attack. He commanded the center, the general Alyattes took the right and the general Bryennius was on the left.<sup>76</sup> For some reason, Romanus gave Andronicus Ducas charge of the reserves, which would attack when needed to protect breaks in the line. As was their norm, the Seljuks withdrew in the face of this force in a wide crescent.<sup>77</sup> They set traps and ambushes to isolate and destroy portions on the Byzantines who lost

discipline.<sup>78</sup> Some of his cavalry detachments took the bait and chased groups of Turks into the hills, to be ambushed and slaughtered, but most marched on.<sup>79</sup> The Seljuk mounted light infantry rode up and down the flanks of the army, showering them with arrows, but the frustrated Byzantine army continued on with no opposition in front of them.<sup>80</sup> However, Romanus, so desperate for a victory, kept the army moving.

Finally, Romanus, knowing that the sun would set soon, gave the signal to turn around and go back. He feared the Seljuks would attack his camp which was lightly defended. The majority of his force was untouched. The signal was to face the imperial banner in the other direction, but it could easily have been a misinterpretation as a signal to retreat because the emperor had fallen.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Attaleiates said that the soldiers far from the front line thought that the emperor had suffered a defeat.<sup>82</sup> Attaleiates points out that the commander of the rear guard, Andronicus, spread the rumor that Romanus was dead and his force defeated, and the rear guard retreated, leaving Romanus behind.<sup>83</sup> Confused units nearby saw the rearguard retreat and followed. Additionally, it would have taken time for all four wings of the army to recognize the order to retreat, causing inevitable gaps between sections of the army for the Seljuk cavalry to take advantage of.<sup>84</sup>

At that point, Alp Arslan, who viewed the whole affair, sprung his attack. The main force of the Seljuk army in the center of the crescent charged into Byzantine army as it turned to go back, and thousands of Seljuk warriors

streamed down the hills onto the Byzantine flanks.<sup>85</sup> Seljuks who had been hiding farther north came out and the main Byzantine force was effectively surrounded.<sup>86</sup> Many of Romanus' mercenary troops fled, including a large contingent of Armenians, who had been conscripted and hated the Byzantines anyway.<sup>87</sup>

This was the point in the battle when the rearguard should have fallen on the Seljuks and crushed them between themselves and Romanus' force. Surrounded, the right wing tried to face both ways and fight, but it was destroyed. The left wing, cut off from the center, fought to reach the emperor, but it was also routed.<sup>88</sup> Romanus and his Varangian Guard (Swedo-Slavic warriors from the Ukraine who had served the Eastern Roman emperor since the reign of Basil II<sup>89</sup>) fought on until they were overpowered and Romanus was captured.<sup>90</sup> Romanus did not give up until his horse was killed out from under him and his sword hand was wounded, preventing him using his sword.<sup>91</sup> The Seljuk Turks had won a great victory against a larger force.

The Byzantines heavily outnumbered the Turks, so why did the Turks win? The answer is in the difference in the states of the armies, the difference in the applicability of the tactics used, and treachery. Although Romanus had made progress in whipping the once proud Byzantine army into shape, there had not been enough time to undo the harm done to the military by previous emperors. The army was ill-equipped, ill-paid, and morale was low. Byzantine intelligence was poor. Romanus

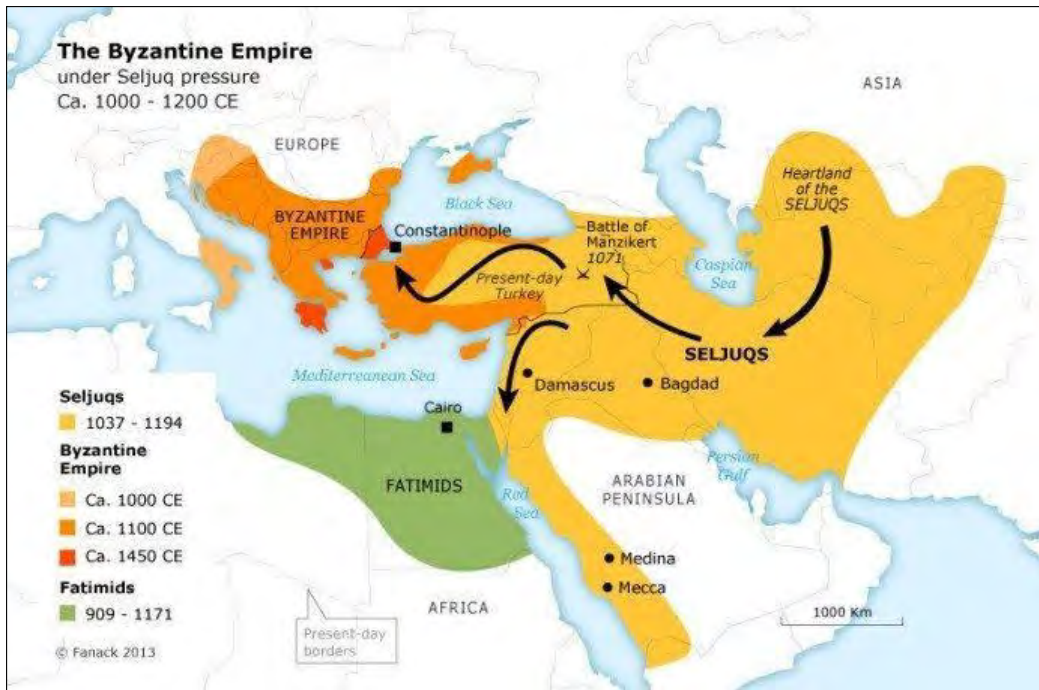


had no idea Arslan was coming to Manzikert to fight.<sup>92</sup> There were divisive elements in the Byzantine Empire and also in the army.<sup>93</sup> The lack of an indigenous professional army had dire consequences—the army was entirely too dependent on mercenaries. These mercenaries were often of limited loyalty (except for the Varangian Guard), as shown by the defection of the Uzes. Additionally, even those who did not defect did not stand and fight—they ran to save themselves once the rearguard retreated. Some spoke different languages and were loyal only to their own captains. In the end, between defections and the abandonment by the rearguard, a large part of Romanus's army did not even participate in the battle. In contrast, although the Seljuk Turk army was smaller, it was highly trained, heavily armed, and totally devoted to Alp Arslan.<sup>94</sup> To be defeated, his army would have had to be crushed to the last man—they were not a mercenary force. However, the Byzantines still should have had enough of a force there to beat the Turks, or at least to not be defeated, but there was a big difference in how they were used tactically.

The Byzantines were well aware of the importance of using cooperative combined arms tactics for fighting light cavalry, especially steppe cavalry. They had fought the Huns, Khazars, Bulgars, Magyars, and Pechenegs. However, although he was an experienced and respected general who had defeated the Turks previously, Romanus ignored 500 years of Byzantine doctrine, going back to Leo VI's *Taktika*.<sup>95</sup> He had committed most of his light infantry elsewhere, but

still attacked, violating this doctrine, and proving the point that heavy cavalry could not defeat light cavalry without light infantry support.<sup>96</sup> Romanus was so intent on defeating the Seljuks in a pitched battle, he continued to pursue the Turks further and further, for hours and hours, causing his numerically superior army to become spread out, disorganized, and tired. This played right into the normal steppe warrior tactics, which Alp Arslan used to perfection. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of his forces and used them optimally, exploiting Byzantine weakness and keeping his forces out of danger. Then, at the perfect moment, he unleashed them to great effect. However, the Byzantine army could still have been saved if not for treachery.

Romanus had made a great error by allowing a member of the rival Ducas family to command the reserves and this sealed the Byzantine army's fate. It is a mystery as to why he did this. After all, he had exiled Andronicus' father.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps he was trying to mend bridges with the Ducas family and thought the rear guard was where he could do the least harm. In any case, this decision cost him dearly. If the rear guard had advanced, it could have smashed the Turks surrounding Romanus' contingent. If it had not inflicted a large defeat upon them, it could at least have saved Romanus and his contingent. Andronicus Ducas' betrayal handed Alp Arslan and the Seljuk Turks victory, and although it furthered the circumstances of the Ducas family in the short term, it had disastrous consequences for the empire.



Map showing the incursion of the Seljuk Turks into the Byzantine Empire. The empire extended to the dark line east of the Battle of Manzikert. By 1194, the Seljuks controlled much of Anatolia in what is now Turkey. [https://about-history.com/the-battle-of-manzikert-1071-and-the-beginning-of-seljuk-dominance/?fbclid=IwAR3gaa59yWxhvJ9KQ\\_eTN6zJvMZx1Rv3sQ5GcePChRU6XxfZYS3P89U8ZNk](https://about-history.com/the-battle-of-manzikert-1071-and-the-beginning-of-seljuk-dominance/?fbclid=IwAR3gaa59yWxhvJ9KQ_eTN6zJvMZx1Rv3sQ5GcePChRU6XxfZYS3P89U8ZNk)

The results of this battle were a shock to the Christian and Islamic worlds. The psychological impact of this battle to the Islamic world was dramatic. For a long time, the Byzantine Empire had been considered “a permanent, stable and unshakeable, element of the political universe of the era.”<sup>98</sup> The Islamic world now began to see the Byzantine Empire in a totally different light. Byzantium was on the decline. Instead of a power, they were a weakening empire, vulnerable and unable to defend itself in many areas, and with wealth and lands available to be taken.<sup>99</sup> This battle, and especially the civil war that followed, led to permanent invasion and conquest during

the next decade.<sup>100</sup> “It dispersed the imperial armies in full view of the Seljuks, opened the eastern frontier, and sent a signal of Roman weakness.”<sup>101</sup> However, even as all of this played out, in spite of the great defeat, strong leadership after the battle could have mitigated this disaster; unfortunately, the Byzantine Empire did not have any at this time.

Manzikert did not have to be a disaster—the Seljuks offered merciful and generous terms as Alp Arslan still wanted to focus on war with the Shiite Fatimids.<sup>102</sup> The Turks were not interested in conquering the Byzantine Empire. Alp Arslan did not follow up his victory—he immediately went east to

Central Asia to deal with a revolt and was killed two years later without ever returning to Anatolia. His son, who succeeded him, also never campaigned in Anatolia.<sup>103</sup> For centuries the Persians, Byzantines, and Turks had raided and campaigned along this fluctuating border. It was business as usual. Additionally, returning a defeated and grateful Romanus to the throne would be much more useful than having to deal with another emperor bent on revenge.

The defeat at Manzikert brought on a civil war in the decade between the battle and the accession of Alexios I Comnenus in 1081, which in turn shaped decades of political and military events. Romanus's return to the throne probably would have been best for the em-

pire, as he would have honored the treaty with Alp Arslan, bringing peace and a period in which to recover the empire's strength. The army had been left leaderless as the high-ranking officers rushed back to Constantinople to play politics. The Ducas family acted before he returned and Michael VII Ducas was proclaimed emperor by the Patriarch.<sup>104</sup> Romanus tried to collect remnants of his armies and march on Constantinople, but he was defeated in battle twice and agreed to give up the throne and retire to a monastery.<sup>105</sup> However, he was betrayed, brutally blinded, and died from his wounds.

The aristocratic families were more interested in their own power and wealth than protecting the eastern borders—they refused Alp Arslan's deal.



A painting depicting the aftermath of the Battle of Manzikert (Mantzikert) in August, 1071 C.E. The battle, in Armenia, was one of the greatest defeats suffered by the Byzantine Empire. The victorious Seljuk army captured the Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes. (Diorama at the Istanbul Military Museum, Public Domain) [https://about-history.com/the-battle-of-manzikert-1071-and-the-beginning-of-seljuk-ominance/?fbclid=IwAR3gaa59yWxhvJ9KQ\\_eTN6zJvMZX1Rv3sQ5GcePChRU6XxfZYS3P89U8Znk](https://about-history.com/the-battle-of-manzikert-1071-and-the-beginning-of-seljuk-ominance/?fbclid=IwAR3gaa59yWxhvJ9KQ_eTN6zJvMZX1Rv3sQ5GcePChRU6XxfZYS3P89U8Znk)

Chaos reigned. After Romanus' downfall, his general Philaretus Brachamius rebelled and briefly held a fiefdom from Cilicia and Armenia.<sup>106</sup> General Bryennius revolted at Adrianople, and Roussel of Bailleul, once Michael VII's Norman mercenary general, tried to set up an independent Norman state in Anatolia.<sup>107</sup> Michael VII was continuously faced with revolts and was deposed in 1078 by Nicephoras III Botaneiates, who himself was deposed three years later by Alexius Comnenus.<sup>108</sup> Byzantine leaders such as Nicephoras III, lacking their own strong armies, often asked Seljuk emirs and troops to help in advancing emperors to the throne—increasing their influence.<sup>109</sup> While the Byzantine leaders were occupied with all of this in-fighting, the Byzantine Empire's strategic position changed.

The defeat at Manzikert and the political strife immediately following combined with the failure to focus on the external threats were a devastating combination that undermined the power of the Byzantine Empire forever. It was a "death blow to Byzantine domination in Asia Minor."<sup>110</sup> The campaign had almost bankrupted the state. Romanus himself said "I have used up the monies of the Romans . . . in the reorganization of the armies and in wars, and I have impoverished the nation."<sup>111</sup> Thus began the slow steady decline of Byzantine influence and Christianity in Anatolia.<sup>112</sup> The Turks used the refusal of the treaty made by Alp Arslan with Romanus as an excuse for their incursions into Anatolia.<sup>113</sup> Turcomans poured over the border. The southern

and eastern borders of Byzantium were effectively defenseless and the Byzantines often fled west. Turkish warriors filled the gap in the central and eastern regions and settled there. The neglect of the frontiers opened up the entire Anatolia region to Turkish raids and settlement and during all of this internal turmoil, independent bands of Turks were able to invade Asia Minor and occupy land unopposed.<sup>114</sup> However, it wasn't until two years after the battle that the Seljuk Turks began to systematically occupy Anatolia and migrated into Anatolia in force.<sup>115</sup> Instead of acting against them, the Byzantines let their internal struggles actually strengthen the Turkish position. Soon the Turks had won control of almost all of Anatolia—by 1080 much of Anatolia was incorporated into the Sultanate of Rum.<sup>116</sup>

As a result of the Battle of Manzikert and the ensuing rebellion, the Byzantine Empire had lost its major recruiting region, which provided over half of its military manpower, its largest grain producing region, and its vital trade route between Constantinople and the east.<sup>117</sup> The Byzantine Empire had lost the greatest part of its internal resources and the real source of its strength, which had previously enabled it to recover from setbacks. Anatolia was "defensible, rich, and populous," but fell because nobody would defend it.<sup>118</sup> By the time of the Crusades, Byzantium only held the Anatolian coasts. A movement was instigated that changed people and ideas decisively—Christianity in the region began to be replaced by Islam, and the people of Anatolia changed identities.<sup>119</sup> Even the Comne-

nian recovery later was really limited to the coastal regions and could not sustain itself long-term.<sup>120</sup> However, this situation had effects which would not only change the Byzantine Empire, but would have a great impact on the entire region.

The Battle of Manzikert is often cited as the *casus belli* for the Crusades.<sup>121</sup> The beleaguered Byzantines had sent many requests for military assistance during Pope Urban II's reign, and in March 1095 Emperor Alexios I Comnenus made another appeal for help in fighting off the Turkish invaders to the Pope at the Council of Piacenza.<sup>122</sup> This fell right into the Pope's plans. There had long been a rift between the Eastern and Western churches, and the papacy hoped to reunite them. After the defeat of the Byzantines at Manzikert and the fall of Jerusalem in the same year, Damascus and Antioch also fell, and it was easy to fan the fears of Christians.<sup>123</sup> Just ten months after Emperor Alexius's request, the Pope made his famous speech at Clermont. Although no record of what he said exists, according to one account, he chastised his knights and said, “[I]f you want to take counsel for your souls . . . go forward boldly as knights of Christ, hurrying swiftly to defend the Eastern church.”<sup>124</sup> Although Alexius expected mercenary warriors to help, he had opened up the proverbial Pandora's Box. The first Crusade was the response to these appeals for help to repel those who held the lands of the Christians, and the Franks soon traveled *en mass* into Byzantium on their way to the Holy Land. Often crusaders carved out their own fiefdoms

or refused to return cities to Byzantine control, and sometimes were very harsh traveling through Byzantine territory.

The Battle of Manzikert was definitely one of the most influential events in history. It marked the beginning of the end for the Byzantines. It sent shockwaves through both the Christian and Islamic worlds and opened the floodgates to Turkish incursion into the most strategically important region of the empire.<sup>125</sup> The two armies and their leaders were very different. The Seljuk Turks were nomadic steppe warriors, experts at using light infantry on hit-and-run attacks. Their leader, Alp Arslan, was a strong Sunni warrior who really wanted no war with the Byzantines—he wanted to make war on the heretical Shiite Fatimids. They had taken over the Persian Empire and were in a very strong position. The Byzantines were in a very different position. Decades of mismanagement had turned the strong Byzantine military into an underpaid, mostly mercenary force with low morale. The Byzantine leader at Manzikert, Romanus, was insecure in his position as emperor with many political enemies, leading a large, but inefficient force. Romanus' campaign towards the Seljuk Turks was filled with errors. He split his army in half and then ignored Byzantine tactics versus steppe warriors, finally betrayed by his own generals. Although the Byzantines lost this battle, it might not have been a disaster if followed by good leadership. In the end, however, the battle and subsequent civil war were a disaster for the Byzantines because of poor leadership, internal struggles, and neglect of

the borders that resulted in the loss of Anatolia, a strategically important area they could hardly afford to lose. The result of the battle had great ramifications for not only the Byzantine Empire, but for the course of history in this region of the world. The battle so changed the strategic position of the Byzantines that soon the Turks had overrun Anatolia and their requests for assistance led to the first Crusade—a seminal event in world history.

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## Notes

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