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DISCUSSION ABOUT THE NATIONAL ASPECT IN THE BATTLE OF BOUVINES (JULY 27, 1214)

Abstract. The article discusses the mythologization of the Bouvines Battle based on the data of the official chroniclers of King Philip II Augustus. The author examines the image of the warring opponents, their mythology and sacred appearance, presented in the presentation of the French side. An alternative conclusion is proposed about the discrepancy with the reality of the thesis characterizing the Battle of Bouvines as the first French national event.

Keywords: Philip Augustus, the Battle of Bouvines, nation, mythology, High Middle Ages.

In modern French historiography, there is a fairly unified position regarding the first national triumph – the event when the French nation was born. Such a position is not a novelty; it is found in the works of French medievalists Henri François Delaborde, Georges Duby, Dominique Barthelemy, in the mass of popular scientific works. This event took place on Sunday, August 27, 1214, the day of the Battle of Bouvines. A person familiar with the history of the Middle Ages will immediately ask the question: “where could the idea of a nation or national feeling come from at the beginning of the XIII century?”. Traditionally, the emergence of nation-states is associated with the period of Modern Era. The research aims to analyze this position, analyze its origins and understand how such an approach corresponds to reality.

You should start with a description of the event itself. Why is the Battle of Bouvines so important? Firstly, the Battle of Bouvines was a decisive general battle, summing up more than twenty years of confrontation with the English Kingdom and its ruling dynasty, the Plantagenets. For the era of the High Middle Ages, a general battle in itself was a rarity, since in the period described it could decide the fate of the sovereign, question the existence of the entire kingdom. And finally, even in case of victory, it could not bring great benefits, but cause irreparable dam-

age. The sovereigns of the Middle Ages preferred not to put all available means at stake, choosing less risky ways for war – maneuvering on foreign territory with their subsequent ruin or sieges of castles. Nevertheless, the battle took place, and this is really the first battle of territorial France with an international coalition. On the battlefield of Bouvines, many enemies of the French king came together under a single banner: the dukes of Flanders and Boulogne, in fact, powerful and independent rulers, Count William Salisbury from England and the head of the entire union, Emperor Otto IV. That is, if earlier the predecessors of Philip Augustus could only claim the lands around Île-de-France and the city of Orleans due to the limitations of their real power, then the scale of the confrontation changed during the reign of Augustus [6, P. 59]. Now the King of France possessed vast territories and a large army, which could only be compared with the combined Anglo-German forces. The significance of the battle was so great that almost immediately it began to acquire a mystical halo, overgrown with legends and special symbolism. Let's take a closer look at what this symbolism was.

The main source about the Battle of Bouvines is the work “Phillipide” by Guillaume le Breton, the court chaplain and chronicler of King Philip [3, P. 346]. This is a synchronous source that has been

written for several years; specifically, the segment dedicated to the battle was written around the beginning of the second decade of the XIII century. It should be noted that Guillaume le Breton was directly on the battlefield, next to the king. He saw the battle with his own eyes, and although the description was not written immediately, nevertheless, we do not have more synchronous sources. Naturally, the nature of the composition glorifies the figure of the king, but not only. Guillaume praises the main royal advisers: Brother Guerin of the Order of the Hospitallers, the first adviser, Bishop of Beauvais Philippe de Dreux, who knocked William Salisbury off his horse, etc. In addition, the “Phillipide” presents the reader with a detailed description of the battle, presented through inspired descriptions: “The Franks, who were boiling with courage, fought one against three, bravely going to meet dangers,” finally “won because they were strong in spirit and virtuous” [5, P. 141]. However, the author does not examine only the episodes of the battle, but also focuses on the nature of the entire war, turning it into a sacred one. Here symbolism is born, which so clearly fits into the Christian, three-part idea of the Trinity and the world familiar to medieval man; embodied both in heaven and on earth [4, P. 308].

King Philip, as a good Christian, did not want to fight on Sunday – a day that should be dedicated to God. It was the Germans who forced him to wage war with their cunning tricks. When the time of battle came, Philip knelt in prayer; at his command, the Oriflamme, the holy banner blessed by the church, was raised. Saint Dionysius, the patron saint of Paris and France, will fight for the king [4, P. 309]. The royal army was symbolically and conventionally divided into three parts, three orders of the “nation”: first of all, chivalry, the right hand of the king, his hope and savior in case of danger; next come the good commoners, loyal sons of a submissive people, not plebeians or mercenaries; the third part, the “army of God’s peace”, people of communes led by priests, workers and townspeople. It is they who are trusted to guard

the Oriflamme; this gesture of trust shown by the king also had a practical purpose – it was impossible to allow the center of the army to escape, and the Oriflamme had to support people and their faith [4, P. 310]. Thus, Guillaume le Breton portrays the image of a Christian army fighting for the faith and its king. And who was on the opposite side?

The camp of the German Emperor is shown as a place where evil and disorder reign. The leaders are greedy and arrogant, the soldiers are insane or mercenaries. There are no good people or priests in this army, “everything is rotten around the German emperor”. Emperor Otto IV is excommunicated from the Church, his entourage are enemies of the Pope, friends of heretics; or, worst of all, traitors who have changed their oaths [4, P. 309]. In contrast to the blessed Oriflamme, the Germans kept a variety of emblems and banners, all bold and “as if diabolical”, with dragons and black eagles. But the main thing in the enemy’s army is its goals. The Germans, like the ancient barbarians, came to kill and plunder, mercenaries without kin and tribe, paid at the expense of the robbed poor and ruined churches [4, P. 139]. That is, the German emperor and his people, represented through the image of unambiguous evil, darkness and a crowd of monsters.

Guillaume le Breton presents the battle as a chess game, the king of France is on the side of the “Whites”, because he is fighting for a just cause, the cause of Christ and against the rebels; against him, the German emperor is on the side of the “Blacks” with an army of scoundrels and traitors who planned to split the kingdom, burn churches, etc. And the result is quite obvious to any medieval person – the victory was won, and the “evil and damned” fled in disorder [4, P. 310].

The King of France has won, but why? The answer does not lie in the number of knights or sergeants, but in the fact that he could not fail to win. After all, all those who sincerely fight for the cause of Christ, defending his church and people are obliged to triumph. In the perception of a medieval man, it is the motive,

the noble feeling for which Philip II Augustus fought, that is primary, and victory is only a consequence of his correct actions. In the end, any battle is the judgment of God, where you defend the right to your own vision of power and the work of many decades. It was the Lord who helped the king to win.

The people help Philip. When the king returned to Paris, everywhere in the countryside and in the cities, he was greeted with applause, ringing bells, celebrations. When the sovereign entered the capital, a genuine euphoria began. The festivities continued for seven days and seven nights. Thus, Guillaume le Breton shows us that the king is blessed by God, and God has confirmed the rights of the king, restored peace on earth, called on both sides of the world (clergy and people) to glorify the winner and rejoice. And the hitherto unknown is born in this celebration – in harmony of Gregorian singing, the king seems to have thrown his cloak over all his subjects [4, P. 309]. The bloodshed in the battle of Bouvines sprinkled all the “children of Gaul”, and the king, by his grace, supposedly abolishes all dissonances, differences of gender and age, but the most important differences of rank [5, P. 141]. The celebration of the victory at Bouvines is a celebration of equals. Actually, this is where the position of national unity and the French spirit takes root – the king feels the love of the people, pays him the same, and now all Frenchmen will follow the king of France, genuine, real: from the poor to the bishop. So, in the “Phillipide”, and this is noted by Georges Duby, as if a single nation appears, rallying around the king [4. P. 141]. However, how does this assumption correspond to reality? Truly, Philip Augustus changed the idea of France in many ways, literally reformatting it from a Frankish state to a French kingdom. Wearing the crown for the first time as the king of France, and not as the king of the Franks, Philip claims the imperial regalia and powers. After the defeat of Otto, it is the French sovereign who becomes the heir to the empire of Charlemagne. It is not surprising, since it was in this spirit of “strong royal power, with a strong

hand of the monarch, as it was under Charlemagne” that Philip II was brought up from childhood [6, P. 58–59]. A state with the real power of the king was a full-fledged goal, to which the French monarch systematically advanced for four decades. The result of this policy is a great victory, the formation of the kingdom, the nickname August. In the mouth of Guillaume le Breton, “Augustus” is a unifier or collector, primarily of Frankish lands, but also a conqueror who decides the fate of the Christian world together with His Holiness the Pope [4, 311].

People followed the king in a single impulse, and perceived Bouvines victory on such an unprecedented scale that a similar phenomenon was even reflected in the manuscripts of French chroniclers. But if we put aside the laudatory odes and look at reality, we can see that in the entire reign of King Philip II, and even more so in the era of the High Middle Ages, the Battle of Bouvines is a relatively local and small event. It became important in meaning and results, but it could not produce a social revolution and create a different kind of society, a national society.

Indeed, the king, with his charisma, led people to battle, and people stood with all their hearts for him and for the cause of Christ, which he defended. But first of all, it happens because they are his subjects, “the king’s people”. The Latin concept of “*Do ut des*” or “I give that you gave”, explaining the medieval principle of interdependence and belonging to someone (homage, vassalage) it explains the behavior of the king’s subjects much better than a dubious national feeling. It is not entirely clear to which state it would manifest itself, how is this even possible in a feudal society with no concept and idea of a “nation”. In the described period, national feeling could not be a unifying factor. Philip is the first king who managed to unite people under the right hand of the king just by this event, this victory. That is, for the first time, the royal power, in addition to religion and language, became a pillar of unity of people, the little they had in common. But this is not a national feeling, and not its analogue. I am inclined to believe that here we

are talking more about a kind of short-term impulse, fixed on the charisma of a particular king and on a great victory. But to pull up the birth of the French nation to this event is too hasty and doubtful a conclusion. However, if this is not a national feeling, then why chroniclers pay such attention to a local event. What was so different from the others in the policy of Philip II? Let's try to answer this question.

On August 27, 1214, the battle on the fields of Bouvines consolidated in French society the triumph of the "royal model" – a concept introduced by the French medievalist Gerard Sivery to denote the Philippian transformations. The historian noted that during the described period in the society of the High Middle Ages, the "feudal model" and the "royal model" coexisted in parallel; the "feudal model" meant the dominance of large lords in the kingdom, the "royal" model covered the decisive victory of the royal power in all areas of public life [6, P. 10]. A huge synthesis of actions of social and spiritual characters was behind this victory. The creation of a developed and devoted officialdom in the kingdom, the use of a "personal homage" to the king to strengthen power and expand the royal domain, the consolidation of the role of the capital for Paris, the formation of army structures controlled by the baillis, prevots and seneschals, as well as all that legendary and mythological aspect analyzed in this work – the image of a Defender of the Faith, a fighter against heretics and the first the King of France – all this fits into the logic of the royal model and the transformation of the country. It should be noted that despite the seemingly obvious differences and novelty, Philip and his government

team did not create a new society. That is, even such changes were only a kind of French variation of the development of feudalism, or to be more precise, another "Revival", since all the symbolism, spirit and logic of these transformations were permeated with a look back to the Empire of Charlemagne.

The Battle of Bouvines and the transformation of the newly minted King of France are completely unique in scale and consequences. However, despite this, such changes were fully a medieval phenomenon, inseparable from the historical reality of developed feudalism. Despite the brief historical moment of the feast of equals on the battlefield, inequality, which is an integral part of feudal society and a natural norm of life, has not gone away [7 P. 37]. It is enough to look at the time of the epoch after the Battle of Bouvines, at other military campaigns or large-scale events. Such praise in the spirit of "equality" and "unity" is not mentioned by any of the royal chroniclers or writers. Official biographies acquire a different character and turn to the praise of personal qualities: holiness, justice, courage. In the same period described in the works of Guillaume le Breton, there is clearly a desire to pay tribute to the policy of Philip II Augustus to create a genuine French kingdom with real royal power, and not national motives.

For the formation of a new national society, more serious structural changes are needed, which are possible only with a change in historical reality and technological development already directly in Modern Era. The question of creating such a society on the battlefield of Bouvines or in the High Middle Ages is too controversial.

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