

## *Carmen in victoriam Pisanorum*

Unknown author

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown; early or mid-11<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown  
DATE OF DEATH Unknown; late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown

### WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

#### *Carmen in victoriam Pisanorum*, 'Poem on the victory of the Pisans'

DATE Probably soon after the events it relates, 1087, and before the First Crusade, 1095-99  
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Latin

#### DESCRIPTION

This is a poem in 73 stanzas celebrating the Pisan and Genoan attack on Mahdiyya (Tunisia) in 1087. The poet is clearly a Pisan cleric; he makes frequent allusions to biblical, particularly Old Testament, persons and events. The poem is an epic evocation of the Pisan struggle against the forces of evil, a paean to the victory that God granted to his faithful over his enemies. Timinus (Tamīn ibn al-Mu'izz, the Zirid emir of Mahdiyya) is a 'cruel dragon,' comparable with the Antichrist and with Pharaoh. His fortress has massive walls; its towers reach up to the clouds; he has raided Spain, Italy, Gaul and as far as Alexandria. In short, he is an epic villain who has little in common with the historical Zirid emir. By contrast, Pisa is a new Rome, come to destroy Mahdiyya, the new Carthage. But such classical allusions are far outnumbered by biblical (primarily Old Testament) parallels: the poet compares the conflict to Moses' struggle with Pharaoh, to David's fight with Goliath, and to Gideon's combat against the Midianites (whose name indeed, becomes *Madianites*, residents of *Madia*). God assures the victory of His army by sending the same angel to smite the Agarenes that he sent against Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35);

at the hour of battle, the Archangel Michael sounds his trumpet, just as he did when he slew the dragon.

In the heat of battle, the Agarenes call on Muḥammad, ‘who roused the world with his perfidy, the enemy of the Trinity and of the holy faith; he denies that Jesus of Nazareth, the Word, became God’. Muḥammad ‘was a more powerful heresiarch than Arius’. His Saracen followers are ‘like beasts’. God, of course, grants victory to the Pisans and their Genoan allies, who conquer the suburb of Zawila (Sabila in the text), then the city of Mahdiyya itself. Men, women and children are massacred in the mosque (*meschita*) and the Italians cut down ‘a thousand of Muḥammad’s priests’.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

This poem, written just a few years before Urban II’s call for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, has been seen as expressing a vision of holy war against Muslims which will subsequently come to full fruition during the First Crusade. Unlike many texts on the First Crusade, the poem presents Muslims as heretics (rather than idolaters) and Muḥammad as a heresiarch (rather than a false god). The description of the Saracen enemies and in particular of their king is similar to that in French *chansons de geste*. Yet the poet’s use of the Old Testament in order to present the Pisan army as the echo of that of Israel, anticipates the chronicles of the First Crusade.

#### MANUSCRIPTS

MS Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale – 3897/919, fols 63r-65v (first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century)

#### EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

<http://www.uan.it/alim/testi/xi/AlimCarmenvictorPisanXIepica-poes.htm>;

this transcription seems to be the source of three other websites that reproduce the poem:

[http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LATo619/\\_P1.HTM](http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LATo619/_P1.HTM)

<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/latinlibrary/carmeninvictoriam.html>

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/carmeninvictoriam.html>

H. Cowdrey, ‘The Mahdiya campaign of 1087’, *English Historical Review* 92 (1977) 1-29, pp. 24-29 (repr. in J. France (ed.), *Medieval warfare 1000-1300*, Aldershot UK, 2006, 493-521; Cowdrey was unaware of the 1971 and 1969 editions)

- G. Scalia: 'Il carme Pisano sull'impresa contro i Saraceni del 1087', in *Studi di Filologia romanza offerti a Silvio Pellegrini*, Padua, 1971, 565-627 (reproduced online at *Carmen in victoriam Pisanorum*, ed. P. Loi, Pisa, 1969 (edition with introduction, commentary and Italian trans.))
- F. Schneider (ed.), *Fünfundzwanzig lateinische weltliche Rhythmen aus der Frühzeit*, Rome, 1925, pp. 34-42
- P. Pecchiali (ed.), 'Il carme del 1087', in P. Pecchiali, *Gloriosa Pisa*, Pisa, 1907 (reproduces the 1847 edition with an Italian trans.)
- F. Belgrano (ed.), 'Carmen in victoriam Pisanorum', *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria* 4 (1867) ccxvi-ccxxxvii (transcription based on 1843 and 1847 editions, without direct reference to the MS)
- E. Du Méril (ed.), 'Chant sur la victoire remportée par les Pisans, en 1088', in *Poésies populaires du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1847, pp. 239-51
- Baron of Reiffenberg (ed.), 'Poème sur l'honneur de Pisans vainqueurs des Sarrasins', *Bulletins de l'Académie Royale de Sciences et de Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles* 10 (1843) 524-45 (according to P. Loi, edition containing numerous errors)

## STUDIES

- D. Bachrach, 'Conforming with the rhetorical tradition of plausibility. Clerical representation of battlefield orations against Muslims, 1080-1170', *International History Review* 26 (2004) 1-19
- M. Oldoni, 'Guerra e pace nell'epica medievale', in E. Menestò (ed.), *Pace e guerra nel basso medioevo. Atti del XL Convegno storico internazionale*, Spoleto, 2004, 335-45
- Cowdrey, 'The Mahdiya campaign of 1087'
- M. Allegretto and G. Lachin, 'Epica latina medioevale ed escatologia cristiana. Il "Carmen in victoriam Pisanorum"', *Atti dell'Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti - Classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti* 131 (1973) 209-29

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