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# The Fourth Crusade: An Analysis of Sacred Duty|

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The Fourth Crusade: An Analysis of Sacred Duty  
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BY

Dale Robinson

History

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The crusades were a Christian enterprise. They were proclaimed in the name of God for the service of the church. Religion was the thread which bound crusaders together and united them in a single holy cause. When crusaders set out for a holy war they took a vow not to their feudal lord or king, but to God. The Fourth Crusade was no different. Proclaimed by Pope Innocent III in 1201, it was intended to recover Christian control of the Levant after the failure of past endeavors. Crusading vows were exchanged for indulgences absolving all sins on behalf of the church. Christianity tied crusaders to the cause. That thread gradually came unwound as Innocent's crusade progressed, however.

Pope Innocent III preached the Fourth Crusade as another attempt to secure Christian control of the Holy Land after the failures of previous crusades. Like these previous crusades, the Fourth Crusade failed to regain lasting Christian control of religious sites in Palestine. The Fourth Crusade is a unique event in medieval history, though, because its failure resulted from attacking Christian cities in complete contradiction to the pope's original intention. The main army of crusaders initially converged on the Republic of Venice, where leaders had agreed to a contract with the Venetians for transport to the Holy Land. Yet, unable to fulfill its end of the contract, the crusading army diverted from its original course and began attacking Christian cities in the Mediterranean. This led the crusade to sack the Byzantine capitol of Constantinople and establish a short-lived Latin empire on its ruins. The crusaders failed to fulfill their original vow to fight for control of the Holy Land while instead targeting fellow Christians.

While some sources have focused on superficial, sometimes even frivolous issues, the majority of historians direct their research to explaining the crusade's diversion to

Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> Despite this common focus, a major area of disagreement remains among scholars in determining what caused the crusade's diversion. While the contention that the diversion was inevitable has all but disappeared among academic writings, historians are unable to come to a consensus on what factors led to what may be called the greatest accident of history. An analysis of the sources reveals the need for a revision of historiographical trends and a new interpretation of the crusade's development that incorporates the entire socio-political situation surrounding the event. Current historiography tends to examine the crusade strictly from the perspective of crusaders and crusade leaders and subscribes to various, sometimes contradictory, interpretations. None of these dominant approaches or interpretations, however, adequately incorporates the much broader theological or socio-political trends, such as the relationship between clergy and common crusaders or the dynamics of authority permeating the crusade, which may have directed the crusade's events.

Robert Browning, a Byzantine historian attempting to explain the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, lays the foundations of the events of 1453 in the events of 1204.<sup>2</sup> He asserts that the Byzantine Empire was never able to recover from the catastrophic events of the Fourth Crusade. Browning references the idea of a "balance of power" in Anatolia, which was heavily skewed away from the Byzantines following the Latin occupation. He writes that this created a void which the Ottomans continued to fill leading up to 1453.<sup>3</sup> While the Byzantines were decimated, the Ottomans continued to grow stronger within extremely close proximity. This

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<sup>1</sup> The most notable example of research unhelpfully independent of scholarly debates is Zdislaw Pentek's brief article on food provision, in which the author spends about five pages discussing crusaders' eating habits with sources which he admits mention almost nothing about the subject. Zdislaw Pentek, "The Fourth Crusade and the Problem of Food Provision in the Accounts of Robert de Clari and Geoffroy de Villehardouin," *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* 32, no. 1 (Dec. 2014): 109-114.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xix, 290-291.

powerful combination is what Browning argues led to the Ottoman capture of the city. In his words, “the final blow was delivered by the Ottomans, but the fatal injury was inflicted in 1204.”<sup>4</sup>

The Fourth Crusade was an anomaly of theology and ecclesiastical authority in which laymen openly defied clerical directives and the clergy split against itself. At certain points the clergy became increasingly irrelevant as their role was replaced by common crusaders answering their own theological questions and earthly considerations such as fundraising and crusade unity took precedence over theology, while the entire clerical base, including the pope, was unable to come to a unified consensus regarding the expedition's sanctity.

### **Historiography**

Scholarship on the Fourth Crusade commenced immediately after the sack of Constantinople. The leading consensus evolved to assert that the crusade was an act of treason. While ideas of a formal scheme to attack Constantinople have been dismissed as relying on a misreading of the sources, this theory enjoys a much more persistent conception in the belief that calculated Venetian greed led the crusade to its final destination.<sup>5</sup> Edward Gibbon’s renowned *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, as one influential example of this theory, portrays the crusade as a pattern of ambition and avarice, an expedition often sowed with the “seeds of discord and scandal.”<sup>6</sup>

This gradually changed as modern 20<sup>th</sup> Century historians began to distance themselves from that idea in favor of a theory of accidents. Donald Queller and Gerald Day, professors of

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<sup>4</sup> Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, 253.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 205.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan & Cadell, 1776).

history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, contributed most to the Venetians' vindication with their article, "Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade." According to them, the treason theory has its roots in French historian Louis de Mas Latrie's indictment of Dandolo and the Venetians in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, from which generations of crusade scholars erroneously followed.<sup>7</sup> They challenge the resulting assumptions that the Venetians did not share the piety of the crusaders and that they manipulated the crusade to make it more advantageous to their trade interests. They hypothesize that the Venetians garnered no selfish motives and were committed to the crusade for its own merits, fostering no ulterior motives. They claim that, while the Venetians certainly had some commercial advancement in mind, they were also heavily inspired by faith and made only reasonable demands on the crusaders. Their sources are relatively simple, however, yet apparently adequate to make such strong assertions on the Venetian's motives. The article draws frequently from original chronicles of the crusade, such as those of Villehardouin, Clari, Gunther of Pairis and Dandolo, to reveal how pro-Venetian attitudes and exonerating information can be found in these sources.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the clear summation provided by Queller and Day, and their sound rebuttal of the theory of treason, the theory of accidents began development among historians for years prior. French archivist Natalis de Wailly is sometimes credited with establishing the dispute between the two theories in 1874. His work is considered responsible for the positions taken by the far more influential Comte de Riant on this matter.<sup>9</sup> Riant became one of the most eminent and

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<sup>7</sup> Donald Queller and Gerald Day, "Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade," *The American Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (October 1976): 717.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 717-737.

<sup>9</sup> A. Frolow, "La déviation de la 4<sup>e</sup> Croisade vers Constantinople: Problème d'histoire et de doctrine," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 145, no. 2 (1954): 170; The theory of accidents is prevalent in the work of European crusade historians, sometimes referred to as either *la théorie de circonstances fortuites*, *Intrigentheorie* or *Zuffalstheorie*.

fervent champions of the idea of a pre-established conspiracy by the Venetians.<sup>10</sup> His writing speaks often of Venetian political treason and the appearance of a secret treaty between Dandolo and the Egyptian sultan to divert the crusade, while also characterizing the Venetian contributions to the crusade as “fraudulent.”<sup>11</sup>

Another late nineteenth century historian, Edwin Pears, assumes the same interpretation as Riant, crediting him and his scholarly reputation as the influence for his own work on the crusade. Pears agrees completely with Riant’s theory of a premeditated Venetian plot to alter the crusade’s course.<sup>12</sup> Pears believes that scheme to attack Constantinople was rooted in Dandolo's desire for revenge and was the natural conclusion of decades of Venetian struggle against the empire. He points to examples such as past treaty violations, the transfer of trading privileges to Genoa, and the rumor that Dandolo was blinded by the emperor as the basis for the doge's "inextinguishable hatred" of the Greeks.<sup>13</sup> Pears adds an additional layer to Riant’s theory, though, by arguing that Phillip of Swabia pre-planned the attack on Constantinople to place Alexius IV on the throne and shared his intentions with Boniface when they met in 1201.<sup>14</sup> While he believes there was a premeditated plot, collusion between Dandolo, Boniface and Phillip of Swabia, he also argues that Innocent used his power and authority in an unsuccessful campaign to prevent the plot's execution and thus shares none of the blame for the crusade’s conclusion.<sup>15</sup> Pears creates an intriguing characterization of the crusade, describing the crusaders

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<sup>10</sup> Riant’s contemporary, Edwin Pears, credits him with dividing the historiography on treason theory into ideas of premeditated and non-premeditated plots. Edwin Pears, *The Fall of Constantinople, being the Story of the Fourth Crusade* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1886), xi-x.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Riant, *Innocent III, Philippe de Souabe et Boniface de Montferrat : examen des causes qui modifièrent, au détriment de l'empire grec, le plan primitif de la quatrième croisade* (Paris, V. Palme, 1875), 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> Pears, *Fall of Constantinople*, xi.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-234.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-240.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xi, 266.

as "prisoners" and the Venetians as their "jailers." The work of Queller and Day is thus best regarded as an essential part of this debate's culmination, but by no means its beginning.

Historians have now commonly adopted the view that the Fourth Crusade's diversion to Constantinople was a complex series of accidents. This new consensus asserts that the crusade's end result was an unintended consequence which no party foresaw until it was too late. Even in spite of clear direction toward that end from those such as Alexius III or Doge Dandolo prior to Zara, historians believe the crusade as a whole was directed only by chance. Recent popular books by Jonathan Phillips, Jonathan Riley-Smith and Christopher Tyerman adhere to this theory in their narratives of the crusade.<sup>16</sup> David Nicolle also incorporates this theory into his discussions of the crusade, asserting that the events of 1204 were neither direct nor unavoidable.<sup>17</sup> He instead focuses on the specific circumstances that arose during the crusade, particularly "the realities of power, money, climate and the availability of food," to explain how it was gradually pushed toward Constantinople.<sup>18</sup> The presence of such a resolute scholarly consensus does not grant it immunity from criticism, though. Michael Angold of the University of Edinburgh is hesitant to accept this view because he believes it far too expediently relieves historians from their duty to dig deeper into the crusade's diversion, arguing that "in one sense all of history is an accident."<sup>19</sup> Despite minimal objections, the theory of accidents remains the prevailing scholarship. The diversion, as it is now commonly understood, was based on the

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Phillips, *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople*, New York: Penguin, 2004; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014; Christopher Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom: Holy War and the Crusades*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. These books primarily offer a clear beginning to end narrative that is useful for anyone trying to grasp the basics of current attitudes toward the crusade. Tyerman takes a more cautious approach to the accident theory, but he seems only to have issues of semantics. He prefers explaining the crusade as "pragmatism, idealism and opportunism" rather than as an accident per se.

<sup>17</sup> David Nicolle, *The Fourth Crusade 1202-04: The Betrayal of Byzantium* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Angold, "The Road to 1204: The Byzantine Background to the Fourth Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 25, no. 3 (1999): 257.



circumstances that arose, rather than any party's deliberate plot to hijack the crusade. It is within this framework that historians now theorize about the Fourth Crusade.

In spite of the common acceptance of the theory of accidents, some modern historians still cling to the notion that the crusade's diversion was directed by Venetian avarice. The most prominent perpetuator of these ideas is Steven Runciman. In many of his widely-lauded works Runciman hedges often on the question of Venice's motives. His writing exhibits what can be viewed as a weaker version of the treason theory advanced in the nineteenth century. While he does not deny the influence of several other factors on the crusade's direction, he defies the post-Queller and Day consensus by his inclusion of Venetian avarice as a controlling dynamic on the crusade's outcome. According to Runciman, the crusade was not directed to Constantinople through Venice's passive guidance but was actively "lured" by its "jealous greed."<sup>20</sup> In his often-referenced *History of the Crusades*, Runciman goes so far as to suggest an element of deception and claim that the Franks were "outwitted by the Venetians," which is a direct contrast to the ideas of Queller and Day.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Jonathan Harris approaches a more minor form of treason theory by identifying Boniface as potentially the primary cause of the diversion. He postulates that Boniface was enticed by the riches of Constantinople and supported the diversion as a way to preserve the endangered crusade.<sup>22</sup> Though Harris recognizes his argument as an unconfirmed interpretation, he believes the circumstances of Alexius' approach of Boniface support its plausibility.<sup>23</sup> Current overall scholarship remains soundly committed, however, to the task of explaining the crusade in terms of the unpredictable circumstances that arose.

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<sup>20</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Runciman, *The History of the Crusades, Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 129.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 162-163.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *Constantinople*, 163.

Thomas Madden argues that the crusade's fate was a result of the competing, and often contradictory, requirements between the crusaders' spiritual vow and the secular contracts to which they bound themselves. The crusading vow, the Treaty of Venice and the Treaty of Zara form the basis of the crusade's contractual obligations. Crusaders had to constantly adapt their actions to their contractual agreements, according to Madden, which directed the series of events leading the crusade to Constantinople.<sup>24</sup>

Historians, however, have largely ignored the role of theology both on the crusade's diversion and the individual crusaders. This is perhaps the great irony of decades of studies on the Fourth Crusade, considering how crusading was inherently a theological act. By instead focusing on the political aspects of the events, scholars bypass what was likely the greatest driving force behind the crusade.

Alfred Andrea, introducing his translation of the *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, suggests that "modern historians have too often misrepresented the Fourth Crusade as a purely secular venture."<sup>25</sup> This is an unfortunate facet of much of the current historiography on the crusade. It neglects the theological intricacies that took place on the crusade, many of which resulted from the evolving relationship between crusaders, the clergy and the religious establishment. To use Andrea's phrasing, the crusade itself was a "religious expression."<sup>26</sup> The journey's events changed the religious interpretations and sentiments of many crusaders. It challenged the traditional religious atmosphere of Christendom. From this perspective, the crusade was anything but secular. Religion, and sometimes the very lack thereof, played a substantial role in the

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Madden, "Vows and Contracts in the Fourth Crusade: The Treaty of Zara and the Attack on Constantinople in 1204," *The International History Review* 15, no. 3 (August 1993): 441-468.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred Andrea, trans., *The Capture of Constantinople, The Hystoria Constantinopolitana of Gunther of Paris* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

crusade's events and the influence they had on crusaders. Because of the crusade's reformatory nature regarding traditional religious authority, the Fourth Crusade was perhaps the most religiously conscious crusade of medieval history.

Raymond Schmandt examines the religious and ethical musing of common crusaders by applying the philosophy of just war theory to the crusade. He argues that the crusaders were constantly engaged in introspection about the justifiability of their actions and did not blindly accept the sanctity of their diversions to Zara and Constantinople, but had to actively justify them as a just war. Schmandt describes the interpretations of just war theory that were prevalent at the time and shows how the crusaders compared them to their own actions in moral reflection. Schmandt ultimately agrees with the crusaders' conclusions that the crusade was a just war according to the standards of the time. Schmandt's theory is significant to understanding the crusade because it implies that the crusaders were not just blindly following the group. They exhibited a level of autonomy that made attacking Christians a conscious choice. Schmandt's article offers an interpretation often neglected by historians—that the individual crusaders were responsible for the crusade's events because they amended their own viewpoints to see nothing wrong with their actions.<sup>27</sup>

Schmandt has been the most helpful in emphasizing how the crusaders' concepts of theology played a role in the crusade's course of events. He does not, however, focus on reasons specifically why such introspection was necessary. Schmandt neglects to examine the ambivalent responses to crusaders' theological questions from those in positions of influence. The shortcomings of his work arise when he places too much emphasis on the crusaders themselves

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<sup>27</sup> Raymond Schmandt, "The Fourth Crusade and Just War Theory," *The Catholic Historical Review* 61, no. 2 (April 1975): 191-221.

acting as interpreters of faith when, in reality, every convention of the time dictated they turn to the clergy for matters of theological debate. The only reason they would take the task upon themselves is if the answers provided by the clergy were insufficient.

For the purpose of examining the clergy's impact on the crusade, and the theological implications of it, the narrative of Gunther of Pairis is perhaps the most revealing source. Gunther recorded the observations and tales of Abbot Martin, who oversaw a Cistercian monastery, when he returned from the crusade. Gunther's chronicle, the *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, provides the most detailed source from the viewpoint of a cleric who actually traveled with the crusade.

Just as the crusade was the epitome of division between Eastern and Western Christians, however, it was equally divisive among the Latin crusaders. The Fourth Crusade is best viewed as an ideological tug-of-war between two opposing concepts of theology. While Raymond Scmandt presents a firm groundwork to examine the theological intricacies of the crusade, this aspect of the expedition has been left virtually untouched for the past forty years.

### **Participation in the Crusade by Clergy**

The rebellious attitudes of the crusade's laymen and nobility is what sets the crusade apart from the many others. Every precedent laid before the Fourth Crusade suggested the church held supreme authority over the theological matters of a holy war. According to Fulcher de Chartres, when Pope Urban II commenced preaching of the First Crusade at Clermont he clarified that "[crusaders] must especially let all matters that pertain to the church be controlled by the law of

the church." Urban specifically requested that the crusade "keep the church and the clergy in all its grades entirely free from the secular power."<sup>28</sup>

The chronicles are unclear exactly how many clergy traveled with the crusaders, and the nature of history deems it impossible to ever know for sure how strong of a presence the church had in the crusade compared with other crusaders. Clari mentions that there were so many clergy that he is unable to include them all in his narrative, despite discussing scores of crusaders by name.<sup>29</sup> Their importance to a crusading army is undoubtable, though. Religion was the standard against which all else was applied for crusaders.<sup>30</sup> Interpretations of the crusade and proper courses of action to take depended on analogous interpretations of religion which the clergy was trained to readily supply.

### **Theological Uncertainty**

The Fourth Crusade was rife with dissent, debate and, the natural product of the two, uncertainty. This, then, begs the question of whether the events of the crusade were caused by theological uncertainty or the theological uncertainty was caused by the crusade's events. The evidence seems to point to the latter

The Venetians, with Doge Dandolo at the forefront, suggested the crusade aid Venice in reclaiming the Adriatic city of Zara to relieve part of the debt. Zara, however, was a Christian city. Its inhabitants followed Western Christianity and recognized the pope's supremacy.

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<sup>28</sup> Fulcher de Chartres, "Urban II: Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095, according to Fulcher of Chartres," Internet Medieval History Sourcebook, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-fulcher.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Robert de Clari, "Robert of Clari's account of the Fourth Crusade," De Re Militari, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://deremilitari.org/2014/01/robert-of-claris-account-of-the-fourth-crusade/>.

<sup>30</sup> Schmandt, "Fourth Crusade," 194.

Furthermore, its ruler was King Emico of Hungary, who had taken the crusading vow.<sup>31</sup> His property was thus under papal protection, and the crusaders were obligated to protect the property of those who took the cross.<sup>32</sup> The crusaders were aware of these realities and recognized that if they attacked this city the crusade would be turning inward against itself.<sup>33</sup> Dispute arose over whether this was a permissible act in the context of the crusading vow.

The plans for Zara were not immediately revealed to the entire crusading army, however. They were initially known only to the doge and the nobility, who organized the plan and clandestinely agreed on it. Clari suggests that “none save the men of the highest estate” knew of the plan prior to landing at Zara.<sup>34</sup> When the crusade’s intention was finally revealed to the mass of crusaders, it triggered a moral rift in the host and led to the difficult choice of disobeying the crusade leaders or defying the pope.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the lack of presence by the clergy in the moral reasoning of the laymen, the crusade clerics nonetheless shared their concerns. One of the more ominous splits between the clergy occurred just prior to the sack of Zara, in the midst of the heated debate between crusaders regarding the permissibility of besieging Zara. This schism was overwhelmingly dominated by disputations between two clergymen: the Abbot of Vaux-de-Cernay and the Abbot of Loos. Following Dandolo's revelation of the plan to attack Zara, the Abbot of Vaux sharply condemned it on the grounds that a crusade cannot attack a Christian city reigned by a crusader king without angering God and damning the participants. He argued that no one who took the crusade vow did

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<sup>31</sup> Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 110.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey de Villehardouin, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, in Caroline Smith, ed., *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 22-24.

<sup>34</sup> Robert de Clari, “Chapter 13: How The Pilgrims Made Yet Another Levy; How The Doge Proposed That The Pilgrims Go Against Zara; And Of The Setting Forth Of The Fleet,” in Clari, “Account of the Fourth Crusade.”

<sup>35</sup> Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 111.

so for the purpose of attacking fellow Christians. An interesting aspect of the abbot's argument is his distinction to the crusaders that attacking Zara would be unrighteous because "those within it are Christians, and you are pilgrims."<sup>36</sup> This implies the scenario may have been weighted differently if the army was not on its way to a holy war. Because the expedition was an official crusade, however, the abbot, perhaps futilely, argued that it was of utmost importance not to attack fellow Christians. He invoked the name of the pope in expressing his argument, hoping the supreme pontiff's religious authority would hold a persuasive effect on the crusaders.<sup>37</sup> While, at this point, the abbot's sharp objections were unlikely descended directly from Rome, he was acting as a proxy of the pope and expressing his wishes for the crusade's strictly religious purpose. Arguments against the abbot were synonymous with rejections of the pope's authority over the crusade.

The theological arguments of the Abbot of Vaux created yet another point at which laymen could reject the church's direction. The situation in front of Zara provided an opportunity, and indeed a necessity considering the competing ideas expressed by different clergymen, for the crusaders to pick and choose which theological arguments to follow. A secular alternative to the religious claims made by the clergy, which was espoused by the crusade leaders and laymen challenging the clergy's role, was the notion that the attack would be justified as an act of vengeance. The Abbot of Vaux's assertions sparked impassioned backfire from the doge.<sup>38</sup> Villehardouin reports that the doge, "irritated and troubled" by the Abbot's declarations, rallied the crusade leaders against the abbot and tried to convince them of the necessity of attacking the city.<sup>39</sup> In rejecting the abbot's theological arguments, the doge

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<sup>36</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 20.

made a grand appeal to vengeance, citing past wrongs by the king of Hungary and the manner in which the city was originally taken from Venice. The doge disassociated himself from the clergy and assumed responsibility for preaching the merits of the attack on Zara.<sup>40</sup> In this situation, the doge essentially usurped the clergy's power of resolving religious disputes by involving himself in the debates between the abbots and contradicting a prominent clergyman, illuminating the crusade's crisis of theological authority.

Clari's narrative adds further that the bishops and lesser clergy of the crusade had to debate vehemently prior to agreeing that the attack would be a righteous one.<sup>41</sup> The actual outcome of the debates is of less significance than the debates themselves, however. It was no revolutionary idea to claim that attacks on Christians could be righteous. Peter the Venerable, decades earlier, argued that such attacks were even nobler than attacks on Saracens.<sup>42</sup> Yet despite this precedent, the moral debates at Zara plunged the crusade into a cacophony of competing ideas and weakened the clergy's grasp on the theological moorings of crusaders.

Despite the outcome of these disagreements, the pope, essentially taking the same position as the Abbot of Vaux, sent a letter threatening excommunication to the crusaders if they attacked Zara. Clari reports that the citizens of Zara took an active role in requesting Innocent's protection.<sup>43</sup> The pope's disapproval and threat of excommunication, however, did little to change the minds of those advocating the attack. The pope was rendered irrelevant in the minds of many crusaders. The doge's response to hearing the news of the pope's commands illustrates

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<sup>40</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Robert de Clari, "Chapter 14: How The Pilgrims And The Venetians Went Against Zara; How They Attacked It In Despite Of The Pope's Ban; And How They Took The Town And Divided It," in Clari, "Account of the Fourth Crusade."

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Rethinking the Crusades," The Institute on Religion and Public Life, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/03/rethinking-the-crusades>.

<sup>43</sup> Clari, "Chapter 14."



the precedence secular authority held over religious authority in this situation. Clari writes that Dandolo remained adamant in his position and proclaimed "that not for all the Pontiff's excommunication would he refrain from avenging himself on them of the city."<sup>44</sup> Not only did the doge outright reject the pope's direction, but placed his wanton desire for vengeance high above the parameters of Christian law and theology. This is a thought-provoking development in the history of the crusades considering both that a retaliatory excommunication would defeat the purpose of taking the crusade vow for all those involved and that the Venetians took the cross overwhelmingly for reasons of piety, according to Villehardouin and modern scholars.<sup>45</sup> This situation demonstrates a clear conflict of authority between the Venetians and the papacy with which the crusaders sided with Venice.

Disregard for the pope's letter was not limited to the crusade's Venetian contingent, though. The doge's challenge of the pope also caused a split in the nobility over where the crusade's allegiances lie, somewhat analogous to that which occurred amongst the clergy. While the gross majority of the crusade leaders agreed with the doge, Simon of Montfort and Enguerrand of Boves refused to defy the supreme pontiff. Montfort and Boves eventually chose to abandon the crusade, in what Schmandt describes as "exercising [their] right to disagree," rather than ignore the pope's desires and risk excommunication.<sup>46</sup>

This situation raises questions as to how the dichotomy of religious versus secular was balanced at this point in the crusade. Did the crusaders attack Zara because they let political matters to overtake completely the crusade's original purpose? Or was Zara in itself seen as a

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<sup>44</sup> Clari, "Chapter 14."

<sup>45</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 9-11; Donald E. Queller, Thomas K. Compton and Donald A. Campbell, "The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority," *Speculum* 49, no. 3 (July 1974): 441-465.

<sup>46</sup> Clari, "Chapter 14;" Schmandt, "Fourth Crusade," 207.

religious objective of the crusade? Or perhaps they allowed political digressions to take place while still convincing themselves it was a religious war? While it may be tempting to cast the capture of Zara as a political act apart from the crusade or as a practical necessity that was not viewed even by the crusaders as a religious objective, primary sources offer a different perspective. Villehardouin reports a general consensus among common crusaders that the capture was possible only because the army was divinely empowered.<sup>47</sup> The doge also endorsed these sentiments by proclaiming “we have taken this city by the grace of God” to a meeting of the nobility.<sup>48</sup> The attack on Zara was thus regarded as a congruous detour of the crusade which was divinely sanctioned and in line with the religious purpose Innocent initially laid out for the expedition. This intertwining of religious justification with secular Venetian territorial disputes demonstrates the theological uncertainty inherent in the crusade’s modified course.

The *Gestae Innocenti*, containing many of the pope’s letters from this situation as well as primary source commentary, nonetheless corroborates the notion that the pope was against the idea of attacking Zara as soon as he heard it. He carefully crafted his response to suggestions of attacking Christian cities to ensure he took a stark stance against attacking Christians without appearing hostile or authoritarian to the crusade.<sup>49</sup> He forbid all attacks on Christians, except on the condition that “they wrongfully impeded in their journey, or for some other just and necessary reason they could not act otherwise.” Even in those situations, Innocent mandated that such attacks be approved by a papal legate.<sup>50</sup> More problems thus arose when, according to the *Gestae*, the Venetians refused to accept these standards laid by the pope.<sup>51</sup> Without sufficient

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<sup>47</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III*, James Powell, trans. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 132-133.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, *Deeds*, 132.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

resolution, this was the crusade's political situation going into Zara. Concepts of authority and leadership over the crusade were deeply in question. This disagreement between the Venetians and the papacy foreshadows the more serious disputes surrounded by the moral dilemmas at Zara. Members of the crusade had difficulties accepting papal supremacy even in this limited capacity.

Despite their rejection of the pope's letter of excommunication and determination to proceed in conflict to Innocent's input, the religious consequences must have troubled the crusaders somewhat because it prompted the dispatch of an envoy to Rome to ask for the pontiff's reconsideration. This decision was not immediately agreed upon, however. It resulted only after a series of debates and counsels between the crusaders.<sup>52</sup> Villehardouin reports that, in response to this hastily sent envoy, the pope decided to rescind the excommunication. This restored rights of salvation to both the crusaders and the Venetians. The pope's reasons for nullifying his previous condemnation are not fully clear aside from a brief statement that the crusade's actions were forgivable because they were compelled to them through the failures of others.<sup>53</sup> Innocent seems to permit the crusade's actions as yet another consequence of large parties of crusaders traveling from alternative ports, forcing the lack of funds. Regardless of the specifics at work behind the scenes, to the crusade as a whole this scenario only further confused ideas of spiritual righteousness.

The arrival of Alexius after the sack of Zara saw another competing authority entering the fray of moral debate in the crusade. King Phillip, Alexius and their associates brought further theological uncertainty to the crusaders by claiming authority in religious concerns alongside the

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<sup>52</sup> Robert de Clari, "Chapter 15: How A Contention Arose Between The Venetians And Certain Of The Pilgrims; And How They All Obtained Absolution From The Pope," in Clari, "Account of the Fourth Crusade."

<sup>53</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 26 ; Clari, "Chapter 15."

factions of clergy, nobles and Venetians already disputing what sanctified the crusade. King Phillip, speaking on behalf of Alexius, claimed the inherently religious purpose of the crusade rendered it obligated to restore any righteous monarch to his reign whenever possible.<sup>54</sup>

Religious appeals were made on the grounds of vengeance against the unfaithful and blasphemous Greeks, similar to notions of vengeance evoked by the doge against Zara, and the potential for church unity ending the Great Schism. Church unity was not only a potential outcome of accepting the request, it also actively drove the crusaders. A unified church was explicitly included in Phillip's offer, which suggested to the crusaders that "if God grant that you restore [Alexius] to his inheritance, he will place the whole empire of Roumania in obedience to Rome, from which it has long been separated."<sup>55</sup> This same argument was later used by the clergy to justify attacking the city on the basis of Greek rebellion against Roman Christianity and disloyalty to the pope.<sup>56</sup>

There were extensive conceptions of the Greeks injuring Christendom in past years, and various examples of past Byzantine wrongdoing were rife in the minds of crusaders. One such idea was that the Byzantines were held responsible for the ruin of Troy and many Western Christians viewed themselves as descendants of Trojans. This very belief was used by the crusader Pierre de Bracheux to validate the crusade's conquest of Byzantine lands.<sup>57</sup>

Despite these new appeals to the crusaders by Alexius, the period following the siege of Zara put the crusade in a critically fractured and disunited state. Villehardouin writes that the

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<sup>54</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Robert de Clari, "Chapter 72: How The Bishops Assured The Pilgrims Yet Again That It Was A Work Of Merit To Fight The Greeks," in Clari, "Account of the Fourth Crusade."

<sup>57</sup> Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "Art and Identity in Medieval Morea," in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, eds. (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001).

majority of crusaders, “more than half of the host,” disagreed with assenting to yet another detour to fulfilling the pilgrimage. Although they participated in the capture of Zara, and the moral intricacies that arose from it, many crusaders refused to use the crusade to support Alexius at Constantinople. Instead, they intended to send envoys to Walter of Brienne’s party, which was travelling independently, demanding to go directly to the Holy Land.<sup>58</sup> A further contention arose in the crusade army as to the relevance of the crusade’s original purpose. There were some in the host who felt that the new plan preempted the old one and, for reasons of both practicality and theology, made more sense for the crusade at that point. Perhaps because the original plan of capturing Alexandria was kept secret from the bulk of crusaders for so long, there was little or no theological connection to that plan. It was not in line with their conceptions of the crusade’s holy purpose. This likely augmented concerns of how the crusade was to reach Egypt with so much debt already remaining unpaid to the Venetians. This group of crusaders clashed against the faction that placed the holy pilgrimage above all else and sought the quickest and most efficient way of completing it.<sup>59</sup>

To alleviate sentiments of despair caused by the revelation of plans to attack Greek Christians, many crusaders turned to the clergy for theological answers. The clergy, however, came to the general consensus that an attack on Constantinople was permissible and righteous.<sup>60</sup> Clari represents this as a straightforward decision without much difficulty in the debate. The crusaders continually looked to the clergy for guidance and numerous times they directed them

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<sup>58</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Robert de Clari, “Chapter 33: How The Pilgrims Were In Two Minds Whether To Go To Constantinople,” in Clari, “Account of the Fourth Crusade.”

<sup>60</sup> Robert de Clari, “Chapter 39: How The Pilgrims Enquired Of The Bishops Whether It Were A Sin To Go Against Constantinople And How The Bishops Said That It Was A Work Of Merit,” in Clari, “Account of the Fourth Crusade.”

with little hesitation to the walls of Constantinople. Yet questions arise as to why the agreement of clergy at Constantinople was so dissimilar to meetings of clergy at Zara.

*The Chronicle of Novgorod* tells of petitions sent to the pope seeking a middle ground. In spite of whatever control over the crusade the pope actually had, many attempts were made to influence the crusade through the pope. One petition to the pope by King Phillip suggested taking more of a middle stance between the debating factions of crusaders. A compromise was proposed wherein the crusade would attempt to peaceably restore Alexius to the throne. If the objective cannot be peaceably accomplished, the crusade would send Alexius back to Phillip and continue to the Holy Land. This petition is gravely clear, however, that the crusade should "do no injury to the Greek land."<sup>61</sup> While it cannot be ascertained from exactly what the pope's eventual position on the matter resulted, he remained clear in his condemnation of the attack. Despite the ambiguities in his response to the capture of Zara, it was evident to many the pope was against attacking Constantinople. The Chronicle explains that in continuing to besiege Constantinople after hearing this input "the Franks ... forgot the commands of tsar [Phillip] and pope."<sup>62</sup> The crusade was no longer about following the pontiff's theological example or orders, and it was becoming less and less about following established secular authority as well.

The effect on the crusaders was not as straightforward as the decision itself, however. Later in the siege, the crusaders returned once again with questions of their actions' sanctity. They connected their failure with sinfulness, asserting that perhaps they were unable to make significant progress in capturing the city due to divine intervention against them.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Mitchell and Nevill Forbes, trans., *The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016-1471* (London: Offices of the Society, 1914), 44.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Robert de Clari, "Chapter 72: HOW THE BISHOPS ASSURED THE PILGRIMS YET AGAIN THAT IT WAS A WORK OF MERIT TO FIGHT THE GREEKS," in Clari, "Account of the Fourth Crusade."

To fill the void left by the ambivalent and insufficient direction from the clergy, while simultaneously attempting to rationalize their actions in the context of religion, many crusaders turned to profound introspection. The crusading army was composed almost primarily of volunteers whose laid more so in their crusading vow than the nobility or even the clergy. As Schmandt explains, this made the crusaders “highly individualistic, fractious, and accepting discipline and control only when it suited their convenience or coincided with their own conception of their role.”<sup>64</sup> It became common during the crusade for the rank-and-file to assume the role of the clergy and take questions of sanctity and morality into their own hands. At this stage, the Fourth Crusade became a festering point for individualism. It highlighted the rationalizing ability of common crusaders while the clergy and secular leadership were disjointed and split by moral debate.

Theological uncertainty flooded the crusade prior to the commencement of warfare at Constantinople. Another moral debate among the crusade came following the death of Alexius. At this point, the justification that the crusade was using for the attack--restoring a ruler to his rightful throne--lost its relevance. Many of those who previously saw the diversion as righteous were now conflicted with the moral implications of continuing the attack without the theologically permissible reason they had. *The Chronicle of Novgorod* explains that many crusaders finally became fearful of the pope's condemnation and were "troubled for their disobedience."<sup>65</sup> The sentiment that it was better "to die at Tsargrad [Constantinople], than to go away with shame" started becoming popular.<sup>66</sup> Because, as Natasha Hodgson has pointed out,

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<sup>64</sup> Schmandt, "Fourth Crusade," 192.

<sup>65</sup> Mitchell and Forbes, *Novgorod*, 46.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

vindictive notions of honor and shame permeated the crusade, this likely factored heavily into the moral contemplations of the crusaders.<sup>67</sup>

The *Hystoria Constantinopolitana* suggests there was much more grave disagreement about attacking Christians at Zara than the other sources imply. It states that "even in the face of importunate pressure, [the crusaders] stubbornly continued to say no. As a result, a good deal of time passed in dissentious argument."<sup>68</sup> The crusaders rooted into their principles and were not quickly swayed. They not only regarded the plan as despicable, but also considered it flatly illegal for crusaders to use their force against Christians.<sup>69</sup> The crusaders' disagreement transcended simple difference of opinion and became concerned with grand notions of theology and sanctity—what is a proper and improper action for a crusade. Passive disagreement does not adequately describe this period of the crusade, either, as the crusaders thought their eternal salvation may rest on the outcome of the disputes. This left many "frightened to the point of terror at the thought of committing an outrage."<sup>70</sup> The crusade's development, from the revelation of the plan to attack Zara to the eve of the attack on Constantinople features the common crusaders trusting the clergy and nobles less and less with matters of their salvation.

The same source reasons that the crusaders dismissed their scruples and attacked the city because "it seemed to them more pardonable and less blameworthy to secure the greater good through means of the lesser evil, rather than to leave their crusade vow unfulfilled."<sup>71</sup> The common crusaders, however, are not traditionally the judge of scholastic matters such as

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<sup>67</sup> Natasha Hodgson "Honor, Shame and the Fourth Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 2 (2013): 220-239.

<sup>68</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 90.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 90.



different tiers of sinfulness. The crusade as a whole effectively preempted the role of the clergy and the pope--the same clergy that bickered amongst itself denying the crusade any conclusive stance on the issue and the same pope that failed to maintain authority over his own organization. Placed into this unique position, the crusaders prioritized attacking Christians over abandoning their vows.

This is not to imply that the clergy played no role, however limited, in directing the crusader's actions in the conquest. The conquest was mostly achieved by the spread of fire and calculated siege craft.<sup>72</sup> The necessity of brutal combat was restricted to when the crusaders entered the city and the pillaging began.<sup>73</sup> According to the *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, many crusaders further refrained as much as possible from bloodlust in the attack because of the pleas of several clerics not to shed blood.<sup>74</sup> They were not entirely deaf to the advice of the clergy, but only followed it when it was convenient and coincided with their own ideas.

To determine whether the crusaders were in fact righteous, whether by the standards of the time or those of modernity, one potential course of action is to look to the legacy of their acts. The Latin Empire lasted nearly sixty years. Yet its establishment is regarded as the foundation of the Muslim conquest of the city in 1453. The crusade, blending in with many previous and later, accomplished little to nothing in securing Christian control of the Holy Land. Whether following the lead of the Abbot of Vaux or many other who did not endorse the crusade's diversion would have led to a different Middle East delves into the realm of

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<sup>72</sup> Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 206-208, 236-237.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>74</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 118-119.

speculation. It is certain, however, that if more credence had been offered to the worries of dissenting crusaders, world history had the potential for drastic alteration.

### **Venetian Direction in a Theological Context**

While the Venetians desired payment and were partly economically motivated, they were even more so influenced by the theological mission of the crusade, as evidenced by Villehardouin's detailed discussion of them accepting the cross. Despite its later events, the crusade was acknowledged as a strictly holy war during the early negotiations at Venice. Villehardouin, who was present at these meetings, writes there was little debate during the negotiations for transportation that the crusade's purpose was solely religious.<sup>75</sup> The doge and the Venetians later took the cross enthusiastically and with immense piety, apparently holding the same initial religious purpose to their commitment as the crusaders.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is reasonable to assume that they would have followed clerical direction if it was much clearer.

The Venetians were indeed quite pious and devoted to the crusade, despite the dangerous results of their direction. Many historians view them as traitors to the crusade. Donald Queller and Gerald Day refer to this prolific idea as the “treason theory” of the Fourth Crusade.<sup>77</sup> Modern scholarship reveals, however, that most were just as part of the theological situation as other crusaders. Queller and Day cite as a primary influence on the “treason theory” the belief that the Venetians were indifferent to the religious mission of the crusade.<sup>78</sup>

The fact that the Venetians controlled so much of the crusade's route while retaining piety makes the situations at Zara and Constantinople all the more thought-provoking. The Venetians

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<sup>75</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

<sup>77</sup> Queller and Day, “Some Arguments,” 717.

<sup>78</sup> Queller and Day, “Some Arguments,” 718.

had a strong hand in directing the events of the crusade, but this was in no way independent from the crises of religious authority that occurred *en route*.

### **Demands for Unity take Priority**

Throughout the crusade ideals of unity took precedence over not just certain temporal considerations, but eventually overcame crusaders' religiosity as well. The heavy clerical influence from the initial preaching and organization of the host quickly ceased as the crusade got underway, however. Innocent's emphasis on theology and the moral reform of Christendom was replaced by the crusaders' prioritization of unity in the host above all else. The theological concepts from which the crusade was built were overshadowed by the more practical matters of the journey. The very unity in the host was equated by Villehardouin with the crusade's sanctity, with his brief digression "that if God had not loved the host, it could never have held together, seeing how many people wished evil to it!"<sup>79</sup>

When faced with arguments questioning the sanctity of their actions, crusade leaders often justified their stance by the need to maintain unity in the host. By breaking from clerical directives in this way, and convincing themselves of their actions' sanctity, the crusaders effectively locked in the course to Constantinople without needing to answer to traditional theological authority. This is most evident in the narratives of Villehardouin and Clari. Villehardouin, in particular, emphasizes throughout his chronicle the malevolence of those who deserted the host or traveled from alternative ports.<sup>80</sup>

The *Chronicle of Morea* also briefly discusses issues of unity that arose from those travelling from other ports. It differs from the other sources, however, in that the only reason it

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<sup>79</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 25.

<sup>80</sup> Villehardouin. *Conquest of Constantinople*, 16-18.

gives for the disunity is "that the route was too long" and neglects to mention various differences in agreement about which Clari and Villehardouin seem so adamant.<sup>81</sup>

Appeals to unity at the expense of theology came to the forefront on the eve of the siege of Zara. Despite numerous complaints about attacking a Christian city and threats of desertion, crusade unity took priority. The arguments between the two factions, those who supported the attack and those who did not, provide profound insight into the role of traditional clerical analysis and the theological dynamics of the crusade.

These sentiments continued as the crusade moved toward Constantinople. When faced the Alexius' proposal, the Abbot of Loos made a grand display before the crusaders and, instead of appealing to the theology of the matter, argued in favor of the request only for its ability to maintain unity in the crusade.<sup>82</sup>

### **Initial Preaching**

Both Villehardouin and Clari open their narratives by discussing the influence of Fulk of Neuilly. In many ways, the actions of Fulk set the stage for what the crusade ideally could have been in regards to the relationship between the pope and the crusade and the impact of clerical preaching on the crusade. Fulk's contributions set up a point by which later events of the crusade can be compared to identify changes in clerical and papal authority throughout the expedition. Fulk was a priest who earned such renown as a local preacher that Innocent directly authorized him to preach the crusade on his behalf. Although it is uncertain exactly where Fulk much of his sermons, and thus the extent to which he influenced Christendom on the pope's behalf, Gunther of Pairis places him in Flanders, Normandy and Brittany, but is not explicit as to the "other

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<sup>81</sup> "Que le chemin etait trop long." Alfred Morel-Fatio, trans., *Chronique de Morée* (Geneva: Jules Guillaume Fick, 1885), 7.

<sup>82</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 24.

provinces" he may have visited.<sup>83</sup> Peter Noble writes that Fulk then became the leading recruiter for the crusade and exercised tremendous power over the crusade's development while operating under Innocent's authority.<sup>84</sup> He was present at the tournament of Ecry and, in addition to numerous commoners and knights, was responsible for many of the crusade's influential nobles taking the cross.<sup>85</sup> Clari's narrative likewise confirms Fulk's pervasive influence and successful recruitment throughout the expanses of Christendom, while mentioning that "God wrought very great miracles in his behalf; and much substance did this priest obtain to carry to the holy land beyond the sea."<sup>86</sup> The crusade became popular in Christendom in large part due to Fulk's tour of preaching Innocent's crusade message.

Historian Andrew W. Jones believes that current historiography improperly presents Fulk of Neuilly as an enthusiastic preacher who, despite this characterization, was nonetheless insignificant to the crusade's development. He argues that Fulk played a direct role in the recruitment and organization of the crusade and worked with both the pope's representatives and the crusade leaders. Jones shows that Fulk's style of preaching and rhetoric, based in moral reform ideals, was compatible with the crusade's religious message and thus increased recruitment. He further develops this argument to show that Innocent III's inspiration for the crusade was also rooted in his promotion of the moral reform of Christian life. Jones represents the crusade as the convergence of moral reform with the crusading ideal. He takes the position that, at least during the recruitment phase, the crusade was not a spontaneous accident. He believes it was the result of a deliberate effort to establish a crusading force, of which Fulk of

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<sup>83</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 79.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Noble, "The Importance of Old French Chronicles as Historical Sources of the Fourth Crusade and the Early Latin Empire of Constantinople," *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001): 399-416.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Clari, "Account of the Fourth Crusade."

Neuilly was an instrumental part.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, due to his close association with several of the other preaching clergy, some historians believe Fulk actively influenced their individual crusade sermons as he encountered them.<sup>88</sup> Fulk's views, fueled by Innocent's direction, became the basis on which much of the crusade's ideals were built.

A crusade to the Holy Land was an integral part of Innocent's administration, and he expressed deep desire for a holy war when he ascended to the papacy.<sup>89</sup> There is a scholarly consensus that Innocent took a more active role in planning and leading crusades than any pope other than Urban II.<sup>90</sup> The pope saw himself as all-powerful over church affairs, along with considerable influence over secular activities as well.<sup>91</sup> Another defining aspect of the pope's administration was his attempts to bring moral reform to Christendom.<sup>92</sup> Innocent's agenda of moral reform became interconnected with the crusade's preaching, wherein he thought he could achieve both goals with a successful crusade to the Holy Land.<sup>93</sup> Considering its outcome, this is perhaps the greatest irony of the crusade. Innocent foresaw an adamant bond between the reformation of a sinful Christendom and a grand pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the form of a crusade.<sup>94</sup> The latter goal was an undoubtable failure, but whether the crusade contributed to Innocent's vision of Christian morality remains for historians to debate. According to Noble, this agenda was transparent in Fulk's crusade preaching.<sup>95</sup> Innocent was profoundly invested in Fulk's

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<sup>87</sup> Andrew W. Jones, "Fulk of Neuilly, Innocent III, and the Preaching of the Fourth Crusade," *Comitatus* 41 (September 2010): 119-148.

<sup>88</sup> Schmandt, "Fourth Crusade," 202.

<sup>89</sup> Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 4-5.

<sup>90</sup> S.J. Allen and Emilie Amt, *The Crusades: A Reader* (North York, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 216; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 174; Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, 173.

<sup>92</sup> Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Phillips, *Fourth Crusade*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Noble, "Old French Chronicles," 401.

recruitment for the crusade and the crusade's ultimate success. Along with the Fulk's commission to preach the cross, Innocent also sent Cardinal Peter Capuano, who later became a papal legate imbedded in the crusade, to proclaim the official indulgence for taking the cross.<sup>96</sup> Thus, during this initial period of the crusade's development, the clergy, under the pope's direct authority, exercised a strong influence over the impending holy war. This aspect of the crusade's early preaching shows Innocent taking an active role in the expedition's welfare.

Fulk was not the only cleric to receive a papal mandate to preach, however. Martin of Pairis also records that he had a papal commission to preach the crusade. Indeed, this early period of the crusade's development shows Innocent amassing a contingent of preachers to recruit the crusade under his authority. Some sources suggest Abbot Martin held a leadership role among part of the army while traveling to Venice.<sup>97</sup> Although historians believe it was much more limited than suggested, this gives insight into the level of authority some of the clergy held over troops during the crusade's initial travel. Although he limited his own preaching, Innocent took an active role in ensuring the efforts of others would realize his vision.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the widespread influence of Fulk and his contemporaries at the start of the crusade, the concept of being led to the cross through clerical preaching was not universal. The *Chronicle of Morea*, rather than opening with the deeds of Fulk like other chronicles, opens with Villehardouin convincing the Count of Champagne to take the cross. While Fulk certainly exerted a strong degree of influence on the count, especially at the Tournament of Ecry, the *Chronicle of Morea* instead stresses that Villehardouin was responsible for count's final act of

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<sup>96</sup> Villehardouin. *Conquest of Constantinople*, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 86-87.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

commitment.<sup>99</sup> While it can be debated how much influence each side had on Thibaud's decision, there is further evidence that, even in its early stages, the crusade saw a distinct merging of temporal and religious authority. The chronicle records that after Thibaud took the cross, the other crusade leaders were content with rendering him the captain of the expedition. Rather than outright distilling on Thibaud the honor of captain, however, they first sought and gained approval from Innocent. Yet while doing this, they simultaneously sought the pope's indulgence and blessing for the entire crusade.<sup>100</sup> The chronicle adds that the crusaders were so invested in the pope's role in choosing the crusade leadership that they begged him to approve Boniface de Montferrat to replace the deceased Thibaud, writing that the crusaders insistently "begged that he be pleased to confirm the marquis as general captain of the expedition."<sup>101</sup> The crusade leaders saw the pope as the clear spiritual authority reigning over the crusade's religious and penitential aspects, but they also placed him in a position of secular authority by giving him organizational influence over it.<sup>102</sup> The turning point in the crusade occurred between decisions to attack Zara and Constantinople when the crusaders began to resent both facets of papal authority in which they placed themselves.

According to his chronicler and his political correspondence, Innocent made a tangential command that Alexius III "lead the Greek church back to the obedience of the apostolic see, its mother, from whose magisterium it had withdrawn" while initially planning and requesting Byzantine support for the crusade in late 1199. Even before the crusade's destination became Byzantium, church unity factored into the pope's conception of the crusade's potential.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Morel-Fatio, *Chronique de Morée*, 1-2.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>101</sup> "Suppliaient qu'il lui plut de confirmer le marquis capitaine general du passage." *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Anonymous, *Deeds*, 77.



There is no extant evidence to suggest crusade indulgences differed significantly by the time of the Fourth Crusade. While the crusades evolved over their long history, the penitential character and practices of crusading remained relatively stable.<sup>104</sup> In exchange for fulfilling their original crusading vow, crusaders were rewarded with a plenary indulgence forgiving them of their previous sins. This relies on the interpretation of sin as a debt to God which can be repaid by committing holy acts.<sup>105</sup> Villehardouin briefly describes the Fourth Crusade's indulgences as follows: "all who should take the cross and serve in the host for one year, would be delivered from all the sins they had committed, and acknowledged in confession."<sup>106</sup> Innocent saw the development of a noteworthy change in the conceptualization of crusade indulgences, however. He held the view that no one could live a truly holy life without taking some part in the crusades. Innocent interpreted refusal to take the cross as direct defiance of God's wishes.<sup>107</sup> The penitential nature of the Fourth Crusade, at least in Innocent's mind, was much stricter than that of previous attempts at holy war.

Thomas Madden suggests that the indulgence is the foundation to understanding any crusade. Crusaders, he writes, "were deeply aware of their own sinfulness and anxious over the state of their souls," according to documents they left behind.<sup>108</sup> Such anxiety contributed doubtlessly to the moral debates and introspection of the Fourth Crusade. Jonathan Riley-Smith adds another intriguing take on the incentivizing nature of indulgences, writing "a crusade was for the crusader only secondarily about service in arms to God or benefiting the Church or Christianity; it was primarily about benefiting himself. He was engaged in an act of self-

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<sup>104</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople*, 1-2.

<sup>107</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 174.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas F. Madden, "Inventing the Crusades," *The Institute on Religion and Public Life*, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/06/inventing-the-crusades>.

sanctification.”<sup>109</sup> This purification that so many aspired to was permitted by serving the church in a holy war and placed a personal stake extending beyond simple morality in whether the crusade’s events were righteous. The practice of granting crusade indulgences reveals that the ecclesiastical foundation had strict authority over the spiritual rewards and incentives of participating in the crusade.

Innocent admits his self-imposed lack of authority against temporal kings and nobility in a letter to the prefect Acerbius and the nobles of Tuscany in 1198:

"Just as the founder of the universe established two great lights in the firmament of heaven, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, so too He set two great dignities in the firmament of the universal church..., the greater one to rule the day, that is, souls, and the lesser to rule the night, that is, bodies. These dignities are the papal authority and the royal power. Now just as the moon derives its light from the sun and is indeed lower than it in quantity and quality, in position and in power, so too the royal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority...."<sup>110</sup>

He self-limited his authority, setting a precedent for his weak involvement in the crusades.

### **Aftermath and Legitimization**

The church’s legitimization of the crusade offers insight into the ambivalent direction of the clergy, and most notably the pope. Despite Innocent’s marked condemnation of attacks on Christians at Zara, the crusade’s aftermath provides a legacy of Innocent’s embrace of the outcome. The pope’s changing direction and inability to arrive at a stable position on the matter from early in the events at Zara, further show the church’s weak handling of the crusade’s unique theological demands.

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<sup>109</sup> Riley-Smith, “Rethinking the Crusades.”

<sup>110</sup> Innocent III, “Innocent III (r.1198-1216): Letters on Papal Polices,” Internet Medieval History Sourcebook, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/innIII-policies.asp>.

Innocent was incensed at the sack of Constantinople. He saw the attack as direct defiance of his clearly stated wishes and his authority over the crusade. He wrote to Peter Capuano, who was still representing the pontiff in the crusade, not long after the siege denouncing the crusade's events and chastising him for his involvement. One of the pope's main points of concern was Peter's relief from their crusade vows all the crusaders who remained to defend the Latin Empire, believe he far exceeded his authority and arguing that he "neither should nor could give any such absolution."<sup>111</sup> Innocent thus maintained the same tone he took while previously trying to control the crusade--that he was the supreme authority over all matters of holy war and religion. He laments that the crusade's actions ruined all hope of a union between the Roman and Greek churches, while the crusaders brought shame to Western Christians by engaging in bloodlust and other heinous acts against the city of Constantinople.<sup>112</sup> This rhetoric could have set a powerful precedent for the church rejecting the activities, and subsequent, gains of the Fourth Crusade. Why did the pope's frustration abate so quickly, though?

Nikolaos Chrissis examines how popular abstract philosophical ideas from the crusade converged with papal legitimizations of the crusaders' acts. He argues that, after the crusade, several popes used rhetorical themes and motifs associated with Constantinople both to justify the crusade and garner support for further defenses of the Latin Empire. He identifies a dichotomy which dominated papal representations of Constantinople: the temporal and religious importance of the city. Its temporal attributes consisted of its legendary wealth and designation as *the new Rome*, while its religious attributes consisted of its role as a repository of relics, the location of many ecumenical councils, its designation as *the new Jerusalem* and its status as

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<sup>111</sup> Innocent III, "Pope Innocent III: Reprimand of Papal Legate," Internet Medieval History Sourcebook, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/1204innocent.asp>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

second in patriarchal rank to Rome. Chrissis explains how these points were utilized by the popes to legitimize Western control of Constantinople. Chrissis writes that the papacy relied on two arguments to justify its defense of the Latin Empire, and thus the crusade. Popes believed that control of Constantinople would allow more efficient crusading and would bring the Eastern Christians under the authority of Rome. Although he does little to analyze their accuracy, Chrissis assists the historiography by identifying these papal interpretations of the crusade.<sup>113</sup>

The clergy of the crusade, the very groups who bickered amongst themselves as to the attack's religious permissibility, showed a similar embrace of the conquest. Abbot Martin of Pairis' actions from Zara to Constantinople are representative of this phenomenon. Martin, who was a Cistercian monk like the Abbot of Vaux, embodied deep contempt for the crusade's detour at Zara.<sup>114</sup> Martin's contradictory later actions form an excellent illustration of the unique religious fluidity that characterized the crusade, though. In the heat of conquest within the walls of Constantinople, he readily ignored his past scruples and smuggled sacred Christian relics out of the city in the hopes of bringing them back to the west. Although his exact motivations remain unclear, it appears Martin resorted to looting because he saw himself as more worthy of it as a cleric than the common crusaders.<sup>115</sup> The *Hystoria Constantinopolitana* suggests he initially made the decision out of jealousy, recording he "began to think also about his own booty and, lest he remain empty-handed while everyone else got rich, he resolved to use his own consecrated hands for pillage."<sup>116</sup> Yet, in keeping with the crusade's character, Martin had to independently persuade himself that his actions were righteous. He resolved that it

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<sup>113</sup> Nikolaos Chrissis, "The City and the Cross: the image of Constantinople and the Latin empire in thirteenth-century papal crusading rhetoric," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 36, no. 1 (2012): 20-37.

<sup>114</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 15, 30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

was "improper to commit sacrilege except in a holy cause."<sup>117</sup> He convinced himself that looting Byzantine religious relics would be theologically permissible because of his status as a representative of the church, much how the crusaders convinced themselves to attack the city.<sup>118</sup> It is unclear how much Martin's religious sentiments actually changed because, despite his belated support for the sack, Martin limited his own benefit from it. He declined an offer to become a bishop in favor of staying with what was left of the crusade to fulfill his vow and returning to Paris with humility<sup>119</sup>. After successfully displacing numerous relics during the looting, however, he reflected on his acts and simply remarked "we have done well."<sup>120</sup>

Clerical sentiments about the Fourth Crusade's aftermath are also evident in the decisions passed by the Fourth Lateran Council. Although some individual clergymen brought the crusade in line with their theology on the eve of the sack of Constantinople, the Clergy, as a general institution, exercised weak control over the crusade in general.

### **Final Thoughts**

The purpose of this argument is not to place blame on the clergy or to explain the crusade's diversion. Rather, it is to illuminate the theological intricacies inherent in the Fourth Crusade and analyze the significance of the clergy when placed into this anomalous situation. Following the plunder of countless sacred relics, and the bloodshed that accompanied it, the crusaders began to establish order in the city under the new authority of the Latin Empire. The crusaders remaining in the city then celebrated Holy Week and practiced their religion with

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<sup>117</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 121-123.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

almost no regard to the circumstances which brought them to Constantinople.<sup>121</sup> They carried on their religious practices as if there was no dispute over the sanctity of their situation.

Evidence exists suggesting that the Byzantines did not blame the pope for the crusade, even though it was fundamentally his own creation. They did, however, blame the Latin clergy for the holy war's corruption. The Byzantines saw it more fitting to accuse the agents of the Latin Church for the disaster rather than the head of the same church. This is further evidence that, at least in the eyes of some, the clergy was separated from the papal institutions during the crusade. In fact, they trusted the pope enough to ask him to mediate the relationship between the Latins and the Greeks.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the scrupulous justification the crusaders went through to validate their actions, the Byzantines still viewed the crusade as a corrupt and unholy war.<sup>123</sup> The Byzantine ruler of Nicaea accused the crusaders of apostasy for diverting a holy cause to cause Christian suffering.<sup>124</sup> Nicetas Choniates, likewise noting the inherently religious consequences of the crusade, viewed the attack as "madness against God himself."<sup>125</sup> The Byzantines were thus much less favorable to the crusaders' moral justifications than Western Christians and rejected their reconciliations of their actions with the faith. It is also intriguing to recognize that, although the Byzantine rulers were more forgiving of the pope than the crusaders, the Nicaean governor partly assumed the pope's, or the Greek patriarch's, authority of excommunication in declaring the

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Madden, *Enrico Dandolo & The Rise of Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 174.

<sup>122</sup> Michel Balard, ed., *La Papauté et les Croisades: Actes du VII<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East* (Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate, 2011), 158.

<sup>123</sup> Nicetas Choniates, "Nicetas Choniates: The Sack of Constantinople (1204)," Internet Medieval History Sourcebook, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/choniates1.asp>.

<sup>124</sup> Balard, *La Papauté*, 158.

<sup>125</sup> Choniates, "Sack of Constantinople."

crusaders apostates. The circumstances likely became dire enough that some Byzantines' theology was altered after the Latin conquest in a similar way to that of the crusaders.

Considering the pope's belated acceptance of what the crusade brought the church, his ambivalence is further developed in a letter he sent to the Byzantines. The letter begins with the pope's expression of regret for what the crusade became. His anger at the crusade's defiance is just as prominent as in the previous and more well-known letter he sent Peter Capuano. Yet the pope takes the issue much farther when writing to the Greeks. He argues that the crusaders, as well as the Eastern Christians, were not only heretical but outright "evil." He writes that the crusade was "God's way to use evil to punish evil people."<sup>126</sup> Innocent placed both the crusaders and the Greeks at the absolute bottom of the Christian hierarchy, as enemies of the church, while simultaneously embracing the same divine intervention theory that many of the crusaders endorsed. Despite his concerns in this particular letter, Innocent became concerned with maintaining his image in the eyes of the Greeks and used that as further justification for distancing himself from the crusade.<sup>127</sup>

Gunther of Pairis goes so far as to claim a divine mandate for the crusade, in spite of the crusaders' actions. Because the acts were committed during the execution of a holy war, they must be considered part of God's commands. He requests that his readers ignore the impiety implied by such acts and instead focus on the holy purpose of the crusade.<sup>128</sup>

Pope John Paul II, addressing the Patriarch of Athens in 2001, reflected on the crusade and how it still affected relations between the Greek and Roman churches into the twenty-first

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<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Balard, *La Papauté*, 158,

<sup>127</sup> Balard, *La Papauté*, 161.

<sup>128</sup> Andrea, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, 78.

century. Taking an opinion shared by many of crusaders and crusade clergy, though some adamantly and others only temporarily, the pontiff announced that "it is tragic that the assailants, who had set out to secure free access for Christians to the Holy Land, turned against their own brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret. How can we fail to see here the *mysterium iniquitatis* at work in the human heart?"<sup>129</sup> John Paul II further appealed to the church unity that Innocent came to envision as a positive result of the distorted crusade, but never truly accomplished. Throughout the dialogue he unfalteringly acknowledged that, despite the "deep wounds" left by past meetings of the churches, "the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the path of unity with all the Churches. Only in this way will the one People of God shine forth in the world as the sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> John Paul II, "Address of John Paul II To His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop Of Athens And Primate Of Greece," EWTN, accessed December 1, 2016, [http://www.ewtn.com/footsteps/words/CHRISTODOULOS\\_5\\_4.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/footsteps/words/CHRISTODOULOS_5_4.htm).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.



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