

Auch hierfür sei ein letztes Mal Gunther von Pairis zitiert, der diese Denkweise geradezu programmatisch ausspricht. Für ihn war der Erfolg des Kreuzzugs ein «Ratschluß der Güte Gottes, die mit dieser Entwicklung beabsichtigte, das um seines Reichtums willen so hochfahrende Volk aus diesem seinem Überschwang hinabzustürzen und es wieder zum Frieden und zur Eintracht mit der heiligen allgemeinen Kirche zu bringen [...] Dazu kommt auch als gewiß bedeutsam, daß die oft genannte Stadt, die gegen die Pilger stets treulos gewesen war, [...] treu und einmütig bleiben und uns zur Niederkämpfung der Barbaren und zur Besetzung und Behauptung des Heiligen Landes infolge ihrer größeren Nähe um so wichtigere Hilfe leisten wird. Das alles würde gewiß hinfällig werden, wenn dieses Volk durch Menschen eines anderen Glaubens, etwa Heiden oder Häretiker, bezwungen würde oder gar, was das Schlimmste wäre, zu deren Irrglauben überträte [...] Und ich glaube, es ist nur durch ein sichtliches Wunder der göttlichen Gnade möglich geworden, daß diese schwerbefestigte Stadt, der ganz Griechenland zu Diensten stand, so urplötzlich, so vor aller Welt und so leicht in die Hände von wenigen gegeben wurde».<sup>30</sup>

Oder um es mit anderen Worten zu sagen: Der Erfolg des Kreuzzugs bewies, daß die Eroberung Konstantinopels von Gott gewollt war. Eine Entschuldigung war damit überflüssig. Eine tiefer gehende Diskussion der Gründe für die Ablenkung und der moralischen Verantwortung für sie wäre den Rittern gar nicht in den Sinn gekommen. Sie hätte nicht ihren Denkkategorien entsprochen. Eine solche Diskussion konnte erst in einer Zeit beginnen, als man einen Erfolg nicht mehr mit der moralischen Überlegenheit der Sieger und umgekehrt mit den Sünden der Verlierer begründete. Anders ausgedrückt: den Teilnehmern des Vierten Kreuzzugs wäre unsere ganze moderne Diskussion wahrscheinlich völlig unverständlich gewesen.

*tion de la 4<sup>e</sup> Croisade vers Constantinople. Note additionnelle. La Croisade et les guerres persanes d'Héraclius*, in «RHR» 147 (1955), 50-61.

<sup>30</sup> GUNTHER VON PAIRIS c. 11,24-28 (ORTH): «Fuit autem et alia, ut credimus, causa [...], divine scilicet bonitatis consilium, que gentem illam elatam ex rerum opulencia ab illo fastu suo deprimi et ad pacem et concordiam sancte universalis ecclesie revocari hoc ordine disponebat [...]» (11,34-41): «Accedit autem et illud, quod utique magnum est, quod sepe dicta civitas, que semper infida peregrinis extiterat, deinceps volente Deo mutatis civibus fida et unanimes permanebit et nobis ad expugnandos barbaros et Terram Sanctam obtinendam ac possidendam, quanto vicinius, tanto presencius ministrabit auxilium. Que omnia utique cassarentur, si gens illa per homines alterius fidei veluti gentiles aut hereticos expugnata foret, yummo quod et gravissimum esset, in eorum transire cogere errorum [...]» (19,78-80): «nec arbitror absque certo divini favoris miraculo fieri potuisse, ut civitas illa munitissima, cui tota serviebat Grecia, in manus paucorum tam repente tam publice tam facile traderetur». Deutsche Übersetzung zitiert nach ASSMANN.

## THE PROBLEM OF SUPPLY AND THE SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE

JONATHAN HARRIS

It has become orthodoxy in recent English-language scholarship to deny the idea that the diversion of the Fourth Crusade and its subsequent sack of Constantinople were the culmination of mounting hostility between East and West. Instead it is claimed that they came about as the result of a series of accidents. Proponents of this view lay stress on the unforeseen events which prevented the crusade from going on to Egypt as planned: the massive debt which was owed to the Venetians because not enough crusaders came forward to fill the ships that had been hired; the attack on Zara which the crusade undertook to secure a postponement of that debt; and the proposal made by the Byzantine prince Alexios Angelos that the crusade should accompany him to Constantinople. Finally there was the seizure of power by Alexios Mourtzouphlos in early 1204 which so horrified the crusaders by its treachery that it precipitated the final attack. None of these events could have been planned or foreseen and so the notion of any prior plan to attack Constantinople is dismissed.<sup>1</sup>

There is no denying that the theory has its attractions. It is much more convincing than the wild and far-fetched conspiracy theories dreamed up in the nineteenth century when the Venetians, Pope Innocent III and Philip of Swabia were all made out to be plotters of incredible cunning and skill, subtly manipulating events at the time and carefully covering their traces to avoid being unmasked by curious posterity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among proponents of this theory are J. GODFREY, *1204. The Unholy Crusade*, Oxford 1980, VII; J. RILEY-SMITH, *The Crusades: A Short History*, New Haven and London 1987, 130; W. TREADGOLD, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford, California 1997, 666; D. E. QUELLER-T. F. MADDEN, *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople*, Philadelphia 1997, IX-XI; M. ANGOLD, *The Fourth Crusade*, London 2003, 103-104; J. PHILLIPS, *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople*, London 2004, 311. The problem of the theory of accidents is also discussed in R.-J. LILIE, *Byzanz und die Kreuzzüge*, Stuttgart 2004, 165-170.

<sup>2</sup> On the Venetians: L. DE MAS LATHIE, *Histoire de l'île de Chypre sous le règne des princes de Lusignan*, I-III, Paris 1852-1861; K. HOPF, *Geschichte Griechenlands vom Beginn des Mittelalters bis auf unsere Zeit*, in J. S. ERSCH, J. G. GRUBER et al. (a cura di), *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, I-CLXVII, Leipzig 1818-1889, LXXXV. 188. On Innocent III: A. LUCHAIRE, *Innocent III: la question de l'Orient*, Paris 1907. On Philip of Swabia: P. RIAnt, *Innocent III, Philippe de Souabe et Boniface de Montferrat*, in «Revue des Questions Historiques» 17

Yet the accident theory also has a particular weakness: it follows exactly the argument of the main contemporary apologist for the actions of the Fourth Crusade, Geoffroy de Villehardouin. Himself a participant in the expedition and a confidant of some of its leaders, Villehardouin presented the progress of the crusade as a series of unfortunate accidents which all turned out to the good by the grace of God.<sup>3</sup> To accept that version at face value is unconvincing in the extreme and invites a reappraisal of the events leading up to April 1204.

This article will place those events in the wider context of the previous century of crusading, during which western efforts first to conquer and then to hold the city of Jerusalem had been constantly hampered by the difficulty of supplying their armies. Far from being an accident, the sack of Constantinople was merely the last and most spectacular of the efforts of crusade leaders to tap the resources of the Byzantine empire for what they saw as the pious duty of all Christians.

Those earlier historians who saw the sack of Constantinople as the outcome of worsening east-west relations always encountered some difficulty in knowing where to begin. Some saw it as the culmination of a process that began as far back as 1054, while others pointed to the arrival of the First Crusade at Constantinople in 1096 as the beginning of the trouble. Still others claimed that the *coup d'état* of the supposedly anti-Latin Andronicus Komnenos in 1182 began the slide towards catastrophe.<sup>4</sup> There is, however, one date that has been consistently ignored: 2 October 1187 when Saladin recaptured Jerusalem, in the wake of his victory at Hattin the previous July. Not surprisingly, the news of the disaster was greeted with outrage and grief in western

(1875), 331-366 and 18 (1875), 69-72; IDEM, *Le changement de direction de la Quatrième Croisade*, in «Revue des Questions Historiques» 23 (1878), 71-114.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, a cura di E. FARAL, I-II, Paris 1938-1939; C. MORRIS, *Geoffroy de Villehardouin and the conquest of Constantinople*, in «History» 53 (1968), 24-34.

<sup>4</sup> On 1054 as the beginning of mutual hostility, see E. GIBBON, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a cura di J. B. BURY, I-VII, London 1926-1927, VI, 385-386; A. A. VASILIEV, *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453*, Madison, Wisconsin 1952, 338-339; G. OSTROGORSKY, *History of the Byzantine State*, English trans. J. M. HUSSEY, Oxford 1968, 334-337. On 1096, see ST. RUNCIMAN, *The Eastern Schism*, Cambridge 1955, 79-80; D. M. NICOL, *Byzantium and the Papacy in the eleventh century*, in «Journal of Ecclesiastical History» 13 (1962), 1-20, at 19; H. E. J. COWDREY, *The Gregorian Papacy, Byzantium, and the First Crusade*, in «Byzantinische Forschungen» 13 (1988), 145-169, at 167; D. M. NICOL, *The Byzantine view of Western Europe*, in «Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies» 8 (1967), 315-339, at 329-330; M. ANGOLD, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, London 1997, 233-240. On 1182, see C. M. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180-1204*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1968, 41, 173, 188.

Europe and the bull *Audita tremendi* was issued by Pope Gregory VIII to call for a new crusade to retake the Holy City.<sup>5</sup>

Those who responded to this and subsequent calls to arms, however, can hardly have been blind to the difficulties of the undertaking. Although the First Crusade had enjoyed spectacular success against all the odds, those who participated in it had undergone tremendous hardship, usually as a result of shortage of food. During the siege of Antioch in 1097-1098, they had been reduced to eating thistles and leaves, and to stewing the skins of horses and asses.<sup>6</sup> The Second Crusade of 1147-1148 had enjoyed much less success but had encountered the same problem, the French and German contingents being reduced to virtual starvation as they marched across Asia Minor.<sup>7</sup>

It was not that the crusaders had not anticipated the likelihood of supplies running short. On the contrary they had planned for it by choosing a route across Christian territory and negotiating in advance with the ruler of that territory, the Byzantine emperor, so that he would supply them with whatever they needed on the journey. The participants in the First Crusade were under the impression that the emperor 'would come with us by land and sea; that he would faithfully afford us a market by land and sea, and that he would diligently make good our losses'.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Second Crusade, a treaty had been made beforehand between the king of France and the Byzantine emperor whereby, in return for an undertaking not to attack Byzantine territory, the Byzantines promised that adequate supplies would be provided for the French army.<sup>9</sup>

Precisely what went wrong with these arrangements is not entirely clear. Part of the problem was no doubt the sheer size of the armies passing through Byzantine territory which must have put immense strain on the available food supplies, while inevitably there were some individuals who were tempted to cheat the crusaders by selling them inferior goods at inflated prices.<sup>10</sup> It would also seem, however, that the Byzantine emperors, fearful that these massive forces might pose a threat to Constantinople, were not averse to restricting the availability of food. They also tended to leave the crusaders to fend for themselves once they were safely across the Bosphoros and no longer a danger.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, these

<sup>5</sup> ANSBERG, *Historia de expeditione Friderici Imperatoris*, in A. CHROUST (a cura di), *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kreuzzuges Kaiser Friedrichs I.*, MGH, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum* 5, Berlin 1928, 1-115, at 6-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, a cura di R. HILL, Oxford 1962, 62-63.

<sup>7</sup> ODO DE DEUIL, *De profensione Ludovici VII in Orientem*, a cura di V. G. BERRY, New York 1948, 96-99.

<sup>8</sup> *Gesta Francorum*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> ODO DE DEUIL, 24-29.

<sup>10</sup> ODO DE DEUIL, 41.

<sup>11</sup> J. HARRIS, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, London 2003, 64-68, 94-101.

tactics did not make the Byzantines popular with the crusaders. Western chronicles of the time tended to portray the 'Greeks' as treacherous and duplicitous and to blame them for any disaster such as the massacre of the followers of Peter the Hermit in 1096 and the failure of the Second Crusade.<sup>12</sup>

Those who answered the call for a crusade to recover Jerusalem after 1187 were faced with the same problem of how to supply their expeditions. One answer was to avoid Byzantine territory altogether. This was the option taken by the kings of France and England, Philippe Auguste (1180-1223) and Richard the Lionheart (1189-1199) in 1191 when they travelled to the Holy Land by sea from Marseilles during the Third Crusade. That did not tackle the root of the problem, however. The fact was that the primitive economies of western Europe had no real means of providing the money to equip, transport and feed large armies in a field of action far from home. In a feudal society, taxes were almost unknown so that the attempt to levy the 'Saladin tithe' in England and France in 1188 met with deep resentment and was sometimes impossible to collect. Instead, most crusaders simply paid their own way, with the result that often meant that they ran short of funds and were unable to stay in the field. The experience of Jean de Joinville on the Seventh Crusade was no doubt a common one on earlier expeditions. Joinville had undertaken to pay not only his own expenses but also those of eleven other crusaders. Unfortunately, he ran out of money when the army had only travelled as far as Cyprus and he had to be rescued by a gift of eight hundred livres from the king of France.<sup>13</sup> No wonder that in his letters, sent back to the west in 1191-1192, Richard the Lionheart begged that further supplies and money be sent.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1190s, three powerful rulers seem to have come to the conclusion that there was only one solution. There was a Christian society which did have the sophisticated financial apparatus needed to raise large sums of money to pay for a major long-range military expedition. It boasted a money economy

<sup>12</sup> RAYMOND D'AGUILERS, *Historia Francorum qui Ceperunt Jerusalem*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: historiens occidentaux*, I-V, Paris 1844-1896, III, 240; HENRY OF HUNTINGDON, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, a cura di D. GREENWAY, Oxford 1996, 750-753; WILLIAM OF NEWBURGH, *The History of English Affairs: Book I*, a cura di P. G. WALSH-M. J. KENNEDY, Warminster 1988, 92-95.

<sup>13</sup> JEAN DE JOINVILLE, *Histoire de St Louis*, a cura di N. DE WAILLY, Paris 1874, 48.

<sup>14</sup> C. IMPERIALE DI SANT'ANGELO (a cura di), *Codice diplomatico della repubblica di Genova*, in *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia* 77, 79 and 89, I-III, Rome 1936-42, III, 20: «Unde vestre sinceritati, cum quanta possumus precum instancia supplicamus, quatenus divine pietatis intuitu et vestre comoditatis respectu, cum quanto poteritis apparatu, ad exercitum Christianum, sine dilatione, veniat[...];» F. A. CAZEL, *Financing the Crusades*, in K. M. SETTON (a cura di), *A History of the Crusades*, I-VI, Madison, Wisconsin 1969-1989, VI, 116-149; C. TYERMAN, *England and the Crusades*, Cambridge 1988, 75-81.

and its ruler enjoyed the revenue of taxes regularly collected and payable in gold. This was, of course, the Byzantine empire, and the conclusion seems to have been that it was incumbent upon the Byzantines to disgorge some of this wealth to assist the crusading effort and thus make up for their neglect in supplying earlier crusades. If they failed to do so then it would be legitimate to use force against them. The three rulers who adopted this view were Richard the Lionheart, the German emperor Henry VI (1190-1197) and Pope Innocent III (1198-1216).

Richard's extortion of resources from Byzantium took the form of the invasion and occupation of the Byzantine island of Cyprus in June 1191. The ostensible reason for Richard's action was outlined in a letter which he sent back to his justiciar in England: Isaac Komnenos, the ruler of the island, had imprisoned and maltreated the crews of some of Richard's ships which had been wrecked on the coast of Cyprus while the English fleet was sailing towards the Holy Land. Such provocation could hardly go unanswered so Richard landed his army, defeated Isaac and occupied the island.<sup>15</sup>

Yet it is clear that there was much more to the episode than that. Contemporary accounts from Richard's camp all comment that Cyprus was a wealthy island and that the booty amassed by the victorious Richard was considerable.<sup>16</sup> That wealth would be of immense value to the crusade for, as the anonymous *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* makes clear, Richard took from the island 'everything necessary for his expedition as if it had been collected for him'.<sup>17</sup> Although the king kept the gold, silk and jewels that he captured for himself, he passed on the silver to his men and to the hard-up king of Jerusalem, Guy de Lusignan.<sup>18</sup> In this way, Richard was using the proceeds from the conquest of Byzantine territory to enable other crusaders to equip themselves for the field.

The conquest of Cyprus aided the crusade in another way. As the anonymous author of the *Itinerarium* pointed out, the island was close to the Syrian coast and in the past Jerusalem 'used to receive no little benefit each year' from that quarter.<sup>19</sup> This was probably a reference to the food supplies that were

<sup>15</sup> W. STUBBS (a cura di), *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I*, Rolls Series 38, I-II, London 1864-1865, II, 347.

<sup>16</sup> R. C. JOHNSTON (a cura di), *The Crusade and Death of Richard I*, Oxford 1961, 25; STUBBS, I, 204-205.

<sup>17</sup> STUBBS, I, 204: «haec omnia expeditioni necessaria tanquam sibi procurata diripuit».

<sup>18</sup> Richard of Devizes, *The Chronicle of the Time of Richard the First*, a cura di J. T. APPLEBY, London 1963, 38.

<sup>19</sup> STUBBS, I, 183: «Verum omnia praedicta unum erat exsuperans, de insula dico Cypri, de qua non modicum terra Jerosolimitana consequi consueverat annuatim emolumentum».

exported from Cyprus to Syria. At the time of the First Crusade's march on Jerusalem in 1098-1099, for example, considerable quantities of fruit and wine had been despatched to the army from Cyprus by the exiled patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> That Richard was well aware of the potential of his new conquest as a supply base is suggested by his decision to leave some of his men behind when he departed for Acre. Their job was to collect barley, wheat, sheep and cattle and send them on to the main army.<sup>21</sup> Cyprus was, moreover, to prove an important supply base for future crusades.<sup>22</sup>

One account of the conquest of Cyprus places the question of supply at the very centre of the narrative. According to this version, once Richard had landed, he met with Isaac Komnenos and upbraided him for standing by and doing nothing while Jerusalem had been seized by Saladin. He demanded that the Greek ruler make amends by joining the expedition to the Holy Land and by providing licences for all participants to buy food in Cyprus. Isaac excused himself from accompanying Richard to Acre, but he did promise to make the food available and to supply troops, terms upon which he later reneged.<sup>23</sup>

The extortion practised by Henry VI was much more direct. Having taken the cross at Bari on Good Friday 1195, Henry may well have pondered on the experience of his father, Frederick Barbarossa, who during his crusade in 1189-1190 had had to defeat a Byzantine army in battle before the necessary supplies were provided.<sup>24</sup> Henry therefore decided to dealing with the matter in advance and sent envoys to Constantinople to deliver what amounted to an ultimatum. According to the Byzantine chronicler, Niketas Choniates, his ambassadors laid claim to all the land between Dyrrachion on the Adriatic and the city of Thessalonica, a demand that they must have known the Byzantines could not possibly accede to. It would seem, therefore, that the land claim was merely a threat to force the Byzantines to give Henry what he really wanted:

<sup>20</sup> ALBERT OF AACHEN, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: historiens occidentaux*, I-V, Paris, 1844-1896, IV, 489.

<sup>21</sup> AMBROISE, *The History of the Holy War*, a cura di M. AILES-M. BARBER, I-II, Woodbridge 2003, I, 34, II, 61: «E li reis leissa en la terre tels genz qui savaient de guerre; cil qui enveirent vitailles, orges, formenz, mutons, almailles, don't la terre esteit bien garnie, ki granz lius tindrent en Sulie».

<sup>22</sup> A. FOREY, *Cyprus as a base for crusading expeditions from the west*, in N. COUREAS-J. RILEY-SMITH (a cura di), *Cyprus and the Crusades*, Nicosia 1995, 69-79, at 75; N. COUREAS, *To what extent was the crusaders' capture of Cyprus impelled by strategic considerations*, in «Epetêris» 19 (1992), 197-202; P. W. EDBURY, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374*, Cambridge 1991, 74-100; J. A. BRUNDAGE, *Richard the Lion-Heart and Byzantium*, in «Studies in Medieval Culture» 6-7 (1970), 63-70, at 66.

<sup>23</sup> *L'estoite de Eraclès empereur et la conquête de la Terre d'Outremer*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: historiens occidentaux*, I-V, Paris 1844-1896, II, 165-167.

<sup>24</sup> BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts*, 186-188.

finance and assistance for his forthcoming crusade. Choniates describes how Henry's representatives not only demanded an annual payment of five thousand pounds of gold as the price of peace but also 'help for his countrymen in Palestine by the sending out of ships'. As Charles Brand has pointed out, the sum demanded from the Byzantines was exactly that which Henry had elsewhere stated that he needed to maintain in the Holy Land and army of fifteen hundred knights and fifteen hundred sergeants.<sup>25</sup> Henry's premature death on 28 September 1197 saved the Byzantines from having to hand over the tribute. Nevertheless, the episode illustrates very clearly how Byzantine wealth was now seen as an essential ingredient in a successful crusade strategy.

Finally, there was Pope Innocent III. The theory that Innocent somehow deliberately diverted the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople in order to subjugate the city to Roman ecclesiastical dominance has long since been discredited.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the pope, like other crusade leaders, clearly considered that the Byzantine empire had a moral obligation to support the enterprise. In 1199 Innocent had written to the Byzantine emperor, Alexios III Angelos (11895-1203), and told him in no uncertain terms that it was his Christian duty to use his abundant resources to assist the cause of the crusade.<sup>27</sup> He later told the same emperor that he should not wait for divine providence to secure the restoration of Jerusalem to Christian rule but instead should play an active part in it.<sup>28</sup>

The question remained, however, of what was to happen if the Byzantine emperor did not fulfil his duty and failed to provide help and supplies for the crusade. Innocent had prepared for that eventuality. In June 1203, he drew up a set of instructions for the leaders of the Fourth Crusade. Anticipating that the army might run short of food, as previous expeditions had, Innocent undertook to write to the Byzantine emperor and to ask him to make the necessary supplies available. If, however, the emperor, like his predecessors, failed in this respect, Innocent had his response ready:

«If, perchance it happen that these supplies are denied you, because you have sworn yourselves to the public service of the Crucified One,

<sup>25</sup> CHONIATES, I, 475-480; BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts*, 193-194.

<sup>26</sup> See for example: J. GILL, *Byzantium and the Papacy, 1198-1400*, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1979, 20-21; RILEY-SMITH, *Crusades*, 130; J. M. POWELL, *Innocent III and Alexius III: a crusade plan that failed*, in M. BULL-N. HOUSLEY (a cura di), *The Experience of Crusading*, I-II, Cambridge 2003, I, 96-102, at 102.

<sup>27</sup> *Die Register Innocenz III*, a cura di O. HAGENEDER et al., I-VII, Graz-Köln 1964-1999, I, 526: «cum tam ex vicinitate locorum quam habundantia divitiarum tuarum et potentia, qua inimicos crucis munere divino precellis, id potueris commodius et expeditius aliis principibus adimplere».

<sup>28</sup> *Die Register Innocenz III*, II, 395; *Gesta Innocentii*, in PL, CXXIV, cxx.

to whom the land and its fullness belong, in no way is it absurd to draw an analogy with the earthly emperor [...] If his army lacks food, it may take it anywhere [...] For necessity, especially when one is occupied in necessary work, excuses much in many situations».<sup>29</sup>

There can be no doubt that the pope's views on this matter were known in the army of the Fourth Crusade. The chronicler Gunther of Pairis recorded that Innocent III had permitted the crusaders to take 'half a year's supply of free food' from the Byzantine coast.<sup>30</sup> The message was clear. If the Byzantine emperor failed to provide what was needed, the crusaders would be within their rights to seize it.

This then is the background to the diversion of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople. An atmosphere had developed where crusade leaders considered themselves entirely justified in bringing force to bear on the Byzantine empire in order to extort the necessary supplies and money for the effort to retake Jerusalem. It was therefore particularly convenient that Alexios Angelos should appear in Italy during 1201 and make contact with Boniface of Montferrat and the other leaders of the Fourth Crusade. When his servants were sent to Venice to sound the leaders out, the message was returned: 'If your young lord will agree to help us reconquer Jerusalem, we in our turn will help him regain his empire.' By Christmas, Alexios was at the court of Philip of Swabia, brother of the late Emperor Henry VI, where he was joined by Boniface of Montferrat.<sup>31</sup> It was no doubt at this time that Alexios made certain far-reaching promises: that he would hand over two hundred thousand silver marks and provide ample supplies for every man in the army. He also undertook to go with the crusader host to Egypt, at the head of a contingent of ten thousand men. Once that campaign was over, he would maintain a corps of five hundred knights in the Holy Land to assist in its defence.<sup>32</sup> In the summer of 1203, following the restoration of Isaac II to the throne and the coronation his son Alexios as co-emperor, another of the crusade leaders,

<sup>29</sup> *Die Register Innocenz III*, VI. 166-168. The translation is from A. J. ANDREA, *Contemporary Sources for the Fourth Crusade*, Leiden 2000, 67-68. For a discussion of this letter, see A. J. ANDREA and J. C. MOORE, *The Date of Reg. 6: 102: Pope Innocent III's Letter of Advice to the Crusaders*, in E. E. KITTELL - T. F. MADDEN (a cura di), *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, Urbana-Chicago 1999, 109-123.

<sup>30</sup> Gunther von Pairis, *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, a cura di P. ORTH, Hildesheim-Zürich 1994, 130: «Permittebat eciam eis, ut de maritimis locis Romanie, quam alluit illud mare, cibos inemptos, id est absque precio moderate tollerent, qui eis ad annum dimidium possent sufficere».

<sup>31</sup> GEOFFROY DE VILLEHARDOUIN, I. 73-74; ROBERT DE CLARI, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, a cura di P. LAUER, Paris 1924, 6.

<sup>32</sup> GEOFFROY DE VILLEHARDOUIN, I. 93-94.

Hugh of St Pol, wrote to one of his vassals in the west, proclaiming that the following March, the new emperor Alexios IV would be set out with the crusaders for the Holy Land, accompanied as promised by ten thousand soldiers, and that he had given his word to provide food for the crusade army for an entire year.<sup>33</sup> This is just another example of Byzantine wealth being prized out to finance a crusade, the only difference being that it was to be handed over as payment for services rendered, rather than seized by conquest or extracted by threats.

Unfortunately, receiving financial aid from Byzantium did not prove as easy as Hugh of St Pol had hoped. Alexios IV found it difficult to raise the immense sums that he had promised and his failure to pay put his relationship with the crusade leaders under great strain. By the winter of 1203-4 supplies were beginning to run short in the crusader camp and the leadership had once more to confront the familiar problem of feeding such a large army.<sup>34</sup> By February 1204, however, it was clear that the crusaders were not going to be paid in full, now that their puppet Alexios IV was dead and Alexios V Mourtzouphlos had taken his place on the Byzantine throne.

There can be no doubt that the moral outrage felt in the crusader camp for what was seen as the treacherous murder of a liege lord by his vassal was genuine. Villehardouin goes so far as to present that outrage as the main motive and justification for the attack on Constantinople.<sup>35</sup> To accept this explanation at face value, however, would be to ignore the other sources which betray the crusaders' real concerns. Gunther of Pairis lamented that, had Alexios IV lived, he would have sent the crusaders well provisioned from his kingdom but now they had been cheated of all these things by the usurper.<sup>36</sup> Baldwin of Flanders, the future Latin emperor of Constantinople, made much the same point, complaining that Mourtzouphlos had rejected the undertaking of his predecessor to provide aid for the Holy Land.<sup>37</sup> The view from the ranks of the crusade comes from the chronicler known as the Anony-

<sup>33</sup> R. POKORNI, *Zwei unedierte Briefe aus der Frühzeit des lateinischen Kaiserreichs von Konstantinopel*, in «Byzantion» 55 (1985), 180-209, at 209: «Ad hoc noster novus imperator, omnibus que nobis promiserat plene et integre persolutis, iuramento se nobis astrinxit, nobiscum transfretare ad passagium Martii instantis cum decem milibus armatorum et toti exercitui domini in annum victualia largiturum».

<sup>34</sup> ROBERT DE CLARI, 60.

<sup>35</sup> GEOFFROY DE VILLEHARDOUIN, II. 22-24.

<sup>36</sup> GUNTHER VON PAIRIS, 145: «Si vivaret posset [...] nostros plurimum consolari eosque securos ac locupletes de regno suo ad explendum iter sue perigrinacionis emittere. Quibus omnibus se nunc frustratos penitus agnoscebant [...]».

<sup>37</sup> *Die Register Innocenz III*, VII. 257: «Obedientiam autem Romane ecclesie et subventionem Terre Sancte, quam iuramento et scripto imperiali firmarat Alexius, adeo refutavit [...]».

mous of Soissons, for whom it came down to a stark choice between taking drastic action and starvation.<sup>38</sup>

The tactic of extracting supplies from Byzantium in return for services rendered had clearly not worked. The crusaders were accordingly resorting to the tactics of Richard the Lionheart and Henry VI and taking up arms to seize the wealth that they considered theirs by right. In April 1204, they attacked and captured Constantinople, amassing, in the words of Villehardouin, more booty than had ever been captured since the creation of the world.<sup>39</sup>

Obviously the element of chance and accident can never be eliminated completely in considering the causes of the diversion of the Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople, anymore than it can be from any other aspect of human life and endeavour. To cite it as the sole reason behind these events, however, is to set a very ominous precedent for our understanding of the past, reducing human beings to mere playthings of fortune. It therefore seems vital, without returning to the old far-fetched conspiracy theories, to bring human agency back into the discussion of the Fourth Crusade, and to accept that far from being a random outcome, the sack of Constantinople was the culmination of a trend that can be traced back to 1187 and beyond.

<sup>38</sup> ANONYMOUS OF SOISSONS, *De Terra Iherosolimitana et quomodo ab Urbe Constantinopolitana ad banc Ecclesiam Allate Sunt Reliquiae*, in P. RIANT, *Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, Genève 1877, 3-9, at 6: «nec mare sine mortis imminenti periculo intrare possent, nec in terram morari diutius propter victualium et rerum suarum ingruentem egestatem, inito consilio [...] et concorditer summo diluculo sumentes, urbem viriliter aggressi sunt».

<sup>39</sup> GEOFFROY DE VILLEHARDOUIN, II. 52-53.

## WHOSE FAULT? REFLECTIONS ON BYZANTINE SHORTCOMINGS BEFORE AND DURING THE CAPTURE OF CONSTANTINOPLE\*

EVANGELOS CHRYSOS

The capture of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 was a catastrophe of immense magnitude. It marks a decisive turning point in the medieval history of Europe and the Mediterranean world, especially in the East. The capture has been lamented by historians who experienced the sack personally and narrated it as eyewitnesses, such as Niketas Choniates, as well as by erudite historians, thinkers and writers of later times. Even in our days Umberto Eco has devoted some pages full of sensitive reflection to the event in his bestseller novel "Baudolino". For a final judgement of what happened apparently there can be no way to excuse the behaviour of the Christian forces from the West involved in attacking and especially in looting the City and in conquering the European parts of the Byzantine Empire. Inevitable is therefore the conclusion that any form of modern reflection in the spirit of Christian fraternity cannot be effective unless it acknowledges the crime as a crime against humanity, in Donald Nicol's phrasing «one of the greatest crimes in the annals of human affairs».

However, the historian who wants to understand and explain what happened is asked to seek for causes in all possible areas, to draw attention to the shortcomings of all the parties involved and to bring to the fore what the different sides failed to do in order to hinder or foil the catastrophe to come. On this path of investigation this paper aims at signaling the shortcomings and mistakes of the victims, the Byzantines, both in the period leading to the

\* This text reproduces the paper as presented at the conference. There is no real need to add extensive footnotes with reference to the sources because the narrative is based in modern bibliography, mainly on the following publications, which include abundant literature: C. M. BRAND, *Byzantium confronts the West, 1180-1204*, Cambridge, Mass. 1968; D. NICOL, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge 1988; J. HARRIS, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, London 2003; M. MESCHINI, *1204: l'Incompiuta. La quarta crociata e le conquiste di Costantinopoli*, Milano 2004. The most recent reflections on the topic are: J. KÖDER, *Selective Erinnerung bei Zeitzeugen. Berichten über die Eroberung Konstantinopels im Jahr 1204*, in «Wiener humanistische Blätter» 47 (2005), 28-50 and O. HAGENEDER, *Innocenz III. und der vierte Kreuzzug auf Grund der offiziellen Korrespondenz in den päpstlichen Registern*, in the same volume, 51-69.