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CRUSADES AND CRUSADER STATES: FOURTH

THE PREACHING AND TAKING OF THE CROSS

Pope Innocent III's proclamation of a Fourth Crusade to Jerusalem in 1198 stemmed essentially from a deeply felt responsibility to rid the Holy Land of the infidel and at the same time aimed to resolve the conflicts between the Christian heads of Europe by uniting them in a religious cause. There was virtually no response, however, to Innocent's repeated demands for men and money, until religious fervor was fanned by a charismatic preacher, Fulk of Neuilly. His eloquence touched the hearts of the common people, though it failed to have an enduring effect.

The enlistment of a real crusading army began at a tournament held at the castle of Écry in Cham-

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pagne on 28 November 1199 by Count Thibaut, at which an illustrious assemblage of knights, gathered to display their military prowess, spontaneously laid down their weapons and committed themselves to the crusade. Led by Thibaut and his cousin, Count Louis of Blois, the French knights converted a momentary passion into vows of a lasting and enforceable obligation.

Naturally the salvation of Jerusalem was not the sole motivation of these knights. Each crusader was fully aware of his privileged temporal and spiritual status, besides which chivalric ideals, the joy of battle, and the winning of lands and power were factors. Nevertheless, we should not devalue the spiritual motives of these medieval Christians whose religious impulses were stronger than is easily comprehensible to us.

Other nobles in northern France, most notably Count Baldwin of Flanders and Count Hugh of St. Pol, were soon inspired to follow Thibaut's example, and at a meeting in Compiègne in the following year it was decided to seek transportation to the Levant from one of the great maritime cities. Six envoys—among them Geoffroi de Villehardouin, later chronicler of the crusade—were given full powers to contract for transportation in the names of their principals.

Their choice of Venice was based on the practical consideration that it was the only port able to serve the crusaders' purpose, as Pisa and Genoa were engaged in a maritime struggle. It is likely that Pope Innocent III neither encouraged nor discouraged the choice (although there has been considerable controversy over his attitude), and in any case the crusaders did not deem it necessary to ask his opinion. Innocent's vision of papal leadership was anachronistic in an increasingly secular society.

THE ILL-FATED TREATY OF VENICE

The crusaders' envoys were greeted by Doge Enrico Dandolo of Venice in February 1201. The doge was very old and virtually blind, but still a skilled statesman and ardent patriot. Although undoubtedly ambitious for his own glory and for the profit of the republic, he was not the unscrupulous manipulator that historians have depicted.

To the envoys' request the doge replied that Venice would provide transport for 33,500 men and 4,500 horses and provision the army for a year, in addition to supplying fifty war galleys at the republic's own expense, on condition that the Venetians should receive a half share in any conquests made. The agreed price of 85,000 marks was not extortionate. The contract represented the committing by Venice of virtually all its resources.

Once the treaty had been approved by the Venetian Great Council, Dandolo summoned the popular assembly in St. Mark's, where, in a highly emotional scene, he and the Venetian people pledged themselves as allies to the crusaders. On the following day a treaty was concluded, and although it did not name a specific destination, Dandolo and the envoys secretly agreed on Egypt as the most strategic point of attack. Recent years had seen a change in the ideal of the crusade, which was now less specifically associated with the Holy Land and was seen in broader terms of war against the enemies of Christendom. The less liberal-minded, especially among the lower ranks of the crusaders, however, still retained a romantic fascination with the holy places and would not have readily accepted the Egyptian objective.

Papal confirmation of the treaty has been the subject of much discussion, but it is probable that Innocent willingly confirmed the treaty, at the same time imposing a condition prohibiting any attack on Christian lands. In the final reckoning, however, practical solutions were to become more important to the crusaders than papal prohibitions.

THE ELECTION OF BONIFACE OF MONTFERRAT

Returning home by the Mont Cenis pass, Villehardouin and his companions would have had to pass through the marquessate of Montferrat, and it seems reasonable to speculate that they stopped to visit Marquess Boniface—a relative by marriage of Thibaut—who very probably expressed interest in the crusade.

Thibaut's untimely death on 24 May 1201 forced the crusaders to seek a replacement for him. First the duke of Burgundy and then the count of Bar-le-Duc were offered the command of Thibaut's contingent. When they declined, the French crusaders assembled in June at Soissons, where Villehardouin proposed that Thibaut's troops and the supreme command should be offered to Boniface of Montferrat, who, he was confident, would accept. And so it was agreed.

Boniface of Montferrat was an excellent choice. A man in his early fifties with a long experience of command, he was a chivalrous, fearless, and renowned Christian knight. He was also one of the greatest of the Italian nobles and commanded the allegiance of a large fighting force. It was not for the

crusading ideal alone that Boniface assumed the cross. Most crusaders were driven by a complex of religious and secular motives, and ambition ran deep in the souls of the Montferrats, whose interests in the Holy Land and the Byzantine Empire were unsurpassed among the Latin nobility.

The crusaders agreed to meet at Venice in the summer of 1202. Boniface stopped on his return journey to spend Christmas with the German king, Philip of Swabia, at Hagenau. It was here that he met the exiled Prince Alexios, son of the deposed Byzantine emperor Isaac II Angelos and brother of Philip's wife, Irene. Boniface and Alexios shared a common resentment against Byzantium, for two of Boniface's brothers had married into the imperial family with unhappy consequences. The question of moving the crusading army to Jerusalem by the accustomed route through Constantinople, where the young Alexios should be installed as an ally of the crusaders, could scarcely fail to arise. That Alexios was later rejected by the Byzantines does not alter the significance of the crusaders' firm belief that he would be welcomed as the rightful heir.

Historians have often attributed the Latin conquest of Constantinople to a plot laid by Boniface and Philip of Swabia at Hagenau to install Alexios in Constantinople by means of the crusading army. The subject was undoubtedly discussed, though probably not with any firm conclusion; for Philip was powerless and Boniface was well aware that, in spite of his status, he did not have a disciplined army that would respond to such a command. At any rate, neither was capable of maneuvering events at will.

Alexios thus found commiseration but no promise of aid at Philip's court. A journey to Rome also did not gain him support, for Innocent was unimpressed by the prince's claims. The pope later expressed to Boniface his displeasure that the crusaders should consider an attack on Christians.

THE POVERTY OF THE ARMY AT VENICE

Synchronizing the movements of any army is enormously difficult; for a crusading army it was impossible. Departures were tardy, and even though the first crusaders arrived in Venice before the scheduled date, 29 June 1202, they had to await the latecomers. Tents were pitched on the island of St. Nicholas—the Lido—because it was not feasible to host a large alien army in the city proper, especially considering that a force of 33,500 was expected to descend upon a population of about 100,000. Venetians felt that they—and their wives and daughters—would sleep more soundly if the lagoon divided them from these foreigners.

The Venetians had fulfilled their contract to the letter and assembled a formidable fleet of about 500 vessels, a number that was not needed, because the expected passengers were lacking. Already in June 1202 it was clear that the crusade was in trouble, because crusaders were not arriving soon enough or in sufficient numbers. Some never set out, and others either sailed from another port or were detained by adverse circumstances. It has often been suggested that some of the crusaders avoided Venice out of distaste for the Italian marquess who was now in command of a predominantly French undertaking. This is not a very plausible argument. It implies a decidedly modern "nationalistic" approach and fails to recognize the high rank of the marquess in the international brotherhood of chivalry.

Moreover, an abundance of good reasons for the paucity of crusaders at Venice can be found. It must be remembered that Villehardouin's loyalty to the Venetian ally was not necessarily shared by the mass of crusaders. The cost of transportation, paid by the crusaders themselves, in many cases decisively affected the decision to sail from other ports. In addition, rumors of the intended destination in Egypt influenced those who believed that Palestine was the only legitimate goal to find other ways of reaching the Holy Land directly. Although Villehardouin judges these men harshly, they acted according to their conscience and best judgment, and it is the unrealistic treaty that plays the villain's role. The assembled army was only one-third as great as anticipated.

Sometime during this period the refugee Prince Alexios sent messengers to the crusaders to seek the aid of the army, assuring them that he would be welcomed in Constantinople as a liberator and that he would then aid their enterprise in Palestine.

To the barons, now in extreme financial straits, it was an alluring proposal. Dandolo was demanding payment, and the crusaders were unable to pay the remaining 34,000 marks that they owed. The evil consequences of the unrealistic treaty now stood starkly revealed, for the Venetians could not be expected to renounce payment for this enterprise in which they had invested so much. Indeed, if the crusaders did not pay, Venice faced a financial disaster. On the other hand, as the summer dragged on, the languishing army grumbled against what they regarded as the avariciousness of the Venetians.

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THE CONQUEST OF ZARA

Doge Dandolo realized that the crusaders could pay no more. Despite the complaints of the ill-informed, the Venetians were not responsible for this plight; indeed, they stood to suffer with the crusaders in the face of impending crisis.

Searching for a solution that would enable the crusade to get under way, Dandolo raised the question of the Venetian desire to reconquer Zara (Zadar). Control of this Adriatic port was essential to Venice's maritime supremacy. Payment of the crusaders' debt could be deferred in return for their help; thus the interest of Christendom in the holy war and the self-interest of Venice in reconquering Christian Zara coincided. It did not take the crusaders' leaders long to conclude that their options were extremely limited, and they agreed to lend aid.

When rumors of the plan to attack Zara leaked, there was widespread disaffection. For crusaders to become involved in an attack on a Christian city seemed detestable to many, and those who were unwilling to soil their consciences turned back. The more sophisticated, aware that men often find themselves in situations where no ethically commendable choices are open to them, were prepared to make the best of it.

The papal legate, Peter Capuano, accepted the plan, for he wished, at all costs, to prevent the disintegration of the army. There is no evidence that he was repudiated by the pope, even though Innocent, as head of the church, could not condone an offensive against a Catholic city. The pope's letter forbidding the attack did not reach the army until it stood before Zara, too late to have any effect, and it is likely that the prohibition was merely for the record.

The fleet finally set sail in the first week of October 1202. Numbering more than 200 major vessels, it was an imposing armada that swarmed into the harbor of Zara on 10 November and landed unopposed. Some disaffected crusaders assured the Zarans that, as Christians, they would not be harmed, but Dandolo demanded that the agreement to conquer Zara be honored and the city was forced to surrender. The crusading soldiers unleashed upon the defenseless town snatched, plundered, and destroyed, and citizens particularly hateful to the Venetians were exiled or killed.

The conquest of Zara has been represented by many as a moral abomination, but it must be remembered that the Venetians considered they had just grievances against the rebellious and hostile city. If we do not find them guiltless, we should at least comprehend the Venetian point of view.

THE TREATY OF ZARA

A letter from Pope Innocent, written about the end of 1202 or beginning of 1203, vigorously condemned the crusaders for the attack on Zara, though it was not a formal bull of excommunication. His reaction once again reveals the ambiguous situation in which Innocent was placed by his moral duty and his desire to preserve the crusade.

While the fleet wintered in Zara, a riot broke out between embittered crusaders in the ranks and their Venetian allies, in which about 100 men were killed, and in mid December, when Boniface rejoined the army, the camp was still restive. This gave the marquess, encouraged by Philip of Swabia, an opportunity to raise once more the issue of an alliance with the Greek pretender. In return for aid in gaining the Byzantine throne, young Alexios would provide needed financial and military support for the crusade, while the Latins would be performing a work of charity and justice. Neither was aware of the prince's overestimation of his resources and of his influence among the Greeks.

The merits and demerits of the German proposal were argued in the camp. One side spoke of the disgrace of attacking a Christian city, while the other pointed out that the army must accept the proposal in order to survive. A handful of leaders decided to accept the offer, a decision that resulted in the desertion of about 2,000 men. Although Doge Dandolo was certainly aware of Venice's economic interests in the Eastern Empire, it is unfair to accuse him of diverting the crusade.

Innocent III was wisely prepared to be indulgent toward those barons who requested absolution for the attack on Zara, provided they confessed their guilt and desisted from any further attack on Christians. The unrepentant Venetians were punished by a bull of excommunication, although its suppression by Boniface reveals that Innocent still exercised only the most minimal influence over the crusade.

Late in April 1203 the host departed from Zara. Dandolo and Boniface remained behind to wait for young Alexios and together they soon joined the main body at Corfu, where they were initially well received by the Greeks, although some hostile incidents later revealed the depth of bitterness between East and West and the antipathy that any Latin-supported pretender would kindle among the Greeks.

When the Constantinopolitan question was once more raised, more than half the crusaders refused to accept the decision of the leaders. It was only when Boniface and others humbly begged the dissenters not to abandon the army that they agreed to go to Constantinople, on condition that they remain no longer than a month. The army was saved from its gravest crisis so far.

TAKING THE TOWER OF GALATA

The fleet set sail for Constantinople on 24 May 1203. The arrival of Innocent's letter of prohibition too late to stop them has given rise to accusations by Byzantinists of papal misuse of the crusade in order to subjugate the Greek church. The best interpretation of the pope's action is that he simply allowed to happen what he had no power to prevent.

In Constantinople, Alexios III awaited the attack helplessly. He could muster no fleet to oppose the Latins, and the effectiveness of his army was dubious. Alexios probably hoped that the walls that had withstood assaults for eight centuries would prevail once more.

These lofty walls astounded the crusaders when they first caught sight of the magnificent city on the Bosporus. The fleet made port at Scutari, disturbed that no supporters of young Alexios came to welcome him. This surprise and consternation are crucial to my interpretation of the crusade, for the leaders had never planned to conquer the city, much less subject it to Latin rule; they hoped only to restore a rightful ruler who, they expected, would be welcomed by his rightful subjects.

At Dandolo's suggestion the young pretender was taken on the doge's galley and rowed back and forth under the walls of the city, to be shown to his people, while the citizens were urged to recognize their emperor. The ship was greeted with hoots, whistles, insults, and a shower of missiles. In fact, presenting Alexios as a puppet of the Latins only served to unify the Greeks against him, but it reveals how even the sagacious Dandolo expected the prince to be greeted with rejoicing. This abortive attempt to incite revolt precluded the possibility of a bloodless coup and made battle inevitable.

The strategy agreed upon was to attack the shore of the city north of the Golden Horn, defended only by the strong tower of Galata. An army of 10,000 men was assembled in seven battalions, not including the Venetians, who were to be responsible for the fleet, which was vital to success and the survival

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of all. In the hour of battle all disaffection with the course of the crusade seemed to disappear. All realized that now they must either conquer or die.

Just after sunrise on 5 July 1203 the Venetian ships advanced across the strait in order of battle. The crusaders landed without opposition and their thunderous mounted charge caused the Greeks to flee, abandoning the northern shore except for the tower of Galata. On the following day the crusaders took the tower and broke the chain barring the mouth of the Golden Horn. The Venetian fleet now sailed into the harbor, protected from the elements, while the crusaders occupied the northern shore.

THE FIRST CONQUEST OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Turning their attention to the city on the opposite shore, the crusaders disagreed over their plan of action and finally found a compromise. The Venetians were to assault the harbor walls while the crusaders would attack the fortifications from the landward side.

Crossing the Golden Horn, the crusaders set up camp facing the section of the wall that protected the palace of Blachernae. On 16 July 1203 they began the attack. While crossbowmen opened fire on the walls, the crusaders managed to plant two of their scaling ladders against the battlements close to the sea. In the face of fierce resistance, a handful of men were able to scale the walls, only to be repulsed by the double-headed axes of the Varangian mercenaries.

The Venetian effort was more successful. Led by Dandolo, who stood at the prow of his galley, grasping the staff of the Venetian banner and shouting angrily to his men to put him ashore, the Venetians gained a foothold on the ramparts and soon held about a quarter of the entire harbor wall. Setting fire to the nearest houses, the soldiers started a blaze, which swept as far as the interior of the town, destroying everything in its path.

Never had the people of Constantinople been faced by such peril. The vacillating emperor Alexios III was eventually spurred to action by their condemnations and led onto the plain a force that seemed so overwhelming to the crusaders that they sent a plea for help to the Doge, who withdrew from the walls to aid them. Nevertheless, the Western knights themselves presented a glorious spectacle of colorful shields and silk cloth as, led by Baldwin of Flanders, they rode to meet their enemy.

Reaching the top of a ridge, the crusading army

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confronted the Greeks. Both forces were seized with indecision, but it was the emperor who turned back. The crusaders maintained that he was overcome with fear by the size and strength of their army, but Alexios III's sally may well have been merely a successful tactical maneuver to draw the Venetians away from the harbor walls.

Nevertheless, Alexios was widely regarded as a coward in Constantinople. Anxious to save his skin, he fled during the night, leaving the alarmed magnates and ministers to restore to the throne the blind Isaac II Angelos, father of young Alexios. This was a brilliant stroke of statecraft, which would take away the Latin excuse for capturing Constantinople.

The crusaders rejoiced at the news, for their chivalric zeal to aid the oppressed against the powerful had been real; but still the leaders were cautious, realizing the complexity of their situation. They had staked the future of the crusade on young Alexios, not on his father, whom they had never met and who was not their creature. It was not until a delegation, led by Villehardouin, succeeded in obtaining a promise from Isaac II to abide by the Treaty of Zara that the crusaders would let young Alexios enter the city. Isaac knew, better than Alexios, that this promise could not be fulfilled, and his protestations were a dire warning of the problems that would follow.

THE UNEASY ALLIANCE OF LATINS AND GREEKS

Before long the mutually abrasive attitudes of Greeks and Latins within the city prompted Isaac Angelos to persuade the crusaders to move to the northern shore of the Golden Horn; in return the Greeks reluctantly agreed to the coronation of Alexios IV as coemperor. Henceforth, the crusaders tended to ignore Isaac and address themselves to Alexios.

The soldiers spent their time visiting the centers of imperial and ecclesiastical magnificence, marveling at the wonders of the greatest city in Christendom. As pilgrims they were drawn to venerate the illustrious holy relics of Hagia Sophia, no doubt finding comfort in their spiritual benefits.

Although Villehardouin speaks of friendly relations, and some of the money promised to the Latins was paid, the long-developing animosity between the East and the West soon prevailed. The bitterness of the citizens was directed toward their new emperor, Alexios IV, who was degrading the imperial dignity by his vulgar behavior, drinking and gambling with his Latin friends. He tried to meet the Latins' demands for money by plundering the wealthy families and even confiscating ecclesiastical treasures. Besides this, Alexios was already branded as a traitor by the Byzantines for his open submission to the pope, even if he did nothing to give the pontiff real control over the Byzantine church.

Alexios was sure that he would be killed if the crusaders deserted him. He proposed to pay for the retention of the Venetian fleet, whose contract had almost expired, for another year and to provision the crusaders until spring, by which time he believed that he would surely have secured his authority over the whole empire and thus be able to provide the wealth to fulfill his obligations. This seemed a sensible agreement to the crusade's leaders, but it understandably outraged those who had already waited long enough to fulfill their vows. The achievement of a base in Constantinople, however, with an emperor friendly to the West and submissive to Rome, was too important to abandon. It was agreed to extend the treaty with the Venetians for another year.

An expeditionary force of crusaders, led by Alexios and Boniface, pursued the usurper Alexios III, capturing castles and towns in an effort to establish the new emperor's control over the empire. Meanwhile, the fragile foundations of cooperation between Greeks and Latins in Constantinople were undermined by two incidents. A vicious attack on the Latin inhabitants by a Greek mob forced them to flee to the other side of the harbor, and a few days later the Muslim quarter of the city was plundered by a small band of crusaders.

During the second episode a fire was started by crusaders. The blaze spared nothing in its path, consuming hovels and mansions alike. Villehardouin later wrote that the material damage was beyond the power of man to calculate. Certainly it signaled the end of all amicable relations between the crusaders and the Greeks. Few Westerners dared remain to face the retribution of the incensed populace.

HOSTILITIES RESUME

Greek animosity toward the foreigners in the city had now reached a peak, and the crusaders called back the expeditionary force. Alexios' attitude toward his benefactors changed from the day of his return. The haughty manner he now adopted was perhaps the result of a feeling that they had not adequately appreciated his transformation from suppliant to emperor.

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It was a fatal conceit to believe that he could succeed unassisted, for Alexios now had to contend with undependable troops and a demoralized populace who blamed the hated foreigners, to whom he owed his throne, for all their hardships. Although the Latins were universally despised, the more moderate Byzantines felt compelled to appease them, while the attitudes of the radicals made it increasingly difficult for Alexios to consort with his Latin benefactors. The young emperor was well aware that he could gain badly needed support by inclining toward the popular anti-Latin party led by Mourtzouphlos. He also came to the tardy realization that he had made extravagant promises that he could never keep.

The termination of even token payments to the crusaders increased the emperor's popularity but gave rise to extreme anxiety within the Latin camp. The crusaders began to realize that they must break with the young emperor, but the Western knights' punctilious regard for honor compelled them to confront Alexios once more before declaring war. During an interview with him, the crusaders' envoys warned that they would commence hostilities unless he honored his agreements. In the angry scene that followed, Alexios ordered them from the land. Undoubtedly the episode had a crucial effect on the standing of Boniface in the crusading army. The marquess' close identification with the young prince and the failure of his policy cost him dearly.

The new year began with a Greek attempt to burn the Venetian fleet, which was saved only by the courage and skill of the Venetian seafarers. Still, the crusaders felt they had not sufficient force to besiege the city, though food was becoming scarcer. Within Constantinople the mob was in an ugly mood, demanding action against the plunderers outside their walls and even electing a new emperor. A young noble, Kanobos, was compelled to accept the crown, but his reign lasted only six days. Nevertheless, Alexios' position was seriously threatened and, seeking protection wherever he could, he turned back to the Latins. This gave the ambitious Mourtzouphlos the opportunity to reveal to the Greek nobles the treachery of Alexios, who was imprisoned.

By blackening Alexios' character, firing the people's hatred of foreigners, and bribing the magnates, Mourtzouphlos convinced the Greeks to elect him emperor. During a meeting between the crusaders and the new emperor, Dandolo demanded full payment of the remaining debt and probably submission to the Roman church, conditions utterly unacceptable to Mourtzouphlos and the Greeks.

The fighting continued to rage intermittently, and hardly a day passed without some skirmish. A foraging party of Latin knights was ambushed on their return by Mourtzouphlos but heroically repelled the far superior numbers of Greek attackers and managed to capture the victory-giving icon of the Virgin.

Fearing a popular insurrection, on the night of 8 February 1204 Mourtzouphlos had young Alexios murdered. Although many of the barons would not mourn Alexios, others deplored the manner of his death, for treachery ranked as one of the most despicable crimes in their feudal society. They now determined not to abandon the siege of Constantinople until they had taken the city, avenged Alexios, and secured the money that was owed them. However, prospects were bleak for the pilgrims. Isolated in a hostile land in the midst of winter, they lacked the basic necessities of life; and before them loomed the fortified walls, the strength of which they had already tested.

THE SECOND CONQUEST OF CONSTANTINOPLE

It would take much courage for this small army to make another attempt to conquer the greatest city they had ever seen. To the Venetians attack was imperative, for the cornerstone of their commercial prosperity was threatened. The crusaders, however, had to be persuaded that such an act possessed religious sanction and were urged to fight only by the bishops' assurance that it would be honorable to die in the attempt to subjugate schismatic Constantinople to Rome.

Before planning their attack the crusaders decided upon the distribution of the spoils. Six Venetians and six crusaders would elect an emperor, and a similarly mixed committee was to allocate fiefs and offices. The emperor would receive one-quarter of the conquest, and the crusaders and the Venetians would share the other three-quarters equally.

On the basis of previous experience, the army agreed to concentrate its forces against the walls fronting the Golden Horn. The important tactical advantage of the Venetian assault bridges, which allowed the attackers to approach on a level with the defenders, was only too clear to Mourtzouphlos. In order to combat this, he built wooden superstructures on his towers and added temporary towers between the permanent ones.

On the morning of Friday, 9 April 1204, the cru-

saders prepared for battle by confessing their sins and taking Communion. Having crossed the Golden Horn, the assault troops had to splash ashore, burdened with scaling ladders, pickaxes, and other gear while the defenders hurled great stones down from above, smashing their protective covers and forcing the engineers to flee. Handicapped by a wind from the south, the few ships that managed to get close enough to fight were soon driven back. The crusaders' leaders were forced to give the order to retreat while the Greeks jeered at their defeated attackers. The disheartened pilgrims had lost nearly 100 dead.

In spite of the wave of fear that swept the demoralized army, it was decided to resume the attack on the same walls after two days' rest. Sunday was spent at divine services, the most eloquent preachers assuring the men that making war on the Greeks, traitors and schismatics from Rome, was an act of penance in itself. The pilgrims accepted the explanation, although the Pope had specifically forbidden the army to attack Christians.

At sunrise on Monday, 12 April 1204, the fighting began again. The Venetian ships were now lashed together two by two, and the more concentrated forces managed to take several towers. Meanwhile, a party on the shore had made a small hole in the wall. A few crusaders entered the city and outfaced Mourtzouphlos, who retreated to his command post. The gates were opened and the attackers swarmed into the city. Mourtzouphlos' Greek army, though greater in number, fled before the charge of Western knights. The crusaders were free to run riot, massacring and pillaging, while the emperor and his followers took refuge in the Boukeleon.

The crusaders' leaders decided to make camp and renew their fight the next morning. Not daring to seek quarters or disperse, they slept close by their weapons, fearing the worst and fully expecting to face a hard battle the next day. However, during the night a third devastating fire completed the demoralization of the Greeks. Mourtzouphlos had left hurriedly under cover of darkness, and a new leader, (Theodore or Constantine) Laskaris, was unable to rally the frightened people, who had lost the will to resist.

Somewhat anticlimactically, Constantinople had fallen. Although the pilgrims did not know it, their crusade had ended here, where they would found an ill-fated Latin Empire, the defense of which would require all their energies, all their resources, and many of their lives.

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EPILOGUE

For three days the hardened and embittered army plundered the imperial city. Although the Venetians were sophisticated enough to seize works of art, the rest pillaged indiscriminately, destroying relics, raping women, and desecrating sacred buildings.

The electoral body chose Baldwin of Flanders as new emperor; Boniface had lost support by his close connection throughout the crusade with the ill-fated Alexios IV. Although Venice received its promised three-eighths of Constantinople, including the significant harbor area, besides—by purchase from Boniface—the strategic island of Crete, the planned partition of the empire among the victorious Latins was largely ignored in the scramble for territories. By the end of 1204 the crusaders had won a large part of the empire, but it was only a weak structure that they established, a complex and decentralized system of fiefs without a strong head. The Latins' disdain for political and diplomatic realities brought disaster upon them. They failed to gain the support of at least some Greeks and rejected foreign alliances, compelling them to face hostility on both fronts.

Within two years the great leaders of the crusade—Dandolo, Baldwin, and Boniface—were dead. The Latin Empire, which had never become a workable reality, declined steadily. When the Greeks reconquered Constantinople in 1261, they found the city in ruins. For years the Latin emperors had lived in abject poverty, selling relics and stripping the lead from roofs to meet their most urgent needs. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the future weakness of the new Byzantine Empire was a result of Latin conquest. A fundamentally sound society would have recovered from the sack of Constantinople and if, when the Greeks recovered their capital, they found that Byzantium's former greatness escaped them, it was because they had merely restored a position that had proved untenable before 1203–1204.

The Latin conquest of Constantinople did not supply a base for the successful conclusion of a crusade to the Holy Land (although it did force the Muslims into a new truce in September 1204 with the king of Jerusalem). The crusaders themselves, however, believed they had wrought a great achievement as instruments of God and became enmeshed in securing and extending their conquests, not only because they were greedy for lands but also because they could not otherwise consider proceeding to the

Holy Land. The irony, of course, is that they were never able to do so.

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[See also Baldwin I of Flanders; Boniface of Montferrat; Constantinople; Crusade Propaganda; Innocent III, Pope; Isaac II Angelos; Venice; Villehardouin, Geoffroi de.]

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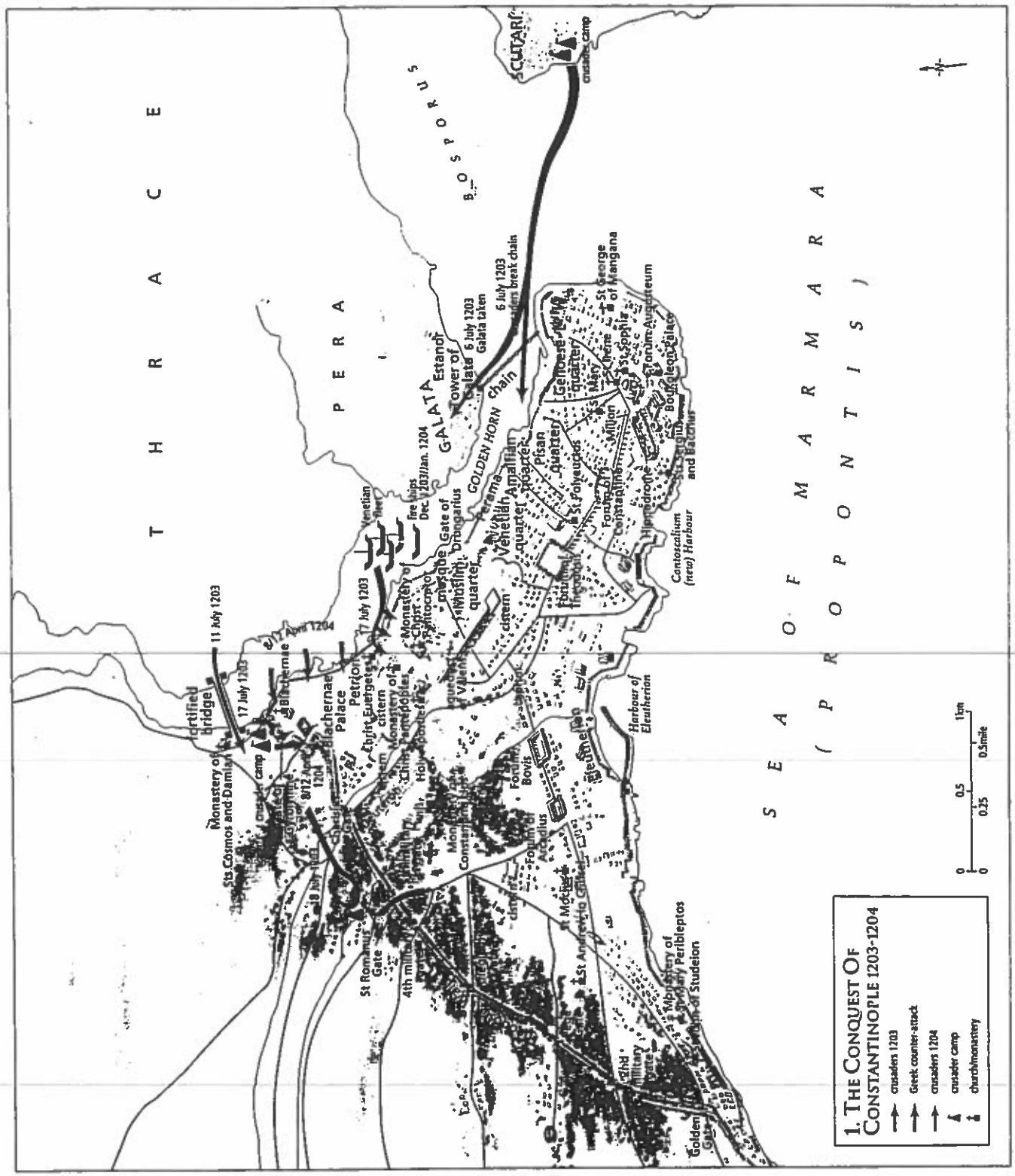

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