

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 70  
The Fourth Crusade I.

As part of the HistoryPodcasters.com network, this episode is sponsored by Leatherman Data Services. Leatherman Data Services are providers of mapping and geographic data services for historians, archaeologists, and cultural resource management firms. So if you're looking for an experienced cartographer to create a map for your website, you can email them at [LeathermanDataServices@gmail.com](mailto:LeathermanDataServices@gmail.com), or go to their website [LeathermanDataServices.com](http://LeathermanDataServices.com).

Hello again. Last week we saw the demise of Henri of Champagne, and the crowning of a new King and Queen of Jerusalem, Amalric and Isabella. We also saw the German Crusade recapture the cities of Beirut and Sidon, before it collapsed after hearing about the death of the German Emperor.

Now, to say that the Fourth Crusade was a controversial and notorious event is an understatement. It has been described by various historians and commentators as "infamous", "misguided", and "a fiasco". Stephen Runciman, in his trilogy on the history of the Crusades, trumped all these comments when he stated, and I quote, "there was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade" end of quote. This, from an historian writing in the 1950s in Europe, was a pretty big call. More recently, in the year 2001 in fact, Pope John Paul II issued a formal apology for the Fourth Crusade on behalf of the Catholic Church. So why was the Fourth Crusade so infamous? Well, you just have to keep listening to find out.

The starting point for any examination of the Fourth Crusade is the election of Pope Innocent III in January 1198. The dynamic personality of this new Pope and the political situation in Europe at the time reignited Crusading zeal across Christendom, and made it likely that a major Crusading event would shortly arise.

So who was Pope Innocent III? Well, in a nutshell, he was a young man, highly educated in matters of theology and law, from a noble family with a strong connection to the Papacy. He was born Lotario di Segni around the year 1160. His father, the Count of Segni, was a wealthy landowner, and his mother was from the noble patrician Scotti family. He must have shown intellectual promise at an early age as he was sent to a Benedictine abbey in Rome, some 30 miles away from his home, for his early education. In his twenties, he traveled to Paris, which was the intellectual center of Europe at the time, and studied theology. He then bolstered his education with three years of legal studies at a law school in Bologna. In between his studies, he managed to find time to make a pilgrimage to Canterbury, paying his respects at the cathedral in England only a few years after Thomas Becket's murder.

He was an obvious candidate for elevation to the Church hierarchy in Rome, and was duly made a Cardinal in 1190 at the young age of 29. His ambitions were kept in check however, by the elderly Pope Celestine III, whose family were traditional enemies of the Scottis, the young Cardinal's mother's family. But despite being cast into the background of Papal politics, Lotario di Segni worked hard, producing several religious tracts which were widely distributed, and generally impressing everyone around him with his ability and his potential. I can safely say that young Lotario impressed those around him because, on

the very day that Pope Celestine died in January 1198, he was unanimously elected to the position of Pope, despite his young age. He was only 37 at the time.

Described as being good looking, of average height, and sporting a moustache, Lotario became Pope Innocent III, and took to the role like he was born for it. Possessing exceptional skills as a writer and public speaker, and also apparently having a sharp sense of humor, he injected life and verve back into the Church. He viewed himself as the Vicar of Christ on Earth, a term that is now commonly used to describe the Pope, but which was first attributed to Pope Innocent III. In this way, he saw himself as standing half-way between God and Man. The Oxford Dictionary of Popes (and yes, you can get a dictionary of Popes; and yes, I do happen to have a copy) describes Innocent III as, and I quote "a man born to rule, uniting exceptional gifts of intellect and character with determination, flexibility, rare skill in handling men, and also humaneness." End of quote.

Basically, when the Cardinals and Bishops of the Catholic Church in Rome elected Pope Innocent III to replace the aging and largely forgettable Celestine III, they were appointing a dynamo.

At the start of Pope Innocent's Pontificate in January 1198, what was the political situation in Europe and the Middle East? Well, as far as the Holy Land was concerned, Amalric and Isabella had just been crowned King and Queen of Jerusalem, and the German Crusade was just on the verge of collapse. In Europe, the political situation was complicated and, to Pope Innocent's mind, highly favorable for the Church. The most important event of recent times had been the death of the German Emperor Henry VI, who you will remember was Frederick Barbarossa's son, and whose death resulted in the collapse of the German Crusade. For the past a hundred or so years, Papal authority in Europe had been effectively kept in check by the rising power of the German Hohenstauffen Empire. German Imperial power reached its peak with Emperor Henry VI. Emperor Henry was married to Constance, the heiress of the Kingdom of Sicily, and the strategically important island Kingdom had been under his control since 1194.

Emperor Henry was ambitious. He was no fan of the Byzantine Empire and basically wished to establish a German Empire to rival the Byzantine Empire. He dreamt of a German Empire which stretched from Europe to the Mediterranean and across into the Holy Land. To that end, he had secured Sicily, and had worked hard to establish vassal kings in Cyprus and Armenia. Had it not been for his unexpected death from malaria in September 1197, and the subsequent collapse of the German Crusade in the Holy Land, Emperor Henry may well have achieved his goal of becoming the head of an Empire to rival that of the Byzantines.

Following his death, however, the German Empire went into a tailspin. Emperor Henry's son and heir was only three years old, and the power-hungry German barons, whose ambitions had been kept in check by the strong hand of the Emperor, began staking their claims and contesting Imperial succession. The nervous, widowed Empress Constance placed her Sicilian Kingdom and her infant son Frederick under the protection of Pope Innocent, while the late Emperor Henry's brother, Philip of Swabia, battled with the German barons for control over the remainder of the Empire. Basically, this meant that the German Empire, which for the last a hundred or so years had posed a threat to Papal authority, suddenly wasn't a threat at all.

King Richard The Lionheart had been released from his German prison in 1194 and since that time he had been busy waging war with King Philip II of France, while also trying to quell the ambitions of his younger brother Prince John in England.

So in January 1198, Pope Innocent III found himself in a unique position. He was young, energetic and smart, and pretty much without a lay rival. Here was an opportunity to increase the power, prestige, and influence of the Church. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Pope Innocent began to consider calling for a new Crusade, with his overriding aim at this stage, apparently being to retake Jerusalem and recover lost Latin Christian territory in the Holy Land.

In June 1198, only six months into his papacy, Pope Innocent wrote of the need for the Christians of Europe to unite to retake the Holy Land, and in August 1198 he issued a formal appeal for a Crusade, entitled "Post miserabile". Here is an extract from that document, and I quote. "Following the pitiable collapse of the territory of Jerusalem, following the lamentable massacre of the Christian people, following the deplorable invasion of that land on which the feet of Christ stood and where God, our King, had deigned before the beginning of time to work out salvation in the midst of the earth, following the ignominious alienation from our possession of the Vivifying Cross, the Apostolic See, alarmed over the ill fortune of such calamity, grieved. It cried out and wailed to such a degree that, due to incessant crying out, its throat was made hoarse, and from incessant weeping its eyes almost failed. Still the Apostolic See cries out, and like a trumpet, it raises its voice, eager to arouse the Christian peoples to fight Christ's battle and to avenge the injury done to the Crucified One." End of quote.

Pope Innocent went on to admonish the arrogance of the early Crusaders, and urged those who would take up the Cross on this new expedition to be of a pure frame of mind, untarnished by vanity and greed.

Pope Innocent sent his call for a Crusade across Europe. He dispatched representatives to France, England, Hungary, and Sicily. Since Spain and Germany were both racked by internal strife, he left them out of his Crusading recruitment drive.

Now, right from the outset, Pope Innocent believed that the key to reclaiming Jerusalem was for the Church to assert control over the entire military venture. He had analyzed the previous Crusades, and firmly believed that he knew where they had gone wrong. In a nutshell, he was certain that God had let Jerusalem, and vast swathes of Latin Christian territory in the Holy Land, fall into Muslim hands because of the degree of sin present in Latin Christendom. Therefore, as an obvious starting point, Europe had to be purified and brought more strongly under the influence and control of the Church. Everyone who took up the Cross must show genuine remorse for their sins, and their motivation for setting out on the Crusade must be spiritual redemption rather than material motivation.

Pope Innocent believed that too many non-combatants had embarked on previous Crusades, and he wanted to control who took up the Cross on this new venture.

He also believed that previous expeditions had suffered from inadequate funding. A solution to this, he thought, was for the Church to fund this new Crusade. Pope Innocent levied taxes on ecclesiastical income and Papal revenue, and also set up donation chests in churches across Europe. People who weren't embarking on the Crusade could assist the war effort by placing money into the chest at their church. Pope Innocent suggested

that the donation would attract a similar redemption of sin to that experienced by fighters actually taking up arms in the Crusade.

Finally, he believed that the previous two Crusades had failed due to ineffective command. The solution, of course, was for the Church to take firm control of the Crusade from the outset. Pope Innocent didn't intend to personally oversee the Crusade. He made it clear from the outset that his workload as Pope wouldn't permit him to leave Rome and lead the Crusade to the Holy Land. Instead, Pope Innocent appointed Papal Legates to oversee the Crusade, and to ensure that Church interests were accommodated.

He also controlled who was allowed to preach the Crusade. In France, Pope Innocent appointed the evangelist Fulk of Neuilly to preach the Crusade. Apparently, Fulk had always wanted to inspire a Crusade, and this was pretty much his dream job. He toured the countryside, galvanizing the poorer rural population into action. And this, perhaps, is where it all started to go wrong. Previous Crusades had relied largely on social hierarchies for recruitment. If a King or a high-born aristocrat could be convinced to go on Crusade, then a whole raft of knights and lesser-born nobles who owed him allegiance would pretty much be obliged to take up the Cross as well. In wanting the Church to take control, Pope Innocent abandoned this top-down form of recruitment, instead opting for a bottom-up approach. By urging the masses, the peasants and the people at the bottom of the social structure, to embark on a Crusade, perhaps he hoped that higher-born aristocrats would also follow suit and could be bent to the will of the Church.

To be fair, he did try to interest King Richard and King Philip to again take up the Cross. He tried to broker a peace deal between the warring English and French Kings, with a view to freeing them up to leave Europe for the Middle East. However, the unexpected death of Richard the Lionheart in 1199 from a stray arrow threw a spanner in the works. Richard's little brother John immediately began fighting to gain both the English crown and Richard's lands in France, and King Philip made it clear that there was no way he was leaving Europe until the succession issue was resolved. Succession issues also prevented the upper echelons of the German aristocracy from taking up the Cross.

So who did take up Pope Innocent's call for a Crusade? Well, the leaders of the Crusade tended to be from noble families who already had a connection to either Crusading or to the Holy Land itself. As such, they were generally joining for material and earthly reasons, instead of for the salvation of their souls as Pope Innocent had hoped.

Possibly the most enthusiastic of the new recruits was Count Theobald of Champagne. Count Theobald, the brother of Henri of Champagne, the ruler of Jerusalem who had fallen to his death with a dwarf two years ago, was only 20 years old at the time he made his Crusading vow. He took up the Cross at a tournament, along with his cousin and close companion, Count Louis of Blois, who was 28 years old. Both men owned extensive lands in France, and both possessed a distinguished lineage. They were both grandsons of King Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine, which made them nephews to the French and English Kings. Count Theobald wished to continue his brother's efforts in the Holy Land to retake Jerusalem, while Count Louis' father had taken part in the Third Crusade and had died during the Siege of Acre.

Joining these two young noblemen was Count Baldwin of Flanders, who was married to Count Theobald's sister Marie, and whose family had been heavily involved in the Crusades for the past one hundred years. Count Baldwin was also aged in his twenties.

Once these young French noblemen took their Crusading vows, it galvanized many lesser nobles in the north of France and across northern Europe to also join up. In Germany, the Bishop of Halberstadt and the Count of Katzenelnbogen in the Rhineland answered the call to arms, as did a group of noblemen from the northern regions of Italy led by one Boniface, the Marquis of Montferrat, whose family were traditionally closely allied with the Emperor of Germany. So, in a nutshell, the main contingent of Crusaders came from northern France, with others from northern Europe, the Rhineland in Germany, northern Italy, and a smattering of recruits from England and other regions.

After these Crusaders had taken their vows, the next question was the one faced by all previous Crusaders. How was the expedition to be funded? Despite Pope Innocent's best efforts, his ecclesiastical taxes hadn't raised as much money as he had hoped, and the donation chests which had been optimistically placed in churches throughout Christendom remained largely empty. So it was pretty much left to the Crusaders to raise the funds themselves. This wasn't so much of an issue for the three young Counts, Count Theobald, Count Louis, and Count Baldwin, who were all very wealthy men and whose combined resources rivaled that of the King of France. However for everyone else, they raised the money needed to fund their participation in the expedition as best as they could, taxing their subjects, mortgaging their land, and selling whatever assets they could spare.

In the spring of the year 1200 the leading noblemen of the Crusade held a planning meeting in a town in the region of Champagne. Despite his young age, Count Theobald of Champagne became the unofficial leader of the expedition. At the meeting, an issue of vital importance was to be decided. How would the Crusaders travel to the Holy Land? Participants in the First and Second Crusade had traveled overland, and their experiences showed the disadvantages of taking this option. Marching through Europe and the Byzantine Empire would be a lengthy and dangerous undertaking, and the Byzantine Empire was likely to be hostile to their cause. As a consequence, the leaders of the Fourth Crusade decided to follow the example set by the Third Crusade, and sail to the Holy Land. This of course was the more costly option. The Kings of England and France, with their royal coffers at their disposal, had struggled to meet the enormous initial cash outlay of financing a sea passage for all the Crusaders to the Middle East, so cost clearly was going to be an issue.

Secondly, who would provide the ships? The Crusaders from Flanders had ships at their disposal, but only enough to transport themselves. The Crusaders from elsewhere in Europe were going to have to approach one of the major seafaring powers to provide their passage. The cities in the coastal regions of Italy were an obvious choice. They had been transporting pilgrims to the Holy Land for the past a hundred or so years, and had transported trading goods back and forth between the Middle East and Europe. They had the experience and the know-how to provide ships for thousands of Crusaders. At the time of the planning meeting, the great trading cities of Genoa and Pisa were busy fighting each other, so the obvious choice remaining was the powerful city of Venice.

Join me next week as a delegation from the Fourth Crusade travels to Venice for a series of fateful negotiations. We see Pope Innocent lose even more control over the military campaign he has instigated, and we see the Crusaders wade deeper and deeper into the mire that is to become the Fourth Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

End