

History of the Crusades.

Episode 79

The Fourth Crusade X.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Venetians and Crusaders pillage and loot their way through the city of Constantinople, and at the conclusion of the episode we saw Count Baldwin of Flanders crowned as the latest Byzantine Emperor. With a Latin Christian installed on the Imperial throne, the victory of the Crusade instigated by Pope Innocent was complete.

For his part, Pope Innocent was initially thrilled about the outcome. He received a letter from Emperor Baldwin outlining the Latin Christian achievement in glowing terms and praising God for handing the Roman Church this victory. The letter, quite understandably, failed to mention the death, rape, and destruction wrought by the Crusaders and also omitted the fact that much of Constantinople lay in ruins. Eventually, travelers and eye witnesses to the sacking made their way to Rome, and rumors began circulating of the terrible cost to Constantinople and her residents of the Crusaders' victory. Pope Innocent's unbridled joy at the outcome of his Crusade first turned to disquiet, and then, once the stories were verified, to disgust.

He wrote to Emperor Baldwin, denouncing the atrocities committed. He was also furious at the way the spoils had been divided. A new Patriarch of the Orthodox Church had even been appointed, and all this had been done without any consultation at all with the Papal See. Pope Innocent was appalled to learn that his Legate in Constantinople, Peter of Saint-Marcel, had issued a decree absolving all those involved in the Fourth Crusade from any further obligation to journey to the Holy Land. To cap everything off, Pope Innocent could see that throughout the whole venture the Venetians had outplayed the Crusaders, and now the lion's share of the spoils were also in Venetian hands.

In accordance with the terms of the treaty they had made, the Venetians claimed three eighths of Constantinople, taking the part which included the Hagia Sophia, the domain of the newly installed Venetian Patriarch Thomas Morosini. Vitally for the Venetians, in the carve-up of the Byzantine Empire, they negotiated for themselves areas which would increase the status and importance of Venice as a maritime power. They laid claim to the western coast of Greece, the Peloponnese, Naxos, Gallipoli and the Thracian ports on the Marmara, the inland trading city of Adrianople, and the island of Crete.

The Crusaders and Venetians named the new Empire Romania, and Emperor Baldwin settled back onto his throne, and no doubt looked forward to a lengthy and prosperous reign. However, as many Emperors had discovered before him, ruling an empire isn't as easy as it might seem, and the new Empire of Romania was no exception. Emperor Baldwin was basically faced with the same problems that had troubled the previous Byzantine Emperors, plus some additional new problems. The age-old question of how to hold the provinces at the edge of the vast Imperial territory was still present, as was the administrative headache of how to actually govern such a large and diverse Empire.

However, the treasury was more empty than was the case under previous Emperors. The Crusaders and Venetians between them had not only emptied the treasury, they had taken off with and sold, stolen, or melted down anything within Constantinople of any value whatsoever. There was simply nothing left to fill the Imperial coffers. Constantinople

herself was largely in ruins following the sack by the invaders, yet there was no money available to start repairs, so the city didn't look like it was going to be restored to its former glory any time soon.

And there was one major problem facing the new Latin Christian Emperor that the Byzantine Emperors never had to contend with: Greek resistance. Not surprisingly, many Byzantine residents, especially those in the heart of the Empire, weren't that happy to see a Latin Christian on the Imperial throne. Many Greek-speaking subjects of the ancient Byzantine Empire weren't content just to sit back and be ruled by a foreigner. They started to gravitate around groups of Byzantine noblemen who opposed Latin Christian rule.

There were three main pockets of resistance. In the east, along the slopes of the Black Sea, two grandsons of the Emperor Andronicus, Alexius and David Comnenus, set themselves up as the heads of a small Greek Empire. David was killed in battle, but Alexius awarded himself the title of Emperor, and his descendants ruled this rebel eastern Empire for two and a half centuries. On the western side of the new Empire of Romania, a relative of the Angelis dynasty rose up to rule over the city of Epirus, and eventually his descendants would rule over Thessalonica. By far the biggest threat however, came from the city of Nicaea. The daughter of Emperor Alexius III, Anna, and her husband, Theodore Laskaris, set themselves up in Nicaea, and their court became a magnet for the nobility who had fled Constantinople. They elected a new Patriarch for themselves, and Anna and Theodore were crowned Empress and Emperor in exile. To most Greeks living in the former Byzantine Empire, these Emperors of Nicaea were the legitimate rulers of the Empire.

If the Latin Christians were worried about Emperor Theodore, well they had every right to be. In a little over 50 years, Emperor Theodore's descendants would again reign over the Byzantine Empire from their seat in Constantinople. Yes, that's right. The Latin Christian Empire of Romania, the ambitious attempt by the Crusaders and Venetians to control the Byzantine Empire, will last less than 60 years. To quote Christopher Tyreman in his book "God's War" and I quote "The Latin Empire was a failure politically, financially, culturally, and dynastically." End quote.

The new Emperor just didn't have the manpower to effectively assert his rule over his new Empire. The Venetians were more interested in taking advantage of their new trading opportunities than helping to consolidate Latin Christian rule. The treasury was bare, and there was no money to raise an army. To survive, the Latin Christian Empire really needed assistance from Western Europe, not just a small amount of help, but a lot of help. And this wasn't forthcoming. In contrast to what occurred following the fall of Jerusalem, the fall of Constantinople didn't attract a new wave of settlers from the West. Nor did the kingdoms of the West seem interested in sending men to help defend the territory. The creation of the new Latin Christian Empire of Romania was met in Western Europe with indifference.

There was one outcome from the sack of Constantinople that the people of the West were enjoying though, and that was the flood of religious relics into Europe. So many of them made their way westwards into the churches of Europe that Pope Innocent issued special instructions on how to authenticate them. In some cases, the arrival of a relic in a city or town transformed the fortunes of its new home. Far, far away from its original home (the Emperor's private chapel in Constantinople), a fragment of the True Cross known as the "Good Rood of Bromholm" found a new resting place at the Priory of Bromholm, on the north Norfolk coast in England. The influx of pilgrims who came to view the fragment and

request miracles of it raised the income and fortunes of the previously impoverished priory. As the income of the church rose, it was able to commission the building of places to house the relic and for pilgrims to rest, which in turn bolstered the employment of the townsfolk, which led to improvements in local roads, bridges, and public buildings. This sort of thing was happening in churches across Europe, resulting in little pockets of economic prosperity.

A more extreme example can be found in the purchase by King Louis IX of France, from a Venetian pawnbroker, of the Crown of Thorns reportedly worn by Christ at the crucifixion. So over-awed was King Louis of his new possession that he commissioned the building of a special chapel to display the relic, the beautiful Sainte-Chapelle in the Royal Palace complex in Paris, which you can still visit today.

Now, before we conclude our look at the Fourth Crusade, we really should take a look at how the lives of the central figures in the Crusade played out. Right, let's start with the new Emperor, Emperor Baldwin, formerly Count Baldwin of Flanders. It's safe to say that for Emperor Baldwin, wearing the Imperial crown was no bed of roses. Shortly after his coronation, he was given the devastating news that his wife Marie had died of the plague in the Holy Land, shortly before she was due to depart for Constantinople to assume her title as Empress. Crushed by the unexpected death of his wife, things really went on a downward spiral for Baldwin from then on.

A little over six months later, he received news that the vital trading city of Adrianople had risen in rebellion against the Empire of Romania, assisted by King Johannitsa, the King of Bulgaria. Realizing the serious nature of this crisis, the Emperor, Louis of Blois, and the elderly Doge Dandolo, mustered as many men as they could and rode out to address the matter. They arrived in Adrianople at the end of March 1205, to find the banners of King Johannitsa flying over the city. The city was heavily fortified. Despite this, the Emperor and his men attacked the city and laid siege to it. While the Westerners were desperately trying to build siege engines and locate food supplies, King Johannitsa sent his men towards Adrianople, intending to crush the Imperial forces and save the city.

The resulting battle was nothing less than a total disaster for Emperor Baldwin and his men. Louis of Blois was killed and Emperor Baldwin was captured and taken prisoner. The remainder of the Imperial forces scattered and fled. The Doge was not involved in the actual battle, and tried in vain to muster a counter-attack, but it was too little, too late. As the Bulgarian King's forces expanded across the region, great chunks of Imperial territory fell into his hands. Henry of Flanders was proclaimed Regent in Emperor Baldwin's absence, and he wrote letters to Pope Innocent and the Kings of Europe pleading for assistance, but none was forthcoming.

The exact fate of Emperor Baldwin is unknown. The Greek historian and flee-er from the sack of Constantinople Niketas Choniates, reported that the Emperor was taken to King Johannitsa capital Tarnovo, deep in the Balkan mountains. There he was placed in chains, including a metal band which was fastened around his neck, and thrown into a dungeon. In the summer of 1205, Niketas reports that King Johannitsa flew into a rage when he discovered that one of his allies had defected to the Latin Christian side. Ordering Emperor Baldwin to be brought before him, King Johannitsa had all Emperor Baldwin's lower limbs chopped off. Both his arms were severed at the elbow and both his legs at the knees. In this deplorable state, Emperor Baldwin was thrown into a ravine, where he lived for three days before dying.

However, there's no independent confirmation that this was how Emperor Baldwin died. Other rumors circulating at the time had King Johannitsa ordering Emperor Baldwin to be beheaded, and then had the head dried and hollowed out, and used it as a drinking cup. Yet more rumors had the Emperor executed, then his corpse thrown to the King's dogs, who ate it. King Johannitsa did confirm to Pope Innocent, in writing, that Emperor Baldwin had died whilst in his custody, but perhaps unsurprisingly, he didn't expand on the details of his death.

Murtzuphlus too met an unpleasant fate after the fall of Constantinople. When we last left him, he was fleeing the city along with the wife of Emperor Alexius III and her daughters. Unsurprisingly, Murtzuphlus made his way to the town of Mosynopolis, around 160 miles west of Constantinople, which was the current residence of the former Emperor Alexius III. Emperor Alexius initially welcomed Murtzuphlus. However, this overture of friendship turned out to be a facade. One day, after having invited Murtzuphlus to Mosynopolis to dine with him, Alexius drew Murtzuphlus into a private room, then ordered his men to tear Murtzuphlus' eyes out, which they did. The blind Murtzuphlus somehow managed to escape from the clutches of Alexius, but was captured by Latin Christian forces and brought to Constantinople. There he stood trial for killing young Emperor Alexius IV, was found guilty, and sentenced to death. His method of execution was unique. He was ordered to climb to the top of the column of Theodosius in the Forum of the Bull. This was a very tall column whose summit could be accessed by an inner staircase. Once Mountzouphlos had emerged from the staircase to the top of the pillar, he was pushed over the edge, falling onto the stone below to his death.

What about Boniface of Montferrat? Well, he had a major falling out with Emperor Baldwin, after the Emperor reneged on his promise to hand Thessalonica to him. Boniface and his forces rebelled against the Emperor, and one stage it looked like war would break out between the two men. Luckily, cooler heads prevailed and the Emperor was convinced to honor his promise. But Boniface didn't get to enjoy ruling the Kingdom of Thessalonica for long. In 1207 he was killed on the battlefield, and Thessalonica fell under Greek control seventeen years later.

Last but not least, the wily, blind, and very ancient Doge Dandolo. After the disappointment of his defeat at Adrianople, the Doge, seemingly feeling his age for the first time, wrote to Pope Innocent, requesting that he be absolved from his vow to journey to Jerusalem. Pope Innocent, who we can safely say was not a fan of the Doge, refused the request. In the end, the refusal was of no consequence. In June 1205 the elderly Doge died. He was buried with full honors in the Hagia Sophia, where a small memorial to him still stands.

Having learned of the fate of the leaders of the Crusade, it's safe to say that for them personally, the Fourth Crusade had some tragic outcomes. But how about on a wider scale? How does history judge the Fourth Crusade? Well, in one word, harshly. We've already heard the historian Stephen Runciman state that, and I quote "There was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade" end quote.

For him and for other like-minded historians, the Fourth Crusade had three devastating consequences. The first is the most immediate and the most obvious, the damage to the magnificent city of Constantinople caused by the two fires and the sack of the city. John Julius Norwich in his book "Byzantium, The Decline And Fall" states, and I quote "Constantinople in the 12th century had been not just the wealthiest metropolis in the

world, but also the most intellectually and artistically cultivated, and the chief repository of Europe's classical heritage, both Greek and Roman. By its sack, Western civilization suffered a loss greater than the sack of Rome by the barbarians in the fifth century, or the burning of the Library of Alexandria by the soldiers of the Prophet in the seventh, perhaps the most catastrophic single loss in all history". End quote.

The second consequence concerned the wider ramifications for the Crusading movement itself. The Fourth Crusade had been instigated with the aim of driving Muslim forces out of the Holy Land. Instead of achieving this, according to some historians, it may have aided Muslim expansion into Christian territory. Stephen Runciman writes that the Byzantine Empire had traditionally formed a buffer between Christian Europe and the Muslims of the Middle East. We've seen in previous episodes how the Byzantine Army spent much of its time fighting and containing the Seljuk Turks. According to Stephen Runciman, after the Fourth Crusade, the Byzantine Empire was effectively broken, a ruined state that could never be put back together again. When a more vigorous Turkish tribe appears in the future, not the Seljuk Turks, but Muslims under the leadership of the impressive house of Osman, the Byzantine Empire will be too shattered to make an effective stand against them. The Ottomans will defeat the Byzantines, creating the mighty Ottoman Empire, and eventually turning Constantinople into the Muslim city of Istanbul, which it remains to this day.

The third and final main consequence of the fourth Crusade was a deepening in the rift between the western Latin Christian and the eastern Greek Orthodox churches. While Pope Innocent harbored dreams that his Crusade would unite the two Churches, the opposite happened. The Churches had been in schism since the year 1054, and the Fourth Crusade sealed this rift. In modern times, over the past fifty years in fact, efforts have been made by the Pope and the Patriarch to bridge the gap between the two Churches, but it hasn't been easy. The ghost of the Fourth Crusade cannot easily be forgotten.

There ends our examination of the Fourth Crusade.

Now, originally, I predicted that this podcast series would run to around 80 episodes. Since we will hit the eighty episode mark next week, I think now's a good time to reassess where the podcast is going. We will shortly be starting on the Fifth Crusade, and I will be continuing on chronologically following the fate of Christian territory in the Middle East until the fall of Acre in 1291. This will take maybe 20 episodes, so we might even hit the 100 episode mark.

Now, at the end of the Fourth Crusade, Pope Innocent starts another Crusade in Europe, the Crusade against the Cathars, or the Albigensian Crusade. Now, remember Simon de Montfort, who left the Fourth Crusade after the attack on the city of Zara, with the noble words "I have not come here to destroy Christians"? Well, he goes on to destroy a whole lot of Christians in the Crusade against the Cathars.

Now, I wasn't originally intending to cover this Crusade. I thought it would take too much time away from the narrative of the Middle Eastern Crusades, but I've changed my mind. The Crusade against the Cathars contains epic battles, epic personalities, and enough cutthroat politics, backstabbing, and bloodshed to rival a fictional saga like "The Game of Thrones", and it's pivotal to the history of Europe as a whole. So I may do it after I finish the History of the Crusades podcast.

I say "may", because I'm going to attempt to crowd-fund it. I don't want to raise a huge amount of money, just enough to cover my expenses for upgrading my recording equipment recently, to purchase textbooks on the Cathars, and to keep me in coffee and pastries for the extra six months or so of work entailed in bringing you the extra series. So keep an eye out for that. There will be some goodies on offer too, as the good thing about crowdfunding is that it isn't a one way street. There will be signed cards, maybe posters, and things like that. I haven't worked it all out yet, but I'll let you know more when we get to the end of the History of the Crusades Podcast.

Right, that's all from me. Join me next week as we returned to the Middle East to catch up on events there. Until next week, bye for now.

End