

Sack of Constantinople, 1204

5 Isaakios II Angelos (1185-1195) belonged in the family of Angeloi, which descended from Philadelphia of Minor Asia. Isaakios was crowned emperor in 1185 but he proved incompetent, lavish and corrupted. He imposed taxes in the popular classes, favored the aristocracy and was indifferent for the proper organization of his empire. He spent most of his time hunting. Nevertheless, his brave general Alexius Vranas defeated the Normands who devastated Macedonia, on 7th November 1185.

10 In 1187, during his administration the Third Crusade took place, against Arabs, headed by Saladin, who had conquered Jerusalem on 3rd October 1187. Saladin proved generous and did not harm the Christian populations. The Crusade was headed by Frederic Barbarossa of Germany, Philip II of France and Richard Lionheart of England. Richard invaded Cyprus in 1191 and later the crusaders occupied Palestine and massacred the whole population. In March, 1195 Isaac II Angelos conducted an expedition against the Bulgars, in Thrace. But he was arrested and blinded by his brother Alexius III Angelos, who became emperor of the Greek Empire, in April 1195. Isaac and his son Alexius were thrown in jail.

15 Pope Innocent III, (1198-1216) despite manifold problems in the West, was the first pope since Urban II to be both anxious and able to consider the Crusade a major papal concern. In 1198 he broached the subject of a new expedition through legates and encyclical letters. In 1199 a tax was levied on all clerical incomes - later to become a precedent for systematic papal income taxes - and Fulk of Neuilly, a popular orator, was commissioned to preach. At a tournament held by Thibaut III of Champagne, several prominent French nobles took the cross, and others joined later. Among them 25 was Geoffrey of Villehardouin, who was to write one of the principal accounts of the Crusade. Contact was made with the aging and blind but ambitious Doge Enrico Dandolo of Venice to provide transport. The republic of Venice had acquired considerable trading privileges within the Byzantine Empire, and the growing number of Venetian merchants had long incurred the hostility of the Greeks. The Crusade was supposed to be directed against Egypt. An agreement was made providing for payments to the Venetians for transportation of 30.000 men and 4500 horses and an equal division of conquests.

30 Alexius, son of Isaac, managed to escape during a campaign against the insurgent Emmanuel Camitzes, and sailed to Ancona. From there he rode to Germany, to his sister Irene who was wife of King Philip of Germany. Promising funds, supplies, and troops to conquer Egypt, the maintenance of 500 Western knights in the Holy Land, and submission of the Byzantine church to Rome, Alexius convinced Philip, Crusade leader Boniface of Montferrat, and their Venetian allies to divert the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople in order to reinstate Alexius and his father as co-emperors. The 40 crusader army that arrived at Venice in the summer of 1202 was somewhat smaller than had been anticipated, since some of the crusaders were travelling directly from France. Even so, there were not sufficient funds to pay the Venetians. Accordingly, the crusaders accepted the suggestion that in lieu of payment they assist the Venetians in the capture of the Hungarian city of Zara. This was done despite the 45 opposition of many crusaders both to the diversion of the enterprise and to the attack on a Christian city. Innocent was informed of the plan, but his veto was disregarded. Here is how Geoffrey de Villehardouin (1160-1213) describes the departure from Venice in his Memoirs or Chronicle of The Fourth Crusade and The Conquest of Constantinople:

50 Then were the ships and transports apportioned by the barons. Ah, God what fine war-horses were put therein. And when the ships were fulfilled with arms and provisions, and knights and sergeants, the shields were ranged round the bulwarks and castles of the ships, and the banners displayed, many and fair. And be it known to you that the vessels carried more than three hundred petraries and mangonels, and all such engines 55 as are needed for the taking of cities, in great plenty. Never did finer fleet sail from any port. And this was in the octave of the Feast of St. Remigius (October) in the year of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ twelve hundred and two. Thus did they sail from the port of Venice, as you have been told. On the Eve of St. Martin (10th November) they came before Zara in Sclavonia, and beheld the city enclosed by high 60 walls and high towers; and vainly would you have sought for a fairer city, or one of greater strength, or richer. And when the pilgrims saw it, they marvelled greatly, and said one to another, "How could such a city be taken by force, save by the help of God himself?" The first ships that came before the city cast anchor, and waited for the others; and in the morning the day was very fine and very clear, and all the 65 galleys came up with the transports, and the other ships which were behind; and they took the port by force, and broke the chain that defended it and was very strong and

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well-wrought; and they landed in such sort that the port was between them and the town. Then might you have seen many a knight and many a sergeant swarming out of the ships, and taking from the transports many a good war-horse, and many a rich tent and many a pavilion. Thus did the host encamp. And Zara was besieged on St. Martin's Day (11th November 1202).

Zara surrendered to the mercy of the Doge, on condition only that all lives should be spared. The Venetians took the part of the city towards the port, where were the ships, and the Franks took the other part. A month later came envoys from Germany, sent by King Philip and the heir of Constantinople, Alexius who was brother of Philip's wife, Irene. According to the Chronicle of The Fourth Crusade:

The knights and the Doge of Venice assembled in a palace where the Doge was lodged. And the envoys addressed them and said: "Lords, King Philip sends us to you, as does also the brother of the king's wife, the son of the emperor of Constantinople.

"Lords," says the king, "I will send you the brother of my wife; and I commit him into the hands of God - may He keep him from death! - and into your hands. And because you have fared forth for God, and for right, and for justice, therefore you are bound, in so far as you are able, to restore to their own inheritance those who have been unrighteously despoiled. And my wife's brother will make with you the best terms ever offered to any people, and give you the most puissant help for the recovery of the land overseas. And first, if God grant that you restore him to his inheritance, he will place the whole empire of Romania (Eastern Empire) in obedience to Rome, from which it has long been separated. Further, he knows that you have spent of your substance, and that you are poor, and he will give you 200,000 marks of silver, and food for all those of the host, both small and great. And he, of his own person, will go with you into the land of Babylon, or, if you hold that that will be better, send thither 10,000 men, at his own charges. And this service he will perform for one year. And all the days of his life he will maintain, at his own charges, five hundred knights in the land overseas to guard that land. Lords, we have full power," said the envoys, "to conclude this agreement, if you are willing to conclude it on your parts. And be it known to you, that so favourable an agreement has never before been offered to any one; and that he that would refuse it can have but small desire of glory and conquest." The barons and the Doge said they would talk this over; and a parliament was called for the morrow. When all were assembled, the matter was laid before them.

The knights had dispute about the outcome of the campaign. One party did not like to attack a Christian city and wanted to sail immediately to Syria, and the other party insisted to sail to Constantinople to gain all those who had promised the thoughtless young prince. Innocent was aware of a plan to divert the Crusade to Constantinople in order to give the throne to Alexius. Accordingly, Innocent ordered Boniface of Montferrat to publish immediately his original letter excommunicating the Venetians, which he had refused to do, and forbade any attack on Constantinople. But the papal letter arrived after the fleets had left Zara.

On 7th April 1203, the crusaders destroyed the city and sailed to Dyrachion, port of the Greek Empire. The city surrendered and swore submission to the heir of throne. The fleet departed and came to the island of Corfu. The inhabitants did not recognize Alexius as legal heir and kept the gates of the city closed. The crusaders pillaged the area around the city which was well fortified and burnt most of the villages and fields of the island. They departed from the port of Corfu on 24 May 1203 and reached the island Andros, in Aegean Sea. The knights again pillaged the island and destroyed most of the villages. Later the huge fleet entered the passage of Ellispontus or Dardanelles, and reached to a city called Abydos. The Latins stayed there a week, stole corn from the land, and sailed to the monastery of St Stephen, on 23rd June 1203. Geoffrey de Villehardouin describes the scene in his Chronicle.

There had those on board the ships and galleys and transports full sight of Constantinople; and they took port and anchored their vessels. Now you may know that those who had never before seen Constantinople looked upon it very earnestly, for they never thought there could be in all the world so rich a city; and they marked the high walls and strong towers that enclosed it round about, and the rich palaces, and mighty churches of which there were so many that no one would have believed it who had not seen it with his eyes - and the height and the length of that city which above all others was sovereign. And be it known to you, that no man there was of such hardihood but his flesh trembled: and it was no wonder, for never was so great an enterprise undertaken by any people since the creation of the world.

On 24 June 1203, the crusaders landed at Chalcedon. Chalcedon is a place in the Asiatic side of Bosphorus. There was a palace of the Emperor Alexius. The counts and barons landed and lodged themselves in the palace. Emperor Alexius saw this

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provocation and sent 500 men to face the Latins. But the fight lasted a while and the Greeks retreated leaving their horses and tents. Alexius III Angelos proved  
135 incompetent and less worthy than his predecessor. The corruption of his court was enormous and the moral of the army low. When the leader of the army is coward then the army is ineffective. His admiral Michael Strufnos was so wicked that he sold the gear of his fleet and increased so his personal fortune. The Greek fleet was in miserable condition. The situation of the empire couldn't be worst. The two emperors,  
140 Isaac and Alexius III Angelos, managed in some years to destroy the work of the Comnenus' dynasty. Two personalities who brightened the dark years of Angelos' dynasty were the brothers Michael and Nicetas Choniates. Nicetas' history is the main source of the events which took place during the 4th crusade.

July 2 1203, the Emperor Alexius sent an envoy, under Nicholas Roux with letters to  
145 the counts and to the barons. The envoy was received in a palace of Scutari (Chrysoupolis), where the crusaders were holding a council. Nicholas Roux, a Franc who lived for years in the Greek capital, read the letters: Lords, the Emperor Alexius would have you know that he is well aware that you are the best people uncrowned, and come from the best land on earth. And he marvels much why, and for  
150 what purpose, you have come into his land and kingdom. For you are Christians, and he is a Christian, and well he knows that you are on your way to deliver the Holy Land overseas and the Holy Cross, and the Sepulchre. If you are poor and in want, he will right willingly give you of his food and substance, provided you depart out of his land. Neither would he otherwise wish to do you any hurt, though he has full power  
155 therein, seeing that if you were twenty times as numerous as you are, you would not be able to get away without utter discomfiture if so be that he wished to harm you. The Latins answered that he should deliver the power to his nephew, Isaac's son who was the legal successor of the throne.

On 3rd July, the Doge of Venice and the Marquis of Montferrat entered into one  
160 galley, took with them Alexius, the son of the Emperor Isaac and sailed close to the walls of Constantinople to show the young prince to the Greeks. There was no sympathy for the prince and the Latins returned back and decided to attack Constantinople. First they attacked the port. Their leaders were: Baldwin of Flanders, his brother Henry, Matthew of Wallincourt, Baldwin of Beauvoir, Peter of Amiens, Count Louis of  
165 Blois and Chartres, Matthew of Montmorency, Robert of Ronsoi, Otho of la Roche, Richard of Dampierre, and Marquis of Montferrat. They easily seized the port, because the Greeks under their ruler Alexius, again retreated; The united European forces (Germans, Italians, Belgians and French) who fought bravely, managed to capture the tower of Galatas; where they broke the chain that closed the Golden Horn (Chresus Keras), and came closer to the sea walls of Constantinople. Theodoros Lascaris, who  
170 later would become the emperor of the empire of Nicaea, tried without success to drive back the enemy.

So was the tower of Galata and the port of Constantinople taken. The French advanced to the land walls, while the Venetians reached by sea to the palace of Blachernae.  
175 The two allied armies stayed close one to another. The Greeks under Theodoros Lascaris ceased not to attack them, but without achieving a final blow to the besiegers. During a fight, Constantine Lascaris, brother of Theodoros was taken prisoner. A knight whose name was William of Gi was killed. On 17th July 1203 everything was ready for the assault. The Marquis Boniface of Montferrat guarded the  
180 camp towards the fields, with the division of the Burgundians and the division of the men of Champagne. Count Baldwin of Flanders and his brother Henry, Count Louis of Blois and Chartres and Count Hugh of St. Paul went to the assault. The Italians under the semi blind Doge attacked to the sea walls and after fierce fighting they captured twenty-five towers. They set fire, that spread so quickly destroying houses and  
185 churches of a large part of the Polis. Again the coward Emperor Alexius III came out of the Adrianople Gate with huge forces, but despite the urging of Theodoros Lascaris, he dared not to attack. That night the Emperor Alexius of Constantinople took of his treasure as much as he could carry, and abandoned his city, his people and his family. Emperor Isaac and his wife Margarita of Hungary were liberated, while  
190 Alexius' wife, Eufrosine was arrested. Isaakios sent envoys to the Latins to announce the news of his return to the throne. They demanded of the emperor to ratify the treaty made by his son; and on 1st August 1203 Alexius IV was crowned co-emperor. Here is how Geoffrey de Villehardouin describes the entry of the Francs in the city:  
195 Now you must know that many of those in the host went to see Konstantinoupolis, and the rich palaces and great churches, of which there were many, and all the great wealth of the city-for never was there city that possessed so much. Of relics it does not behove me to speak, for at that day there were as many there as in all the rest of the world. Thus did the Greeks and French live in good fellowship in all things,

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200 both as regards trafficking and other matters. By common consent of Franks and Greeks  
it was settled that the new emperor should be crowned on the feast of our Lord St.  
Peter (1st August 1203). So was it settled, and so it was done. He was crowned full  
worthily and with honour according to the use for Greek emperors at that time.  
Afterwards he began to pay the moneys due to the host; and such moneys were divided  
among the host, and each repaid what had been advanced in Venice for his passage.

205 Alexios IV confiscated the lands of Eufrosine, emptied the public treasury, imposed  
taxes and gathered 100000 marcs to give to the Latins. This was only one half of the  
promised sum. This attitude increased more the hatred of Greeks for Latins. A hatred  
that would last for centuries, during the middle ages. Among the Crusaders was  
210 dispute about the course of the campaign. Should they continue to the Holy Lands or  
should they stay to take all the money promised by young Alexios? The Venetians  
insisted to take all the sum that Alexius had promised, and so the young emperor left  
his capital, escorted by Frankish knights, for the provinces in a desperate attempt  
to find the promised money. While the Emperor Alexius was away, a conflict arose  
between the Greeks and the Latins. The Latins again set fire to the city, a fire  
215 which destroyed a large part of the capital near the church of St. Sophia.  
It lasted two days and two nights, nor could it be put out by the hand of man. And  
the front of the fire, as it went flaming, was well over half a league broad. What  
was the damage then done, what the possessions and riches swallowed up, could no man  
tell - nor what the number of men and women and children who perished - for many were  
220 burned. All the Latins, to whatever land they might belong, who were lodged in  
Constantinople, dared no longer to remain therein; but they took their wives and  
their children, and such of their possessions as they could save from the fire, and  
entered into boats and vessels, and passed over the port and came to the camp of the  
pilgrims. Nor were they few in number, for there were of them some fifteen thousand,  
225 small and great; and afterwards it proved to be of advantage to the pilgrims that  
these should have crossed over to them.

The Emperor Alexius remained for a long time in Thrace and returned to Constantinople  
in 11 November 1203. Nevertheless he did not manage to gather enough money to satisfy  
the greed of the Francs. The crusaders had an embassy sent to the emperor, to his  
230 palace of Blachernae, lead by Conon de Bethune and Geoffry of Villehardouin.  
They dismounted at the gate and entered the palace, and found the Emperor Alexius and  
the Emperor Isaac seated on two thrones, side by side. And near them was seated the  
empress, who was the wife of the father, and stepmother of the son, and sister to the  
King of Hungary - a lady both fair and good. And there were with them a great company  
235 of people of note and rank, so that well did the court seem the court of a rich and  
mighty prince. By desire of the other envoys Conon of Bethune, who was very wise and  
eloquent of speech, acted as spokesman: "Sire, we have come to thee on the part of  
the barons of the host and of the Doge of Venice. They would put thee in mind of the  
great service they have done to thee - a service known to the people and manifest to  
240 all men. Thou hast sworn, thou and thy father, to fulfill the promised covenants, and  
they have your charters in hand. But you have not fulfilled those covenants well, as  
you should have done. Many times have they called upon you to do so, and now again we  
call upon you, in the presence of all your barons, to fulfill the covenants that are  
245 between you and them. Should you do so, it shall be well. If not, be it known to you  
that from this day forth they will not hold you as lord or friend, but will endeavour  
to obtain their due by all the means in their Power. And of this they now give you  
warning, seeing that they would not injure you, nor any one, without first defiance  
given; for never have they acted treacherously, nor in their land is it customary to  
do so. You have heard what we have said. It is for you to take counsel thereon  
250 according to your pleasure." Much were the Greeks amazed and greatly outraged by this  
open defiance; and they said that never had any one been so hardy as to dare defy the  
Emperor of Constantinople in his own hall. Very evil were the looks now cast on the  
envoys by the Emperor Alexius and by all the Greeks, who aforetime were wont to  
regard them very favourably. Great was the tumult there within, and the envoys turned  
255 about and came to the gate and mounted their horses. When they got outside the gate,  
there was not one of them but felt glad at heart; nor is that to be marvelled at, for  
they had escaped from very great peril, and it held to very little that they were not  
all killed or taken. So they returned to the camp, and told the barons how they had  
fared.

260 So there was war between the Greeks and the Francs, on November 1203. The Greeks  
under the command of Alexius Ducas Murtzuphlus tried to burn the European fleet,  
using fireships, but without success. The Venetians were masters in the seamanship  
and seized the fireships, using hooks. Only one merchant ship from Pisa was burnt. In  
these difficult events the young emperor proved incompetent like his uncle. Three men

265 had the courage to face the barbarians: Alexius Ducas Murtzuphlus, Constantine  
 Lascaris and his brother Theodorus Lascaris. The Greek people were furious with the  
 inefficiency of the young emperor and a revolution broke in 25th January 1204.  
 Alexius IV was thrown in jail and on 5 February 1204, Alexius V Ducas Murtzuphlus was  
 270 crowned emperor of the Eastern Empire. Alexius IV was strangled in his jail on 8  
 February 1204 and Isaac died in prison a few days later. So ended the worst dynasty  
 that ruled the Empire and disorganized the state to such extent that after 2 months  
 this state was to meet its destiny and fall to the crusaders. A fall that would  
 prepare the ground for the Turks to come and destroy definitely the Greek medieval  
 state.

275 The Franks rode to the north and attacked to a city of Euxenus Pontus, named Philea.  
 They pillaged and destroyed the rich city and when they returned back, the emperor  
 assaulted them. But again the crusaders defeated the Greek imperial army and not only  
 the emperor Alexius V was almost taken captive, but the holy icon of the Virgin Mary  
 that was made by Apostle Lucas was stolen by the Latins. This icon was very important  
 280 for the Orthodoxy and the Greeks grieved for the loss of it.

Well had these prepared all their engines, and mounted their petrarries, and mangonels  
 on the ships and on the transports, and got ready all such engines of war as are  
 needful for the taking of a city, and raised ladders from the yards and masts of the  
 vessels, so high that they were a marvel to behold. And when the Greeks saw this,  
 285 they began, on their side, to strengthen the defences of the city which was enclosed  
 with high walls and high towers. Nor was any tower so high that they did not raise  
 thereon two or three stages of wood to heighten it still more. Never was city so well  
 fortified. Thus did the Greeks and the Franks bestir themselves on the one side and  
 the other during the greater part of Lent. Then those of the host spoke together, and  
 290 took counsel what they should do. Much was advanced this way and that, but in the  
 end, they devised that if God granted them entry into the city by force, all the  
 booty taken was to be brought together, and fittingly distributed; and further, if  
 the city fell into their power, six men should be taken from among the Franks, and  
 six from among the Venetians, and these twelve should swear, on holy relics, to elect  
 295 as emperor the man who, as they deemed, would rule with most profit to the land. And  
 whosoever was thus elected emperor, would have one quarter of whatever was captured,  
 whether within the city or without, and moreover would possess the palace of Bucoleon  
 and that of Blachernae; and the remaining three parts would be divided into two, and  
 one of the halves awarded to the Venetians and the other to those of the host. And  
 300 there should be taken twelve of the wisest and most experienced men among the host of  
 the pilgrims, and twelve among the Venetians, and those twenty-four would divide  
 fiefs and honours, and appoint the service to be done therefor to the emperor. This  
 covenant was made sure and sworn to on the one side and the other by the Franks and  
 the Venetians; with provision that at the end of March, a year thence, any who so  
 305 desired might depart hence and go their way, but that those who remained in the land  
 would be held to the service of the emperor in such manner as might be ordained. Thus  
 was the covenant devised and made sure; and such as should not observe it were  
 excommunicated by the clergy.

310 So the Latins decided to divide the Eastern Empire. The men who had swore before the  
 Holy Cross to go and liberate Jerusalem from musulmans, had preferred to act like  
 common thieves and attack to a Christian city with only one purpose.

The sack.

315 The Europeans attacked the sea walls on 8th April 1204. The ships drew near to the  
 city, and a fierce battle began in more than a hundred places. The crusaders were  
 repulsed in that assault, and those who had landed from the galleys were driven back.  
 After the defeat, the Doge of Venice and the other barons were assembled in a church  
 on the other side of the straits and discussed. The Venetians insisted that they  
 should repeat the attacks to the same place, but this time the ships should be bound  
 320 together in order to reach the high towers. The preparations lasted some days and the  
 final assault was repeated on 13th April 1204. The Greeks defended the towers with  
 success, but suddenly the wind changed and blew from the north. Two ships that were  
 bound together, the Pilgrim and the Paradise, approached so near to a tower, that the  
 ladder of the first vessel joined on to the tower. Immediately a Venetian, and two  
 325 French knights, whose name was Andrew of Durboise and John Choisy, entered into the  
 tower. This was the beginning of the end. The tower was taken and many other  
 crusaders raised their ladders and conquered many other towers. In vain the emperor  
 Alexius Murzuphlus tried to encourage his soldiers to counterattack. They fled and  
 Alexius ran to the castle of Bucoleon. He took with him Eufrosine and her daughter  
 330 Eudokia and left the Byzantine capital through the Golden Gate. The Latins set again



fire to the city.

And the city began to take fire, and to burn very direfully; and it burned all that night and all the next day, till vesper-time. And this was the third fire there had been in Constantinople since the Franks arrived in the land; and more houses had been  
 335 burned in the city than there are houses in any three of the greatest cities in the kingdom of France.

When Alexius V left the City, Constantine Lascaris one of the city's leading defenders, was proclaimed emperor in the Cathedral of St. Sophia. He tried with his brother Theodoros Lascaris to drive the Varagkoi (Vikings mercenaries) against the  
 340 invaders, but again the attempt had no result and the two brothers fled the city. In Nicaea, Theodoros Lascaris would later create a new Byzantine state, the Empire of Nicaea. One of his successors Michael VIII Paleologus in 1261, would liberate the Greek capital.

The richest city of the world was at the mercy of the Europeans. The barbarians did horrible things that are beyond imagination. They tortured and massacred a large part of the population, destroyed churches, palaces, monasteries and even sculptures made by Phidias and Praxiteles, stole thousands of priceless icons, relics and other things, raped young girls and boys. Not to mention the countless manuscripts of  
 345 ancient Greek philology which were burnt by the ignorant and illiterate Franks. So much was the hatred of the Europeans for the Greek Empire! Nicetas Choniates or Acominatus describes in his chronicle the detestable actions of the barbarians. Nicetas experienced the looting of Constantinople and with the help of a Venetian merchant, he managed to escape with his family, to Nicaea, capital of a new Greek  
 355 state, where he wrote the 21-volume "History of the Times," a record of the rise and fall of the 12th- and 13th-century Byzantine dynasties, beginning with the Greek emperor John Comnenus (1118-1143) and concluding with the intrusion of the first Latin Eastern emperor, Baldwin I of Flanders (1204-1205). Geoffrey de Villehardouin gives his point of view:

The Marquis Boniface of Montferrat rode all along the shore to the palace of Bucoleon, and when he arrived there it surrendered, on condition that the lives of all therein should be spared. At Bucoleon were found the larger number of the great ladies who had fled to the castle, for there were found the sister [Agnes, sister of Philip Augustus, married successively to Alexius II., to Andronicus, and to Theodore  
 360 Branas] of the King of France, who had been empress, and the sister [Margaret, sister of Emeric, King of Hungary, married to the Emperor Isaac, and afterwards to the Marquis of Montferrat] of the King of Hungary, who had also been empress, and other ladies very many. Of the treasure that was found in that palace I cannot well speak, for there was so much that it was beyond end or counting. At the same time that this  
 370 palace was surrendered to the Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, did the palace of Blachernae surrender to Henry, the brother of Count Baldwin of Flanders, on condition that no hurt should be done to the bodies of those who were therein. There too was found much treasure, not less than in the palace of Bucoleon. Each garrisoned with his own people the castle that had been surrendered to him, and set a guard over the  
 375 treasure. And the other people, spread abroad throughout the city, also gained much booty. The booty gained was so great that none could tell you the end of it: gold and silver, and vessels and precious stones, and samite, and cloth of silk, and robes vair and grey, and ermine, and every choicest thing found upon the earth. And well does Geoffry of Villehardouin the Marshal of Champagne, bear witness, that never,  
 380 since the world was created, had so much booty been won in any city. Every one took quarters where he pleased and of lodgings there was no stint. So the host of the pilgrims and of the Venetians found quarters, and greatly did they rejoice and give thanks because of the victory God had vouchsafed to them - for those who before had been poor were now in wealth and luxury.

For four days the great City was subjected by the rank and file to pillage and massacre. When order had been restored, the crusaders and the Venetians proceeded to implement their agreement; Baldwin of Flanders was crowned emperor in the church of St. Sophia and the Venetian Thomas Morosini was chosen patriarch. But the lands  
 390 parcelled out among the leaders did not include all the former Byzantine possessions. The imperial government continued in Nicaea, and an offshoot Empire of Trebizond, at the eastern end of the Black Sea, lasted until 1461. There was also established a Byzantine Despotate of Epirus, and the Bulgarians under Skylogiannis or Ioannitzes remained hostile. The rift between the Eastern and Western churches widened, and  
 395 Greek popular resistance to any schemes of reunion with the empire intensified. The Byzantine Empire, for centuries a bulwark against invasion from the East, was damaged

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beyond repair. The Greeks never forgave the Europeans for the destruction of their state. A destruction that would bring the final end of the Greek Empire with the invasion of the Turks. An invasion that had as result the slavery of the Greeks for 5 centuries and the irrevocable loss of ancient Greek lands.

Marquis Boniface of Montferrat married the empress who had been the wife of the Emperor Isaac, and was sister to the King of Hungary. He asked from Baldwin the city of Thessalonica, the capital of the province of Macedonia, which was granted to him. Alexius Murzuphlus who had taken with him the empress, wife of the Emperor Alexius III, and his daughter Eudokia, reached Messinopolis, a city of Thrace. There, the former emperor received him and told him that he should be as welcome as if he were his own son, and that he would give him his daughter to wife, and make of him his son. But when he found the chance he blinded him. Later Alexius V Murzuphlus was arrested by the Latins who murdered him by casting him from the top of a column in Constantinople. This was the end for the man who tried without success to fight the Frankish invaders. Alexius III Angelos was also arrested by the crusaders. On 1205, Baldwin and later Boniface were killed by the king of Bulgars, Ioannitzes. The Empire of Nicaea which faced three enemies: the Latins, the Bulgarians, and the Seljuk sultanate, proved worthy of the Byzantine traditions of fighting on many fronts at once and of skillful diplomacy. Theodore Lascaris and his son-in-law John III Vatatzes built up at Nicaea a microcosm of the Byzantine Empire and church in exile. The Latins were thus never able to gain a permanent foothold in Anatolia.

CONSTANTINE XI PALAEOLOGUS (1449-1453) FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE "Ealo h Polis"

Constantine XI Palaeologos (1404-1453), also called Dragases, last Byzantine emperor, was born in 1404 in Mistra, was the son of Emperor Manuel II. He was trained as a soldier, and in 1430 liberated the peninsula of Morea in Greece, which had been under the Frankish principality of Achaia, a state established by the Crusaders.

In 1442 Turks under Murad, sieged Constantinople which was defended by emperor John VIII Palaeologos, while Constantine fought Turks in island of Limnos. There he lost his wife Katherine. Constantine XI was actually married twice and Katherine was his second wife.

In 1444 Constantine with his brother Thomas Palaeologos and a small army liberated Roumeli and Thessalia. The Greek populations loved and admired their leader. They called him "Drakos". Those were the last victories of Byzantium.

His friend was George Plithon or Gemistos a philosopher who created school of Philosophy in Athens. He was teaching Greek Philosophy in Mystras. He advised Constantine to take the property from church and rich men and to give it to the poor farmers. When John VIII travelled in Florence, he escorted him together with other Byzantine intellectuals. There Europeans argued with the Greeks about religion and Plithon told them:

Why are you arguing to unify the two churches? In the future there will be only one religion, and this is the union of Christianity and the ideas of ancient Greeks.

In 1446, the Turkish ruler Murad II reconquered and devastated these lands. The Turks had begun their invasions of the Balkans nearly a century before, and now began to close in on Constantinople.

Constantine was crowned emperor on Jan. 6, 1449, succeeding his brother, John VIII. The last Christian Greek Emperor entered, two months later, on March 12, the isolated Imperial capital. A little less than three years later, on Dec. 12, 1452, the union of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches was proclaimed in Constantinople in the presence of the papal legate and the Patriarch Gregory. Constantine had been a strong advocate of this union, but the people were generally opposed to it, and riots ensued. The popular insistence on Byzantine religious autonomy furthered the estrangement between eastern and western Roman Christendom and weakened Byzantine resistance to the Turks. Catholics never sent army or navy as they were committed to their agreement. They preferred the most glorious Christian city to be destroyed and pillaged from the Muslims.

In 1452 the sultan demolished the old church of Archaggelos Michael and constructed at the narrowest point of the Bosphorus strait, a huge complex of strong fortifications, Rumeli Hisar, whose task was to shut completely, by its artillery, the route of western and Byzantine vessels to and from the Black Sea (Euxeinos Pontus). Indeed, on 26 November 1452, according to the Venetian doctor Nicolao Barbaro, a Venetian vessel under the command of Antonio Ritzo attempted to pass without paying the required tolls. It was sank by the new fortress's guns, its crew of thirty men was taken prisoners in Adrianople (Eridne). The officers and sailors

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were brought in front of Mehmed, who ordered their immediate impalement.

The Turkish sultan, Mehmed II, advanced on Constantinople in the beginning of 1453.

465 Troops came from every region of the Empire, including thousands of irregulars, from many nationalities, who were attracted by the prospect of looting. The regular troops were well equipped and well trained. The elite corps of the Janissaries composed of abducted Christian children, forcibly converted to Islam, and subsequently trained as  
470 professional soldiers, constituted the spear-head of the Ottoman army. The besieging army included a number of artillery pieces, which were made with the help of a Hungarian named Ourvanos. The hugest canons faced the Military Gate of St Romanus, and were expected to cause heavy damage to the 1000 year old walls in that area. The army, accompanied by crowds of fanatic Dervishes, started moving slowly towards Constantinople. A few towns, still in Greek hands, near the capital were soon  
475 occupied by the Sultan's army. Of those towns Selyvria resisted longer. His army included 200000 soldiers (29.000 of them were Europeans).

Constantinople was defended only by 10.000 soldiers (3.000 of them were Europeans mostly Italians). Among the Europeans, who had come to help, was the brave Giovanni Giustiniani. He was from Genoa where he had recruited 400 men and another 300 on the  
480 island of Chios. Others were the cardinal Isidoros, who was of Greek origin, the latin bishop of Chios, Leonardos, the Venetian captains Kokkos, Trevizas, Aloisio, Contarini and a lot more people. Also, the help provided by the German engineer Johannes Grant was of great importance. Grant managed to destroy all the tunnels that the Sultan had attempted to build in order to enter the city. So the greatest  
485 Christian city was defended only by some Greeks and some Italians. No other European leader accepted the emperor's appeal for help.

The defenders lacked in training and armament but were possessed by fighting spirit. Indeed, most of them were killed fighting. The civilian population supported the emperor overwhelmingly. The people, men and women, participated in the repairs of the  
490 walls and in the deepening of the moat, volunteers manned observation posts, food supplies were collected, gold and silver objects, held in the churches, were melted to make coins in order to pay the foreign soldiers. With the exception of about 700 Italian residents of the city, who fled on board seven ships, on the night of February 26, no one else imitated them. The rest of the population, Greeks and  
495 foreigners, fought until the end. On April 2, 1453 the city's harbor, the Golden Horn, was shut by a huge chain, and ten galleys were put behind to protect it. During the first week of April, the Ottoman troops began taking their assigned positions in front of the city walls. The Sultan had his tent installed north of the Gate of St Romanus, near the river Lycus. He ordered the big canon to be installed in  
500 the same area. To protect the troops, a protective trench was opened in front of the Ottoman units, the soil from it was accumulated on the city side and on top of it was erected a palisade. On the 12th arrived from Gallipoli the Ottoman fleet. Composed of approximately 200 ships of various sizes and displacements, it sealed the byzantine capital from the sea. Mehmed's admiral was the Bulgarian renegade Suleiman Baltoghlu.  
505 On his side the emperor distributed his troops as best as he could. It was impossible, with the available garrison, to cover the entire walled circumference of the capital, about fourteen miles long. However, it was clear to all that the main attack would be delivered by the enemy along the land-walls, about four miles long. With the exception of the Blachernae section of the walls, at the north-eastern end  
510 of the land side, the city was protected, on the land side, by a triple wall, with a deep moat in front of it. On the sea side, including the Golden Horn port area, the city was protected by a single wall.

Given the availability of troops and the critical sections of the walls, Giustiniani, with most of his men, as well as Constantine Palaeologus and his best troops, took  
515 position in the St Romanus's Gate sector, where heavy damage was expected to be inflicted by the canon and the main Ottoman assault to be launched. The Venetian Bailo (the Head of the Venetian Community at Constantinople) Girolamo Minotto and his countrymen were charged with the defence of the region of Blachernae, where the Imperial Palace was located. Minotto and his men faced the European troops of Karadja  
520 Pasha. Across the Golden Horn, to the left of Pera, ready to intervene, stood the troops of Zaganos Pasha. Along the southern section of the land-walls the defenders faced the Anatolian troops under the command of Ishak Pasha. The Grand Duke Luke Notaras and Alexios Disipatos with a reserve unit took position near the walls, at the Petra neighborhood, in the north-eastern section of the city. Another reserve  
525 unit of 700 men under the command of Theofilos Palaeologus, Demetrius Cantakouzenos and Nicephorus Palaeologus was stationed near the church of the Holy Apostles, at the center of the city. Most units were positioned on and behind the land-walls. The sea-walls were thinly manned. To protect the entrance to the port, the Venetian commander



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of the small fleet of the defenders, Alviso Diedo, ordered ten ships to take position  
530 behind the chain.  
According to Islamic tradition the Sultan, before the beginning of hostilities,  
demanded the surrender of the city, promising to spare the lives of its inhabitants  
and respect their property. In a proud and dignified reply Constantine XI rejected  
Mehmed's demand.  
535 Almost immediately the Ottoman guns began firing. The continuous bombardment soon  
brought down a section of the walls near the Gate of Charisius, north of the  
Emperor's position. When night fell, everyone, who was available, rushed to repair  
the damage. Meanwhile Ottoman troops were trying to fill the fosse, particularly in  
540 areas in front of the weak sections of the walls which were now constantly bombarded.  
Other units began attempts to mine weak sections of the wall. On the port area a  
first attempt by the Ottoman fleet to test the defenders' reaction failed.  
Until the end of the siege the Ottoman guns did not stop pounding the walls. Heavy  
damage was inflicted. The defenders did their best to limit it. They hanged bales of  
wool, sheets of leather. Nothing could help. The section of the walls in the Lycus  
545 valley, near the Emperor's position, was heavily damaged. The fosse in front of it  
was almost filled by the besiegers. Behind it, the defenders erected a stockade,  
Night after night men and women came from the city to repair the damaged sections.  
The first assault was launched during the night of April 18. Thousands of men  
attacked the stockade and attempted to burn it down. Emperor and his Greek comrades  
550 fought valiantly. Well armed, protected by armor, fighting in a restricted area, they  
succeeded after four hours of bloody struggle to repulse the enemy.  
On Friday, 20 April, in the morning, appeared in the sea of Marmara, near  
Constantinople, five large vessels loaded with provisions for the city. Four were  
Genoese and one, a big transport, was Greek. The Greek captain's name was  
555 Flantanellas. Baltoghlu dispatched immediately his fleet to attack and capture the  
ships. The operation seemed easy and soon the ships were surrounded by the smaller  
Ottoman vessels. Everyone in the city, who was not busy with the defence, rushed to  
the sea-walls to watch the spectacle. The Sultan on horseback, his officers and a  
multitude of soldiers, rushed to the shore to watch the battle. Excited and unable to  
560 restrain himself, screaming orders at Baltoghlu, the young Sultan rode into the  
shallow water. Fighting, the big ships continued pushing the smaller ones, and helped  
by the wind they were now close to the south-eastern corner of the city. Then the  
wind dropped and the current began pushing them towards the coast on which stood the  
Sultan and his troops. Fighting continued, with the Christian sailors hurling on the  
565 enemy crews stones, javelins and all sorts of projectiles, including Greek Fire.  
Eventually the four vessels came so close to each other that they became bound  
together, forming a floating castle. Around sunset the wind rose and the big ships,  
pushing their way through the mass, and the wrecks, of the enemy vessels, hailed by  
thousands of people who were standing on the walls, entered the Golden Horn. Next  
570 morning Baltoghlu was dismissed by the Sultan, who was so furious that he ordered the  
beheading of his admiral. The unlucky admiral was replaced by a favorite of Mehmed,  
Hamza Bey.  
This event convinced the Sultan and his commanders that the city had to be more  
tightly besieged and that the naval arm of the besieged had to be neutralized.  
575 Mehmed's ingenious plan, formulated before the events of April 20, consisted in  
bringing part of his fleet into the Golden Horn. Indeed, thousands of laborers had  
been building, for some time, a road overland from the Bosphorus, alongside the walls  
of Pera, to a place called Valley of the Springs, on the shore of the Golden Horn,  
above Pera. On April 22 to the horror of the besieged a long procession of ships,  
580 sitting on wooden platforms were pulled by teams of oxen and men, over the road, into  
the port area. About seventy boats entered the Golden Horn. The leaders of the  
defence held immediately an emergency meeting. Various plans were discussed and it  
was finally decided to attempt to burn the enemy boats, which were in the Golden  
Horn. After a succession of postponements the attempt was carried out during the  
585 night of April 28. Betrayed by Italians from Pera, it failed miserably. Hit by  
Ottoman guns the Christian ships suffered heavy damage. About forty sailors captured  
by the enemy were tortured to death.  
Despite this failure the situation in the Golden Horn became, more or less, stable.  
Superior naval training, and better naval construction, eventually prevented Hamza's  
590 ships from inflicting serious damage on the allied units. However, the Sultan's idea  
was a military success. Indeed, in 1204 the Crusaders had assaulted the city from the  
sea-walls and the Greeks had not forgotten it. They feared a repetition of that  
assault.  
On the land side the bombardment continued, more walls collapsed, and when night fell

595 everyone rushed to close the gap, reinforce the stockades, build here and there. Moreover, food was wanting and the authorities did their best to distribute it equally. Worse, help was not coming. Everyone was watching and waiting for the sails of the Western ships to appear coming out of the Dardanelles. In early May a fast boat "Byzantine dromon" was sent out, to seek the allied fleet in the Aegean and tell  
600 its commanders to hurry.

During the night of May 7 a new assault was launched against the damaged section, where Giustiniani stood. It failed again and then in the night of May 12 another came and failed. It was launched at the junction of the Blachernae wall and of the old Theodosian one. During that time mining and counter-mining continued. Sometimes  
605 fighting went on underground. Sometimes the tunnels collapsed and suffocated the miners. The German engineer Grant with barrels filled with water all around the walls, managed to discover the underground tunnels.

On May 23 the dromon that had been sent out to locate the Christian fleet returned to the city. Its crew brought bad news. Nothing was in sight. The defenders were alone,  
610 no help was coming. The men of the crew, obeying their duty, decided to return to the doomed city. Realizing that everything was lost Constantine's chief advisors begged him to leave the city. He could still get out and seek help. His father Manuel II had done the same in 1399, at the time of the blockade of the city by Sultan Bayazid. The Emperor refused to discuss the issue. He had already decided to stay in his capital,  
615 fight for it and perish.

Meanwhile, rumors were circulating in the Ottoman camp about the Venetians finally mobilizing their fleet, or about the Hungarians preparing to cross the Danube. The siege was going on without end in sight. The Sultan's Vizier Halil Chandarli, who was also informer of the emperor, had strong reservations about the siege from the  
620 beginning. He was worried about western intervention and he looked upon the whole operation with anxiety. During a meeting of the Sultan's advisors, held on May 25, the Vizir told Mehmed to raise the siege. Pursuing it might bring unknown consequences to Ottoman interests. The Sultan, also depressed because of the prolongation of the operation, finally decided to launch a grand scale final assault  
625 on the city. He was supported by younger commanders like Zaganos Pasha, a Christian converted to Islam. Halil was overruled and all present decided to continue the siege.

While the artillery continued pounding the walls without interruption, preparations for the big assault, which was to take place on Tuesday 29 May, were accelerated.  
630 Material was thrown into the fosse which faced the collapsed ramparts, scaling-ladders were distributed. The Magistrates of Pera were warned not to give any assistance to the besieged. The Sultan swore to distribute fairly the treasures found in the city. According to tradition the troops were free to loot and sack the city for three days. He assured his troops that success was imminent, the defenders were  
635 exhausted, some sections of the walls had collapsed. It would be a general assault, throughout the line of the land-walls, as well as in the port area. Then the troops were ordered to rest and recover their strength.

In the city everyone realized that the great moment had come. During Monday, May 28, some last repairs were done on the walls and the stockades, in the collapsed  
640 sections, were reinforced. In the city, while the bells of the churches rang mournfully, citizens and soldiers joined a long procession behind the holy relics brought out of the churches. Singing hymns in Greek, Italian or Catalan, Orthodox and Catholic, men, women, children, soldiers, civilians, clergy, monks and nuns, knowing that they were going to die shortly, made peace with themselves, with God and with  
645 eternity.

When the procession ended the Emperor met with his commanders and the notables of the city. In a philosophical speech he told his subjects that the end of their time had come. In essence he told them that Man had to be ready to face death when he had to fight for his faith, for his country, for his family or for his sovereign. All four  
650 reasons were now present. Furthermore, his subjects, who were the descendants of Greeks, had to emulate their great ancestors. They had to fight and sacrifice themselves without fear. They had lived in a great city and they were now going to die defending it. As for himself, he was going to die fighting for his faith, for his city and for his people. He also thanked the Italian soldiers, who had not abandoned  
655 the great city in its final moments. He still believed that the garrison could repulse the enemy. They all had to be brave, proud warriors and do their duty. He thanked all present for their contribution to the defence of the city and asked them to forgive him, if he had ever treated them without kindness. Constantine asked Guistiniani to take his beloved Anna Notara to his ship, so that she would not fall  
660 in the hands of the enemy. Everyone knew the fate of those who would be alive when

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Turks entered in the city.

665 Meanwhile the great church of Saint Sophia was crowded. Thousands of people were moving towards the church. Inside, Orthodox and Catholic priests were holding mass (THE LAST CHRISTIAN SERVICE AFTER 1000 YEARS). People were singing hymns, others were openly crying, others were asking each other for forgiveness. Those who were not serving on the ramparts also went to the church, among them was seen, for a brief moment, the Emperor. People confessed and took communion. Then those who were going to fight rode or walked back to the ramparts. They prayed and chanted for the last time the "Akathistos Hymn" in front of the holy icon of "Odigitria", an icon of 670 Virgin Mary, made by Apostole Loukas. The next day most of them would be dead. From the great church the Emperor rode to the Palace at Blachernae. There he asked his household to forgive him. He bade the emotionally shattered men and women farewell, left his Palace and rode away, into the night, for a last inspection of the defence positions. Then he took his battle position.

675 The assault began after midnight, into the 29th of May 1453. Wave after wave the attackers charged. Battle cries, accompanied by the sound of drums, trumpets and fifes, filled the air. The bells of the city churches began ringing frantically. Orders, screams and the sound of trumpets shattered the night. First came the irregulars, an unreliable, multinational crowd of Christians and Muslims, who were 680 attracted by the opportunity of enriching themselves by looting the glorious city, the great capital of the East Roman Empire. They attacked throughout the line of fortifications and they were massacred by the tough professionals, who were fighting under the orders of Giustiniani. The battle lasted two hours and the irregulars withdrew in disorder, leaving behind an unknown number of dead and wounded.

685 Next came the Anatolian troops of Ishak Pasha. They tried to storm the stockades. They fought tenaciously, even desperately trying to break through the compact ranks of the defenders. The narrow area in which fighting went on helped the defenders. They could hack left and right with their maces and swords and shoot missiles onto the mass of attackers without having to aim. A group of attackers crashed through a gap 690 and for a moment it seemed that they could enter the city. They were assaulted by the Emperor and his men and were soon slain. This second attack also failed.

But now came the Janissaries (what an irony that they were born Greek Orthodox), disciplined, professional, ruthless warriors, superbly trained, ready to die for their master, the Sultan. They assaulted the now exhausted defenders, they were 695 pushing their way over bodies of dead and dying Muslim and Christian soldiers. With tremendous effort the Greek and Italian fighters were hitting back and continued repulsing the enemy. Then a group of enemy soldiers unexpectedly entered the city from a small sally-port called Kerkopoorta, on the wall of Blachernae, where this wall joined the triple wall. Fighting broke near the small gate with the defenders trying 700 to eliminate the intruders.

It was almost day now, the first light, before sunrise, when a shot fired from a calverin hit Giustiniani. The shot pierced his breastplate and he fell on the ground. Shaken by his wound and physically exhausted, his fighting spirit collapsed. Despite the pleas of the Emperor, who was fighting nearby, not to leave his post, the Genoese 705 commander ordered his men to take him out of the battle-field. A Gate in the inner wall was opened for the group of Genoese soldiers, who were carrying their wounded commander, to come into the city. The soldiers who were fighting near the area saw the Gate open, their comrades carrying their leader crossing into the city, and they thought that the defence line had been broken. They all rushed through the Gate 710 leaving the Emperor and the Greek fighters alone between the two walls. This sudden movement did not escape the attention of the Ottoman commanders. Frantic orders were issued to the troops to concentrate their attack on the weakened position. Thousands rushed to the area. The stockade was broken. The Greeks were now squeezed by crowds of Janissaries between the stockade and the wall. More Janissaries came in and many 715 reached the inner wall.

Meanwhile more were pouring in through the Kerkopoorta, where the defenders had not been able to eliminate the first intruders. Soon the first enemy flags were seen on the walls. The Emperor and his commanders were trying frantically to rally their troops and push back the enemy. It was too late. Waves of Janissaries, followed by 720 other regular units of the Ottoman army, were crashing through the open Gates, mixed with fleeing and slaughtered Christian soldiers. Then the Emperor, realizing that everything was lost, removed his Imperial insignia, and followed by his cousin Theophilus Palaeologus, the lord Branas, the Castilian Don Francisco of Toledo, Katakouzinis, Mathaios Sgouromalis and John Dalmatus, all seven holding their swords, 725 charged into the sea of the enemy soldiers, hitting left and right in a final act of defiance. They were never seen again.

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Now, thousands of Ottoman soldiers were pouring into the city. One after the other the city Gates were opened. The Ottoman flags began appearing on the walls, on the towers, on the Palace at Blachernae. Civilians in panic were rushing to the churches. Others locked themselves in their homes, some continued fighting in the streets, crowds of Greeks and foreigners were rushing towards the port area. The allied ships were still there and began collecting refugees. The Cretan soldiers and sailors, manning three towers near the entrance of the Golden Horn, were still fighting and had no intention of surrendering. At the end, the Ottoman commanders had to agree to a truce and let them sail away, carrying their arms.

Bands of Ottoman soldiers began now looting. Doors were broken, private homes were looted, their tenants were massacred. Shops in the city markets were looted. Monasteries and Convents were broken in. Their tenants were killed, nuns were raped, many, to avoid dishonor, killed themselves. Killing, raping, looting, burning, enslaving, went on and on according to tradition. The troops had to satisfy themselves. The great doors of Saint Sophia were forced open, and crowds of angry soldiers came in and fell upon the unfortunate worshippers. Pillaging and killing in the holy place went on for hours. Similar was the fate of worshippers in most churches in the city. Everything that could be taken from the splendid buildings was taken by the new masters of the Imperial capital. Icons were destroyed, precious manuscripts were lost forever. Thousands of civilians were enslaved, soldiers fought over young boys and young women. Death and enslavement did not distinguish among social classes. Nobles and peasants were treated with equal ruthlessness.

According to Historian Frantzis the invaders broke the heads of those women who resisted, on the floor of the churches and they raped them dead. The famous icon of Apostle Loukas was totally destroyed. The sultan asked for the young sons of Duke Loukas Notaras. Their father refused and Mehmed was ready to take their heads. Notaras asked him to kill him after his sons so that he was sure that they were dead and not disgraced from the pervert sultan. And this is what happened.

In some distant neighborhoods, especially near the sea walls in the sea of Marmora, such as Psamathia, but also in the Golden Horn at Phanar and Petriion, where local fishermen opened the Gates, while the enemy soldiers were pouring into the city from the land Gates, local magistrates negotiated successfully their surrender to Hamza Bey's officers. Their act saved the lives of their fellow citizens. Furthermore their churches were not desecrated. Meanwhile, the crews of the Ottoman fleet abandoned their ships to rush into the city. They were worried that the land army was going to take everything. The collapse of discipline gave the Christian ships time to sail out of the Golden Horn. Venetian, Genoese and Greek ships, loaded with refugees, some of them having reached the ships swimming from the city, sailed away to freedom. On one of the Genoese vessels was Giustiniani. He was taken from the boat at Chios where he died, from his wound, a few days later.

By the evening of the first day of looting there was left nothing else to steal. The Sultan, with his top commanders and his guard of Janissaries, came into the city in the afternoon of the first day of occupation. Constantinople was finally his and he intended to make it the capital of his mighty Empire. He toured the ruined city. He visited Saint Sophia which he ordered to be turned into a mosque. He also ordered an end to the killing. What he saw was desolation, destruction, death in the streets, ruins, desecrated churches. It was too much. It is said that, as he rode through the streets of the former capital of the Christian Greek Empire, the city of Constantine, moved to tears he murmured: "What a city we have given over to plunder and destruction".

The sultan show in front of many houses the symbol of half moon. He asked why was this symbol everywhere, and they told him that this symbol was dated from the time of 340 b.c. when Philipos Macedonian did not manage to take Byzantium. Ancient Byzantines has since that victory, preserved this symbol. Sultan liked it and added to it a star. So was formed the Turkish flag which terrorized for many centuries the Christian states.

So a civilization of 1100 years old was lost in some days. The barbarians didn't respect anything holy icons, books, paintings, mosaics. They demolished and vandalized churches, ancient monuments, palaces dated from 4th century. Nevertheless the ideas did not vanished. Turks didn't manage to vanish the Hellenic spirit. Many Greeks like Byssarion, Dimitrios Kavakis, Georgios Xaritonimos, Ieronimos of Sparta fled to Europe where they spread the ideas of Socrates, Platon, Aristotelis, Aeschylus, Archimidis, Homer, Euripides, Solon.

Turks must be grateful to the "civilized" Europeans for helping them taking and still keeping this City.

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795

II – LE PILLAGE DE CONSTANTINOPLE PAR LES CROISÉS DE 1204.

Si l'on n'écoutait que les lamentations de Nicéas sur la seconde prise de Constantinople, la ville impériale, théâtre d'abominations sans égales, aurait vu  
 800 périr, en 1204, sous les coups de Barbares ignorants, aussi bien tous les chefs-  
 d'œuvre de l'art antique qui s'y trouvaient rassemblés que les plus précieux et les  
 plus vénérables des objets consacrés par les souvenirs du christianisme.  
 Heureusement, sur tous ces faits, il faut se garder de prendre à la lettre tant le  
 récit de Nicéas, déplorant la destruction de monuments qui existent encore  
 805 aujourd'hui, que les assertions de Nicolas d'Otrante, se plaignant de la disparition  
 des reliquaires de la Passion qui, en réalité, ne quittèrent le palais du Bucoléon  
 que pour passer, trente ans plus tard, dans le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle. Mais,  
 tout en faisant la part des exagérations des vaincus, il est impossible de nier qu'à  
 la suite du dernier assaut donné à Byzance par les Latins, et malgré l'accueil si  
 810 humble qu'ils reçurent des Grecs, et surtout du clergé, des scènes horribles de  
 meurtre et de pillage se succédèrent dans la malheureuse ville. Seulement, il faut  
 distinguer deux périodes différentes dans l'histoire de ces faits regrettables: la  
 première, courte et violente, dura du 14 au 16 avril 1204; c'est pendant ces trois  
 jours qu'eurent lieu les profanations dont les Grecs se plaignirent si justement au  
 815 pape dans un curieux mémoire qui nous a été conservé, et dont trois lettres  
 d'Innocent III sont l'écho indigné. C'est à peine si la garde mise par les chefs de  
 l'armée dans les palais impériaux put préserver les chapelles de ces palais de la  
 rapacité des soldats; aucun sanctuaire ne paraît avoir été épargné, et Sainte-Sophie  
 dut à ses trésors merveilleux et à l'immense renom dont ils jouissaient de se voir le  
 820 théâtre d'excès plus odieux que partout ailleurs. Aux profanations des églises  
 vinrent s'ajouter celles des tombes impériales, dont Nicéas ne craint pas d'accuser  
 Thomas Morosini, patriarche latin élu, mais qui durent être stériles, Alexis III  
 s'étant chargé, sept ans plus tôt, de les dépouiller de tous les bijoux qu'elles  
 contenaient.  
 825 Dans les premiers moments, la rage des conquérants paraît avoir été extrême. «Quant  
 li Latin, dit Ernoul, orent prise Constantinoble, il avoient l'escu Damedieu enbracé,  
 et, tantost come il furent dedens, il le geterent jus, et embracerent l'escu au  
 diable; il corurent sus a sainte Iglise premierement, et briserent les abbaies et les  
 roberent.» Les châsses des saints, dont beaucoup étaient en cuivre émaillé, et par  
 830 conséquent sans valeur pour les pillards, furent brisées. On arrachait les pierreries  
 et les camées qui en faisaient l'ornement, et l'on en jetait au loin les reliques. Un  
 nombre infini de ces reliures de métal si somptueuses qui recouvraient les livres de  
 chœur eurent un sort pareil; les images des saints furent foulées aux pieds ou  
 lancées à la mer. Au bout de quelques jours, les Latins paraissent avoir eu honte de  
 835 ces scandales et même redouté la colère divine. Le conseil des chefs se réunit, et  
 l'on prit des mesures sévères pour arrêter tous ces excès. Les évêques de l'armée  
 fulminèrent l'excommunication contre tous ceux qui se rendraient coupables de  
 nouveaux sacrilèges, et aussi contre ceux qui ne viendraient pas mettre, en des lieux  
 désignés à cet effet, le butin déjà recueilli. Quelques jours plus tard, d'ailleurs,  
 840 l'élection et le couronnement de Baudouin Ier (16 mai) vinrent substituer un pouvoir  
 régulier à l'anarchie; les différents corps de l'armée furent cantonnés dans les  
 divers quartiers de la ville, et un ordre au moins apparent vint succéder aux scènes  
 de violence des premiers jours. Mais là commence, surtout en ce qui concerne les  
 trésors des églises et des reliques, la seconde période du pillage, celle de la  
 845 spoliation régulière et méthodique; cette période paraît avoir duré plusieurs mois,  
 plusieurs années, je dirai même presque autant que l'empire latin d'Orient.

Il n'est pas impossible d'entrer dans quelques détails sur la nature des objets  
 sacrés plus particulièrement recherchés par les Latins; il semble que ces objets  
 850 peuvent se diviser en deux classes: les reliques et les ornements ecclésiastiques;  
 mais, pour les uns comme pour les autres, les croisés ne paraissent point avoir agi à  
 l'aventure.

Parmi les reliques, ce sont les fragments du bois de la Vraie Croix, depuis longtemps  
 objet d'une vénération spéciale en France, qui semblent avoir excité le plus vivement  
 855 leur convoitise. Constantinople avait sur ce point de quoi les satisfaire; sans  
 parler des reliques insignes, des τήματα Ἐύλα, grand était le nombre de ces  
 phylactères, de ces encolpia, destinés à être portés au cou, et dont l'usage, parmi  
 les familles riches, était déjà général du temps de saint Jean Chrysostome; tous



860 contenaient, avec d'autres reliques, une parcelle plus ou moins importante du bois de la Vraie Croix. Les palais des familles princières, les couvents, renfermaient d'autres croix plus grandes; les «couronnes de lumière» des églises en portaient souvent de suspendues au-dessus des autels. Au retour des croisés, les sanctuaires de l'Europe en reçurent un grand nombre, presque toujours gratifiées, soit par ceux qui les rapportaient, soit par ceux qui les recevaient en dépôt, de quelque origine plus 865 ambitieuse qu'authentique. Presque toutes étaient censées avoir appartenu à Constantin, à sainte Hélène ou tout au moins à Manuel Comnène. Après la Vraie Croix, c'étaient les reliques de l'Enfance et de la Passion du Christ, celles de la Vierge, des Apôtres, de saint Jean le Précurseur, du protomartyr saint Étienne, de saint Laurent, de saint Georges et de saint Nicolas que les Latins 870 recherchaient avec le plus d'avidité. Une idée dont ils paraissent aussi avoir été pénétrés et qui leur avait été sans doute suggérée dès avant leur départ, c'est l'intérêt que pouvaient avoir certaines grandes églises de l'Europe à posséder des reliques considérables et authentiques des saints orientaux sous le vocable desquels elles avaient été dédiées; c'est ainsi que les cathédrales de Châlons-sur-Marne et de 875 Langres, qui reçurent chacune, pendant le temps des croisades, trois envois successifs des restes de saint Étienne et de saint Mammès, leurs patrons respectifs, furent redevables à la prise de Constantinople des plus considérables de ces envois. Quant aux objets destinés au service du culte et à l'ornementation des églises, il suffit de parcourir les listes des présents adressés à cette époque de Constantinople 880 en Occident pour être étonné de la quantité considérable de vases sacrés en or et en argent, d'encensoirs, de croix processionnelles, de parements d'autels et de vêtements ecclésiastiques, même de tapis et de tissus neufs d'or, d'argent et de soie, qui prirent le chemin de l'Italie, de la France et de l'Allemagne. Les dyptiques, les tables d'ivoire qui devaient servir à enrichir les couvertures des 885 manuscrits de l'Occident, figurent aussi en grand nombre parmi les objets recueillis par les croisés. Enfin, ce ne dut pas être sans penser de loin à l'ornementation des chasses encore barbares de leurs saints que les clercs de l'armée latine firent si ample provision de ces anneaux, de ces pierres antiques, dont ils remplirent, à leur retour, les trésors de leurs cathédrales, et que, sans le vouloir, ils ont ainsi 890 sauvés d'une destruction presque certaine.

Que devint tout ce butin religieux? Une partie considérable dut en être détournée, ainsi que nous le verrons plus loin; mais le reste, à la suite des mesures prises, vers Pâques, par les chefs de l'armée, fut-il, avec les autres dépouilles de la 895 ville, rapporté aux lieux désignés à cet effet—trois églises, suivant Villehardouin, un monastère, selon Clari—et mis en commun sous la garde de dix chevaliers et de dix Vénitiens? Il n'y a guère lieu d'en douter en ce qui concerne les ornements d'église et les vases sacrés. Pour les reliques, il est certain qu'un grand nombre fut rapporté, mais il y a lieu de penser qu'elles furent dès l'origine séparées du reste 900 du butin, car on voit qu'à l'exemple des croisés de 1097, ceux de 1204 confièrent au doyen des évêques, à Garnier de Trainel, évêque de Troyes, la charge qu'avait remplie à Jérusalem Arnould de Rohas, celle de procurator sanctarum reliquiarum, et que ce fut dans la maison habitée par Garnier que tous ces objets sacrés trouvèrent un asile.

905 Un premier partage du butin fut fait entre le 22 avril et le 9 mai. Il est à croire que les Vénitiens se remboursèrent de leur double créance contre les croisés et contre les Comnènes, et qu'une fois les sommes prélevées, il fut fait, comme le dit Sanudo, deux parts égales, l'une pour les Latins et l'autre pour Venise, parts dont un quart retourna, après le couronnement de Baudouin Ier, au trésor impérial: suivant 910 Villehardouin, les trois huitièmes des croisés montèrent à la somme de 400.000 marcs (20.800.000 francs). Mais le maréchal de Champagne ne parle pas d'un second partage raconté en détail par Robert de Clari. Suivant Robert, ces deux premières répartitions n'auraient porté que sur le gros argent, la monnaie et la vaisselle massive; quant aux bijoux, aux tissus d'or et de soie, ils auraient été, vers le mois 915 d'août, furtivement enlevés par les chevaliers restés dans la ville pendant la campagne de Baudouin Ier contre Boniface de Monferrat, et divisés entre ces traîtres pour lesquels Clari ne trouve pas d'injures assez fortes. C'est donc entre les mains de ces chevaliers félons, et probablement sur l'ordre et au profit du doge, qui commandait dans la ville en l'absence de l'empereur, que tombèrent tous les trésors 920 enlevés aux églises, et rien ne nous indique de quelle manière Vénitiens et Francs se les partagèrent entre eux.

Quant aux reliques, il semble bien que les évêques latins, l'empereur et les Vénitiens en aient eu chacun une part. — Garnier de Trainel, qui disposa pendant près

925 d'une année des reliques mises en commun, en envoya de très précieuses à Troyes par  
 Jean L'Anglois, son chapelain; c'est de lui que l'archevêque de Sens reçut le chef de  
 saint Victor. Nivelon de Cherisy, évêque de Soissons, enrichit de reliques Soissons,  
 la célèbre abbaye de Notre-Dame, et un grand nombre de sanctuaires des contrées  
 voisines. Conrad de Halberstadt ne paraît pas avoir été moins bien partagé que  
 930 Nivelon, si l'on en juge par la valeur des objets rapportés par lui, dont la plupart  
 existent encore aujourd'hui au trésor de la cathédrale d'Halberstadt. — Le premier  
 empereur latin de Constantinople adressa de son côté en Europe quantité d'objets  
 précieux, et Baudouin Ier obéit en cela aux conseils d'une politique éclairée. Devenu  
 le chef d'un État aussi mal affermi, il avait besoin d'autres sympathies et d'autres  
 935 alliances que celles dont avait pu se contenter le comte de Flandre, et devait  
 oublier le temps où, soutien de Philippe de Souabe et vassal turbulent du roi de  
 France, il avait eu à se plaindre des deux personnages les plus influents de  
 l'époque, Innocent III et Philippe Auguste; aussi est-ce précisément à eux les  
 premiers qu'il notifie son avènement, joignant aux lettres qu'il leur adresse des  
 940 présents considérables. Barozzi, maître du Temple en Lombardie, est chargé par lui de  
 porter au pape un véritable trésor, dans lequel figure une statue d'or et une  
 d'argent avec un rubis acheté 1000 marcs, et de nombreuses croix. Philippe Auguste  
 reçoit, outre des reliques de son patron et une croix admirable, deux vêtements  
 impériaux et un rubis d'une grosseur extraordinaire. Après la défaite d'Andrinople,  
 945 le successeur de Baudouin Ier, Henri Ier, continua les envois commencés par son père,  
 dans l'espoir que ces libéralités lui concilieraient les sympathies de l'Occident.  
 Les princes laïques ou ecclésiastiques qui avaient pris la croix, mais qui ne  
 s'étaient pas encore acquittés de leur vœu, furent naturellement l'objet des  
 premières libéralités de l'empereur. C'est ainsi que le duc d'Autriche reçut un  
 950 fragment de la vraie croix. La Belgique et le Nord de la France, d'où il avait lieu  
 d'espérer les secours les plus efficaces, reçurent de nombreuses marques de sa  
 munificence: Clairvaux, où se trouvaient les tombes de sa maison, Namur, où régnait  
 son frère, Bruges, Courtrai, Liessies conservèrent longtemps ou conservent encore les  
 richesses qu'il leur envoya. Après Henri Ier, il faut descendre jusqu'aux années  
 955 lamentables de Baudouin II pour voir reparaître en Occident de nouvelles reliques  
 byzantines; malheureusement, alors, il ne s'agit plus de dons gracieux, mais de  
 vulgaires engagements. Après avoir vendu, pour soutenir son armée, jusqu'au plomb des  
 toits de son palais, l'empereur se voit réduit à abandonner en nantissement aux  
 Vénitiens les joyaux religieux de la couronne impériale. C'est en 1239 que saint  
 960 Louis rachète le plus précieux de tous, la Couronne d'épines; puis, en 1241, la  
 Grande Croix, la Lance et l'Éponge, jusqu'à ce que, en 1247, Baudouin II vienne  
 solennellement confirmer le transfert, dans la Sainte-Chapelle de Paris, des grandes  
 reliques impériales du Bucoléon. —Quant aux Vénitiens, familiers de longue date avec  
 le martyrologe byzantin, ils n'éprouvaient pas, comme les Latins, de difficulté à  
 965 déchiffrer les inscriptions des reliquaires, et leur choix dut être promptement et  
 bien fait. On voit par les récits des pèlerins qui, dans les siècles postérieurs,  
 s'embarquèrent à Venise pour se rendre en Palestine, que cette cité était devenue,  
 depuis 1204, comme une ville sainte, tant était grand le nombre des objets sacrés  
 qu'elle offrait à la vénération des fidèles. Ce que, d'ailleurs, même après  
 970 l'incendie du trésor de Saint-Marc en 1231, la basilique ducale contient encore de  
 reliques de premier ordre et de spécimens sans prix de l'orfèvrerie byzantine peut  
 donner une idée de ce que ce sanctuaire reçut de Constantinople après la quatrième  
 croisade.

975 Mais en dehors du butin mis en commun, qui fut l'objet d'un partage régulier, le  
 récit du pillage a déjà montré qu'il y eut un immense butin détourné par les  
 vainqueurs indisciplinés. Hugues de Saint-Paul fit bien pendre, l'écu au col, des  
 chevaliers coupables de n'avoir pas rapporté leur butin particulier à la masse  
 commune; mais en fait de reliques, on croyait faire une bonne œuvre en volant les  
 980 Grecs. Martin de Pairis se laissait traiter par son biographe de prædo sanctus; il  
 dut donc y avoir sur ce point une certaine tolérance, qui d'ailleurs devint légale le  
 22 avril 1205, terme assigné à l'obligation du rapport des objets trouvés. Or,  
 quelques semaines plus tard (juin), abordaient de toutes parts, de Syrie aussi bien  
 que des divers pays de l'Occident, une foule de gens qu'avait attirés la nouvelle  
 985 inattendue de la prise de Constantinople, et qui venaient demander leur part des  
 dépouilles de la ville impériale. Deux ans après (sept. 1207) est signalée l'arrivée  
 des renforts amenés jusqu'à Bari par Nivelon de Cherisy; ce furent de nouvelles  
 convoitises à satisfaire; enfin, pendant tout le règne de Henri, il paraît y avoir eu  
 entre l'Occident et Constantinople un mouvement non interrompu de gens d'armes qui  
 990 venaient chercher aventure en Roumanie et ne s'en retournaient jamais les mains vides.

## Naspeuringen van Paul Theelen: Sack of Constantinople, 1204, 1453

995 Nous voyons ainsi Dalmase de Sercey et Ponce de Bussière passer un hiver entier à combiner le vol du chef de saint Clément. Comment d'ailleurs expliquer autrement que par des soustractions frauduleuses le fait que de petits chevaliers portant à peine bannière, comme Henri d'Ulmen, aient pu obtenir des trésors tels (à parler seulement de leur valeur intrinsèque) que ceux dont ce seigneur des environs de Trèves a enrichi toute la Basse-Lorraine?

1000 D'après M. le comte Riant, Des dépouilles religieuses enlevées à Constantinople au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans les Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de France, 4<sup>e</sup> série, t. VI (1875).

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