

The Fourth Crusade

VENICE & THE FOURTH CRUSADE

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The Kingdom of Venice was established in the 5th century AD, a city built upon the waters of the Venetian Lagoon. It soon rose to become one of the premier trading ports in the Mediterranean, and later one of the most prominent and prosperous trading powers rivalling the likes of Genoa and the Byzantium for control over trade between the East and the West.

As a port, Venice was host to wealthy merchants and foreign guests but never participated in interstate affairs until the Fourth Crusade. Venetian participation in the Holy War marked the beginning of a change in the tide of Venetian politics as Venice moved towards securing trading security. However, Venice was never expected to be pulled into the Holy War until late 1202, when the crusaders failed to pay their dues. Thus, what was the main reason for Venetian participation in the Fourth Crusade?

I believe that countering financial strain was the main reason for Venetian participation in the Fourth Crusade.


So what happened?

The Fourth Crusade was started by Pope Innocent III, who declared war on the Ayyubid Sultanate as soon as he stepped up in January 1198. Previous expeditions failed as land invasions passed through the hostile Anatolia (modern day Turkey). As such, a maritime invasion was planned. For this purpose, crusade leaders sent envoys to various trading states in the Mediterranean in 1200 to negotiate a deal for transport. The state of Genoa was uninterested, but negotiations with Venice began in March 1201.

The crusaders eventually came to agreement with



The Capture of Constantinople, 1204

Activity	 Requires the Web
	Read up about the Fourth Crusade online.
	Do you think the Fourth Crusade was really a religious war?
	Suggested Starter: https://pdfhost.io/v/sUndqmHcE_Venice_s_Need_for_Settling_the_Byzantine_I

Venice, such that the state would provide transport for 33500 crusaders, consisting of 4,500 knights, 4,500 horses, 9,000 squires, and 20,000 foot-soldiers.*

Counter Financial Strain

One of the many reasons cited was to counter financial strain and make a gain. Venice prepared 50 war galleys and 450 transports,[†] while suspending a whole year of commercial activity to build the ships and train the sailors.* As a result, the livelihoods of many Venetians and the survival of the Venetian government were directly connected to the ability of the

Footnotes: * [1]

† [2]

crusaders to repay their “loans”.

This amounted to a total cost of 85000 marks. However, due to a lack of standardisation on the port at which the crusaders were supposed to depart from, many crusaders chose to sail from other ports such as Genoa and Marseille, and thus only 12000 out of the 33500 crusaders arrived at Venice by May 1202, resulting in only being able to pay 35000 marks, and later 49000 marks by reducing many to extreme poverty.*

This was a problem for the Venetians as they had sustained many losses economically due to the preparations, while 14000–30000 men out of Venice’s 60000–100000 people were recruited to work for the preparations. This caused further strain on Venetian economy and many Venetians were in financial difficulties.† The Doge realised that he could not disband the Crusaders as it would result in a loss of prestige but needed a way to regain the payments. The only way for him was to join the crusades and lead the crusaders to plunder ports and towns down the Adriatic. Instead of criticising Dandolo, crusader leaders such as Geoffrey of Villehardouin praise Dandolo as a “wise and able man”. He blames the crusaders who failed to turn up in Venice for the failure of the crusades.‡ In 1201, the leader of the crusaders, Boniface of Montferrat, met with deposed Byzantine prince Alexios IV Angelos who offered the crusaders 200,000 silver marks, 10,000 Byzantine professional troops and 500 knights in the Holy Land if the crusaders agreed to attack his uncle in the city of Constantinople and re-establish him at the head of the Byzantine Empire. The prospect of financial gain struck the Venetians and they once again decided to participate in the crusaders’ attempt to invade Constantinople. As such, the Venetians participated in the Fourth Crusades for financial security and gain.

Eliminate Trading Rivals and Regional Competition

Another reason for Venetian participation was to remove their major trading rivals – the city of Zara and Byzantium. The city had formerly been a Venetian city and had not been a threat to Venetian trading throughout the 12th century but had rebelled in 1181 and allied with King

SOURCE A:

Excerpt of a book written by American historian Donald E. Queller explaining the economic strains on Venice brought by the Treaty of Venice prior to the crusades, thus leading to the Fourth Crusade.

Venice had undergone enormous expense and disruption of her usual commerce. [...] For a year and a half Venetian traders had lost their normal gain while preparing this great armada. [...] The greatest commercial city in Latin Christendom faced a financial disaster. The crusading chiefs informed the doge of Venice that they were utterly unable to pay anymore, since they were impoverished by their efforts and had scarcely enough money to live on. [...] The merchant republic, in fact, suffered along with the crusaders in their crisis, having expended vast sums and sacrificed customary profits that could not now be recovered. ... Venice was sorely injured by the crusaders’ miscalculation, [...] Enrico Dandolo desperately needed a solution that would send the crusade on its way without Venice renouncing payment.

Emeric of Hungary and Croatia.§ Later Venetian attempts to annex the city were repelled and in 1202, the city became economically independent – directly competing with Venice for trade. The crusader army, led by Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo, felt that an attack on Zara was necessary as Zara was increasingly popular as a trading port and acted as competition for trade against Venice. The army arrived at Zara on 10th to 11th November 1202, and Zara fell on 24th November after a siege. The crusaders plundered the city.¶ Byzantium was another threat to Venetian trade interests. For many years beginning in 992 AD, the two states had been allies in trade, working together to profit as middlemen from the East-West trade and their unrivalled control over the Adriatic Sea and the islands in it, which served as trading destinations.

However, the alliance split, and the two states began to rival each other commercially. The massacre of the Latins in April 1182, where the Roman Catholics, who were the majority in the Byzantine Empire, killed or forced close to 60000 Latins to flee from Byzantium,♯ while nearly 4000 Latins were sold off as slaves.♠ This caused a split in the Western and Eastern Churches. The majority in Venice was Western, or Latins, so the massacre caused the Venetian leaders to treat Byzantium as an enemy. From the Chronicle of Novgorod, the

Footnotes: * [3]

† [2] ‡ [1] & [19] § [4]

¶ [5] ♯ [14] ♠ [15]

SOURCE B:

Excerpt of a research article by Professor of History at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, Jong Kuk Nam, showing multiple scholars feel that the main reason for the diversion of the Fourth Crusade was financial strain.

K. M. Setton writes in his 1976 book, "Perhaps the Venetians took the greatest share in the Fourth Crusade." D. Nicol, in his 1988 book "Byzantium and Venice" wrote that the Fourth Crusade was the most expensive bet that Venice had ever wagered, and was incredibly profitable for commerce. For 57 years the Venetians did not need to worry about protecting the rights of their own merchants in Byzantium. A colonial empire was hence born in Romania. Both the state-led and private businesses [were lucrative and] brought great wealth to Venice. Business continued. "The Latin of Constantinople was the most profitable investment Venice has ever made," he said, supporting the majority.

former Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus also blinded the Doge in 1171, therefore causing him to have a personal grudge against them.* Some historians, such as Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates thus lay most of the blame on Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo, accusing Dandolo of conspiring with the other leaders of the crusades to attack Constantinople while using attacking Egypt as an excuse to gather the troops. He also claimed that the Venetians were motivated by their grudge against Byzantium formed from earlier Byzantine moves to restrict Venetian trade in Constantinople.†

Conflict between Venice and the Pope on Political and Religious Grounds

Lastly, a reason for the Venetian participation in the Fourth Crusades could be due to the battle between the Pope, along with his Papal state, and the Venetians, led by the profit-seeking Enrico Dandolo. This was a split between the church and the crusaders.‡ However, some leading scholars in the field, such as Thomas Madden, suggest that Venice had a good relationship with the Papacy.§ Following the decision to attack Zara, the Pope The Pope wanted to use the crusading army to bring the Eastern Orthodox Church led by the Byzantine

wrote a letter to the crusaders threatening excommunication for those who attacked Zara.¶ This was on the grounds that the Pope had written a letter in 1202 to instruct the crusaders not to commit atrocious acts against fellow Christians, despite his interest to bring Byzantium under Papal authority.⦿ However, the letter arrived too late, and the crusaders sieged and plundered Zara. Incensed, Pope Innocent III excommunicated all the crusaders with Venice. In February 1203, however, the Pope rescinded the excommunications against non-Venetians, thinking that the crusaders had been coerced into doing so by the Venetians, hence effectively singling out the Venetians.♠

SOURCE C:

Excerpt from John Norwich's book, History of Venice, that highlights Venice's shrewd thinking in making the defeating the Byzantines and making the Franks leaders of Byzantium, hence ensuring that neither could challenge her.

[...] encouraging the Franks to feudalise the empire--a step which could not fail to create fragmentation and disunity and would prevent it ever becoming strong enough to obstruct Venetian expansion -- he had kept Venice outside the feudal framework, holding her new dominions not as an imperial fief but by her own right of conquest.

Empire under his power. Thus, when Alexios IV Angelos offered to do so if the crusaders helped him regain his throne from his uncle, who deposed his as the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, this was tempting for the Venetians. It was a chance to regain the favour of the pope §. Hearing of this, Pope Innocent III only issued a letter instructing the crusaders not to attack any further Christians unless they were actively interfering with or obstructing the crusades, without outright condemning the crusaders. ♥ This was seen as a sign of approval, and the attack on Constantinople continued. However, as the newly re-installed Byzantine Emperor was unable to repay the debts to the crusaders, they sieged and later occupied Constantinople. This, however, was against the Pope's wishes and he condemned their actions. The Pope was further infuriated and tried to sabotage further Venetian attempts to secure control over the church in Constantinople, which was seen as a threat to his papal authority. According to the Gesta Innocentii, the Pope originally approached the Venetians with caution. ♦ The scholar community generally favour the argument that the Pope approved of Venetian participation, as seen in Donald Queller's

Footnotes: * [6] † [19]
‡ [16] § [18] ¶ [7] ♦ [17]
[8] ♠ [9] ♥ [11]

Innocent III and the Crusader-Venetian Treaty of 1201,^{*} but some scholars, such as Thomas Madden suggest that the Pope did so with doubts.[†] Further research into books written during the period (1200 – 1210), in particular the Deeds of Pope Innocent III, clearly lay the blame on the Venetians, while preventing the Pope himself from being criticised for the deed.[‡] As such, the split between the Venetians and the Papal state resulted in their participation in the Fourth Crusade to regain their place in the Pope's eyes.



Map of the Conquests of the Fourth Crusade, 1202 - 04

What Eventually Happened?

On the 14th of April 1204, after days of sieging Constantinople after Alexios IV Angelos failed to pay his debts, the crusaders defeated the defending Byzantines and entered the city. The following three days, they sacked the city of all her riches and works of art, along with all priceless artifacts. Their sack resulted in 900000 marks, 150000 of which were first paid to the Venetians, along with their part of another 100000, while the remaining 500000 marks were kept by the many knights.[§]

So What Really Caused the Fourth Crusade?

The Fourth Crusade has been a subject of constant debate – especially over its causes and its link to Venice. For the first time, Venice participated in an interstate crusade for an “ideology” and had misconstrued its purposes. Experts in the field frequently refer to the events of the Fourth Crusade as the most cynical of all the crusades.[¶] Indeed, greed and rivalry were at work during its events. In fact, greed was probably the main factor for Venetian participation in the Fourth Crusades. Had they not accepted the lucrative deal to transport the crusaders

SOURCE D:

Pope Innocent III's letter to the crusading leaders, criticising them for their attack on Zara, him being particularly aggressive against Venice. This serves to show the split of the Venetians and the crusaders.

Behold your gold has turned into base metal and your silver has almost completely rusted since, departing from the purity of your plan and turning aside from the path onto the impassable road, you have, so to speak, withdrawn your hand from the plough [...] for when [...] you should have hastened to the land flowing with milk and honey, you turned away, going astray in the direction of the desert.

SOURCE E:

An excerpt from a basic introduction of the Fourth Crusade on a website about Venetian architecture and history, citing heated Venetian-Papal tensions.

The fourth crusade was initially sought by Pope Innocent III, but he forbade it when the Republic of Venice turned the anti-Islam crusade into a private campaign of politico-commercial expansionism. [...] In spite of excommunications by Pope Innocent III, who saw failure of the expedition against the Unbelievers, the new plan was accepted. In April 1203 the Crusaders' army reached Constantinople, attacked the city and took it.

for a large sum of money, and had the Crusaders decided to all depart from Venice, it would not have had to face the problems of financial strain. Even after it recovered some of its debts through the plundering of the city state of Zara, they accepted the request of Alexios IV Angelos for more money.

As such, money – or more accurately financial security and gain – played the major role in the Venetian decision to participate in the Fourth Crusade. The Fourth Crusade was and is a model example of what would happen if capitalistic ideals and gains are pulled into religious ideology. As David Hume so aptly wrote in *The History of England* 1, “The Crusades – the most signal and most durable monument of human folly that has yet appeared in any age or nation.”.

Footnotes: * [18] † [16]

‡ [19] § [18] ¶ [16]

KEY POINTS

1 The Fourth Crusade was the Republic of Venice's first participation in a multi-national conflict.

2 The Republic of Venice joined the Fourth Crusade to make money, but ended up losing money, and hence needed to continue the crusades to plunder the lost gold back.

3 Other factors, such as Venice's strained relations with the Papal state, and her trade rivals contributed to their participation, but are not main factors.

Sources:

Source A:

D. E. Queller, *The Fourth Crusade the Conquest of Constantinople*. Pp. 51, 55, 56

Source B:

Nam, J. K. (2004). *The Fourth Crusade and its Effects on the Economic Development of Venice*. Ewha Womans University, Seoul. (2008). Pp. 3)
[Translated From Korean, Grammar Checked By Student]

Source C:

Norwich, J.J. *History of Venice* (1982). Vintage Books, US. Retrieved 2 July, 2022.)

Source D:

("Fourth Crusade". Weider History Group. Retrieved 8 November 2013.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Zara#Aftermath) **

Source E:

(*The Fourth Crusade* (n.a.). Basilica di San Marco. Retrieved 9 March, 2022.)

** Note that there has been a link rot, causing the website to no longer exist. This excerpt, can, however, be read on the Wikipedia page that preserved it in words.

Bibliography & Further Readings

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[2], [4]: Madden, Thomas F., and Donald E.

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[16]: Madden, Thomas F. (2004). *Venice, the Papacy, and the Crusades before 1204*. Saint Louis University, USA. P. 1, para. 1.

[17]: Gesta Innocentii PP. III, Migne, PL 214:131

[18]: Queller, Donald E. (1963). Innocent III and the Crusader-Venetian Treaty of 1201. *Medievalia et humanistica* 15 31-4.

[19]: Harris, Jonathan (2004). The Debate on the Fourth Crusade. *Royal Holloway, University of London. History Compass* 2 (2004) EU 114, 1-10.

Further Readings:

<https://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/HistCrus/0001/0002/reference/history.crustwo.i0019.pdf>

<https://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/HistCrus/0001/0002/reference/history.crustwo.i0018.pdf>

<https://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/HistCrus/0001/0002/reference/history.crustwo.i0020.pdf>

You should also go to Google Scholar/Academia and search up the topic "The Fourth Crusade", "Enrico Dandolo" or related topics to acquire a full and complete understanding of this essay.