

Christianity, Violence and collective behaviour

The conquest of Constantinople in 1204

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I. Introduction

In 1204 Constantinople was sacked by Crusaders, mostly of French origin. This paper aims to discuss why Christian crusaders would instead of going east go to Constantinople and conquer a Christian city. How did violence, Christianity and crowd behaviour work together in the diversion of the Fourth Crusade which ultimately led to the sack of Constantinople. The crusaders acted against the advice of the Pope. This paper wants to discuss why the crusaders ended up going to Constantinople and specifically look at the crusaders motivation to do so. In order to that the reasons for the diversion like the issue of money, the succession to the throne in Constantinople and the treaty of Venice and Zara are going to be looked at. Over the years historians had different views on why the diversion happened and if it was planned or happened by accident. Many historians have also asked themselves why the Latins were successful in conquering Constantinople. This paper is going to look at it with the aspect of collective behaviour in mind. Were the crowds manipulated by the leaders or did collective behaviour maybe manipulate the leaders? And how did this maybe lead to the successful instalment of a Latin kingdom.¹ Are the crowds here used to gain political power? The thesis suggests that the issue of money, the succession to the throne of Constantinople and the treaty of Venice and Zara along with collective behaviour lead to the attacks of Constantinople in 1204 and also played a role in the success of the Latins in installing a Latin kingdom. To show this the paper is going to focus on two of the important primary sources for the fourth crusade as well as give an historiographical overview over the most important discussions. The most famous primary source on the Conquest of Constantinople in 1204 was written by Geoffroy de Villehardouin. Villehardouin was part of the armed pilgrimage that was originally supposed to go east but

¹P. Noble, "The importance of Old French chronicles as historical sources of the Fourth Crusade and the early Latin Empire of Constantinople : historiographical essay" (https://usearch.uaccess.univie.ac.at/primop-explorer/fulldisplay/UWI_alma21316784750003332/UWI, n.d.).

ended up going first to Zara (Hungary) and then Constantinople.² Villehardouin's chronicle with the original title *La conquête de Constantinople* is the most famous eyewitness account of the first crusade. Geoffroy De Villehardouin was marshal of Champagne in France and therefore one of the upper-class participants of the fourth crusade. He was present at most of the important decision-making processes. To write his chronicle he probably had access to different documents written during the fourth crusade. Historians generally believe Villehardouin's facts, since he is known to care about the process of writing his stories as true as possible. Some do think however that due to the fact that he was one of the more important participants of the crusade that he must have changed some facts for their advantage. Reading his chronicle, we might want to keep this bias in mind. Interesting will also be his role in the treaty of Venice and its importance for the diversion of the crusader army to Zara and the Constantinople, more about this in a later chapter.³ Villehardouin gives us an idea of the thinking of the leading group in the fourth crusade. His portrayal of the crusade is going to be interesting when looking at collective behaviour and the use of crowds to gain political power. He describes in detail both attacks on Constantinople and also the instalment of a Latin kingdom after Constantinople was successfully conquered. Geoffroy de Villehardouin took his vow to take the cross in 1199, he was then about 50 years old and had been marshal of the Champagne for about 14 years.⁴ He is one of the leading members of the crusade, this however does not mean that he represents all of the leading men in his written work. It does give us a good insight on how the leaders did think and did justify their actions. The second primary source, which gives us a different view on the fourth crusade, was written by Robert De Clari. This is going to be especially interesting when it comes to the question of crowd behaviour - since the army is mostly made up of the poor knights, just like Clari, his account is going to give us an insight on their thinking. He mentions several times that the crusaders originally did not want to go to Zara, or later Constantinople. This paper is going to look at how this was changed and look at the tipping point - when did the soldiers decide to attack Constantinople. How did Constantinople end up in flames, why was the emperor killed, etc.⁵ There are, of course, several other primary sources on the fourth crusade, however this paper is only going to look at the descriptions of the attacks on Constantinople in those two since it would simply go beyond scope to look at all of them. The paper is going to focus on the Latin view of the events and the feelings towards the diversion and how those might have changed during the attacks. It is not going to look at the byzantine view of things and will not look at the specific crowd events that happened during the various attacks in detail. Important for the analysis of collective behaviour are

²Geoffroy Villehardouin and Robert de Clari, *Chroniken Des Vierten Kreuzzuges:1202-1204. Die Augenzeugenberichte von Geoffroy de Villehardouin Und Robert de Clari* (Centaurus Vrelag, 1998).

³Alfred J. Andrea, "Essay on Primary Sources," in *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople*, second edition, 1997.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

going to be the major turning points, especially after Alexius IV is killed. To talk about collective behaviour and its influence in the attack of Constantinople in 1204 we will need a definition of what a crowd is and its connection to the crusades. When talking about collective behaviour and crowds this paper is talking about the non-leading members of the crusade. This does not however assume a common background or collective behaviour because of some kind of class connection. It simply refers to the ones who take part in the crusade but do not have a say in the decision-making process. Hereby the paper is going to look at the turning points in collective behaviour and figure out how those crowds were influenced by the leaders to finally end up sacking Constantinople. It is also important to mention that the crusading party was made up of Franks and Venetians. Both sources only talk about the Franks. This is why when talking about the non-leading participants of the crusade it specifically means the Franks. The last section of the paper is going to focus on these turning points in collective behaviour of the hereby defined crowds. While looking at the crusades as a representation of collective behaviour as an event. In this sense the crowd would be a historical phenomenon used to describing the event of a crusade. Adding the factor of collective behaviour in explaining the diversion question has been neglected so far.

Historiographical overview

Crusades in general have in the last decades gained popularity among historians. Jonathan Riley-Smith in his book *“The Oxford illustrated History of the Crusades”* tells us about the rise of interest in for example combat psychiatry.⁶ Riley-Smith wrote several other books and articles about the crusades and is therefore one of the most read people when talking about the crusades. Other classics would include Runciman’s *A History of the Crusades*, it gives a good overview but does not deal with the question of the diversion thereby ignoring years of scholarship.⁷ To get a more detailed overview one reads *The Crusades* by Hans Eberhard Mayer or Jonathan Riley-Smith’s *The Crusades: A Short History*. The crusade volumes edited by Kenneth M. Setton.⁸ The chapter on the Fourth Crusade in Volume 2 was written by McNeal. He mentions several of the conspiracy plots and the possibilities of them being true when looking at the timelines presented in the various primary sources. He seems to be in one line with Queller and Madden.⁹ Probably the most discussed topic in case of the Fourth Crusade is the diversion question. Over the years there have been arguments about planned conspiracies or accidents leading to the eventual sack of Constantinople and the instalment of a Latin kingdom. But this debate is going to be discussed in a later section. Historians have already described those controversies at length. For a

⁶Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁷Steven Runciman, *A History of Crusades* (Cambridge University Press, 1951).

⁸Donald E Queller and Thomas F Madden, *The Fourth Crusade. The Conquest of Constantinople*, second edition (Philadelphia, 1997).

⁹Edgar H McNeal, “The Fourth Crusade,” in *Setton Crusades Vol*, n.d.

more detailed discussion of Historiography see for example Donald E. Queller and Susan J. Stratton, “A Century of Controversy on the Fourth Crusade”[forgot to get the book in zotero] Or more recent Christopher Tyerman “The Debate on the Crusades, 1099-2010.”¹⁰ To begin with the paper is going to look at how Christianity, violence, values and society in the Middle ages and how those influenced the world of the Crusaders. Then it is going to talk about the specific things that happen during the fourth crusade, the problem of the legitimacy to the byzantine throne of various Emperors. The money issue in Venice and later in Constantinople. The treaties of Venice and Zara and the possible planned manoeuvre by the Venetians. And finally, it is going to look at the important turning points in collective behaviour and the influence on the outcome of the fourth crusade. For me the most interesting point are the turning points in collective behaviour after the decisions to divert the crusades and when the crusader army goes from being a supportive army of Alexius IV to being a conquering army and attacking Constantinople in a completely different way during the second attack.¹¹ And also how the propaganda of the leading men influenced the crowds to get there. This has an impact on the diversion question. But in order to understand how it came to this, we also have to look at the way to Zara, the decision to go to Constantinople and also the first attack on Constantinople.

¹⁰Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

¹¹Queller and Madden, *The Fourth Crusade. The Conquest of Constantinople*.

II. Christianity and crusades

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