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## **The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople** Jonathan Phillips

In 1202, zealous Western Christians gathered in Venice determined to liberate Jerusalem from the grip of Islam. But the crusaders never made it to the Holy Land. Steered forward by the shrewd Venetian doge, they descended instead on Constantinople, wreaking terrible devastation. The crusaders spared no one: They raped and massacred thousands, plundered churches, and torched the lavish city. By 1204, one of the great civilizations of history had been shattered. Here, on the eight hundredth anniversary of the sack, is the extraordinary story of this epic catastrophe, told for the first time outside of academia by Jonathan Phillips, a leading expert on the crusades. Knights and commoners, monastic chroniclers, courtly troubadours, survivors of the carnage, and even Pope Innocent III left vivid accounts detailing the events of those two fateful years. Using their remarkable letters, chronicles, and speeches, Phillips traces the way in which any region steeped in religious fanaticism, in this case Christian Europe, might succumb to holy war.

## **The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople Details**

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# From Reader Review The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople for online ebook

## Stephen Simpson says

One of the best books I've read on the Fourth Crusade. Well-sourced throughout, the author strikes a very good balance between rich and dense historical facts and a narrative that makes it engaging (without reading like the work of a frustrated wannabe novelist).

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## Jack says

Why is the Fourth Crusade one of the most awesome events in western if not world history? It's because the idiots involved didn't even make it to the Holy Land or any Muslim controlled territory but instead attacked their Christian ally Byzantium and sacked Constantinople, one of the greatest cities in history, to pay off the debt to Venice incurred through the building of the ships for the Crusade. And then they went home. I dare you to name a stupider series of events than that.

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## Cory Pedigo says

Phillips does an excellent job painting a vivid picture of all parties involved in the Fourth Crusade from Knights and Nobles to Clergymen and commoners as well as the adversities and adversaries they faced along the way. This book can be enjoyed by both an avid historical reader or a novice. Touching on the necessary how's and who's, the author is able to present a clear understanding as to the why. Which brings a refreshingly unbiased yet uniquely insightful glimpse as to what took place and why. The details of which are quite enjoyable to read and in some ways eye opening.

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## Jerome says

A clear, thoughtful and well-researched history of this catastrophe.

Phillips argues that the lack of manpower and financial resources was the main weakness of the crusaders and that their subsequent course stemmed from this. He also contends that a conquest of Constantinople only became a goal after Alexius IV was toppled by Murtzuphlus.

The narrative is strong, engaging and accessible, and Phillips does a great job setting up context, explaining how the ideas behind crusading developed and how confidently the crusaders anticipated success. He ably describes how overconfidence, bad timing, bad judgment and political expediency led the crusaders to a city they never even intended to visit. His writing makes the characters and their surreal twists of fate come to life, and his portrait of the crusaders is nuanced.

Some more analysis of the empire's weakness, corruption and finances would have been helpful. The book does skim over the military aspects in a somewhat hurried fashion, though, especially in the sections

covering the city's fall. Some more material on Pope Innocent III would also have helped. There are also a few oddities that could have been caught by an editor (the blind doge of Venice at one point breaks into tears "at the sight" of one event, for example)

A solid, well-written and readable work.

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## **Toonvanelst says**

An honest and concious account of the Fourth Crusade written by a superb historian. Jonathan Phillips explains how an initially Egypt bound expedition goes wrong from the start and ends up taking one of the most splendid cities of Christianity. The seemingly incredible event is broken down and analysed, leaving the reader with the understanding that the Fourth Crusade was an avalanche of unfortunate accidents one after the other, leading to an outcome no one ever could have foreseen.

A crusader army leased a fleet from Venice but fails to bring enough participants to pay off the debt. The crusaders gave what they had, but both they and the Venetians, who halted their normal mercantile business for a year, were on the verge of bankruptcy. To ease the disastrous financial burden, the crusader army tries to muscle Zara, an economic opponent of Venice, into surrender. When Zara is on the brink of surrendering, unrest in the crusader army prevents a bloodless outcome. The pope forbade the attack, and some crusaders tell the inhabitants of Zara that the Franks won't support the Venetians, and so they will only face their small part of the army. In this belief, Zara prepares to hold out. But the crusaders did support the Venetians, feeling honor bound to their outstanding debt. Zara could not withstand the combined force of the crusaders and Venetians. All the loot and money raised from the siege went directly to settling the debt. The crusaders earned no penny, but at least their crusade was back on track, only to be thrown off trail yet again. A young Greek prince offers the crusaders a deal that sounds too good to be true: If they return him and his father to power, he will pay them handsomely projecting the end of the debt, reunite the church of Byzantium with Rome, and support the current crusade by sending Greek soldiers and leasing the Venetian fleet for one more year on his costs. Again the crusaders and Venetians think it will only come down to a mere show of force, presenting the rightfull ruler to his people and rounding up the false regent. But it proved to be more difficult. They eventually succeed in bringing the prince and his father Isaac Angelos back on the throne. But the Byzantine rulers have trouble filling in their promises. To raise money, they mulc their subjects, creating an atmosphere of hatred towards the crusaders. The crusaders demand their rightfull pay and the Byzantines can't gather that sum. It is the same situation as arose in Venice. The crusaders were still broke and the expenses kept mounting with every diversion. When the people of Constantinople turn to full scale rebellion and overthrow the new rulers, the crusaders besiege the city. A small broke and frustrated crusader army attacks Constantinople, and almost by miracle captures it. What follows is a grim and gruesome scene of pillaging, looting, raping and sacking. But with the previous troubles in mind, it is no longer an incredible outcome. The crusaders choose a new emperor from their midst and create the Latin kingdom of Constantinople. The pope who once forbade the crusaders to attack Zara now saw his dream of a united church came true. But the capture of Constantinople diverged crusader energy, and in the end weakened the christian cause. Even when the Greeks recaptured their fair city, they would never recover from the blow dealt that day.

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## **Tolga says**

A splendid account of the fourth crusade, with all its “glories” and atrocities. Recommended to anyone wanting to know more about this episode of the crusade series.

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### **Ted Smith says**

This is a gripping historical narrative that sort of resembles a Three Stooges bit in that the crusaders keep fucking up more and more until they're forced to sack Constantinople and it's really the only reasonable course of action. Well-sourced and well-written.

Cumanians only figure at the end of the narrative, but are, as usual, punching far above their weight.

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### **Nigel says**

I made the crucial mistake, while reading this, of listening to the Radio 4 comedy, *All The World's A Globe*, with the result that every now and then I would discover that I was reading it in the voice of Desmond Olivier Dingle, rendering this epic, tragic tale of the strangest left-turn in history, utterly hilarious. It does boggle the mind, somewhat, that a holy crusade whose primary intention is to go kill Muslims in the Holy Land ends up off killing Orthodox Christians in Constantinople, but Phillips lays it all out for the reader and traces the logic of how an untimely death here, a bit of uneven preaching there, some over-inflated numbers, a massive economic hole that threatens to founder both the crusade and an entire city-state, and a deposed Prince turning up at just the right time with just the right offer, all lead inexorably to the catastrophic downfall of one of the most amazing cities of the medieval world, and an entire empire falls with it.

My dimly remembered knowledge of this particular military foray recalls that most of the blame for the wayward expedition was laid at the feet of the wily Venetians, who built the fleet that was to carry the crusaders to the Levant. Phillips lucidly argues that the only truly naked act of greed and cynicism that the Venetians can be fairly blamed for is the siege of Zara. The leaders of the Crusade vastly overestimated the numbers and ordered ships accordingly, at a huge price. Venice literally stopped all other commercial activity for an entire year to produce the fleet, and when the numbers failed to materialise, were left very much in the same hole as the Crusaders. Even when settled on the shore of the great city, they had no intention of attacking the place: they fully expected the princes' extravagant promises to be honoured, whereupon it would have been hey-ho, off to Jerusalem we go. Circumstances, betrayals, mistrust, coups, murders, sneak attacks and outright hostility followed, and the rest is history.

It's a sad, fascinating story. One has to admire the drive, religious devotion, determination and sheer military skill of the Europeans, if not the use to which they are put. Phillips emphasises the importance of tournaments - wide ranging, sometimes lethal competitive brawls - in training the knights and soldiery of the west, as opposed to the neglected, poorly led and deteriorating Byzantine military forces. Even so, in the end, nothing much is achieved except a lot of dead people, tons of looted treasures, one burnt, wrecked and sacked city, and a lingering bitterness between the Catholic and orthodox churches. Basically.

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### **Jim says**

The 4th Crusade achieved its infamy by being diverted from its original goal of re-taking Jerusalem, thanks

to two "targets of opportunity" that intervened: First, the city of Zara on the Adriatic, and Second, the Byzantine Empire and its capital of Constantinople. For the most part, the participants went no farther south.

Jonathan Phillips's *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople* shows us in great detail why the business of crusading was fraught with perils. Pope Innocent III started the ball rolling, but once the crusaders had left Venice, he could only bluster and excommunicate. There were no kings in this crusade, only nobles like Boniface of Montserrat and Baldwin of Flanders. (The closest to a king was Enrico Dandolo, the Doge of Venice, who was not only in his nineties, but blind.)

The targets of opportunity to which I refer bent the crusade from its aim. When the crusaders contracted for some 35,000 knights and their men to be transported to the Holy Land, the Venetians demanded a price that could not be met -- as only some 12,000 men showed up. So Venice wanted the Crusaders to take the city of Zara, which was now a Hungarian port -- and the Hungarians were Catholics, not infidels.

Second were the extravagant promises of a Greek, Alexius Angelos, whose father was deposed by the current Byzantine emperor Alexius III. He offered to pay extravagant sums if the crusaders put him on the throne of Constantinople -- which they did. It turned out that Alexius was unable to deliver on his promises. So the crusaders took Constantinople and ruled it for sixty years.

So the upshot was that, instead of fighting the wicked Muslims, the 4th Crusade conquered a Catholic city and the center of Eastern Orthodox Christendom.

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### **Jonathan says**

I loved this book! Jonathan Philips describes the events leading up to the Sack of Constantinople with perfect clarity. Supported by a plethora of facts and a clear writing style this book is an excellent account of the Fourth Crusade

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### **Arlomisty says**

Good Book... I've always found all the Crusades very fascinating reading....

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### **Mike says**

Jonathan Phillips' *The Fourth Crusade* garners a 4 Star stamp for relating this convoluted and outrageous history at the turn of the 13th Century with clarity and great war storytelling. The Catholic dictionary defines a crusade as "expeditions undertaken, in fulfillment of a solemn vow, to deliver the Holy Places from Mohammedan tyranny." Well, this crusade got seriously off track right from the start. It never got to the "Holy Places" and wound up attacking only fellow Christian cities. Why? Well, Phillips explains this all pretty clearly. Think of it as the prequel to "The Sopranos". A bunch of nobles set up a contract with the

Venetians to transport and support 37,000+ crusaders to the Holy Land for a 9-month crusade. The price is set at 85,000 silver marks. However, only about 12,000 warriors show up at the docks. Well the Venetians want the full price regardless and when the money isn't fully paid, they recommend the group go attack an annoying little town on the Adriatic called Zara. Unfortunately the Zarathustrians (or whatever you would call them) are Christian and the Pope said "no, no" to attacking Christian cities. Screw that said the Venetians and Zara was captured and ransacked. The Pope is pissed off and makes the Venetians and crusaders return what they stole.

Along comes this deposed prince from Constantinople and says, "Hey, I'll give you 200,000 smackers to restore my Dad and me to rule in Byzantium". Hmmm,...the crusaders can pay off the loan sharks from Venice and also get all the supplies they need to carry on to the real objective, the Holy Land. Just one minor detail, they have to capture the best defended Christian city in the known world. And guess what, they do. The prince and his Dad are made co-rulers and the money starts to flow. However, the Greeks are not happy people, they really don't like the prince and they really hate the crusaders. After much tussling, the prince and his Dad are deposed again, the crusaders are kicked out of the city and have to capture it again. They do. But now they are so exhausted they can't hold the city and also go on a crusade at the same time. And the Pope is really pissed off now. In the end, they never actually make it on a crusade.

Phillips tells the story from the initiation of the crusade to the aftermath. After a somewhat tedious start, he tells a fascinating story of this ill-starred adventure. The role of religion in people's lives and the toughness of the individual, as well as their martial excellence, really come through clearly. How the individual organizes to go off on a crusade, the politics of the times, the military science employed in defending and attacking the cities, the logistics of armies in the medieval era, all are covered well. If you are interested in history, this is a great book to add to your collection.

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### **Andrew Lord says**

I loved this retelling of the infamous Fourth Crusade - what led up to the decision to go to Constantinople instead of Jerusalem, why the crusaders were so brutal to their fellow Christians as the battle concluded, and the aftermath that caused a power vacuum lasting for the next two centuries. I highly recommend it to anyone even remotely interested in what became one of history's greatest sidetracks.

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### **Juan Cuellar says**

an amazing recount and revival of such an unfortunate but world history altering event. Phillips does an amazing job of identifying and detailing the main characters and events in a very resounding form. A must read for all history lovers.

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### **Coyle says**

It's always refreshing to come across a writer who can make history interesting and engaging without dumbing it down.

