

The Day the Icon Fell: Relic Conquest in the Fourth Crusade

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The year is 1204, and Constantinople is under siege by a Latin Christian army. Angered by a recent raid on a local fortress, the defending emperor Mourtzouphlos arranges a counter offensive. He is accompanied by the city's patriarch, Sampson, who carries with him a magnificent holy icon. It depicts God, the virgin Mary, and all of Christ's apostles. Within it was a treasure trove of relics: one of Christ's childhood teeth, the shroud in which he was interred, a piece of the lance that pierced his side, and mementoes of thirty martyrs. Never before had the Roman army carried this icon into battle and lost. One noble, Peter of Navarre, led the vanguard. He was so confident in his victory that he chose to wear only a golden crown instead of a helmet. Henry of Flanders, leader of this Western force, split his skull in twain. Several other Greek leaders were toppled, including the patriarch. The knight responsible, Peter of Bracieux, dismounted and took up the fallen icon. The Latin army rallied around him and sent the Greek force fleeing back to Constantinople. Not a single man from the Western force was slain.¹

This is, at least, the story according to Alberic of Trois Fontaines. His is by far the most detailed account of this battle. It took place during the Fourth Crusade, shortly before Constantinople was seized by the invading Latin knights. Relatively speaking, it is not a noteworthy battle. Of greater importance is how the crusade made its way to Constantinople, the taking and looting of the city, and the impact this had on the Eastern Roman Empire and Christendom as a whole. The loss of a single relic during a skirmish hardly seems worth mentioning. Contemporary sources disagree. Nearly every Western account of the Fourth Crusade, however brief, mentions this battle. Alberic of Trois Fontaines' account is unique in that it gives us details of the fighting itself, the people involved, and the casualties. The icon, on the other hand, is always present. Latin Christianity had a deep fascination with this particular

¹ Alberici Monachi Trium Fontium. *Chronicon*. in Andrea, Alfred J. *Contemporary Sources for the Fourth Crusade*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2000. 302-303.

event. To Western Christians, the fall of the icon was a critical detail in understanding the Fourth Crusade. It simplifies the complex and tragic Fourth Crusade into a sacred narrative, one in which the crusade and its consequences were the will of God.

As a brief introduction to the context, the Fourth Crusade occurred in the early years of the thirteenth century. Pope Innocent III originally organized the crusade, but the campaign ran into problems after rallying their forces in Venice. Their original goal was Egypt, and the crusaders had accrued a substantial debt to the Venetians for passage across the Mediterranean. However, the number of men that arrived in Venice was far fewer than had been anticipated. As a result, the crusaders were unable to pay the full sum they owed to the Venetians. In order to pay off their debts, the crusaders agreed to capture the Christian city of Zara for Venice, an act that plunged the crusade into controversy. The pope himself excommunicated the crusaders for the attack and washed his hands of the crusade. The force moved on to Constantinople, the exact reasons for which are still debated.² What is known is that the crusaders installed a claimant to the Eastern Empire, Alexius, who had promised to fund the rest of the campaign. When Alexius was subsequently deposed, conflict broke out between the crusaders and Constantinople, resulting in the city's sack. Great hordes of treasure were taken back to the West, including a great amount of sacred relics. Count Baldwin of Flanders, a Latin crusader, was then crowned emperor. This new, Latin Roman empire would not survive the century.³

The Fourth Crusade is hard to explain and harder to justify. It seems to be in direct conflict with the crusading ideal of defending Christianity. Instead, these crusaders waged war against fellow Christians, seemingly for their own material benefit. Modern scholarship often

² For an overview of this debate, see Queller, Donald E. *The Latin Conquest of Constantinople*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971.

³ For more context, see Angold, Michael. *The Fourth Crusade: Event and Context*. Harlow, England ; New York: Pearson/Longman, 2003.

characterizes the Fourth Crusade as either a tragic catastrophe or an opportunistic perversion of a crusade. This is reflected even in the titles of modern books on the Fourth Crusade: *1204: The Unholy Crusade* by John Godfrey or *The Sundered Cross: The Story of the Fourth Crusade* by Ernle Bradford. In another book on the subject, Bradford claims that “Few episodes in history reveal more clearly the cynicism of the higher command or the stupidity of the masses.”⁴ It has long been considered a tragic and convoluted event. Contemporary Western accounts were fighting an uphill battle in explaining and justifying the crusade.

Some of the most well-known accounts of the Fourth Crusade do an admirable job at explaining the sequence of events that led to the taking of Constantinople. However, they maintain a distinctly apologetic tone. The problem is not so much that fellow Christians were attacked. The Eastern Orthodox church was considered to be in open contempt of Roman authority, and the eventual ‘return’ of the East to papal authority is celebrated. On top of this, there is no shortage of vitriolic depictions of Greek nobility. In Geoffrey of Villehardouin’s account, three successive Greek emperors are shown to be conniving and dishonorable. Alexius succeeds his uncle, who had deposed his brother and exiled his family. Alexius then refuses to fulfill his promises to the crusaders, and is eventually killed and replaced by Mourtzouphlos. The crusaders, in contrast, are ever faithful to their vows and debts. Notably, such vows are made on holy relics.⁵ The Greek people benefit as much as the crusaders: freed from the rule of immoral tyrants and received into the loving embrace of the Roman church.

Religiously and politically, the conquest of the Eastern Roman Empire is depicted positively. What remains awkward is how the crusade came to Constantinople in the first place.

⁴ Bradford, Ernle Dugate Selby. *The Great Betrayal: Constantinople 1204*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967. 68.

⁵ Villehardouin, Geoffroi de, Robert S. Connors, and Robert S. Connors Basic Program Collection. *The Chronicle of Geoffry De Villehardouin: Marshal of Champagne and Romania, Concerning the Conquest of Constantinople, by the French and Venetians, Anno M.CC.IV*. London: W. Pickering, 1829. 16.

This and every previous crusade set out to reclaim the holy land from Muslims, supposedly for the benefit of all Christians, especially those in the East. How could the crusade have to come to attack fellow Christians? Here, Western accounts want to find a villain, someone who can take the blame away from the noble crusaders. Robert of Clari is quick to place blame on the Venetians, who leveraged their debt to force the crusade first to Zara, then on to Constantinople. Robert of Clari makes it clear that only the highest leaders of the crusade knew of these diversions. Most of the army was ignorant.⁶ Agency is taken away from individual members of the crusade. They are virtuous because they served in the crusade. Regardless of the flaws or misfortunes of the crusade's leadership, these soldiers are praiseworthy due to their devotion to the cause. Villehardouin expresses a similar idea. A consistent foe in his account is the faction of soldiers who wished to disband the crusade, either because the campaign had strayed too far from its original purpose or had simply gone on too long. Those opposed to disbanding represent faithfulness to the crusading ideal and the sacred vows they had made. Their intentions remain focused on taking the holy land. Any tribulations encountered must be accepted and overcome in pursuit of this noble goal.⁷ To abandon the cause for any reason is contemptible. The Fourth Crusade as we know it was the unfortunate result of a holy mission going astray. In Villehardouin's words: "Oh! What great damage was done... Christendom would certainly have been exalted and the land of the Turks laid low."⁸ Regardless of the anti-Greek rhetoric, these accounts imply some regret at how the crusade turned out. No Muslims were fought. The holy land was not reclaimed. The conquest of Constantinople required explanation and defense.

⁶ Robert De Clari. *The Conquest of Constantinople*. Trans. Edgar Holmes McNeal. New York: Octagon Books, 1966. 42.

⁷ Villehardouin. *Chronicle*. 53.

⁸ Ibid 18.

These sources tend to avoid the subject of the papacy. This is understandable, as Pope Innocent III was firmly opposed to the crusade's war on the Eastern Empire. The crusade's leadership had beseeched the pope twice for permission to support Alexius's claims and had twice been refused, despite the allure of bringing the Eastern church under papal control.⁹ To Innocent III, a war against fellow Christians was unacceptable for a crusade. In a letter to Emperor Alexius III (Innocent maintained friendly relations with the emperor whom the crusaders would soon depose), the pope reassures the emperor that he did not support the claimant Alexius. Innocent avoids outright condemning the actions of the crusaders. He instead accepts responsibility for maintaining control over the crusade so that they do not 'defile' themselves by warring against fellow Christians. That would invoke the wrath of God, and the crusade would certainly not be able to continue its campaign into the holy land.¹⁰ In Innocent's view, a crusade is a campaign to retake the holy land from Christendom's enemies. By that perspective, the Fourth Crusade was an unmitigated catastrophe, and hardly a crusade at all. It pitted Christian against Christian and never set foot in the holy land. It is antithetical to what a crusade is supposed to be. How, then, did contemporary sources portray the crusade as a holy mission?

We will be focusing on two sources: *De terra Iherosolimitana* (colloquially and hereafter referred to as 'The Anonymous of Soissons') and Alberic of Trois Fontaines' *Chronicon*. Both are somewhat brief accounts of the crusade motivated by explaining and justifying the presence of Greek relics in their native sees. The Anonymous of Soissons is the most obvious in this: the proper title of the work translates to "Concerning the Land of Jerusalem and the Means by Which Relics Were Carried to This Church from the City of Constantinople." A large portion of

⁹ Godfrey, John. *1204, the Unholy Crusade*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. 69.

¹⁰ Innocent III in Queller, Donald E. *The Latin Conquest of Constantinople*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971. 30-31.

it is dedicated to listing out every individual relic that came to the see of Soissons and to whom they were given.¹¹ The *Chronicon* had similar intentions. We will be addressing only the work's account of the Fourth Crusade, as this is meant to be an ambitious work spanning the world's entire history. Alberic of Trois Fontaines was a Cistercian monk. The Cistercians played a prominent role in the Fourth Crusade. They promoted the endeavor beforehand, and many Cistercian clerics accompanied the army during the campaign.¹² The order received many of the relics taken from the East. Notably, the Cistercians housed the fallen icon mentioned above in the abbey of Citeaux.¹³

Both sources were written by people that benefited from the Fourth Crusade, and had a vested interest in portraying the conflict as favorably as possible. Unlike Robert of Clari or Villehardouin, neither are firsthand accounts of the crusade. They were written in the decades immediately following it. Instead, they are some of the earliest narrative recreations of the Fourth Crusade. The authors were looking back at recent events, trying to summarize and justify them. They both focus on the seizure of holy relics: an act that, under different light, may be portrayed as the most heinous crime committed in the sack of Constantinople: sources both apologetic and critical to the crusader's actions mention the taking of relics.¹⁴ In the case of the Anonymous of Soissons and Alberic of Trois Fontaines, relic theft sanctifies the crusade, rather than render it a sacrilegious tragedy.

Relics are not simply objects of religious devotion. They are the physical remnants of a holy person, still vested with divine power and authority. They were treated as if these divine figures are still present within their remains. This adds some complications to how relics are

¹¹ Anonymous of Soissons, 232.

¹² Gutsch, Milton R. *The Papal Preparations for the Fourth Crusade*. 1915. 163.

¹³ Andrea, Alfred J. *Contemporary Sources for the Fourth Crusade*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2000. 273-274.

¹⁴ Frolow, A. *Doctrinal Causes* in Queller, Donald E. *The Latin Conquest of Constantinople*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971. 98.

treated as objects. There is a moral urgency in ensuring that relics remain within the hands of the righteous, but also an assurance that a saint, present in his relic, would not abandon the righteous or allow them to suffer harm. In his book *Furta Sacra*, Patrick Geary sets out a convention of medieval hagiography in which relics were stolen by rival communities of the faithful, either to be cared for properly or due to the passion of the thieves. The saint heralds his or her arrival with the performance of miracles, or prevents his translation by a similar show of holy wrath.¹⁵ Either way, the saint is an active participant in his fate, not a passive object. Ownership of a relic becomes synonymous with divine favor. Only the righteous can gain ownership of them and reap their benefits. Only the wicked lose them.

We can see this same attitude in the Anonymous of Soissons. The author places the Fourth Crusade within the context of the greater crusading movement, by then a century-old practice. His summary of the first three crusades frames these events as works of divine providence. The work begins: “Through the mercy of God... the sacred city of Jerusalem and Antioch, along with the land adjoining them, came into the power of the Christian Franks after the Saracens had been driven out.”¹⁶ The conquest itself is ambiguous. There is no mention of the crusading movement or why the Franks had invaded. The crusade simply happened, ‘through the mercy of God.’ Similarly, the loss of Jerusalem to Muslim forces in 1187 is depicted as divine punishment: “Later, for the purgation of their sins... the Christian army was defeated by the Saracens.”¹⁷ The forces of Saladin are certainly depicted as a vicious foe, but the narrative cannot place the loss of the holy land entirely on their success. To do so would be to imply that either the Muslims had greater claim to divine favor or that God had simply not interfered in the

¹⁵ Geary, Patrick J. *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978.

¹⁶ Anonymous of Soissons, 230.

¹⁷ Ibid 230.

Christians' defeat, both unthinkable. Therefore, this loss must have been due to the Christians' insufficient piety. The section ends with an echo of this sentiment in the form of a relic: "A portion even of the wood of the Holy Cross was lost in the war, which afterward, so we believe, was found neither by us nor by the Saracens."¹⁸ Perhaps miraculously, neither side was able to find this relic after the battle. In other words, the Christian forces had lost the favor of God, but that did not mean that the Muslims had taken it instead. The relic is not just a valuable artifact. It is a stand-in for the will of God.

God's will, not man's, is depicted as the chief motivator of the Crusades. Barbarossa's death by drowning on his way to the Third Crusade, for instance, occurred "By the secret judgement of God..."¹⁹ The eventual dissolution of the Third Crusade is depicted thus: "Meanwhile, by the instigation of the devil, grave discord arose among the kings, through which the work of God was wholly impeded."²⁰ Rather than a campaign organized and conducted by mortal men, the Anonymous of Soissons characterizes the Crusades as a divine quest: one whose successes and failures rely upon holy (or unholy) intervention. From this perspective, a crusade's course of events does not need to be justified. It can simply be understood as the mysterious hand of providence.

The Anonymous of Soissons does not linger on the Fourth Crusade itself. The author provides a brief summary of events with a clear Western bias. Of the conquest of Zara, the Anonymous claims that the crusaders were victims of Venetian greed: "Upon their arrival at Venice, the Venetians demanded from them excessive charges, both expenses and a profit for their ships."²¹ Trapped in Venice and short on supplies, the crusade had no choice but to accept

¹⁸ Ibid 230.

¹⁹ Ibid 231.

²⁰ Ibid 232.

²¹ Ibid 233.

the Venetians' demand to capture Zara. The unholiness of the Greek church is communicated in two major details. Firstly, Alexius's betrayal of the crusading army is focused on his refusal to support the campaign to the Holy Land. The Anonymous claims that relations between the Greeks and Latins were quite positive until: "Finally, having been deceived by the advice of the Greeks and of his own father, who was blind in both eyes, he refused to fulfill his commitment to journey to Jerusalem which he had promised, pledged, and confirmed by sacred oath."²² Secondly, the coronation of Baldwin as emperor is a triumph for all: "With the Greeks applauding, they had him crowned in the church of Sancta Sophia by Nivelon, bishop of Soissons, and the other bishops who were subject to the Roman Church."²³ After several impious emperors, the Greek people are glad to receive a worthy leader, particularly one that is under the auspices of the Roman church.

The Greeks are not characterized with the same vitriol that the Muslims receive. They are Christians, and thus the Latins do regret having to fight them. The siege begins with: "Having purged their consciences by tears and confession and having received with one will and heart the body of the Lord, at the break of dawn they attacked the city manfully."²⁴ The Anonymous does not claim that the Greeks deserved what happened to them. Instead, these characterizations serve to explain why the 'provident mercy of God,' as he puts it, favored the Latins over the Greeks. The Latins were devoted to the sacred mission of retaking the Holy Land. The Greek leadership was not. The Latins obeyed papal authority. The Greeks did not. The crusade did not come to Constantinople to attack the Greek church, but the series of events that led them there can be understood as divine.

²² Ibid 234.

²³ Ibid 235.

²⁴ Ibid 234.

The Anonymous of Soissons then moves on to a detailed list of relics received from the crusade and to whom they were sent. Great celebrations, processions, and miraculous healings followed suit. From whom the relics were taken is conspicuously absent. The narrative simply jumps from the installation of Baldwin as emperor to the list of relics. The miracles tell the reader what they need to know: the reception was blessed by the holy figures that are associated with these artifacts. The text ends with the story of a carpenter who was struck dead by divine intervention. The local church had decreed that no work would be done on the day of the translation of Saint Thomas, likely in celebration of receiving Thomas's head from Constantinople. On this day, "...a certain carpenter was fatally struck as soon as he picked up his tool because he began to do his work unmindful of the Church's precept."²⁵ He died shortly after receiving his last rites. This carpenter was not the only person who objected to the church's decree. Many others are referenced, but their reasoning is limited to being "...inspired by the spirit of the devil."²⁶ These stories are an assertion of clerical authority. The church receives and distributes relics. The people benefit from their holy power or suffer the consequences of disobeying them. It equates the miraculous power of the martyrs and apostles with the authority of the church. The threat of divine punishment may also encourage the reader to take the story at face value.

Relics take care of themselves. However, a somewhat contradictory idea is that relics require the care and protection of the faithful. One can see this in the mission to reconquer the holy land. The Latin west generally resented that holy sites would be in the possession of Muslims: an attitude not shared by the East, which maintained some friendly relations with Islamic society.²⁷ The often clandestine trade of relics was considered appropriate only in the

²⁵ Ibid 238.

²⁶ Ibid 237-238.

²⁷ Godfrey. *1204, the Unholy Crusade*. 24-28.

cases of providing a proper resting place and keeping them out of the hands of the unworthy.²⁸ In either case, Latin Christians sought to make sure that holy relics would be properly cared for. This aligned with a passion in the Frankish church for collecting relics that often exceeded that of other Christians.²⁹ For many, the act of crusading was not focused as much on secular military concerns as on the acquisition of precious relics. Just like the holy land itself, relics were pieces of the divine able to be physically felt. Unfortunately for the East, this made Constantinople a tempting target.

Constantinople was not part of the holy land. The city itself had no connection to the life of Christ. To the west, however, Constantinople was a sacred place due to its vast stores of relics. The sheer amount of relics was awe-inspiring. Villehardouin claims that the city had more saints' relics than everywhere else on earth combined. He mentions this alongside descriptions of the city's majesty and wealth.³⁰ This reputation is echoed in many sources, implying that Western Christians already thought of Constantinople as a great repository of holy relics. Not only was Constantinople the wealthiest and most powerful city in Christendom, several centuries of Muslim expansion had filtered many relics into the city from previously Christian-controlled lands.³¹ One can assume that some Latin Christians would be eager to have these relics for themselves. However, this may not be motivated solely by greed. These are precious remnants of holy figures. Their caretakers have a responsibility to keep relics safely in the hands of the faithful. In the age of the crusades, the Eastern Roman Empire's ability to do so was questionable in the eyes of the West.

²⁸ Herrmann-Mascard, Nicole. *Les Reliques Des Saints: Formation Coutumière D'un Droit*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1975. 340.

²⁹ Geary. *Furta Sacra*, 41.

³⁰ Villehardouin. *Chronicle*. 51.

³¹ Bradford, Ernle Dugate Selby. *The Sundered Cross: The Story of the Fourth Crusade*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967. 165.

Nearly a hundred years before, a false letter circulated the Latin Christian world purporting to be from the Emperor Alexius I. The letter is an invitation to Western rulers (the letter was supposedly sent to Robert, count of Flemings) to claim dominion over Constantinople and the entire Eastern Roman Empire. The author of the letter remains unknown, but was likely a Frankish monk. The letter depicts the empire in dire straits, claiming that almost all had been invaded save Constantinople itself, which was not far behind. The ‘emperor’ goes on to list the most precious relics of Constantinople and beseeches the reader to keep them out of ‘pagan’ hands.³² The fallacious letter displays a pessimistic view of the Eastern Roman empire’s ability to defend its sacred property from Muslim conquest. Only the Latin church had the strength and righteousness to protect these sacred artifacts.

In his article on this letter, Einar Joranson identifies thirty-nine manuscripts that have survived to today. Most of these copies are attached to narratives of the First Crusade. The majority of them were copied after the 12th century.³³ Immediately prior to and following the Fourth Crusade, this letter was circulating in the Latin-speaking West. How widespread it was is difficult to say. However, it does shed some light on how Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire were understood in the West: overflowing with valuable relics and unable to defend itself. It is both a condemnation of the Greek church and a call to arms for the righteous West to claim dominion over it.

Alberic of Trois Fontaines’s chronicle contains similar biases to the Anonymous of Soissons. Alberic claims that the Venetians held the crusaders captive until they agreed to attack Zara: “...the Venetians made those pilgrims come to a certain small island,... and they confined them there. They did not allow them to leave until those same pilgrims swore that they would

³² Einar Joranson. *The Problem of the Spurious Letter of Emperor Alexius to the Court of Flanders*. In *The American Historical Review*, vol 55. 1950.

³³ Ibid 812.

forcibly capture along with them the city of Zara...³⁴ Alberic goes into great detail on the usurpation of the Eastern Roman Empire's throne and the righteousness of Alexius' claim to it.³⁵ These are characterizations that provide a general justification for the Fourth Crusade. In terms of the religious significance of the crusade, there is one blatant error. As discussed before, Pope Innocent III was shocked at the attack on Zara and refused to support Alexius's claim. The crusade continued without his expressed support, at least until after Constantinople was taken. According to Alberic, however, the pope was receptive to the idea from the start: "He freely agreed to this affair, wished them well, and pardoned their transgression, in which they had seized the city of Zara..."³⁶ Regardless if this was an intentional lie or not, we can assume that Alberic preferred to portray the Fourth Crusade as a unified conflict. It complicates the narrative that the crusaders and the pope were not on the same page. At worst, it could imply that the papacy was opposed to the divine will that led the crusade to Constantinople.

This brings us back to the battle of the icon. Before the battle begins, Alberic of Trois Fontaines emphasizes the desperate situation in which the crusaders found themselves:

"Once again there was a time of great scarcity within our ranks, and they ate many horses. Although they made many assaults on the city, they were never able to penetrate into it. Moreover, three of the doge's knights were hung up on iron hooks by the Greeks and were set aflame by Morcuphlus, with our men looking on, and they could not be spared from such a horrible death by any prayer or payment."³⁷

This description, combined with the claims of exploitation at the hands of the Venetians, makes the crusaders out to be downtrodden victims of circumstance. This idea fits the religious

³⁴ Alberici Monachi Trium Fontium. *Chronicon*. 295.

³⁵ Ibid 291-292

³⁶ Ibid 295.

³⁷ Ibid 302.

narrative much better than them being conquerors. It evokes a Christ-like image; the crusaders are beaten and oppressed, seemingly lost, until the heroic final victory.

After the passage above, Alberic of Trois Fontaines immediately moves on to the battle of the icon. The battle has its own dedicated section, introduced with the heading ‘How the icon was acquired.’ Alberic’s version of events, which began this paper, is the most detailed and significant iteration of the battle of the icon. Even the Greeks, according to Alberic, understood just how significant the icon was. Immediately following the battle: “...the Greeks returning to the city said, one after another, that they had been put to shame by Morcuphlus. They assembled at Sancta Sophia, talked it over, and made Nicholas emperor.”³⁸ A vicious battle ensued within the Greek ranks, with Mourtzuphlus eventually regaining control. In this version of the story, the loss of the icon is synonymous with the loss of divine, imperial authority. At the same time, it was the Latin knights who took it back up. During the final conquest of Constantinople, Alberic writes: “...the remaining Greeks came unarmed to our men. With our clergy, who benevolently offered them guarantees of safety, first begging mercy for them, the Greeks humbly handed over their swords to them.”³⁹ The Greeks accept the authority of the West and of the Roman clergy that accompany them.

Why, in a work that covers all of history, does Alberic of Trois Fontaines dedicate so much attention to this skirmish? It is because this battle tells the reader all that he needs to know. The Fourth Crusade was a complex event. Unlike the previous crusades, it resists the simple classification of Christians fighting against the enemies of the faith. But in the claiming of relics, we do see an easier narrative. Relics are a symbol of divine will. They belong in the hands of those worthy of their blessings and strong enough to protect them. In this battle, the Greeks carry

³⁸ Ibid 304.

³⁹ Ibid 305.

aloft an ancient and venerated relic, which is torn from them as they are decisively defeated. The battle does not just appeal to the Latin excitement of receiving new relics. It is a declaration that the Fourth Crusade was a result of divine will. The question of how and why the crusade came to Constantinople becomes unimportant. While it is a relatively unimportant battle today, to medieval Christians, it was a critical part of understanding what happened in 1204.

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